



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
5152 NEW BRITTON LP NW. ASH, NC 28420

VOLUME LXI

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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:
Treasurer: Bob Armour
Directors: Sally Robinson
Jim Marlowe
Dave Lewis

Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis
Webmaster: Charles Clemmons

Website:

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ciety.org



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

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, November 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).

BCHS's new mailing address.
5152 New Britton LP NW
Ash, NC 28420.

Dues

Annual **DUES** will be payable by the February 2023 meeting 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 program speaker will be Mr. Mark Koenig. Mark is a local author and former director of the Wilmington Railroad Museum. While director of the museum he became interested in the Wilmington, Brunswick & Southern Railroad, a spur running between Wilmington and Southport linking the lower Cape Fear area to points west. This will be his topic for the evening along with celebrating the 111th anniversary of this short spur line.

The WB&S railroad line was known by locals as “willing but slow.” Mark chronicles the short life of a short line and the long process of making it a reality in his book titled, “The Wilmington, Brunswick & Southern Railroad.” This book weaves history, geography, photographs, archival materials, anecdotes and personal memories into the surprisingly long lead-up to the short line, along with the life and times of its short life.

Mark will have signed copies for sale at the meeting.

SOUTHPORT’S GREAT PARTY

by Mark Koenig

The live oaks in Franklin Square in Southport have surely witnessed many large and small events of note. If they could speak, they would recount tales of a fort being built during the town’s Smithville days, platting 100 blocks separated by wide streets, episodes in the waning days of the Civil War, innumerable picnics and gatherings, and much more.

In the fall of 1911, however, they were witness to what may have been Southport’s most exuberant celebration – the formal arrival of a railroad and promises of a bright and prosperous future.

The event had been a long time in coming. For twenty-five years or more the good people of Brunswick County had been hearing proposals to establish a railroad. Not only would such an enterprise provide reliable and faster transportation for passengers and freight, it would open up the interior of the county to capitalize on its vast untapped resources, especially forests and agricultural potential.

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In an improbable scenario in the 1880s, it was northern capitalists who first pitched a vision to establish a major terminus for coal and commodities near the mouth of the Cape Fear River. They even lobbied to change the name of a small town from Smithville to Southport to symbolize its bright future. They saw greater efficiency and profit in shipping to Southport than utilizing inland railroads that ran to Virginia and South Carolina.

Initially, these proposals generated a good deal of excitement and speculation. Southport doubled its platted area, real estate values took off, and the local papers were full of excited predictions. However, local support was hard to come by; Brunswick County, for all its potential, was cash poor and the grand vision was difficult to embrace. Counties were enthusiastic about the possible rewards, but very reluctant to commit their own financial backing.

In a series of fitful starts over the next two decades, only four out of more than twenty companies managed to make headway. Physical progress was limited to small fragments here and there, and broader financial panics in the national economy took their toll on availability of financing. In Brunswick County, skepticism grew as proposals repeatedly failed to deliver on their promises.

In 1906 interests much closer to home took matters into their own hands. A consortium of individuals with knowledge of logging, agriculture, commercial shipping, and finance bought a lumber company operating out of Town Creek. Along with its assets – buildings, property, equipment – the group also quietly secured harvesting rights to timber on over 25,000 acres of land.

They expanded that enterprise to construct a thirty-mile rail line from Southport to connect with existing rail lines in Navassa. They built on previous work, stitching together improvements at the north end and at several bridges across waterways along the route. The company was the Wilmington, Brunswick and Southern Railroad, and it

progressed slowly over the next four years to survey, clear, grade, and lay rails.

By late June of 1911 the line was at least a mile short of reaching Southport's city limits. This was an important destination, since Southport's participation in the project was contingent on rails entering the city by July 1. The company was encumbered by a performance bond, and if it failed to meet the deadline, it would forfeit its bond. To no one's surprise, the track-laying crew grew quickly, spurred on by the urgency to accomplish the goal. On June 30 the track crossed the city limits.

Rails continued into Southport, and the company's president drove a ceremonial last spike a few weeks later. Runs of trains were made in August to test the track and make adjustments, and freight service began. It was important to establish revenue as soon as possible to recapture the cash invested in the line's construction.

Plans were also made to celebrate the start of passenger service with a "grand opening" in November. Southport leaders, finally realizing the vision of a railroad (although much diminished), rallied the community to prepare for a glorious celebration to mark the occasion. Committees were formed for various aspects of the celebration, and soon the whole town was involved.

