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JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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TOURING ON NEW BERN'S NEWEST TROLLEY

Richard Lore

The trolley one sees meandering through town represents a tribute to the folks who live in New Bern's downtown Historic District. Collectively, the neighborhood has managed to preserve a uniquely beautiful array of old houses which never fails to charm and please our visitors. Indeed, sometimes the nineteenth century illusion is so near perfect that many folks who ride the trolley come away with the conviction that this historic district is just another reproduction, like Disney World.

In my part-time job as tour guide on the trolley, I learned an early lesson when a number of tourists asked me about the "For Sale" signs on the houses: "How can these houses be for sale? They're not private property." Others sometime asked why those people walking down the sidewalks or sitting on porches were not wearing colonial costumes. So, as a regular part of my tour, I now remind the trolley riders that this is an ongoing, active, and very real neighborhood and that the homes are not reproductions nor are they owned by the state or some entertainment corporation.

Many factors contribute to the "Disney World" illusion. Over the years nearly every home in the Historic District has been resurrected into a show-place and is now in pristine condition. As a result tour guides are hard-pressed to find a shabby old home to use as a "before" example to illustrate the magnitude of the rehabilitation efforts in New Bern. Thank goodness some old wrecks remain; my favorite is the house at 509 Metcalf Street. Long abandoned and a source of irritation to all the neighbors, particularly the late Mrs. Eleanor Carr, who lived for

many years just across the street, the old wreck is now in the initial stages of rehabilitation. We already miss the pink asbestos siding which was removed in the spring of 1996.

In contrast, some homes have been so carefully restored that they elicit suspicious comments from trolley passengers. For example, Alice and Gordon Ruckart's meticulous refinishing of the original "heart pine" siding on their house at 520 Craven Street convinces some passengers that the siding is vinyl. On one occasion I invited a skeptical trolley rider to step off and closely examine the siding to satisfy himself that the siding was wood. Perhaps the Ruckarts should "stress mark" the siding to ensure a more authentic appearance.

I am sharing my experiences as a tour guide in the hope that it will prove helpful in your own efforts to show off the town to visiting friends and relatives. This article may also provide some insights into how our town is perceived by the ever-increasing number of tourists who visit New Bern.

The trolley was purchased in the winter of 1993 by Sabrina Bengel with the help of her newly hired manager Barbara Ballard. The trolley was shipped here from Arizona, and it was gorgeous with new paint and lots of gleaming wood upon arrival. Unfortunately, the mechanical condition of the second-hand vehicle did not match its appearance, and virtually every component, including the engine, had to be rebuilt over the first two years of its life on the streets of New Bern. Barbara was given the job of planning the trolley's route, hiring all of the part-time guides and drivers, training these folks, preparing publicity brochures, and the other myriad details associated with starting a brand new business.

Ridership was slow during the first year of operation, improved markedly during the second year, and has enjoyed a similar increase during the last (1996) season. I have served as a tour guide since the beginning. As a retired university professor (30 years at Rutgers), a history buff, and a native North Carolinian (Roanoke Rapids), learning and presenting

the material was not difficult. There were, however, some adjustments for me: You cannot make disparaging remarks about the intelligence, maturity, or sobriety of the occasional rider who falls asleep or talks while you are giving your spiel as I regularly did in my university classes. The tourists are not threatened by having to take an exam next week on the material.

Nor was I accustomed to dealing with the rare five-year-old exuberant and rambunctious child ("spoiled brat", in the original version of this piece, but changed at the suggestion of several politically correct women) who cannot be controlled by his/her parents. On these occasions I always cite the child-rearing strategy of Francis Hawks when we pass his grand old house at the southeast corner of New and Metcalf streets. Francis raised five energetic boys during the early part of the nineteenth century in that house, and, according to Gertrude Carraway (1940), he took each one out and gave him a whipping every Monday. When the boys protested the unfairness of the uncalled-for punishment, Francis told them that the chances were good that they would do something to deserve it before the week was out. Modern psychologists might predict that all five boys would grow up to be axe murderers or worse, but these kids didn't do badly: Three became prominent Episcopal ministers, one was a renowned educator, and the fifth was a career lawyer. Four out of five is not too bad.

