Journal of the New Bern Historical Society

Vol. XII, No. 2 November 1999

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY





The JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY is a semiannual publication of the New Bern Historical Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the rich heritage of New Bern. Articles, letters, photographs, and memorabilia relevant to the history of New Bern and Craven County may be submitted to the editor for review. (Post Office Box 119, New Bern, North Carolina 28563 or nbhistoricalsoc@coastalnet.com).

# MEMORIES OF THE U-BOAT WAR IN WORLD WAR II OFF THE OUTER BANKS

James T. Cheatham,
CDR, USNR (Retired)

Editor's note: The following article was presented as a program sponsored by the New Bern Historical Society at Tryon Palace Auditorium on November 6, 1999.

During the early months of World War II, North Carolina Outer Banks residents were the most susceptible of any along the Atlantic seaboard to rumors and misinformation. The isolated villages at Hatteras and Ocracoke on these barrier islands were without means of receiving current news of the war. Picture yourself living under those conditions and waking up at night with the windows rattling from concussions of ships being torpedoed and looking out on the horizon of the ocean to see as many as five ships at one time burning.[1]

Most Outer Banks residents earned their living fishing and many were without formal education, and as far as they were concerned invasion was imminent and their lives were severely threatened. Rumors ran amuck and you could not blame them. These people were witnessing the war firsthand much more graphically than the West Coast Americans, who the country seemed to think were at great risk. For many Outer Banks residents, a mail boat, several times a week, was all the news they received, except what they heard on the radio. As we know, the United Stated government, in the early part of the war particularly, highly censored all radio broadcasts after the Germans initially were able to pick up the names of ships being sunk and weather information from local radio stations along the coast. During the first few months of 1942,

over 60 ships were sunk off the North Carolina Outer Banks between Cape Lookout and the Virginia border.[2]

Now it is quite a contrast to compare the news coverage that we saw in the Persian Gulf War. We were able to sit by our television sets and watch the actual initial bombing of Baghdad and hear all the commentators, generals, admirals, the President and Saddam Hussein give the status of the war. Conversely, these Outer Banks residents were completely in the dark during World War II.

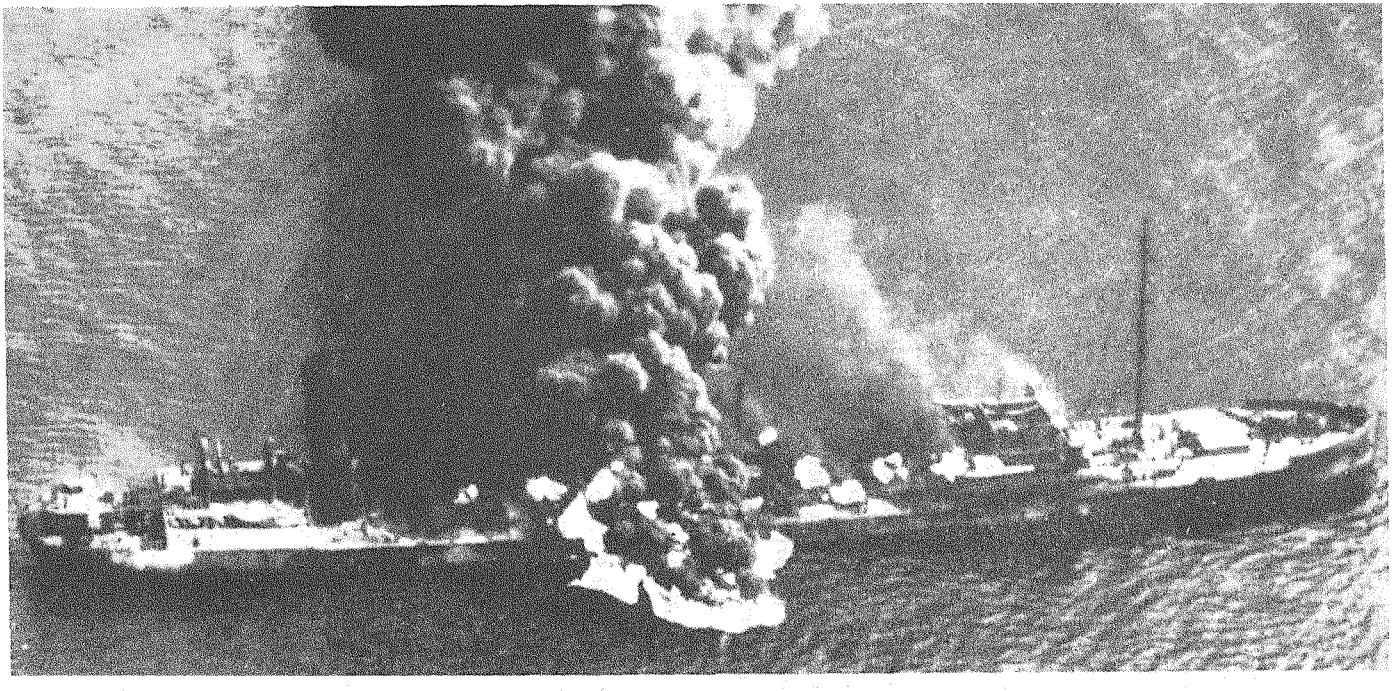
When I vacationed at Atlantic Beach or Morehead City, North Carolina, in early WWII, I remember hearing rumors of German spies being caught with theater tickets from the Morehead City theater in their pockets. These were never proven true, and in fact, the FBI between January 1942 and May 1943 investigated over 500 reports along our coasts of such spies signaling to submarines, etc., but each one was a false alarm.[3]

The only spies put ashore by submarine were at Long Island, New York, and Ponte Vedra, Florida. These were caught because of one spy who turned state's evidence.[4]

I recall houses on the coast having to have blackout curtains at night, and cars had to have their headlights painted so only a small amount of light would be emitted.

