



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
Acting Secretary: Gwen Causey
Treasurer: Bob Armour
Directors:
Dave Lewis

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



NOVEMBER MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC NOVEMBER 10, 2025 at 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, November 10th, 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).

Program

Our speaker for the next meeting will be Mr. Archie Cumbee. His topic will be on the history of Crusoe Island.

Mr. Cumbee was born in Columbus County and lived in Crusoe Island during his childhood. He attended Old Dock Elementary School and graduated from Whiteville High School in 1966. A graduate of NC State University, Archie was a risk management specialist for the US Dept. of Agriculture followed by a career as a residential real estate appraiser. He is also an Air Force veteran and served many years with the NC Air National Guard.

Growing up next door to his grandparents and step great-grandmother, he recalls listening to their stories about life in their earlier years. These memories sparked his interest in learning more about his ancestors and a life-long interest in genealogy.

In 1976, Archie contributed a chapter on the origins of Crusoe Island that was published in *Recollections and Records*, a project of the Columbus County Bicentennial Commission. In 2015, he published *A Genealogy of Crusoe Island*.

Archie and his wife Brenda are living in the Wilmington area and have two grown children and two grown grandchildren.

Voices of Brunswick County

Newcomers to Brunswick County may have noticed that natives and long time residences of southeastern North Carolina like this area a lot. So much so that many folks from all over the United States have decided to move here without any previous connection to this coastal area, simply because it seemed like a good place to live. There is, however, one notable characteristic that rarely makes it into advertisements about its cultural and historical resources: its language and dialect heritage. Language reflects where people come from, how they have developed, and how they identify themselves regionally and socially. In some respects, language is simply another artifact of history and culture, but language variation is unlike other cultural and historical landmarks.

We don't need to visit a historical monument or go to an exhibit to witness it first hand; language resonates in the sounds of ordinary speakers in everyday conversation. While other landmarks recount the past, language simultaneously indexes the past, present, and future of our area. Our voices reflects the diversity all citizens. Settlers came into this region in different eras from different places under varied conditions and established diverse communities based on the natural resources of the land and waterways. The range of settlers extends from the first American Indians who arrived here from other regions in North America to the most recent retirees. The diverse origins and the migratory routes that brought people to Brunswick County have led to a multilayered linguistic cultural that continues to evolve along with the ever-changing profiles of its people.

The conditions for dialect and language diversity are tied closely to physical geography and the human ecology of the region that eventually became known as the Cape Fear region. From the eastern estuaries along the Atlantic Ocean to the terrain transitions into the Coastal Plain. Waves of migration at different periods originating from different locations here and abroad have helped establish communities in both convenient and out-of-the-way areas that still reveal a distinct "founder effect" in language even centuries after settlement.

Our coast line still echo's the dialect influence of those who journeyed south by water from the coastal areas of Virginia, Maryland, and points

north. Mix in the contributions of American Indian languages, the remnants of African Gullah-Geechee, and Europeans and the result is a regional and ethnic language ecology. Words are not just words; along with a distinct brogue they define status and identity of the Cape Fear region of southeastern North Carolina.

As people travel over the vastness of Brunswick County they can note the different accents associated with various communities. Our southern shore line is different from the west bank of the Cape Fear River. Inland farmland speech is different from the Crusoe Island area just south of Lake Waccamaw. All leading to a linguistically intriguing Cape Fear region with no defining boundaries. Our language is who we are. These voices are not as prevalent as say a couple of hundred years ago or even maybe fifty years back. Being isolated in this region of North Carolina kept much from changing but once progress and growth during the last half of the 20th century emerged we began to change. If we listen closely we can still be taken back in time to the settlement of Brunswick County.

So where does these various blends of dialects and accents come from? While the English influx from Virginia was initially the most influential source of new settlers, they were not the only early arrivers. Lowland Scots were one of the earliest groups, arriving in the Cape Fear region before 1700. Welsh settlers came to North Carolina via Pennsylvania between 1730 and 1734 and some settled in upper Cape Fear region. Highland Scots arrived a little later in 1740, with a group of about 360 immigrants who came after Governor Johnston exempted foreign Protestants from local taxes for ten years. As more Highland Scots began to arrive into the Wilmington area, many moved up the Cape Fear River to a region near where Fayetteville is located today. Several of the distinct dialect traits of this area were molded during this era, exemplifying the founder's effect.

