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New Bern  
Historical Society

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**Special Seventy-fifth Anniversary Issue**

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# JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY: THE FIRST SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS

Richard Lore

### *Introduction*

As we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of The New Bern Historical Society, it is appropriate to take a look back at our origins, accomplishments, and yes, even some of our failures. After all, the purpose of the Society is to both honor those who preceded us and to learn from their experiences. Certainly our now-thriving and vibrant organization is the result of the hard work and talent of thousands of capable men and women who have lived in New Bern over the last 75 years. Surely we can learn from their contributions.

The following account of the Society's history is taken largely from the minutes of the board meetings of the Society as well as newsletters published by the Society. These two major sources of information were supplemented by articles from local newspapers and a few interviews with long-term members of the Society.

The focus is on major events or turning points in the long life of our organization. My judgment on these matters is highly subjective, and may indeed even be faulty from the perspective of others. Moreover, my version of the Society's history is not written for the professional historian. There are, for example, no lists of officers of the Society, nor do I present exhaustive data on membership or financial matters. Rather, my intent is simply to tell the Society's story for the current membership.

Initially I dreaded the thought of plowing through hundreds of pages of material, some written in handwrit-

ing even worse than my own. It was a pleasant surprise to learn that the old minutes contain a wealth of information. Although they are of little consequence to the major theme of this article, many of these little nuggets brought a smile or elicited a chain of memories from my own past.

Take, for example, the brief announcement from the *Society Newsletter* of August 1961: It states simply that Inglis Fletcher visited the Attmore-Oliver House. No other information was given nor was any needed at that time, because Mrs. Fletcher was a well-known and accomplished writer of historical novels with settings in eastern North Carolina. She has been largely forgotten now, but her novels are still worth reading.

Mrs. Fletcher's name brought a smile because my mother was an avid reader of her books. When I was about 10 years old, my mother hit upon the ideal punishment, one that would also be educational as well. For a variety of transgressions, I was to read several pages from one of Mrs. Fletcher's novels and then summarize and interpret the material. This cruel and unusual punishment came to an abrupt end when one of the passages I was forced to read described the book's heroine and her eager anticipation of going to bed with her husband that night. "Hey Ma, what's so exciting about going to bed?" So ended this particular punishment, and I went back to my preferred literature at that time, Captain Marvel comics.

On another occasion, the board was indignant about the "awful trash cans" the city had placed in downtown New Bern (Minutes, January 1972). The trash containers were plastered with advertisements for local businesses, and the board's negative opinion was based upon the fact that they were too tacky and garish for a town trying to preserve a more genteel image. The trash cans did not last long.

*The Roaring Twenties: Those Were the Days*

A delightful way to capture the essence of an era in a

APRIL 20, 1923

LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORGANIZED

Nineteen interested persons met at the home of Mrs. R. N. Duffy Thursday evening for the purpose of organizing a local branch of the State Historical Society. Mrs. Duffy acted as temporary chairman and the following officers were elected:

President, R. A. Nunn; first and second vice-presidents, Mrs. R. N. Duffy and Mrs. John Dutton, respectively; recording secretary, Miss Mary Ward; corresponding secretary, Mrs. K. M. Spencer; treasurer, Mrs. E. S. Duffy.

Mr. Nunn spoke for a few moments on the aims of the organization, the wealth of historic material in New Bern, the lack of interest which the citizens as a whole have taken in its preservation and the opportunity which the present generation has of perfecting really worth while things which must otherwise be lost.

Mrs. R. N. Duffy, Mrs. Tom Hyman and Mrs. Raymond Pollock were appointed a committee to report after investigation of the relation to the state organization, to frame a constitution and to ascertain the feelings of the members as a frequency of meeting.

Mr. Nunn and Mrs. C. R. Hollister were requested to prepare papers to be read at the May meeting on subjects of historic interest to be selected by themselves.

Mrs. William Dater, of Boston, a member of the state society, was present and made some valuable suggestions which we are hoping to carry out as soon as the organization is perfected. She mentioned Miss Weller's "Square Deal" or "American Judge" as a book well worth reading and apt to bring about a much better understanding of conditions existing between England and America in the past.

Mr. A. D. Ward gave some interesting information as to the stamp act published for the first time in England during the last six or seven years. This information concerned North Carolina particularly.

Those present were Mr and Mrs. Charles Hollister, Mrs. K. E. Spencer, Mrs. Lalyce Buford, Mrs. E. H. Mead, Mrs. Raymond Pollock, Mrs. William Potter, Mrs. R. B. Williams, Mrs. H. C. Pratt, Miss Sadie Hollister, Mrs. R. E. Knowles, Miss Anna Hant, Mr. A. D. Ward, Mrs. R. N. Duffy, Mrs. Tom Hyman, Mrs. John Dutton, Mrs. E. K. Bishop, Mrs. R. A. Nunn, Miss Mary Ward.

Others who could not be present but who asked to be enrolled were: Mrs. Charles Ivms, Mrs. Royal Turner, Mrs. J. P. C. Davis, Mr. D. S. Jones, Mrs. Tom Roberts, Mrs. J. T. Hollister, Mrs. R. B. Nison, Mrs. R. E. Whitehurst, Mrs. T. A. Usell, Mrs. Sam Dill, Mrs. H. B. Wadsworth, Mrs. F. S. Duffy, Mrs. Moulton, Mr. Ernest Gilkin.

Those interested may secure all necessary information from Mr. Nunn, Mrs. Duffy or Miss Ward.

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Coplon Company

Sun Journal article of April 20, 1923, announcing the start of a "Local Historical Society".

particular locale involves reading the local newspapers from that period. Fortunately the New Bern Public Library has a fairly complete collection of local newspapers which are ideal for this purpose. One can easily see the exuberance and optimism of the town during the decade of the 1920s from a quick reading of only a few issues of that era's *Sun Journal*. We had won the "War to End All Wars", and the economy of New Bern was flourishing. To be sure, Caleb Bradham had recently gone bankrupt, but a new bottler of "Orange Crush" had just opened on Pollock Street and was celebrating with an open house featuring free drinks to all visitors.

In the issue telling of the birth of the Historical Society, big headlines announced the start of what would prove to be an unduly optimistic oil drilling venture in the "Great Lakes" section, 30 miles to the Southwest of New Bern. This same issue reflects the twenties as the decade of the automobile. The Blades Motor Company was offering a rakish new Dodge sedan for sale, and one short article noted that two New Bern men, Owen Dunn and J. C. Bragg, had made a trip to Wilson and back in a Ford Coupe—in one day! Apparently some New Bernians were ignoring the new pesky state requirement that they register their cars and buy license tags. The paper contained a brief warning that state inspectors from Raleigh had been seen about town, and they were looking for unlicensed vehicles. One wishes that the *Sun Journal* would publish similar warnings today about government people from Raleigh.

