



# NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PO BOX 874, SHALLOTTE, NC 28459

VOLUME L

November 2010

NUMBER 4

Organized June 21, 1956

## MISSION STATEMENT

To collect, preserve, study, evaluate and publicize the history of Brunswick County, NC. To devote meetings to presentation of materials about Brunswick County and the Lower Cape Fear through lectures, slices, and discussion. To publish a newsletter which contains news of the Society's activities, research papers and articles that pertain to genealogy.

## Society Officers

President: Gwen Causey  
Vice-President: James Green  
Secretary: Roberta Brady  
Treasurer: Sandra Ward  
Directors: Don Hickman  
Jim Marlowe  
Dave Lewis  
Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis

## BCHS Website

[www.bchs1764.org](http://www.bchs1764.org)  
Webmaster: Jimmy Green

## NOVEMBER MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC November 8, 2010 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on November 8th at the Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation Building, 795 Ocean Highway West, Supply, NC. The meeting begins at 7:30 P.M. We always meet the 2nd Monday in February, May, August and November.

The November, 2010 issue of the *NEWSLETTER* begins the 50th Volume. Volume I, Number 1 was printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletter from September 1961 to November 2009 can be found in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill, NC and at the New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Room in Wilmington, NC. There were no publications of Volume 17, #3 & 4 (1977) and Volume 18, #1 (1978).

Bharen Frink will be the speaker for our November meeting. She will be presenting a *Victorian Christmas*.

## *Comprehensive Historical/Architectural Site Survey of Brunswick County*

The now completed final report was presented to the Board of Commissioners at their regular meeting agenda on Monday October 4, 2010 by Leslie Bell, Planning Director of Brunswick County.

Also in attendance was Claudia Brown of the State Historical Preservation Office, Dan Pezzoni, co-principal of the Virginia-based Landmark Preservation Associates which conducted the survey, members of the survey team and several members of the BCHS.

More than 500 sites from across Brunswick County were surveyed in a process begun about a year ago to conduct the first comprehensive report on historic areas in the county. "Very little had been recorded in Brunswick County outside of Southport," said Dan Pezzoni. "Much of the information was brand new, it had never been recorded before."

The final report details 506 properties, with photographs and a narrative of their significance. Included in these properties are 100 communities, schools, churches and cemeteries. To qualify, the site must be at least 50 years old and have maintained at least part of the original architecture. Twenty eight of these historic properties will be submitted for consideration for the National Register of Historic Places.

"Besides being useful for research, the survey will also allow the county to plan developments while preserving historic areas and help property owners who have restored historic buildings," said Claudia Brown. "State and federal tax credits are available for rehabilitation projects."

After hearing the report, commissioners expressed their appreciation and suggested the work continue on historical preservation. They also directed Leslie Bell to create a historic preservation council to be able to approach the state for preservation grants.

"What everybody's done is incredible," Commissioner Marty Cooke said. "I want to see us keep it going"

To view the report in its entirety go to the BCHS web site: [www.bchs1764.org](http://www.bchs1764.org) and look under the Historic Locations window.

## ***CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE MEETING SCHEDULE***

A series of monthly Civil War round table meetings are scheduled to be held at Trinity United Methodist Church, 209 E. Nash St. in Southport.

Registration begins at 6:30 PM and programs begin at 7 PM. Everyone is invited to attend.

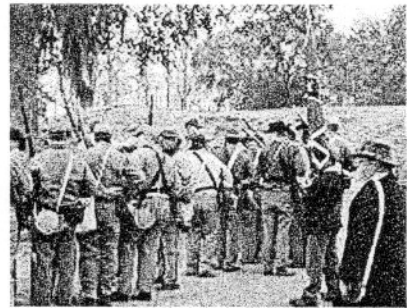
**Tuesday, Nov. 2:** "Confederate Commander-in-Chief: The Military Background of Jefferson Davis." Keith Hardison, director of Historic Sited in North Carolina will be the guest.

**Tuesday, Dec. 7:** "The Early Days of the Civil War in New Mexico." Presented by Jim McKee, BCWRT vice president and senior staff member at the Brunswick Town / Fort Anderson State Historical Site.

