

Dave Sampson usually enjoyed good health and claimed never to have called a doctor, but his health began to fail in 1931 (it would prove to be cancer.) He was unable to work at Camp Bryan that fall and winter. When Babe Ruth and a friend, Frank Stevens (“the hotdog king of New York”) arrived for their annual visit in December of that year, they sorely missed his presence about the camp. They placed him on their payroll for the season and carried Dave to Camp Bryan just to enjoy his company.

Dave Sampson died on the morning of January 25, 1932, aged 78 years. He was buried the next day in his family plot at Mt. Olive A.M.E Zion Church in Riverdale, Craven County.



Dave Sampson with the tools of his trade.
Photo c. 1930

Dave always attributed his good health to his outdoor life and his habit of not worrying. He expressed the essence of his philosophy thus (*Charlotte Observer*, November 25, 1928, Section 3, p. 10):

What's the use of worrying? If I've got what I want, it's all right. If I ain't got it, it wouldn't do any good to worry. I've always trusted in the Lord. He will always provide for his children.

Acknowledgement: An earlier version of this article appeared on the blog of the New Bern-Craven County Public Library Kellenberger Room, <http://kellenbergerroom.blogspot.com>

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JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The *Journal of the New Bern Historical Society* is a publication of the New Bern Historical Society Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit organization whose mission is to celebrate and promote New Bern and its heritage through events and education.

Prospective authors should contact the New Bern Historical Society at 252-638-8558 or by email, adminoffice@newbernhistorical.org, for article guidelines and submission requirements.

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in 1885. Together they had five children: Alfred, Annie, Rosa, Effie, and Eva May. Their first home was a 10-foot by 12-foot log cabin which Dave built himself. In time, Dave was able to accumulate enough money to acquire a large tract of land and build a frame house.



Dave Sampson Home c. 1930

Although Dave Sampson farmed his land, it was his work as a cook and guide that provided a reliable income of wages, tips, and presents from his hungry and admiring fans. Dave was the regular cook at Camp Bryan, a sizable hunting preserve in the Lakes Pocosin area of Craven County. Serving faithfully for thirty years, he became known as "the cook that never failed." It was during these years that he cooked for a number of national figures who invariably sang his praises. Many were baseball heroes such as Babe Ruth and Christy Mathewson, while others were writers such as Irving S. Cobb and Rex Beach. Bud Fisher, creator of the Mutt and Jeff cartoons, and H.H. Brimley, curator of the North Carolina Museum of Natural History, were also numbered among Dave's friends.

Dave preferred the title cook to that of chef and described himself as being not "much for style but strong for substance." He could cook almost anything but numbered among his specialties barbecue, cornbread, and lemonade. His cooking was popular with men, especially men with hearty appetites. Of Babe Ruth he would say, "No wonder he weighs so much. He shore kept me busy cooking. I just couldn't cook him enough collards and cornbread." (*Morning New Bernian*, January 27, 1932, pp. 6-70)

Cooking for The Babe

John B. Green III

He was born a slave yet he lived to become a valued companion of some of the greatest sports figures of the 20th century. His parents were sold away when he was only three weeks old yet he survived to marry and have a family of his own. His name was Dave Sampson and for more than thirty years he was perhaps the best known camp cook and hunting guide in eastern North Carolina. Dave's story, nearly forgotten today, is told in a number of articles that appeared in North Carolina newspapers of the late 1920s and early 1930s.



Babe Ruth, Dave Sampson c. 1930
Probably at Camp Bryan

David Sampson was born in Craven County, North Carolina in 1853, the slave of Michael Fisher. Both his parents were sold and sent to Mississippi by Fisher when Dave was three weeks old. Raised in his master's house, Dave learned to wait on the ladies of the household and, following the Civil War, remained with the family to learn to cook and wait on tables. At the same time he developed into a prodigious hunter and fisherman. This combination of talents would make him much sought after as cook, guide, and companion in later years.

Sampson moved away from the area for a time but returned to marry Mary Jane Mitchell, his childhood sweetheart,

PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION

For many years the New Bern Historical Society published a journal of articles written to relate the stories of our wonderful town. In a renewed format, the *Journal* is back. I am grateful to all of the people who made this rebirth possible.

In the past the *Journal* has played a vital role in accomplishing the mission of the Society. New Bern is remarkably rich in the kinds of stories that make us aware that our history is not just who we were, but, indeed, who we are. Our stories are diverse and varied, but they are all part of the human drama and comedy that continues to inform our thoughts and actions. I appreciate the people who lived these stories and the people who tell them. What splendid gifts. "That's why I'll cherish 'til I die this lovely town of mine."

Nelson B. McDaniel, President, New Bern Historical Society

OLD TOWNS

By J. Gaskill McDaniel, June 21, 1910 – February 19, 1976,
father of Nelson B. McDaniel

I love old towns, where memories
Like climbing ivy cling;
And stardust from a golden past
Is found on everything.
Where little children, bright of eye,
Are taught to fear the rule,
While sitting at the self same desk
That Grandma used in school.
I love each street, that knows the steps
Of men both rich and poor;
The faltering man, with heavy heart,
The gay man, strong and sure.
Give me the homes where bits of light
Come trickling thru a door;
Just as a million other beams
Have tumbled out before.
Yes, old things get into your soul,
And build a lasting shrine;
That's why I'll cherish 'til I die
This lovely town of mine.

KEEPING THE DARK AT BAY

How New Bern's Public Lighting Evolved

Paul Switzer

The 19th century was the period when indoor and outdoor lighting rapidly evolved from simple hand-held open flames to clean, safe, automatic flood lighting of large spaces. Before 1800 interior spaces were typically lit by the light from fireplaces, and supplemented by either candles or by metal portable oil and wick lamps often referred to as Betty Lamps, or by "Dutch Lamps", an improved variation introduced by German settlers. When one had to venture outdoors into the night, a tin candle lantern with a glass shield was commonly used to prevent the candle from overturning or blowing out. All of these devices were subject to accidental fires. Most of us have heard of the fiery demise of Tryon Palace, possibly caused by an unshielded candle falling into straw in the basement.

In the 1790s whale oil became commercially available as lamp fuel, particularly in the eastern United States, as New England whalers exploited the seemingly inexhaustible supply of whale blubber and rendered it into clean burning lamp fuel. Whale oil candles were found to be far superior to animal fat candles, burning with less smoke and odors. As this industry grew, so too did the manufacture of whale oil lamps, pressed glass lamp bases, and elaborate whale oil chandeliers. In the early 1800s, public buildings, banks and theaters could extend their hours of operation by installing whale oil chandeliers which were lowered by pulleys for filling and lighting the wicks.

In North Carolina whale oil was less available and more expensive than in New England. Distilled turpentine from our naval stores industry was found to be a reasonable substitute for lamp oil. Camphene, a mixture of turpentine, alcohol and other plant oils, was commonly used here as a lighting fuel although it was highly flammable.

Although joyful that a goal had been accomplished, ladies of the Association experienced a degree of sadness, as their president, Elizabeth Batchelor Graham Daves, was not there to experience the dedication. She had passed away the previous day. She knew that the monument had been completed but never saw it with her own eyes.

Four years after the founding of the national United Daughters of the Confederacy, a New Bern chapter of the UDC was formed in 1898. It later merged with the Ladies Memorial Association to produce an organization of more than 200 women to carry forward their mission under the presidency of Mary Oliver. A chapter of the Children of the Confederacy was also organized and was known as the Jane Daves Hughes chapter in honor of the granddaughter of Elizabeth Batchelor Graham Daves, the first president of the Ladies Memorial Association.

The following poem appeared in a newspaper report of one Confederate Memorial Day (*The New Bernian*, May 9, 1879):

Bring flowers the fairest in the land,
And scatter them with lavish hand;
No off 'ring can you bring to lay,
Too noble, on these tombs to lay;
All honor to the soldier's grave,
He died his native land to save!

The Earl of Craven Questers, the local chapter of an international Questers organization dedicated to preservation and restoration, has adopted Cedar Grove Cemetery as their preservation and restoration project. They have continued the Ladies Memorial Association's intent to *Cover them With Beautiful Flowers* by the planting of thirty-six rose bushes over the mausoleum and around the Confederate Memorial in the Spring of 2013, one hundred and forty six years after the association was established in New Bern, North Carolina.



Confederate Monument, circa 1890.
Originally published by M.E. Whitehurst & Co.
Source: New Bern Historical Society Collection

Stand there, O effigy in stone!

To guard 'gainst time's corroding dust

The sacred men 'rises of the past

Confided to your silent trust.

In the early 1800s a more efficient European lamp, the Argand Lamp, which produced the light of 8 to 10 candles, became available in America. The increased light was produced by a cylindrical wick burning at high temperature, surrounded by a glass "chimney" and fed by an elevated fuel reservoir. These lamps were produced in many styles, would burn brightly with most any fuel oil, and were of particular use for reading after dark. Fine examples of these advanced lamps can be seen at the Dixon House and Stanly House at Tryon Palace.

The success of the whale oil industry eventually led to its own demise, as more ships chased fewer whales further from New England. As whale oil became more difficult to harvest and more expensive, it became clear that liquid fuels were not practical for lighting outdoor spaces.

A New Bern merchant or sailor who might have arrived at night at the Port of Baltimore in 1819 would have been astounded to see the city alight with gas street lights. No other city in America was illuminated at night although several cities in Britain had gas streetlamps as early as 1805. The gas was generated by burning coal, stored in large tanks, and piped to individual streetlamps. The lamps were lit each evening and turned off by a valve each morning by a lamplighter. This new light "had a peculiar softness and clearness of light which brought it into great favor among the working people, being free of sparks and the need for frequent snuffing." (Gas Lighting. www.en.wikipedia.org)

If Baltimore could have gas lighting, why not New Bern? At that time, New Bern was a prosperous and busy seaport. Coal gas plants, however, required a ready supply of bulk coal, a transportation system (such as Baltimore's canals), and investors willing to build the system. New Bern had none of these.

In spite of these drawbacks, in 1818 New Bern ordered 20 fuel oil streetlights, but they were soon declared impractical. One can imagine the liquid fuel reservoirs being filled every evening, the wicks being trimmed, then a flame applied to the burner, all on top of a pole, reached by a ladder. This was a situation conducive to accidents and fires. Theft of the lamp fuel and vandalism might also have mitigated the utility of these lamps.

