



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 2019 & 2020 Term

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FEBRUARY MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC FEBRUARY 14, 2022 at 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, February 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 2022 issue of the *NEWSLETTER* began the 61th Volume. Volume I, Number 1 was printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletter from September 1961 to February 2021 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).

Program

Our speaker for the February meeting will be Mrs. Martha McKee Koletar. Martha is a North Carolina native, born in Gastonia and grew up in Greensboro before moving to New York City and Glen Rock, New Jersey. She is currently the Regent for the Brunswick Town Chapter, NSDAR and since 2004 has been an active member of the Concord United Methodist Church. Her topic for our program will be the history of Concord United Methodist Church.

Dues

DUES are now payable 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**. Please address questions of your membership status thru our website.

First Hand Account of a Slave's Life in Brunswick County

Slavery in Brunswick County had its beginning in the early 1700's. The 1769 county tax list identified 1,239 enslaved African Americans. However, slave ownership was not common, and 110 of the white males (representing 54% of those reporting) owned no slaves. By 1772 the number of reported slaves in the county had declined slightly to 1,150. Regardless of the specific numbers 63% of the Lower Cape Fear population consisted of enslaved African Americans. This was in contrast to only 29% of the population in the upper reaches of the Cape Fear were slaves.

Rice was assumed to be the agricultural mainstay of Brunswick County during the antebellum period, but this production was possible only along the Cape Fear River. Slave labor was used in the plantation wetlands for ditching and making dikes for the rice fields that could be periodically flooded. For the remainder of the County the most significant crop was likely naval stores – products that could be harvested from the flatlands dominated by longleaf pine and wire grass.

In 1856 Frederick Law Olmsted discussed the conditions of those living in the "piney woods". Olmsted said, "The negroes employed in this branch of industry seemed to me to be unusually intelligent and cheerful. Decidedly they are superior in every moral and intellectual respect to the great mass of the white people inhabiting the turpentine forest. Among the latter there is a large number, I should think a majority, of entirely uneducated, povertystricken vagabonds. I mean by vagabonds, simply, people without habitual, definite occupation or reliable means of livelihood. They are poor, having almost no property but their own bodies; and the use of these, that is, their labor, they are not accustomed to hire out stately and regularly, so as to obtain capital by wages, but only occasionally by the day or job, when driven to it by necessity. A family of these people will commonly hire, or "squat" and build, a little log cabin, so made that it is only a shelter from rain, the sides not being chinked, and having no more furniture or pretension to comfort than is commonly provided a criminal in the cell of a prison. They will cultivate a little corn, and possibly a few rows of potatoes, cow-peas and coleworts. They will own a few

swine, that find their living in the forest; and pretty certainly, also, a rifle and dogs; and the men, ostensibly, occupy most of their time in hunting."

Very few records indicating the first hand account of a slave's life in Brunswick County exist, but two narratives from ex-slaves can be found. The only ex-slave from Brunswick appearing in the Library of Congress typescript collection of narratives is Joseph Anderson, interviewed by Mrs. Edith S. Hibbs. Another notable slave was James (Alfred) Johnson, whose autobiography, "The Life of the Late James Johnson (Colored Evangelist), an Escaped Slave from the Southern States of America," tells of his life while living in Brunswick County.

Joseph Anderson was interviewed at 1113 Rankin St., Wilmington, NC sometime before his death in 1940. He reported being the slave of T.C. McIlhenny on what he called "Eagles Nest" rice plantation. Anderson said that after his parents death in 1865 his older sister took care of him. He married in Brunswick County with his unnamed wife living nearly 21 years. After that he married a second time until her death after a few years. At some point he moved to Wilmington where he "was a stevedore for Mr. Alexander Sprunt for sixty years". Joseph was born November 1, 1850 in Brunswick County and died in Wilmington on January 28, 1940 and is buried at the Pine Forest Cemetery.

