



# NEWSLETTER

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

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## 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, slides, and discussion. To publish a newsletter which contains news of the Society's activities, research papers and articles that pertain to genealogy.

## Society Officers For the 2016 & 2017 Term

President: Richard Hollembeak  
Vice-President: Sally Robinson  
Secretary: Roberta Brady  
Treasurer: Bob Armour  
Directors: James Robinson  
Jim Marlowe  
Dave Lewis

Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis



## MAY MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC MAY 14, 2018 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, May 14th 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 February 2018 issue of the *NEWSLETTER* began the 59th Volume. Volume I, Number 1 was printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletter from September 1961 to November 2016 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).

## Dues

**DUES** are now **PAST DUE** unless you are a **Life Member**. The annual dues are \$15.00 for an active member or \$150.00 to become a Life Member. Checks may be mailed to the **BCHS** in care of Bob Armour or bring check or cash to the February meeting. Use the membership application found on page 7 for contact changes. Make checks payable to the **Brunswick County Historical Society**.

## Program

Our guest speaker will be Mr. Dean Doshier, a Brunswick County native born in Southport. Living in Varnamtown, he has worked many years with local "old time" boat builders. Several of his boats are still being used in our area waters today. He will speak on the history of wooden boat building in Brunswick County.

## Big Blast from the Past

Geological evidence along the Outer Banks clearly shows that hurricanes have, for centuries, been frequent visitors to the state. The first severe storm recorded in North Carolina took place on 6 Sept. 1667, when strong winds and rain struck the Outer Banks, destroying corn and tobacco crops and demolishing some buildings. More detailed accounts from Virginia tell of the 12 days of rain that accompanied this storm. Later, in the mid-eighteenth century, severe storms along the North Carolina coast destroyed ships and flooded coastal towns. In one such storm in 1752, the town of Johnston, then the Onslow County seat, built in an area known today as Old Town Point (part of present-day Camp Lejeune), was completely destroyed, as were all of the county's records and deeds. Highly detailed reports of a hurricane that hit North Carolina in September 1769 tell of great destruction in the region from Smithville (present-day Southport) through New Bern. During this storm, the Brunswick County Courthouse was reportedly blown down, and the tide in New Bern rose 12 feet higher than average. Other hurricanes hit the New Bern area again in 1803, 1815, 1821, and 1825. Two major hurricanes in 1842 resulted in the famous "wet year" that saw massive destruction of homes, businesses, and crops. Throughout the nineteenth century, storm damage repeatedly affected areas of the North Carolina coast and sometimes inland as far as Winston-Salem.

It seems relatively unscientific to assign a storm designation such as "really bad" to hurricanes that blew Carolina's doors off prior to the category system, but that is certainly a kinder term than many might apply to the hurricane season of 1899. In August, a storm front by the name of San Ciriaco (a nod to its Puerto Rican origins) arrived to decimate Diamond City and Shackleford Banks and devastated Ocracoke Island and Hatteras Village. Residents likened it unto the circles of hell depicted in Dante's *Inferno*, and some thought the storm was God's punishment for allowing dancing on Sunday.

Subsequent hurricanes often take advantage of already-saturated fields and streams to deliver the second of a one-two punch, and that was the evil plan of the Halloween Storm of 1899. After strik-

ing the Brunswick Beaches and wiping out all of Southport, the demon winds flew north to deal devastating blows to Wrightsville Beach and Wilmington. At the Wrightsville Beach Museum of History a plexiglass model, divided in half, shows the oceanfront structures that were standing prior to 1899 on one side and the buildings that now line the shore on the other side. Among the significant casualties were the Ocean View Hotel, a public open-air pavilion, the Carolina Yacht Club and the Atlantic Yacht