New Bern would have to wait another 40 years before the railroad connected it to sources of bulk coal. The following year, in 1859, \$6000 was raised to build a coal gas plant on South Front Street next to the railroad where Carolina Gas was located until 2009. By September 1859, public buildings, subscribers' homes, and new streetlamps were connected to the gas plant by iron pipes. New Bern's citizens could experience the outdoors with the soft glow of gas. For the first time this system safely separated the fuel reservoir from the burning flame, there were no wicks to trim or adjust, and the homeowner could adjust the number and intensity of flames. Elaborate ceiling-hung gasoliers and wall sconces were available from northern manufacturers and can be seen today in at least 5 houses downtown.

Some leading businessmen did not wait for the municipal lighting system, however, purchasing their own portable acetylene gas generators which produced a soft interior light. Mr. Miller, owner of the large Washington Hotel on Broad Street, piped gas lines into his home, store and hotel so that his guests could enjoy evening society and dinner. Not long after, Mr. Moore, owner of the large Gaston House Hotel on South Front Street, installed a similar system. These portable acetylene generators became simple and affordable and were in use in isolated areas up until the 1930s.

In 1859 vast quantities of petroleum were discovered in Pennsylvania by Colonel Drake that would revolutionize indoor lighting. This discovery led to a distilled by-product called kerosene, which proved to be a safe and low cost lamp fuel. As the petroleum industry grew, expensive whale oil was replaced by kerosene and whale oil burners were converted to kerosene lamps.

The Civil War brought a halt to gas lighting in New Bern as the railroad and coal shipments were shut down and some residents left town. In the post-war period the city could not afford this expenditure even though crime and political and racial chaos were common problems after dark.

Nevertheless, in 1871, the mayor of New Bern, Mr. R.P. Williams urged citizens to restore gas service for the "urgent need to protect life and property" after dark. (Alan Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County*, 1987, p.

ers to be placed around the Confederate Memorial. At the Confederate Memorial there was a Confederate flag, furled and bound with bands of crape, surmounted by a black cross in mourning. The speaker's stand was decorated with gray moss, and floral tributes were placed around the Memorial.

The Ladies Memorial Association began the installation of a Confederate Monument over the mausoleum in 1878, and by 1885 it was completed and dedicated on Confederate Memorial Day. An address was given by the Reverend L. C. Vass, after which Mrs. Vass, a member of the Ladies Memorial Association, pulled the cord, the drapery fell, and a Confederate soldier standing as a sentinel on an outpost stood before the vast audience who sang *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow*. William E. Clarke stepped forward and read a poem prepared for the occasion by his wife, Mary Bayard Clarke:

DUX FOEMINA FACTI

'On Fame's eternal camping ground'

A sentinel now takes his stand,

To guard his comrades' dreamless sleep

Until relieved by Time's command.

But - though this soldier carved in stone

May slowly crumble and decay -

Material things all pass away.

Yet, Love, like Truth, can never die;

And 'raved on Time's historic page,

The memory of our soldiers' deeds

Shall live undimmed from age to age.

By woman's hand 'tis written there,

'Our dead shall live,' she said,

And placed her sentinel above.

The grave of the Confederate dead.

those throughout Eastern North Carolina. Steamers collected many from Neuse River landings and brought them to New Bern. Military school cadets were invited to participate. Surviving Confederate soldiers and their regiments from Smithfield, Goldsboro, Kinston and Morehead City arrived by train. They were met at the train station by a contingent of city leaders, from where they marched through New Bern, ending up at the Gaston Hotel where they were served a meal.

By 4:30 participants and spectators gathered at the Academy Green where an elaborate program was presented. Choirs sang, the Silver Coronet Band played, prayers were said, and a major speech by an invited guest was given. The speech generally praised a Confederate military hero or provided details of a major battle. The speaker was often a former Confederate officer.

When the Association met on Tuesday, February 5, 1878, they discussed extending an invitation to Gov. Zebulon Vance to speak at the upcoming Confederate Memorial Day. Vance, a Colonel in the Twenty-sixth North Carolina, had fought in the Battle of New Bern on March 14, 1862. On another occasion, the principal speaker was former General Robert Ransom who spoke for forty minutes on the battle of Fredericksburg, which occurred on the 13th day of December, 1862. The battle was a crushing defeat for the Union and Ransom played a major part in the Confederate success. General Ransom is buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery.

The program held on the Academy Green had a specific order. The ceremony was opened by a choir accompanied by the Silver Coronet Band; they sang *The Guard Around the Tomb*, a requiem composed by Mary Bayard Clarke. An appropriate prayer followed, most often offered by the Reverend L. C. Vass, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, but sometimes offered by other New Bern ministers. There were additional musical offerings followed by the Memorial Address. At the conclusion of the address, the choir sang *Cover Them Over With Beautiful Flowers*. (Written by Will Carlton, American Poet, 1845-1912) The procession to Cedar Grove Cemetery was lead by the Silver Coronet Band playing a solemn dirge, followed by former Confederate soldiers, the orator and chaplain, former orators and chaplains, the Ladies Memorial Association, civic organizations, citizens, and children carrying flow-

306) Gas service was restored but was expensive and irregular and by 1884 the city would only pay for service until midnight. It reached the point that the city agreed to pay for streetlights only in front of police and fire stations downtown.

As New Bern was struggling with its gas service, an inventor in England named Joseph Swan developed a workable electric light bulb but it produced a weak 12-hour light and required impractical heavy batteries. A young inventor in New Jersey improved the bulb to last 1200 hours before burning out and then developed a full system to generate and transport electricity to 59 customer homes in New York City. This was the beginning of Edison's indoor lighting system in 1882.

Another young inventor in Cleveland, Ohio, Charles Brush, developed the electric arc lamp for street lighting. This carbon arc lamp produces an intense white light, ideal for large outdoor spaces. Thus Cleveland became the first American city with outdoor electric lighting. In 1886, New Bern began planning for an arc lamp service and in 1889 the city signed a contract with the New Bern Electric Light and Power Company, owned by a prominent politician, Mr. R.P. Williams. Gas for indoor lights continued to be available at this time from the private New Bern Gas Company.

In 1901 there were frequent complaints about the unreliable arc light service and its high cost of \$300 per month. Moreover, the contract for Mr. Williams' service was about to expire. The Aldermen at the time were divided politically, with Republicans wanting to continue the service (owned by Williams, a Republican), and the Democrats wanting a new city owned electric plant, financed by a bond issue. Unable to agree, the Aldermen let the contract expire for existing service and failed to act on a bond issue for new city owned electric service. The public was outraged and protested as Mr. Williams turned off his generators and streetlights. New Bern was once again plunged into darkness. "The aldermen have allowed a great darkness to settle over New Bern, a darkness that could be felt. Tonight, the citizens of New Bern will go back to their ancestral habit of carrying their own lights when they venture outside." (Electric History, www.newbern-nc.org)



New Bern Water and Power Plant, circa 1915
Source: New Bern Historical Society Collection

North Carolina, Confederate Memorial Day is May 10th, the date of death of Stonewall Jackson in 1863 and also the date of capture of Jefferson Davis in 1865. Confederate Memorial Day became a legal holiday in North Carolina in 1881 and remained a state holiday for 90 years until in 1969 the General Assembly passed a law conforming North Carolina's holiday to the uniform federal law. Before Southern states adopted the national Memorial Day, Confederate Memorial Day was observed, and most often referred to as Decoration Day.

In New Bern, the Ladies Memorial Association was created and legitimized by city ordinance in 1866 and chartered by the legislature in 1867. The president of the Association was Mrs. Elizabeth Batchelor Graham Daves and the vice-president was Mrs. Mary McKinlay Daves Ellis Nash, her daughter.

The Association held quarterly meetings at the Broad Street home of the President, Mrs. Daves, on the first Tuesday of November, February, May and August at four o'clock. Other meetings could be called by the President. The association consisted of ladies who along with their husbands, represented the elite of New Bern: McLin, Moore, Hughes, Vass, Bryan, Primrose, Guion, Roberts, Nelson, Jones, Slover, Dewey, Attmore, Manly, Whitford, Gaskins, Lane and many others. The Association minutes indicated that at one time George Allen served as Treasurer, but members of the Association also served in the position of Treasurer.

The Ladies Memorial Association was charged with raising funds for the proper internment and care of fallen Confederate soldiers. Funds were raised from fairs, concerts and charitable donations. By 1867 sufficient funds were secured to lay the cornerstone of a proposed mausoleum in Cedar Grove Cemetery. When completed, the mausoleum was to measure 90' long, 10' wide and 8' high. Although the Civil War had ended in 1865, a period of Reconstruction followed, and New Bern was still occupied by the Union military. As members of the Ladies memorial Association and residents of New Bern processed to Cedar Grove Cemetery to lay the cornerstone, they were prevented from displaying Confederate flags or banners.

Confederate Memorial Day was an important day in New Bern; the event was well planned in advance. A typical observation involved not only the residents of New Bern but also

NEW BERN'S LADIES MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

Alice J. Ruckart

Ladies Memorial Associations were established in a number of Southern communities following the end of the Civil War to honor Confederate dead. One of the many treasures belonging to the New Bern Historical Society is a bound book of the minutes of New Bern's Ladies Memorial Association meetings of 1878 and several years beyond. The book also includes articles from New Bern's newspaper, the *Daily Journal*, documenting activities of the Ladies Memorial Association and their leadership in New Bern's observation of Confederate Memorial Day. Many pages of the book are difficult and sometimes impossible to read, but what can be gleaned from the minutes make for interesting reading. The book has been scanned, which will make the deciphering of letters and words much easier and will expand our knowledge of the activities of the Association.

The Ladies Memorial Association of New Bern was not operating in a vacuum, and the idea of forming an association to honor the Confederate dead did not originate in New Bern. Debate continues to this day as to the origin of the observation of Confederate Memorial Day. In the spring of 1866, the Ladies Memorial Association of Columbus, Georgia passed a resolution to set aside one day annually to memorialize the Confederate dead. The secretary of the Association, Mrs. Charles J. (Mary Ann) Williams was directed to send a letter inviting the ladies in every Southern state to join them in the observance. The letter was sent to all of the principal cities in the South.