**First Meeting.** Given the optimism and energy of the twenties, the first organizational meeting was successful. A modest notice in the Personals section of Thursday's afternoon edition of the *Sun Journal*, April 19, 1923, read as follows:

Historic Society

Persons interested in the organization of a Historical Society in New Bern are asked to be present at a

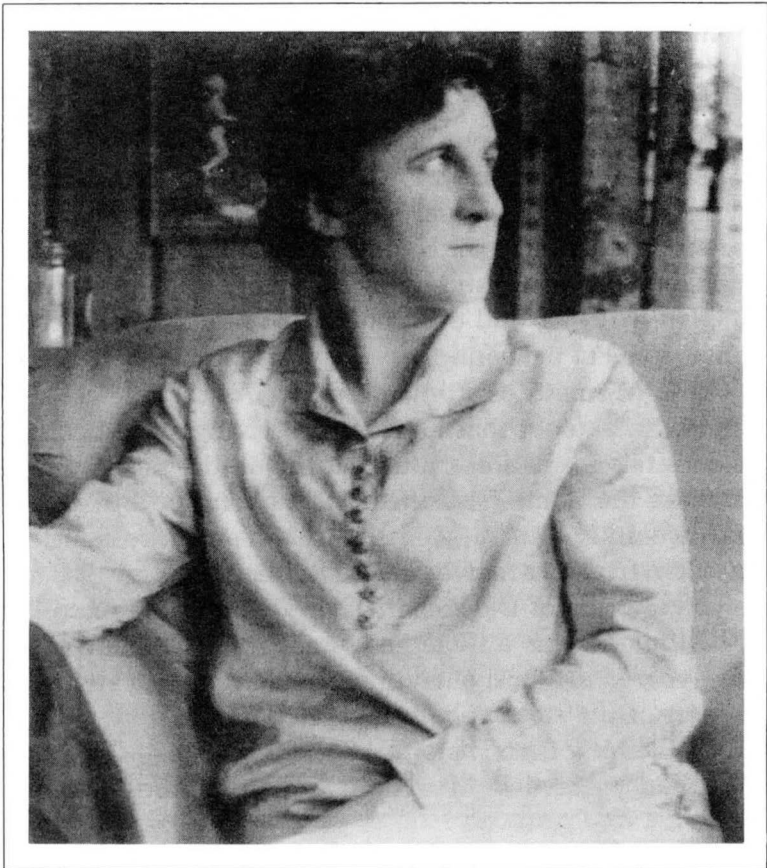
meeting to be held at the home of Mrs. Richard Duffy, on Johnson Street, tonight at 8:30 O'Clock.

No doubt the organizers had already notified about everyone in town of the meeting prior to this announcement. In any event this charter meeting attracted 19 of the most prominent citizens of New Bern. Fourteen other citizens who were not present asked to be enrolled. Mr. Romulus A. Nunn, a local lawyer and judge, was elected as the Society's first president. Judge Nunn had an active, lifelong interest in history, and he was to make many contributions to the Society throughout his long life.

On the following day, Friday, April 20, the *Sun Journal* ran an article on the initial meeting. The entire article is reproduced on page 5. To my knowledge none of the original members are still living but many of their descendants are with us, and even newcomers to town will recognize some of the names.

**Mrs. Minnette Chapman Duffy.** As capable as Mr. Nunn was, I doubt that he was the driving force behind the Society's formation. Note that this initial meeting occurred in the home (still there at 301 Johnson Street) of Mrs. Richard N. Duffy. Minnette Chapman Duffy came to New Bern from her native Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1908 as the young bride of Dr. Richard Duffy. Until her death in 1951 Minnette was an energetic and gifted woman who was involved in a host of civic and philanthropic causes in this part of the state. She was elected as the third president of the New Bern Historical Society in 1926. Mrs. John Dunn had succeeded Mr. Nunn as second president in 1925.

Mrs. Duffy exemplifies the many newcomers and non-natives of the town who arrived here, recognized the unique heritage of the area, and actively worked to preserve this region's history. She was one of those few people in town during this early period who entertained the then ridiculous notion that we might one day actually rebuild Tryon Palace.



MRS. MINNETTE CHAPMAN DUFFY (1882-1951)





**PRESIDENT STALLINGS SEEMS PLEASSED** – R. L. Stallings, Jr., president of the New Bern Historical Society is congratulating Mrs. Luby G. Hardison, chairman of the Christmas party held Sunday at the restored Attmore-Oliver House, home of the society, for her fine work. Miss Gertrude Carraway, one of New Bern's outstanding citizens interested in historic preservation, hears President Stallings' congratulatory remarks.

MISS GERTRUDE CARRAWAY (1896-1993)

Jim Gunn, who arrived in New Bern in the mid-1980s, was active in Society affairs until his untimely death in 1996. A native Canadian, Jim never met Mrs. Duffy but, as our Society's Historian, he was well aware of her accomplishments. Jim was working on a biography of this unusual woman at the time of his death. Fortunately he did provide us with a short sketch of her life in New Bern (Gunn, 1990).

**Miss Gertrude Carraway and Miss Rose Carraway.** Jim also wrote a short sketch on another remarkable woman, Miss Gertrude Carraway (Gunn, 1993). Miss Carraway joined the Society in 1925 and remained a member until her death at age 97 in 1993. She attended meetings of the Society as late as 1992. Throughout her long and distinguished career as a journalist and author, Miss Carraway also made enormous contributions to the Society, the city, and the entire region. Along with Mrs. Duffy, she helped lead the fight to restore Tryon Palace.

Personally, I own a debt of gratitude to Gertrude's sister, Miss Rose Carraway. Rose served as the secretary of the Society for many years during the early period. The minutes she kept of the Society's meetings are models of clarity. Apparently Rose shared her sister's writing ability.

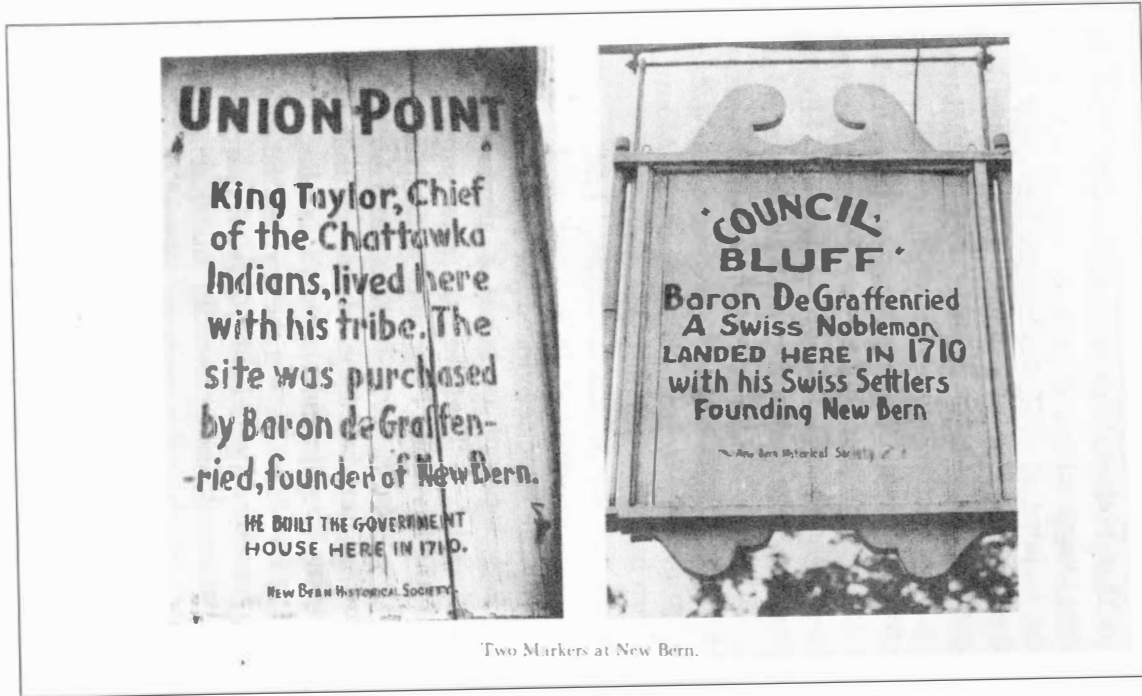
**Early Meetings.** The Society met frequently after this first organizational meeting. Most meetings were held in the homes of members and sometimes involved presentations by an academic historian, a local historian, or a visit by a state employee active in archival work or historic preservation. More often than not, however, it was the local members who prepared papers for presentation at these meetings. The focus was almost exclusively on the Colonial period, and members became well versed in the activities of such men as De Graffenried and Lawson as well as those associated with the Revolution and New Bern's role in this war. Informal question and answer sessions followed the presentations, and the evening always concluded with the serving of "light refreshments".

**Historic Signs.** From the beginning, the Society's efforts focused on much more than just the exchange of information among members. Throughout the first seven years of existence, this small group promoted the region's history so that both natives and visitors to New Bern would come to appreciate our past.