The Scots-Irish were one of the largest and most influential groups of immigrants in North Carolina. They affected the lowlands of Southeastern North Carolina in a more indirect way. The Scots-Irish were a diverse group that was mostly composed of people originally of Presbyterian Scottish and Anglican English heritage but also included members of other persecuted populations, such as political

dissenters from Northern England, Wales, and the London area. Between 1717 and 1775, somewhere upwards of 300,000 Scots-Irish came to America with some residing on the Outer Banks of North Carolina before moving into what was then New Hanover County (before Brunswick County was formed.) Others were coming into North Carolina via the Great Wagon Road running through the western side of our piedmont region before migrating to the coast line. The American Revolutionary War effectively ended the Scots-Irish immigration.

As stated before, various regional dialects have no defined borders and while most settlers were moving north to south there was minor dialect seepage that moved north from the lowland of South Carolina and Georgia. The Cape Fear region is the northern boundary of the Gullah-Geechee corridor stemming from South Carolina's coastal island region. African slaves brought into Charleston and Savannah were working on the many rice plantations along the coast line from northern Florida to just north of Wilmington. These slaves developed the Gullah-Geechee language and culture of this region. The language is an English-based Creole with many African words, grammatical structures, and sentences structures influenced by African languages.

While Gullah-Geechee is most commonly associated with the islands and coastal areas of lower South Carolina, its influence is present in Brunswick County's dialect. Traveling along the west bank of the Cape Fear and Brunswick Rivers where the former rice plantations were located you may encounter remnants of the language once spoken. Towns of Belleville, Navassa, and Northwest are all Gullah towns. The Gullah-Geechee language is highlighted during the spring Rice Festival with events at various locations along the Gullah corridor of our county.

This creole based language was once widespread throughout the plantations of the American South and was the basis for the developments of African American English in the regions away from the isolated Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia where Gullah still exists. Gullah is still detectable in a number of language traits characteristic of African American English: the absence of the linking verb *be* in sentences like "She nice"; the absence of *-s* suffixes on verbs as in "She go to the store"; and distinctive verb particles such as *done*

to indicate completed action in "He done went," or the use of *been* to designate distant time as in "She been known him forever."

Stopping by for a visit to one of our local seafood markets dotting the southern coast line and barrier islands one might still encounter traces of another dialect once widely spoken. An accent that is distinctly unique to our region. Unique because of the merging of at least three different regions to our north.

Beginning around 1750 when a group of poor fishermen from Cape May, New Jersey, known as "Whaler Yeoman," arrived and began settling between the Lockwood and Shallotte Rivers. The ancestors of these families, Hewett, Holden, and Leonard, all immigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony from England during the Great Migration period between the years 1629-1640. Possibly looking for a more tolerant religious area some began to move south through what is now New York and New Jersey before settling in Cape May. From there around 1750 a small group of these fishermen and whalers along with the families of Swain, Ludlum, and Willett moved even farther south to what is now known as Brunswick County. They would have brought an English accent and because of their closeness as families and isolation, chances are voices had not changed very much over the past 100 years.

Sometime before 1850, Roland Varnam landed in Smithville, from Maine. Before making his way to Varnamtown, family lore has him traveling up the Cape Fear River and eventually marrying an Indian girl. Settling in Varnamtown on the Lockwood Folly River and beginning a life of boat building and fishing. His offspring's quickly began marrying into the Galloway family from Maryland that was already in the area. Their mixture of voices began to take shape.

A few years later yet another group of families from Carteret County began moving into this same area along the coast line. Notable family names such as Lewis, Fulford, Chadwick, Styron, Davis, and Pigott. They were also fishermen and farmers with ties back to the lower Outer Banks barrier islands between Portsmouth Island and Beaufort Inlet. They brought with them a language and dialect known as the Ocracoke Brogue or more famously, "Hoi Toiders." These families originally came south out of the Tidewater area of Virginia

into northeast North Carolina before relocating to the barrier islands now known as Davis Island and Shackleford Banks at the Cape Lookout area of North Carolina. Living in isolation and seclusion on these islands make for considerable linguistic intrigue where a language can exist without interference from the outside world.

The myths about Outer Banks language and life start with one of the most frequent questions about Outer Banks English: is it Elizabethan or Shakespearean English. In reality neither is correct. The English language in North Carolina has been growing and evolving since 1584, when the first English explorers to visit North America arrived on Roanoke Island on the northern outer banks making it the first place in the New World where English was spoken. Over time as more colonists began to populate the coastal region the various forms or dialects of English they brought with them became the basis for the English language as it is written and spoken in North Carolina.

As so with the isolated coastal shoreline of Brunswick County, the blending of these families developed an accent unique to our area with traces still heard today. Maybe you have talked with a shrimp boat captain or crew member, someone working in a seafood market, or even the crew on our ferry system traveling the Cape Fear River between Southport and Fort Fisher and heard someone with a voice from the past.

Traveling inland through Brunswick County farmland there is still another accent to be found. Settlers arriving out of south central Virginia through North Carolina were developing what is known as the Coastal Plains Dialect. This southern dialect is what many people think of when they hear the term “southern” or “plantation” English.

