

Creekmore, Vernon Lee: In Old Currituck ^[1]

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Vernon Lee Creekmore: In Old Currituck

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 10/12/2003. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

On a recent trip to [Currituck County](#) ^[3], my family and I visited some of my favorite parts of the North Carolina coast. We explored the broad marshes of North River, picked apples on the remote shores of Knotts Island, and toured the old hunting clubs along Coinjock Bay. Guided by local history teacher Barbara Snowden and her husband, Wilson, we avoided the crowded oceanfront resorts on Currituck Banks and clung instead to quiet back roads on the county's mainland, where the past did not seem so distant.

One morning Wilson and I visited with an old buddy of his named Vernon Lee Creekmore, a retired fisherman in the little community of Tulls Creek. A steady, soft-spoken man, Creekmore recalled when Currituck Sound was wintering grounds for some of the largest flocks of migratory waterfowl in North America. Back then waterfowl hunting was the county's lifeblood, he told us, and his grandfather and other local hunters shipped ducks and geese north by the barrel full.



Vernon Lee Creekmore. Photo by Chris Seward, 2003. To request permission to use this photo to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

Oh, there were plenty of ducks and geese here in my grandfather's day. Even when I can remember, I've seen them fly up right here in the sound and they were so thick they'd black the sun right out. You've seen blackbirds fly up out of a field. The grass used to be so thick in Currituck Sound you couldn't run a boat through it without what they call a weedless propeller. On the shoals it was almost solid grass, and the ducks and geese came here to eat that grass. My God, someboc I was born in that house right over there in 1921. My grandparents were raised right here too. My grandfather, he tended his little field, raised some sweet potatoes, corn, stuff like that, had cows, hogs. He built boats a little bit too in his spare. They killed, gosh, I don't know -- they killed barrels of them every day. There were so many back then, you could kill all you wanted. They killed the ducks and iced them and shipped them to New York in barrels. They called it market hunting. They hunted with what they call "batteries." The batteries sunk down in the water, and you tie about 300 decoys with them. Farming, you didn't have anything to do in the wintertime, so they'd sit around and carve decoys. It didn't make any di They outlawed market hunting in 1918, 1919. Then most of the fellows that were doing that went to taking sportsmen hunting. Back years ago they'd come down here from New York. They'd come up here to Snowden Station on a train, and c There were several hunting clubs too. There was one over here at Gibbs Woods, two over here at Moss's Point, one at Bell Island, one at Grandy. J.P. Knapp had one out at Mackay Island, and the Whalehead Club at Corolla was one of ther A lot of people used to hate the hunt clubs. Back years ago, before the clubs got so much of it, you hunted where you wanted to and nobody cared. A bunch of marsh, some of them didn't even know whether they owned it or not. Didn't care v The hunt clubs never bothered me. You knew where their property was and you just didn't go on it. I didn't want to go on it anyway.

Granddad bought me a little .410 shotgun when I reckon I was about 12 years old. First goose I ever killed, I killed him with that .410 right here in the sound. Surprised me to death. It just comes natural when you're raised around this water. I'i Most people killed them to eat. I loved them to death. Still do. My mother baked them in the oven, and they were good, I'm telling you.

Daddy liked to hunt, but he wasn't crazy about it like grandfather. Grandfather, if he was gathering corn out there in the fields and he saw a bunch of ducks out there, he'd take off and go right on out there and go hunting. My grandmother, she She said one time he was building a boat out there in the yard, and sweet potatoes were selling for \$5 a barrel, which was a lot of money in that time. She tried to get him to stop building on that boat and go dig the potatoes. He said, "Nah, I'r She said when he got that boat finished and dug those potatoes, he got 25 cents a barrel for them. She said it didn't worry him a bit. Didn't bother him. Money was not something that he cared about. The people back then were not that crazy We didn't have any money, but you only went to the store about once a week to buy flour, sugar, stuff like that. Of course, it was just scraping by. That's what everything was back then, scraping by.

Another thing I remember is when they raised sweet potatoes and stuff here, freight boats would come in as close as they could get to the shore. Then you'd take a horse cart and a mule and make the ol' mule go on out there in the water and We had one old mule, he started out there and got out part the way and the devilish mule decided he didn't want to pull. He kind of reared up like that, and when he did the potatoes run to the back and tipped the cart up. He was up off the boi It was a lot different from what it is now, I'll tell you that.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina: :
Vernon Lee Creekmore lived from October 1, 1920 - December 7, 2003.

Ancestry.com. *North Carolina, Death Indexes, 1908-2004*.

Subjects:

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Origin - location:

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