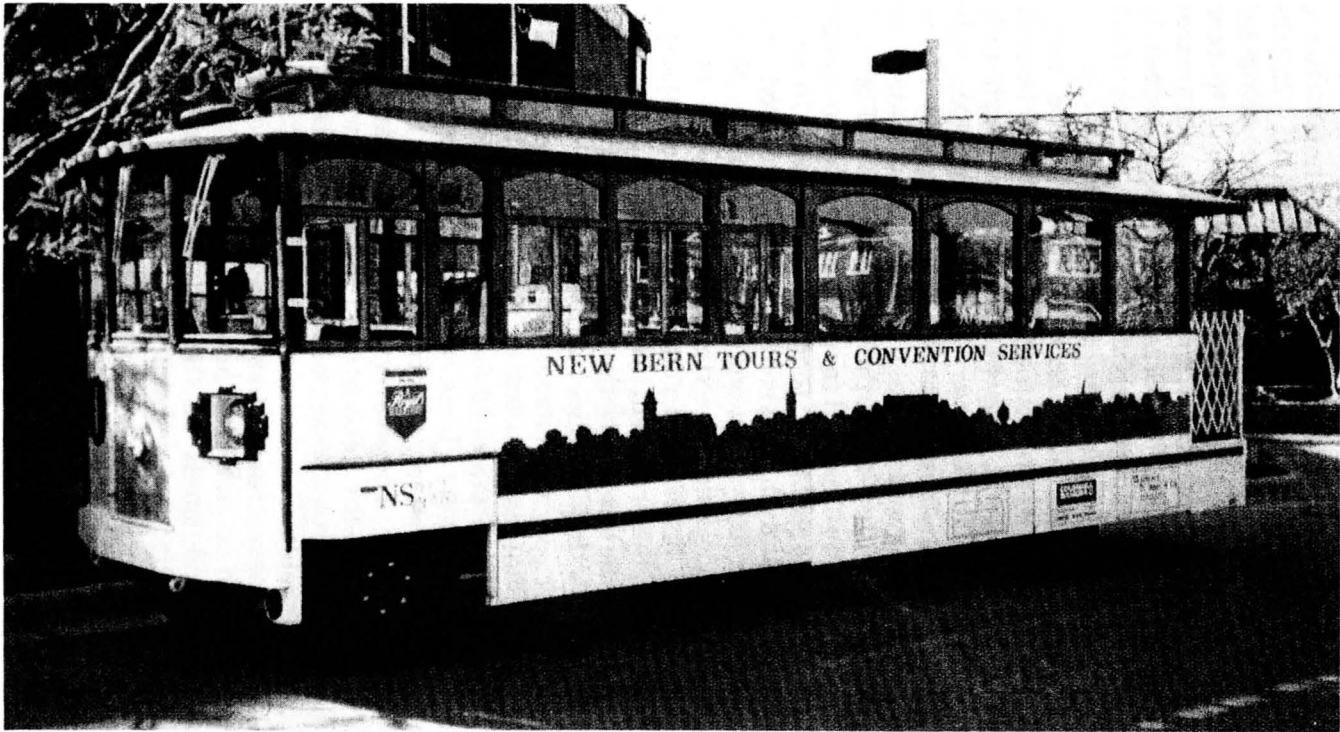
Who rides the trolley? Some native New Bernians take the ride, and it is always fun to have them, especially the older ones who have been away for many years. I recall one older black couple: The woman had left New Bern as a little girl with her parents in January 1923 after their house burned in the great fire of 1922. Her most vivid and upsetting memory of that disaster as a five-year-old was the huge number of dead cats she encountered in the ruins.

A very handsome woman now living in California took the trolley ride with her adult son, who

now lives in Georgia. She had spent several months here in the fall of 1940 as the brand new bride of a young marine officer assigned to Camp Lejeune. The big marine base was under construction at that time. Neither said a word until the trolley passed the 300 block of Broad Street. She looked to the south side and exclaimed, "I'm sure it was about here; it's gone!" She was looking for the old Hotel Queen Anne (formerly the James Blades House, torn down in the 1960s). Apparently her son had been conceived in the old hotel, and mother and son were making a pilgrimage of sorts to recapture both his origins and her days as a young bride. As luck would have it, I had a copy of John Green's book, *A NEW BERN ALBUM* (1985), and was able to show her a picture of the old house as it appeared in 1913. Although the house had been enlarged when it served as a hotel, she was able to recognize it instantly as the hotel she had stayed in with her young husband more than 50 years ago.

A good many native Tarheels from other towns in the state take the trolley ride. Many of these riders have an active interest in the history of our state. Indeed, on occasion I have learned about as much about the state's history from these folks as I have given them. After the completion of a tour last year I spent more than an hour with a couple from Charlotte discussing this region's history. Later Mr. Selby Daniels, originally from the Goldsboro area, sent me a large amount of material on this region's history from his extensive private collection. Among the items he provided were two photographs of a small and extremely rare book written by Vincent Colyer, the first Superintendent of the poor during New Bern's Civil War occupation (Colyer, 1864). I honored his request to provide our local library with one copy and later negotiated with him to purchase the original. The book's exquisite woodcuts of New Bern scenes during Colyer's short but stormy stay in New Bern were more than worth the price of the book.

The majority of the trolley riders, however, are



THE TROLLEY AWAITS ANOTHER TOUR THROUGH THE HISTORIC DISTRICT. Photo by New Bern Tours.

from out of state. I always ask the hometown of each passenger prior to beginning the tour. If most are from northern climes, then I include comments on the trees since these folks seem to want to learn how to identify magnolias, crepe myrtles, pecan tree, and Spanish moss (Cedar Grove Cemetery is ideal for the latter). Could somebody on the trolley route plant a fig tree in their front yard?

We folks who make New Bern our home forget the perspective of the out-of-state visitor. In order to reach New Bern, one has to pass through miles and miles of pine forests. As a consequence, many visitors are convinced that they are now in an undiscovered backwater village and that the end of the world must be just down the Neuse River. For most visitors New Bern is not a primary vacation target. Rather, we represent a stopover on the way to somewhere else, and most seem to have acquired their knowledge of New Bern via word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, many elect to extend their stay or return. Repeatedly I hear them remark on how appealing it is to enjoy the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of a small town that reminds them of their own origins.

