



NEWSLETTER

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

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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 - 2024 Term

President: James Green
Vice-President: Gwen Causey
Secretary:
Treasurer: Bob Armour
Directors:
 Dave Lewis

Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis
Webmaster: Charles Clemmons
brunswickcountyhistoricalsociety.org



MAY MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC MAY 13, 2024 at 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, May 13th, 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.

Publication of the *NEWSLETTER* began with Volume I, Number 1, printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletters from September 1961 to current dates may be viewed on the BCHS website by selecting "Newsletters" in the right navigation panel. The collection also 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 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. **You may now pay your dues through PayPal by using our website.**

Program

BCHS member, Ann Bokelman will be our speaker. Her program will be "The Story of the Vista," a blockade runner that ran aground at what is now Sunset Beach.

Ann Bokelman is a co-founder of Old Bridge Historical Society and lives in Sunset Beach. She is an Ohio State University graduate and earned her Ph.D in Adult Education from Virginia Commonwealth University. She believes that knowing about local history is part of community building and enriches the lives of residents and visitors alike. She enjoys storytelling as a means of sharing history.

Genealogy Research Center to Open at BCC

Source: The Brunswick Beacon, March 21, 2024.

A genealogy research reference collection for public use is being assembled at Brunswick Community College. The initial donated books are from Brunswick Town Chapter National Society Daughters of the Revolution, which is coordinating the collection in conjunction with BCC.

BCC Librarian Katherine Knibbs noted that the state community college system has encouraged the development of collections such as this to meet the public's interest in genealogy. "It's in our mission to meet the needs of the public," she said.

Patrons will be able to view and scan pages from books in the collection. BCC has made available a large flatbed scanner, desks, chairs and bookshelves. Brunswick Town chapter is applying for an America 250 grant through NSDAR to purchase a dedicated computer, archival storage materials, flash drives and other materials for the room. Public contributions to the room are also welcomed.

Community members, especially genealogy buffs, are encouraged to donate their family genealogies and other materials to the library. Following is a partial list of the materials which may be accepted for the room: family histories with complete citations (unsourced collections will not be accepted), Local history books which include names and places, Bible records, cemetery records, obituaries, photographs with identifications, church records, loose family papers, maps, vital records and city directories, military records, land records and deeds, tax records, court records, diaries and journals, and oral histories.

Complete guidelines for use of the collection are being developed. The collection is housed in a room within the college's library on the second floor of Building A and will be open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and other times by appointment. To donate to the collection, it is preferable that you call the library at 910-755-7331 to discuss your intended donation and a possible appointment time. DAR representatives have final say as to what can and cannot be accepted for permanent placement into the collection.

Bible Records Scanning Event

6 April 2024

Media Release on Behalf of Brunswick Town Chapter National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

Teresa A McLamb

Bible Record Scanning Event Planned

SUPPLY- Family Bible records are among the most prized lineage proofs for genealogy enthusiasts. These records are often the only proof of a person's important life dates, marriages and family members.

Residents are requested to share their Bible records with genealogy researchers by taking them to a scanning event to be held at the genealogy research room of Brunswick Community College (2nd floor Building A) on May 13 to 16 from 9am until 4:30pm. Brunswick Town Chapter NSDAR members will scan the records to digital files which will be stored at the library and return the Bible to the owners – all in just a few minutes.

Bible records from all parts of the world will be accepted.

The Brunswick Town Chapter NSDAR Genealogy Research Room is a joint venture with Brunswick Community College.

Daughters of the American Revolution is a service organization founded in 1890 for women who can prove direct, blood lineage from a Revolutionary War Patriot. The organization promotes patriotism, education, and historic preservation.

DAR is a nonprofit, nonpolitical volunteer organization with more than 185,000 members in 3000 chapters across the world. There are more than 100 chapters in North Carolina.

The Brunswick Town Chapter has more than 160 members, several of whom descend from Patriots who lived in Brunswick County while fighting for our country's independence. The chapter's membership descends more than 700 proven Patriots from the original 13 colonies.