The date was set for November 23. Invitations went out, a program was put together, and arrangements were made for a sure-fire attraction — free food! Excitement built as the pieces came together, and Franklin Square was chosen as the staging point to accommodate the expected large crowds. Just how large they would be was going to be a surprise.

Civic groups and churches were enlisted to plan for and support the effort. The local Chamber of Commerce even had a special notice printed conspicuously on the front page of the *Southport News*, inviting one and all to the great celebration. A companion notice in the *Wilmington Morning Star* of November 20 gave an "All Aboard" call and encouraged one and all to ...

"Take a day off and ride through the vast domains of undeveloped country laying at our back doors and which is destined to early become the trucking paradise of the Old North State. Patriotic Speeches

by Statesmen and Orators, Boat Races and Parades, Grand Display of Battleships, Foot Races, Base Ball, Military Drills, Free Dinner and an Old Fashioned Barbecue of Beef, Pork, Mutton, Venison, Possum, Etc., including All of the Good Things Grown and Produced in Brunswick County."

The event was widely reported throughout the state, aided by busy telegraphers burning up the wires. A special train of VIPs and party-goers left Wilmington at 8:30 a.m. The engine pulled six festively-decorated coaches down the new line and made stops at Town Creek and Winnabow to pick up more passengers. It was welcomed by cheers in Southport by the crowds already assembled there. A second packed train arrived soon after to its own cheering welcome.

The steamer *Wilmington*, under Captain John Harper, floated into town with a load of five hundred more people. It was joined by a flotilla of small watercraft, the revenue cutter *Seminole*, and torpedo boats *McDonough* and *DeLong*. Hundreds more celebrants ventured in from towns and settlements in the county. It was estimated that about 5,000 people were there that day, more than tripling Southport's population.

All Aboard for Southport

: NOVEMBER 23rd, 1911 :

First Passenger Train Over the Wilmington, Brunswick and Southern Railroad, Into the Historic Capital of Brunswick.

Take a day off and ride through the vast domains of undeveloped country lying at our doors and which is destined to early become the trucking paradise of the Old North State.

Patriotic Speeches by Statesmen and Orators, Boat Races and Parades, Grand Display of Battleships, Foot Races, Base Ball, Military Drills, Free Dinner and an Old Fashioned Barbecue of Beef, Pork, Mutton, Venison, 'Possum, Etc., including All of the Good Things Grown and Produced in Brunswick County.

A Good Time Guaranteed Everybody and Perfect Order Insured.

Southport is full of historic interest, while Fort Caswell, just across the bay, is one of the Finest on the South Atlantic Seaboard. Boats will run between Southport and Fort Caswell every fifteen minutes during the day, thus furnishing the public an Opportunity to Visit this interesting Harbor of Defense, such as no other occasion will ever offer.

Don't Miss This Opportunity to Ride on the First Passenger Train Through Brunswick County, Into the City of Southport. Meet Old Friends and Renew the Acquaintances of by-gone days.

Trains Leave Union Station, Wilmington, at 8:00 A. M. and 8:30 A. M. Fare for the Round Trip as Follows:

Wilmington, \$1.00; Navassa, \$1.00; Jackey's Creek, \$1.00; El Paso, \$1.00; Town Creek, 75 cents; Brunswick, 75 cents; Bolivia, 50 cents; Loughlin, 50 cents; Goresville, 50 cents; Coolvale, 40 cents; Atwood, 25 cents.

The venerable live oaks of Franklin Park had never witnessed such a gathering. This was the "biggest deal" the town had ever seen, and organizers were understandably giddy after all the years of false starts, speculation, and unfulfilled promises. The *Charlotte Observer* newspaper wryly noted that pickpockets also had a good day, according to Sheriff J.J. Knox, "touching" more than 100 people for cash, papers, jewelry, and watches.

The VIPs and dignitaries received an escort to Franklin Square by a military band from Fort Caswell and an honor guard of Spanish-American war veterans. The processioned a block or so to the park, where a long speakers' stage had been built, complete with a floral arch and draped bunting. The band played patriotic music while the special guests made the customary rounds of meet-and-greets, and then the speeches began.

After an opening blessing from a local clergyman, prominent lawyer Robert W. Davis kicked things off with a welcoming address which, as printed in the *Wilmington Morning Star*, was long on emotion and short on substance. He resurrected ambitions from decades before by proclaiming ...