I always begin tours with an overview of the eastern part of the state by asking the question: Why is most of eastern North Carolina--roughly, that part east of Interstate 95--such an unpopulated backwater? My answer: Look at our coastline; we have no natural deepwater ports like Norfolk, Baltimore, or Charleston. The waterways in this part of the state are ideal for recreational boating and fishing, but any boat with a draft of more than 12 feet or so is in big trouble.

Next I pass around a small piece of "heart pine" and ask them to note the heavy weight, rich red-purple color, and smell of the old board which came from the interior of a longleaf pine which was more than 40 inches in diameter when it was cut over 100 years ago. These pines were the economic mainstay of this area for almost 200 years when they were used to produce tar, turpentine, and lumber (Lore, 1996). Further, the rot and insect resistant quali-

ties of the wood help explain why so many of the houses they are about to see are in such fine condition. On all tour days except Sunday, I predict at the onset that we will see at least two log trucks on the tour. The trucks have yet to fail me, and they exemplify the local economy's continuing dependence on forest products.

Folks seem to particularly enjoy learning about how the past centuries have shaped our current city. For this reason, after a brief discussion of the German and Swiss founding of New Bern, I note that not a single building of these first European settlers survives. There are, however, many human connections. One of the most common names in our local telephone book is "Ipock". It is a rare name everywhere except New Bern. The New Bern Ipocks are assumed to be descendants of the Swiss "Eibach" family who first arrived here in 1710 when New Bern was founded.

Still another favorite example of a human connection to the past is the current Baron de Graffenried who lives in Bern, Switzerland. As a direct descendant of the original Baron de Graffenried who led those early Swiss and German settlers to New Bern, he enjoys regular visits to New Bern and loves to talk about his early ancestor's attempt to colonize our town. As a retired executive of General Motors of Switzerland, his English is perfect. When the Baron and his wife took the trolley tour during its first year of operation, he remarked that his ancestor had essentially abandoned his wife and their 13 children during his stay in the New World. I asked the innocent question: "Did he go back to his wife and kids when he returned to Bern, Switzerland?" The Baron paused for the longest time and then replied, "Well, yes and no. That's a complicated question." From his response, I gather that the old Baroness was not entirely pleased upon the return of her errant husband.

The current Baron also tells the story of a visit to Washington, D. C. An American friend was anxious to introduce him to a Washington lawyer whose

last name was DeGraffenried (American spelling). One of the 13 children of the old Baron had immigrated to this country after his father returned to Switzerland. This son was the founder of a large American branch of the family. Thinking the lawyer would be an American relative, the current Baron was startled at the introduction because his presumed relative turned out to be a large, handsome black man who greeted the Baron with a big smile. After a minute of startled silence on the part of the current Baron, the lawyer's smile broadened to a big grin, and he informed the Baron, "It's not what you think; we're not related. My ancestors were the slaves of your Virginia ancestors and we took the name when we were freed."

As our trolley tour unfolds, the content varies from architectural details such as the fine Palladian windows in the gable ends of the William Hollister House to vignettes on the people who lived or live in the houses. One needs to emphasize the great variety of house styles we have in New Bern and the fact that some of the most valuable and interesting dwellings from an historic perspective are the smaller, more modest houses which still survive. Further, many of our houses are deceptive because they are much older than their current appearance would indicate.

If weather permits, we most always take a short walk into Cedar Grove Cemetery. The recent city restoration efforts in the old cemetery were most welcome. Sadly, one also has to mention the mindless acts of vandalism that have also occurred in the old graveyard. As folks get back on the trolley, we offer complimentary bottles of Pepsi and tell them of the origins of this popular drink. Most everyone accepts a Pepsi, but even here there are exceptions: One family from Atlanta with two young children refused after strict orders from mama who ignored the pleas of her little ones. It turns out that generations of her family had worked for Coca-Cola. In her loyalty to Coke, she considered our hometown drink to be nothing less than rat poison!

The trolley route seldom varies, and this necessary strategy means that many of the most picturesque streets in the Historic District are not seen by trolley riders. I always suggest several streets that should be walked by tourists as well as several churches which can be visited after the tour is completed.

Over the years the spontaneous comments and questions by the trolley riders have influenced my narrative in a variety of ways. For example, they want to know the difference between exterior and interior end chimneys, why so many of the roofs are made of "tin", or was that picket fence really there when the house was built?

Some riders have a rich sense of humor and help enliven the tour. For example, when passing City Hall, I always point out the bears protruding from the elegant old building. One lively ten-year-old asked a perfectly logical question of the bears: "Is the bear's rear end sticking out on the inside of the building?" Before I could answer, a native New Bernian informed the boy: "No, son, there's no room for bear rear ends inside that building. That's City Hall; it's too full of horses' rear ends." His comment went over the child's head, but the adult passengers got the message.

On another tour this summer we were passing Temple Chester B'nai Sholom, and I remarked that they did not have a full-time rabbi, because they commanded high salaries. A woman spoke up, "Tell me about it. We just hired a rabbi in Greensboro and he's making \$140,000 a year." An old fellow from the back of the trolley replied in amazement, "I'm Southern Baptist, and I know at least a dozen preachers who would be glad to change over for that kind of money!"