By the summer of 1927 the Society had paid for the construction and erection of a number of historical markers. These signs, made of cypress with a white background and black lettering, celebrated noteworthy events and structures in town. The well-known cast aluminum signs we now see on just about every corner of town are the result of the North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. The state program was not started until 1936.

According to a brief article in the Society's *Newsletter* of March-April 1986, Mr. Josh Horne of Rocky Mount visited New Bern in the early 1930s. He was impressed with the numbered markers which the Society had erected in New Bern, and, apparently at the suggestion of Miss Gertrude Carraway, he later convinced the Board of Conservation and Development to begin a similar program throughout the state. The program was subsequently transferred to the Division of Archives and History. Thus our Society's very early sign program gave birth to the state program and to those historical markers that all of us enjoy today while traveling across North Carolina.

**Preserving History.** During these years the members of the Society acquired and held for safekeeping a large number of books and other written materials on New Bern's history. Much of this material formed the nucleus of what is now our public library's Kellenberger Room collection on New Bern. For example, at the same meeting of the Society in 1926 when Mrs. Minnette Duffy was elected president, the Society donated a multi volume set of books entitled *The History of the De Graffenried Family* to the library.



DURING THE 1920s THE SOCIETY PLACED HISTORIC SIGNS LIKE THESE IN NEW BERN.

**Historical Jubilee of 1927.** The Society organized and conducted one of its first fund-raisers during this period. Soliciting the help of many other civic organizations in town, a "Historical Jubilee" was held in the Elks Club rooms (Fifth floor of the Blades Building, Northwest corner of Pollock and Middle streets). Numerous displays of New Bern's history together with skits of historical events helped make this event a resounding success, and the Society realized a "substantial sum" from the jubilee. Additional details of this jubilee were reported by Jim Gunn in the Society's *Newsletter* of November-December 1986.

**Fort Totten.** Sadly I must report on one notable failure at historic preservation that occurred in New Bern in the 1920s, and our Society must shoulder at least some of the blame for this failure. It seems that the Fort Totten & Atlantic Coast Realty Company was developing a swank new residential area just west of the city during this time. In a much advertised contest to name the new development, it received the name "De Graffenried Park". Mrs. Minnette Duffy was one of the contest winners who selected this appropriate name.

Lots in the new development sold briskly during this affluent period, but the developers had a problem. The remains of Fort Totten were on their land. At that time huge mounds of dirt still defined the ramparts of the pentagon-shaped fortress. Fort Totten had been hastily erected by free blacks shortly after the capture of New Bern by federal forces in March of 1862. Mounting 26 large-caliber cannon, it was the keystone fort in the multitude of federal fortifications surrounding town. The location between the two main East-West roads was ideal to prevent a land attack, and the long-range guns of the fort could also be employed in river attacks by Confederate forces. Fort Totten was probably the largest federal fort built in North Carolina during the Civil War.

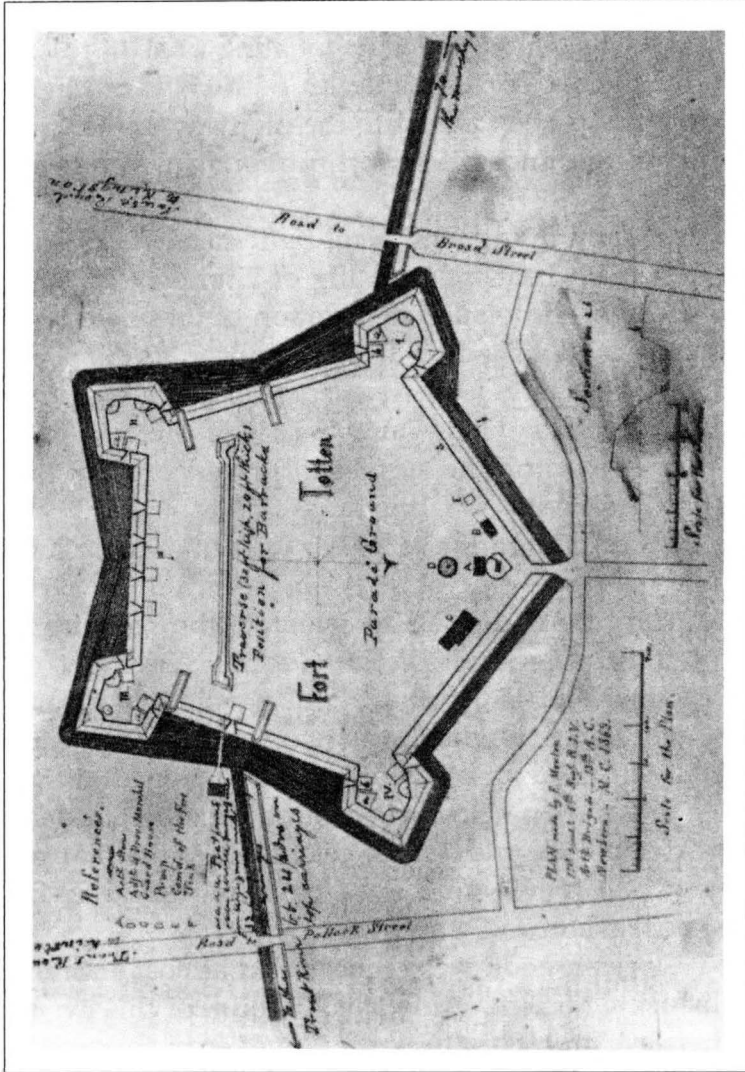
What were the developers to do with the land occupied by the old fort? They came up with an ingenious solution to their dilemma and one they thought would rep-

resent a model of good public relations. We will donate the land now occupied by Fort Totten to any historical association willing to maintain the old structure. At that time the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution apparently wanted nothing to do with the old fort (not their war). Nor did the United Daughters of the Confederacy express an interest in it. Fort Totten, after all, was an enemy fort to them.

In November 1926 the Society formed a committee to examine the offer to take over Fort Totten and preserve the imposing structure. In July 1927 the Society decided to take no action regarding Fort Totten. Subsequently the huge earthen fortification was removed, and a children's playground and ball field were erected on the spot.

From our viewpoint in 1998, if the earth and log ramparts of the fort could have been preserved, even a partial restoration of its armament and fittings would offer a fascinating perspective on that difficult time. Fort Totten would now bring home the desperate plight of this town during the Civil War as no other artifact could. And, of course, the fort would represent a major tourist attraction. As my wife claims, "Men build forts when they are about eight years old, and since they never mature much beyond that age, they love old forts!"

Why did the city, county, state, and our Historical Society allow the old fort to be destroyed? First it was ugly. By the 1920s nothing remained other than the earthen ramparts, and it would not have won any beauty awards when first erected either. A rare photograph of the fort during the Civil War can be seen in John Green's (1985) book. Moreover, in the twenties, no particular attention was being paid to the Civil War. Most of the veterans of that war were gone by that time, and others just wanted to forget the episode. Interest in the Civil War revived sharply only in the 1960s and continues unabated today. Remember, the fledgling Historical Society had a strong colonial orientation, and thus most of their activities centered on earlier times. Finally, given limited resources and



FORT TOTTEN WAS A LARGE CIVIL WAR FORT BUILT BY FEDERAL FORCES.

numbers, many members must have felt that they could not possibly undertake the huge responsibility for restoring and maintaining Fort Totten.

Currently a committee of the Society is investigating the surviving breastworks of Confederate Fort Thompson where the major battle of New Bern during the Civil War was fought. This committee is negotiating to acquire the property for the Society. Located on both sides of Highway 70, roughly perpendicular to the highway at the Craven County fairgrounds, these fortifications are in danger of being destroyed.

Other equally dramatic federal-built earthworks survive west of town near the crossing of Highway 55 over Bachelor's Creek. A detailed description of these western earthworks was published by Tom Thompson in the Society's January-February 1987 *Newsletter*. I hope that the person writing on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society's inception can report on the successful preservation of the remains of these Civil War landmarks.

