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HISTORY OF THE NEW BERN FIRE DEPARTMENT PART II: POST CIVIL WAR

Claudia B. Houston

Although most of the fire companies in New Bern that were part of the Union Army Fire Unit disbanded near the end of the Civil War, fire protection for the town was still needed. It appears that the Holden Hook & Ladder Company continued to function. On January 1, 1865, the New Bern Steam Engine Company No. 1 was organized by former Union soldiers who remained in or returned to New Bern after the war (incorporated on December 20, 1866 per Chapter L, Laws of State of NC 1866-67, pp. 305-306). At the same time, Confederate soldiers began returning home from the war and restarted the Atlantic Fire Company Number 1. A rivalry between the two companies began that would last through the next century.

African American Fire Companies

Many of New Bern's leading black citizens participated in religious, civic, educational, political, and fraternal groups during and after the Civil War. As part of that civic pride, by January 1, 1865, African American community leaders helped to establish two fire companies (called "colored" companies at the time). Edward J. Richardson, a freeborn plasterer and bricklayer, Henry H. Simmons, a freedman and cooper, and barber John R. Good were founders of the Harland Fire Company No. 1. The company consisted of seventy-five members, with Good as foreman. The Kimball Fire Company was organized at the same time by John Randolph, Jr., a painter, who became the foreman of the company. This company consisted of eighty-five men (Catherine Bishir, *Crafting Lives*, p. 173).

In 1868, following the disbanding of the Kimball and Harland companies, African Americans organized the Reliance Bucket and Axe Company at the urging of the New Bern Commissioners,

who claimed that "the public interest demands that our colored town citizens should take a greater interest in the Fire Department of the City" (Alan Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County*, p.449). The company was formed by George Willis, John Randolph, Jr., and cooper William H. Lawrence as a successor to the other African American companies organized during the war (Bishir, p. 289). It was also known as the Independent Colored Company-Reliance Engine Company (incorporated March 1, 1870, per Laws of NC Chapter XXXIII, Section 7, p. 61).

In 1871 the Reliance Bucket and Axe Company received praise for its efforts in fighting alongside white fire companies, until it demanded admission to the city fire department. The Reliance Company was denied such admission, although, adding insult to injury, the newly-formed Excelsior Axe & Bucket Company, a junior firefighting group of white sixteen-to-eighteen-year-olds, was admitted into the department. Members of the African American company hinted that the Reliance Company might not participate in upcoming emergencies, and they also threatened to go to the legislature, which spurred a backlash toward the company. The mayor, however, recognized a need for a company in the African American community, and he authorized city funds to enable the Reliance Company to purchase an engine as well as other apparatus, since the African American companies did not always have the same equipment as the white companies (Watson, p. 463-464).

The Rough and Ready Fire Company, also known as the Axe, Rough and Ready Company, was organized in 1874. The founders included African American artisans such as Virgil Crawford, Samuel Jackson, James D. Dudley, and brick mason Israel Harris Jr. J.W. Willis was foreman and Thomas Harris assistant foreman (Bishir, pp. 232, 339). At least two of the African American units served until the end of the nineteenth century: the Rough and Ready Company and the Reliance Bucket and Axe Company.

1865-1889

The New Bern Steam Engine No. 1 had a hand operated pump that had been used during the Civil War. It took sixteen

men to pull the vehicle to the scene of a fire and operate the pump. It is thought that the company used the hand pump for three years and then gave it to an African American company.

On September 16, 1866, flames appeared in a building on Middle Street and quickly spread to Pollock Street. Property losses were estimated at more than \$200,000. The demolition of buildings in the path of the blaze eventually brought the fire under control, but blame for the damage was said to be because of a lack of cooperation between the various fire companies (Watson, p. 441). The companies met, formed, and adopted a constitution and bylaws, and on February 25, 1867, the state legislature consolidated all fire companies -- the New Berne Steam Engine Company 1, Atlantic Engine Company, and Holden Hook and Ladder Company-- into one department: the Fire Department of the City of New Berne (subsequently referred to as the New Bern Fire Department). The law also spelled out who would be in charge if the chief engineer were not available. By 1868, the New Bern Fire Department was headed by Samuel Radcliffe, who had command over all three companies; however, the individual companies still elected their own leaders. A short time later The Atlantic Fire Company No. 1 changed its name to the Atlantic Fire and Hook & Ladder Company (in 1868 and ratified by the state assembly March 22, 1869, subsequently referred to as the Atlantic).

In 1868 the New Bern Steam Engine No. 1 Company received an Amoskeag steam engine from the city. The original engine was pulled by hand, but was later converted so horses could pull it. This engine was considered to be of sufficient size until January 10, 1871, when a fire broke out at Hahn's Bakery on Pollock Street. Some of the sparks ignited the roof of Christ Episcopal Church across the street, and flames consumed the interior of the church and melted the church bell. It proved to be difficult fighting the fire on both sides of the street with the Amoskeag steam engine, and this large fire virtually destroyed downtown New Bern. Everyone saw the need for two steam fire engines, but it took several years to raise sufficient funds to purchase another.

During the decade of 1870-1880, fires continued to ravage the city, which was vulnerable to fires originating in sawmills,



Atlantic Company Steam Fire Engine, probably early 1900s.

Ernest Richardson Postcard Collection.

distilleries, blacksmith shops, and numerous wooden buildings. The fire department and its regulations were important to the citizens of New Bern, and many volunteered and provided new equipment to the various companies (Watson, p. 508).

On January 27, 1873, the Holden Hook and Ladder Fire Company No. 1 changed its name to Mechanics' Hook and Ladder Company No. 1. This fire company was originally organized by the Union army during the Civil War and incorporated on August 24, 1869. It is unclear whether the Mechanics Hook and Ladder Company subsequently became an African American company, as there is contradictory evidence. The company seemed to disappear after a short while.

By the 1870s fire horses were becoming a fixture in fire departments. Moving steam engines by hand required considerable manpower, and for cities that had paid fire departments, salaries for the number of men needed to pull the engines were expensive. Horses

were much cheaper, and they could easily pull the heavy equipment. A fire horse was strong, fast, and dependable (Mike Legeros, *Early Black Firefighters*, p.9). Most horses were owned by the town and used for other purposes when there was no fire to fight. At the sound of a bell, horses took their place in front of the equipment and waited for the harness to drop from the ceiling to be fastened. This entire operation took around ten seconds. The horses then pulled the wagon with lightning speed (Thad Stern Jr., "The Day of the Fabulous Fire Horse," *Charlotte Observer*, June 12, 1966, pp. 2,3).

The first fire horses in New Bern were owned by local merchants, who used them dually in their businesses. The moment the fire bell rang, the horse and driver were at the disposal of the fire companies. At the turn of the century, the city purchased numerous horses to haul garbage. The minute the alarm rang, a horse was unhitched and the driver and horse raced to the station (New Bern Firemen's Museum pamphlet). Fred, Ben Hurst, and Old Jim were the most notable New Bern fire horses.

Fire alarms/bells changed over the years in New Bern. The first fire alarm bell was mounted on top of a two-story frame building used for a city hall at the corner of Broad and Craven streets, now occupied by the Craven County Courthouse (Jack Honrine, "Over One Hundred Years History of New Bern Fire Department Given," *The Sun Journal*, New Bern, May 7, 1974). The bell assembled the firemen at one location and, in the absence of visible smoke, they would discover the location of the fire by word of mouth. In 1883 New Bern obtained its first fireboxes, provided by Southern Bell Telephone Company. In 1885 the Atlantic Company moved to 220-226 Craven Street, when one of the stores in this building was converted to a firehouse (New Bern Firemen's Museum pamphlet).

Fire department volunteers were exempted from certain city taxes, which helped encourage active memberships in the fire companies. Many of the volunteer firemen were local merchants active in civic affairs, such as Elijah R. Ellis, a local businessman who was a leader in the Atlantic Company. Elijah R. was quite wealthy: he owned a rice mill and regularly traded with the West Indies via his schooner, *The Melvin*. He was active in the Democratic Party,

as well as other civic endeavors. In August 1878, Elijah R. Ellis donated horses to the Atlantic Company, and the gift was accepted with the understanding that the horses would belong to the city and could be used for other work except at the time of a fire or parade (*New Berne Times*, August 30, 1879, p. 3). In 1879, the city purchased, for \$4,200, a Silsby engine, number 604, and a thousand feet of hose. Elijah R. Ellis advocated that the equipment be given to the Atlantic Company, and the town agreed to do so. The fire company named the engine the "Elijah Ellis" in honor of their friend and benefactor and had his name painted on the back of the engine. This was the first instance in New Bern fire department history of the naming of an engine for a person. While in future years fire engines would bear the names of mayors of the city, Elijah Ellis was not, in fact, a mayor (William Hand, "Looking Closer at a Local Fire Engine Tradition," *New Bern Sun Journal*, April 29, 2018).

By 1879 the New Bern Fire Department consisted of three white companies: the Atlantic Steam Engine Company No. 1, the New Berne Steam Engine Company No. 1, and the Excelsior Bucket and Axe Company No. 4. There were also two African American companies in town: the Reliance Bucket and Axe Company and the Mechanics Hook and Ladder Company (unofficial NBFD website: newbernfire.tripod.com).

Early Fire Houses

In 1871 a new firehouse was being built for the Holden Hook and Ladder Company. The 1885 Sanborn insurance map shows a "Steam Engine Company" on Broad Street, which is presumably this building. The 1888 Sanborn map shows a two-story engine house and later a combination fire station and synagogue from before 1888-1893 at 41 Middle Street (Legeros, *New Bern Former Firehouses*, pp. 1,3). Both the New Bern Steam Engine Company No. 1 and the Atlantic Company were stationed at the old City Hall at 220-226 Craven Street until the beginning of the twentieth century. This three-story building served as an engine house and department headquarters until 1928, when all operations were moved to 420 Broad Street.

Steam Engines

During 1884, the town expended \$3,500 to buy engine number 155 from the Button Manufacturing Company of Waterford, NY. In replacing the old 1868 Amoskeog used by the New Bern Steam Fire Company No. 1 with the new Button engine, the company became informally known as the "Button" company (subsequently referred to as the Button Company). The firemen tried it out immediately; they moved the steamer in front of Christ Episcopal Church and were able to throw a stream of water over the 150-foot-high steeple. Despite this advanced equipment, fire insurance rates remained high, mainly because of the constant disrepair of the engines and fire apparatus. As much as one-fifth of the city budget was expended for maintenance of fire equipment. Nevertheless, the African American fire companies sometimes lacked even the means to haul their engines to fires.