During those early months of 1942, most of the sinkings along the coast occurred by submarines on the surface at night. They were much faster on the surface, 17 to 18 knots vs. seven knots. They would usually fire only one torpedo, because there were so many targets. They were saving as many torpedoes as possible. This usually allowed the crew to disembark, then the U-boat would simply stand off and sink the ship with its deck gun. Conversely, United Stated submarines in the Pacific had a standard procedure of firing these initial salvos. Obviously, if all three were accurate and the ship was not too large, there was not much left of the ship or crew.

In World War II terminology, "U-boat" was used to describe German underwater craft, while "submarine" applied to similar vessels of the Allied fleets, the good guys.



SS *Byron T. Benson* (tanker) burning off Cape Hatteras after being torpedoed by U-552 on April 5, 1943. Photo courtesy James T. Cheetham and U. S. Naval Institute.

## Experiences of the Coastal Residents

On Harker's Island, a small island between the town of Beaufort and Cape Lookout, Paul Tyndall (former member of the North Carolina House of Representatives) remembers well the early months of World War II.[5] He was the principal of the local school at Harker's Island. The residents of the island at that time consisted of many families who had moved over from a whaling village at Cape Lookout after the hurricane of 1899. The island was isolated with no telephones, and at that time a bridge connecting the mainland had not been completed.

Soon after the war started, passes were required for citizens to go over on the Outer Banks to fish. Tyndall remembers seeing the many ducks and loons washed ashore covered in oil from tankers that were sunk off the coast. At night, he recanted that windows would occasionally be blown out from explosions from ships off shore. In this atmosphere rumors got started early about German spies and the possibility of signals from shore being given to U-boats.

At Tyndall's school there was a teacher of German descent who was immediately suspected of being a spy and even followed by well-intentioned natives who suspected him of foul play. When this teacher began to leave his home early in the morning to cross over to the mainland, the citizens immediately suspected he was rendezvousing with the enemy. As it turned out, he was only going to get milk for his children. However, by the end of the school year, he was forced to leave the island and seek employment elsewhere.

One day the principal noticed that many of the boys in school who usually came barefooted were wearing new Florsheim shoes. Investigation revealed that these had washed up on the Outer Banks from a merchant ship that was sunk by a U-boat. The children's fathers, who were fishermen, had quickly commandeered these shoes and the children wore them proudly.

During the spring of 1942, Tyndall's wife had to be transported to the Morehead City Hospital with a serious appendicitis, and while she was a patient there, he visited the hospital daily and saw the many burn victims being treated. These were seamen who had been rescued off the coast from burning tankers, and Tyndall even assisted the nursing staff in caring for these patients since the hospital was shorthanded at the time and overflowing with patients. The public was not made aware of this for fear of panic along the coast.

In fact, on April 1, 1942, the United States Navy, after nearly three months of bad news, announced that 29 Axis submarines had been sunk in the Atlantic.[6] This was good news for the beleaguered coastal residents, but absolutely false. The Navy did not sink the first East Coast submarine until April 14.

On the sound near Salter Path, a small fishing village west of Atlantic Beach lived Mrs. Alice Hoffman, whose niece married Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Mrs. Hoffman had purchased approximately a nine-mile portion of Bogue Banks in the early 1900s. Her name, of German origin, spurred many rumors that she was aiding the enemy. One such rumor had Mrs. Hoffman refueling submarines from the dock of her home. Since the water was only a few feet deep in the sound, even I, six years old at the time, could figure out that this was impossible. After the war, I visited Salter Path (at that time still accessible only by boat or a dirt road) and talked to fishing families. Some were quick to tell of windows being blown out by exploding ships just off the coast, much debris and oil on the beach, and suspicious persons seen about during the spring of 1942.

Farther up the coast at Ocracoke Island, Jack Willis, who was then in his late teens and later served in the Navy, remembers seeing as many as four or five ships burning at one time off the coast at night. Both he and longtime native Thurston Gaskill adamantly refute the rumors among vacationers that native fishermen assisted German submarines off the coast.[7] In fact, further investi-

gation through the German Military Historical Research office has proved their contentions correct. Captain Werner Rahn, a German historian, in an interview in September 1987, emphatically stated that he had read all the U-boat logs concerning East Coast activity, and there was absolutely no evidence of islanders selling supplies to U-boats. He does not believe it happened either on the East Coast or in the Caribbean area later on.[8]

By April, Admiral Donitz had introduced large U-boat tankers called "Milch-Cows" which allowed the submarines further cruising limits. Some, including U-123 captained by Reinhard Hardigan, moved farther south off Florida and into the Caribbean where the "turkey shoot" continued unabated. In one incident Hardigan showed compassion for Florida residents watching from shore when he brought his submarine around between a burning tanker and the beach so that shells from his deck gun would not fall ashore.