**The Grand Celebration of 1929.** By far the most successful and largest event of this era occurred in 1929. Plans began in the mid-1920s to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the first session of the General Assembly of North Carolina held in April 1777. Unavoidable delays produced a celebration which was two years late. When it was finally held on June 11, 1929, it was a gala affair indeed. The celebration helped close out the exuberant decade of the twenties. Little did the celebrants at that happy affair know that they would soon be facing 15 years of economic depression and world war.

The 1929 celebration was orchestrated almost entirely by the Historical Society. A detailed account of this event was written by Mrs. Mary Osborne Conover in Volume 1 of the *Journal of the New Bern Historical Society* (Conover, 1988). Briefly, a large parade with many floats representing the area's history was coupled with equally numerous storefront displays. Somehow the Society managed to solicit the cooperation of just about everybody in town. In-



deed, the entire region as well as local, state, and federal officials were involved in this celebration.

Significantly the Society had also secured out-of-town financial support for the event from the Hanes and Reynolds families of Winston-Salem. The Society *Newsletter* of July-August 1986 reports that Mrs. Duffy and Miss Gertrude Carraway went to Winston-Salem and secured a loan of \$5,000 from Mrs. William N. Reynolds, the sister-in-law of R. J. Reynolds to fund the pageant.

After the event Mrs. Duffy sent Mrs. Reynolds a check for \$3500, because only \$1500 of her donation had been needed. Mrs. Reynolds promptly returned the \$3500 check with the stipulation that it be used to support the restoration of Tryon Palace. These funds along with the money earned from the 1929 event were invested and held in trust. More than 20 years later, the entire financial resources of the Society would be donated to the Tryon Palace Building Fund. I suspect that the fund-raising skills and the state contacts that would be needed in the long fight to restore Tryon Palace were honed at this event. Certainly, Mrs. Reynolds and the New Bern Historical Society had made the first cash donation to help restore Tryon Palace.

### *Economic Depression and World War: Time of Trial*

Only three months after the elegant celebration in 1929, the world was plunged into economic depression. New Bern's economy was no exception. Again, one can get some feeling for these hard times by reading the local newspapers of that era. After 1929 no formal meetings of the Historical Society were conducted until the 1940s. A reorganization meeting took place on December 1, 1941. Obviously the timing of this meeting was singularly bad; six days later the country was at war once more. Given the huge increase in military activity in this area coupled with the demand for agricultural and industrial products produced in eastern North Carolina, World War II strained



GOVERNOR AND MRS. O. MAX GARDNER AT LUNCH DURING THE JUNE 1929 CELEBRATION.

the resources of New Bern to the limit. Mrs. Duffy was still president of the Society, but after two meetings of the organization in early 1942 the Society remained inactive until the early 1950s. Certainly informal meetings of Society members took place during this period, but no formal records of these sessions survive.

*Resurrection with a Vengeance: The Go-go Fifties*

**Rebirth.** The written records contained in the minutes of the Society are confusing. According to one unsigned report in the minutes book the Society was reorganized at a meeting held in the Gaston Law Office (Craven Street) on November 12, 1952. Mr. H. B. Smith was elected president at this meeting. In the undated history of the Society prepared by Mary Pickett Ward the Society was reported to have met earlier on October 12, 1941, in the house of Mrs. Clyde D. Foy. At this earlier meeting the minutes state that the money made by the Society from the 1929 pageant, now more than \$5000, was given to the Tryon Palace Commission. These funds were subsequently used for the purchase of the Townsend-Goddard tables now in the Council Chamber of Tryon Palace.

By the fall of 1953 Eisenhower was President, the Korean War was resolved, and times were good. Locally the future reconstruction of the Palace was assured. Most everyone was excited over the prospect that this elegant building would once again grace New Bern and turn the town into a major historical center. Approval and funding of the Palace were not an easy fight, and the battles had been fought largely by tenacious, even stubborn, members of the Society since the mid-twenties. Of course financing the Tryon Palace reconstruction was a major problem. Moreover, many New Bernians, particularly those who owned property on the site of the Palace, were opposed to its reconstruction. The homeowners' lawyer, Mr. Charles L. Abernethy, Jr., labeled the project a "pig in the poke" that would interfere with business and traffic patterns

(Watson, 1987).

**John R. Taylor and the Attmore-Oliver House.** On November 12, 1953, Mr. John R. Taylor was elected President of the Society. According to the minutes of the March 1953 meeting there were 65 members in the Society, and, as of June 15, 1953, the treasurer's report indicated a grand total of \$89.64 in assets. Despite the anemic membership — at least by today's standards — and almost total lack of financial resources when he assumed the presidency of the Society, Mr. Taylor's inspired and vigorous leadership produced an unprecedented period of growth. When John R. Taylor left the presidency after 11 years in office, the Society had acquired and paid for the Attmore-Oliver House. Moreover, the old home had been restored and furnished, and the Society boasted a large membership and financial solvency. Mr. Taylor's organizational skills and enthusiasm were just the right catalyst to mix with the increasing awareness of New Bernians of their town as a historic center. In anticipation of the completion of the Palace, people were willing to work hard to develop other symbols of the town's historic importance, and John R. Taylor certainly knew how to channel the energies of his fellow citizens! (See Mary Baker's article following.)

Mr. Taylor's work for the Society was appreciated. Upon his death on November 30, 1974, the Society *Newsletter* of January 1975 noted that,

Under his administration, the Attmore-Oliver House was bought and restored. He worked tirelessly to raise funds for the upkeep of the house. It was his dream to see the Attmore-Oliver House a showplace of the historic section of New Bern.

The article then lists more than 75 individuals and companies who had contributed to the John R. Taylor Memorial fund. The money was to be used for the "preservation, restoration, and decoration" of the house.

The story of the acquisition of the Attmore-Oliver

House by the Historical Society is fascinating. Miss Mary Oliver, the last private owner of the house, died in 1951, and her grand old home at 509 Broad Street was inherited by her nephews. The house was purchased by the Society in 1954 for the sum of \$30,000, a figure which was assumed to be about \$10,000 less than the real value of the house at that time. Negotiations to purchase the house by the Society certainly began in 1953 or earlier, but surprisingly the first mention of the house in the minutes was on January 1, 1954, when a large dinner held shortly before that date in the Parish Hall of Christ Episcopal Church netted the Society \$100 toward the purchase of the house.

The pace of meetings now quickens. On January 4, 1954, another meeting was held, and the minutes reveal the existence of a seven-member Finance Committee as well as a list of 29 people with the ominous title of "Solicitor". These two groups apparently had been formed sometime earlier in 1953. In any event one gets the impression that these "Solicitors" had been out strong-arming every citizen, business, and professional office in the county. Whatever they were doing, the money came flooding in. Remember that the total in the Society's treasury in June of 1953 was \$89.64. Six months later the treasury had grown to more than \$9000 and in another month to \$15,000! In the spring of 1954 one-half of the purchase price (\$15,000) was paid in cash.

When purchased, the Attmore-Oliver House was showing its age and was totally devoid of furnishings. "Showing its age" is perhaps not accurate. Some said that it was a forlorn old wreck when the Society made its purchase. Immediately those now-infamous "Solicitors" were sent back on the street to capture money for restoration and furnishings. Many businesses were generous with money, and the local building supply and paint stores donated large amounts of costly materials. Gifts of furniture, labor, and decorating skills came from numerous citizens. In short the entire town seems to have taken the challenge to resurrect the old house.



THE ATTMORE-OLLIVER HOUSE PRIOR TO PURCHASE BY THE SOCIETY IN 1951.

They succeeded. At last, at a banquet on March 20, 1963, at the Governor Tryon Hotel, the mortgage on the Attmore-Oliver House was burned. In less than 10 years the Society had raised and spent more than \$65,000 to purchase, restore, and furnish the Attmore-Oliver House. If one were to count the value of donated building supplies and furniture, this figure would easily be in excess of \$90,000. This amount of money was a huge sum for a just-resurrected organization in a small town in the fifties. The fact that John R. Taylor was able to galvanize the town and achieve this goal is a tribute to both his own organizational abilities and the determination of all New Bernians of that era.