The steam engines answered all fire alarms and drew water from the wells that had been used in the early days of hand pumps. These wells were located at Middle and Pollock streets, Bern Street in Five Points, North Craven at Pelletier's Knitting Mill, and the intersections of Broad and Middle streets, New and George streets, Middle and South Front streets and Metcalf and Johnson streets. If a fire occurred near the Neuse or Trent rivers, water was pumped from the river (New Bern Firemen's Museum pamphlet). Just prior to 1900, a city water system was installed and the streets were paved with bricks, so that the fire department was consequently in a better position to fight several destructive fires that occurred in the next century (New Bern Firemen's Museum website https://www.firemensmuseum.com).

Fire Company Rivalries

The receipt of a steam engine for each of the two companies intensified the rivalry between them. Hoping to promote harmony and deter unnecessary use of equipment, the aldermen directed that only one steam engine at a time should attend a fire and the other should be held in reserve (Watson, p. 509). Fire alarms became com-petitions between the Atlantic Company and the Button Company. When the alarm was given, the two companies raced each other to

the fire. The citizens of New Bern soon appeared to be more interested in who won the race than in the handling of the fire. Mothers of the town would dress their babies in the colors of their favorite company: Atlantic Company colors were pink and white and Button Company colors were blue and white. There were also monthly parades in which the companies would show off their equipment and capabilities. By 1887, the Atlantic Fire & Hook & Ladder Company changed its name to the Atlantic Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 (ratified by NC State Assembly March 4, 1887).

The North Carolina State Firemen's Association (NCF-SA) was created in 1888. From its inception, a statewide tournament was held each year. The first annual meeting of the NCFSA opened in Raleigh on August 13, 1889, and the first company to arrive was New Bern's Atlantic Company, along with the New Bern band. The two-day event began in the morning of August thirteenth, with a firemen's parade and a welcome by the mayor and other luminaries. The contests began that afternoon. The Atlantic Company entered the steamer contest and won for quickest steam (Legeros, Firefighter Games, a Long Tradition in NC, p. 1). In between the competitions, meetings were conducted and officers elected (Legeros, The First Convention, p. 2). Besides teams from other towns competing against one another, the rivalry between the Atlantic and Button companies became even more competitive. New Bern hosted the tournament August 6-9, 1895.

The African American companies were not asked to participate in these NCFSA tournaments, so the North Carolina Colored Volunteer Firemen's Association (NCCVFA) was established between 1888 and 1889. Prior to the formation of this association, one of the earliest conventions for African American firemen was held in Raleigh on October 15, 1873, and the New Bern companies were specifically invited. "The object of the convention is to establish a unified understanding with all the colored firemen in the state with regard to our future welfare and prosperity" (*Daily Sentinel of Raleigh*, Sept 30, Oct 9, 1873). The first convention of the NCCVFA took place in Charlotte in 1893. New Bern hosted in 1909 (Legeros, *Black Firefighters*, pp. 10-11).

In 1899 the New Bern Fire Department attended the state tournament in Greensboro, and the Button Company won the "quick streaming" and hose wagon races. Upon their return, the fire department attendees were greeted by a parade that ended at the New Bern Academy, where Congressman Charles R. Thomas gave a speech and townspeople distributed a large barrel of lemonade to the firemen. The Atlantic Company met and approved resolutions of appreciation for their courteous treatment by the citizens of Greensboro, but also made clear their opposition to a rumor that the reel teams of New Bern might be consolidated. The fierce competition between the two companies continued and in the next century, world records would be set and broken by both teams (Watson, p. 562).

Besides competing at tournaments and conventions, the fire companies participated in parades, escorted militia, appeared at banquets, and gave speeches. The New Bern Fire Department celebrated George Washington's birthday each year with a parade that included the fire department band, a tradition that continued until at least 1890 (Firemen's Museum). While the African American fire companies were sometimes included, the Reliance Engine and the Rough and Ready Hook and Ladder companies usually held their own parades.

The New Bern Fire Department and the New Bern companies were recognized as the best in the state by the end of the nineteenth century. Competition between the companies would continue through the next century, but it would also be a time of tragedy and cause for reorganization.

Twentieth Century

On November 6, 1904, the New Bern Fire Department suffered its first "in the line of duty" death. Johnnie J. Gaskill was killed when a fire horse kicked him in the head. There would be one more "in the line of duty" death on June 10, 1931, when Edgar D. Elliott drowned while fighting a riverfront fire.

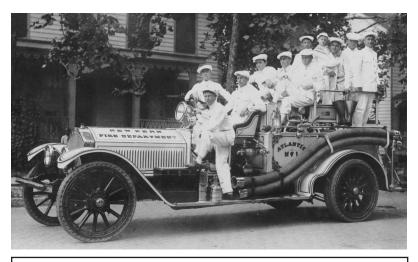
In 1904, the Button Company set the record in quick streaming. Between 1904 and 1911, the Atlantic Company and Button Company traded this record back and forth, but in 1911 the Button Company

set the world's record that still stands today. In 1913, the last year for steam engine contests, the New Bern Fire Department won eight out of ten first place finishes at a state competition held in Wilmington.

In 1913 the New Bern Fire Department consisted of four companies, four stations, one chief, one assistant chief, and eleven paid firemen. To serve a population of fifteen thousand, there were six thousand feet of hose, a Gamewell fire alarm system, twenty break-glass boxes, and five alarm systems, one in each station house and one at Five Points. The four fire companies and stations were Atlantic, Button, Fourth Ward, and Riverside.

The Atlantic Company was stationed at 51 Broad Street from 1913-1928 in a three-story brick building built between 1888 and 1893. It housed the Hotel Neuse in 1898, and the Elks Lodge met there in 1904. (The building that was once this fire station is now the banquet room for the Chelsea Restaurant.) The company had two paid men and a volunteer company of thirty-five men, as well as one horse (alternating with the Button Company), one hose wagon, and a Silsby steam engine. The Button Company was stationed at the old City Hall on Craven Street and consisted of five paid men, one volunteer company of twenty-eight men, three horses (one of which alternated with the Atlantic Company), one hose wagon, a Button steam engine, and a hook-and-ladder truck. The two-story station house for the Fourth Ward was at 139 Broad Street. It had two paid men, one volunteer company of twenty-five men, one horse, and one hose wagon. The Riverside Fire Company had a station in a one-story building at the intersection of George and Cypress streets, built circa 1908-1913. It had two paid men, a volunteer company of twenty-three men, one horse and one hose wagon. Neither the Fourth Ward nor Riverside station buildings are still standing (Legeros, Down East Fire Departments, p. 5; New Bern Former Firehouses, pp. 1,2).

On Thanksgiving Day 1914, the Button Company received a motorized fire truck from the city, and the Atlantic Company received one in 1915. Sometime during this period, the Riverside and Fourth Ward companies ceased to exist.



Atlantic Company Gasoline-Powered Fire Engine purchased by the city in 1915, shown approximately 1920.

Ernest Richardson Postcard Collection.

The Great Fire

In 1922, New Bern suffered the worst fire in its history, commonly known as the "Great Fire." The details of this fire are well known (see Mary Osborne Conover, "New Bern in Flames," *New Bern Historical Society Journal*, Volume II, No.1, April 1989, or displays at the New Bern Firemen's Museum). It was an event that greatly impacted the city. Its cost was estimated at 2.5 million dollars (\$34.5 million in 2018 dollars). The fire changed the city in many ways, and residents clearly saw the need to have sufficient men and equipment, plus cooperation between companies. It also resulted in a law mandating that all new homes have metal roofs.

In 1925, at the age of twenty-five, Fred, the fire horse of the Atlantic Company, died of a heart attack while answering a false alarm. Ironically, the driver of his hose wagon, John Taylor, an African American, had died of a heart attack only two weeks prior. The Atlantic Company wanted Fred to be remembered, so his head was mounted and continues to be on display at the New Bern Firemen's Museum (Vicky Edwards, "Fred the Fire Horse," *Our State Magazine*, October 27, 2010, pp. 1,3).

In 1927 the first motorized ladder truck was purchased by the Atlantic Company for \$27,000 (https://www.newbernnc.gov/departments/fire_department/NBFR_history.php).

In 1928 a new firehouse was built at 420 Broad Street to house the Atlantic and Button companies, with the hope that doing so would quell the rivalry between the two. However, in some ways the building seemed to formalize it. The firehouse was essentially cut in two--each unit had its own identical living quarters, meeting rooms, and chief's offices. Each fire company also had its own pole. The only joint meeting space was the second floor open gallery fac-ing the street. The companies also continued to operate under their original charters, with the fire chief position alternating each year between companies. This fire station was eventually closed in 2000 and is now the home of the New Bern Firemen's Museum. After the move, the two companies eventually merged into one and the rival-ry ended, although stories about their competition abound and are part of the lore of the fire department and New Bern history (New Bern Firemen's Museum website and "Fred the Fire Horse," p. 2).



FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM: THE HISTORY OF THE 35th USCT

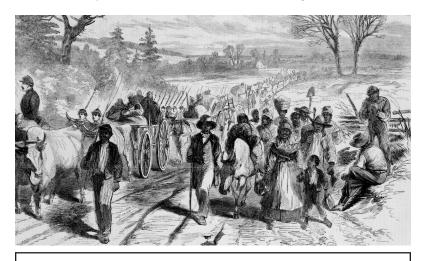
Bernard George

Late historian Dr. John Hope Franklin reportedly cited New Bern and eastern North Carolina as having the most comprehensive African American history in this country. However, as a young African American boy growing up in New Bern during the 1950s and 1960s, I was oblivious to the rich African American history of our community. I can still hear my grandfather's voice as he repeatedly recounted stories handed down from generation to generation of almost 300 years of family history in Craven County. Most interesting were his stories about the Civil War and his grandfather's enlistment in the Union Army. Fortunately, I now have the benefit of my own research and that of many respected scholars who have researched and documented a much more factual and inclusive history of the local African American experience. That experience permeates local, state and national history, illustrating our community indeed has "one history, many stories."

African Americans on the Eve of the Civil War

In 1790, when the first census was taken, African Americans numbered about 760,000—about 19% of the nation's population (United States Bureau of the Census, Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790 North Carolina). By 1860, at the start of the Civil War, the country's African American population had increased to 4.4 million. The vast majority were slaves, with only 488,000 counted as "freemen." The population of North Carolina included 331,059 slaves, representing 33% of North Carolina's total population (Joseph Kennedy, Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior). My great-great-grandfather Theophilus George and his wife Sarah, who

lived on Clubfoot Creek in North Harlowe, were among only 30,463 North Carolinians listed as free people of color in the 1860 census. This free colored population was mainly found along or near the eastern seaboard, in what has historically been known as the "black district" of North Carolina. Craven County, home to the state's highest free African American population, with more than one-fifth of the colored population being freemen, provided the region a rich resource of boatmen, builders, laborers, skilled craftsmen and other vocations for the local economy. By the time Theophilus George died in January of 1861, the nation was on the verge of the Civil War.