The Coastal Plain Dialect is traditionally non-rhotic, meaning the “r” sound at the end of words or before consonants is often dropped or softened. You might have heard the characteristic “Southern Drawl”, which involves lengthening the vowels. For example, “pen” might sound like “peeyin”. Other examples of Coastal Plain English might include Y’all: A contraction of “you all”, fixin’to: Meaning “getting ready to do something”. “Might could”, meaning “might be able to” is another notable feature stemming from older English dialects.

An even more isolated area in the region would be Crusoe Island. A small out of the way settlement

in Columbus County that is bounded on three sides by the Waccamaw River and on the fourth side by the Green Swamp. It is not an island, but its residents tend to be isolated as though it were. Crusoe Island has a colorful reputation and the settlement tends to be viewed somewhat mysteriously by outsiders. Though it is speculation, the most commonly accepted theory is that the original inhabitants were white residents from French Haiti who migrated there in the late 1700s and early 1800s. With the French background this is another unique sound of southeastern North Carolina. (Editors note: I’m looking forward to Archie Cumbee’s speech about Crusoe Island history at our November BCHS meeting bringing us much more information about this small isolated region.)

As we learn about the various language dialects and accents of the Cape Fear Region we raise awareness about the historical, cultural, and humanistic explanations for language diversity. Those differences tell about who we are and who we hope to be. With Brunswick County being somewhat isolated geographically until around the mid 20th century, the language used here evolved from social interaction and marriage within the communities. As the county transitioned from a fishing and farming region into a more retirement community our language changed and grew to what we hear today. But, if we listen closely we can still hear snippets from long ago voices.

References: *NCpedia.org. “English Dialects.”*
CoastalReview.org. “African Roots in Brunswick County,” by Denice Patterson
North Carolina Field and Family. “The different dialects in North Carolina”
“More languages heard in Coastal N.C. as Diversity Grows,” by Molly Parker, Star News, Willmington, NC.
“Talkin Tar Heel How our voices tell the story of North Carolina,” by Walt Wolfram and Jeffrey Reaser with the North Carolina Language and Life Project program of NC State University.

Wilmington News-Dispatch

(Special to News-Dispatch)

Editors Note: As written

April 27, 1925: Southport-The placing of a "rum-chaser" at the mouth of the Cape Fear river, calls for some action on the part of this patrol boat. At this period of the year the pleasure yachts are on their return from winter cruises in southern waters, going north, and there is a daily procession of these craft in and out of this harbor. Some come in from an anchorage: many for supplies. Before this there has been no special attention paid to these yachts, in the matter of examination as to what their cargoes may consist of, a looking over of a yacht's manifest. With the government patrol boat here, there is a scrutiny of manifests, and yacht people are going to keep within the law. So far there appears to be no trouble, and each yacht with its one to ten or more cases of alcoholic liquors, has no hesitancy in making lawful declaration, for each has its receipt okayed with the Washington, D.C. prohibition clearance for the liquor the manifest declares.

Compulsory cattle dipping for the destruction of ticks is going on in Brunswick County at different places at intervals of two weeks. This compulsory act does not meet with universal favor, as could be noted at the reorder's court last week, where a number of delinquents who had failed to comply with the dipping law were brought into court and given fines for not dipping their stock. These fines were paid or cases continued, the delinquent accepting their position with no signs of liking the law. For the time it is cutting down the stock business of the county, which is likely to revive when local sentiment recognizes the value of tick eradication.

The season for outside fishing seems to be some weeks earlier this year. The menhaden boats have been out several times lately, and brought in loads of menhaden that were of the summer variety, good size and oil producing. Old hands in the fishing line say that this being the third year, 1923 and 1924 not being good years for pogie fishing, 1925 must be a large year for their business.

The weather to date has been quite favorable for

crops in this section. The stringless bean experiment for canning purposes which a local cannery is steering this spring, has every promise of success. The cannery people have recently brought in two carloads of cans for the prospective crop, which is already coming along.

"Personals" from the Southport Standard

March 8, 1900: Mr. J. H. Mintz, of Shallotte, was a welcome visitor this week.

Miss Mittie McKeithen, of Winnabow, arrived yesterday to visit her sister, Mrs. A. S. Kirby. She was accompanied by her niece, little Miss May McKeithen.

March 15, 1920: Mr. S. Lancaster, of Supply, was in Southport on business last week.

Col. F. W. Kerchner, of Wilmington, made a business trip to Southport on Thursday.

Mr. Rodger Galloway who has been spending a few weeks ashore returned to the Lightship last week.

Mr. John Walker, arrived from Newbern on Saturday last to visit relatives in the city.