**Tuesday, Jan. 3:** "Civil War Medicine." Presented by Don Johnson, physician-turned-historian and instructor at UNCW.

**Tuesday, Feb. 1:** "Civil War Women: Spies, Nurses and Homemakers." Charen Fink is the presenter, a director of the BCWRT and former nurse.

The Brunswick Civil War Round Table was founded by Tom O'Donnell and Wallace Rueckel. Its meetings are open to all, and history buffs are invited to become members. For more information contact Wallace Rueckel at [wrueckel@questor.com](mailto:wrueckel@questor.com) 253-7382 or Tom O'Donnell at [tomkat450sl@yahoo.com](mailto:tomkat450sl@yahoo.com) 253-3249.



The BCWRT was formed when several Civil War enthusiasts formed a planning committee, and sought the advice of Larry Maisel, historian and current president of the Southport Historical Society; Mary Strickland from the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport, Dr. Max Williams, Professor Emeritus of History, Western Carolina University; and, Jim McKee from the Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson State Historic Site

### ***AND THE HEADLINE READ.....***

By Carol Phelps Neubert  
August 2010

And the headline read "Clean Sweep Tuesday - All Democratic Candidates For County Offices Win in General Election Tuesday."

It was time to select someone to represent the folks of Brunswick County in the NC House of Representatives. The winner would spend time in Raleigh enacting laws that would affect the Brunswick County locals.

It was Odell Williamson, Democratic candidate who bested this primary opponent (Edward H Redwine) vs B D Phelps running unopposed as the candidate for the fledgling Republican party.

Odell Williamson was a young Shallotte businessman just back from The War. He was advertising his business in the State Port Pilot on a weekly basis. His name was always before the local community who would be voting for him.

B D Phelps was my dad. He was 25 years old. He, too, had just returned from doing his part to protect our American liberties. I don't know how he campaigned. Did he knock on doors? Did he shake hands in the streets of Supply, Shallotte, and Southport? Did he pass out flyers? Did he have to raise money to help support his campaign? He surely didn't have enough money to fund a campaign on his own. I'd love to know the answers to these questions. He never told me the story. I believe I only heard it mentioned once at some family get-together. The only detail that I recall being offered that day was that Dad marginally lost the election.

What I know about this time in his life I learned by reading old issues of the State Port Pilot. I feel fortunate that Dad left a short biographical sketch outlining the major events of his life, although he omitted this foray into politics. From that overview, I deduced that the only span of time that allowed for this adventure had to be the election in the fall of 1946. After a half day of reading back issues of the paper, I found it.

Odell Williamson, considered the favorite, had the name recognition. He was a WWII veteran. He was a local, well-known businessman. He belonged to the political party well-established in Brunswick County. My dad didn't come from a prosperous family with connections.

The sub-headline told most of the story: "House Contest Is Very Close." The newspaper story read: "Tightest race of them all was between Odell Williamson, Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives, and B D Phelps. Williamson had 2207 votes to 2204 for his opponent and came up with 3 votes to the good." In his first (and as far as I know his only) attempt to run for public office, my dad lost by only three votes to the man who would eventually develop Ocean Isle Beach. What a remarkable showing for the young man from the Green Swamp.

### *BENJAMIN SMITH*

Benjamin Smith was born into a wealthy family. His father, Thomas, was a wealthy planter and descendant of Thomas Landgrave Smith, a wealthy South Carolina planter. His mother's father was Roger Moore of Orton Plantation, a plantation on the Cape Fear River at the northernmost area of rice-growing country in the United States.

Always interested in education, Smith was appointed to the first board of trustees of the University of North Carolina, and he served in this position until 1824. As a trustee, Smith donated 20,000 acres as an endowment to UNC. He served when North Carolinians complained that the University of North Carolina turned young, Republican men into Federalists. A controversy existed whether the board of trustees, comprised of men with Federalist sympathies, hired only professors with Federalist sympathies.