Freed slaves coming into Union lines at New Bern, North Carolina, following the Emancipation Proclamation

American engraving, 1863. (Harpers's Weekly, 21 February 1863)

The Battle of New Bern and the push for a New Birth of Freedom

The Civil War had an immediate and major impact on New Bern and eastern North Carolina. Many citizens, both black and white, felt the question of slavery and of slave holders' so-called "property rights" in human chattel would finally be settled, as it

should have been 85 years earlier by the country's founding fathers' powerful words in The Declaration of Independence that "All men are created equal" Although most references do not mention the profound impact of the Battle of New Bern on the local African American population, it is clear that New Bern became a mecca for freedom well before the Emancipation Proclamation. Thousands of escaped slaves sought safety within Union lines at New Bern, eventually establishing James City, the largest freeman settlement in the state. New Bern's progressive black community offered former slave refugees the first rays of hope and renewed faith in the promise of freedom, as local African Americans helped establish some of the state's first schools, churches, civic organizations and businesses for newly freed slaves. Before the war ended in 1865, black leaders from New Bern and Beaufort, led by freedom fighter Abraham Galloway, met with President Lincoln to demand basic rights of citizenship for the newly freed slaves. The historic meeting on April 29, 1864 was the first official White House meeting of its kind with a southern delegation of former slaves (David Cecelski, *The Fire of* Freedom: Abraham Galloway & The Slaves 'Civil War, pp. 115-117).

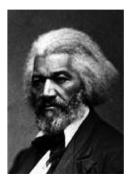
The First North Carolina Colored Volunteers (later the 35th USCT)

With the mounting loss of lives and morale, increasingly intense pressure was brought upon President Lincoln and the War Department to replenish Federal forces. At the insistence of Frederick Douglass and white leaders, the door was finally opened in 1863 for black soldiers to enlist in the Union army in large numbers. The Emancipation Proclamation authorized recruitment of Negro volunteers for Federal service beginning on January 1, 1863.

Influenced by the success of the 54th Massachusetts, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew and General Edward A. Wild saw potential for recruiting former slaves in occupied northeastern North Carolina. Many Union officials in North Carolina opposed raising black troops. Most whites questioned the ability of Negroes in general to perform as soldiers and others believed that ex-slaves were less capable than free blacks. However, since the beginning of New Bern's

occupation in March 1862, thousands of escaped slaves had poured behind the lines seeking freedom and aid. New Bern's large black population and strong support for the Union made it an ideal location for recruiting fresh troops and laborers (Richard M. Reid, *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era*).

The efforts of northern civilians and soldiers became crucial for the success of recruiting black soldiers. Governor Andrew was instrumental in drawing attention to North Carolina. The suc-



"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." - -

Frederick Douglass

cess of his two African American regiments, the 54th and the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers, led him to believe that the South offered potential for black enlistments. He wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton suggesting the idea of sending "some able, brave, tried, and believing man as a brigadier" to raise a brigade in North Carolina. He knew that within Major General John G. Foster's department there were from 2,500 to 5,000 black men available to be recruited. Several prominent abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips, George Stearns, Edward Kinsley, and Francis Bird were among those who supported Governor Andrew's efforts. Realizing the difficulty of attracting blacks to join White troops, Andrew recommended sending the 54th Massachusetts Regiment to be the "nest egg of a brigade" of North Carolinians. If the government refused to sanction the North Carolina undertaking, Andrew was prepared to welcome North Carolina fugitives into his Massachusetts regiments. He preferred, however, to see the work going on in the South, where more slaves

were apt to volunteer (Brigadier General Fred C. Ainsworth and Joseph W. Kirkley, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, pp. 109-111).



Philadelphia's Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments sought to attract African American recruits by using this poster.

Lithograph printed by P.S. Duval and Son, Philadelphia, 1864. It is represented in a number of collections, including that of the Smithsonian Institution. See http://americanhistory.si.edu/lincoln/come-and-join-us-brothers

In May 1863 Wild began recruiting for the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers (NCCV), placing the regiment under the command of Colonel James Beecher, half-brother of writer Harriet Beecher Stowe. Recruitment was slow until Abraham Galloway negotiated terms of enlistment and humane treatment of black soldiers

(Cecelski, pp. 78-80). Colonel Beecher established the regiment's campsite on the south bank of the Neuse River just outside of New Bern, and the first recruits went to work clearing land and setting up camp and a parade ground. By June 7, two of seven companies were in uniform and all had begun drill instruction. They were mustered in on June 30, 1863. White soldiers from the Forty-Fifth Massachusetts regiment aided in training. With the exception of Major John V. DeGrasse, Assistant Surgeon and Chaplain John N. Mars, the top officers in the First NCCV were white. Company commanders chose promising enlisted men to serve as sergeants and corporals.

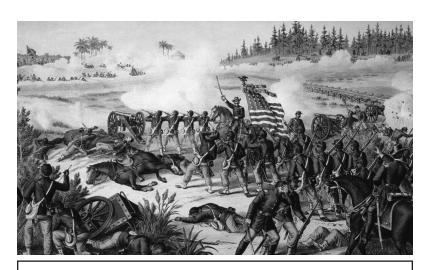




Representation of flag presented to General Wild on July 30, 1863 by the African American ladies of New Bern.

Upon completion of training, the regiment joined others in forming General Edward A. Wild's "African Brigade" (Reid, pp. 22-28). During a farewell ceremony held at the Academy Green in New Bern on July 24, 1863, the "Colored Ladies Relief Association of New Bern" presented the regiment a silk flag (Cecelski, pp.87-89).

Within a short time, the existing black units received orders for Charleston. Officials continued to recruit for the Second and Third NCCV, which took several months to fill and muster. Though the three regiments were intended to form a single brigade, their sequential organization resulted in widely varying experiences and effectiveness. Unlike the Second and Third regiments, the First



A Kurz and Alison lithograph print of the Battle of Olustee.

regiment trained for a longer period of time under the careful supervision of General Wild. Thus, when the First NCCV entered combat, it was better prepared to fight than most other black regiments.

The regiment would prove to be both brave and reliable in battle. The regiment spent several months at Folly Island outside Charleston, where on February 8, 1864, Federal authorities redesignated it the Thirty-Fifth U.S. Colored Troops (USCT). The regiment soon deployed to Florida where it fought at the Battle of Olustee. One report stated "no regiment went into action more gallantly, fought more desperately, or did better execution" than the Thirty-Fifth (Noah Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War 1862-1865*, p. 148).

The Battle of Olustee or Battle of Ocean Pond was fought in Baker County on February 20, 1864. Union forces of 5,500 led by Brigadier General Truman B. Seymour were soundly defeated by Confederate Brigadier General Joseph Finnegan's 6,000 well entrenched soldiers. Though the battle was a federal defeat, the valor displayed by the 35th USCT while providing critical rear-guard fire-

power for the retreating Federal forces played an important role in changing white attitudes about the capabilities of black troops. "The men's refusal to collapse in the face of superior numbers and a flanking fire helped to prevent the Union army's retreat from becoming a rout" (Reid, p.83). However, many Confederate attitudes hardened as evidenced by the atrocities committed on wounded and captured black soldiers and their white officers following the battle (Reid, p. 93). Despite heavy losses, the Thirty-Fifth served for the duration of the war in coastal Georgia and South Carolina. Among the first of more than 100,000 southern black Civil War soldiers, including more than 5,000 from North Carolina, the First NCCV paved the way in demonstrating the importance of black soldiers to the Union's preservation.

The Men of the 35th USCT



Edward Augustus Wild—A brigadier general in the Union Army during the Civil War. After suffering a severe wound that required amputation of his left arm, Wild was promoted and assigned to recruiting duties. A fervent abolitionist, he aggressively recruited black soldiers for the United States Colored Troops, as well as helping recruit white officers to lead them. Wild enlisted James C. Beecher to lead the 1st NCCV. Wild took command of a brigade of black

infantry that soon became known as "Wild's African Brigade." (This and other profiles in this section are drawn from Cecelski and Reid.)



Colonel James Beecher—Beecher commanded the regiment. Brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, Beecher drifted through various occupations during his early years, including a stint as a missionary in China. Labeled "The Odd One" by a biographer of the Beecher family, James seemed an unlikely candidate to com-

mand a regiment in combat, but he had previously served ably as lieutenant colonel in the 141st New York Infantry, and proved an efficient administrator and trainer during the unit's early months.



William Nikolaus Reed—Reed was originally appointed as a lieutenant colonel and the regiment's second-in-command on 11 July 1863, by Brigadier General Edward A. Wild. Colonel Beecher was on leave in the north when the Florida campaign began, so Reed commanded the 35th USCT at Olustee, Florida as regimental commander. Reed was reportedly the son of a Haitian mother, which would make him the highest-rank-

ing person of color to serve in the Civil War. "...It also appears that the Lieut Col of the Regt (which is commanded by Col Beecher) is a mulatto and while he has been temporarily in command of the Regt he has done everything in his power to elevate the Negro..." (Letter from Major Horace Wirtz, Department Medical Director, to Major General Quincy Gilmore, Commander of Department of the South). Reed was mortally wounded in February 1864 at Olustee.



Dr. John V. DeGrasse—Regimental surgeon, he was one of the most controversial appointments in the regiment. Major DeGrasse was born in New York City and, on May 19, 1849, received his MD with honors. After graduation he traveled abroad to Paris where he became an assistant to the renowned French surgeon, Alfred Velpeau. When

he returned to the States, DeGrasse became the first African American surgeon admitted to a medical society. When war broke out, DeGrasse volunteered his services to the United States Army, thus becoming one of only eight black surgeons to serve in the Union forces and the only African American to serve in a battle-field unit. For his service with the 1st NCCV, Governor Andrew

awarded him a gold-hilted sword from the state of Massachusetts.

William Henry Singleton—He was born into slavery in Craven County, North Carolina, near New Bern. During the Civil War, Singleton escaped to Union forces and gained his freedom. In the summer of 1863, he recruited and helped lead the 1st NCCV, which became part of the 35th United States Colored Troops (Cecelski, pp. 76-77). After being wounded in the Battle of Olustee in February 1864, Singleton was assigned to garrison duty in South Carolina, which was occupied by Union troops.