"...that nature has destined Southport to be the greatest seaport on the eastern coast ... be glad that the dream of Southport's railroad is real, and is the initiative step to make North Carolina [the] leading competitor with Pennsylvania and Ohio for all our mountains with coal and minerals."

Several more speeches followed, including congratulations from Gov. William W. Kitchin and an hour-long oration by U.S. Sen. F.M. Simmons (given a stage and a crowd, such a speech was predictable). At the close of formal remarks, the railroad's president, Z. W. Whitehead, received a gold cane from appreciative citizens.

It was then time for the eager and hungry crowd to chow down at the feast among the trees in Franklin Square. To impart a hometown flavor, all menu items were supposed to be from Brunswick County. As such, the selections were heavy on seafood, wild game, and pork, with an assortment of beans and greens. It was thought that even bear meat would be served, but those creatures had the good sense to make themselves scarce.

Meanwhile, the day wasn't over yet, not by a long shot. On the river, boats lined up and presented a waterborne parade. Regular shuttles went to Fort Caswell to show off small arms and drill maneuvers. While sports and field events entertained the ordinary crowds back in Southport, the VIPs took a special cruise on the *Seminole*. They reconvened at the quarantine station for a banquet accompanied by many toasts and cordial backslapping.

It's not hard to imagine that the folks of Southport thankfully settled back to their normal quiet lives once the big day was over. It was time to get back to the routine activities of everyday existence.

As regularly scheduled passenger service

RAILROAD CELEBRATION

Southport, N. C November 23, 1911
11 O'Clock A. M.

PROGRAM

PRESIDENT Z. W. WHITEHEAD, MASTER OF CEREMONIES

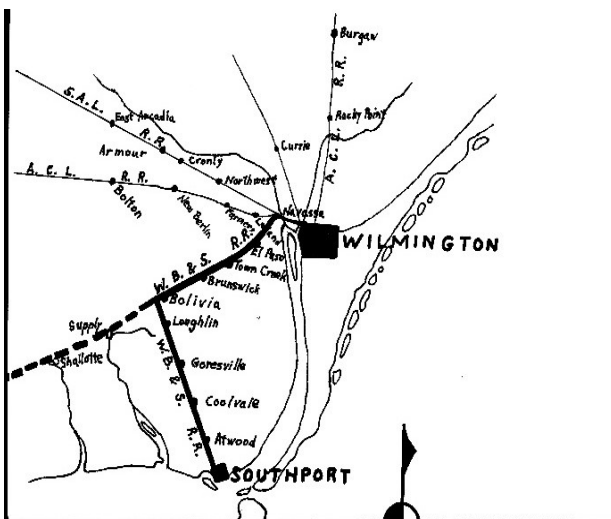
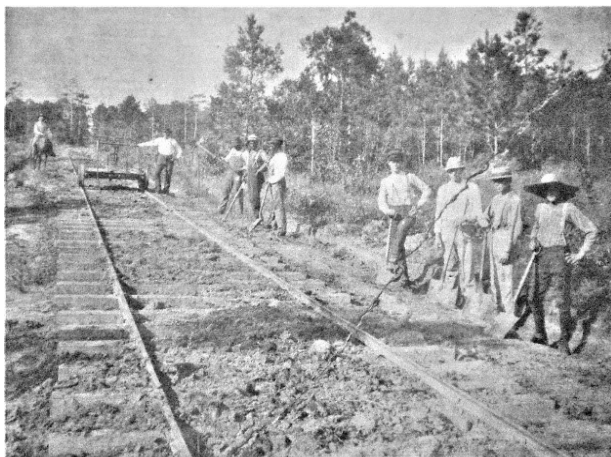
Song.....America
Prayer.....K. B. Tupper, D. D., L. L. D.
Welcome Address.....Robert W. Davis, Esq.
Response.....J. D. Smith, Mayor of Wilmington, N. C.
Address.....Representative H. L. Godwin
Address.....George Rountree, Esq.
Address.....Harry Skinner, Esq.
Address.....J. O. Carr, Esq.
Address.....Senator Lee S. Overman
Address.....Senator F. M. Simmons
Address.....His Excellency Gov. W. W. Kitchin
Appreciative gift from the citizens of Brunswick County to President Z. W. Whitehead.....
Presentation by C. Ed. Taylor, Esq.
1:30 P. M., picnic dinner and barbecue in Franklin Square.
2:30 P. M., motor boat parade in harbor, viewed from Garrison.
3:00 P. M., field sports in Franklin Square:
100 yard dash for State championship.
High jump.
Bayonet drill by soldiers from Fort Caswell.
Tug of war- Fort Caswell vs. Southport.
Relay race.
Bag race.
Light calisthenics by U. S. soldiers.
Music during the day by military band from Fort Caswell.
The Steamer General G. W. Goffe will make regular trips to and from Fort Caswell during the afternoon for the accommodation of visitors.

began, it was boasted that the 30-mile trip took under two hours. It was a great improvement over the main alternative of river steamers, whose four-hour service was at least partially dependent on tides and weather. And it was vastly better than a trip by automobile of up to three hours or more, contending with the primitive roads of the time.