On March 11, the American freighter *Caribasca* was sunk near Ocracoke. Survivors were tossed about on life rafts all day until they used a metal can as a reflector and attracted the passing steamship *Norlindo* bound for Baltimore. One of those lost was James Gaskill from Ocracoke whose brother Thurston Gaskill still resides on the island. The nameplate of the ship is said by island residents to have floated through the Ocracoke Inlet and washed ashore near where Gaskill lived. Marvin Howard fount it and made a cross which can be seen today in the Methodist Church located on the island.[9]

It was not until the fall of 1945 that the Fifth Naval District released the number of merchant seamen and gun crews lost off the coast by Axis submarines in World War II. In this district's waters, which extend halfway to Bermuda and include the shores of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina down south to Onslow Bay, 843 men lost their lives.[10]

## The *Bedfordshire* Incident [11]

Alarmed by the large number of ships being sunk off the eastern coast of the United States, the British government in February 1942, at the request of the United States, agreed to loan the United States Navy 24 anti-submarine corvettes. These ships were about one half the size of a World War II type destroyer, being 170 feet long, with a crew of four officers and 37 enlisted men. Their armament consisted of a four-inch quick-fire deck gun and a 303-caliber Louis machine gun. They also carried approximately 100 depth charges and sonar.

It seems ironic that only two years after the United States had given, through its lend-lease program, 50 destroyers to the English, they would have to turn around and give us ships to combat our submarine menace.

Among the 24 corvettes leaving England in early March was the HMS *Bedfordshire*. The ships traveled through the North Atlantic to Newfoundland, then Halifax, Nova Scotia, and New York. At least one ship was lost during the winter gales on this trip, and the fleet arrived in New York in much need of repairs. Among the officers on board the *Bedfordshire* was Sub-Lieutenant Thomas Cunningham. The *Bedfordshire* spent April and part of May patrolling off the North Carolina coast between Morehead City and Norfolk, with Morehead City being its home port. These ships were coal burners and required refueling frequently.

In early May a Naval Intelligence officer visited the ship to obtain British flags to use in the burial of Englishmen at Cape Hatteras who had lost their lives in ship sinkings. Sub-Lieutenant Cunningham was the officer who procured these flags for the U. S. Navy. The *Bedfordshire* then refueled at Morehead City and left to check out a submarine siting report.

On the night of May 12, U-boat 558, captained by Gunther Krech, was cruising between Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout. Its mission to date had been uneventful,

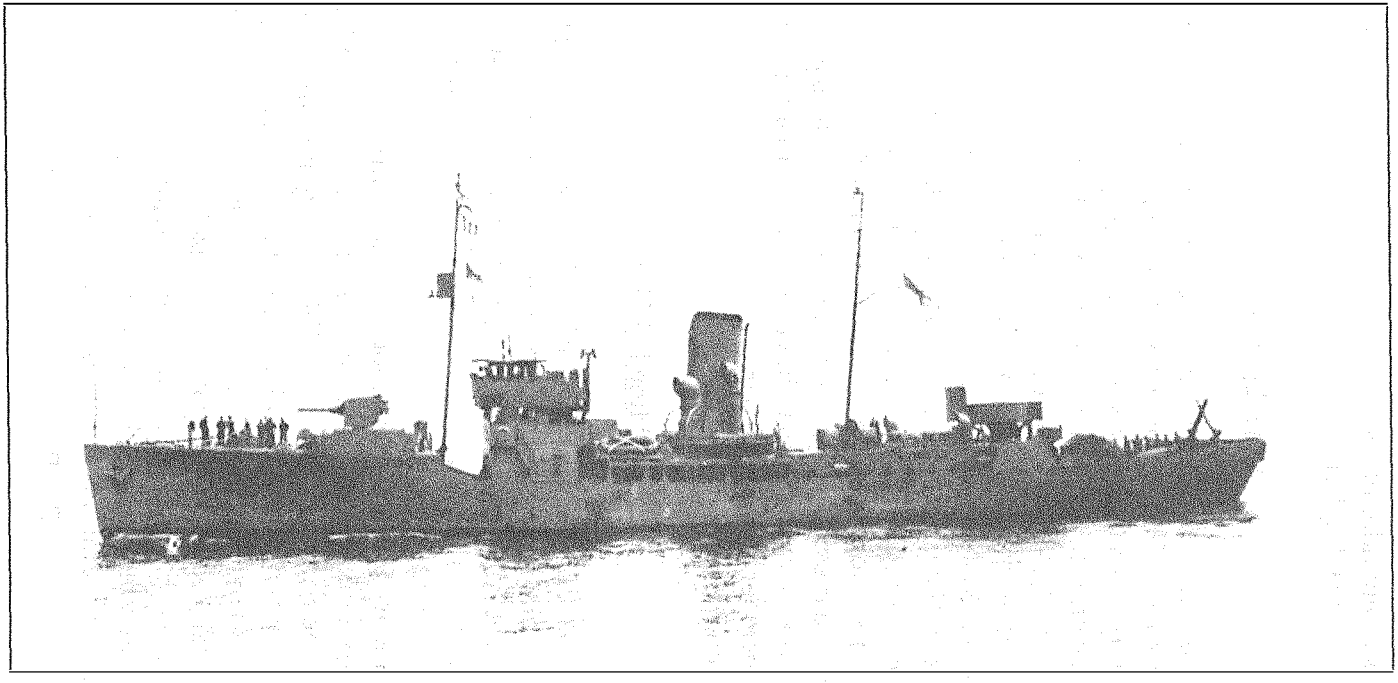
and the captain was beginning to wonder if he would have as successful a cruise on the American coast as his counterparts. Suddenly the noise of a ship's crew was heard on the submarine's listening device, and a lookout saw the HMS *Bedfordshire.*