The tropical storm formed on October 26, 1899 just south of Jamaica in the Caribbean Sea. The storm became a hurricane during the morning of October 28<sup>th</sup> less than 24 hours before crossing central Cuba. The Cuban landmass weakened the storm only temporarily, and "Nine" quickly regained hurricane strength and became a category two storm while in the Bahamas the night of October 29<sup>th</sup>. The hurricane made landfall in the morning on Halloween 1899 with maximum sustained winds near 110 mph. Moving steadily northward, the "Halloween storm" follows a track eerily close to that of Hazel a half-century later, making landfall near the North Carolina-South Carolina line, severely damaging the Brunswick beaches, Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach before heading north for the Virginia line. The landfall point of the storm is uncertain; the "official" track analysis shows a landfall along the South Carolina coast near Garden City Beach, SC. The operational weather maps produced by the U.S. Weather Bureau in real-time suggested a landfall position closer to Cape Fear, NC. Historical research by NWS meteorologist James Hudgins indicates the worst damage and highest storm surge occurred north of Cape Fear at Wrightsville Beach which supports the more eastern landfall position. At Wrightsville Beach sea water was eight feet above normal high tide and two feet higher than in the August hurricane. Water came over the wharves in Wilmington and flooded some streets and there was much flooding and damage in New Bern, Morehead City, and Beaufort.

In Wilmington, Hurricane "Nine" produced the twentieth lowest barometric pressure ever recorded.

*Sources: Star News, MyReporter, By Ben Steelman: The Hurricane Hall of Fame, NCBeach-*

## **The Bluff's**

The "model plantation" would have been "The Bluffs", owned by Colonel Thomas D. Meares, of Brunswick County. (Also known as Gabourel's Bluff, Mears Bluff, and later Navassa).

Having only the fifth largest improved acreage on the Cape Fear River with 346 acres, in 1859 it produced 864,000 pounds of rice or almost 20,000 bushels, the largest crop ever recorded on a single plantation next to the river. A yield in excess of sixty bushels per acre. The slave population was 107, third largest among the rice plantations. The plantation possessed probably the finest milling facilities, stream driven "of the best pattern." Some of the fields had been planted regularly for over 40 years and still produced vast amounts of rice. Colonel Meares, farming old school, used no plows in his rice production even though he owned four horses and twelve working oxen. All work being done with manual labor and a broad short hoe and a long narrow hoe. An interesting by-product developed on the Meares plantation was hay from rice straw.

An early map of the Cape Fear River plantations shows "Gabourel's Bluff" laying across the river from the north end of Wilmington and just north of the Belvidere Plantation. It was the property of Joshua Gabourel, an attorney and justice of the peace in New Hanover County in 1736. Known as Partridge's Bluff prior to 1735.

The Wilmington Star, dated September 5, 1879, reported that "the prospects for the rice crop in this section are represented as very fine... At Meares' Bluff there are some 200 acres in rice that also promise a large yield."

Meares Bluff became the site of the new Navassa Guano Company's plant in 1869. It slowly developed until it encompassed much of the old plantation. The Wilmington Star, September 8, 1891, wrote: "The Navassa Guano Company's rice fields above Wilmington have flooded by the recent freshet in the Cape Fear river, but it is now falling rapidly and it is expected all the water will be off

the fields by tomorrow. The rice is not fully ripe, but it is expected that cutting will begin with them next week and from present indications their rice will be harvested in good condition."

The State of North Carolina leased the rice fields at Navassa in February 1898. The Southport Standard newspaper reported, "the State has leased the outstanding rice lands at Navassa belonging to the Navassa Guano Company and will put a force of convicts to work in getting the fields in readiness for cultivation. The convict camp will be placed near Navassa on the Cape Fear river about five miles from the city and Mr. George H. Cannon has been appointed manager of the farm."

From the Wilmington Messenger dated September 12, 1899, "Mr. F.B. Arrendell of Raleigh, manager of the state penitentiary, arrived in Wilmington on September 11, 1899 to make arrangements for harvesting the state's rice crop on the Cape Fear, near this city." Mr. Cannon arrived in Wilmington to meet Mr. Arrendell at which time he mentioned "that he has 250 acres in rice and that the crop is excellent."

One month later, there was a display in Wilmington at the Bonitz House showing some of the rice grown on the State rice farm in Brunswick County. Statement from the Wilmington Dispatch, October 12, 1899 said that "it appears to be very fine rice, being headed beautifully."