James Irvin Marlowe

James Irvin "Jim" Marlowe, age 91, of Southport, North Carolina passed away on February 15,

2024. Jim was a longtime member of the Brunswick County Historical Society and served on our Board of Directors.

Jim will be remembered by the BCHS for his interest in the early history of the Waccamaw and lower Cape Fear regions, and for more than sixty years pursued the histories of families of those regions. He authored two books and numerous shorter compilations on the result of his research.

Dr. Marlowe was a warm and decent person and loved and respected by all who knew him.

Oliver Mercer, 1842-1863

Source: Sunday Star News, May 24, 1987. By Jeannie Faris

Oliver Evans Mercer was just another young face of 20 years in the Confederate Army when he enlisted May 25, 1861. Before his 22nd birthday, he was another name on a list of soldiers killed in action, left dead on a battlefield a long way from his North Carolina home.

Oliver was among the first soldiers of the South to enlist when he joined the "Brunswick Guards," Company G of the North Carolina 20th Regiment. At that time, nobody knew that the Civil War would drag on for four years,

Born Jan. 23, 1842, he was the oldest of ten children, with four brothers and five sisters. They were raised and educated in a rural area called Mercer's Mill Pond, which is between present-day Southport and Supply, according to his great-nephew Charlie Taylor. His parents, John and Ann Jane, made a modest living farming cotton, corn, livestock and operating a mill, Taylor said.

Upon leaving home, Oliver was stationed at Fort Caswell for artillery training. His company was moved around camps in the Wilmington defense system, including Camp Johnson and Camp Lamb, before marching northward to Virginia and Pennsylvania. During his two-year service, Oliver advanced through the ranks. He was elected 2nd lieutenant upon enlisting, promoted to 1st. Lieutenant Feb. 18, 1862, and became captain of his company May 16, 1863.

Oliver was the only one of his siblings to go to war, an honor his father stringently reminded him to uphold in the many letters they exchanged during the war. In October 1861, his father wrote: "Oliver, you are occupying a position which de-

mands your strict attention to your duty; make all the improvement you can in every honorable way."

As the war raged on, Oliver wrote of his good health and faith in the Southern cause, but his enthusiasm fluctuated with the Confederate victories and defeats. In a letter to his father in August 1862, he wrote: "...When our country is struggling as at present for liberty, we must abandon all ideas of the luxuries of life and pitch into it mentally and physically, being actuated as we are, by the anticipation of being free from the rule of the Northern Kings such as Old Abe."

But the war was not Oliver's only concern. In each of his letters, he inquired anxiously about the floundering farm and the failing health of his father, who suffered from an unidentified disease that often left him unable to work. Oliver rejoiced when his father was "mending" and sent hope for recovery when he was ill. He wrote in January 1862 to his sister Sarah, to whom he was very close: "Tell (Pa) not to fret over little things, but to consider his health. I know he will get better."

Oliver's father wrote him letters encouraging strength of character and the importance of a good education. These letters indicated that the Mercer children had received a strict and moral upbringing, Taylor said. "Do the best you can, observe temperance in everything, be prudent in all your acts," John wrote to his son in August 1861. "Carefully avoid the influence of bad company and bad examples and devote your leisure to useful study."

Taylor said the Mercer family was probably educated at home. Even while Oliver was in the war, his father regularly admonished him for careless handwriting and misspellings in his letters. When Oliver wrote to Sarah, he often asked her not to show their father the letters because he would surely "rake me down."

Oliver practiced his writing and grammar and encouraged his sisters at home to get a good education. To his sister Sophie, he wrote in October 1861: "I was glad to see that you improved so much in writing. You must learn all you can."

To Sarah, the same month, he wrote: "I am glad to hear that you are getting so smart out there. I don't suppose I will hardly know home when I come out. You will have the place so changed with you 'smartness.'" "

Oliver's letters suggest that he respected the moral and instructional counseling his father of-

ferred. He wrote in July 1862: "I shall endeavor by the help of the Lord to conform as strictly as possible to the rules and the very good advice you gave me."