Smith held many government offices and performed many public services before becoming governor of North Carolina. He was member of the General Assembly in 1784 and, in that year, a member to the Continental Congress. Afterward he served from 1789 to 1792 in the North Carolina House. During these terms, he hosted George Washington during the first president's inaugural tour of the United States. From 1792 to 1800 and from 1804 to 1810, he served in the state Senate. As a state legislator, he gained respect among his colleagues and became Speaker of the Senate (1795-1799). During these

times, Smith was known for his support of Federalist ideas.

His Federalist leanings, more than likely, influenced his private dealings with the national government. For instance, according to *The Governors of North Carolina*, “he was under contract with the federal government to rebuild and expand Fort Johnston at Smithville (now Southport).” In 1794, he sold a tract of land on Smith Island to the national government so that a lighthouse might be built. The island later became known as Bald Head Island.

The legislature elected Smith governor in 1810, and he served in this position for one year (he never sought reelection). Before he became governor, Smith changed allegiance to the Democratic-Republican Party, but his administration revealed his Federalist inclination. He encouraged industrial growth, for instance. He also wanted a stronger militia. More telling, however, was his dislike for his accommodations in Raleigh; they “were not ‘fit for the family of a decent tradesman’.” (In 1813, the executive mansion was completed.) Also, much like what Thomas Jefferson had advocated in Virginia, Smith encouraged in North Carolina the formation of a public school system that reached every child; an educated citizenry was deemed necessary for the survival of a republic.

After his term as governor, Smith served one more term as state Senator (1816), but he spent the remainder of his years in his Brunswick County home. Born into wealth, Smith through the years spent too much money and assumed too much debt. In January 1826, he died in poverty.

#### Sources:

Michael Hill, ed., *The Governors of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 2007) and William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill, 1989).

By Troy Kickler, North Carolina History Project

### ***James Marvin Willett***

Born: Feb. 12, 1921  
Wilmington, NC  
Death: Aug. 4, 1943

He was the son of W.J. Willett and Bertha Skipper Willett and a veteran of World War II.

About 1956 someone stamped “**DECLASSIFIED**” in all capital letters across the USS Shubrick’s August 1943 ship’s log.

The destroyer’s information for that month begins at Zero-hundred hours with its location, Palermo Harbor, Sicily, and the remark, “Ship completely darkened in condition of readiness...”



For the Willett family, however, the log may as well begin and end at 4:30 a.m. three days later, the moment when a bomb dropped by a German airplane killed Fireman First Class James Marvin Willett.

If he'd lived just a few weeks longer, he could have celebrated his wedding anniversary. A few weeks also would have been long enough for Marvin, as family called him, to receive news from his wife, Dorothy, that he was going to be a father. "I don't think he knew because the last letter I got from him, he didn't mention it," Dorothy, 90, said while sitting under a large magnolia tree that shades her husband's grave.

According to her niece, Joyce Rich, her aunt never remarried. She never even dated another man.

Dorothy arrived at Bellevue Cemetery in a pale pink knit top and greeted her family with a quiet Voice as veterans in Army and Navy uniforms looked on. They gathered to honor Marvin's Memory and install an official World War II Veteran's Marker at the foot of his grave.

I've been in the Legion 35 years and this is the first one I've ever done, or even heard of, really," said Post 10 Commander Milton Woodle.

He said usually ceremonies like this for World War II veterans are performed after a soldier, Marine or Sailor missing in action is finally identified with DNA.

When Marvin was killed, he and four other sailors who died with him were immediately buried at the nearest location, the Army's Seventh Armored Division cemetery in Palermo. Two years after the war, his son was already 4 years old and the family shipped Marvin's body home for burial at Bellevue Cemetery under the magnolia. At the time, no one knew he was entitled to a military marker.

So, 63 years after Marvin's death, Rich, his niece; Bellevue's caretaker, Cliff Williams; and members of American Legion Post 10 held the memorial marker service.

Marvin Willett, Jr. looked on from the back of the crowd, hat in hand. The son who grew up without his father is a self-proclaimed "private person." He's tall and thin with gray hair now. He retired from General Electric after more than 30 years there and doesn't like to talk much to strangers about his family.

