



NEWSLETTER

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

VOLUME LVIII

NOVEMBER 2019

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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 2019 & 2020 Term

President: James Green
Vice-President: Gwen Causey
Secretary: Roberta Brady
Treasurer: Bob Armour
Directors: Sally Robinson
Jim Marlowe
Dave Lewis

Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis

NOVEMBER MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC NOVEMBER 11, 2019 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, November 11th, 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 2019 issue of the *NEWSLETTER* began the 58th Volume. Volume I, Number 1 was printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletter from September 1961 to November 2018 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 for the year 2020 will be payable by February 2020 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 Speaker

Teresa A. McLamb will be our guest speaker for the November meeting. Her topic will be the "History of Brunswick Community College." Ms. McLamb is a professional journalist and PR consultant with involvement in business and community events within New Hanover and Brunswick Counties. Her genealogical roots grow deep in Brunswick County connecting with the McLamb, Bellamy, Gore, and Jenrette families. She is the owner of McLamb Communications and currently president of board of Brunswick Community College Foundation.



Capture of Fort Caswell Initiated Struggle

Source: "Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region", Copyright 1956, by Louis T. Moore, Chairman, New Hanover Historical Commission

Transcribed as written.

With the announcement several years ago that the national government had agreed to sell historic Fort Caswell, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River near Southport, to the State Baptist Convention, an era of uses during various wars came to an end for the reservation. This will be succeeded with more definite and useful objectives, such as schools for training ministers and church workers, lecture courses, and various recreational purposes.

The purchase price was announced as \$86,000, the government originally having specified \$150,000 as a bottom figure. For that sum the purchasers secured a valuable ocean front area of 300 acres, with enough modern houses on it to constitute rather a small town in itself. There are many other substantial advantages which render the area ideal for the general purposes it has been acquired.

In view of the direct and diametrically different change hereafter in usage, possibly a look backward into history of this reservation may prove not uninteresting to approximately a half million followers of the Baptist belief, but to the citizenship of North Carolina as well.

With Forts Fisher, and Johnston at Southport, Fort Caswell protected the important port of Wilmington during the stormy days of The War Between the States, from 1861 to 1865. The Confederacy would have been much the loser because of needed supplies of foodstuffs, materials, medicines, etc., if the three forts enumerated had not actively functioned during the days of the great conflict.

Government records indicate that this fort was named in honor of Richard Caswell, first governor of the State.

The files of the War Department indicate that the

construction of Fort Caswell was started in the year 1826. Thus it can be seen that with the exception of the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812, the fortification has served a purpose and demand in every subsequent conflict in which this country has engaged.

The first appropriation for construction was under the Act of Congress, approved March 2, 1825. Records show that Major George Blaney, of the United States Corps of Engineers, was in charge of the work of construction until his death at Smithville (now Southport), in 1836. It is interesting to note that his assistant was James Ancrum Berry, a native of Wilmington.

Captain Alexander J. Swift, succeeded Major Blaney in charge of construction. It was under his capable direction that the work of installing the fort was finished.

The original Fort Caswell was reported as completed October 20, 1838 at an approximate cost of \$473,402. From 1838 to 1857 for preservation of site, repairs, etc., and other minor details, the sum of \$69,422.09 was required. The area was officially named Fort Caswell by order of the War Department, No. 32, dated April 18, 1838.

At a later period, following The War Between the States, the fort was entirely remodeled and modernized. This work as was proved by the modern devastating effects of World War One, was rendered useless. The Government then decided to abandon not only this fort but many others along the coast, as well. About the year 1896, the Government provided liberal appropriations for the construction of modern quarters, guns and mortar batteries and for armament of fortifications. These improvements were made at a cost of several million dollars. A power plant, water system, and other facilities were provided. These will be utilized by the new owners in the provision of a modern assembly plant.

A most unusual, unique, and glamorous chapter rests in the fact that Fort Caswell is undoubtedly the only reservation of its kind in the entire country which actually was captured several months prior to The War Between the States. This occurred

January 9, 1861, at least three months prior to the much publicized bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, which engagement long has been heralded as the commencement of hostilities between the North and South. The captured reservation was relinquished two days later to the Federal Government, upon order of the Governor of North Carolina. It was again captured by the same men a few weeks later, to remain then in possession of the Confederacy practically until the cessation of hostilities.