Abraham Galloway — Galloway was born in Smithville (now Southport, North Carolina) in 1837. An escaped slave, Galloway was a fearless spy, courageous freedom fighter, and outspoken political leader who played an important role in supporting the Union Army's success in North Carolina and the Mississippi valley. By early 1863, Galloway had become eastern North Carolina's most important spokesman

for African American rights. After leading a delegation of black leaders who met with President Abraham Lincoln on the issue of African American suffrage, Galloway attended the National Convention of the Colored Citizens of the United States in Syracuse, New York. He traveled across North Carolina speaking to black audiences about women's suffrage and equal rights for African Americans. Galloway organized the state's first Equal Rights Leagues in New Bern and Raleigh and was a leader in founding the North Carolina Republican Party. Following the Civil War, Galloway served in the North Carolina Senate during the Reconstruction period. His untimely death in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1870 was honored by over 6,000 people who attended his funeral



Furney Bryant—Bryant, who was one of the North Carolina noncommissioned officers, came to New Bern as a refugee

dressed in rags. Unable to read and write, he joined Superintendent Vincent Colyer's night classes. Bryant was rewarded for his diligence in school when he was selected to serve as one of General Burnside's spies. He later enlisted in the 1st NCCV and was promoted to first sergeant for his display of intelligence and leadership.

Luke Martin — One of the first African American soldiers from the South was an enslaved man named Luke Martin. He was born on December 12th, 1836 in the town of Hertford, Perquimans County. Sometime between his birth and 1860 Luke was taken across the Albemarle Sound to Washington County, where he was among the 2,465 human beings accounted for in the county's 1860 slave census. The total white population of the Eighth United States Census in Washington County enumerated 3,593. In the spring of 1863, Luke escaped from his slaveholder's plantation near Plymouth and fled across the Tar and Neuse Rivers to the newly established freedom sanctuary behind Union lines in New Bern. Luke Martin enlisted in the First North Carolina Colored Infantry as a free man on May 22, 1863, and was later wounded in the Battle of Olustee. After the war Private Martin settled in New Bern, built a home, raised a family and helped establish and pastor Saint John Missionary Baptist Church.

Conclusion

Many local freemen and former slaves felt the call to fight for the Union, and by the War's end more than 7,000 of the 180,000 United States Colored Troops hailed from eastern North Carolina. According to Dyer's Compendium, black troops fought in a total of 449 engagements, 39 of which he rated as major battles. Over 37,000 black soldiers lost their lives in the conflict. Organized in New Bern in June 1863, the 1st NC Colored Volunteers (later designated 35th Regiment, USCT), one of the first Union regiments of former slaves, courageously fought in campaigns in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

That same courageous spirit of civic pride, moral leadership and support of this country's principles of freedom, justice, and equality continues today in the greater New Bern community. In 2016 the Tryon Palace Foundation was awarded a Museums for America: Learning Experiences grant to develop an interpretive program entitled "An Eagle on His Button" based on the experiences of the United States Colored Troops during the American Civil War. With grant assistance, the 35th USCT Reenactment Regiment was created to recruit, train, and educate interpreters who then serve as history ambassadors for the community's rich and diverse African American heritage. The regiment includes more than twenty reenactors and living historians who proudly participate in historic reenactments and other public events across the state as they share New Bern's unique African American Civil War history.



35th USCT Reenactment Group - Tryon Palace at New Bern, NC



THE EVANS MILL COMPLEX DURING THE CIVIL WAR

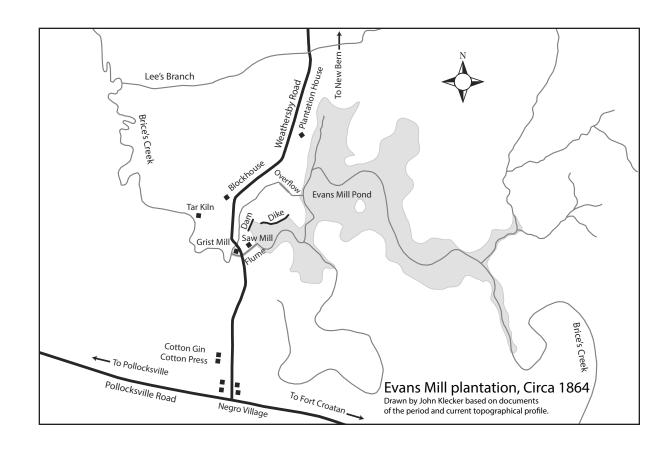
Steve Dembickie and John Klecker

D uring the Civil War a subsantial complex, including a plantation, a gristmillandsawmills, and eventually a Union blockhouse, existed where the Evans Mill subdivision is now located off Old Airport Road.

The subdivision is named after Peter Gustavus Evans (1822-1863), a wealthy plantation owner in Craven County at the time of the Civil War, who purchased the property in 1856. Evans had married Eliza Morehead, the daughter of former North Carolina governor John M. Morehead (for whom Morehead City is named) in 1850. They had four children.

The Evans Mill plantation was located off what was then Weathersby Road (now Old Airport Road) near the point where it crossed Brice's Creek. Evans owned many slaves who worked the plantation and who were housed in huts in a small Negro village at the crossroads of Weathersby Road and Pollocksville Road (now County Line Road). The plantation produced cotton, corn, sweet potatoes and fruit from large apple and peach orchards. It also had a gristmill and a sawmill that ran two saws that were powered by the running waters of a millrace from dammed-up Brice's Creek, along with a blacksmith shop and a shoemaker shop, a cotton gin, and a cotton press. The Evans plantation home was also located off Weathersby Road, in the location of the 3500 block of Old Airport Road in the present-day subdivision. No evidence remains today of where the home stood.

Peter G. Evans was commissioned a captain in the Confederate cavalry in October 1861, and with his wealth he was able to outfit his own unit, known as the Macon Mounted Guard. The unit's initial mission was to patrol the area around Fort Macon, near Beaufort. It was present at the Battle of New Bern on March 14, 1862.



After the Union victory, the Federal army occupied New Bern for the remainder of the war. At this time Captain Evans was known to have ridden the Craven County countryside burning the property of the farmers, especially those who were loyal to the Union, stealing cattle and generally making himself athorn in the side of the Union occupiers.



Colonel Peter G. Evans

Photo from the book: "Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-65" Written by members of the respective commands, edited by Walter Clark, Vol. III, published by the State, Nash Brothers, Book and Job Printers, Goldsboro, NC, 1901

In October 1862, Evans was elected colonel of the Fifth North Carolina Calvary, Sixty-third Regiment, part of Robertson's Brigade under Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry. His regiment led a cavalry charge against a Union position behind a stone wall at the Battle of Upperville, Virginia, on June 21, 1863. His horse was shot from under him; he was mortally wounded and taken prisoner by the Union forces. He died from his wounds in a Washington D.C. prison hospital on July 24,1863.

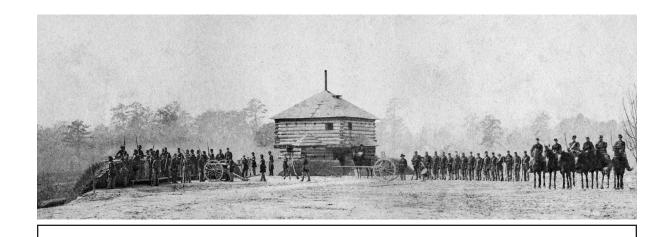
Following the Battle of New Bern, the Evans plantation was occupied by Union forces on March 17, 1862. The Fifty-first

Pennsylvania was the first regiment to arrive, and after a few weeks of picket duty it was soon followed by Company D of the New York 103rd. Five letters penned by Capt. Henry Sand of the 103rd, dated from April 6 through April 18, describe in great detail his new surroundings (*Crossing Antietam – The Civil War Letters of Captain Henry Augustus Sand, Company A, 103rd New York Volunteers*, edited by Peter H. Sand and John F. McLaughlin). The letters tell of his helping to repair the sawmill and sawing planks to build quarters and using the gristmill to grind the corn for meal. Orders for the 103rd were to hold the mills at all costs and to do reconnaissance between the Beaufort and Trenton roads (present-day Old Cherry Point and Pollocksville roads).

Captain Sand tells of his experience trying to find his way around the large millpond at Brice's Creek. He writes:

"The lake, at the outlet of which these Mills are situated is the queerest piece of water I ever saw and it so full of islands, trees and intricate passages that you are pretty sure, if you venture too far from your landmark, of losing your way and the lord knows how long you may paddle round before you find it again. It is in fact a sunken forest, and is as perfect a labyrinth as you can find anywhere in the world, I will bet, for I was out in it yesterday for 6 hours and have now no more idea of its size or shape than I had before. I never knew what a swamp was before—I've read about them but never realized there lonely denseness before seeing this one."

In June 1862 an order was given to Company E of the Ninth New Jersey to build a blockhouse at Evans Mill adjacent to the plantation house, one of four blockhouses the Ninth would construct, the others being at Havelock Station, Bogue Sound, and Gales Creek. The trench works of the blockhouse are still visible today, located on private property in the Evans Mill subdivision. Sec. Lt. Albert Beach of Company E, writing in the August edition of the *New Jersey Herald and Sussex County Democrat* (as reported in *The Sharpshooters – A History of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*, by Edward G. Longacre) described his unit's new venue as "a splendid place," in fact, "the only property I have seen in the whole



Evans Mill Blockhouse

This is a photo of the Evans Mill Blockhouse showing the troops of the Nineteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry stationed there during the war. The huts (not shown) where some of the troops were housed during their stay were to the right of the mounted soldiers. Company E of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry built the blockhouse at Evans Mill adjacent to the plantation house.

The illustration is courtesy of Bill Schuette and Reedsburg, Wisconsin, Public Library

State that looks anything like living." The plantation included beautifully manicured lawns, apple and peach orchards, two grist mills, a saw mill, two cotton gins, and more than a dozen slave cabins, "which make quite a little town of themselves." But Beach later went on to describe his situation as "anything but pleasant. We are obliged to quarter down in the hollow at the mills, and our bed-room is a very open one, it being ... among the mosquitoes, fleas, and all kinds of insects, with the mill-dam under us making such a roaring that sometimes upon awakening I imagine myself at Niagara Falls."