The president of the Columbus, Georgia Ladies Memorial Association, Mrs. Elizabeth Rutherford Ellis, is credited with the origin of Confederate Memorial Day. She chose April 26, the first anniversary of Confederate General Johnston's final surrender to Union General Sherman at Bennett Place, North Carolina (near Durham) to be Confederate Memorial Day. Confederate Memorial Day varied by state, some selecting Robert E. Lee's birthday, others Jefferson Davis' birthday, and even the date of death of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. In

Taxpayers demanded action and feared for the safety of firemen answering alarms at night. Finally a vote was scheduled. When it was revealed that no new street lamps were to be installed in the colored districts, voters from those districts were encouraged to vote against a new plant. Voters approved the \$10,000 bond issue and plans for the new generating plant on First Street. New poles and wires were laid out. Thus, for the first time, the city took on debt in its quest to supply reliable electric service.

By 1902 the city installed 62 arc streetlights and provided capacity for 1500 incandescent residential and commercial lights. However, only 200 customers signed up for the service, clearly cautious about the reliability of this new technology. Other problems emerged. A Mr. Dewey on George Street sued the city because a newly installed wire fell on his horse, killing it. There were frequent complaints that the new poles were rotten and unstable and had to be replaced. The city offered to buy the old generator and poles from Mr. Williams' company but he declined their offer. The aldermen then demanded that Mr. Williams remove the old poles within 5 days. Mr. Williams promptly sued the City for \$50,000 in damages.

Despite these setbacks, the city offered customers either a flat or metered rate for lights. The flat rate was 35 cents/month if turned off at midnight or 75 cents/month for continuous use. The metered rate was 10 cents/KWh (compared to our current rate of 14 cents/KWh) and a 10% discount if the bill was paid on time.

New Bern's residences and businesses had the option of two sources of indoor lighting: the older piped in gas or the newer electric bulb. Some cautious customers chose both and purchased elaborate lamps with gas valves and electric incandescent bulbs.

As the first decade of the new century passed, new uses of consumer electricity (pumps, fans, heaters, appliances) came to market and the city utility rapidly upgraded its equipment and power lines to all parts of the city. The New Bern Gas Light Company ceased operations as its customers realized the obvious safety and convenience of Edison's inventions.

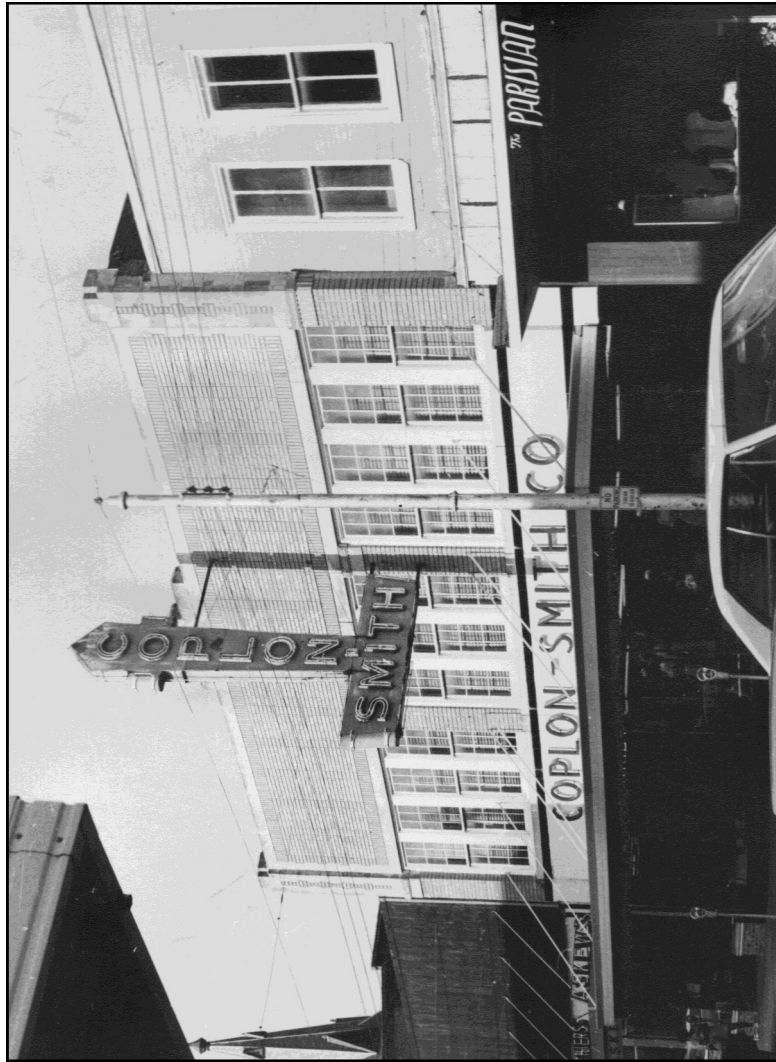
Cheap, safe electricity must have been a miraculous change. The dark could be kept at bay with the pull of a light switch. Many people experienced drastic changes in lighting throughout their lives. They were born by candlelight and raised by whale oil light. They learned to read by an Argand lamp and raised their families by kerosene lanterns. They walked in the evenings with gas street lamps and enjoyed their grandchildren illuminated by the electric light bulb.

was only part of a more general development. With the advent of malls in New Bern and other area cities, the increasing ease of driving to cities such as Raleigh and Durham for shopping, and limited parking in the downtown area, Middle Street lost its role as a destination for “mainstream” purchases—clothing, shoes, furniture, jewelry, and the like. The bottom line is that consumer traffic went elsewhere.

The Middle Street businesses, Jewish and otherwise, could of course have followed their market to the malls or to stand-alone buildings in the suburbs with easy access and ample parking. However, several factors restrained them from doing so. These were hands-on, family-run operations, a mode of operation that does not work well with being open seven days a week and in the evenings, as is expected in malls. In some cases the business owners were unable or unwilling to commit the capital required for new buildings or fitting out new spaces. Changing consumer tastes were also a factor—e.g., suits became less common attire for men and they stopped wearing hats (as opposed to caps) entirely. The perceived advantages of competing chain store operations in purchasing, advertising, and the like probably also discouraged such moves.

A final but critical factor is that, simply put, there was no one to carry on the business. Many of these businesses dated from shortly after the end of World War II or came under a new generation of family management around this time. The owners increasingly were reaching retirement age, and typically their children had entered other professions or relocated to other parts of the country. These businesses had helped the families involved become firmly established in America, and it was time to move on.

Acknowledgement: This article benefited greatly from recollections gathered from in-person, email, and telephone interviews with Jane Vatz Abel, Hyman Barshay, Dorothy Coplon, David Elden, Judy Steinberg Gilman, Dale Goldman, Carole Forstadt Hagstrom, Elbert Lipman, Nelson McDaniel, Bertha Howard Miller, Helene Howard Shuter, Mark Suskin, Jennifer Waters Williams, Robert Yudell, and David Zacks. Various New Bern City Directories provided valuable information on street addresses, dates, and operators of the businesses reviewed.



200 Block of Middle
Street Looking East,
around 1971 showing
Coplon-Smith and The
Parisian. Photograph by
A.D. Brooks

Source: New Bern His-
torical Society Collection

FROM SLAVERY TO THE NEW YORK CITY POST OFFICE

Claudia B. Houston

In 1874 the *New York Graphic* newspaper printed an article entitled “Romantic Adventures of a Slave Boy. From a North Carolina Plantation to the New York Post-Office.” (March 27, 1874, p. 3) It was immediately picked up by papers across America, sometimes with a different title such as this one: “The Success of a Slave Boy. How a young negro Boy planned an escape to the Union Army - His fortunes and his Present Position.” (*Indianapolis Sentinel*, April 26, 1874, p. 7) The headlines were certainly sensational but the story seemed improbable. The protagonist of the piece was David F. Nelson, a young enslaved boy from New Bern, North Carolina. David’s story as written by the *New York Graphic* and other newspapers of the time is summarized below.

David F. Nelson, a young slave boy, lived on a plantation seven or eight miles outside of New Bern, North Carolina. Several other young slaves were playing nearby, when they overheard some of the older slaves saying that they were going to be moved inland to be kept out of the hands of the Yankees. The Southerners had heard rumors for a long time that the Union Army was coming. They just did not know when. David, the youngest of the slaves, devised a plan to enable them all to escape and join the Union Army. The next day, David awoke to the sound of cannon. The Union gunboats had sailed down the Neuse River and began shelling the shores of New Bern in preparation for the Yankee invasion. This was the opportunity that David had been looking for, but his friends refused to accompany him despite their plan. David, age 8, set out by himself and walked approximately twenty miles from the plantation where he lived, to the rear of the Union lines. He was stopped several times by Union soldiers who thought that perhaps he was a spy. They were surprised when they learned that the details that David had given them turned out to be accurate. Da-

vid asked the Union soldiers to take him to a ship, pointing to a gunboat in the Neuse. They did so and from that time until 1864, David performed various activities in the Union Army and Navy. He went north to New York City and obtained a position as office boy for Harry J. Raymond, of the New York Times. While still employed there, David returned to New Bern in 1872 to find that all of his relatives had died, along with his master, "Colonel Streets". He did find his former mistress who was happy to see him and he gave her \$25 which she gratefully accepted. David noted that the family still had property, however, had little cash. During his time in the North he had come in contact with many public figures and he cultivated the art of public speaking which his friends much admired. David returned many times to New Bern and during his visit in 1872 his friends wanted to nominate him for Sheriff. It was finally determined that he was too young to run for office and David thus returned to NYC. It was said that David was able to secure positions in NY for over fifty of his people from North Carolina. David F. Nelson found out the day before this story was published that he had passed an exam for a \$1,000 clerkship in the post office. He was 20 years old and has held the position of doorkeeper for the postmaster which was obtained for him by Thurlow Weed. He is self educated and has a scrapbook that contains statistics about his race as well as miscellaneous writings by Whittier, Alice Cary and others. (*New York Graphic*, March 27, 1874, p. 3)

Could this story possibly be true? David mentioned that his master was "Colonel Streets." This writer could not locate anyone by the name of Colonel Streets in the Confederate Army. However, the use of the name "Colonel" was used many times in the south as a means of respect rather than a rank. Several families with the surname Street resided in New Bern in the 1860s prior to the war. The 1860 Federal Slaveholders Census (Ancestry.com) lists seven men who were slave owners in New Bern with the surname of Street (none as Streets): Stephen Street, S.R. Street, Stephen E. Street, Oliver P. Street, William J. Street, Nathaniel H. Street and Paxton Street. David said that his master served in the army and was killed. S.R.

a reporter for the *Herald Tribune*. Punch & Judy ceased operation in 1963. (Carole Forstadt Hagstrom Recollections)

244-46 Middle Street – The Jewel Box – Murray and Frieda Fitterman ≈ 1946-1980: The Fittermans began operation in New Bern shortly after the end of WWII. Murray, who was from New York State, had previously been employed by a jewelry store chain elsewhere in North Carolina; Frieda was from Greensboro, N.C. Murray became aware of the business opportunity in New Bern as a result of his prior employment. Initially the Fittermans had two business entities, The Jewel Box, watch and jewelry repair, at 244 Middle Street, and The Jewel Box Gift Shop at 246 Middle Street. Eventually these businesses were consolidated under the name The Jewel Box at 244 Middle Street. (Hyman Barshay Recollections; City Directories)

The Jewel Box is fondly remembered by children growing up in New Bern in the 1950s for its window displays, and in particular for the automatons. These were attention-generating action models of things like Santa's Workshop, featuring elves working away with saws, hammers, and the like. Several companies produced these automatons and had programs whereby they were circulated among subscribing retailers.