Story of Joseph Anderson (as written by Mrs. Edith S. Hibbs)

"Yes'm I was born a slave. I belong to Mr. T. C. McIlhenny who has a big rice plantation "Eagles Nest" in Brunswick County. It was a big place. He had lots of slaves, an' he was a good man. My mother and father died when I was fourteen. Father died in February 1865 and my mother died of pneumonia in November 1865. My older sister took charge of me."

Interviewer: "Can you read and write?"

Joseph: "Oh yes, I can write a little. I can make my mark. I can write my name. No'm I can't read. I never went to school a day in my life. I just "picked up" what I know.

I don't remember much about slave times. I was fourteen when I was freed. After I was freed we lived between 8th and 9th on Chestnut (Wilmington). We rented a place from Dan O'Connor a real estate man and paid him \$5 a month rent.

I've been married twice. First time was married by Mr. Ed Taylor, magistrate in Southport, Brunswick County. I was married to my first wife twenty years and eight months. Then she died. I was married to my second wife just a few years when she died.

"I was on the police force for a year and a half. I was elected April 6, 1895. Mr. McIlhenny was an ole man then an' I used to go to see him.

"I was a stevedore for Mr. Alexander Sprunt for sixty years."

Joseph is now buying his house at 1113 Rankin Street. Rents part of it for \$8.50 a month to pay for it. He stays in one room.

Note: Joseph's health is none too good, making information sketchy and incoherent.

Story of James Alfred Johnson, "The Life of the Late James Johnson, an Escaped Slave from the Southern States of America," is a pamphlet about Johnson's life as a slave in Brunswick County, his escape in a Union vessel during the Civil War, his passage to Liverpool as a sailor and his journey through England and Wales. Johnson settled in Oldham, England in 1866 and died there in 1914. The only known copy of his biography is preserved in the Oldham M.B.C. Archive.

James Johnson's story is recorded in an autobiography published by his daughter Alice, in 1914 after his death. The small pamphlet is just 12 pages with a lengthy title. It begins with his early life being born into slavery on March 20, 1847 in Smithville (Southport), North Carolina. He indicates that his owner when he was a small child was a boat builder named Uriah Moss. Because of financial difficulties Moss sold him to a planter named Jesse Drew from Orton Plantation on the Cape Fear River just north of Smithville.

Prior to Moss selling him, he also was temporarily in the household of a local storekeeper, William Galloway, apparently as a payment for Moss's debts to Galloway. While owned by Drew he describes his work life: "It was my Sunday task to go into the fields and scare the birds from the Indian corn and rice. During the winter I had to uproot and gather the sweet potatoes or yams, and rake straw. In the summer, to plough the ground for the reception of Indian corn, cotton, peas, and sugar cane. During the autumn season, to strip fodder for the horses and cattle from the Indian corn stalks."

Johnson remembered life with Drew as "comparatively pleasant". He makes no mention of

Drew ever whipping him, unlike Uriah Moss.

After approximately two years Drew sold Johnson for \$825 to a George Washington. Johnson recalled that Washington employed him as a coachman and hostler and when not doing either of those jobs he was sent to labor on one of Washington's two plantations, one in the Green Swamp and the other five miles away at "Five Points". During this time he suffered a great deal of abuse. He refers specifically to one incident sometime in 1859 or 1860 when he was tied to a tree trunk, flogged until blood streamed down his back and then ordered some of the other negroes to wash him in salt and water in order to cure his lacerated back as soon as possible. Johnson said, "The suffering enduring such a proceeding can only be felt, it cannot be described".

After the Civil War broke out, he was made a house servant. Johnson's story during this period focuses on the struggle of local slaves to find adequate food. Perhaps they were experiencing the consequences of the Union naval blockade of the Cape Fear River and other war-time disruptions to the local economy. His efforts to feed his hunger by pilfering his owner's livestock and smokehouse are some of the pamphlet's lengthiest passages.