Visibility was low. Because of the faster speed at which submarines can move on the surface, U-558 made its attack on the surface. After missing with its first torpedo, the submarine's second torpedo hit the *Bedfordshire* squarely amidships, catapulting the ship into the air and sinking it almost immediately. No one survived this sinking to explain how the "hunter was killed by the hunted." We can only speculate that our British friends had become too complacent in their efforts to assist their allies.

The United States Navy, to which the British ships were attached, was not diligent in keeping track of these patrol craft, as evidenced by the fact that the Navy was not aware of what had happened to the HMS *Bedfordshire* for several days.

On May 14, while patrolling the shore at Ocracoke Island, a coastguardsman discovered the bodies of Sub-Lieutenant Thomas Cunningham and telegrapher Stanley Craig. Later two other bodies, unidentifiable, were recovered. These were removed to a small plot next to a local cemetery at Ocracoke Village and, with Coast Guard assistance and Protestant graveyard services, they were given proper burial. Ironically the flag used for Cunningham's funeral was one of the very ones given by him to the Navy about 10 days earlier.

In subsequent years, with the cooperation of the United States government and the citizens of Ocracoke Island, this small plot of land was deeded to the British government and is now an official English cemetery. It can be viewed today on Ocracoke Island. Permanent grave markers are present, and a British flag flies continuously over the site to remind all who see it of the brave men who fought in World War II and died in defense of democracy.



A British coal-burning corvette similar to the HMS *Bedfordshire*, whish was sunk by a U-boat near Ocracoke on the night of May 11, 1942. Photo courtesy James T. Cheatham and U. S. Naval Institute.

It also is a reminder of the close ties by this country to our mother country England.

## Cape Lookout

Cape Lookout with its fine natural harbor is located five miles east of the town of Beaufort. During early colonial history it was an ideal sanctuary for pirates. The Cape was a beautiful, isolated barrier with only a lighthouse until early World War II when again it became a "haven" for desperate seafaring men. The German submarine menace on the North Carolina coast in the winter of 1942 forced the Navy to form a "bucket brigade." This consisted of a group of ships that would only sail during daylight hours and spend their nights anchored in harbors such as Charleston, Cape Lookout, and the Chesapeake Bay. Those of you who may have visited the area after the war remember seeing submarine net buoys that remained rusting on the beach.

## Early Mined Harbor

One of the "bucket brigade" harbors was a specially mined harbor in the ocean between Hatteras Inlet and Ocracoke Inlet. The idea was to put United States merchant ships in the harbor where they were surrounded at night by Mark 6 contact mines.

In theory this sounded good, but as a practical matter the mines sank several of our own ships when they failed to enter the harbor properly. In 1943 a Navy minesweeper was dispatched from Norfolk to clear this minefield, as the harbor was no longer used. The Mark 6 contact mines were considered "unsweepable" because, instead of a cable, they were anchored to the bottom with chains. This proved an interesting and exciting time for the ship; however, after several months, most of the mines were swept and the minesweeper proceeded to the Pacific for further duty.[12]

Many years after the war, a trawler that had snagged one of these mines in its net brought the mine to the dock at Jack's Store in Silver Lake on Ocracoke Island. Apparently the fishermen did not know what it was and hammered on it for several days, thinking it might be a treasure from Blackbeard's time. When the Coast Guard heard about it, they carried the mine to the northern end of the island to be detonated. On the way it fell off the truck but still did not detonate. Finally, with the aid of a bomb squad from Norfolk, it was determined it was still live and with one shot it exploded. The explosion left a crater 150 feet across, caught the marsh on fire, and the Ocracoke Fire Department had to be called out. Needless to say, if the mine had gone off in Ocracoke Harbor, there would have been little left of Jack's Store and the surrounding area.[13]

Some seamen who were on ships torpedoed during World War II still reside in Snug Harbor, a seamen's retirement home on the Outer Banks about 30 miles north of Morehead City. They can recite their experiences with the U-boats and subsequent rescue at sea. While I was visiting there, an old sailor sitting in the lobby was overheard saying, "That young author believes all these stories they are telling him."

## Conclusion

Hitler's refusal to heed his U-boat Commander's recommendation of sending more than six submarines to our East Coast in early 1942 probably saved the country an oil and sugar crisis. As it was, these items still had to be rationed, and England's ability to stockpile war materials for pending operations against the Axis was curtailed. While all such postponements and setbacks cannot be directly linked to the success of the German U-boat off the American coast, Doritz's submarine offensive unquestionably restricted allied operations. During the early part of 1942 the U-boats were making their mark, and the Americans were repeating just what happened in World War I, that is,

instead of instituting convoys, they were sending random, single ships out to hunt the U-boats. President Woodrow Wilson had a saying for this action in World War I which was equally applicable for the first months of 1942, "They despaired of hunting the hornets all over the farm."[14]

## NOTES

[1] Interview with Jack Willis, Ocracoke Island, December 20, 1987. (Notes in possession of the author)

[2] David Stick, *Graveyard of the Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952).