The Jewel Box went out of business around 1980. (Barshay Recollections)

Why Did New Bern's Jewish Business Community Disappear?

All of these businesses are now gone, and most had disappeared by 1990. The obvious question is what caused their disappearance. There are many reasons, some idiosyncratic—the destruction of Coplton-Smith by fire, for example—but several common factors can be recognized.

The 1979 opening of the Twin Rivers Mall in New Bern has been cited as a cause of the decline of traditional Middle Street businesses. (Elbert Lipman Recollections) However, this

232-34 Middle Street – Coplton-Smith – Solomon, sons Charles, Harry and Abe, and Betty Coplton – 1895-1974: Solomon Coplton immigrated to the United States from Russia. He began his business activities in the Carolinas as a traveling peddler. He founded S. Coplton, a department store, in New Bern in 1895. (Dorothy Coplton, “The Copltons of North Carolina”, *American Jewish Times-Outlook*, July-August, 1987) Therefore, it appears to be the oldest Jewish-owned business in New Bern to survive into the postwar years.

S. Coplton, and later S. Coplton & Sons, as Solomon’s sons entered the business, was an extremely successful department store. It carried a wide range of clothing, as indicated by the slogan “Quality Clothing for the Entire Family.” Solomon was obviously an extremely talented merchandiser. His was among the first businesses of this type to employ newspaper advertising, beginning as early as 1900. He also ran special sales and utilized other modern merchandising strategies. As a result, Coplton & Sons expanded to locations in a number of other Southern cities. The New Bern store had a reputation as one of the largest department stores south of Richmond, and attracted a wide clientele from around the area. (“The Copltons....”)

In the postwar years the New Bern business was managed by Solomon’s son, Abe, and Abe’s wife Betty. In the late 1940’s Bynum Smith joined the business as Vice-President and Treasurer, and the business name was changed to Coplton-Smith. Charles and Harry Coplton, who were very entrepreneurial, started another substantial chain, Charles Stores, which today would be called dollar stores. (A Charles Store was located at 303-05 Middle Street in the 1950s and 1960s, managed by a gentile.) (Dorothy Coplton Recollections)

New Bern’s Coplton-Smith was destroyed by fire in 1974 and did not re-open. (“The Copltons....”) The site is now Bear Plaza.

238 Middle Street – Punch & Judy – Michael and Sylvia Forstadt – 1947-1963: Punch & Judy was a children’s clothing store. It was opened by the Forstadts in 1947. Sylvia Forstadt was the sister of Lucille Zacks (see The Parisian). This family connection accounts for the Forstadts locating in New Bern. Michael Forstadt was from New York City, and previously was

Street (Samuel R.), Paxton Street, and William J. Street all served in the 2nd NC Infantry. Stephen E. Street served in the 18th NC Infantry. Of the four of them, the only one killed was Paxton Street. Stephen Street does not appear to have been in the Army, but even if he were, he only owned two slaves who were 76 and 56 years of age. It does not appear that Oliver P. Street was in the Army either, as he was sole caretaker of a young daughter. He had seven slaves, none of whom were the right age/gender. Nathaniel H. Street did not serve in the Army, so by process of elimination it would appear that Paxton Street could have been the “Colonel Streets” to whom David referred.

Paxton Street was Nathaniel Street’s son. Nathaniel Street was a large landholder and he resided in the Richardson’s Census District (named for the Richardson family who had large landholdings in what is now the current day Rt. 55 and Beech Grove area and who purchased and owned Bellair Mansion) at the Streets Ferry Plantation, approximately 9 miles west of New Bern. He was a wealthy man and owned over 50 slaves. According to the 1860 Federal Census, Paxton Street resided near his father with his wife Julia and two children. Paxton Street married Julia Montford French, who descended from William Cray French and Mary Susan Francks Fonville. Both of her parents were deceased by 1860. Paxton enlisted in Company F of the 2nd NC Infantry. He died of gastritis in Richmond Hospital, Virginia on July 3, 1863, and is buried at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond. Julia was left with three young children and no means of support.

According to the 1860 Federal Slaveholders Census, the Paxton Street family owned seven slaves: a 56-year-old male, a 50-year-old woman, a 37-year-old male, two 14-year-old males, one 14-year-old female, and one 6-year-old male. This 6-year-old boy could certainly have been David F. Nelson, who would have been 8 or 9 years of age in 1862.

Following Paxton’s death in 1863, Julia Street remarried in December of that year. She became the wife of Frances Jeremiah McIlwean, 10 years her junior. At the beginning of the War, Francis was only 16 and did not enlist in the Army, but helped his father on their plantation. Francis Jeremiah McIlwean was the sole heir of his father’s estate but he “had lost his horses, cattle and other livestock to union troops. It is

told that he would roll around on the floor and pound his fist because of his destitute situation.” (*The Heritage of Craven County North Carolina*, Volume I, 1984, pp. 360-361) In 1870 Francis died of consumption at the age of 24, leaving Julia alone with six children. She did have land, but no money to speak of. Her former father-in-law, Nathaniel Street, had been very wealthy prior to the war, but, like so many southern plantation owners, basically had nothing but worthless Confederate money and bonds by 1870 and no labor to help farm. This would corroborate David’s story that when he returned to New Bern in 1870 he gave his mistress \$25 and she seemed to have land but no money. Thus, it would appear that David’s master and mistress were Paxton Street and Julia Street McIlwean.

David F. Nelson was said to have held various positions in the US Army and Navy. This representation is corroborated by 2nd Lt. Valentine Voorhies, of the 13th NY Artillery who wrote a letter dated September 9, 1865 confirming much of David’s story.

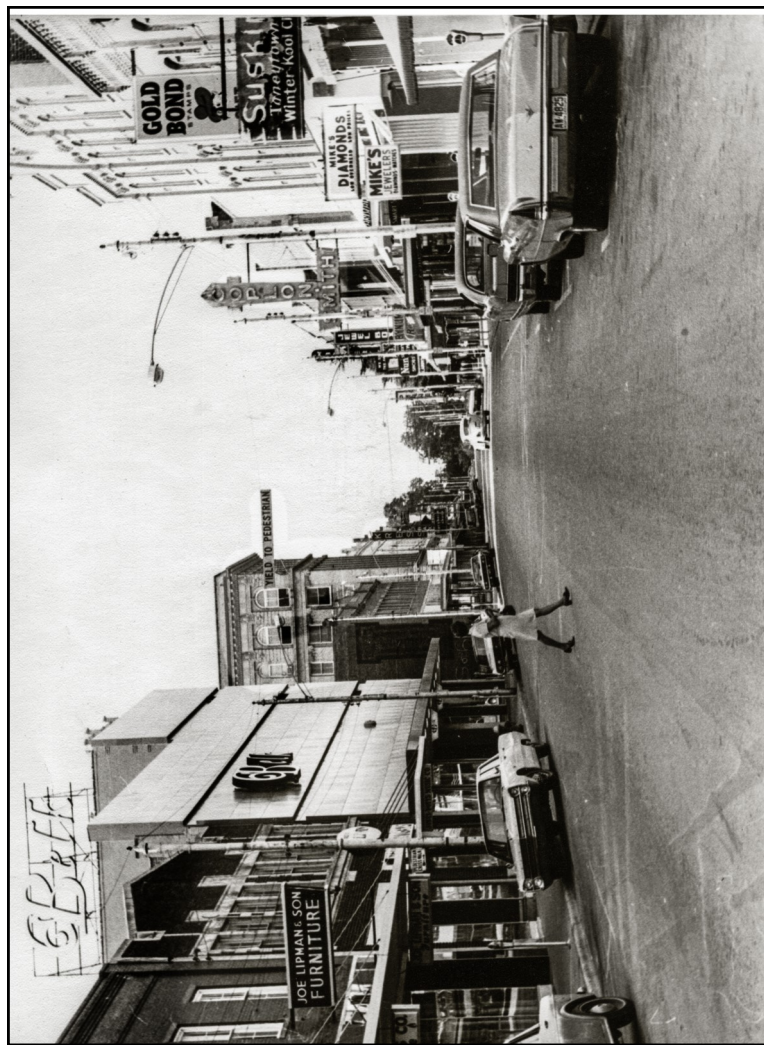
This is to certify that the first time I ever saw David F. Nelson (colored boy) was on the shore of the Neuse River, in North Carolina, about twenty miles below the city of Newbern, the day before the battle of Newbern. Though scarcely nine years of age, he brought information as to the location of the enemy, and while I almost discredited his statements, the information was found to be correct.