"I never knew him, never saw him. But I'm very proud of what he did for this country," he said. "I never felt any loss or anything with it because I always had uncles around. Both sides of the family were close-knit."

What Marvin Jr. knows about his father he learned from family stories. And each family member remembers a little something different about the young sailor.

"He never met a stranger. He talked to everybody," said Jesse Willett, Marvin Willett, Sr.'s younger brother by six years. "He was a little better than 6 foot tall, blonde-headed and blue-eyed. He really loved his wife. He loved her more than anything, I reckon." Marvin also loved playing sandlot baseball around Wilmington and was quite good at it.

"He was a mess. He was mischievous... everyone liked him, that I know," Jesse said.

Before the war, he said, Marvin "was a meat cutter for Lee's Grocery out near Fish House alley."

Dorothy worked next-door as a waitress at St. Helena Restaurant. According to Rich, all the young people during that time hung out at St. Helena, so it was natural that the two would meet.

"I guess he just fell in love with her. She was a beautiful woman," Jesse said.



At the outset of the war, Marvin was already draft age. And, perhaps because other members of his family had already joined the Navy, Marvin decided to join the Naval Reserve, Jesse said.

Jesse remembers his brother attending boot camp in Norfolk and going to signalman's school on the Great Lakes.

"The next thin I knew, he was assigned to the USS Shubrick as a Fireman," Jesse said.

Just before he left, Marvin took his little brother to school at Forest Hills. Jesse was in the seventh grade.

"And that was the last time I saw him," he said.

Marvin would be one of the first sailors to report aboard the Shubrick, a new destroyer headed for the North Atlantic and then the Mediterranean. He was at sea about five months before he was killed, Jesse said. "He didn't want to go. I would have went in his place, but I wasn't old enough."

The ship's log picks up the story after Marvin left his family, including his new wife an unborn child.

At 0400 hours on August 4, 1943, Marvin ran to general quarters along with his shipmates. The alarm was sounded after radar picked up unidentified planes to the north.

The Shubrick was underway, "steaming on various courses at various speeds," according to the log.

Ten minutes later, it, along with other ships in the fleet, opened fire on the aircraft. One fell, then another, like fireballs, into the sea.

At 0430, the log states, "After many bomb splashes in vicinity, plane heard diving on ship from starboard to port. Immediately afterward, a stick of three bombs landed, one short, one hit, one over."

One of those bombs hit close enough to end the log entry with names of those injured and killed. Among those killed instantly: "Willett, James Marvin, Fireman First Class, USNR severe multiple third degree burns."

"Probably 500 or 600 pounds of that super-heated steam is what killed my brother," Jesse said.

Dorothy was back home working for City Optical when she heard the news.

"I got a telegram at my father-in-law's," she said. "I had just went back to work."

At the memorial marker service, Dorothy spoke individually to those who walked up and shook her hand. Some knew her husband, some were too young to know him.

After The Rev. Jimmy Jarrell spoke, a veteran in sailor's dress blues accepted the carefully folded flag and knelt in front of her.

The words he spoke were so soft, it's likely only she could understand them. Dorothy thanked him and he saluted as she clutched the flag and a tissue.

"It was really hard for her because she had lost the one thing in the world that she really loved," Rich said.

"His momma, to this day, she has never dated another man."

Marvin Jr. walked away from the grave soon after the ceremony. But a few days before, he had made his feelings clear.

"I've always been proud to be a war orphan," he said. "I didn't feel any different in school. If anything, I held my head up higher than the rest of them because of it."

This epitaph was written by Clair, September 2005; found in "www.findagrave.com"

### *Last Will and Testament of John Leonard*

REFERENCE: Probate Court Records - Cape May County, New Jersey - File Reference: 311E - Last Will and Testament - John LEONARD, Esquire, 10 February 1771.

In the Name of God Amen the tenth of February In the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy one.