By September the blockhouse was nearly completed, and at this time the Massachusetts Seventeenth, Company K, was garrisoned there. Thomas Kirwan of the Seventeenth described the Evans plantation this way (in *Soldiering in North Carolina*, by Thomas Kirwan of the Seventeenth Massachusetts):

"On Sunday morning about 10 o'clock, we started for Evans' Mill, to relieve Co. E, which had over-stayed their time one week. About a mile further on, after passing through a narrow belt of woods, we came out upon Evans' Plantation. On our right was a field of eighty acres, about half of which was covered with a young growth of apple trees. On the left was a field of twenty acres, at the further end of which was the plantation house, with its negro huts, surrounded with the inevitable grove of elegant shade trees. On entering the front gate, I was struck with the size and beauty of an immense beech tree, whose wide extending branches covered a circle of over 100 feet in diameter. The house was an ordinary two story one, containing about 7 rooms, set on brick blocks about three feet from the ground, and serving as a cool place of resort for the pigs, fowl, and youthful, curly-headed negroes, during the heat of the day. Just opposite of the front gate of the mansion, the road turned sharp to the right, and on looking ahead, we beheld a block-house, nearly completed, in the rear of which was the encampment, and our future abode. Upon reaching the block-house, the road took a turn to the left, down a short, steep hill, skirting the bank of a stream, which it crossed



Evans Mill Plantation House

This is a photo of the Evans Mill plantation house showing the troops of the Nineteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry stationed there during the war. The boy seated in the lap of a soldier in the center is Frank Pettis the drummer boy for the unit. The illustration is courtesy of Bill Schuette and the Reedsburg, WI, public library.

on a rude plank bridge, still turning toward the left. After crossing the bridge, a grist mill lay on the right, and about 60 yards on the left, on the dam of a magnificent pond of water stood a large saw mill, which ran two sets of saws when in operation. It was then idle, the dam having broke away. The road, after crossing the flume of the grist mill led on to the negro village—quite a collection of comfortable houses—built on each side of the crossroad, which led to Pollocksville. Just before coming on to the Pollocksville Road, in a field to the right was a large cotton gin and press. At the intersection of these roads was our outpost in the daytime, the guard being drawn in to the mills at night."

Other Massachusetts regiments would have their time here as well, including the Twenty-third Regiment (November-December 1862), the Forty-third (January-March 1863), and the Fifty-first (March-May 1863). While the Fifty-first Massachusetts was garrisoned at Evans Mill, Sgt. Gustavus Williams of Company K took up the pen to write home to his wife Bernette and sister Emily. (https://sparedshared9.wordpress.com/2015/06/03/1863-augustus-b-williams-to-bernette-hill-williams/ Spared & Shared 9, Saving history one letter at a time..., transcribed by William J. Griffing):

"Evans Mills, North Carolina, March 5, 1863, My Dear Wife, We started as I wrote we expected Thursday at ten A.M. arriving without incident about 6 P.M. Co. I, Capt. [George O.] Tyler of the 43rd, was here and marched off his company very soon after our arrival. They had been here some seven or eight weeks and liked the situation much. It is indeed a position far superior to anything I ever expected to have while a soldier. The officers occupy a good house—one of the best plantation houses I have seen.

The sergeants and privates have quarters in board huts accommodating from two to a dozen or more each, and the blockhouse—a strong log building of two stories with port holes for cannon and perforations for musketry. There are ten or eleven cavalrymen stationed here as this is an important outpost towards Pollocksville from which an attack—if





Frank Pettis, Drummer Boy

The picture on the left is an enlargement from the Evans Mill plantation house. The picture on the right is a daguerreotype which may have been taken before leaving Wisconsin.

The illustrations are courtesy of Bill Schuette and the Reedsburg, WI, public library.

one were made—might come. The cavalry scour the country around and our pickets comfortably stationed in huts along the road a mile from our company quarters, which are just back of the blockhouse, guard the only approach.

My chums occupy a very comfortable cabin with two tables, three bunks, one chair, two cupboards, and a good fireplace. All the huts have either stoves or fireplaces but ours is the best building and seems quite civilized. This was an immense plantation with two hundred (I judge) negroes upon it. A creek flowing near us carries a sawmill and a grist mill. The mills are kept running now and the Government have kept agents manufacturing tar a mile below here. A great many contrabands—I don't know how many—are employed here so you see we have in our care much that is valuable."

The Wisconsin Nineteenth Volunteer Infantry, Company A, was on picket duty there from October 1863 until April 1864. With the Wisconsin Nineteenth was a thirteen-year-old drummer boy by the name of Frank Pettis, born in Crainesville, Pennsylvania, in 1850. Frank had followed his teacher A. P. Ellinwood and his father Amos to enlist in the Union Army at the age of eleven in January 1862 as a musician drummer. Frank's father Amos was also a musician and played the fife, so there was both a father and son garrisoned at Evans Mill from October 1863 to April 1864. They were at the blockhouse during the attempt by Confederate Maj. Gen. George Pickett to retake the city of New Bern on February 1, 1864. Confederate Gen. Seth Barton brought up his troops from Pollocksville to make an attempt to seize Evans Mill. It was only by the order of Union Brig. Gen. I.N. Palmer to have Company A fall back towards the city that saved it from probable surrender and capture. Frank, his father Amos, and his teacher Captain Ellinwood all survived the war. (History of Reedsburg and the Upper Baraboo Valley—Part II, Reedsburg in the Civil War, by Merton E. Krug, and the Sauk County Historical Society with Bill Schuette)

Another attack on the Evans Mill blockhouse occurred on May 5, 1864, when Confederate Major General Robert F. Hoke made a third and final attempt to retake New Bern. After his successful raids on Plymouth and Washington in April 1864, Hoke again set his sight on New Bern. His efforts at Evans Mill are described in the following account:

"Early in the day, the Confederates crossed to the south side of the Trent well below the city near Evans Mill on Brice's Creek. The Federal outpost at Evans Mill consisted of a blockhouse supported by a redoubt with one heavy gun mounted at an elevated point, so as to allow the small garrison to keep a large force at bay. When Hoke and his staff rode up to reconnoiter the defense works, they attracted the attention of the enemy. A journalist accompanying Hoke described the greeting that followed: 'Very soon a puff of smoke announced the salute intended for us, and almost instantaneously a twelve pound solid shot ricocheted

in front, and sped at a few feet above our heads, to seek the earth some distance in the rear.' Hoke immediately ordered Colonel John A. Baker of the Third North Carolina Calvary to deploy skirmishers in the woods to flank the outpost and protect the artillerymen. Two Napoleons [a cannon that fires a 12 pound shot, also called a 12-pounder] were rushed forward into an open field several hundred yards in front of the works and soon unleashed a steady barrage of well-directed fire. As soon as the skirmishers made their way through a nearly impassable bog, the Federals 'took to their heels.' Soon after the encounter, a bridge spanned Brice's Creek, and Hoke's troops poured across and headed in the direction of New Bern." (General Robert F. Hoke—Lee's Modest Warrior, by Daniel W. Barefoot)

A company of the Seventeenth Massachusetts garrisoned there retreated towards New Bern, and the Evans Mill blockhouse was under Confederate control for the remainder of the day and until the next morning. On the evening of May 5, about 50 men of the Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, Company A, which had been captured earlier in the day at Fort Croatan, was marched to Evans Mill and held under guard at the blockhouse by the victorious Rebels. The Rhode Island boys were marched out under guard from the Evans Mill blockhouse on the morning of May 6 to Pollocksville and eventually to Kinston to wait for trains to take them to Goldsboro and then south to the Andersonville prison, where most of them died. Through a bit of irony, remnants of this same Company A of the Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery were garrisoned at the Evans Mill blockhouse one year later, from May 8 to June 6, 1865, probably one of the last companies to do picket duty at Evans Mill.

The authors would like to acknowledge that this research would not have come about without the help of Linda Hitchcock and Steve Shaffer.

Note: An extended version of this article, including a listing of Confederate and Union troops at Evans Mill plantation during the Civil War, is available from the authors.



CAPTURE AND FATE OF A REBEL SPY

As told by Wm. H. Eaton, Company B, 17th Massachusetts Regimental History

Contributed by Steve Dembickie and John Klecker

The following selection, from *Memorial History of the Seventeenth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* by Thomas Kirwan and Henry Splaine, copyrighted in 1911, is reproduced as a curiosity only; there is no verification of this account in standard sources.

During the early summer of 1864, Company B, Captain Tompkins, was on outpost duty at Evans Mills, an important strategical position some six miles south of New Bern, and west of the railway running from the latter city to Moorhead city. At that time the rebels were active in that section, threatening to cut off the union forces in Newbern from communication by rail with the sea, the design evidently being to 'bottle them up' in the Newbern district.

To guard against this, our forces in this section of the district were required to be particularly vigilant, especially in that section were the Evans Mills were located, and where a blockhouse had been established, and other works of a defensive character constructed. At this post also was stationed a company of the Second Carolina Mounted Infantry in command of Captain Graham.

One day the outer vidette [mounted sentinel in advance of pickets] brought in word to the picket at the inner bridge that a suspicious person had been seen lurking around for two hours or more; that the vidette given chase to him, and that he had escaped in a swamp. This intelligence being quickly conveyed to the headquarters (in the old Evans House) the company was at once ordered out and proceeded to the place where the fugitive had disappeared. This was a pond rather than a swamp, with water from knee high to waist deep. In about the center of this pond was a

large hillock covered with course cane grass, about twelve feet high above the water surface. The company was deployed from the road on both sides of the hillock, and the men were ordered by Captain Tomkins to cross over to deep water and search the hillock thoroughly. This was done, but no one was found there.

Two members of the company, William H. Eaton (who was acting headquarters clerk) and George Pitman, Jr., continued the search, the later saying, 'Billy, you go to the right, and I will go to the left, and make all the noise you can in the water.' This suggestion was made at the rear of the hillock, and both started again to go around it on opposite sides. As the two men came around and turned to meet each other, a strange thing happened. A man lifted his head above the water and stood up. As quick as a flash the soldiers grabbed him, Eaton by the right shoulder and Pitman by the left, and took him and his belongings onto the road. They marched him to headquarters where he was searched. In his pocket was found a waterproof tin can, in which, on oiled silk, were complete drawings of the camp and fortifications of Evans Mills, finely executed. He had with him a six-shooter carbine.

The prisoner, who did not reveal his name, was carried to Newbern, tried by court-martial, convicted as a spy and shot.



THE GHENT HISTORIC DISTRICT

John F. Leys

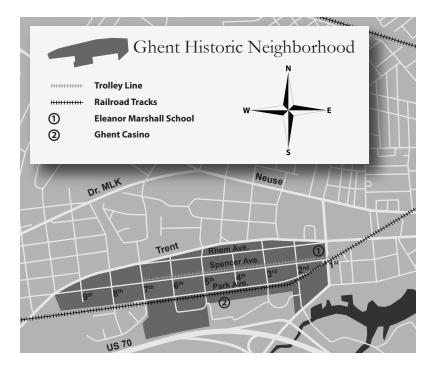
The charming Ghent neighborhood is New Bern's second-oldest suburb after Riverside that was established in 1894. The major development period of Ghent ranged from 1912 to 1941. The development of DeGraffenreid Park followed in 1922, but its progress was delayed because of the Great Depression and World War II. Perhaps surprisingly, Ghent was not named for the city of Ghent in Belgium's Flemish Region but rather for an upscale neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia. New Bern's Ghent neighborhood has been designated as a historic district by the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service under the United States Department of the Interior. Now encompassing an area of one hundred thirty acres, it has lots along both sides of Rhem and Spencer avenues and on the north side of Park Avenue.