Some might argue that we should offer the scenic ride in a modern air-conditioned tour bus with soft seats. After all, the trolley provides little protection from our hot and humid weather. We do distribute handheld fans identical to the ones available in churches many years ago, and the riders appre-

ciate them. More importantly, the simple act of boarding the trolley represents an immediate and very concrete step back into another era, one which many of our riders experienced in their youth. For younger riders the trolley is viewed as an exotic contraption, totally different from any form of transportation they have encountered previously. Moreover, no bus has a pull rope attached to a large bell. Kids love the bell, and many times the promise to let them ring the bell at the end of the tour will pacify the itchy five-year-old who would otherwise become restless during the tour.

On occasion we forsake the trolley and do a "step on" tour of the city for one of the immense tour buses which comes our way. These huge vehicles can hold up to 70 people in sumptuous comfort, and thus it is more efficient to give a single tour on their bus rather than two tours on the much smaller-capacity trolley. It's a real challenge for the drivers to negotiate some of the narrower streets on these large buses, and I don't think the experience is quite as vivid as the tour on the trolley.

At times we do have requests from some hardy souls for a walking tour of the town. I enjoy the walking tours, because the views from the sidewalk offer a more intense visual experience than those from the trolley simply because you are much closer to your target. One can appreciate particularly the portico details and the ornamental work on some of our fine old houses from the sidewalk. In recent years the cruise ship Nantucket Princess has made New Bern a regular port of call during its spring Civil War tour of the Coastal Southeast. These sophisticated and well-heeled cruise tourists like the trolley, but many of them opt for a walking tour. During their first visit several years ago, one older man elected to take the walking tour. I was hesitant because he was lugging a large and very heavy video camera which he operated almost constantly during the tour. Turns out that he was a former president of the California Historical Society, and he was 87 years old! He finished the tour in better

shape than I.

Finally, I should note that streetcars similar in exterior appearance to the modern tourist trolley were a part of New Bern's past. A street- or trolley car system began operating in New Bern in 1912 to connect the commercial district of the city with Ghent, the first suburb of the city. The tracks ran along Pollock Street and Spencer Avenue and also looped through the business district on Middle and Craven streets. A portion of the original track is still exposed on Pollock Street in front of the Athens Theater (Saax Bradbury Playhouse). During the recent reconstruction of Middle Street, the intact trolley tracks were found to be still in place. They had been covered by about a foot of asphalt after the streetcar line fell victim to the automobile boom of the 1920s and ceased to operate after 1930. John Green's (1985) book provides a marvelous photo (page 123) of an early streetcar operating on Pollock Street.

The trolley is also chartered frequently for other uses in our town. It serves as a convenient shuttle bus for festivals such as Ghost Walk and the Spring Historic Homes & Gardens Tour and performs the same function for many of the conventions and meetings held in New Bern. It is often rented for use by wedding parties and family reunions as well as for chartered tours by school classes and local organizations. Hence, you are likely to see the colorful old streetcar wandering around town at the oddest hours and locations. For information on the regularly scheduled tours or charter possibilities, one can call New Bern Tours and talk with either Barbara Ballard or Sabrina Bengel.

After three years of operation the trolley has become a major asset in presenting our lovely and graceful old city to visitors. Again, all of us associated with the trolley are grateful to the folks in the Historic District for the loving care they lavish on their old houses. We also appreciate your patience when you get stuck behind the slow-moving contraption. Keep your eye on our driver; he will wave you

by as soon as you can safely pass.

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Special thanks to Gordon Ruckart for his editorial assistance.

THE NEW BERN GARDEN CLUB

Kathleen Harris

In Chapter 16 of his timeless work entitled WALDEN Henry David Thoreau writes, "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads".

In gathering facts for the history of New Bern Garden Club it is evident that those who organized and directed this club through the years shared that sentiment. They have worked diligently and tirelessly to improve the environment and create beauty in the community and lives of the residents of New Bern.

The club evolved through several organizations, the first being the City Improvement Club, organized in 1905 by Mrs. R. N. Duffy, who served as its first president. This group awakened the city to the importance of community beautification and functioned until 1917. Another group was organized in 1926 and became a driving force in the cleanup of Union Point, then the city dump, and the erection of the Women's Clubhouse there.

A third club began in 1932 at a delightful garden party at the home of Mrs. W. H. Street. Mrs. Ben E. Moore was the first chairwoman of this group, which became the Garden Division of New Bern Woman's Club and affiliated with the Garden Clubs of North Carolina Association in 1933. As such it has continued for more than half a century, keeping before it the motto, "To Conserve, To Revere and to Beautify our Community".

In 1948 the law office of Judge William Gaston (1778-1844) was presented to the club by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Jones in memory of their daughter Elizabeth Jones Bass. The club has participated in the restoration and maintenance of the building, and it

has been included in a number of the historic homes tours. Many of the club's meetings and workshops are held there.

The list of the club's projects and community participation is long and impressive, and evidences are probably still gracing the New Bern area. Countless trees have been planted, such as dogwoods in memory of service men and loblolly pines at Lawson Park. Planters in the downtown area were often furnished with plants and also maintained at times.