The revealed capture of Fort Caswell by Wilmington military company even before The War Between the States was entered upon, is a generally unwritten and rather unknown chapter to many people. It has fascinating human interest angles and the story should be of value to the present generation of patriotic North Carolinians.

In the first week of 1861 the people of Wilmington were greatly disturbed as it was realized that war clouds were slowly but surely lowering overhead. Local records show that a great mass meeting was held in the Courthouse at Wilmington. After thorough discussion of the grave conditions of affairs between the Southern states and the North it was decided to form a "Committee of Safety". This was followed immediately with a call for volunteers to be enrolled for quick service under the name of "Cape Fear Minute Men". Colonel John J. Hedrick was selected as Commander.

Without delay, Colonel Hedrick and his men embarked on a schooner and set sail for Smithville. It should be held in mind that this brave display antedated by several months the formal declaration of war between the Confederate States and the North.

Upon arrival at Smithville, (now Southport), Colonel Hedrick and his men took possession of the United States barracks known as Fort Johnston. With a continued spirit of defiance, generated with a desire to protect their home, the invaders proceeded to Fort Caswell, two miles across the harbor. There, they formally demanded and obtained surrender of the Fort from the United States Sergeant in charge. This occurred some weeks before actual declaration of war.

Colonel Hedrick assumed direct command, holding in custody the members of the garrison, which had been captured. These Brave Southerners decided to hold Fort Caswell at any cost. In spite of cold January weather, which was altogether unpleasant, the captors patrolled the beach front so as to prevent any surprise attack from the ocean side of the reservation.

Upon receipt of unofficial information of the invasion and capture of Fort Caswell by the Wilmington military company on January 9, 1861, Governor John W. Ellis, as Captain General and Commander-in-Chief of the North Carolina Militia, after saying that the Wilmingtonians were actuated by "patriotic motives", continued to write, as follows: "Yet, in view of the relations existing between the General Government and the State of North Carolina, there is no authority of law, under existing circumstances for the occupation of the United States forts situated in this state. I cannot therefore sustain the action, however patriotic the motives may have been. I am impelled by an imperative sense to order that Fort Caswell be restored to the possession of the authorities of the United States. On receipt of this information communicate orders to have troops withdrawn from Fort Caswell".

Not intimidated in the slightest degree by the formal order from Governor Ellis, transmitted through Colonel John L. Cantwell, of Wilmington, Colonel Hedrick and his men stipulated that they be given until the next morning to arrive at a conclusion. At that time an answer was given that the mandate from the Governor would be followed. Thereupon, the Federal soldiers were released from custody, the captors withdrew, and the United States Sergeant again assumed control of the National government's property.

Rebellious as the act may have been considered, there was not the slightest intimation of any subsequent procedure against Colonel Hedrick and his brave followers from Wilmington. While they had marched against, and had taken possession of a fort owned by the United States government, they had felt that the exigencies of the occasion demanded such a course.

Thus matters remained for a three months' period, until early April, 1861. In the meantime, North Carolina drifted steadily toward secession and war. The former "Minute Men" were permanently organized as the Cape Fear Light Artillery. Under this name they subsequently served during the war.

On April 14, came official notification that Fort Sumter at Charleston had been fired upon. This was three months and five days after Fort Caswell initially had been captured. Promptly, then came a curt order from Governor Ellis which directed that Forts Caswell and Johnston be taken without further delay, and held until further instructions, against all comers.

So it will be seen that the original captors of Fort Caswell in January, three months later in April, again took possession of Fort Caswell for a second time and held the reservation for the Confederacy.

One can easily perceive that the century-old historic lore and tradition which surrounds Fort Caswell with a glamour of rich and attractive color, will be of immeasurable value to the plans in contemplation by the Baptist of North Carolina for its conversion into an Assembly area for religious instruction, educational training, and healthful recreational purposes. As the years come and go, this past setting, combined with climatic advantages, water sports, and other forms of enjoyment will mean much to the new owners of the beautiful and alluring site.