The land that today comprises Ghent in New Bern was originally a working plantation owned by the Rhem family, whose name is even now borne by Rhem Avenue. Joseph Lane Rhem, Sr. (1825-1901) son of Amos Rhem (1788-1853) and Theressa (or Teresa) Lane (1794-1853), came into a large inheritance of land and slaves when his parents died. He may never have lived in the area where Ghent is as he built his fine home (ca.1855-1860) on the corner of Broad and George streets soon after his parents' death. Joseph Rhem's daughter, Kate, inherited his plantation and, alongside her husband, Jones M. Spencer, helped to develop the land whose main thoroughfare, Spencer Avenue, carries their family name to this day. (Price, Jr., William S., National Register of Historic Places/Ghent Historic District. February 1988)

In 1911 the Spencers sold their remaining holdings in Ghent to Callaghan J. McCarthy, the mayor of New Bern, and Ernest C. Armstrong, an osteopathic surgeon. With the financial aid

of a Virginian, Fritz Sitterding, these men formed the Ghent Land Company in 1912. The Certificate of Incorporation lists the original shareholders as Fritz Sitterding, Richmond, VA; J.W. Brown, Jr., Norfolk, VA; C.J. McCarthy, New Bern, NC; and E.C. Armstrong, New Bern, NC. In 1930 at Mr. Sitterding's death, the Ghent Land Company went out of business (Craven County Record of Incorporations, Volume C. Microfilm c. 028.92002). The intention was to extend Ghent south of Park Ave. to include Sitterding Avenue, McCarthy Avenue, Armstrong Avenue and Brown Avenue after those first shareholders. There would be a park south of Park Avenue between Fifth and Sixth streets. These developments, however, were never realized. (Plan of New Berne compiled by Raymond Eagle 1913)

The Ghent neighborhood was platted in 1906. The Ghent Land Company imposed restrictive covenants in the development typical of the time, including property usage, fence building and



placement, and number of houses on a lot along with the responsibility of the owner for sidewalk construction through the Land Company. It was also stipulated that no lots could be sold or rented to anyone of African descent. The requirements stated that houses had to have a minimum cost of \$1,500 to \$2,000.

The developers of the Land Company established the New Bern-Ghent Street Railway Company that laid a streetcar line between the downtown and the new suburb of Ghent. Installed in 1912/1913, it ran out Pollock Street from Middle Street to Ghent down the center of Spencer Avenue as far as Seventh Street, and eventually was extended almost to Riverside. Before most people owned an automobile, the trolley was an easy way for people to get to town and for children to get to and from school. They even came home to lunch from downtown on the trolley line. The trolley operated until 1929. The tracks were pulled up in 1939, and in the 1940's curbing and a median were installed where previously the tracks had run on Spencer



Spencer Avenue looking east from Fourth Street around 1920, with the trolley in the median.

Courtesy of Steve Tyson and the Kellum Collection.

Avenue. Initially, the median was planted with dogwood trees that were beautiful when blooming in the spring and festively lighted every Christmas season. Along city property between the sidewalks and street, oak trees were planted to shade the dogwoods from the scorching summer sun. Because of a dogwood blight, several years ago the affected trees were replaced with flowering Chinese fringe trees, and today 1920's period style streetlights adorn the median.

Most Ghent homes are in the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles. The Craftsman/bungalows stand close to the street on narrow lots. Single lots were mapped out to be 50 feet wide by 150 feet deep. The house located at 1507 Spencer Avenue is representative of the Craftsman/bungalow style. Craftsman, California, and Bungalow combinations are shown in the Joseph W. Paul house, 1710 Spencer Avenue and the Henry W. Armstrong house, 1701 Rhem Avenue. Characteristics of the Colonial Revival style "foursquares" include porches with classical columns or posts resting on brick piers, as well as transoms, sidelights and pedimented roofs. Examples of the Colonial Revival style are the large John S. Garrett house, 1322 Spencer Avenue, the compact home at 1418 Rhem Avenue, and the Disosway house at 1621 Spencer Avenue.

Another hallmark of the Ghent neighborhood represents an interesting phenomenon of the early twentieth century: several mail order houses from Sears, Roebuck & Company are to be found here as well. Floor plans in the book, Houses By Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company (an updated version by Katherine Cole Stevenson in 1986) catalog a number of houses that could be ordered as kits and delivered by train. (The Atlantic Coastline Railroad had tracks that ran north-south parallel to Park Avenue on the south side. The tracks were taken up in the 1990's.) The Brock-Wooten House at 1402 Spencer Avenue is a good example of a Sears house. This house plan is similar to the "Saratoga," in the Sears, Roebuck catalog. A bargain at only \$1,980 and furnished with all the material needed to build this six-room house, the mail order package consisted of lumber, lath, shingles, mill work, medicine case, flooring, porch ceiling, siding, finishing lumber, building paper, eaves, trough, down spout, sash weights, mantel, hardware

and painting material. The price, we are told, however, does not include cement, brick or plaster. Other examples of the Sears, Roebuck and Company houses are 1401 Spencer Avenue, 1410 Spencer Avenue, 1601 Spencer Avenue and 1602 Spencer Avenue.

As an attraction to the neighborhood, the Ghent Land Company put in a park just south of what is today Park Avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets. It opened in June 1913, complemented by a recreation pavilion called the Ghent Casino. This was an enormous construction, built high off the ground. Included were a number of amusements: an outdoor movie theater, dance floors, boxing arenas, a skating rink, football and baseball fields, and a basketball court. Naturally, there was the merry-go-round, and concessions including ice cream and sodas—there was even an area where circuses could set up, as well as plans for air ships that would carry four passengers at one time. Why, the Ghent Casino had it all!

Except for the location of the Casino until it was demolished in the 1930's—where the Temple Baptist Church and the YMCA stand today—the land south of Park Avenue was undeveloped. The circus would always come in on the train. The children could gather there to watch the circus people pitch their tents in the fields. Local boys would get up early in the morning and go meet the train to haul water for the elephants, help to unload the animals, and the like. In this way they earned tickets for the show—AND they were excused from school! Of the shows that came through, John Robinson, Clyde Beatty, and the Ringling Brothers circuses stand out. Local New Bernian, Marea Kafer Foster remembers this from her childhood.

Ghent's success during its first decade encouraged the New Bern Board of Education to build the two-story Ghent Elementary School in 1922 on the corner of Rhem Avenue and First Street (originally called "End Street" as it was where the New Bern city limits stopped). At the same time, the Board decided to build another graded school virtually identical to Ghent's in Riverside. Wilmington architects, L.N. Boney and J.F. Gause designed the schools in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. The Riverside school is still standing, though it is no longer used as a school. The Ghent school was later renamed the Eleanor Marshall



1621 Spencer Avenue: a representative Ghent Colonial Revival house, once occupied by Dr. Lula Disosway.



1402 Spencer Avenue: a Sears Roebuck house.

(wraparound porch has been added)



1507 Spencer Avenue: a representative Ghent Craftsman/bungalow.



1416 Rhem Avenue: a Lustron house.



New Bern Historical Society Collection.

School to honor a favorite teacher and principal. The original part of the Eleanor Marshall School was demolished in 1982/1983.

Throughout the 1930's development slowed considerably. Builders and owners continued to prefer the Colonial Revival and Craftsman/bungalow styles. The Great Depression affected Ghent as some homeowners could not continue to make mortgage payments. Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and the Equitable Life As-surance Society took possession of many of those properties under foreclosure. Some were sold, but most were converted into rent-al properties. During World War II, very few houses were built in Ghent. From the 1940's to the present, new houses west of Seventh Street have been for the most part one-story brick or ranch-style houses. An unusual exception is the Lustron House on Rhem Ave-nue. The only other one in New Bern is 1716 Trent Boulevard. These houses are of enameled steel panels over a frame of steel channels. Lustron houses were mass-produced by the Lustron Corporation of Columbus, Ohio from the late 1940's to the mid1950's http://en.wikpedia.org/wiki/ (Wikipe-dia. Lustron House.) Lustron house).

Houses constructed after World War II—sections of Park Avenue and the south side of Spencer Avenue east of Second Street—are not included as part of the Ghent Historic District.

Ghent was a middle and upper class neighborhood. Riverside, the oldest New Bern suburb, had a much more diverse population. It was developed to provide homes for workers in the industries built along the Neuse River. The lot and house sizes varied considerably, allowing for a range of more affordable to more expensive land and homes. In Ghent residents included bankers, lawyers, physicians, prosperous merchants, realtors, the high school principal and members of local industries. It would be impossible to mention them all, but here are two notable residents of Ghent: Dr. Lula Disosway and Pat Conroy.

Dr. Lula Marjorie Disosway (1897-1973) is a New Bern luminary and a trailblazer for women in the field of medicine. Born in New Bern, she suffered from spinal meningitis. She felt it was through prayer and the devotion of her parents that she survived. She recovered and went from New Bern High School to the North Carolina College for Women (later Woman's College, now UNC Greensboro). She attended Johns Hopkins University and received her degree in medicine from the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in 1925. In 1926, she became a medical missionary for the Episcopal Church and also taught at St. John's Medical School in Shanghai, China. In 1938, she obtained her professorship in obstetrics at St. John's and continued to serve there until 1941 when she was forced out of China by World War II. After the war when called by the church, she dutifully went to Fort Yukon, Alaska until illness in her family brought her back to New Bern. In 1948, she assumed positions as Director of the Good Shepherd Hospital (1954-1967) and later as a Director of the Craven County Medical Center (1966-1973). The chapel there is named in her honor. She lived at 1621 Spencer Avenue in Ghent. (McCotter, Charles K. (Ken), Episcopal Church Women, Christ Episcopal Church, New Bern, North Carolina, 2016)

Pat Conroy was a well-known author whose works include The Water is Wide, The Great Santini, The Lords of Discipline, The Prince of Tides, Beach Music, The Pat Conroy Cookbook, and My Losing Season. He lived in New Bern on Spencer Avenue when he was in first and second grades. For the most part, he had a very troubled boyhood, as described in the autobiographical *The Great* Santini. His father was a very harsh and demanding Marine aviator. Before going off to college, Pat Conroy moved twenty-three times during his traumatic childhood. Pat and his sister did endear themselves to their neighbor, Mrs. Leo R. Orringer. She lived next door at 1710 Spencer Avenue in the large Pickle Palace—so called because the Orringers, a prominent Jewish family, owned the pickle factory in Riverside. Pat Conroy's mother had been reading the Anne Frank diary to her children. Horrified by the treatment of the Jews in Amsterdam, Pat and his sister ran next door to assure Mrs. Orringer that she was not to worry; if necessary they would hide her. After speaking on the phone with Mrs. Conroy and understanding the children's intentions, Mrs. Orringer was moved to tears and from then on gave the children many hugs and wonderful exotic chocolates from her trips abroad. Conroy was so happy here that he said he would guard those memories and would not come back to New Bern. Pat Conroy died in March of 2016, and he never did return. (Conroy, Pat. The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life. Doubleday. New York. December 2004. 33-38)

Now, after more than 100 years since its original platting in 1906, Ghent maintains its historic significance in New Bern. The Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles represent the architecture typical of an early twentieth century neighborhood. The well-crafted houses framed by mature trees, gardens and plantings instill pride in its residents. It is hoped that Ghent will continue to contribute as vitally to the future of New Bern as it always has to her past.