*Source: From the notes of William M. Reaves, Wilmington, NC.*

## **Our Richest Resource: Forests**

### **Going... Going...**

*As written by LeRoy Mintz, Sr.*

LeRoy Mintz, born in Brunswick County on August 26, 1910 and died in New Hanover County on November 21, 1984 was the son of Harry Luther Mintz, Sr. and Minta Catherine Tart. He married Eva Catherine Chadwick on August 12, 1939 in Brunswick County and they had two sons, LeRoy Jr. and John Hamilton Mintz. LeRoy Sr. was a graduate of NC State University and with first hand knowledge through years of observation provided a

written article on the history of the timber and related industry as it was practiced in Brunswick and Columbus Counties. He described the changes that have occurred in harvesting timber from colonial days to the mid 1980's in detail. Here is the rest of his story continued from a "Newsletter" article published in August 2016.

**First Saw Mill:** Our first saw mill in America started at Jamestown. That was the first timber cut by English settlers. Whether there are any earlier mills in this area, we don't know since it is not recorded in the history of forestry.

The forest had virgin timber insofar as white inhabitants were concerned. As far as time is concerned, it wasn't virgin timber. Long leaf pines will grow five thousand years or so. Long leaf pines have grown and are now growing where we think salt water was at one time. If you follow an imaginary line from Southern Pines to Hamlet and on down, you will find signs of salt water shells. That was supposed to have been the beach so many millions of years ago. After you pass that line, you will find signs of ocean life. Those trees that we sometimes call "virgin" have never been tampered with by white man. It definitely wasn't the first growth.

The first mills in Brunswick County, as I understand it, were somewhere along the river banks, and they were steam mills. There was one down on Shallotte River in the Boone's Neck area. They floated the logs down a creek or branch. They had no way of moving the timber other than by water. Then there was one at Supply and another at Town Creek. Those mills went out of business somewhere about 1895 to 1910. Some mills lasted until about 1920. Then they began to bring a few of them inland. Neal Thomas, for example, had a big mill. It was a problem to haul timber to where they could put it on boats and carry it away; however, the timber was so thick that they could select a stand near water. In that way, they didn't have a lot of distance hauling to do. They'd have to haul it less than a mile.

**Examples of Lumbering Before 1900:** When my grandfather settled here in 1830, he cut timber close to the river so that they could roll it down to the river on poles. They cut timber mostly in front of where West Brunswick High School is now. It was large timber. I don't know how they got the

trees to the water, but they got them to the water. They'd catch the tide. The tide would raise the water about eighteen inches, and they'd float them down the river.

Every now and then a log would get away from them and settle in the stream. When I was a boy, I used to trap and would often use a log to walk across that had turned crosswise in the river. That was one that got wedged so that they could not pry it loose to float it on down the river. That log and one or two others we have found had no saw marks on them. Axes had been used for the entire operation.

My grandfather cut the timber and was almost solely responsible for constructing the Presbyterian Church that was located near the old Shallotte high school.

In the 1800's, my wife's great uncle, John R. Chadwick, came from near Beaufort County, N.C. because of the availability of timber. He had connections with some big company in the West Indies. They had a timber building industry down there and he was a buyer for them. He would go buy large tracts of land, ten to fifteen thousand acres, just to cut a few select trees. The curious thing to me was how he got those logs out of the woods and on the boat. They would take them to the West Indies and bring back things from there. He operated in this area. All the land from Shallotte River to this side of Village Church where there is a little creek, was one tract he owned. He wouldn't buy it if it were too far from water. Then after he got all he wanted around here, he went up on the Cape Fear somewhere between Old Brunswick Town and Clarendon, in that area.

There was a great demand for our timber that far back. They wanted special kinds of trees. They may have been getting out beams, ribs, or side framing for ship building. It had to be special stuff. On an acre of land, they might not have touched a tree. They would get what they wanted and sell it to someone else in order to buy another tract. I imagine they wanted heart pine which was more durable.

**Introduction of Ground Saw Mills:** Then little gas engines became prevalent all over the county. In traveling around in Brunswick or Columbus Coun-

traveling around in Brunswick or Columbus County, you could stop almost anywhere and hear the sound of a gasoline-powered saw mill operating.

That's one natural resources we were rich in at one time. It simply got away from us. They cut more timber out from 1920 to 1935 than in any other time. A hundred percent more was cut in that time than in any previous thirty or forty-year period. About 1935 timber began to get a little scarce and difficult to get and to cost more to get it. The little mills began to disappear. They started cutting it and loading the logs themselves, especially when the longer trucks came into use. Loggers started carrying the logs, instead of the timber to the mills at Whiteville, Tabor City, and Conway.