Ongoing projects have included seasonal decorations for the Enoch Wadsworth and Bishop homes and Operation Santa Claus for the Mental Health Clinic. For a number of years the club conducted an annual Christmas Decoration Contest in the neighborhoods of New Bern.

Programs through the years have been timely and informative. Environmentalism was stressed long before it became a popular theme. Members carry their enthusiasm into many facets of community life and participate in numerous endeavors which benefit the city and cooperate in the activities of many groups, providing flowers and assisting in decorating for countless dinners and banquets. Since the inception of the Spring Historic Homes & Gardens Tour, New Bern Garden Club has provided beautiful arrangements for many homes on the tour.

Service has always been a motivating force of this group. Several Junior Clubs have been sponsored and at the present time a club member, Mrs. Noel Proudfoot, works with children at Oaks Road School, planting gardens, watching them grow, fostering an interest which could be a life-long influence. Also, each year applicants are sought as candidates for the club scholarship, awarded to a high school senior in one of the fields of earth sciences.

In 1955 a club member, Mrs. James Garver, was elected president of the North Carolina Federation of Garden Clubs, and, as part of District 11, the club hosted the state convention, held in New Bern in May of 1996.

In recent years the club has sponsored several



NEW BERN GARDEN CLUB HOME IS ASSOCIATED WITH JUDGE WILLIAM GASTON. Photo by Conway.

Schools for Flower Show Judges with good participation. Several members of the group are accredited judges: Mrs. Frank Farmer is a Judge Emeritus; Mrs. Robert Chiles is a Master Judge; and Mrs. Joseph Gluck and Mrs. Paul French are Accredited Judges. Mrs. William Harsen is a Student Judge, working toward accreditation.

New Bern Garden Club includes members at many levels of involvement and welcomes new members with enthusiasm. Mrs. Stephen Hicks serves as president for the 1996-1998 term, and thus far it has been an active year. If you have an interest in becoming part of this parade reaching back into history and stretching into the future, please consider joining New Bern Garden Club.

HOMES ON TOUR, 1946-1997

Mary Osborne Conover

When the first springtime tour of historic homes was held here in 1946, the New Bern Historical Society was entering its 24th year, and the Preservation Foundation was not so much as a twinkling in anyone's eye.

The Society had its first meeting on April 19, 1923, and the Foundation was chartered in 1972. Now the organizations co-sponsor annually the event which attracts admirers of historic homes and magnificent gardens from throughout the state and nation, many coming also from Canada and some even from overseas.

While the tour has changed, it has not changed drastically. Much about it remains the same as when the first was sponsored by the New Bern Garden Club, and its starting point was the Woman's Club House at Union Point where, according to the program, Baron de Graffenried built the "Government House" in 1710. Held intermittently for 30 years, it became biennial in 1976 as a highlight of that year's New Bern/Craven County Bicentennial Celebration and has been held annually since 1984.

It has been suggested that the tour again be biennial, but arguments for its remaining annual appear stronger than those against.

Mary Bullock, who chaired the Bicentennial Tour and continues to serve on the steering committee, is one who favors its being held every year. "You establish a momentum, a modus operandi, and you get people working together who know what they're doing," she says, "so it isn't necessary to assemble a new team and start from scratch every time."

Isn't it difficult to book a dozen homes each

year? To persuade the owners of historic properties to let a couple of thousand people come to call on a Friday and Saturday in early April?

The answer is yes and no.

There are those who say they'll never do it again, Mary admits. "But normally," she adds, "if we ask them, they do." Those who say "I'll never do it again" are usually first-timers, she explains, who have purchased a perhaps dilapidated property, invested time and money in its restoration or renovation, and agree to having their home on tour as a target date for its redecoration.

Having experienced a frenzy of painting, papering, and planting, it is not surprising that their pre-tour reaction is negative, she continues. Nor is it surprising to Mary Bullock that homeowners change their minds when they realize how much visitors appreciate their efforts to keep New Bern from losing another irreplaceable piece of the past.

The problem is not so much booking enough homes, she says, as it is maintaining the quality and variety of those chosen, and of not opening the same homes to the public year after year. Actually there are homes people want to see more than once, because they are so historic or so beautifully decorated, or both, and because they have different owners the second or third time around, so the decor is quite different.

Yes, people do tour for decorative ideas, and those ideas abound, varying in style with the period of the house, and usually reflecting its date and origin as much as the likes and tastes of its owners.

Each year the committee endeavors to span not only New Bern's three centuries of architecture, but also to group homes by neighborhood so visitors can easily proceed from one to another without a long walk or a long ride.

In the past three years it has been different. Instead of featuring only homes in the downtown Historic District, four in the Riverside Historic District were on the 1995 itinerary, four others this year, and three last year were in the Ghent Historic District.

How does it all work? It works by having a steering committee of past chairpersons to maintain continuity, a committee of well over a dozen who help year after year or pick up where others leave off, and literally hundreds of volunteers who serve as house chairs and hosts/hostesses, distribute posters and brochures, arrange flowers, handle ticket sales, and stock the Colonial Bakeshop & Pantry in the Attmore-Oliver House with pastries and preserves which contribute to overall income.