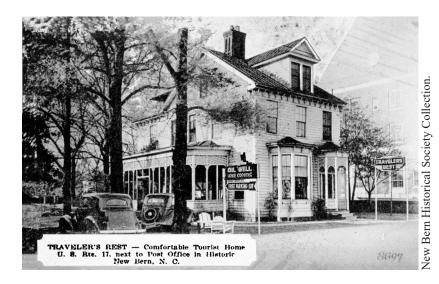
Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Marea Foster; Carroll Langston; Rebecca Lucas; David French; Steve Tyson, John Klecker and the Kestner brothers for photos; Vern Sells, John Green, and Victor Jones of the Kellenberger Room, New Bern-Craven County Public Library; Alice Wilson, City of New Bern; New Bern-Craven County Schools and all and any who were kind enough to share their knowledge and memories whom I may have forgotten and left out.



NEW BERN ON POSTCARDS

The Editor

Postcards provide an interesting look at how streetscapes appeared and what mattered back in the day. The New Bern Historical Society's collection of postcards has been augmented in the last year by access to an extensive postcard collection owned by lifelong New Bern resident Ernest Richardson, III. The society is grateful to Mr. Richardson for making this collection available.



The Travelers Rest Tourist Home was located in the 400 block of Middle Street between the Mohn Building (now occupied by two law firms) and the Federal Courthouse. This illustration is probably from the 1930s. The site is now a parking lot.



Middle Street looking south from approximately the middle of the 300 block, probably in the 1910s. No parking problem here! Notice the trolley turning from Middle Street onto Pollock Street.



The Pepsi-Cola office and production facility formerly located on the northwest corner of Pollock and Johnson Streets. This site is now occupied by residential housing.



Ernest Richardson Collection.

As the caption states, shown here is the 1913 Eastern Carolina Fair, located at the Glenburnie fairground off Oaks Road.



Ernest Richardson Collection.

A view of the Roper Lumber Company mill, possibly around 1915. Several of the buildings shown are still standing between North Craven Street and the Neuse River on the old Maola Milk property.



New Bern Historical Society Collection.

A view of the intersection of Middle and South Front Streets, about 1948, looking southeast from the northwest corner. These fine buildings were victims of urban renewal. Bank buildings are now located on these sites.



New Bern Historical Society Collection.

A view of the Neuse River bridge, which was located at the foot of Johnson Street, following the Great Hurricane of 1913. Notice the two-masted schooner capsized against the bridge; such vessels were the eighteen-wheelers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hauling goods up and down the eastern seaboard.



WHAT DO YOU CALL THIS PLACE? NAMES OF SOME CRAVEN COUNTY COMMUNITIES

Victor T. Jones, Jr.

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can."—George Bernard Shaw

As any motorist might travel the 770-plus miles of state-maintained roads in Craven County, there are several towns and communities that are readily recognized: New Bern, Havelock, Vanceboro, Cove City, Bridgeton, and Dover. There are also crossroads and communities that one probably never even knew had a name until seeing the little green-and-white sign along the roadway naming the community. This article will introduce readers to some of these communities, most of which have a common characteristic: they once had their own post office. A few of them still do.

(Unless otherwise noted, sources are *Post office department reports of site locations, 1837-1950 North Carolina.* Microfilm Publication M1126, roll 419. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1986; Vernon S. Stroupe and others. *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina: Colonial to USPS.* Charlotte, N.C.: North Carolina Postal History, 1996; and *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of the Atlantic & North Carolina R.R. Company.* 1858-1917.)

In the days before automobile travel, cellular phones, and e-mail, people communicated through letters. Sometimes the nearest post office could be ten or fifteen miles distant, so people picked up their mail infrequently. Following the Civil War, as railroad travel increased, post offices followed the rail lines as communities sprang up alongside the railroad tracks.

As one travels north from New Bern and Bridgeton on U.S. 17, there are several communities that grew up along the Norfolk Southern Railroad between New Bern and Washington. **Askins**, named for its first postmistress Laura J. Askins, was a stop on the rail line. An effort at the turn of the twentieth century to incorporate and develop the community into a town never materialized. The post office continued from 1893 until

1919 when the office moved to Ernul, but the community still survives.

Ernul, another stop on the Norfolk Southern during the early part of the twentieth century, still maintains a post office. This facility, first established in 1884, continued until 1902, when the mail was sent to Askins. Once the Askins post office closed, however, mail returned to Ernul and its post office has remained. A section of brick road built in 1917 from U.S. 17 to the Ernul post office is still evident.

About five miles east of Askins and Ernul is the community of **Caton** (spelled "Cayton" on the maps and road sign), named for David B. Caton, who donated land for a school there in the 1880s. The community, originally called Zorah, had a post office from 1888 to 1904.

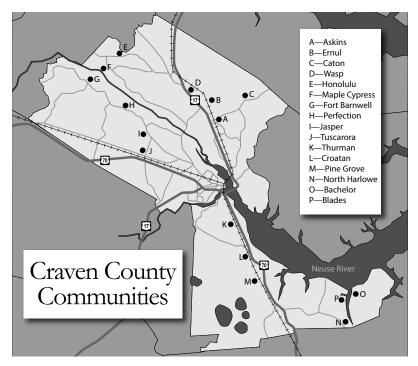
Continuing on U.S. 17, just outside of Vanceboro, was the community of **Wasp**. When Pennie Willis applied for a post office in 1900, she wanted to name the office "Willis," since so many Willises lived in that area. Someone struck through the name "Willis" on the application, however, and wrote in "Wasp," and that name remains on some of the older maps of the county.

Just north of Vanceboro off N.C. 118 is the community of **Honolulu**. This locality got its name in 1900 when James L. Witherington requested a post office be established in the area. When asked what to name the post office, Witherington replied, according to family members, "Heck, just name it Honolulu." The post office remained open until 1904, but the name remains on county maps. (Sun Journal, July 16, 1976)

South of Honolulu is the community of **Maple Cypress**. A post office was established there as early as 1875 and continued until 1904 (with a brief six-month break in 1885 when the mail was sent to Vanceboro). An article in the New Bern Daily Journal on June 19, 1883, states the community received its name from a maple growing in a cypress stump near the river at that place.

Across the Neuse River from Maple Cypress is the community of **Fort Barnwell**, named for the fort built by Colonel John Barnwell during the Tuscarora War of 1712-1715. Before it was known as Fort Barnwell though, the community was called **Cobton** after the first postmaster there, Richard G. Cobb. The post office at Cobton operated from 1872 until 1888, when the name changed to Fort Barnwell.

Traveling down N.C. 55 from Fort Barnwell back toward New Bern are the communities of **Perfection** and **Jasper**. In the effort to get a post office for the neighborhood of Perfection, several names were sub-



mitted to the post office department, including Myrtle Hill and Kimea. Eventually, "Perfection" was approved and the community received a post office, which operated from 1888 until 1903. Jasper received its name from the first postmaster John J. Speir, though he originally wanted to call the office Eula. Some say the name "Jasper" is for James Spear (Jas.Spear), a local resident, but census records from the 1860s through the 1880s do not list a James Spear/Speir in Craven County.

Just south of Jasper is **Tuscarora**, a stop on the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad (and today along Old U.S. 70). Named for the Tuscarora Indians who once inhabited the area, Tuscarora was settled before 1858, but did not receive its post office until 1882.

Travelling south and east of New Bern along present-day U.S. 70 are several other communities that grew up adjacent to the railroad link between New Bern and Morehead City. **Thurman** opened as a post office in August 1885 and continued until 1909.

Croatan was a station on the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad as early as 1859. A post office served this area during the Civil War, but was closed at the conclusion of the war. The Croatan post office reopened in 1874 and continued until 1927.

Pine Grove first appears on the record around 1890. By 1908 the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad had a stop for passengers at this location just north of Havelock. (Daily Journal, September 22, 1891; June 28, 1908)

North Harlowe is named for the creek near which it is situated. North Harlowe (in Craven County) was chosen as a name to designate it from nearby Harlowe (in Carteret County). A newspaper article in 1893, when the North Harlowe post office opened, stated: "Harlowe is now pretty well supplied with post offices. One at Mr. O.G. Bell's store, the neighborhood in which it has been held for many year retains the old name Harlowe, the new one near Morton's mill, J.R. Bell post master, has the name of North Harlowe." (Daily Journal, December 21, 1893)

Just up the road from North Harlowe is the community of **Bachelor**, situated near Clubfoot Creek. The government established a post office there on November 17, 1890, at the request of local resident Isaac Taylor, who served as the first postmaster. Taylor wanted the name of the post office to be "Taylor" for the local family, but an official changed the name on the application to "Bachelor." Taylor also requested that the post office be established at a village almost halfway between the North Harlowe and the Merrimon post offices. The village had two stores, two mills, and a dozen families, so the post office would serve between 250 and 400 people. The Bachelor post office closed on June 30, 1945.

On the opposite side of Clubfoot Creek and almost due north of North Harlowe was the community of **Blades**, named for the Blades family which owned Blades Lumber Company and which had a timber mill plant in the area in the early twentieth century. A post office opened for families living near the mill in May 1903 and continued until 1927, when mail was transferred to North Harlowe.

These communities are some of the more recognizable of the many neighborhoods scattered along the roads and by-ways of Craven County that formerly had a post office at their location. Many smaller communities did not have the honor of a post office to give note to their particular community name. If readers might know some of these smaller community names and locations, please inform the author. The New Bern-Craven County Public Library has been collecting place names for a possible Craven County Gazetteer.

CHARLOTTE RHONE AND THE RHONE SISTERS

Carol Vivian Bonner Becton

New Bern's rich history is inclusive of outstanding and noteworthy accomplishments and contributions by African American men and women. However, because of Jim Crow laws, racism, and other prevailing practices in the South following the Civil War, "Negro" African American achievements were seldom recognized, honored, or preserved. Overcoming the obstacles of the time required strength, valor, resilience, intellect, and a driving force to press on against all odds.