[3] Quote by J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *American Magazine*, October 1943, p. 110.

[4] Interview with Professor Dr. Jurgen Rohwer, German historian, October 20, 1989, Annapolis, Maryland. (Notes in possession of author)

[8] Interview with Captain Werner Rahn, West German Navy (Head, German Military Historical Research Office), September 25, 1987, Annapolis, Maryland. (Notes in possession of the author)

[9] Interview with Jack Willis, Fall 1989, Ocracoke Island, North Carolina. (Notes in possession of author)

[10] Fifth Naval District Press Releases, September 1945.

[11] L. Vanloan Narisawald, *In Some Foreign Field (The Story of Four British Graves on the Outerbanks)*, Winston-Salem, N. C.: John F. Blair, 1972.

[12] Interview with Arminstead J. Maupin, Executive Officer of the minesweeper, August 14, 1990, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Notes in possession of the author)

[13] Interview with waterman Norman Miller, Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, December 1990. (Notes in possession of the author)

[14] T. J. Belke, "Roll of the Drums," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (April 1983).

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEW BERN PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

Barbara Howlett

The New Bern Preservation Foundation had its beginning in the spring of 1972 when Dr. Junius Davis, President of the New Bern Historical Society, appointed a committee from the Society membership to examine the possibility of initiating a revolving fund. Dr. Davis had been approached regarding this matter by Michael Brantley, former director of the Tryon Palace Commission, who recognized the need for such a committee to save the old buildings that were in danger of destruction by demolition or neglect.

Dr. Francis King, first president of the Foundation, says the architectural survey being conducted in New Bern by the Division of Archives and History at the time triggered interest. New Bern's Downtown Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in the spring of 1973. The Historical Society became aware, through the survey, of New Bern's large number of significant historic buildings, many of which were being lost through demolition or abuse.

The Revolving Fund Committee, while a part of the Historical Society, determined that the fund could function more efficiently as a separate entity. A charter was prepared, bylaws written, and on August 29, 1972, the State of North Carolina granted a charter to the Historic New Bern Foundation, Inc. In April of 1973, 19 members attended a meeting to approve bylaws and elect officers.

A June 9 letter from Dr. King asked interested parties to come to a June 20 meeting and to join the Foundation

with a lifetime general membership of $100.00 and a voting membership (director membership) for an additional $500.00, also a lifetime membership. The members prior to this had been nonpaying. A June 19 letter to the bank indicated three director members, six general members, and a bank balance of $2400.00. That many more joined on the twentieth seems obvious as many of the first officers and early members were not on the list of the nineteenth. Dr. Francis King was the first elected president. Michael Brantley acted as secretary for the first two meetings, while Jane Millns was the first elected secretary.

The first project of the Foundation was the purchase of two small adjoining lots on Change Street. The first house purchased was the Elijah Clark House at the junction of Middle and Craven streets. In November 1973 the purchase was completed with payment by the Foundation of $4500.00. The house was sold for restoration to Mr. and Mrs. William B. Smith later in the year.

The Foundation's second house was the early nineteenth century Mayhew-Hendren House, which was given to the Foundation by Centenary Methodist Church on the condition that it be moved. It was moved to the lots on Change Street in February 1974 at a cost of about $6000.00 and purchased in July by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Parrish.

By April 1975 the Foundation had 20 director members, 95 fully paid general members, and 26 general members who were paying on installments.

In late 1976 the Foundation expanded its ambitions, purchasing six structures, the majority of the north side of the 800 block of Pollock Street. This was an enormous risk, as the purchase price of $60,000.00 was over twice what the Foundation had in its treasury. Two of the six houses dated from the early nineteenth century, and both were sold in 1977 with rehabilitation beginning immediately. Two Victorian structures were removed, and the early nineteenth century Ann Green Lane House (formerly Rice's Grill) was moved from Broad Street onto the empty lots.