The Historical Society and the Preservation Foundation benefit equally from the event which helps the Society to document the city's social and cultural heritage and the Foundation to preserve its historic architecture through a revolving fund.

In its 25 years the Foundation has helped to rescue more than 50 properties from demolition or decay--a mission quite different from that of the Society, which has a major project maintaining the Attmore-Oliver House as a museum that itself attracts tourists throughout the year.

An important Homes Tour magnet is, of course, Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens, though not so much the sites as the gardens. Open free to the public Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for Gardeners' Weekend, they display a kaleidoscope of hyacinths and anemones among thousands upon thousands of tulips.

Neither the reconstructed Palace nor its gardens was open to the public in 1946, but they did not exist. In the brochure for the 1954 tour, still under sponsorship of the New Bern Garden Club, there appears this description as item #30:

Tryon Palace. 233 George St. Now being restored. Erected 1767-70 by Royal Governor William Tryon. It combined the governor's residence with capital offices and General Assembly Hall. The first provincial convention of N. C., the first anywhere in America to be called in defiance of British orders, met here. President Washington and other officials were

entertained at a banquet here.

That same year's brochure listed as attraction #5:

Tryon Palace Cannon. East Front River Shore. This cannon was removed from Tryon Palace in 1775.

The cannon also was a highlight of the 1946 Homes Tour, when "restoration of the Palace is assured" and attention was called to another cannon as well.

In the corner of the yard at Christ Episcopal Church, advised that year's brochure,

may be seen the Lady Blessington Cannon, captured from the British ship-of-war "Lady Blessington" by one of John Wright Stanly's privateers during the Revolutionary War.

All day Saturday and Sunday afternoon that year, too, "by appointment with Mr. Williams, the pastor," one could see at Christ Episcopal Church the silver Communion Service presented by King George II of England in 1752.

The dates of the first Homes Tour held in New Bern, Cradle of North Carolina, were May 11-12, and its hours were 10 to 12 and 2 to 6 o'clock Saturday, and "in the afternoon from 2 to 6 o'clock" Sunday.

Though no suggestion was made as to where to have Saturday lunch, "all guests holding tickets" were invited to enjoy fruit punch at 5 o'clock Saturday and Sunday in the garden of Mr. and Mrs. B. A. Jones, 413 Craven Street. On Saturday, in front of Christ Church, Aunt Anna Jones sold candies and cookies "as was done long ago by Aunt Hattie," and on Sunday at 4 o'clock there was to be a band concert "on rivershore, East Front Street near the Tryon Palace Cannon" where "ladies in Colonial Costumes will promenade."

Of the half-dozen private homes on the 1946 tour, three have been shown a number of times since, thanks to the gracious owners of such hand-

TOUR OF
OLD HOMES
AND GARDENS
NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA



Wednesday, April 19, 1967
and
Thursday, April 20, 1967
11 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Sponsored by
THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Admission Tickets \$3.00

Cover of 1967 homes tour brochure shows Wednesday-Thursday schedule and \$3.00 price. Photo by Conway.

some and historically significant residences as the Jones-Jarvis-Hand House on East Front Street, the Charles Slover House on Johnson at East Front, and the Jerkins-Duffy House on Johnson at Craven. While the houses have been renamed, some more than once, to reflect a change of ownership or a shift in the manner of identifying historic properties, it is interesting to read how each was initially profiled.

The Jones-Jarvis-Hand House, built in 1810, General Foster's Headquarters in 1862, and in 1946 an antique shop, was extolled for its "exquisite hand-carved woodwork". Said to be "furnished throughout with antiques," the early nineteenth century Jerkins-Duffy House was described as "a fine frame house with gable windows that were to become a feature of the architecture of the town". Ignoring completely the admirable architecture of the Slover-Guion House, the editor of the first tour brochure went straight to the point that it was "'used by General Burnside as his Headquarters while in command of Federal Troops after the capture of New Bern on March 14, 1862".

John Wright Stanly and his house got pretty much equal billing in a paragraph reading:

The John Wright Stanly House. New Street. Built prior to 1779. Occupied by George Washington during his visit to New Bern in 1791. Built by the patriot, John Wright Stanly, who lost fourteen privateers during the Revolution. He loaned General Nathaniel Greene forty thousand pounds for the "cause" but was never paid back. This house is said by Thomas T. Waterman, the architect, to contain the finest Colonial stairs in North Carolina. Now the Public Library.

Two points of note: That in 1946 the Stanly House was the Public Library and that it was located on New Street.

Threatened with demolition, the house was pur-

chased by the Tryon Palace Commission in 1966, moved to its present site on George Street, and in 1972 became a year-round attraction as a component of the Tryon Palace Complex, now known as Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens.

Parenthetically, the structure which was the public library from 1912 to 1935 has been a tour site twice in more recent years. Constructed in the late 1840s on Middle Street at the corner of Broad, it was the reading room of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, from 1935 until progress threatened it in 1984. Purchased then by the Preservation Foundation and moved to 517 Johnson Street, it was put on tour with a "for sale" sign as a work in progress, and in 1990 was again on tour, completely restored by the couple who acquired it from the Foundation.