He had been a slave, and had been living a few miles out from the city with his mistress, from whom he ran away two days before the battle. He was taken by me, at his request, from the shore to the United States gunboat, **Chasseur**, and received on board as contraband, where he acted as officers’ mess-boy; and for faithfulness and intelligence was promoted and stationed at one division of great guns, as powder-boy. He was afterwards transferred to the United States gunboat **Ranger**, under my charge, and on several occasions, while on board the latter vessel, attracted the attention of General A.E. Burnside and other officers, by his unusual smartness and ingenuity. David, as he was called, was always obedient and strictly honest, and

223 Middle Street – “Joe Lipman and Son” – Joe Lipman, son Elbert Lipman, and Kenneth Margolis <1916-1986: Joe Lipman was the nephew of Sam Lipman (see above). When Joe emigrated from Lithuania in the early 1900s he was sponsored by Sam, so understandably he followed his uncle to New Bern. Initially he worked as a clerk in Sam Lipman’s establishment. Some time prior to 1916 he opened his own store, Joe Lipman, which sold furniture and home furnishings. The business occupied several locations on Middle Street over the years, but in the postwar years it was always at 223 Middle Street. Joe’s son Elbert joined the business in 1941, but was soon involved in the war effort, where he was an Air Force navigator. Elbert rejoined his father after the war and the business became Joe Lipman and Son – “Good Furniture for Good Homes.” Upon Joe’s death in 1953 Elbert took his brother-in-law Kenneth Margolis into the business as a partner, and together they ran it until around 1986. (Elbert Lipman Recollections)

230 Middle Street – “The Parisian” – Kenneth and Lucille Zacks – 1943-1980: The Parisian was founded by Ben Karpf, who came to Savannah, Georgia in the 1920s. The family roots were in Austria, and it appears that Karpf may have come to America in 1870. By 1937 Karpf owned The Parisian; it is unclear how this came about. At this time it was managed by David Miller, Ben’s son-in-law. From the beginning it was a women’s clothing store. In 1943 Kenneth and Lucille Zacks took over operation of The Parisian. Lucille was Ben’s daughter. Kenneth, raised in New York City, was a member of the North Carolina bar but did not actively practice law. His parents were immigrants from Russia. (David Zacks Recollections; Leslie Zacks, “My Grandparents”, unpublished memorandum written when he was 14 years of age, approximately 1983.)

Lucille concentrated on the purchasing and sales end of the business, while Ken attended to the business end. During the years the Zacks operated The Parisian, it was a leading women’s clothing store in the area. Lucille was the arbiter of style in women’s attire in New Bern, and the business had a loyal following among the more affluent women of the community. Ken died in 1975. The Parisian was sold out of the family in 1980 and ceased business two years later. (David Zacks Recollections)



200 Block of Middle Street Looking North, around 1971, premises of Joe Lipman and Son visible on left, signs for Suskin's, Coplon-Smith, and the Jewel Box visible on right. Photograph by A.D. Brooks.

Source: New Bern Historical Society Collection

was a general favorite with all who knew him. (Voorhies Account from "Life and Letters of Roscoe Conkling", 1889, pp. 576-577)

While still at the plantation, David awoke to the sound of guns. The gunboats entered the Neuse River on the evening of March 12th, and "at 8:30 a.m. our gunboats commenced shelling the woods in the vicinity of the proposed place of landing ... at intervals along the shores to protect the advance of the troops." (Report of Commander Rowan, U.S. Navy) This would seem to be the cannon fire that awakened David Nelson and prompted his escape the morning of the 13th. It took David Nelson two days to travel the twenty miles and it would seem that he ran into Lt. Voorhies on March 14, 1862, the day of the Battle of New Bern. The rear of the Union line was at Slocum's Creek in the Havelock area, and twenty miles would have been the approximate distance between the Streets Ferry Plantation and the northern troops.

Sometime after the war, David went to New York City. In the 1870 Federal Census he is listed as a domestic servant. On March 28, 1871, David F. Nelson, age 19, applied for a bank account through the Freedman's Bureau. On his application he indicated that he was born in 1852, in New Bern, and that his father's name was Charles Nelson who died before 1865. His mother was listed as Rebecca Nelson and she died in 1865. His siblings were listed as Susan and Jobs. On this application he gave his middle name as Fox, the only time this name was mentioned. He stated that he was working for Robert Summerville who was in the furniture business. Per the Freedman Bank records, when David returned home after the war ended in 1865 all his relatives were dead. A search of death records, slave records, burials, and cemetery records revealed nothing related to this Nelson family. This is not unusual, as many graves of slaves were not marked. We also do not know whether David's family also left the plantation after the Battle of New Bern or whether they might have moved inland and died elsewhere.

Sometime during this time frame, Thurlow Weed, well-known NY politician, helped David obtain a position as a messenger in the newsroom of *New York Times* editor, Henry

J. Raymond. Not only did Henry Raymond start the New York Times, but he was also a member of the New York State Assembly in 1850 and 1851 as well as Lieutenant Governor from 1855-1856. Raymond had a prominent part in the formation of the Republican Party, and in 1862 was the speaker of the New York State Assembly. Raymond supported Lincoln's policies, and in 1865 he was made Chairman of the Republican National Committee. He was a member of the House of Representatives from 1865-1867.

After Raymond's death in 1869, Thurlow Weed again helped David obtain a position as a doorman and messenger for the Postmaster of New York City. In this position he saw and met many men in high positions. It should be noted that Thurlow Weed was an influential New York newspaper publisher and Whig and Republican Party politician. He controlled the New York Whig party and was against slavery. Prior to the Civil War, Weed became a Republican and worked hard for Lincoln in the 1860 election. Weed was also an unofficial envoy to Britain and France during the War.

Several newspaper articles mention David in New York City. After the publication of the "Slave Boy" article in 1874 "A Teacher" wrote (*New York Herald*, March 28, 1874):

To the Editor of the Herald:

My attention has been called to an article in the HERALD of the 21st inst. Relative to the examination passed by David Nelson, a colored clerk in the Post Office. It is there stated that he was wholly self-educated. This is an error. He was a pupil of Colored Grammar School, No. 1 in the Fourteenth ward, for four years, passing through all the grades. I know you will see that the mistake is corrected and give credit where it belongs.

A TEACHER

David was said to be held in high regard by NY politician Roscoe Conkling. Conkling was a Republican Representative in Congress as well as the Senate from the State of New York from March 4, 1867 until May 16, 1881. He was against slavery. On January 20, 1879, David wrote the following letter to Mr. Conkling:

219 Middle Street – "The Fashion Center" – Harry and Isabelle Vatz, Morris Vatz – 1950-1989: Harry Vatz was a native-born American, as was his wife Isabelle. Harry's parents were immigrants from Latvia and Lithuania, while Isabelle's parents were from Russia. Harry's father was a peddler in West Virginia and North Carolina; Isabelle's parents owned and operated Fried's, a department store in Weldon, NC. Harry and Isabelle were married in 1947 and then lived in Fayetteville, NC, where Harry worked at a store owned by his brother and brother-in-law. The Vatz were interested in locating a town that would be suitable for a ladies clothing store, and after consulting with relatives, chose New Bern. (Jane Vatz Abel Recollections)

The Vatz opened The Fashion Center, selling quality women's clothing, in 1950. Their slogans were "Famous Brands at Popular Prices" and "Your Center for Fine Fashions." Harry and Isabelle together ran The Fashion Center until retirement in 1987. It was then operated by their son, Morris Vatz, for several years before closing.

Harry Vatz was well known in New Bern as a speechmaker, teller of jokes, and raconteur. Stories about him—and by him—are legend in New Bern. (Nelson McDaniel Recollections)

220 Middle Street – "Suskin's" – Mark, and later sons Raymond and Leon Suskin ≈ 1919-1978: Suskin's was one of the older retail establishments in New Bern. The business was opened by Mark Suskin around 1919. He was born in 1876; alternative sources specify his country of birth as either Lithuania or Russia. According to family lore, he came to New Bern from Baltimore. In early city directories the listing was simply "Mark Suskin, dry goods." Initially the business sold both men's and women's clothing and made alterations; in the post-war years it was strictly a men's clothing store. By 1926 Mark Suskin's sons Raymond and Leon were employed in the business, and in later years the business was called Suskin's. Mark Suskin died in 1936. Thereafter Raymond was the owner-manager, while Leon was listed in city directories as "clerk". Suskin's closed its doors following Raymond's death in 1978.

(Mark Suskin Recollections; Jennifer Waters Williams Recollections)

and the last to go out of business. The Steinbergs came to New Bern in 1955, from Buffalo, New York. Louis' parents were from Poland while Muriel's were long established in America. They had been seeking a wholesale magazine and newspaper distribution company, and acquired the Zaytoun News Agency in New Bern when it became available. In addition, they opened a newsstand in the old bus station located at 812 Broad Street, and later established another newsstand, Central News Agency, at 419 Broad Street. Around 1958 this latter operation was moved to the Middle Street Location and became Central News and Card Shop. This business closed around 1990 when the Steinbergs retired. (Judy Steinberg Gilman Recollections)

210-214 Middle Street – “Sam Lipman and Sons” – Sam, and later sons Harry, Morton, and Adolph Lipman ≈ 1900–1963: Sam Lipman emigrated from Lithuania in 1885, and initially peddled from a horse-drawn wagon in the Trenton area. Some time around 1900 he opened a dry goods store in New Bern under the name “Sam Lipman”. (Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities – New Bern, Institute of Southern Jewish Life) He was later joined by his sons, hence the name change. Sam Lipman and Sons became a major department store, as is suggested by its multiple street addresses. Its slogan was “New Bern’s Biggest and Best Department Store”. Sam Lipman died in 1946. The business was subsequently operated by Harry and Adolph with the involvement of other family members and the Klines, Joseph and Ida. The business ceased operation around 1963. (Elbert Lipman Recollections)

215 Middle Street – “New Bern Loan and Jewelers” – Martin Elden, Louis and Ethel Elden – 1943–1979: Martin and Louis were brothers. Their father, originally from Russia, settled in Boston where they were born. The brothers later moved to Winston-Salem. During World War II they were advised by a relative operating a pawnshop in Jacksonville, NC that New Bern would be a good location for a similar operation. They opened New Bern Loan and Jewelers in 1943 as a partnership under the management of Martin, as Louis was serving in the military. Upon his release from service in 1945 Louis joined Martin and soon thereafter bought him out. Under the management of Louis and his wife Ethel, the business expanded to locations in Havelock and Kinston. It was sold out of the family in 1969, and under other ownership continued in operation until approximately 1979. (David Elden Recollections)

New York, January 20, 1879

My Dear Sir: A goodly number of your colored friends and admirers in this city, mindful of the invaluable services experienced by them at your hands, and desirous, in a slight degree at least, of expressing their appreciation thereof, propose tomorrow evening, January 21, firing a gun for each vote cast in the Legislature at Albany for your re-election to the United States Senate. They also most respectfully and cordially tender you their congratulations on the occasion, trusting that your career may be as brilliant and useful in the future as it has been in the past. Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

David F. Nelson

Roscoe Conkling wrote a letter of thanks to David which was read the following Sunday in all the Negro churches of the city of New York and reread at Conkling's funeral.