His Methodist faith found its way into more of his letters as the war dragged on and he frequently wrote of wanting to return home healthy. "If by the kind Providence of the All Wise Creator I live to see it over, Virginia won't hold me long. I prefer the Old North State forever," he wrote to Sarah in July 1862. "I want you all to pray for me. If prayers ever were needed they are now. I have at last taken to pray myself. If it should be the will of God to take me from this world I want to meet you all in heaven."

Oliver was shot in the head and killed July 1, 1863, in the Battle of Gettysburg while leading and cheering his men on to a Confederate victory that never occurred. Oliver's body was buried in Gettysburg, Pa., the same year his father died.

Visited Gettysburg

Source: Wilmington Star, August 29, 1897 and the Wilmington Messenger, August 29, 1897.

Mr. J.B. Mercer finds the spot where Capt. Oliver E. Mercer of the 20th NC Regiment was killed. Mr. J.B. Mercer, who left a week or two ago for the northern markets, returned Friday. While away he had an opportunity to make a visit to a place which has gone down in history as the scene of one of the bloodiest battles in modern times, the town of Gettysburg.

Here in the first day's engagement, July 1, 1863, Mr. Mercer's elder brother, Capt. Oliver E. Mercer, Company G, Twentieth Regiment, NC troops, Iverson's Brigade, lost his life and it is no wonder that the battle grounds brought sacred associations in Mr. Mercer's mind.

Editors note: Oliver Evans Mercer was born in Brunswick County on January 23, 1842 to John W. Mercer and Anna Jane Evans.

The topsy, turbulent and tragic life of Leon George

Written by Hunter Ingram and printed in the fall

2022 issue of "Inscriptions" from the Friends of Oakdale Cemetery.

In the early 1920's, the name Leon George was a mainstay in the Wilmington Morning Star. A detective with the city's police force, George was at the center of repeated news stories that, today, read as though they were ripped right out of Prohibition-era movies and novels. Bootleggers, rum runners, hooch makers - all make and model of Prohibition rebels ran up against the long arm of the law and Leon George's no-nonsense enforcement of it.

Hired to the force in 1898 just before the Wilmington Massacre. By the time Prohibition's libation limitations came to Wilmington, he was assigned to enforcing the ban on alcohol and quickly became known in the news as a "tiger hunter" for busting down illegal bars and the "official 'monkey rum' sleuth of the police department." When he patrolled the streets, it was a time when lawlessness ran rampant. Danger, stoked by desperation, lurked around every corner - and George would run afoul of it soon enough. But not before finding himself wrangling a different kind of outlaw.

This October (2022) marks the 100th anniversary of the harrowing escape of Topsy the elephant, who had arrived by train in Wilmington with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus for a whirlwind one-day appearance on October 9, 1922.

The circus was a source of entertainment like no other at this particular moment in history when radio and movies were just new enough that not everyone had access. When the circus quite literally rolled into town, people showed up in droves. As was evident that October when more than 11,000 people visited the fair set up at 13th and Ann Streets despite a steady rain falling dawn till dusk.

After the final spectator was ushered out of the big top that night, Topsy was reportedly being herded back into her train car when she was spooked by a dog and fled into the darkness. The search for her consumed the city, as reports came in from the residential sector of a monster trampling through vegetable gardens and tearing down fences.

The elephant became a sensation as her 18-hour walkabout stretched on. Venturing into downtown Wilmington, she ended up bursting through the door at Eureka Dye Works at Second and Dock Streets (now the Topsy-themed Dram Yard + Ga-

zebo Bar), spewing ink and nearly collapsing the back wall. The owners of the building went on to sue for \$5,000 in damages while simultaneously using the notoriety of the commotion to promote their Topsy-approved business in newspaper ads.

According to report from the Morning Star, she managed to tangle herself in the reeds of Greenfield Lake, where she was freed with the help of trainers and a few local officers including none other than Leon George.

The detective's role in Topsy's rescue varies depending on who tells the story. Some reports claim he was the one who bravely waded into the waters of Greenfield Lake to untangle the scared animal, creating an unspoken friendship between the two. "The police officer showed absolutely no fear in entreating with the beast that had created consternation in the hearts of many people," the Morning Star read. Others merely place him among those who helped walk her back to confinement by offering peanuts and apples as enticement.