Fort Caswell During World War I

Source: As written from, "Fort Caswell In War and Peace," published in 1983, and written by Ethel Herring and Carolee Williams. From the North Carolina Baptist Assembly archives.

The U-Boat Scare at Caswell – From the early days of our involvement in the war the German submarine posed one of the greatest dangers. Thousands of men and shiploads of ammunition and supplies had to cross the Atlantic. The ships were like sitting ducks for a well-trained submarine fleet. There were numerous submarine tracking stations along our eastern seaboard, and unknown

numbers of submarines came close to our shores. U-boats sank many vessels, including Diamond Shoals Lightship, near the mainland.

One night in 1917 the report came to Fort Caswell from the Coast Guard Station on Smith (Bald Head) Island that gas had been released by a German Submarine. Chickens and livestock on the ground were killed. (It was later thought that the enemy might have released gas to be carried to Fort Caswell by a wind which changed direction and blew toward Bald Head Island.

An alert was ordered, every gun on the post was manned, with service ammunition ready. About this time three United States submarine chasers chose to come in. In spite of repeated attempts to communicate with them by radio and signals, they gave no answer.

Colonel Arthur W. Chase was almost ready to fire on them, thinking they were the ones who had released the deadly gas. Charles H. Foard, chief observer at the primary station for Battery Caswell, tells of Colonel Chase demanding, "Sergeant, what is the azimuth (direction)?" The sergeant turned on a tiny light and was immediately reprimanded by the colonel. "Do you want to give away my position?" The sergeant said he thought the vessels were sub-chasers coming in. Three wooden 110-foot sub-chasers came into the glare of three million candlepower searchlights about that time—otherwise they would have been blown to bits.

The daring U-boat raiders finally did make their presence known to the people of North Carolina coast several months later on August 12, 1918. The Navy announced that a German submarine attacked the Coast Guard Station and Cape Fear Lighthouse on Bald Head Island, just across from Fort Caswell, by using poison gas. Six persons at the two stations, including the wife of one of the men in charge, were overcome by the fumes.

At all times, as on every fort, there was potential danger. But, Fort Caswell mainly served as a training ground for artillery during World War I rather than as a defense.

Soldiers' Life: There was an urgency about the

soldiers' stay at Fort Caswell in 1917-1918. They were desperately needed on the battlefields of Europe, therefore the training had to be hurried and intense. Because of the rushed experience, the men were often poorly prepared for what lay ahead.

During the soldiers' short stay, community members tried to encourage them and help them find a little happiness and relaxation. At the start of the war there was only a small auditorium serving a variety of purposes-theatre productions, games, and religious services. In November of 1917, the citizens of Southport provided the men with an Army and Navy Club on the first floor of the Masonic Lodge. The club, furnished with comfortable furniture, magazines, newspapers, and games, was dedicated to the soldiers' and sailors' use. A local group even sold homemade cakes and sandwiches. The services of this club were the forerunner of what became known as the USO during World War II. In February of 1918, a Y.M.C.A. hut was constructed with two large waiting rooms, four classrooms, living quarters for four coordinators, guest chambers for visiting speakers and entertainers, and a seating capacity of a thousand men. This building was located between present day Ocean View and the Dining Hall.

Men stationed at Fort Caswell during these years tell tales of their experiences. Charles H. Foard, retired engineer (of Wilmington Light Infantry Company during World War I), recalls: *It was a sunny, Sunday afternoon and the weekend visitors had departed a short time before on the steamer for the return trip to Wilmington. Suddenly there was an explosion and we ran from the barracks toward the recruit camp. We arrived at the isolation barrier in time to see a man emerge from the smoke-filled cook tent and fall flat on his face. At that moment two men from the camp ran to him. We heard him say, "Is he dead? What can we do?" The other answered, "I don't know, put some water on his face-but we don't have water. Let's take him to the ocean." Letting action suit their words, they did. We learned later that the poor fellow was mercifully uninjured by the explosion of an old shell thought to have been empty since the War Between the States and used to prop up the cook stove. A fragment of the shell passed between the victim's knees, tearing both*

trouser legs. Half blinded by smoke and ashes he had stumbled from the tent, tripped on a tuft of grass and fallen on his face. His mouth was filled with sand and he could not utter a single word of protest. He was almost drowned by his would-be saviors putting water on his face. The fact that some one yelled, "The Germans are coming," brought on pandemonium.