Those incidents often involved other slaves, but Johnson mentions only one by name, a cook named Rebecca. After being flogged Rebecca escaped from the plantation but was run down by bloodhounds in Shallotte. Johnson remembered that she was "beat again, put in irons, kept in a barn for a week, and fed on bread and water." Though he had not always had a friendly relationship with Rebecca, Johnson attempted to nurse her back to health. He recalled that lengthy period of Rebecca's debilitation as his darkest moment.

"I became so down-hearted at what I had endured myself, and saw poor Rebecca suffer, that I tried to put an end to my miserable existence by eating the leaves of a poisonous plant, but the doctor was brought and the stomach-pump applied, but I was ill for a long time afterwards. I went nearly mad and ate clay to destroy myself, upon which my master got spirits of turpentine and clay mixed together, and forced it down my throat in order that I might be sickened of it and sick and heart-sore I was."

In the summer of 1862, Johnson and three companions succeeded in stealing a boat from their

owner and rendezvousing with one of the Union naval blockade vessels off the Cape Fear River. It was the U.S.S. Stars and Stripes. Johnson indicates that he served on that naval vessel for six weeks until the Stars and Stripes sailed to Philadelphia for overhaul and repairs.

James Johnson left the Stars and Stripes in Philadelphia and bummed his way to New York City. There he signed on as a crew member of the Blenheim, an English ship bound for Liverpool. He recalls, "Darkie" got kicked about a good deal all the way to Brunswick Dock, Liverpool," arriving penniless and friendless. He continues to write, "Now I know of the dear friend in heaven, the Lord Jesus, but I didn't then, so I was sad and downcast." He first lived on the city's streets begging for bread or scrounging in ash pits for food scraps and sleeping in out-houses, water closets, timber yards, etc. He repeatedly fell victim to thieves and scam artists until leaving Liverpool in the winter with scarcely any clothes on his back.

Traipsing through the English and Welsh countryside he visited Ormskirk, St Helens, Warrington, and Manchester among other locales. He was on the road for nearly four years and went to sea twice but always returned and "spent my money in drinking, etc." While traveling he "took to singing, dancing, and rattlebones" in front of taverns in order to earn a bite to eat. In Sheffield, South Yorkshire he joined Chuckie Harris's Boxing Tent, a traveling show renowned for its sleazy lifestyle, gambling and vicious bare-knuckled fighting. Johnson's role in the boxing show was that of "sparring man" for the professional boxers.

After arriving in Oldham in the northwest of England in September 1866, he found work at a foundry and then at Platt Brothers and Company, a leading maker of textile machinery. While in Oldham, Johnson experienced a spiritual awakening that began with an invitation from a co-worker to hear the Sheffield Hallelujah Band. He eventually began to attend "the Oldham Church" and "the Town Hall services". Johnson wrote, "light began to dawn more fully onto my soul."

One night after a Town Hall service Johnson realized that "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleansed me from all sin. Oh gladsome day, when I was able to say, free from slavery of the master in America, the master of my body. But what a still more glorious one when I realized I was

free from the soul-master, the devil. Now I am free, body and soul."

The pamphlet is fundamentally a tale of a religious journey as it is a slave narrative. After his religious awakening Johnson says very little about his life. He indicates that he married Sarah Preston in 1869 and credits her with teaching him how to read and write. It is estimated that the date of his authorship of his autobiography as being 1877 or 1878. At that time he had been preaching "the old, old story of Jesus and His love" in public for four years. It wasn't until after his death on February 24, 1914 that this manuscript was published with his daughter, Alice Johnson holding the pamphlet's copyright.

Sources: "African American Lives on the Lower Cape Fear River in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." Prepared By: Michael Trinkley, PH.D and Debi Hacker, Chicora Foundation, Inc.

Library of Congress, loc.gov.

"The Life of the Late James Johnson (Colored Evangelist), an Escaped Slave from the Southern States of America," by James Johnson

Everybody Loves a Bear Story

By Gwen Causey

July 24, 2021

The Green Swamp, originally about 200,000 acres, has always been sparsely populated. It was named for John Green, a property owner who lived there prior to the Revolutionary War. The name has changed over the years...it was first known as John Green's Field, then John Green's Swamp, later Green's Swamp and today Green Swamp. In 1795, it was appraised at 4.2 cents per acre when the State deeded the land to private individuals.