Topsy didn't go easily though. After her first rescue, reportedly fled once more and, according to some, took a dip in the Cape Fear River before being found. Having missed her ride to the circus' next stop by a few days at this point, she was eventually hoisted back into a cage and sent to South Carolina to catch up with her traveling owner. George playing a role, even a small one, in Topsy's story places him at the center of two local legends - each defined by the rebels in his path.

His name was so well known in the papers that it sent a shock-wave through the community when he was brutally murdered on July 29, 1924 by father-son bootleggers in (Phoenix) Brunswick County. George, along with his beloved dog Baby, was serving a warrant with Deputy U.S. Marshal Samuel Lilly in the latter's Ford when they were ambushed with guns by C.W. and Elmer Stewart. The shooting, as recorded in an alarmingly detailed Morning Star account, left George, Lilly and Baby riddled with bullets on a desolate road described as one of the area's "most lonely spots imaginable." With the car in motion when the bullets began flying, George was unable to escape from behind the steering wheel. He was found with one arm draped across the back of the seat as if he had reached for Baby behind him.

George, just 52 years old, was widely mourned in town, striking a different refrain in the repeated

news reports that bore his name in the days after. The Stewarts were tried and sentenced to death for the murders of George, Lilly and Baby. They were executed by electrocution in 1925 - the first pair to ever be executed together, according to some accounts. They are buried together in Wilmington's Bellevue Cemetery.

But Leon George's legacy is more than just the sum of his headlines. He was, in essence, an eternal mama's boy, having never married and lived with his mother until the day he died. Today, he is buried in Oakdale in the same plot and under the same stone as his mother, Rhoda Ann. Although her son's life was cut short, hers carried on for a few more years, passing away at the sturdy age of 101 in 1931.

At the time of his death, he was survived by his mother, brother and two sisters.

What had been a life lived in pursuit of justice came to an end in a violent hail of resistance to it. But on their shared gravestone, his unwavering dedication to the rule of law is still etched nearly a century later - "Nobly he fell while fighting for right."

Brunswick Sheriff

Wilmington Morning Star, February 22, 1957

Shallotte, February 21, some of the Brunswick County moonshiners have had tough luck, lately, according to the law enforcement officers.

Leo Hewett was charged with having equipment for making whiskey, Deputy M.L. Galloway said.

The still was of the wooden sides and copper top and bottom style, with the worm type condenser, and was of three barrel capacity.

Galloway was assisted in the raid by Deputy Sheriff Henry Pike.

In another raid, the sheriff's department and a number of federal agents combined to destroy a large booze plant.

About 6,000 gallons of mash was poured out, and the officer said this still required 65 bags of sugar and 25 bags of wheat middlings for a single operation.

No arrest were made.

Sheriff Gray reported the raid of another still near the city limits of Southport last Tuesday. No operators were present, and no arrest were made,

and 250 gallons of mash was poured out.

BCHS February Meeting Minutes

The Brunswick County Historical Society meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by the President, James Green. There were 10 members and 4 visitors in attendance.

The President led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

The President extended a welcome to all in attendance.

The minutes of the November 13, 2023 meeting were printed in the February 2024 Newsletter. The Acting Secretary reviewed the minutes.

Gwen Causey briefly reviewed "Southport's Secret Suffragist, The Story of Anna Alene Clemmons", a book by Dr. Liz Fuller.

The Treasure was absent due to ankle surgery. No report was given.

The President reminded the members of our website and how to access it. Also, mentioning the various area events for February and March.

There was no unfinished business or new business.

The program was given by Dr. Zelphia Grissett on the history of Cedar Grove Missionary Baptist Church, which is being written for their Homecoming in September, 2024. The church was founded in 1872 with 17 charter members as an outgrowth of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, a white congregation. Today they have approximately 600 on the church roll. Since 1915 they have been a member of the Ocean View Association.