Charlotte S. Rhone was one such driving force in New Bern. She was born on December 16, 1874, the child of parents born during the era of slavery: her father John in 1842 and her mother Henrietta in 1852. She was one of six children: three sisters, Caroline (Car-



rie), Amy, and Henrietta, and two brothers, James and Walter (Craven County Register of Deeds. Death Certificates: New Bern Greenwood Cem-The etery Index). parents instilled in their children the importance of faith, education, and service, values very necessary for them during the post-Civil War period. The challenges of that era, however, did not deter Charlotte or her sisters from persevering to achieve their dreams.

Charlotte Rhone.

Photo restoration by James Becton, courtesy of the Climbers Club.

As a young girl Charlotte wanted to become a nurse. She had learned of and read about the courageous work that Mary Mahoney, Martha Franklin, and other Negro women were doing in paving the way for Negro nurses to attend and graduate from professional nursing institutions. After graduating from the segregated New Bern public schools, Charlotte made her decision to become a professional nurse. It would be a long and arduous process. North Carolina had six white hospital-affiliated schools of nursing. Charlotte applied to them, one after the other, and was turned down each time. None of these six schools accepted Negro students or employed Negro nurses.

Charlotte was undaunted. By 1898 she learned of and enrolled in the Freedmen's Hospital School of Nursing, which served as the clinical training site for medical and nursing students attending Howard University, a Negro institution in Washington, D.C. Charlotte graduated in May 1901, having achieved her dream to become a professional, credentialed graduate nurse (P. Pollitt. "Charlotte Rhone: Nurse, Welfare Worker and Entrepreneur," *American Journal of Nursing* 115, February, 2015, p. 67).

When she applied for a nursing position at the local New Bern hospitals, however, she could not obtain employment because she was black. No hospitals in New Bern or surrounding areas would hire Negroes. Although disappointed, Charlotte did private duty nursing, made home visits with local white doctors, assisted with baby deliveries, and provided home health care. Ninety-yearold Mary Bray Mollineaux recalls, in an interview conducted in 1991 as part of the Memories of New Bern Oral History project, "I was delivered by Dr. R.S. Primrose and a nurse, a Negro registered nurse known and loved by everyone in New Bern. Her name was Charlotte Rhone. She came along with the doctor to administer to my birth." Charlotte spent her entire nursing career in New Bern, with the exception of five years (roughly 1910-1915) when she served as the matron or head nurse at the infirmary at the National Religious Training School (an early name for North Carolina Central College) in Durham (Durham City Directories, pp. 110-14, and "Colored training school: faculty of new religious institution at Durham announced," Wilmington Morning Star, August 20, 1910).

With her positive character and quest for excellence, it is not surprising that Charlotte was active in promoting the profession of nursing, most likely being the first African American woman certified as a registered nurse (RN). North Carolina was the first state to pass a nurse practice act that permitted nurses to register and use the title "registered nurse." Charlotte registered in Craven County on June 23, 1903, about three weeks after registration by the first white nurse (documented by a 1938 letter from the clerk of the Craven County Superior Court to the Secretary of the Board of Nurse Examiners).

Charlotte continued to promote the new profession of graduate nursing. Because of Jim Crow laws and segregation, Negro registered nurses were not permitted membership in state organizations of nursing and, therefore, were barred from participating in the national American Nurses Association. In 1908, Martha Franklin, one of the Negro nurses who had inspired Charlotte, invited her fellow Negro nurses across the country to meet in New York City to discuss their visions, concerns, and strategies to overcome these obstacles. Of the fifteen hundred nurses who received notification. only fifty-two met in New York. Charlotte Rhone was the only one from North Carolina. She became a charter member of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN), serving as a member of the executive board. Organization goals were to promote the welfare of African American nurses, ensure high academic standards among nurses and nursing schools, foster relationships with nursing leaders in the U.S. and around the world, and break down racial discrimination in nursing schools, work places, and professional organizations. Charlotte remained an active member working for better conditions and equality for professional nursing school graduates while continuing her work on the local level. (Althea T. Davis, Early Black American Leaders in Nursing: Architects for Integration and Equality, Sudbury Jones and Bartley Publishers Inc., 1999, pp. 2-3)

Although not performing as a graduate-level nurse as she had dreamed, Charlotte was actively administering to the needs of others and providing a model of inspiration and perseverance. She volunteered for civic improvement, established a Girl Scout troop, and collected clothes for the needy. In December 1907 and January 1908,

she was noted for helping in the Emancipation Day ceremonies. On September 29, 1921, the *New Bern Sun Journal* lauded her for her successful work as chair of a committee to exterminate rats in the Negro community. She was also appointed director of the Negro playground that was designed to ensure "good health, discipline and moral uplift" to the youth of the community (*Sun Journal*, October 1, 1921).

Charlotte's accomplishments were rooted in the values her parents had instilled in their children. With this firm foundation, the siblings supported each other in their endeavors. They were active in their church, St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, and lived a Christian life of loving their neighbors and caring for others.

Charlotte's sister Carrie had her own aspirations. Carrie married Isaac Smith, one of the richest Negro men in North Carolina. He was a state politician who owned property, New Bern real estate, and investments in a Guilford County mill. After his death Carrie was left a wealthy widow. One of her dreams was to charter a branch of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in New Bern. The first meeting of this nascent group was held at her lovely four-square house at 607 Johnson Street, a house still standing and occupied. As a result of that 1921 meeting, a new club was founded under the National Association of Colored Women auspices with Charlotte as a charter member. The local group was named "The Climber's Club," and since its formation, the club has flourished as a vibrant organization providing cultural, educational, and benevolent services in the community. (See "The Climbers of New Bern," New Bern Historical Society Journal, Volume XX, Number 2, November, 2008, for more on this organization.)

Charlotte continued to serve her community in many capacities. Negroes still were under the oppression of Jim Crow laws, but Charlotte would not let anything deter her from addressing not only health issues but also life issues affecting overall quality of life in the community. It was "the best of times and the worst of times." Charlotte faced the worst with zeal and determination to make it better.

One cold December morning in 1922, Charlotte and the city of New Bern, and especially the Negro community, were thrust into a

devastating tragedy: the Great Fire of New Bern. Early that morning a fire began that eventually destroyed more than forty blocks of homes, primarily in Negro neighborhoods. Thousands were left homeless, injured, and without jobs, and even without a place for medical attention. St. Luke Hospital, a beautiful three-story brick building on the corner of Broad and George Streets opened in 1916, and other white hospitals did not welcome Negro victims needing medical care.

Undaunted, the Reverend R.I. Johnson, rector of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, where Charlotte attended, opened the church's doors to serve as a makeshift hospital for Negroes needing medical attention. Charlotte was a major help with her nursing skills, as well as with her Christian faith teaching, comforting and counseling those traumatized by the fire. She was also appointed to a committee to help develop strategies and seek resources for meeting long-term physical, psychological, and social needs arising from the fire. Tents were provided to house the homeless, and many fire victims lived in these tents for up to two years until they could rebuild or find other homes. Charlotte lost her own home and applied for a tent as well. But that did not dash her determination to press on. Drawing on her strong values and the support of her family, she kept helping wherever she could.

As a result of her consistent service before the fire and the ardent and unselfish care she rendered during the tragedy, Charlotte was hired as Craven County's first Negro social worker.

Charlotte was out of her tent in a year's time. She and her sisters decided to build not just another home, but rather a hotel. Knowing that Negro travelers could not stay in white hotels because of segregation laws, they wanted to provide a place for them. Charlotte was an entrepreneur in addition to everything else! She and her sisters Henrietta and Amy opened their hotel in 1923. Charlotte and Amy lived upstairs, with guest rooms on the lower floor.

Located at 512 Queen Street, the "Rhone Hotel" was listed in The Green Book, a book that listed lodgings for Negro travelers throughout the United States during the period of segregation. Most guests, especially the porters who worked for the railroad, referred to



512 Queen Street, formerly the Rhone Hotel.

Courtesy of Susan Cook.

it as the "Rhone Home," a place that opened its doors "to the weary travelers of this segregated state" (J.L. Hicks, "'House by the Side of the Road' wins high acclaim from prominent travelers," Afro American, February 10, 1951). The Rhone hotel building remains standing and in use as an apartment building.

As the Depression hit during the 1930s, a challenge arose again for Charlotte to overcome yet another obstacle, not just for herself, but for others too. Charlotte

had another dream, conceived in the struggle of the Depression, to open a shirt and dress factory to help provide jobs. The enterprise was a tremendous success, and its dresses and shirts were sold in stores in downtown New Bern. Others saw the shop's success and copied Charlotte's idea with small businesses of their own.

Charlotte continued to serve as a community activist and volunteer. Her professional career flourished as she became a leader in the North Carolina Social Worker Association; eventually she became the first Negro assistant superintendent of the Craven County Welfare Department. In the meantime, the committee to which Charlotte and other Negro and white civic leaders had been assigned after the Great Fire continued to work and raise funds to establish a hospital in New Bern for Negroes. This effort was sponsored by the Episcopal diocese, with contributions from the Duke Endowment, the Pennsylvania diocese, private sources, and community donations. Again, under the leadership

of the Reverend R. I. Johnson, the Good Shepherd Hospital, located on West Street, opened on June 26, 1936. This building is still standing and is now the Good Shepard Home for the Aged.

Immediately following the completion of Good Shepard Hospital, the idea of a library for Negros emerged. Another committee was formed, again with Charlotte Rhone as a member. Partnerships were formed with the Negro West Street School across from the new hospital. As the committee met, plans were implemented to start a library in a nook located on the campus of West Street School. Charlotte was assigned the task of finding a site on which to build a permanent library. Eventually she found land at 608 West Street, directly across from the Good Shepard Hospital and two doors down from the school. Charlotte organized a fund-raising campaign seeking donations from teachers, students, and the general community surrounding the property. She was designated chairwoman of the board, and after more fund-raising, the property was purchased and the West Street Colored Library was completed and opened in 1947. Charlotte continued to serve on the board of directors until her death. The library closed in 1973 with the advent of civil rights and desegregation, and its building was turned over to the Climber's Club. It is fitting that the building was renamed in Charlotte's honor, as the "Charlotte Rhone Cultural Center" (New Bern Craven County Public Library, History of the library, undated http://newbern.cpclib.org/about/hist lib.html).

Charlotte died on June 4, 1965, and was interred in the family plot in Greenwood Cemetery (*New Bern Sun Journal* obituary index June 7, 1965).

With her resilience, perseverance, intelligence, and courage, Charlotte Rhone was a true exemplar of the Climber's Club motto "Lifting as we climb." She, along with her sisters, was a dynamic force in the success, history, and beauty of New Bern. Jim Crow and the devastation of the Great Fire were unable to daunt this strong woman—a registered nurse, social worker, and Christian servant!

Faith, education, and service: how firm a foundation, how great a legacy.