Most of the original property was purchased in 1861 by the Green Swamp Company which initiated large scale logging operations. Logging camps sprung up in the nearby communities of Makatoka and Bolton. Local farmers used the fringes of the swamp as pastures for their hogs and cattle...letting them roam free for months and then gathering them up at slaughter time. The animals were distinguished by a mark on the ear, each family's mark being registered at the courthouse.

Farmers and their families have always used the swamp for hunting, trapping and fishing.

The Clewis families live in the area of the Green Swamp that includes Crusoe Island. The Phelps families live in the Juniper Creek area that includes Exum and Makatoka. And the Little families live in the area around Camp Branch. All three families are known for their hunting exploits and their stories could fill a book.

One of the most interesting animals still present in the Green Swamp is the black bear.

Early in the spring of 1935 the boys at Camp Sapona (CCC) rescued a couple of small bear cubs from a forest fire that was roaring through their refuge in the Green Swamp. The rescue was not without danger to the boys who had to work fast to fell the trees where the cubs were stranded. The cubs were kept at the camp for some time and the boys were so proud of their rescue, they began advertising in newspapers to find a home for their pets. The advertisement became a classic and was copied over and over in many U. S. newspapers, as it also made a plea to the public to refrain from setting fire to the woods, pointing out the great loss to animal life, as well as the destruction of property.

The cubs were named Mike and Ike. In July, 1935 they came to the attention of the state department of conservation and development. J. D. Challe made a special trip to Southport for the purpose of securing the cubs from W. C. Long, who purchased the animals from the CCC boys that rescued them from the Green Swamp fire. Mr. Long is reluctant to give up his pets but the game official has the law on his side and the cubs either must be turned loose or turned over to the state game authorities.

The bear is one of the most prized and sought-after game animals. It is hunted with dogs, without which it would be impossible to catch.

The bear has three weaknesses: its fondness for corn (often used as bait), its predilection (preference, special liking) for areas where garbage is discarded and its tendency to "tree." There is a small amount of predation on livestock, probably when its preferred food source is scarce.

During some hunting seasons, when water levels in the swamp are high, few bears are killed. Under such conditions, the bear can "water" the dogs. This means the bear leads the dogs through

wet areas, making it harder for them to be treed.

Persons living in or near the Green Swamp recall experiences in the wilds and stories they heard in their youth. Stories abound of attacks by animals.

Arthur Little spent many of his younger days hunting and trapping. His father, Rufus, bought 450 acres on Bear Pen Island and was a farmer. In 1933 Arthur moved to a house on the Columbus/Brunswick border on Highway 211.

Arthur Little had a talent for telling stories and recounting his hunting experiences. Once he told of the time his father was attacked by a bear.

One morning at breakfast his Dad said that a bear was killing his sheep, said he had killed two sheep and that he had to try and kill the bear. So, he asked if I didn't want to help kill the bear. I told him I couldn't go bear hunting since I had promised that I'd be at work at twelve o'clock. I was working for the Waccamaw Lumber Company.

Later I returned and when I was about a quarter mile away, I heard the dogs coming. Pretty soon I saw my father running down the road, stop and throw up his gun and shoot. When he shot, he ran behind a thick bunch of bushes. When he ran into the bushes the bear came out and hit the road running. Two dogs were on either side of the bear, pinching him enough to make him mad. The bear whirled around, grabbed a dog up and was gnawing him. Dad broke from the bushes, ran across the road and was pointing his gun right at him and fired.

By the time that the gun fired, I saw him start floundering backwards. I saw the bear come up and went into him with both forefeet, right in the chest. The bear bit him on the ankle and he bit him four times because there were twelve teeth holes. Moving on to the muscle of his leg the bear left fourteen tooth holes. The bear then put his left forefoot on his stomach and was standing on him.