### *The Sixties and Seventies: Growth and Expansion*

**Making Room for the Dependencies.** The 1954 acquisition of the Attmore-Oliver House included only the property on Broad Street. The rear property line of this lot was only about 65 feet behind the back of the house, and there was no access to the property from Pollock Street. To gain entrance to the Attmore-Oliver House, one had to enter the Broad Street driveway which was located just west of the house. As Dr. Junius W. Davis, President of the Society, noted in the minutes, "There is a certain amount of stout-heartedness or foolhardiness, or perhaps both, required to maneuver an automobile in and out of the driveway". Difficult access and lack of parking spaces discouraged tourists and even townspeople from visiting the house.

By 1980 the current configuration of the Attmore-Oliver complex was pretty much in place. The purchase of the Pollock Street entrance property provided much easier access and a significant increase in parking space. Next the dependency (now the offices of the Historical Society) was acquired. The dependency was originally located on Change Street, and it was a gift from Mr. David Ward on behalf of his mother Mrs. Leah Jones Ward. The expenses

associated with moving the little house, extensive restoration, and remodeling precipitated another financial struggle for the Society during this period.

Also in 1980 the brick structure called the Haslen Dependency (now the home of the New Bern Preservation Foundation) was relocated to the southwest corner of the lot. The careful rebuilding of this historic structure, assumed to be the oldest brick structure surviving in the county, took several years.

The Haslen Dependency was most likely the detached kitchen for the Haslen Mansion which stood on the northwest corner of Pollock and East Front streets. The mansion was destroyed in the 1843 fire that burned the entire first block of Pollock Street. The dependency survived and was used as a dwelling for many years prior to its reconstruction on the Society's property.

**Smokehouse.** Most of us ignore the smaller brick structure sitting so unobtrusively just behind and to the east of the Attmore-Oliver House. We should not, because this early nineteenth-century building represents an entire class of structures which are virtually gone from New Bern. I believe that any visitor from New Bern's past would take a look around, and his first question would be: "Where are the outbuildings? I see no privies, woodsheds, chicken coops, stables, buggy sheds, or smokehouses". Hence our smokehouse, which was built on the site, is a uniquely valuable addition to this complex. With its Flemish bond brickwork and parapeted ends, the smokehouse was the pride and joy of the owners of the Attmore-Oliver House.

Visitors often ask why city folks would own a smokehouse. Many raised their own hogs right in town. For others, more high-toned folks, it was a matter of status to purchase fresh hams, shoulders, and sausage from a local farmer and cure their own meat. Each urban smokehouse owner had his own secret curing ingredients, and the contents of a well-filled smokehouse were valuable. Smokehouse doors were usually secured with the best



locks on the premises. This tradition is actually not that old. Many people cured their own meat up until the late 1940s when the advent of frozen food lockers rendered the labor-intensive curing process obsolete. The old smoke-house is now used as a storage shed and tool house, but we should not forget that it also represents an important link to our past.

**The Scholarship Legacy of Miss Harriet Marks.** The educational mission of the Society took an unexpected turn in 1968. An endowment of \$68,000 in securities was entrusted to the Society by Miss Harriet Marks upon her death that year. Miss Marks was a New Bern native and the daughter of Oscar Marks, a noted New Bern merchant. She stipulated in her will that the interest from this fund be used to provide college scholarships for local high school students. The scholarship is renewable for three years provided the student is not married and that his/her grades are acceptable.

Each year in early March application forms are given to top seniors, and the Society's Scholarship Committee selects the Marks Scholar of that year. The young scholar and his/her family are presented to the Society at its annual meeting. The endowment, now valued at over \$100,000, has supported more than 30 students since the inception of the program in 1971. The Reverend Edward Sharp, retired rector of Christ Episcopal Church, now chairs the Marks Scholarship Committee.

**Urban Renewal Controversy.** A critical component of the Historical Society's educational mission has always involved the lectures and dinner talks sponsored by the Society. There is a long tradition of using both local and amateur historians as well as professional or academic historians to present information on topics of local interest. Sometimes, however, these talks can generate a good deal of controversy.

Many native New Bernians will recall the bitter arguments surrounding the major urban renewal project on New Bern's waterfront during the late 1960s and early

1970s. At the annual dinner on May 3, 1972, Mr. Tony Wrenn and Miss Janet Seapker gave a joint presentation to a large audience of members of the Society. These two individuals were experts on historic preservation and were at that time in the midst of surveying New Bern for the National Register of Historic Places. Apparently, the two speakers were strongly negative about some aspects of New Bern's current urban renewal project during their presentation. The Chairman of the Urban Renewal Board—who was also a member of the Historical Society—objected to their talk. As a result, Dr. Junius Davis offered his resignation as President of the Society. Mr. Wrenn and Miss Seapker subsequently wrote a letter to the Society exonerating "Dr. Davis for any responsibility for their remarks and in-depth program presented at the annual banquet. . . ." The resignation of Dr. Davis was not accepted by the Board of Directors of the Society, and he continued to serve as president.

**Formation of the Preservation Foundation.** The controversial urban renewal project of New Bern's waterfront led to the appointment of a Society Committee to examine historic preservation in more detail. This Committee was then called the "Revolving Fund Committee", because the stated purpose of the group was to (1) secure funds to buy endangered properties, and (2) sell the property to a buyer willing to restore the building. The process was then to be repeated with other endangered structures.

Soon the Society's "Revolving Fund Committee" decided that the preservation mission was important enough to justify a separate organization devoted solely to rescuing old houses and buildings in New Bern threatened with destruction. Many members of this committee were convinced that a separate and smaller organization would be able to act much more quickly when faced with a rapidly developing crisis that threatened a historic property with immediate destruction.

Thus the Society's Revolving Fund Committee became what we know now as the New Bern Preservation Foun-

dition. This sister organization was chartered in 1972, and the first president of the new organization was Dr. Francis King. The Preservation Foundation has been enormously successful in fulfilling its original mission. At this time more than 50 homes in New Bern have been saved and entire neighborhoods revitalized through its efforts over the years. With headquarters now in the old Haslen Dependency the New Bern Preservation Foundation remains as vigorous as ever under the able leadership of Executive Director Mrs. Barbara Howlett.

**Vermont Connecticut Royster.** Not all talks generate controversy. The talk I would have liked to hear most was the one following the 1972 program by the preservation experts noted above. Mr. Vermont Connecticut Royster (1914-1996) was the speaker for the 1973 annual dinner in April of that year. Mr. Royster was born in Raleigh and was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of North Carolina in 1935. He was a Pulitzer Prize winner in journalism and, as the long-term editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, was the man most responsible for shaping that publication into the world's leading business daily. His unusual given names originate in a family tradition of naming children after states. As can be seen from an excerpt of his address, New Bern held a special place in his heart:

I first came here more than forty years ago—it was in July 1931—a stripling youth, doing the things the young men did in those days—swimming on the beach at Morehead, watching all the girls go by, chasing them when we could at dances, or furtively courting them on darkened front porches. It all seems so long ago, and rather simple compared with what the young do today.

Perhaps it is only a distortion of memory, but New Bern seemed to me even more lovely then than it does today. Today the town is much more prosperous than it was then; after all, that was in the depths of the de-

pression. But you had a beautiful waterfront, there at the confluence of the Neuse and Trent, and there was a charm to the streets with their old houses, their old buildings. But some loss of old charm is the price we pay, I suppose for progress.

I have many other memories. That summer I made many new friends here in New Bern. Genevieve Tolson and that lanky boy she was to marry, Mark Dunn. There was another Tolson, too, Jack. And Sam Eaton. They, Like I, have traveled afar. Both are generals now, and Jack anyway has come back to North Carolina to live just as I have.