So Brunswick County's timber and a large part of that in Columbus County was cut with little ground saw mills. The lumber was transported out by early trucks with small loads 1500 feet or something like that. Wherever a navigable stream was available, the lumber would be loaded on what we called schooners at places like Town Creek, Lockwood Folly River, or Shallotte River, or at Seaside, wherever a schooner could get in. They would load the timber on them.

**They Stole it!** They stole it, to begin with. I mean they paid the landowners such a little bit for the trees. When they sold it in Wilmington, they got fifteen dollars a thousand for it. There was no other way for them to operate. They'd go out and tell some poor farmer that didn't know how much a tree was worth. They could tell him he had \$150.00 worth of timber and pay for it. In reality the timber would be worth \$3000.00. That's how they had to operate if they were going to make a profit.

**When the Great Depression Came:** Then the Depression came, people couldn't get up money to pay their taxes on their land. At that time International Paper Company and others like them came in and bought up land for three to five dollars per acre. Now International is selling coastal land that joins the water for a thousand dollars or more per acre. They have cut the timber off. Back inland at Exum and in the Waccamaw area, it is difficult to buy any land. It is better timber land and it joins larger tracts.

**A Crude Operation:** Now it was a very crude operation. They had nothing but the mill and a little edger, where they would run the boards through to get the bark off. It was very inexpensive. That's what brought the mills in, more than anything else. It didn't take much money to get into this kind of mill business.

Most of the time, unless it was special order, they would cut the logs in lengths of 2x6, 2x8, or 2x10, whatever the log would yield. Then it was carried to Bates Lumber Company in Wilmington, Waccamaw Lumber Company, or some other lumber company, that did finishing work. They'd take a 2x8 and run it through a gadget that had a rip saw in the middle of it. It was ripped into two precise or equal pieces. Then they would run that into the dry kiln. After it was dry, they'd run it through the planer. The planer planed it and made it the desired size. Flooring, for example, was usually just over three-quarters. Weatherboarding was about the same. They were two of the main uses of lumber then. The framing of the house was right off the mill. It was rough. All of it is planed now. They don't sell any rough lumber now.

We had no railroad running through the middle of the county to pick up lumber. They had to haul it by truck. Most of it was sold in Wilmington.

The Waccamaw area was better off than other parts of the county because they had more timber and more water. During the winter months, late January or thereabouts, they would cut a good many trees and get ready to raft them down the river whenever it had rained enough to get the water high enough to float the rafts and to make the bends. They'd put a bunch of rafts together and have a little house built and put that on one of the rafts. They'd take their liquor, their meat, their potatoes, and everything aboard and start out for Conway, or some even went as far as Georgetown, with long rafts of logs.

**Employees:** Those little mills usually had two log carts or wagons to keep them supplied with logs. That would require four mules.

In the woods they ran two saws, two men to a saw. They had what they called a snaker, a man who piled the logs up to drive the cart over to get the logs. A man was needed on each cart or wagon. At

the mill a man turned the logs to roll them over onto the carriage. Next was the sawyer, the man who put the lumber in the edger; then it took two men to carry the lumber and the slabs off. (We burned up twenty percent of our timber in slabs because they didn't see any use for them).

They thought of timber as being an inexhaustible resource. They tried to square up the logs in four trips across the saw and wasted a large part of the tree. Now they save more by running short pieces across the saw.

To operate a saw mill efficiently required eleven men. I have seen them use one man on what they called the green end and it would almost kill him. It would take a strong man to run for ten hours. And I have seen them operate with just two men in the woods. The "green end" meant the heavy end.

One family who ran saw mills on an extensive basis would pay only \$1.25 for ten hours' work. The poor people couldn't help themselves. They had to work for whatever they could get. Think about working a week and getting six dollars! It was the hardest work known at that time. That particular family had been strong Democrats, but when Roosevelt's administration had some labor act passed, they had to start paying twenty-five cents an hour! They became disgruntled Democrats.