Capt. J. T. Harper, of Wilmington, was in Southport on Monday and Tuesday to the interest of his business here.

March 22, 1900: Shallotte Notes

Farm work is now going on nicely. There will probably be an increase in the acreage of cotton this year.

Business is doing fairly well.

Mr. Irvin Milliken, will open up a general store, at White's old stand, in a few days.

Well, it didn't happen! The cards were called in, the papers annihilated and the would be groom, went home with a brain full of sad reflections.

A great many people from here attended court this week.

We learn that a forest fire destroyed much turpentine, timber and some fences last week near this place.

Mr. Haynes Clemmons and Miss Obedia Holden, were married on Sunday a week ago. G. W. Sellers, Esq. officiating.

Veterans Day, November 11, 2025

Veterans Day will be observed on Tuesday, November 11 and commemorates the service of all U.S. veterans. Also this year, September 1, 2025 marked the 80th anniversary of the ending of World War II.

On that Saturday evening Americans gathered around their radios, waiting for a historic broadcast from the USS Missouri, anchored in Tokyo Bay. It was already September 2 in Japan, and after 2,194 days of conflict and an estimated 60 million military and civilian deaths worldwide, peace had finally come.

For many, joy was tempered by grief. WWII claimed the lives of over 400,000 US military personnel, left approximately 700,000 wounded, and more than 78,000 missing in action. Today, some 72,000 Americans remain unaccounted for and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency continues the mission to bring them home.

Less than 1 percent of the 16.4 million Americans who served during the war are alive today. As we mark the 80th anniversary, we honor their courage, sacrifice, and enduring legacy.



Iconic photo of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square after the Japanese surrender

BCHS Minutes, August 11, 2025

The Brunswick County Historical Society meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by the President, James Green. There were 15 members and 3 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 May 12, 2025 minutes were read by the Acting Secretary. Motion by Dave Lewis to approve and was seconded. Unanimous vote to approve.

The Treasurer reported a bank balance of \$8,311.24. Motion to accept Financial Report by David Holden and was seconded. Unanimous vote to accept.

The President announced **Carolinas: Indigo on the Cape Fear** to be held at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson site on September 27, 2025 and **Port Brunswick Days** on October 18, 2025 at the Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson Stated Historic site.

The President spoke about the Society needing new leadership and asked those present to be willing to serve as an officer.

There was no unfinished or new business.

Information was requested about the DAR Research Room at Brunswick Community College. Gwen Causey gave an update as to resources available.

The program was given by Howard Varnam. He showed a video of Varnamtown that his son, Aaron Varnam, had done as a project while in college. A lively discussion followed about the community and the families that live there.

Motion to adjourn.

Members present: Jimmy Green, Dave Lewis, Ennis Swain, Arty Phelps, Meg Shelton, Steve Varnam, Gwen Causey, Judy Holden, David Holden, Brian Clemmons, Richard Hollenbeck, Barbara Varnam, Howard Varnam, Tammy Cully, Yvonne Brown.

Visitors present: Doug Jones, Chip Harris, Karen Harris.

Gwen Causey, Acting Secretary

Area Events

Nov. 1, 2025: "The Great Pumpkin Blowout," Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson. Press a button and to detonate your pumpkin. Cost: \$10 fee and bring your own pumpkin. Free to watch. Time: 11am - 4pm.

Dec. 12, 2025: "A Light in the Darkest of Night," Brunswick Town/ Fort Anderson. A self-guided exploration and meditation offering visitors the chance to experience a peaceful evening. Free program beginning at 4pm until 7pm.

Dec. 14, 2025: "An 18th Century Christmas," Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson. Explore how the American colonists celebrated Christmas. The highlight of the evening will be authentic period candlelit service in the ruins of St. Phillips Anglican Church. Cost: Ten dollars per adult. Time: 1pm-5:30pm.

At time of printing no events are scheduled at **Moore's Creek National Battlefield** due to government shut down.

Dear Ancestor

*"Your tombstone stands among the rest
Neglected and alone.
The name and date are chiseled out
On polished marble stone.
It reaches out to all who care
It is too late to mourn.*

*You did not know that I exist
You died and I was born.
Yet each of us are cells of you
In flesh and blood and bone.
Our blood contracts and beats a pulse
Entirely not our own.*

*Dear Ancestor, the place you filled
One hundred years ago.
Spreads out among the ones you left
Who would have loved you so.
I wonder how you lived and loved
I wonder if you knew.
That someday I would find this spot
And come to visit you."*

Walter Butler Palmer

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 **Note: Please include a \$10.00 fee for printing and USPS mailing**

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 10, 2025

May 12, 2025

August 11, 2025

November 10, 2025



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