The girls names, well they are legion. Amy and Betsy Williams, Eleanor Stevenson, Nettie Pinnix; some go by different names now, but all remain old friends. But not the ladies alone. Charles Styron, Simmons Patterson and Joe Pat, now eminent doctors all and of course the lady known as Any [Amy?].

And there was one other. Than summer I met a 16-year-old beauty of large brown eyes, the daughter of Jesse Claypoole and Bonnie Broadfoot. She above all became entwined in my life. And it is especially for my Frances that my heart is warmed by your kindness in this homecoming.

### *The Modern Era: A Strong and Flourishing Historical Society*

**Maintaining a House Museum.** When one reads the minutes of the Society's board meetings over the years since the acquisition of the Attmore-Oliver House, it is easy to get the impression that owning an old, historic house is about like having a wife addicted to furs, diamonds, and caviar. Or a husband whose passions involve exotic sport cars, large boats, and air-conditioned lawn tractors. You love them and are proud, but they sure can

VERTICAL FILE  
NEW BERN/ CRAVEN COUNTY

The Sun-Journal, New Bern, N.C.—Tuesday, February 19, 1974—3



## Costume Ball Winners Saturday New Bern Historical Society

Winners, left to right, at the New Bern Historical Society's Costume Ball on Saturday are: the Rev. C. Edward Sharp, as the devil, best man's costume; Bob Baskerville, as Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame, man, most original; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lee Stallings, Jr., as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, with live fish on their fishing poles, best couple; Mrs. Euclid Armstrong, as Eliza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady" best woman;

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Morris as children, funniest; and Mrs. M. H. Askew, Jr., front, woman, most original, as the Stallings as poodle, using real poodle fur saved by Dr. George Bullock.

The ball was held in the New Bern Shrine Club building which was elaborately decorated. The foyer was a tropical scene and the ballroom a show scene with white clouds and snowflakes floating overhead. At the back of the picture can be seen an ice-laden tree.

Tables, arranged cabaret style, were covered with black cloths and arranged with white candles in hurricane globes surrounded by simulated ice and snow-laden branches.

A beautiful buffet breakfast was served at midnight by members of Shrinette Club, which Mrs. Preston Banks is president.

Music for the dance was presented by Barry Shank and his orchestra of East Carolina University, Greenville.

Winners of 1974's costume ball. The Reverend Edward Sharp still has the devil's costume he wore at this memorable party.

be expensive.

The vast amount of money required to improve and maintain the house over the last 30 years is startling. At one time or another, virtually every system and component has needed either replacement or repair. Some components have been replaced twice or even three times. Virtually every meeting of the Society's Board of Directors reveals another problem: the bricks in all four chimneys need repointing, the sills are rotting, the roof leaks, the heating system needs replacement, plaster is falling, termites are eating the back porch. The list of needed and completed repairs goes on and on.

Yet in 1998 I do not believe the house ever looked better. With a new roof, a recent complete interior painting and cleaning, and a great deal of yard work ongoing, the old house fairly sparkles. Since 1985 the cranky old house has met its match in the form of Mr. Harry Goodman. Whatever challenges the old house presents, Harry manages to come up with the solution. Much of the work he does himself. At other times he recruits friends to help or convinces a local tradesman to do the work for a discounted fee.

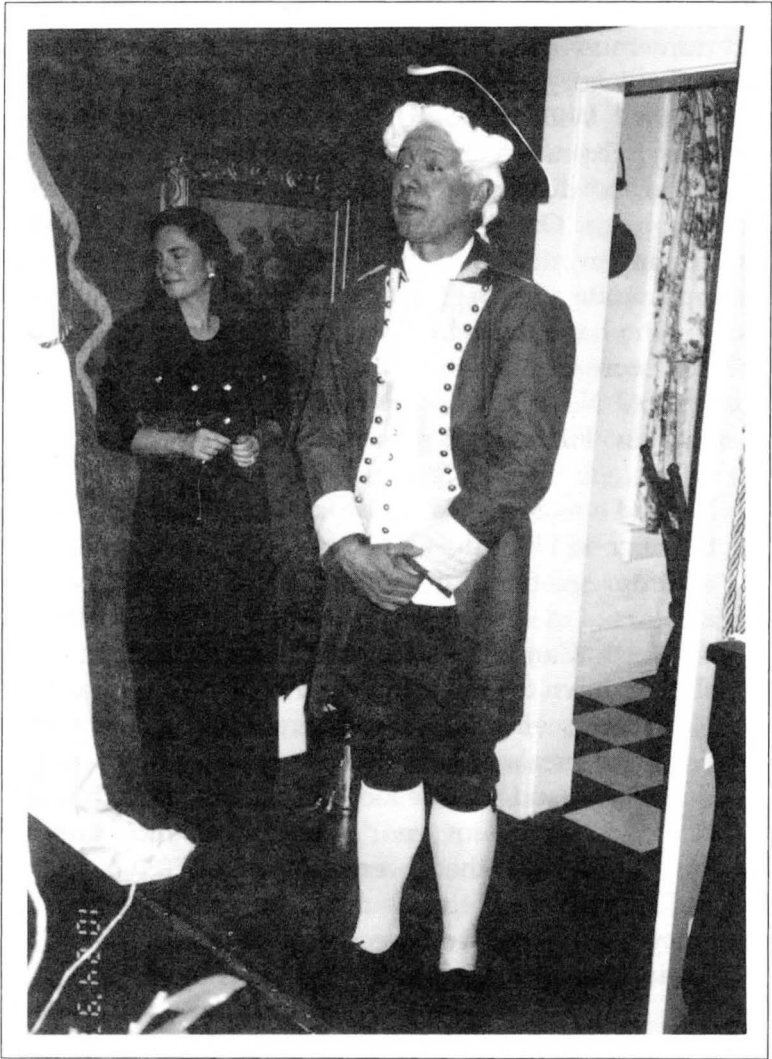
Harry and his crew also maintain the other buildings on the grounds of the Attmore-Oliver House as well as All Saints Chapel on Pollock Street. The deconsecrated chapel is owned by the Episcopal Church but has been on long-term lease to the Society for the sum of one dollar a year. All members of the Society owe a debt of thanks to Harry Goodman, a retired and transplanted Yankee who manages to keep on top of the old house's problems with such skill and good humor.

**Ghost Walk, a New and Successful Tradition.** Many people have no inkling of how much planning and hard work go into the events currently sponsored by the Historical Society. Take, for example, our annual "Ghost Walk" celebration. This event began in 1986 with a different title, "New Bern at Night". Ghost Walk is now normally held in October and is one of our major fund-raisers.

The planning for this event begins fully six months prior to its presentation. A large committee is assembled, and planning sessions begin with the selection of a theme and numerous committee assignments. For the last two years Carol Lof has been the chairman of the planning committee. With the assistance and advice of Joanne Gwaltney, Executive Director of the Historical Society, Carol had the difficult job of making sure that all pieces fell into place. Once a theme has been selected for the forthcoming event, the job of writing scripts and a search for appropriate sites begins. Last year's theme, "Famous people who have visited New Bern", involved the preparation of more than 16 scripts. The most famous person to have visited New Bern in the past was obviously George Washington. His script is presented below:

We had a most pleasant stay in New Bern. I must say that a good bit of the Old North State leaves one with the impression that the place has seen better days. It appears to me that some of the towns we have visited in North Carolina—such as Halifax and Bath—are sliding down the hill as they say back in Virginia. But New Bern seems to be thriving, and the accommodations and meals at John Stanly's gracious home were fine. The grand ball the local folks threw for my party at the old Royal Governor's palace was uncommonly fancy. I declare, there were more than 70 gals there, and most were pretty as could be and gotten up in fancy gowns that would equal what you might see in Baltimore or Philadelphia.