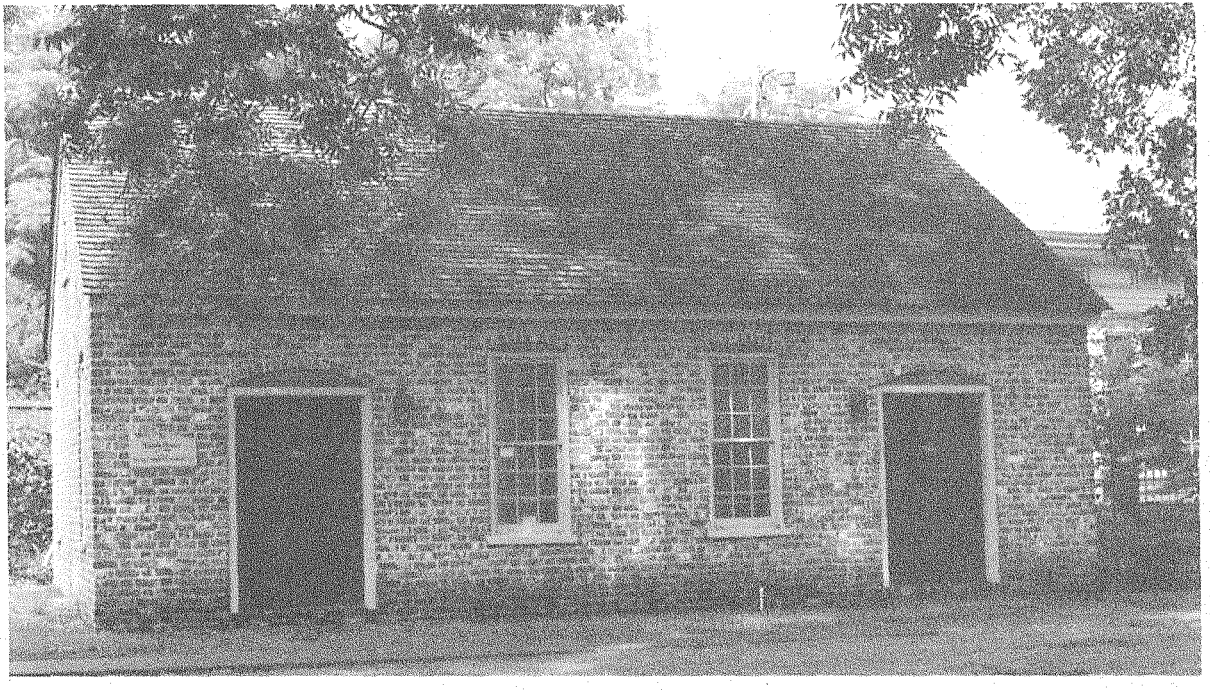
The Elijah Clark House (ca.1760-1780) was the first house purchased by the New Bern Preservation Foundation. NBPF file photo.

In March 1979 the Central School Complex, or Academy Green, was put up for sale. The Foundation purchased the Moses Griffin School and the 1884 Bell Building. The Bell Building has since been adaptively renovated as apartments. The larger school building could not be saved, and several significant endangered structures were eventually moved to the site. This block and the area around it have been rehabilitated to become a very desirable neighborhood.

The Foundation learned in December 1979 of the proposed demolition of the Haslen Building reported to be the oldest brick structure in Craven County. This mid-eighteenth century structure, which had served many functions and been greatly changed over the years, was moved to a spot behind the Attmore-Oliver House, headquarters of the New Bern Historical Society. An archaeological dig was done, largely by amateurs, at the original Haslen site and produced evidence of the many uses of the building. The Haslen Dependency now serves as offices for the New Bern Preservation Foundation.

1981 was a landmark year for the Foundation. It was the recipient of the Gertrude Carraway Award of Merit for "outstanding achievement in the field of historic preservation in the State of North Carolina." With a membership of 200, more property acquisitions, and more covenants and restoration agreements to administer, the Foundation hired Angela Barnett as its first professional Executive Director. The name of the organization was changed to the New Bern Preservation Foundation, Inc.

Over the past years several neighborhoods and over 50 structures have been restored through the efforts of the Preservation Foundation. Two additional national Register Historic Districts were surveyed and nominated to the National Register through the efforts of the NBPF in the mid-1980s. Riverside, New Bern's earliest suburb and a fine example of a turn-of-the-century neighborhood, came first and was noted by an ice cream social in the area. A few months later Ghent, New Bern's trolley car suburb, an



The Haslen Dependency (ca. 1760-1770) was moved and reconstructed 1980-1985 by the New Bern Preservation Foundation and is currently used as its offices. NBPF file photo.

early-twentieth-century area, was celebrated with an afternoon tea.

The Foundation has worked with the City of New Bern on a neighborhood initiatives program to improve the corridor between the Downtown and Riverside historic districts and purchased eight structures in that section. Six are either completed or are being rehabilitated at the moment. The Union Station Depot, a major railroad structure between the two historic districts, seems to be an ongoing frustration. The Foundation has been trying to gain control of the building and see to its rehabilitation since the late 1980s. Much time and effort go into this project every year.

In the 1990s some reorganization of the membership and bylaws took place. While renewing memberships were instituted in the late 1980s, lifetime memberships were still available. These have been eliminated although previously purchased lifetime memberships are honored. The Board of Directors now includes five renewing members as directors and is currently composed of revolving board members. "Any member in good standing" may be elected to an office. The change has allowed decision making to be done by those most active and interested at the time.

Ongoing projects and programs include educational programs for fourth and eighth grades in the public schools, speaking to local groups about the Foundation and its contributions to the preservation of New Bern's history and quality of life, and several programs free to the public each year. Fund-raisers include the co-sponsorship of the Spring Historic Homes and Gardens Tour with the Historical Society, our salvage program which offers period architectural features for sale, an annual antiques show and sale, and catered meals in the historic homes of our members.

Our current Brick Road project will preserve a stretch of brick road over the Caswell Branch Bridge, rehabilitate the bridge, and serve as a pilot project for adapting other

brick roads to current traffic needs while preserving their unique historic appearance. This project has attracted nationwide attention and has the blessing of the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Another project that has recently gathered good publicity for the Foundation is the collaboration with Habitat for Humanity on rehabilitation of historic houses for affordable housing.

While the vision of the Foundation has expanded from saving a significant old house to restoring whole neighborhoods, to education, to roads and gravestones, the basic focus is the same: Preservation of our unique built environment, saving our history for generations to come. In this basic idea, the New Bern Preservation Foundation has excelled and will continue to operate far into the next century.

## SOURCES


King, Francis. Address: "The Early Years, 1972-1975." New Bern Preservation Foundation. New Bern, N. C. 13 October 1982.