Lieutenant Holmes of our company had been detailed to command the recruit camp. He told us afterwards that he had been called to the telephone shortly before the explosion. He later returned to his tent and found a piece of the shell had passed through the back of his chair and wrecked the table at which had he been working. (Foard, interview)

Another tale from this time describes how Colonel Ludlow, also known as (Blackbeard,) punished men by sending them onto the parade to pick up sandspurs. To make matters worse they had to dig up the sandspurs with their mess kits. More jovial experiences of the soldiers include catching alligators in Elizabeth Creek and enjoying the companionship of the girls of Southport who along with their chaperones were given the use of a parade grounds home.

World War I – A Personal Word: At long last the war over - the "war to end war," the Great War," we now call World War I. The Armistice was signed to take effect November 11, 1918, at eleven o'clock on the morning of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, in a railway car in Compiègne, France. The American boys who fought so bravely to "make the world safe for democracy" came home. That is, except the thousands whose bodies rest in Flanders' fields where "poppies grow between the crosses row on row."

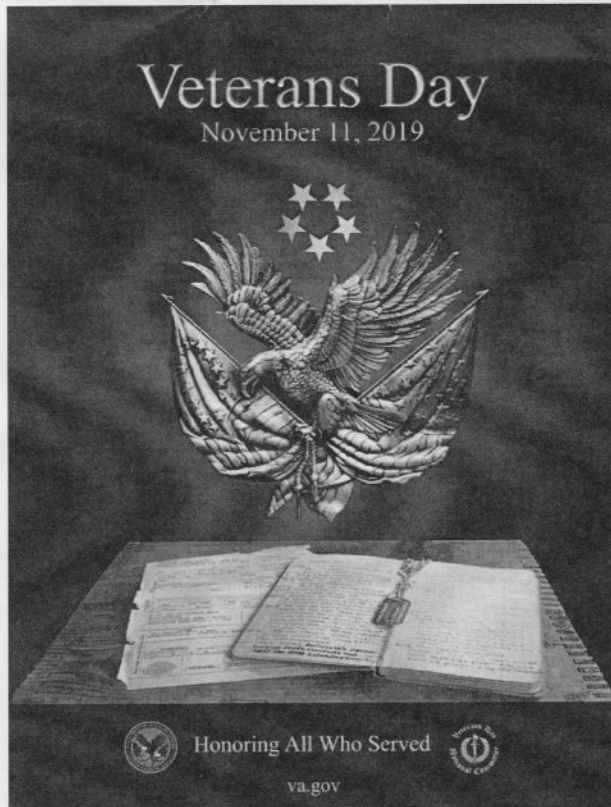
This writer (Ethel Herring) remembers that November day, at the age of thirteen, hearing every whistle that could make a sound, every horn that could blow, every bell (large and small) that could ring, every band that could gather and voices laughing almost uncontrollably, singing and talking, some offering thanks aloud. This was in our normally quite little college town in the beautiful hill country of North Alabama. It was being re-

peated all across our thankful and war weary America.

Veterans Day, November 11, 2019

The theme for the 2019 Veterans Day Poster is: "Service."

Veterans contribute to American society in many ways; not just during their time in active duty. Throughout our history, military service members have put on their uniforms to protect the values and liberties that this nation was built on. But that doesn't stop once the uniform comes off and their time in active duty has ended. Veterans take the lessons they have learned and the experiences they've gained and continue their service to our nation by strengthening our communities. They become our nation's leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs. Veterans are the most active volunteers working to improve communities across our country. Service goes beyond the uniform. This Veteran's Day, we honor the men and women who have worn their uniform who continue to serve our country.



Civil War Round Table

The Brunswick Civil War Round Table has announced its lineup of renowned guest speakers for the upcoming November, December, and January meetings.