I was most surprised to run across an old friend and loyal comrade in arms here in New Bern. Asa Spellman showed up at the ball, and I glanced across the room and would have known him anywhere tho it has been years since we served together. Now Asa is a black man who lives on a small farm outside of New Bern. When he heard I was to visit, he told some of



Mr. Bob Hollatschek plays George Washington at the 1997 Ghost Walk. Hostess Katherine Hardison serves in the background.



the white folks in town that he knew me. As he said it, "I know Mastuh, General, President Washington". Not a soul believed old Asa.

As a joke and to prove Asa was a liar they brought him to the party last night. As I recall, my greeting to him was something like, "Why Acey, how come you to be in these parts? I surely am glad to see you". We shook hands and talked through a good bit of the ball.

Let me tell you why I remembered this man's name. When British regiments form in front of your line, they are slow about it. Four or five deep and stretching for what seems a mile. Once formed, their cannons give you a volley, the drums roll, and those Britishers receive the order to lower their pieces so the sun flashes off polished bayonets. Then they come at you in quickstep time. . . . There is no more horrifying sight on earth. . . . Good men, brave me, will run. Your mouth goes dry and knees go weak, but you look to your flank and there is a man like Acey Spellman—he's standing and holding his ground while working his musket like a demon. You don't forget a man like that.

George Washington is known to have commented negatively on the status of both Halifax and Bath in North Carolina during his presidential tour. Washington was right; both villages are probably smaller now than they were when he was there. Not unlike some more recent presidents, he was also known to have an eye for pretty girls. The Asa Spellman story comes from John D. Whitford's unpublished manuscript (undated, circa 1899). Many of you may recall hearing Mr. Robert Hollatschek, the excellent actor who played George Washington, speak these lines in the home of Denise and Joshua Willey at 208 Johnson Street (Harker-Sparrow House, ca. 1780) during the 1997 Ghost Walk.

Ghost Walk is essentially an outdoor historical pageant, and it is pretty much new each year. It takes the hard work and cooperation of more than 100 volunteer writers, actors, homeowners, and house monitors to produce this event. Ghost Walk makes money for the Society, and it has been so successful that other cities have begun offering similar autumn celebrations.

**Spring Homes Tour.** Of course other events sponsored by the Society require comparable planning and work. The Spring Homes Tour, an event jointly sponsored by the Society and the Preservation Foundation, requires the cooperation of homeowners willing to allow battalions of visitors into their homes as well as the work of volunteers willing to interpret and explain the houses and furnishings.

**Best Durn Cooks in New Bern.** One most pleasant way to gain insight into the Society's past is to attend any of the traditional events still offered by our Society. A good example is the Fall Lawn Party. On a glorious fall day last year I was greeting friends and admiring the new cedar shake roof on the Attmore-Oliver House when an older fellow, tall and rail thin, walked over with both eyes glued to the food tables. More than 30 feet of food was laid out under the old pecan trees in the backyard of the Attmore-Oliver House. After intense examination he declared, "Oh boy! I do believe they have even outdone last year's spread. The best durn cooks in New Bern".

He had the good manners to wait until at least one other person began to fill his plate and then promptly moved into line. I followed next because I also have an appetite and somehow knew that I was in the presence of an expert. "The secret here is to not get too much on the first go-round because they will bring more, and sometimes they save the best for last." He loaded up on deviled eggs but passed on the ham biscuits. "The eggs won't last long, but the ham biscuits will be here for awhile," he advised.

After reading the minutes of more than 600 meetings

of the Society since its inception in 1923, the amount of food consumed by its membership at countless dinners and luncheons would no doubt represent the caloric equal of our national debt. Add in the pies, cakes, brownies, fudge, and candy sold by the Society on every conceivable occasion, and you could conceal the Attmore-Oliver House under a literal mountain of food. Bake sales, or "bakes" as they were called, are a long tradition and continue today as a part of our modern "Ghost Walk" and "Spring Homes" celebrations.

We should honor the women—and perhaps some few men—who held these "bakes" every Saturday on the sidewalk in front of the J. C. Penney store (then on Middle Street) during the early 1950s. In the struggle to acquire the Society's premier property, the Attmore-Oliver House, they made their contribution the hard way. Unfortunately, I am faced with the dilemma of anyone who writes the history of any human endeavor: The foot soldiers who do the real work get lost in the shuffle. All of us who have stuffed ourselves silly at meetings of the Society in the past and those of us who anticipate future delicacies salute the folks who prepare the food that helps make our functions so much more enjoyable. "Best durn cooks in New Bern", indeed!

**Founding a Journal.** The *Society Newsletter* always included events of the Society, notices of future happenings around the region, and updates on the Society's needs and accomplishments. From the start the *Newsletter* also offered a forum for members to publish short articles on New Bern history. In effect, it evolved into something more than a newsletter. Indeed, on occasion it became downright unwieldy with as many as 11 pages.

In order to combat the increasing length of the *Newsletter* a separate publication was needed. Accordingly, in 1988 the *Journal of the New Bern Historical Society* was established. The founding and continuing editor of the *Journal*, Vance Harper Jones, had been involved in editing the *Newsletter* for several years prior to beginning the *Journal*.



'BEST DURN COOKS' PREPARED THIRTY FEET OF FOOD FOR 1997 FALL LAWN PARTY.

His editorial skills and his intimate knowledge of local history represent an ideal combination for his work as editor.

The *Journal* offers a number of advantages. It reduces the size of the *Newsletter* and invites longer, more thoughtful, and more carefully researched articles on this region's history. Most important, the *Journal* can be readily archived, which simply means that research libraries will collect and maintain the past issues of the *Journal* for future reference. Writers, particularly academics, know and appreciate the archival function of a journal and often will not write for a publication which is not archived. Moreover, given that a journal is readily available in libraries, it will be used much more frequently by future historians, both professional and amateur.

**Kellenberger Foundation Support.** Throughout the years, our Society has been the beneficiary of numerous grants from the Kellenberger Foundation, and any history of the New Bern Historical Society would be remiss in not acknowledging the contribution of the foundation. In 1944 Mrs. James Edwin Latham, a New Bern native, established the Maude Latham Trust Fund for the purpose of restoring Tryon Palace. Prior to her death in 1951, she accumulated a valuable collection of antiques and silver to furnish the building, and her estate was willed to the Tryon Palace Commission. Mrs. John A. Kellenberger, a native of Greensboro and the only daughter of Mrs. Latham, took over her mother's quest to establish Tryon Palace. At her own death in 1978, Mrs. Kellenberger left \$3,500,000 of her estate to establish the Kellenberger Foundation. The Foundation's sole mission is the promotion and preservation of history in New Bern and Craven County.

Kellenberger Foundation grants have been used to fund numerous renovations on the Attmore-Oliver House as well as to help acquire and restore its furnishings. Other grants from the Kellenberger Foundation have been used to help the Society move and renovate the little house now used as an office by the Society and to restore All

Saints Chapel. Our sister organization, the New Bern Preservation Foundation, has also received numerous Kellenberger grants and loans for its work in New Bern. Clearly, the generosity of Mrs. Latham and her daughter Mrs. Kellenberger has made a substantial impact on the cultural and economic health of New Bern.

**Membership Diversity, Now and Then.** Currently the Society's large membership is a diverse lot. Many native New Bernians have been members for years, but some of the most vigorous members are newcomers to this area. Most of these newcomers are retirees who selected New Bern for a variety of reasons, and the Society has benefited from their enthusiasm for their new home. Not all of the non-natives, however, are retired. Younger people who come to this area for jobs are also well represented on the membership roll, and they do their share of the work for the Society.

Most people, including the officers of the Society, assume that the influx of retirees and younger working people into the area has changed the membership composition of the Society over the years. I suspect that the changes are not as great as we assume. If one examines the membership rolls over the years, it becomes obvious that newcomers to town have always been attracted to the Society and have made major contributions from the start. After all, Minnette Duffy was not a native New Bernian.