Sources:

Wilmington Morning Star, Wilmington Dispatch, Charlotte Observer (various dates)

The Wilmington, Brunswick & Southern Railroad, Mark W. Koenig (The History Press, 2022)



Editors Note: Thank you Mark for contributing this article. All text, pictures, and illustrations are the sole property of Mark Koenig.

First Prohibition Law in North Carolina

It may interest the general public to know that Brunswick County, and North Carolina as a state, can undoubtedly offer and sustain a challenge to any other state in the union to produce a prohibition law which ante-dates the year 1745. Thousands of voters, regardless of their attitude toward the controversial question of whether or not sale of hard liquors should be abolished, may be interested in knowing about a colonial regulation which served to keep imbibers from leaving the straight and narrow path. It is a fact, beyond controversy or dispute and as can easily be demonstrated, that a regulatory law to control the sale of “fire water” was passed, and enforced in this general area more than two hundred years ago.

The particular law in question levied a fine against anyone, tavern-keeper, or otherwise, allowing a person to get drunk in his place of business, or home, on Sunday. The reason assigned for the passage of the law was to prevent disturbance of religious services in a recognized house of worship, or to be more specific, St. Philip’s Church, which was then in course of construction, at the colonial town of Brunswick, eighteen miles below the site of Wilmington.

It is generally known that the State of North Carolina in our own day and time adopted prohibition some six to ten years before national enactment of a Prohibition Law. However, readers are not so well advised of the fact that two centuries and more, prior to prohibition laws enacted after World War One, an act of similar force and character was made into law. It applied to the confines of the small town of Brunswick, then situated on the west bank of the Cape Fear River. Its location was about 15 miles south of the present site of Wilmington.

It was “way back” in 1745, that the rather unusual and unique law (for that time and period), was adopted. This early prohibition regulation was written in Section 18, Chapter 12, of the Acts of the Colonial Assembly, under King George II, of England. It is dated April 20, 1745. After the introduction the gist of the Act is as follows:

“And it is further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if at any time after 20 days after

after the ratification of this Ace, any tavern-keeper, ordinary-keeper, or any other persons whatsoever, selling liquor or keeping a public house in the said town (Brunswick), shall suffer any person or persons to get drunk in his house on the Sabbath, such person or persons so offending shall forfeit and pay, for every such offense, the sum of 10 shillings, proclamation money."

Thus, it can be seen that on Sundays, at least, the way of the old toper in colonial days, in the good old town of Brunswick, was beset with legal difficulties and financial thorns. The chief difficulty he encountered was in securing that which "cheers and also inebriates". The stumbling block in the path of the one who would be the seller rested in the fact that he would have to pay an equivalent of \$2.50 in present coin of the realm, if he made such sales on Sunday and his customer became slightly hilarious.

Just how long the law remained on the statute books for general enforcement is not known – probably during the life of the town of Brunswick, however, which came to an end about 1775, or prior there-to. A study of colonial laws reveals the fact that Bath, Edenton and several other early settlements also had their liquor problems. Various and sundry laws were passed in relation there-to.

A note attached to a copy of the interesting old law states that the other sections in the particular chapter noted, dealt with enforcement of other laws for the town of Brunswick, as it existed in that day. The preamble states that Maurice Moore, late of the Cape Fear section, appropriated and laid out a certain parcel of land, containing 320 acres, on the west side of the Cape Fear River, for a town, and common, for the use of the inhabitants of what was to be the town of Brunswick. It is further stated that the laws passed under said Act are "to encourage persons to settle in the town of Brunswick".

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

Everybody Loves a Bear Story

By Gwen Causey, July 24, 2021

Lemuel Phelps was the father of four sons and the grandfather of 16 grandsons and all of them

became part of a legacy of black bear hunters.