Williams, Newsom. Address: "1976-1980, The Middle Years." Adapted from a speech given to the Historic Preservation Society of North Carolina, 10 May 1980. 13 October 1982.

New Bern Preservation Foundation. Records and minutes in the Archives of the Foundation.

# WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE?

Gordon Ruckart

Interested in tracing the history of your house? If so, get ready to go digging through old pages often written in an almost indecipherable English script.

Neither Craven County nor the City of New Bern has an historian on staff. Never has had, and apparently no single depository of what could be called historical records exists. Only those official records required to be kept can be found, and they are in several places.

## Places to Look

To start with a title search, you will need to visit the County Register's Office. This office, now on the first floor of the County Administration Building on Craven Street opposite the Courthouse, is scheduled to be moved to the renovated *Sun Journal* building on Pollock Street by year end.[1]

In addition to records of grants (patents) and real estate transactions, this room holds birth and death records 1914-date. The Register also records all marriages. From the earliest to the latest, marriages are indexed by both bride and groom. One of these days in the not-too-distant future, Register Becky Thompson plans to begin scanning records into a computer system that will offer access through the State Web site. However, without special funding to do so, no plans are contemplated to go back and scan existing records.

The first floor of the County Courthouse at Craven and Broad streets is the location of the Estate Records re-

source. Original copies of all wills registered in the county are filed here. From the time such records began up through November 30, 1968, the pages are bound in large bindings, and all are indexed. Beginning on December 2, 1968, the pages are kept in indexed folders. Anything having to do with estate records is filed in this room. Ms. Lois Pate will direct you to these files.

To obtain or view a plat drawing of your lot, you can visit the mapping office, now located to the right of the entrance to the County Administration Building on Craven Street. The office staff can access your lot description on computer and will print a copy for 50¢ per page.

Both Register of Deeds and Estate Records offices are county records keepers; they are not available to do research for you. Staff persons will point you to the files; you must do the digging for yourself. However, you may visit the public library on Johnson Street and find reference librarians who are there to offer greater service in finding much of the same information on microfilm.

The Kellenberger Room of the library has microfilm files and microfilm readers available for use. Librarian Victor Jones and staff are there to help you use these resources, as well as those in reference books. The Kellenberger Room also has a large collection of old photographs of structures in New Bern; you may find your house among them. And they have flat files of early town maps.

## Beginning Your Search

First, consult a copy of the Price-Fitch map of New Bern and Dryborough based on a survey conducted in 1810 by Jonathan Price. This map shows the numbers assigned to lots in New Bern.[2] Those same numbers continue in use today. Because these original lots, which were most one-half acre in size, were divided and subdivided over the years, all lots now have a tax number that more particularly defines a property. The original lot number can help you track your property, but the tax number can

be used only when you follow tax records.

You should start your title search from the easier approach: from what you know now and go backwards. For example, who sold you your house? Using the GRANTEE index for the appropriate time period, look up that name to discover from whom your seller bought. The index listing will refer you to a deed book number and page. Deed books are filed all around the Register of Deeds room in book number sequence.

You can use either the GRANTEE (buyer) or the GRANTOR (seller) indexes to look for whatever buyer or seller name you come up with. If you begin as suggested here, you would continue following the buyer trail. But trails sometimes go cold; in which case you'll have to check both indexes.

If you are interested in tracking the cost history of your house (which can then be matched with tax records to conclude, with some guessing added, when your house may have been improved), look for the stamp tax notation on the indenture. Earliest deeds included the actual sale amount, but when taxation was applied to such sales, the tax stamp became the only indicator of sale price. If you find tax stamps with a notated dollar figure, the dollar amount means this: up to August of 1991, buyers were taxed $1.00 per $1000 of price paid; beginning in August 1991, the tax was increased to $2.00 per $1000 of price paid. So a tax notation of $200 on a deed dated before August 1991 means the buyer paid $200,000 for the property; a $200 tax charged after August 1991 indicates a $100,000 sale price.

Of course, finding a deed for a property does not mean the buyer necessarily paid in full, then or since. More recent deeds have a notation in the margin indicating a paid-in-full mortgage. The older deeds have no such indication, so one often finds more than one indenture (listed as "deed" in the index) on a property. In many cases, a buyer died before paying off an indenture, and you may find a court suit against the estate resulting in

seizure by the county sheriff and public sale of the property on the courthouse steps to the highest bidder. Many, many active real estate investors acquired properties then and now through these public sales.

Once you have traced your deed records through all your house's owners, you may have an interest in learning more about some of the owners, especially the earliest ones. You should probably begin this research at the Kellenberger Room. If the person was at all prominent, you may find a write-up in William S. Powell's *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography.* If the person was buried in Craven County, the Kellenberger Room has good data on cemeteries. You may also find information in census data, tax data, court minutes, and local histories. City directories from 1893 are also quite helpful in tracing owners/occupants of houses. If your house dates to about 1915, its street address number has changed at least three times; you will not find this number any help except when using the city directories.

The major depository of tax records is the State Archives in Raleigh. Microfilm copies of some tax records are filed in the Kellenberger Room, and the library at Craven Community College has a collection of tax records on microfilm. Contact librarian Vance Harper Jones at the college for information.

## NOTES

[1] Also moving to the Pollock Street building are all departments related to county taxes: assessment, mapping, collection, and appraisal.