**Transition to the Present.** Under the leadership of Dr. E. Newsom Williams, President of the Society 1983-1988, the New Bern Historical Society made the transition into the organization it is today with full-time office staff. Mrs. Kathy Beckwith was employed as the first Executive Director in May 1985 and served through December 1990. Mrs. Jean Buck is the first full-time Administrative Assistant.

**Current Leadership.** I shall not dwell on the current status of the Society. Under the able leadership of Mr. James Sugg, our President since 1993, the Society continues

to flourish. The Board of Directors is a multitalented group of men and women—sometimes with multiple opinions as well—who share a love for this region and its long history. Miss Joanne Gwaltney has been the full-time Executive Director since 1991. Joanne is the person most responsible for overseeing all ongoing Society activities. Mrs. Jean Buck, full-time Administrative Assistant since 1990 and a computer guru of the first rank, provides a degree of helpfulness and good spirit that make her ideal for the job.

Still, as in the beginning, it is the work of our membership and their willingness to devote their time and talents to the yeoman work of our Society that are the critical ingredients in the success of the Society over the first 75 years. One can only hope that this spirit will continue for many more generations.

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Jim Gunn. Special thanks for their editorial assistance are due Dr. Francis King, Mr. Gordon Ruckart, and the Reverend Edward Sharp. Photography is by Larry Conway.



## JOHN R. TAYLOR

Mary Baker

At our last *Journal* meeting six of us were sitting around the table discussing the upcoming issue which was to commemorate the Historical Society's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The name of John R. Taylor was mentioned. Everyone was familiar with this name except me. We decided to include a brief article on Mr. Taylor as there were probably other members, transplants like me, who were unaware of John R. Taylor and what he did for the New Bern Historical Society.

John Rose Taylor was born in La Grange, North Carolina, September 15, 1889, the son of Elijah Taylor and Iola Hardy Taylor. The young family lived in La Grange for about one year and moved to New Bern, Elijah Taylor's home. A few years later a second son was born. John was 13 years old when his mother died, and he quit school to stay home and care for his younger brother. He is reported to have said that he had no particular liking for school at that time in his life, however he remembered with great fondness a teacher, Miss Molly Heath, and the little private school he attended in New Bern. Mr. Taylor had a great love of reading and read everything that came his way. Judging by the achievements of his lifetime, one could say that he was a self-made man.

When he was about 15 years of age, he went to work as an office boy for his cousin. Soon he got a job with S. S. Duffy Co. as a soda jerk, and young John remarked of Duffy, "He had the most beautiful soda fountain in town, and all the girls came there in the afternoon". One of these

young ladies later became John Taylor's wife. Even though the salary was only six dollars a week, being a soda jerk obviously had its compensations. In his next position as a shipping clerk with the Arnold Packing Co., he was paid 10 dollars a week. From here he moved to the New Bern Cotton Oil and Fertilizer Mills in Riverside as assistant bookkeeper, and his salary increased to 12 dollars a week. About this time he married, and with marriage came more responsibilities and the need for more money.

John Taylor decided to supplement his income by selling insurance part-time. He was offered a contract by Mutual of New York (MONY) which he tried for six months. When he realized he could make a go of it, he went into the business full-time. By the 1920s he had become a partner in the firm of Griffin, Taylor, Stith and Henderson on Craven Street. He later organized the John R. Taylor Agency and was president of it for 55 years. He offered this word of advice: "No man can accomplish anything by himself. Only through the help of his friends and neighbors can he be successful in life. We can't live to ourselves."

Taylor's family, in addition to his wife Alice Land Taylor, included a son John Rose Taylor, Jr., and two daughters Alice Taylor Stanley and Elizabeth Taylor Hodges. Both girls became teachers. Son John graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and served in the U. S. Navy for 10 years before joining his father in the insurance business. Eventually there were six grandchildren. Mr. Taylor used to say that his family always came before his other loves, nevertheless, there was always a lot of room in his heart for other things. Mrs. Hodges, the younger daughter, remembers him as "always being there for you". For years it was a family tradition to have a picnic every Sunday after church, weather permitting.

While as a youngster he may have lost his interest in formal education, as an adult he took great interest in the subject following the death of his mother. He served on the New Bern Board of Education and for many years was



**Mr. John R. Taylor (1889-1974)**

New Bern High School, asked Mr. Taylor to present her diploma.

Other memberships and activities that claimed his time included the Elks Lodge, the New Bern Rotary Club (charter member), and the Masonic Lodge. He organized and was president of the New Bern Executive Club. He was a director of the New Bern Savings and Loan Co. from 1930 until his death in 1974. Taylor was also active in Broad Street Christian Church and played a significant role in the construction of the present structure during the years 1921-1926. As a representative of Mutual of New York he received many honors and awards, among them the National Quality Award for outstanding sales and service to policy holders. He was also a member of the National Association of Underwriters.

With all of this one wonders how he could find time for another project; yet he did. The New Bern Historical Society, while founded in 1923, had fallen on hard times. It was in 1952 that John R. Taylor called together about 50 of the former members, among them Mrs. Joseph Latham, Carrie Duffy Ward, Bess Guion, and Jane Stewart. The Society was reorganized with Mr. H. B. Smith, Superintendent of the New Bern Schools, agreeing to serve as president for one year. Helen Lawrence was elected secretary. The speaker for the reorganization meeting was Mr. D. L. Corbitt of the North Carolina Historical Commission.

The following year Mr. Taylor became president of the Society and served for 10 years. In 1951 Mary Oliver, sole owner of the Attmore-Oliver House, died and willed the house to nephews living in Fayetteville. None of them had a need for the house, and they were reportedly planning to have the house torn down and use the land as a parking lot. When this became known, Mr. Taylor, who had known Miss Oliver, journeyed to Fayetteville to see the heirs and asked them to sell the house to the Historical Society. This they agreed to do for \$30,000. To raise funds the Society held "silver teas" on Sunday afternoons at the

Attmore-Oliver House. These teas were for members and their friends. The silver part of the tea came from contributions of silver coins. Later these teas became sherry parties, a forerunner of the Society's present parties. There are people in New Bern who still remember the teas and parties with great fondness.

By 1957 the Attmore-Oliver House had been purchased and restoration begun. Twenty thousand dollars had been spent, but more money was needed. The New Bern Chamber of Commerce occupied two rooms on the first floor, while the Daughters of the Confederacy had two upstairs rooms for use as a museum. It was that same year that *The News & Observer* of Raleigh named John R. Taylor "Tarheel of the Week", primarily for his work for New Bern and the New Bern Historical Society. In 1963 the Society had a dinner in his honor at which he was presented a framed picture of the Attmore-Oliver House. Mr. and Mrs. John Kellenberger of Greensboro and Miss Gertrude Carraway were present. At that same dinner Mr. Taylor presented to the Society a ledger or diary from 1797 which had belonged to John Oliver, a former owner of the Attmore-Oliver House. It was opened to an account of a duel between Governor Richard Dobbs Spaight and John Wright Stanly.

Mr. Taylor was a great walker and was frequently seen walking in New Bern from his home at 709 Broad Street down to the Attmore-Oliver House, to the insurance agency, and other places. He averaged about five miles daily. He said he preferred walking to riding and that this was his only hobby. In 1974 on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, he went to his office where he did some work, came home, had lunch of a piece of pie and milk, his favorite lunch. He then watched the Army-Navy football game on television and went out for another walk. He visited his sister-in-law on Metcalf Street. While they were talking, she got up to adjust the blind because she thought the light was in his eyes. When she turned around, she realized life had gone from him. He died of a heart attack.

The esteem the community had for him was foreshadowed in a letter written to his son some years before Mr. Taylor's death. The writer John L. Kassoff was not even a member of this community but a friend from Mutual of New York. In this letter he calls Mr. Taylor

a solid person, capable, reliable and who bears an enviable reputation of fair and square dealings with his fellow-man. And on top of it all, he is a personable and likable individual.

The New Bern Historical Society can well be proud to have had such a man as president and such a firm friend.

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