In Closing, Dr. Grissett spoke about her book, "Reflections of Union High School and the class of 1969." This inspired a lengthy conversation among those in attendance about experiencing integration and growing up in Brunswick County.

Motion to adjourn.

Members present: Jimmy Green, Anne Bokelman, Gwen Causey, Yvonne Brown, Glenn Kye, Steve Varnam, Doug Jones, Tammy Cully, Dave Lewis, Bertha Bell.

Visitors present: Zelphia Grissett, Lynn Grissett, Artis Butler, David Bennett.

Gwen Causey, Action Secretary

He's More Than a Name on a Wall

As we observe Memorial Day and commemorate our American military personnel who died in all wars, let us be reminded of these words. A song by the Statler Brothers, written by Jimmy Fortune and John Rimel.

I saw her from a distance
As she walked up to the wall
In her hand she held some flowers
As her tears began to fall
And she took out pen and paper
As to trace her memories
And she looked up to heaven
And the words she said were these...

She said Lord my boy was special,
And he meant so much to me
And Oh I'd love to see him
Just one more time you see
All I have are the memories
And the moments to recall.

So Lord could you tell him,
He's more than a name on a wall.

She said he really missed the family
And being home on Christmas Day
And he died for God and Country
In a place so far away.

I remember just a little boy
Playing war since he was three
But Lord this time I know,
He's not coming home to me.

And she said Lord my boy was special,
And he meant so much to me
And Oh I'd love to see him
But I know it just can't be
So I thank you for my memories
And the moments to recall.

But Lord could you tell him,
He's more than a name on a wall.

Lord could you tell him,
He's more than a name on a wall.

New Magistrates for the Year 1893

Brunswick County, Northwest Township, J.D. Robbins, J.C. Rowell; Town Creek Township, James D. McRae, Rufus Galloway, Samuel D. Swindell; Lockwood's Folly Township, George Leonard, George W. Kirby; Shallotte Township, Thomas H. Patterson, Reuben W. Long, Samuel Bell; Waccamaw Township, C.C. Little, J.A. Phelps; Smithville Township, Thomas M. Williams, Samuel W. Lehew, James Rowell.

Brunswick County Records

State of North Carolina, Brunswick County, October 1, 1873. To the Register of Deeds: The Board of Examiners of Brunswick County report according to Section 15 School Law, the names and number of teachers to whom they have given certificates during the year ending October 1, 1873.

White Teachers - No. of Males, 8; No. of Females, 1.

Colored Teachers - No. of Males, 3.

The following are the names of teachers to whom certificates have been granted: Joseph B. Marble, E.M. Rosafy, Asa Ross, John N. Bennett, McCarroll B. Gause, James M. King, Geo. N. Hill, Jonathan Bennett, Miss Kate Stuart, John W. Davis, Limus Mimps, Geo. Simmons.

Source: North Carolina Archives, spelling as recorded.

Early Genealogist in Wilmington

Family Pedigrees Investigate at a moderate price. Apply to Genealogist, in care of Messenger.

The Wilmington Messenger, January 27, 1895.

Area Events

May 07, 2024: Brunswick Civil War Round Table, "United States Colored Troops", will be featured at the Tuesday May 7th meeting. US Navy Captain Edward W. Gantt (Ret.) will be the speaker. He will speak on the contributions of the US Colored Troops during the Civil War. The meeting will be held at Hatch Auditorium at Fort Caswell. Registration begins at 6:15pm and the program starts at 7pm. Guest fee is \$10.

May 18, 2024: "Women of the Port", Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site. Get a chance to see what their life was like and dive into a new perspective of Port Brunswick. This is a free event for all ages. Saturday, May 18th. 10am - 4pm.

September 28, 2024: "Carolina Blues: Indigo on the Cape Fear." This subtropical plant was an important commodity in the Carolinas during the 18th century. In conjunction with the Southport Maritime Museum, you will be exploring the process used by enslaved African labor to extract this valuable dye from the indigo plants. Saturday, September 28th, 11am - 3pm.

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 LP Rd., 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 12, 2023

May 13, 2023

August 12, 2023

November 11, 2023



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