



NEWSLETTER

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EXCAVATION OF THE COURTHOUSE RUIN AT BRUNSWICK TOWN

From the documentary evidence we know that a courthouse was supposed to have been built in Brunswick Town shortly after 1729, and that it was not to measure less than 16 by 24 feet. We know that a courthouse was standing in 1734 when Governor Johnston took the oath of office. No sign of this courthouse has been found. With the creation of Brunswick County in 1764, a courthouse was to be built; and when Sauthier drew his map of the town in 1769 he showed the courthouse. We also know that it was used only until the fall of 1769 when Governor Tryon reported that a hurricane had blown it down. The ruin of this courthouse has been found and excavated. It measured twenty-five feet square, slightly larger than the minimum required. A partition wall at the east end of the ruin probably represents the division between the officials and the courtroom for the public. The room was heated with a fireplace located on the west side of the building. Of primary interest are the objects recovered during excavation of this ruin, because they tell a story of a much longer use of the courthouse site than the five years, from 1765 to 1769, indicated by the records.

As is often the case, the buttons and coins recovered from this ruin are of interest because they can be dated and are of value in reconstructing the story of the ruin. Sleeve-links and buttons of the colonial period were found, along with coins of George II, and represent the pre-Revolutionary War period of the town. Of particular interest is a button of the Revolutionary War period with "82" on the face. This button was lost by a private in the 82nd Regiment which occupied Wilmington during the year 1781, and indicates that men from this British regiment also visited Brunswick Town. A coin from Ireland dated 1775, during the reign of George III, was also found and represents the Revolutionary War period. This information and the fact that these objects of this period were found in the yard and not inside the ruin itself indicate that a building was probably standing on the courthouse foundation during this time.

The period following the Revolution is represented by a coin of 1787 made in Connecticut, and the War of 1812 period is indicated by a button from the uniform of an artilleryman having an eagle perched on a cannon and the word "CORPS" beneath it.

A few feet to the east of the courthouse ruin is located a gun emplacement of Fort Anderson from the Civil War period. Buttons of Confederate North Carolina soldiers and Federal artillerymen were found in the yard around the ruin, but not inside, indicating that a building still stood on the foundation at that time. Cut nails in the ruin indicate that repairs were made, or a building was built on the foundation of the ruin after 1800. From the buttons and coins, we learn much more about the courthouse site than we could from the historical records alone.

Other objects of interest from the courthouse ruin are a small key, buckles, a baleing seal with "M&D" on the face, a drawing knife, rock hammer, rake fragments, horse bits, pipes, fragments of muskets and musket balls, Civil War period .58 caliber bullets, friction primers and many other interesting objects. Of particular interest was a fragment of a 4" brass bell that may have been used to call the court into session, and a glass seal with the impression of a lamb carrying the Christian banner. This symbol of Christ was used to impress into wax a personal identifying seal on official papers. The courthouse excavation at Brunswick is an example of how archaeology can add dimension to history through recovery of such items as those described here.



THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD



THE WAR OF 1812 PERIOD



THE FEDERAL PERIOD



THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR PERIOD



THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Clues to History from the Courthouse Ruin

Stanley South, Archaeologist
Brunswick Town State Historic Site
N. C. Dept. of Archives & History



Excavated Courthouse Ruin