**More Changes:** These sawmillers never had more than three to five hundred dollars invested. Now a lumberman can't go into the woods with less than a quarter to a half a million dollars in equipment. Once they could go out with a bunch of old oxen and axes. Now they have so much money invested they can't slow up for anything. That has brought about another change in timber harvesting. We first taught that we ought to do what is called selective cutting; that is, go in and cut nice trees and let the others grow. But now they have found it much cheaper to slaughter it — site clear it — and set it with seedlings grown in a nursery. It will grow faster. No one can operate profitably with slow and crude equipment any more.

**Jackson Brothers Lumber Company:** A lumber company out of Maryland called Beaufort came to Craven County and went broke. Some Virginia men by the name of Jackson bought that bankrupt operation. They moved to Robeson County in the

Fairmont section and later about 1925 settled in Longwood, Brunswick County. They picked the area where the best timber was and built a spur railroad to that spot. The checks were written at Longwood, but most of their business was done at the town of Brunswick, south of Whiteville.

From 1918 to 1962, there was also a mill at Bolivia with a dry kiln that manufactured dressed lumber.

### ***Has Memorial Day Lost Its Meaning?***

While millions of Americans celebrate the long Memorial Day weekend as the unofficial start of summer - think beaches and backyard barbecues, sales, and sporting events - some veterans and loved ones of fallen military members wish the holiday that honors more than 1 million people who died serving their country would command more respect or at least awareness. Sadly, to most it has become a fun holiday with an extra day off from work.

Veterans groups say a growing military - civilian disconnect contributes to a feeling that Memorial Day has been overshadowed. More than 12 percent of the U.S. population served in the armed forces during World War II. That's down to less than one-half of a percent today, guaranteeing more Americans aren't personally acquainted with a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine.

With an all-voluntary military, shared sacrifice is largely a thing of the past - even as U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan and Iraq nearly 17 years after 9/11.

"There are a lot of things working against this particular holiday," said Brian Duffy, commander in chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "It hurts," Duffy said. For combat veterans and Gold Star families especially, "it hurts that, as a society, we don't truly understand and appreciate what the true meaning of Memorial Day is."

Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, was conceived after the Civil War as a way to honor the Union's war dead, with Southern states setting aside separate days to honor fallen Confederate soldiers. By the early 20th century, the holiday had evolved to honor all military members who died in service.

Source: "To many Americans, Memorial Day has lost its meaning." By Michael Rubinkams, AP

### Cargo for Sale

*The Wilmington Chronicle, September 24, 1795*

State of North Carolina, Brunswick County Notice is hereby given, that the cargo of the schooner, "Mary and Helen," stranded on Tube's Beach near Shallotte Inlet, consisting of 2,575 feet pine boards, 5 M. dressed R.O.H. staves, 38 BBLs turpentine, 30 BBLs varnish, and 50 BBLs of tar (more or less as it lies on the beach) will be sold there at public auction, at the hour of 12 o'clock on Thursday, the 24th. Conditions cash.

James Allen, Captain  
Jno Johnston, Shipper

### Drowned

*The Wilmington Democrat, issue dated November 1, 1877*

A boat containing Reed Register, white, and Ben Pickett and Henry Hewett, both colored, capsized last week near Shallotte, Brunswick County. The two Negroes were drowned, being under the influence of liquor. The white man, by dint (sic) of great exertion, saved himself. No foul play is suspected.

### Honored WWI Brunswick County Veterans

The *BCHS* has submitted the following names to be honored by the Ft. Caswell Rifle Range with more to be added at a later date.

**John Thomas Ballard, Ace C. Leonard, Hanson Hillard Leonard, James W. Leonard, Jesse James Leonard, Mark Leonard, Stacy Elton Leonard, David Elton Lewis, Craven Ledrue Sellers, Herbert T. Sellers.**

Any *BCHS* members wishing to have their *Brunswick County WWI Veteran* ancestor added to this honor list please notify Sally Robinson or Dave Lewis.

### Area Events

**May 5, 2018: Ft. Caswell Rifle Range**, their only fund raiser for the year will be a Kentucky Derby held at 2:30pm in the Caswell Dunes Clubhouse, Caswell Beach. Tickets are \$15.00 per person and includes a catered dinner. Send check to: *Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range, 5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, NC 28465.*

**May 26, 2018:** The *250th anniversary* of St Philip's Church, Brunswick Town. Contact Brunswick Town for list of activities. 910-371-6613

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

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

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

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

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

Receive *Newsletter* by email: Y N

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

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