Immediately his father rammed his right hand down the bear's mouth. And he wouldn't take it out because the bear was going to bite him in the face. The bear bit him thumb and finger joints in two.

I just flew on to him like a cat, hugging my left arm around his head. Turning his attention from my father, he then started trying to get shed of me. He was pushing me around and I was still hanging on.

At that time, I had a little Smith and Weston six-shot squeezer pistol that I carried in a knapsack along with a box of bullets. I stuck the gun in there and started shooting. And, I shot until it snapped. I turned the old bear's head a-loose. It flopped down and hit the ground.

And he raised his old head back up and looked right into my eyes and opened his mouth, took his foot and moved it under his chin, rolled his eyes up and he was dead. He laid that chin on his foot just so pretty as padding for his head. I reckon he had the headache or something.

After removing the dead bear off his father, he borrowed a buggy from Mance Little and took him to Dr. Goley in Shallotte—some 22 miles away.

While I carried Dad to the doctor, Uncle Mance went up there and skinned the bear out. There was about an inch and a half of white lard or white fat between it and the red meat all over the bear. That's the reason them buckshot wouldn't go through there. The fat had wadded up the buckshot and hadn't penetrated in the bear hardly enough to do anything but sting. The bear fat was tried and rendered up a fifty-pound lard stand of bear lard or bear grease or whatever you want to call it.

Lewis Napoleon (Pode) Little's wife was the first cousin to Arthur Little. Lewis Little was another bear hunter with a reputation.

Pode tells a reporter from *The State Port Pilot*, (July 31, 1935) of a Saturday morning in August, 1917 when he and Miles Little went hunting together near one of the Green Swamp cornfields.

"Our dogs, Poor Boy, Wheeler, Talley, Bouncer and Beaver were along and they soon picked up the scent spore of a bear. After running around across a network of canals for about six hours, they treed him.

Miles stayed on the canal bank and hollered and whooped to keep the bear's attention on him until I could slip around to the rear and up near enough to get a shot.

The briars and bushes were so high and thick that I had to tunnel my way beneath them. However, I reached the tree without the bear observing my approach, I shook a bush to get him to look at me that I might fire a more deadly shot.

He looked down and I shot him in the breast. He let go of his hold except one front paw.

After swinging back and forth once or twice, he came tumbling down into the bushes at my feet.

I was down with bushes over me and five dogs and the bear wallowing and fighting about me like nobody's business. Eventually the bear got away, ran off and then came directly back to me and jammed his nose against me where I stood still tangled in vines.

The dogs were so hot behind the bear he turned and climbed another tree. I shot at him again inflicting a fatal wound."

Another story he told was of the time R. W. Scott, a neighbor, had him set a trap for a bear near his bee yard. The next morning Mr. Scott, J. P. Long, C. M. Carr and myself went to see what I had caught.

I had set three traps and one was gone. We followed the trail from the bee yard into the swamp. We found the trap and then made a bargain, if I just wounded the bear then we were to scatter and each run for his life each hoping that the bear might get some other member of the party.

To make the climax more entertaining I secretly slipped a load of bird shot into my gun and fired them at the bear's nose. Whereupon the bear snorted, bounded toward us, and we scattered like a covey of frightened quail. However, I remember that Mr. Long jumped into a stump hole, and finding it no place of security decided to lose no time getting up and coming pass me yelled, "Pode, for heaven's sake, if you've got another shell in that gun, shoot that bear and kill him!" And, so I did.

Robert Andrews Sellers (1847-1905)

By Paula F Kermon, Sept. 15, 2017, NC Civil War & Reconstruction History Center Blog.
(As Written)

Robert Sellers' childhood is very sketchy, but according to his widow, his father died when Robert was a young child. When his mother remarried, his stepfather bonded him to a farmer. The 1850 census for Brunswick County listed him as a 3 year old living with farmers George and Mary Montgomery (his maternal grandparents). The 1860 census showed him as 12 and living with James Reynolds. Eventually Robert "ran away to the woods" and worked in a lumber mill. During that time, he taught himself to be a ship's engineer

and was allegedly the first licensed maritime engineer south of the Mason Dixon Line.