David was also known outside of New York City. He was cited in an article written by the *People's Advocate* (April 24, 1880, p. 77) “Mr. David F. Nelson of postmaster fame recited ‘Zulu Freedom’ to the entire satisfaction of the audience who gave him a hearty encore, then he recited ‘He Is Tired Out’ in a very creditable manner and received and was presented with twin beautiful bouquet.” In March, 1891, it was written “David F. Nelson, one of the fixtures of the NY Post Office whose position is never affected by change of postmasters or administrators. He has met and known more public men than any other man in NY for the past 10 years. He stood especially high in the good graces of the late Senator, Roscoe Conkling and John Swinton, the veteran journalist, (Editor of *NY Sun*) never allows a convenient opportunity to pass without speaking a good word of him. He is a man of very few words, has less familiars, and is always busy. He is invaluable to Postmaster Van Cott, as he has been to other postmasters before him.” (*New York Age*, p. 5)

On Thursday, May 14, 1896, the *New York Tribune* wrote “David Nelson, the colored messenger in the office of Postmaster Dayton, has applied for a short vacation to begin on May 28. He will be married on that day to Miss Cassie E. Day, at

No. 451 Halsey St., Brooklyn, by the Rev. Dr. Hunt, pastor of the Abyssinian Methodist Church. Nelson has been in the employ of the Post Office Department in the city of New York since 1871, and is popular with the employees and with those people who have business at the Postmaster's office." And a few days later it was written "David F. Nelson, Postmaster Dayton's colored messenger was married yesterday afternoon to Miss Cassie E. Day. Postmaster Dayton and his staff presented the couple with a silver pitcher. Mr. Nelson has been a messenger in the P.O. for over 20 years. He came to NY from the South with Thurlow Weed 25 yrs. ago." (May 1896 *New York Tribune*, p. 12)

Unfortunately, David Fox Nelson died at his home on January 7, 1899 at the age of 49 from cerebral meningitis and influenza. His wife, Carrie Ann, applied for a pension in 1912 based upon David's service with the Transportation Service Quartermaster's Department, US Volunteers. It is unclear whether she received a pension. This writer could locate no other documentation regarding David's Naval or Army service despite searching well-known military databases. Carrie died April 5, 1915 at the age of 70. Both David and Carrie are buried at Cypress Hills Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina*, 2010.) Two New Bern Jewish business families that were active in the postwar period--the Coplons and Sam Lipmans—descended from newly arrived immigrants who started out as peddlers in the area. Both soon accumulated enough capital to open retail stores in New Bern.

In the later years family connections were important in the decision for Jewish families to open businesses in New Bern.

Specific Middle Street Businesses

(Beginning at the southern end of Middle Street moving northward; even-numbered addresses are on the east side.)

204 Middle Street – “Howard’s” – Phillip, and later sons Ellis and Louis Howard ≈ 1900–1961: This business was founded by Phillip Howard (originally Horowitz) who immigrated to America from Russia around 1890. Initially he worked as a peddler in Caswell County. Sometime around the turn of the century he opened a store in New Bern in partnership with a brother-in-law based in Baltimore, Jacob Nacht, which they called the "American Stock Company." Phillip soon became sole owner and changed the business name to "Phillip Howard." In 1904-5 and 1908 New Bern city directories the business is identified as "dry goods," but for most of its existence, and certainly in the postwar years, it was a men's clothing store. ("Dry goods" seems to have been a catchall classification in early directories for retail establishments other than groceries, hardware, and other specialties.) At a later date Phillip was joined in business by his two sons, Ellis and Louis, and the name became "Howard's." Shortly after the end of the war Phillip died, Louis moved on to other business ventures, and Ellis was the store manager. Howard's ceased operation in 1961 when Ellis retired. (Louis N. Howard, "My Family History", unpublished memorandum, December 10, 1980; Bertha Howard Miller Recollections; Helene Howard Shuter Recollections)

208 Middle Street – “Central News and Card Shop” – Louis and Muriel Steinberg ≈ 1958–1990: This was both the last of the Jewish family-owned businesses to locate on Middle Street

gional market center in eastern North Carolina, such as Kinston, Goldsboro, and Wilson, had a substantial Jewish family-owned business community in the postwar years, especially in retailing, and almost without exception these businesses are no more.

The Background

New Bern has a long history as a regional shopping center. Until recently there was almost no retailing elsewhere in Craven County and the adjacent counties of Pamlico and Jones except for grocery stores, gas stations, and “general stores,” and retailing in Carteret County was limited. For clothing, shoes, jewelry, and furniture, New Bern was the place to shop. Retail traffic, especially on Saturdays, was heavy. Moreover, New Bern was something of a boomtown during the war years; by one estimate the population in the area relevant for retail business nearly tripled, largely because of military installations. (Robert Yudell Recollections) And this area remained reasonably prosperous, if a bit sleepy, in the postwar years. Therefore, New Bern was a good location for retail establishments.

Most of New Bern’s Jewish businesses were founded either by immigrants from eastern Europe, for enterprises dating back to around 1900, or by the children of such immigrants for businesses founded during or shortly after the end of World War II.

In the period from approximately 1880 to 1920 there was a dramatic increase in the number of Jewish immigrants from Russia and other eastern European countries. More than two million mostly eastern European Jews came to America in these years. Many were from small villages, and for this and other reasons were uncomfortable in major metropolitan areas. One estimate is that nearly a quarter of these immigrants soon moved to small towns in this country, and in the process North Carolina’s Jewish population grew by nearly ten-fold. Many of these immigrants began their careers as peddlers, often financed and directed to promising territories by Baltimore-based Jewish-owned wholesale establishments—Baltimore being a major port of arrival for Jewish immigrants. (Leonard

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW BERN’S DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT AND THE CITY’S HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Susan Moffat-Thomas

In the 1960s and 1970s significant residential and commercial structures in New Bern’s downtown area were demolished, many others were in a deteriorated state, and the original facades of many buildings were covered with aluminum and other materials in an attempt to *modernize* them. With the establishment of the Historic Preservation Foundation in 1972, (today known as the New Bern Preservation Foundation), a private nonprofit whose focus was/is preserving historic properties, and Swiss Bear, Inc., in 1979, with a focus on restoring the downtown, the area was beginning to experience an active revitalization effort. Preserving the City’s unique and historic architecture became a major priority.

In the late 1970s, as a revitalization strategy, local preservation groups nominated a 20 block downtown area for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1980 the downtown historic district was expanded to include three areas overlooked in the original district: Frog Pond, Union Station, and Trent Court. Trent Court, considered to be an example of high quality public housing, was to act as a buffer zone around Tryon Palace. National Register Districts, basically honorary designations, are not protected by design controls. Their one tangible value is that they enable owners of commercial and income-producing property to claim tax benefits for restoration expenses; however, those who choose not to restore along prescribed lines can simply obtain building permits and renovate their building in whatever fashion they choose.

In February 1980, spurred on by Swiss Bear and the Historic Preservation Foundation, the City Planning Department looked into the feasibility of establishing a local Historic District Commission (HDC), authorized by state statute and enacted by local ordinance, that would place design controls on the rehabilitation of exterior buildings and new construction, and delay demolition within the historic district. On February 28th, with the support of City Planner David Rowland and the Tryon

Palace Commission, a public forum was held in the Tryon Palace Auditorium that included presentations by Robert Stallings Jr., President, New Bern Historical Society; Newsom Williams, President, Historic Preservation Foundation; David Henderson, Chairman, Swiss Bear Architectural Committee; and Dr. Larry Tise, head of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. They all expressed the need to establish a historic district commission with design regulations for any rehabilitation or new construction within the Historic District.

The great show of interest led to the Board of Aldermen appointing a nine member Commission: Boyd Meyers, Chairman, Peter Sandbeck, Newsom Williams, Charles Francis, Martha Smith, Janet Latham, Carrie Miller, Ray Houghton and Eliza Dudley. Their charge was to develop an ordinance, guidelines, and application process, with the Planning Department providing support and overall coordination.

It was controversial from the start.

“To nudge, or sledge hammer to preservation” was the title of an August 16th, 1980 *Sun Journal* article by Catherine Landis who covered the contentious public meeting at which many people spoke.

David Henderson advised the Commission to specify which guidelines are mandatory and which are just suggestions. ‘You have to be consistent’ he said, “‘should’ can never be enforced.’ Commission Chairman Boyd Meyers said, ‘when you get to texture, color, mass, you can’t get specific. Let’s keep it general enough so it will help everyone in the community.’ Henderson replied ‘you’re going to get yourself in a hole if you don’t have something enforceable.’ Dr. Ray Houghton, Commission Vice Chairman said ‘we’re not trying to strangle people or keep someone from doing something. I’d prefer to nudge people, not hit them with a sledge hammer.’

JEWISH FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESSES ON MIDDLE STREET IN THE POSTWAR YEARS

Richard Wolcott McEnally

Author’s note: This is the first part of a two-part article. The second part, to appear in a later issue of the *Journal*, will deal with Jewish family-owned businesses, retail and otherwise, in other parts of New Bern.

New Bern’s business community has had a strong Jewish presence for many years. Several of the Jewish businesses active in the years following World War II date back to around 1900. In the early postwar years Jewish family-owned businesses flourished, with no fewer than eleven Jewish retail establishments in the 200 block of New Bern’s Middle Street (between South Front and Pollock), many of them founded during or shortly after the end of the war. Unfortunately, this era has passed. By 1990 or so most of New Bern’s Jewish retailers were out of business, and in 2011 the last of the city’s Jewish-owned businesses, Goldman Metals, was sold out of the family.

It is worth emphasizing that in the early postwar years the New Bern Jewish community was strictly concerned with business. There were no Jewish doctors or dentists in the city, and the sole Jewish member of the bar did not actively practice but rather was engaged in retail business. (D. Zacks Recollections) Jewish retirees were mostly from local businesses; New Bern in those days had not yet become a retirement community.