I John LEONARD of the County of Cape May and province of New Jersey Being poorly in halth But of a perfect sound sences and Memory and Calling to Mind the Mortalty of My Body of My Body: I do make ordain this My Last Will and Testament that is to Say I give and recommend My soul into the hands of God that Gave it Me and My Body to be buried in a Decant manner at at the Descretion of My Executors: and touching such Wordly Estate as it has pleased God to Bless Me In this Life I give Devise Dispose of the Same In the following form and Manner.

First, I give and bequeath unto Anne My Most Most Dear and Beloved Wife all My Moveable Estate: and also the use of My plantation and Ceder Swamp Laying and In the County of Cape May to use for her support During her Widderhood and no Longer and If it should so hapen as she should want Money to to Support her then it is My Will that she sell ..... her title is good in Law as If myself had don it I do give to Nathan GOFF fourty pounds In Cash Be paid unto him when my Land is sold and the money Received or ..... I give the said Nathan GOFF my plantation I now Live on to him his Heirs and assign forever If he can pay to my Cousens In Carolina the sum and sums As followeth that is to Cousen Samuel LEONARD the sum of Eighteen pounds: to My Cousen John LEONARD the sum of Sixteen pounds to My Cousen Henry LEONARD the sum of Eighteen pounds to My Cousen Jacob LEONARD the sum of Sixteen pound to My Cousen John ROBINSON the sum Sixteen pounds I also give ten pounds to My Brother Samuel LEONARD If he is Liveing but if he is Dead then it is my Will it shall be Equally Devided between My Cousen Samuel son John LEONARD and My Couson Henry son John LEONARD and it is My Will and I do order that If he the Nathan GOFF Dont pay the several sums to My said Cousen as is now Liveing in Carolina when his ant or My Wife is Dead about six months If he is of the Age of twenty and one years then I Do order Samuel LEONARD John or Henry or Jacob LEONARD to sell the Land and Ceder Swamp as is in the said County of Cape May or Either of them and ther title shall be good from me and my Heirs and assigns forever: and then I order and it is My Will that the Money to be Devided to My Brother Henry four Dagthers ten pounds a peace: to Phebe HEWIT Children ten pound to My Sister Sarah ROBINSON Dagthers five pound a peace and the rest If any remains Shall be My Brother Samuel LEONARD If Liveing If not to his Dagther Jaon LUDLAM ten pounds and If any Remains to be Devided between Samuel John Henry and Jacob LEONARD and John ROBINSON: it is My Will that Nathan GOFF doth not sell My Land to make advantage by it not all loneing his title good till twenty five years of age but If he the said Nathan cant pay a hundred and four pounds to My Cousens Within named then If any sells my Land and Ceder Swamp they shall pay to him



the said Nathan GOFF fourty pounds out of the Money for My Land and Swamp and it tis My Will and I do give Nathan my swamp of Ceder with the Land to him his heirs and assigns forever on the above conditions: and I do Constitute My Most Dere and Well beloved Wife Anne LEONARD my hole and only Executor of this my Last Will and testament Rattefing and Confarming this and no other to be my Last Will and Testament.

In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seale the Day and year above written In the presents of us the subscribers: signed sealed published and pronounced and declared by him the said John LEONARD to be his Last Will and Testament In the presents of us.

Jacob SMITH	John LEONARD
Jonathan EDWARDS	(Signature)
Shamgar HEWIT	
Enoch SMITH	

I John LEONARD writ this Will With My own hand and the Intent of it is that Nathan GOFF should not sell My Land to make profits out of it but if he cannot pay the sum of 100 pounds then to be sold by any of My Cousens as I have mentioned and as witness my hand.

John LEONARD  
(Signature)

Editors Note: This will was transcribed as written and makes the geographical connection between the Leonards of Cape May, NJ and Brunswick County, NC. The work "*cousens*" is a legal reference made by 18th century attorneys to identify *nieces and nephews*.

***Membership Application ... Invite a Friend to Join  
Brunswick County Historical Society***

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

New: \_\_\_\_\_ or Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with your check to: P.O. Box 874, Shallotte, NC 28459

Annual Dues: Individual \$15 Life Membership \$150