Delma Phelps, a grandson, gained the nickname "Bearcatcher". The nickname was given to him because of an instance when he killed a bear. He and his brother, Aldreth, went to check on a trap he had set earlier. A bear was caught in the trap and Delma hit him in the head with a pole and killed the bear. Bearcatcher was an eccentric man who lived with his wife in a two-room house on the dirt road leading from the Prospect community to Makatoka and Exum. The road was paved after his death in 1984.

He kept a diary of the day's events and always included the weather. Remember the small notebook supplied by fertilizer companies?

During the late 1940's large groups of bear hunters from Tennessee were coming to the Green Swamp to hunt for black bear. Traveling in jeeps the visitors brought with them a large pack of exceptionally fine dogs. On this occasion (November 17, 1948) Bearcatcher Phelps and his brother, Aldreth, were serving as guides. Three bears were killed, one reported to be the largest bear—around 500-600 pounds—ever killed in Brunswick County. Three shots, all fired at different times during the chase, were required to bring the big bear down.

The big bear is said to have been chased many times over a period of years. On the Monday before it was killed Elwell Russ of the Makatoka community chased it with his dogs for several hours. At one time the hounds held it at bay until Russ was able to approach near enough for a shot. In fear of killing a dog, Russ withheld his fire and the bear took off again.

A 250-pound bear found the cornfield of Woodrow Russ, brother-in-law of Aldreth Phelps, an unhealthy place in which to forage. Finding that the animal had been in the field Mr. Russ summoned John Fearnside and his dogs, Homer and Edward Russ and Warren Phelps. In short order they trailed the bear down and it fell a victim to the famous old Winchester belonging to Fearnside. After finishing off the bear the party went deer hunting and Warren Phelps killed a large buck.

John Fearnside, father-in-law of Warren Phelps, gained notoriety for leading hunting parties from Tennessee, Alabama, Texas and as far as Oklahoma into the Green Swamp hunting for deer,

alligators and the elusive black bear in Juniper Creek and Lake Makatoka.

By way of Irsene Vereen we learn that bear hunter John Fearnside of Freeland is getting a lot of mail. Folks are writing from all around, asking about the bears in the Green Swamp and the Fearnside dogs. Newspapers and magazines are just beginning to ask for pictures of Fearnside and his dogs to go with stories they already have. Bill Sharpe, of the North Carolina State News bureau in Raleigh forwarded a letter to *The State Port Pilot* newspaper from *Hunting and Fishing* and also from *Grit*, widely circulated Pennsylvania weekly.

The use of an experienced guide is an absolute necessity for the resident hunters as well as to the non-resident hunting visitors. Many skilled woodsmen have been lost for days in the swamp.

John Fearnside says that the bears in the swamp are the very devil on dogs. Chases may last anywhere up to 24 hours and even then, the bear may be lost through its getting to some inaccessible part of the swamp. One of his dogs has been killed and others badly mauled. He still managed to keep a fair pack of bear hounds on hand. His pack was led by Betty, a black and fawn colored hound that is now somewhat aged, but still the leader of the pack. Others carried the names of Beaver, Pup, Lady, and Lou. To be continued.

Our Veterans

To all who are currently in or have served in the military. Thank you for the commitment you made to serve this country.

Area Events

November 11, 2022: Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range are planning a Veterans Day Event for Friday, November 11th at 11:00 beside the rifle range in Caswell Beach, off of Pinehurst Dr. in the Caswell Dunes residential area.

Please park in any Caswell Dunes parking lots, please not on the grass. Everyone is welcome. Come to see the washed walls of the rifle range! Bring a folding chair to sit. The Southport Historical Society will fire their cannon after Roll Call of the men who served in the Great War from Brunswick County way back in 1918. Also, a Brunswick Town DAR member will portray Navy Nurse Susan Adkins Williams who grew up in Southport. You will not want to miss this event!

The book, Brunswick County in the Great War, written by members of the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range will be available for purchase.

November 3, 2022: Southport Historical Society's November general meeting will be Thursday, November 3rd. The meeting is free and open to all, no reservations needed. Renowned historian Dr. Chris Fonvielle will be presenting "Curious Tales of the Lower Cape Fear." Meeting is at the Southport Community Building. Dr. Fonvielle will have copies of his latest book available for signing.

With sadness, long time BCHS member, Connie Hendrix, recently passed away. No other details at this time.

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

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail _____

New: _____ Renewal _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Receive ***Newsletter*** by email: Y N

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

Mail this form with your check to: 5152 New Britton Loop NW, Ash, NC 28420

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



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5152 New Britton Loop NW
Ash, North Carolina 28420