It also must be stressed that the emphasis here is on the business activity of the Jewish community. Members of this community made significant contributions to the civic and cultural life of New Bern, and to the Temple, Chester B’nai Sholem, that deserve to be celebrated but are beyond the scope of this article.

While the focus here is on New Bern, it is important to recognize that what transpired in this city was not unique but rather was representative of what was happening elsewhere throughout North Carolina and the South. Virtually every re-

rifle pits – hastily constructed depression in ground dug by infantrymen to provide modest protection from small arms fire.

gun/cannon – long-barreled artillery of various sizes (see pounder) used to fire at long range; usually smoothbore (smoothly bored) but later became rifled (see rifled below).

breastworks – same as earthworks above.

redans – small fortification characterized by two walls set at an angle pointing to enemy, often a component of breastworks.

redoubt – small field fortification, often hastily constructed.

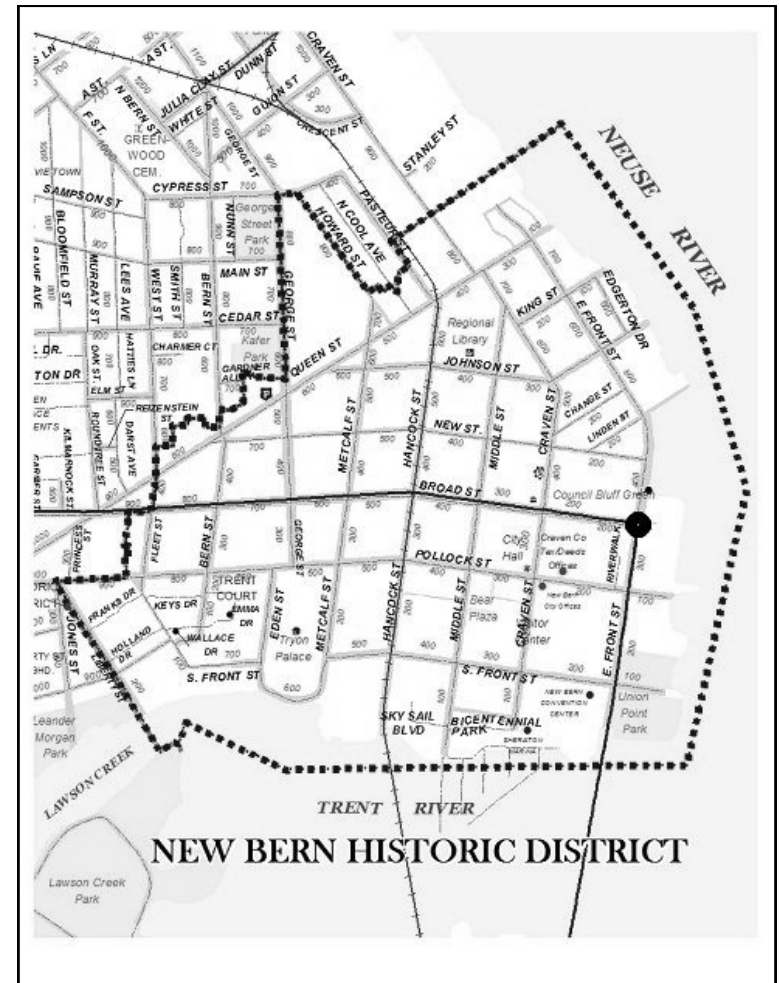
pounder – describes the size of a cannon or gun. Refers to the weight of a solid projectile the weapon could fire; an 8-pounder would be modest while a 100-pounder would be very large.

6” rifled gun/cannon – the measurement in inches, another measure of size, refers to the diameter of the barrel bore. Rifled indicates that the barrel has grooves that cause the projectile to spin, thereby extending range and increasing accuracy.

revetted fort – fortification characterized by a retaining wall at its face made of earth and wood to stabilize it.

battery – cluster of cannon or guns, usually 4-6 in number.

columbiad – long-barreled, muzzle-loading smoothbore cannon (not rifled; see above), among the heaviest of artillery weapons, primarily used in seacoast fortifications.



Source: City of New Bern

In the November 18th, 1980 *Sun Journal* article by Lee Landis, “New Bern Historic District praised, panned at hearing”, he reported on a recent public hearing at a Board of Alderman meeting.

...the near capacity audience, most of who supported the ordinance, appeared at the meeting. The issue as both the advocates and opponents of the ordinance saw it was more government regulation. But those favoring the ordinance said it was necessary to preserve the historic integrity of the city. Those opposing the ordinance said they objected to being considered an 'irresponsible minority.' At the urging of former Alderman Ben Hurst, audience members stood up. Hurst said he observed, '90% of the audience favored the ordinance.'

At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Board of Aldermen adopted the ordinance and the Commission's guidelines. Effective January 1st, 1981, a certificate of appropriateness had to be obtained from the Historic District Commission (HDC), (now Historic Preservation Commission - HPC) prior to any exterior alteration, relocation, new construction or demolition of a building.

A year later, the HDC decided the guidelines needed to be revised. As reported in a May 22nd, 1982 *Sun Journal* article, "Historic Ordinance may be revised":

...the consensus of the HDC members was 'we should go with our gut reactions (on applications) and stop being worried about being so diplomatic.' Another commissioner noted 'two years ago downtown New Bern was dying and I did not feel like imposing any requirements on people that might impede the restoration of the historic area. Now, with revitalization firmly underway, the circumstances were different and with our experience we can see some of the problems people are having with us and we are having with them and make changes.'

From the onset, the power of the HPC has been a controversial and complex issue and the subject of many bitter arguments, editorials, and letters to the editor. Proponents credit the district controls with protecting areas of historic significance, helping chart future growth, and stimulating new investment.

Bridge. Known as the UNION POINT BATTERY, the installation was easily taken by the Union Navy at the close of the battle. There are no visible remains of this battery nor the one that existed a few blocks away at the foot of Middle Street.

FORT ASTOR was located south of New Bern on the north bank of the Trent River. Quite possibly it was near the railroad trestle, but may have been on Jack's Island (part of Lawson Creek Park today). It was destroyed during the battle.

A small fort located at the point where the Old Beaufort Road crossed the Trent River at the Clermont Bridge was called FORT GASTON. It was later occupied by Union troops, who expanded it. Some remnants remain today.

An installation, called OLD FORT, was located at the mouth of Brice's Creek, quite possibly at or near the site of old FORT BRICE from colonial times. There are only vague hints of the site today.

The Confederates had other fortifications in the area. Some exist at undetermined locations. Others, such as the outpost at Batchelder's Creek, are not on the map, but can be found on Rte. 55 leading westward from New Bern.

Acknowledgement: I am indebted to my colleagues and fellow guides at the New Bern Battlefield Park for their advice and support. In particular, native Craven County historians Ray Cahoon and Horace Mewborn who provided me with private tours and access to many of the locations described in this article.

Explanation of Technical Terms – In Order of Appearance

earthworks – hastily constructed fortification consisting of a trench with earth and wood erected in front for protection from enemy fire. Used interchangeably with breastworks.

casemate – compartment or chamber designed to withstand artillery fire.

na Governor John W. Ellis, the fort mounted one 8” columbiad and seven 32-pounder cannon as well as a sizable powder magazine (3000 lbs.) and 500 loaded shells (Branch and Davis, p. 3). The fort was manned by Captain James Mayo and the Pamlico Artillery (aka Company E, 36th NC Troops/ 2nd Regiment NC Artillery). Mayo was ordered to evacuate the installation and blow up the magazine as the Federals advanced during the battle. Today the remains of this site are behind the Brinson School on Old Cherry Point Road. It is largely overgrown, but lies between the school and the Neuse River.

CAMP BRANCH provided the initial encampment of Confederate forces prior to their deployment along the Fort Thompson line. It was located near and west of FORT ELLIS. The site may have been renamed by the Union forces as *Camp Reno* immediately after the battle, but this is pure speculation.

An uncompleted battery, labeled UNFINISHED BATTERY above FORT ELLIS, was not manned during the Battle of New Bern. It is thought that the site was located somewhere between Neuse Cliffs Road and the Neuse River.

FORT LANE was named after New Bern Mayor Frederick Lane and was located at or near the site of old FORT CASWELL, about 1.4 miles south of the city. Rebuilt and enlarged by General Branch, this fort supported a four-gun battery. During the Battle of New Bern, it was manned by the “Lenoir Braves”, commanded by Captain William Sutton (aka Company A, 40th NC Troops/3rd Regiment NC Artillery). Federal reports claim capturing four guns here: two 6” rifled cannon and two 32-pounder cannon. Today, a state highway marker at the corner of Green Springs Road and Old Cherry Point Road in James City refers to the location. The site lies on private property, north of Green Springs Road.

The Confederate base camp located behind Fort Lane was called CAMP GATLIN. It was later used by Union forces during the occupation of New Bern to house the thousands of troops that soon arrived to the area.

A cotton bale battery of perhaps two guns was located at the southeast corner of the city near the present Cunningham

Opponents contend the historic districts are elitist, often arbitrarily administered by commissioners who abuse their power and are not qualified to pass judgment on what are frequently complex, subjective decisions.

When the design controls were put in place, the New Bern Historical Society, Swiss Bear, the Historic Preservation Foundation, preservationists, and some developers and investors saw promoting good design within the context of historic preservation as part of a comprehensive approach to stimulate residential and downtown revitalization efforts. It is apparent the desired outcomes are being achieved. A historic district that looked beaten, bruised, and neglected in 1980 is now a healthy, vital district with new and rehabilitated structures that give New Bern its distinctive “sense of place.”

CIVIL WAR SITES IN CRAVEN COUNTY

Part I: Confederate Fortifications (1861-1862)

Peter J. Meyer, Jr.

Author's note: This is the first part of a multipart article. The second and third parts, to appear in later issues of the *Journal*, will deal with Union fortifications (1863-1865) and pre- and post-Civil War fortifications.

The Civil War (1861-1865) period brought about a large concentration of military sites in New Bern and Craven County. These forts, camps, blockhouses and earthworks can be examined within the framework of two time frames: those built by the Confederates (1861-1862) and those constructed by the Union (1862-1865). Remnants of many of them still exist today. [Note: Unless otherwise indicated, these sites are located on private property; the privacy of property owners and restrictions against trespassing should be respected.]