Another highlight of the 1946 tour, featured repeatedly since, is not a house but a tree, described then as

The famous **Cypress Tree** in the rear of Mrs. S. W. Smallwood's grounds, one of the twenty most famous trees in America. Under its shade have stood many famous men, as General Nathaniel Green, 1780; President George Washington, 1791; and President James Monroe, 1819.

When the same garden was a Homes Tour attraction as recently as last year, its plantings took precedence over its famed centerpiece, which was described in the 1996 brochure as "the 700 year old Bald Cypress tree where a peace treaty with the Neusiak Indians was signed in 1711".

Times change, taste changes, and a lot depends upon who writes the copy for each year's brochure. The verbiage has become less formal, as has the tour itself. For years ticketed solely for its historic credentials, for example, the Attmore-Oliver House has been the tour's hospitality center since 1992. On its porch visitors can sip lemonade courtesy of Maola Milk & Ice Cream Company. Indoors they can buy homemade pastries and preserves and tour the Greek

Revival mansion with costumed docents who are members of junior history clubs at Bangert and Trent Park elementary schools.

Built in 1790, renovated and enlarged in 1834, and acquired by the Historical Society in 1953, the Attmore-Oliver House is one of the earlier properties included in what is now a typical year's tour. The oldest is likely to date from 1750-1760, and most were built from the 1840s to the 1890s. The most recent, from the 1920s, reflect the city's expansion and also the recognition of Riverside and Ghent, New Bern's first outlying neighborhood and its first suburb, as historic districts.

Riverside, laid out for grand homes when it was carved from farmlands north of the city's core in 1894, achieved listing on the National Register of Historic Places in the spring of 1988. Ghent, connected with the downtown area by streetcar when it was developed by a family named Spencer in 1913, was listed in the summer of 1988.

Like early homes in Riverside which are predominantly Victorian and American four-squares, Craftsman-style bungalows there and in Ghent add variety to the admirable examples of Georgian, Federal, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, Renaissance Revival, Italianate, and Coastal Cottage architecture Homes Tours include.

Each year's tour, of course, has had its unique attractions, not necessarily architectural. In 1954, item #27 was "**Federal Prison.** Eden at Pollock Sts. One of xx local Federal prisons. Emeline Pigott was imprisoned in this Jones-Lipman home." A spy for the Confederacy, Emeline was jailed by Union forces when it was discovered she concealed and carried messages in her hoopskirt.

More frequent among the famous identified with homes on tour were the American presidents who visited from time to time. Quoting again from the 1954 brochure, item #6 is

Emory-Bishop-Brewer House. East Front at New St. Home of Mrs. D. W. Brewer. President

James Monroe and Vice President John C. Calhoun were entertained here in 1819. It is said to have been the home of James Coor, a talented architect and prominent statesman.

Not a few references are made to Union occupancy of historic homes, including two in the brochure quoted above. One calls attention to the "Captain's Walk" on a home built in 1828 at the southeast corner of Johnson and Craven streets, mentioning use of the residence as a hospital in the War Between the States by the 9th N. J. Infantrymen and as a barracks for Co. B, 45th Massachusetts Regiment. The other recalls that the Jerkins-Duffy House at Johnson and Craven was used by the Union Staff Officers during the War Between the States.

Skimming the brochures still available in Historical Society archives, it is interesting to note both similarities and differences through the years.

Ticket prices have risen from \$2 in 1946 to \$3 in 1967, \$4 in 1969, \$8 in 1976, \$10 in 1984, \$12 in 1990, and \$12.50 in 1995. Advance and tour-day prices differed for the first time in 1978.

Always a two-day (normally Friday-Saturday) event, the tour was held on a Saturday-Sunday in mid-May in 1946, the first Thursday-Friday in April 1954, and a mid-April Wednesday-Thursday in 1967. While the hours most often have been 10 to 5, the 1954 tour (like the first) had morning and afternoon hours with a break for lunch.

It appears that houses built as a workingman's rentals were first on the itinerary in the early 1980s and that no downtown commercial property was included until 1994. Today such houses as those on Metcalf Street constructed 1903-1905 as investments for Oscar Kafer, proprietor of a Middle Street bakery, are as much a part of the tour as those built in the early nineteenth century on East Front Street by prosperous merchants.

The commercial property shown in 1994 is a loft above the F. S. Duffy Drug Store at the corner of Middle Street and Tryon Palace Drive converted to

living quarters by Peter Driscoll, owner of Captain Ratty's on the ground floor.

Two years later a Broad Street apartment above the Miller Store, ca. 1845, was on the tour, which that year featured a residence with a quite different claim to fame: Ordered by mail from a Sears Roebuck and Company catalog, the Charles F. Bartling House was erected in the Ghent neighborhood in 1913.

As recently as 1971 tea was served each afternoon from 4 to 5 o'clock at the Bryan-Moore House "as a compliment to our visitors", and luncheon was served each day at the Attmore-Oliver House. Now luncheon is available at two of the several churches in tour neighborhoods, Centenary United Methodist and First Presbyterian, and at others are such attractions as quilting demonstrations, gospel music, and displays of antique hand tools. There has been an organ concert at First Presbyterian every year since the Fisk Organ was installed in 1986.

Each year's tour represents a monumental amount of work by committee members, and equivalent hours of entertainment and education for those who walk the walk and hear the talk in homes, gardens, and public places.