November 5, 2019: Carolyn Evans, a New York actress, will perform what is considered a "historical drama," a one-woman show portraying Harriet Tubman, an American abolitionist, political activist, and one of the most heroic women in America.

December 3, 2019: Jim McKee, site manager of Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site and a BCCHS member. His topic: "Fort Anderson in the Civil War."

January 8, 2020: Ed Bearss returns for his eighth visit. He is a renowned Civil War historian, prolific author, battlefield guide, and television commentator. His topic: "Reflections of the Civil War," recounting highlights of his vast knowledge of Civil War events, without the benefit of a single note or script.

The Brunswick Civil War Round Table meetings take place at Hatch Auditorium located at Fort Caswell on Caswell Beach. Registration and refreshments begin at 6:15 p.m. and programs start at 7 p.m. Visitor fee is \$10 and can be applied toward the \$25 annual membership dues. Everyone is welcome. For more information check their website brunswickcivilwarroundtable.com.

A Brief History of the BCCHS

Written by, Mary Wyche Mintz, 1964

The BCCHS is now into its sixty-fifth year! Organized on August 3, 1954 with Cornelius Thomas as president. From October 1954 until June 1956, the organization did not function. On June 21, 1956, a group met at Clarendon Plantation and reorganized the Society electing Kirby Sullivan president. Since that date the Society has had regular meetings. Others who have served as president were H. Foster Mintz for the year 1957 and the Rev. Lawrence Bridges from 1958 through 1961. Mrs. M. Henderson Rourk has served continuously since 1961. Miss Helen F. Taylor has been treasurer since 1959

and secretary-treasurer since 1963, at which time the two offices were combined. Various other positions in the Society have been held by Mrs. C. Ed. Taylor, Miss May Phelps, the Rev. H. Author Phillips, Mrs. Gertrude G. McNeill, Mrs. Ramona King, and Mrs. Jeannette V. Driscoll.

A constitution was adopted in 1962.

The Society maintains a Brunswick Town Preservation Committee whose function is to formulate policy and to give financial aid to the historic site.

The quarterly programs of the Society have dealt with various phases of the history of Brunswick County. The Society has been fortunate in having the programs presented by its own members especially Stanley A. South, archaeologist in charge at Brunswick Town and at Ft. Fisher; R.V. Asbury, formerly official guide at Brunswick Town; and C.B. Berry, surveyor from Ocean Drive, South Carolina. Other notable speakers included Dr. Phillips Russell and Dr. Lawrence Lee of the Citadel faculty.

In 1963 the president of the Society, Mrs. M.H. Rourk, served as the area chairman for the State's tercentenary celebration of the granting of the Carolina Charter. In recognition of this event, the Society presented a program at Brunswick Town on September 8, 1963. The program, under the direction of Charles Taylor, included Dr. Lawrence Lee, who conceived the idea of preserving the ruins

of Brunswick Town; J. Laurence Sprunt, who donated the land for the site; and Brig. General John D.F. Phillips, who was the executive secretary of the State Tercentenary Commission.

The Society was also active in helping to secure a legislative grant for the construction of a museum-visitor center at Brunswick Town, and as mentioned in the Preface, the Society had a Bicentennial Celebration at Brunswick Town on November 15, 1964. Mrs. Harry L. Mintz, Jr. was chairman of the program.

Upcoming Events

November 11, 2019: Fort Caswell Rifle Range has scheduled its next Brunswick County WWI Veterans Roll Call program. Time, 11:00 a.m. beside the Rifle Range Memorial located on Foxfire Trace inside Caswell Dunes subdivision at Caswell Beach.

December 7, 2019: Moores Creek National Battlefield Colonial Christmas. Beginning at 10:00 a.m. and lasting approximately five hours. Includes a Children's Program, Cultural/Craft Demonstration, Exhibition/Show, and Living History. Located 20 miles NW of Wilmington in Currie, NC. Free to the public.

December 8, 2019: An 18th century Christmas at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson. Explore how the American colonists celebrated Christmas. Time, 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Brunswick Town. Fee, \$5 per vehicle.

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

Name: _____

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