Following the election of Abraham Lincoln as President in 1860 with his presumed anti-slavery views, Southern states began to secede from the Union. North Carolina was reluctant to join the Confederacy, but finally, on May 2, 1861, the state legislature passed an ordinance of succession. It was the last southern state to secede.

North Carolina was already late in her preparations for the terrible conflict that was to embroil the nation. General Theophilus Holmes commanded the state militia, but he was soon dispatched to Virginia. He was replaced by Brigadier General Richard C. Gatlin, who organized troops, prepared for the defense of the coast, and divided the area to be covered into two districts. General Daniel H. Hill was made commander of the District of the Pamlico, which included Craven County. He began the construction of several forts and **earthworks** to protect New Bern. [Terms in bold type are explained at the end of this article.] However, he too, was soon sent to Virginia.

Company (aka Company H, 36th NC Troops/2nd Regiment NC Artillery). They gave spirited fire during the battle, but were eventually forced to evacuate. The Federals recovered 12 guns: two 6" rifled cannon and ten 32-pounders. Today, only a small portion of the fort remains on private property at the end of Fort Road.

A main line of earthworks, generally referred to as the FORT THOMPSON LINE, ran approximately a mile westward to the railroad and Woods Brickyard. The bulk of the forces under General Branch manned this line. A large portion of these breastworks remain intact, south of Bradford Road and Fort Road. Some remains can be seen north of the parking lot at the New Bern J-Cs Fairground off Highway 70.

The REDANS west of the railroad were constructed on very short notice in February and March, 1862. This sector of the battlefield was manned by the 26th NC Infantry Regiment and some units of the 33rd NC Infantry Regiment. It is the only part of the battlefield that has been preserved. The earthworks are in excellent condition. Today, these redans provide the main attraction to the New Bern Battlefield Park. This site is owned and managed by the New Bern Historical Society. It is on the *National Register of Historic Sites* and is open to the public.

While the exact location of the UNFINISHED CASEMATE remains elusive, it is likely that it would have been a 2-3 gun emplacement located about one-third the distance between FORT THOMPSON and FORT ELLIS.

Construction began in early 1862 on the CASEMATE **BATTERY**, a small earthen fort that was incomplete at the time of the Battle of New Bern in March. (Branch and Davis, p. 3) Also known as FORT ALLEN, it was designed to be a two-gun emplacement, located south of Fort Ellis near Johnson Point. It was manned by Company B, 1st Maryland Regiment under Captain Charles Edelin. This was the only out-of-state Confederate unit at the battle. Today, the site is estimated to be just north and east of Seifert Road.

FORT ELLIS was located about 2.85 miles south of New Bern. Constructed in early 1862 and named after North Caroli-

When word of the Union victory at Roanoke (February 8, 1862) reached Branch, he saw the necessity of protecting his *right* flank. He ordered the 26th North Carolina to occupy the area west of the railroad and north of Bullen Branch (a small stream). “Then beginning not far from the railroad, he constructed westward not a continuous line of breastworks, but a series of **redans**, just behind Bullen Branch, which flowed into Brice’s Creek on his right.” (John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina*, 1963, p. 97). Those redans and earthworks were constructed in a very short time. Today, that site is preserved as the New Bern Battlefield Park.

Map #1 provides a view of the defensive positions that existed prior to the Battle of New Bern on March 14, 1862. This narrative will trace these positions from south to north in line with Federal movements on that day. The Croatan Line is not on the map: it could not be adequately garrisoned by Branch and was abandoned prior to the battle.

FORT DIXIE was located about 5.45 miles south of New Bern on the Neuse River. It has been described as a four-gun **redoubt** about a mile south of FORT THOMPSON and just north of the Croatan Line. Another description says this was an eight-gun installation mounting four 24-**pounder** and four 32-pounder cannon. However, it is dubious that the fort had eight guns at the time. It was manned by Captain Benjamin Leecraft’s Independent Artillery (aka Company G, 36th NC Troops/ 3rd Regiment, NC Artillery), a rather small and inexperienced company. Leecraft was ordered to abandon the fort on March 13th. According to the Union Navy, one **6” rifled gun** and three 32-pounder cannon were recovered. Today, the site would be on the VFW property off Butler Avenue.

A sand and sod **revetted** fort built in 1861, FORT THOMPSON was located about 4.45 miles south of New Bern. It anchored a line of earthworks that extended a mile to the west, ending at the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad. Mounting thirteen 32-pounder cannon, three of which faced landside, it was a formidable installation. The fort was garrisoned by Captain John N. Whitford’s Independent Company (aka Company I, 10th NC Troops/1st Regiment NC Artillery) and Captain William A. Heering’s Independent

Thus, the State Quartermaster, General Lawrence O’ Bryan Branch was appointed to replace him.

When General Branch arrived in New Bern in November 1861, he immediately inspected the existing fortifications protecting the town. These consisted of a chain of small forts and **casemates** along the west shore of the Neuse River anchored by one large installation called FORT THOMPSON; a randomly placed set of earthworks and **rifle pits** in and around New Bern; and a sizable defensive line of earthworks about ten miles south called the Croatan Line. The Croatan Line stretched westward from a point just north of the entrance to Otter Creek (off the Neuse River) for about ¾ of a mile to the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad. At the time, it was the only real obstacle to a landside invasion.

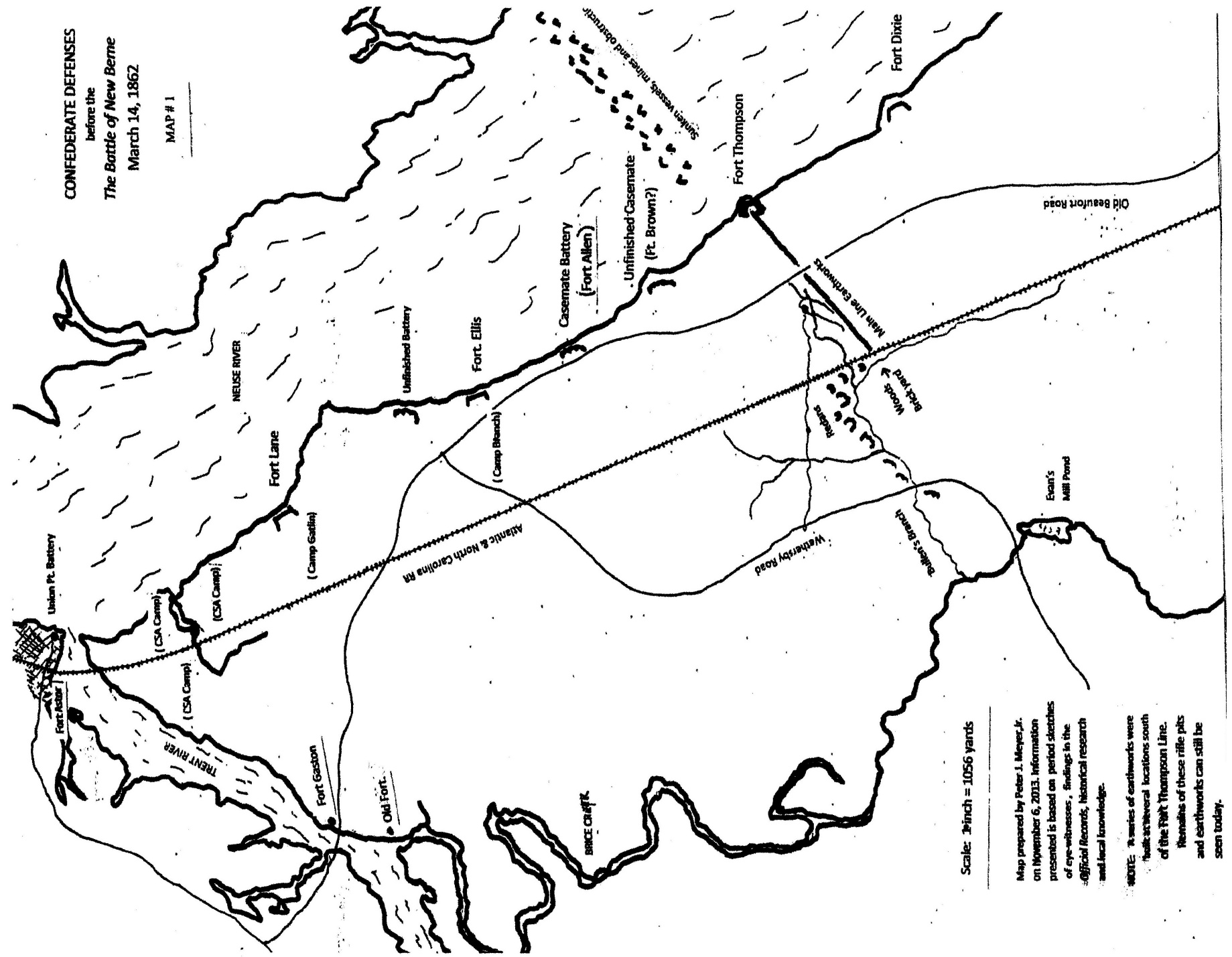
Daniel Hill would write some six decades later that, “Seven forts were designed to protect the town from naval attack; yet not a single heavy **gun** guarded directly the railroad and the country road that ran along the river and crossed the entrenchments at right angles.” (Daniel H. Hill, Jr., *Bethel to Sharpsburg: North Carolina in the War Between the States*, 1926, p. 219)

As Branch would observe, “the defensive works were located and constructed before I assumed command. The troops (now) under my command had performed a large amount of work, but it was mainly on river defenses.... I was for six weeks engaged in making necessary changes.” (“Report of General Branch...,” War Department, *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1880–1901, pp. 241-242)

The forts along the river were upgraded and several new installations were started but never fully completed. A line of **breastworks** was constructed westward for about one mile from Fort Thompson to the railroad. Construction of additional defenses west of the railroad had to be abandoned for lack of time, labor and supplies. For his part, Gatlin repeatedly sought additional reinforcements and supplies for Branch, but none were available.

CONFEDERATE DEFENSES
before the
The Battle of New Berne
March 14, 1862

MAP # 1



Scale: 1/2 inch = 1056 yards

Map prepared by Peter J. Meyer, Jr.
on November 6, 2013. Information
presented is based on period sketches
of eye-witnesses, findings in the
official records, historical research
and local knowledge.

NOTE: A series of earthworks were
built at several locations south
of the Fort Thompson Line.
Remains of these rifle pits
and earthworks can still be
seen today.