In 1976 Mary Bullock was warned not to expect more than 200 tourists, and there were far more. Now upward of 2000 tour tickets are sold each year, and multiplying the number of homes by the number of hours they are open, that's a lot of company for any one house to hold!

Homes Tour committees are always open to suggestion, and both the Historical Society and the Preservation Foundation welcome calls from volunteers as enamored of New Bern and its heritage as they are willing to pitch in and help to stage yet another successful event.

Having dealt with rain and whipping winds as often as this year's perfect weather, Mary Bullock admits you never know what to expect, and she has seen it all, from replacing wilted flowers to hauling in furniture to fill empty spaces.

It was probably before horticulturists at Tryon Palace began to base tour dates on planting schedules that she, as chairperson, experienced the closest of all calls. Agonizing over a choice of weekends, she was warned that the FARMER'S ALMANAC predicted severe thunderstorms on the one she preferred. Opting, then, for the other, she made the right choice. The sun shone on the Homes Tour, and on the other weekend it would have drowned!

BOOK REVIEW

ON A STREET CALLED EASY, IN A COTTAGE CALLED JOYE: A RESTORATION COMEDY, by Gregory W. Smith and Steven Naifeh. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1996. 321 pp. \$23.95.)

Two accomplished writers living in a Manhattan apartment develop an obsession to buy, restore, and live in the largest, grandest house they can afford. After devouring real estate ads in the NEW YORK TIMES and SOTHEBY'S as well as numerous on-site visits throughout the country, they fall in love with a gargantuan old wreck (20,000 sq. ft., 20 bedrooms, 16 bathrooms, 26 fireplaces) in Aiken, South Carolina. Their dream house had been built in 1897 for J. C. Whitney, one of the richest men in America. Old "JC" was a robber baron of the first rank, and he became one of the many "Winter Colony" people who transformed the sleepy town of Aiken into a luxurious playground for the rich Northeastern "horsey set" during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The first problem: The asking price for the abandoned mansion was \$1,750,000, way beyond the financial resources of two guys who could barely qualify for a car loan. Infinite patience and a father with formidable negotiating skills enabled the two men to acquire the house for a small fraction of the initial price.

The restoration--more accurately, the resurrection--of the house occupies the bulk of the book. Apparently, the restoration costs of more than \$600,000 were paid for with the royalties from two True Crime books as well as a respected biography of the abstract painter Jackson Pollock. Mind you, the book I am reviewing is decidedly not a how-to-do-it manual. There are no dry and elaborate dia-

grams, materials lists, or even pictures in the book to describe in any detail what went on in the restoration. Rather, the book focuses on the wonderful, offbeat characters who live in Aiken and make their living in the building trades. There is, for example, the benign chimney sweep who also removes truckloads of accumulated junk from the house that had not been lived in for more than a decade. "Lucky" is a world-class pack rat with massive collections of phonograph records, old magazines, and postcards. Or take one of the several men attempting to install a security system. One looks just like "Charles Manson, only less wholesome". Another security system installer runs off with the down payment.

This book could have been just another tiresome story by two overeducated (Harvard Law School, how overeducated can you get?) and provincial Yankees on life out in the woods amongst us Southern primitives. After all, in New Bern our tradesmen are always efficient, sober, honest, and on the job when they are supposed to be. How could Aiken's carpenters, roofers, plasterers, plumbers, and electricians be such a strange and quirky lot? But then maybe there are similarities: Eight months ago, a local electric company made a "temporary repair" to a buried line in my yard and announced they would be back, "next week to do a permanent job". They called one month ago and asked "do you still need us to come out?" Alas, they missed that appointment as well.

Boiled down to essentials, the book is about social class. The authors, however, are most positive in their description of life in Aiken. They also do an excellent job in describing the town's roots as well as the lives of many of the wealthy "Winter Colony" people who built the town's grand houses. My bet is that you will enjoy the book, and you will come away from a reading convinced that the authors must have spent time in New Bern. Although the book is mostly pure fluff and fun, it offers a surprisingly insightful view of small-town life in the South. At the same time, it provides an unusual perspective on aspects of Southern history which are

seldom covered in standard texts.

The pervasive influence of social class that is so apparent in Smith's and Naifeh's book represents a topic that has been almost totally neglected in recent years. The interested reader might enjoy John Dollard's old book *CASTE AND CLASS IN A SOUTHERN TOWN*. Dollard, a Yale psychologist, did this research in the 1930's, yet many of his findings and conclusions are still relevant. Dollard's book is widely available in paperback; my 1957 edition cost a quarter in a used bookstore. Closer to home, Alan Watson's *SOCIETY IN COLONIAL NORTH CAROLINA* should be required reading for anyone interested in class differences and their influence on social history. Many of Watson's examples are drawn from early New Bern; a new paperback edition of his book was published in 1996.

On a recent trip to Birmingham to see our daughter and her family, my wife and I took a short detour off Interstate 20 and spent the night and following morning in Aiken. Despite the bitter cold of that January morning, the town's appeal is obvious. We shall return, particularly since a local motel charges less than \$25.00 per night. Don't, however, eat the local barbecue; it tastes like something a mule chewed up and spit out. But then, provincialism is relative, isn't it?

Richard Lore