

The Legend Of The Maco Light Lives On

MACO — It's unsettling to hear Herbert Long admit he's seen the Maco light.

Long, the 55-year-old postmaster of the Leland Post Office and a longtime Brunswick County resident, appears to be a down-to-earth, solid citizen.

But he readily confesses to seeing the ghostly light at the old railroad tracks near Maco — and so do many of his neighbors.

"I don't believe in ghosts," Long says behind his post office counter. "But that light has never been explained. No one's embarrassed to say they've seen it — it's been seen by enough people now that it's just an accepted fact."



At The Beach

Jerl Fischer

Eyewitness accounts are so convincing, visitors have come from as far away as the S.C. coast to stalk the beacon themselves.

The light, legend says, belongs to the

ghost of Joe Baldwin.

On a rainy night in 1867, Baldwin was the conductor of a train aimed for the N.C. shore. The train reached Maco just before midnight and Baldwin, with his lantern blazing, opened his car door to watch for the station.

The train seemed to slow early, but a few seconds passed before Baldwin realized what had happened: His car had come uncoupled.

He ran to the back and swung his lantern through the fog to warn the next train.

It sped on.

The crash derailed Baldwin's car and

threw him to a soggy ditch near the tracks. Searchers found his decapitated body the next morning.

On a rain-soaked night several months later, two lost hikers picked their way through a swath of pines near the tracks. When the pair reached Maco, they saw a distant flame.

"Some believe it was the conductor," Long says, "looking for his head."

Now, more than a century later, the train station has disappeared and weeds and asphalt cover the tracks. Maco, once a cross-

roads town on the way to the beach, was bypassed when crews straightened U.S. 74.

But residents still talk about the mysterious light.

"You'd look down the tracks near Maco Road (U.S. 87) and see a huge red ball glowing," says Long. "It would bounce from the edge of the woods to the tracks and then back to the woods. It always gave me goose bumps."

Long remembers walking along the tracks as a boy. A graveyard stood on one side of U.S. 87. The beacon appeared on the other.

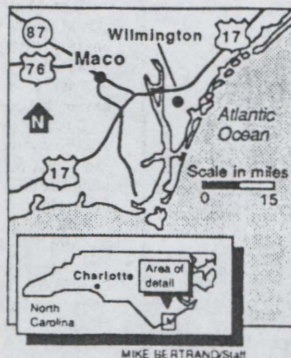
"It came out mostly on rainy or real humid nights," he says. "You wouldn't see it every time."

Witnesses say the light often floated about 5 feet — shoulder height — above the ground.

"It looked like a train coming from on up the track," says Neal Kilian, owner of the Maco Truck Stop Restaurant on U.S. 87. "They had the Army engineers try to get it one time. But they weren't successful."

Kilian saw the beam at least five times, including one drizzly night about seven years ago.

"It got brighter and brighter, and then faded," he says. "Everything went hush and no one said a



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"My wife's uncle dropped right down on the tracks and prayed. Of course, he'd had a few."

— Neal Kilian

word for five minutes. My wife's uncle dropped right down on the tracks and prayed. Of course, he'd had a few."

Whether the aura still shines is debatable. Long says it vanished years ago.

"The only lights out there now are headlights from the highway," he says.

But others refuse to test their courage.

"People still come out trying to find it, but you wouldn't catch me going out there in the dark," says Sgt. George Inman, parked near the tracks in his Department of Motor Vehicles patrol car.

In sunlight, the thicket looks harmless. But at night, Inman says, "I'm scared I might see something."