Robert enlisted in the 3rd Company G 40th Regiment CSA on March 16, 1863 at the age of 17. He became part of the crew on the blockade runner "Venus" off the Cape Fear River. The Venus was reportedly one of the fastest iron sidewheelers and under the command of Captain Charles Murray.

She was returning to port in September 1863, loaded with salt pork, bacon, coffee, sugar, and armament for Lee's Army of Northern Virginia when she met Union resistance from a Federal Gunboat. The Venus was trying to run the blockade when the Union's Nansemond joined the chase attempting to disable the Venus. As the Venus was coming into the Wilmington inlet, the Nansemond came into range of Fort Fisher's gunners. The gunners peppered the waters around the Nansemond, forcing her to fall back from the chase. The Venus was damaged but able to reach safety in the Cape Fear River. However, on her very next trip, returning to Wilmington in October 1863, the Venus again was attacked by the Nansemond, and her hull was damaged by cannons and was beached at Carolina Beach. Attempts to refloat her the next day were unsuccessful, and she was set on fire to keep her out of enemy hands. With his ship now destroyed, Robert continued as a pilot for other blockade runners. (This account was told by family and supported by the account detailed in *Gray Phantoms of the Cape Fear* by Dawson Carr).

Robert was captured at Fort Fisher on January 15, 1856 and was a POW in Elmira, NY (named Hellmira by the prisoners). During the 12 months that the prison was in use, 2,970 of the

12,100 Confederate soldiers there died of malnutrition, exposure, disease from poor sanitary conditions, and lack of medical care. Robert was released on June 12, 1865.

Robert Sellers married Sarah Matilda Bowers on June 5, 1869 in Brunswick County, and they had 9 children.

In the 1870 census, Robert was shown as being employed as a seaman and living in Smithville, Brunswick County. He drowned on February 23, 1905 in Wilmington, NC under suspicious circumstances, (family stated that he had \$400 taken from him). He was then living at 722 Front Street in Wilmington and is buried in the Bellevue Cemetery.

Some of Robert Sellers' descendants continue to be pulled by the sea. His grandson, Robert Andrews Sellers, was a machinist mate in the engine room while serving in the US Coast Guard during World War II. His great grandson, Philip Van Sellers, was a chief engineer, and his great great grandson, Raymond Gordon Davis, was a captain, with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Editors Note: The headline from The Wilmington Dispatch, dated February 24, 1905, stated, ***"Death Lurked In Dark Waters, Engineer Robert Sellers was Drowned Last Night. Tragedy that Occurred Twenty-Nine Miles From Wilmington – Body Brought to the City About Noon Today and Prepared for Burial. Captain of the May Flower Gives Graphic Description, Coroner Moore of Brunswick Will Investigate."***

Continued on page 8

***Membership Application ... Invite a Friend to Join
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Please submit any articles or information for future newsletters to Dave Lewis.

Email: davelewis@atmc.net

CALENDER OF EVENTS

BCHS Meetings: February 14, 2022

May 09, 2022

August 08, 2022

November 14, 2022

Robert Andrews (Augustus) Sellers was born July 7, 1847 in North Carolina and doesn't appear to have a direct connection to the Sellers of Brunswick County. He married Sarah Matilda Bowers on June 5, 1869 in Brunswick County. Sarah was born June 10, 1854 in Southport and died June 24, 1940 in Wilmington. Robert's father is reported to be James W. Sellers and may have been from Edgecombe County, North Carolina. He died Abt. 1848 in Edgecombe County. Robert's mother was Susan Angeline Montgomery and little is known about her, except the 1850 census shows she and Robert were living with her parents, George and Mary Montgomery in the Town Creek community of Brunswick County. She may have married a James Reynolds before 1860.

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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