[2] You will find reproductions of this map in various places including the Kellenberger Room, the Academy, city and county planning offices, and in Peter Sandbeck's book *The Historic Architecture of New Bern and Craven County, North Carolina.*

## BOOK REVIEW

*Letters to the Home Circle: The North Carolina Service of Pvt. Henry Clapp*, ed. by John R. Barden. (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1998. 252 pp. $28.00, paperback.)

Reading diaries and letters of Civil War soldiers can get tiresome, particularly when one has to plow through page after page of the bloody battles, hardships, and sacrifices that are the usual fare of this genre. But Private Henry Clapp was not your typical Civil War soldier. First, like many members of Company F of the 44th Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, he was a recent Harvard graduate. Second, his brief nine-month career in the Federal Army was spent almost entirely in New Bern, and Henry was a perceptive and literate observer of his surroundings. Third, I suspect that, if Henry were living today, he would be considered a nerd, possibly even a dork.

Most important, John Barden has done a singularly excellent job in describing Henry's family, his childhood in Dorchester, Massachusetts, as well as his long life after the war as a lawyer and successful drama critic. The detailed interpretive notes of the editor after each of Henry's letters are particularly helpful in understanding the context of this young private's writings. Barden notes several cases where Henry just plain got his facts wrong in his family letters. I suspect, however, that Henry's accuracy rate was a great deal higher than that of many official battle reports written by Civil War generals.

Henry Clapp's regiment arrived in New Bern in late October 1862. The veteran troops already stationed here, particularly those signed up for three years of service, did not take kindly to these nine-month dandies from Boston.

For example, Charlie Mosher of the 85th New York Infantry wrote in his diary:

> The nine months men from Mass. are a fancy lot. The regiment from Boston have uniforms made to order, as of fine cloth and made up in the same styles as the officers. . . . The 44th are city clerks and professional men, and are very stylish. . . . The 44th Mass. have always said that they did not come down here to fight, but just to hold places. . . . How we blackguard them along that line and they have to take it.

Of course, parts of Charlie Mosher's diary (edited by Wayne Mahood, Longstreet House, Hightstown, N. J., 1994) read like a manual on how to shoplift and steal in New Bern as well as a primer on looting while in the field.

Henry was certainly no warrior. At the very beginning of the first of his few combat experiences while in New Bern, Henry managed to lose his rifle, fall down into a steep ditch, and thus had to tag along at the end of his regiment during this minor skirmish. Upon returning to New Bern from this inglorious encounter, Henry found that he had also lost his mittens! Later, the 44th Mass. Regiment was accused of cowardice during this particular encounter. Now I can see myself doing exactly the same things during my army days, but I certainly would not write my mama about the sorry episode. I suspect that his officers realized early that Henry might best serve the cause of the Union Army from behind a desk. Accordingly, he was given various clerical jobs such as the responsibility of taking a census of the large numbers of African-Americans then flooding into New Bern. He developed close ties with many of the newly freed slaves he met while taking the census.

The off-duty activities of Henry and his fellow enlisted men of Company F, 44th Mass., during their brief stay in New Bern demonstrate a remarkable ability to make the best out of a bad situation. They wrote letters,

hundreds of letters, and seemed to compete with each other on who got the most mail from home. They also received elaborate care packages from home that contained most every nineteenth-century goody (e. g., candies, preserves, cakes, pies, cookies, canned milk, wines) available at that time. Henry's mother sent him a new pair of mittens and other articles of clothing as well. Despite the fact that there was a war going on and the primitive nature of transportation at that time, a letter or package sent from Boston usually arrived in New Bern six days later. I doubt that the United States Postal Service does much better now. Henry's company prepared elaborate holiday meals, presented and attended plays and concerts in New Bern, and also went to church on a regular basis.

Henry marveled at the mild climate and the profusion of flowers and birds in New Bern. He did not care much for our hot summers, nor did he like serving as provost guard (military police) in the city. At the congested stations in town, he was kept busy saluting all the officers who strode past and checking the passes of all enlisted men. On May 12, 1863, he writes, "It is so odious to halt a man as if you were a police officer and order him to show his pass subjecting yourself to a running fire and grumbling." Apparently, the 44th was lax at these police duties, and later he writes in the same letter, "Our regiment were rather easy at first in doing this work and consequently the screws have been tightened on them for about five turns."

Many readers will remember the special edition of this *Journal* (Volume X, no. 2, November 1997) that was devoted to the 200th anniversary of one of New Bern's most imposing brick structures, the Harvey Mansion. Everyone involved in the celebration of this anniversary knew that the old mansion must have served some important function during the long occupation of New Bern by Federal troops, but not any of the local historians could provide a clue as to how this strategically located old building was used. Henry Clapp's letters provide a clear answer to this mystery: the Harvey Mansion served as a barracks for a

succession of companies performing Provost Guard duty. Henry's letter of May 5, 1863, notes that

> It is a curious old brick house—built in the antique French fashion with an arch way running under it exactly in the middle, a door on either hand and an enclosure, once a court yard, behind. From the back windows of this house we shall have fine views of the river all the wharves and shipping. . . . And its situation will make it as cool as any house in Newberne can be now.

Later, Henry describes the interior of the Harvey Mansion in his letter of May 12, 1863,

> Our room runs the whole length of the building, so that we have windows at each end. . . . The room is three times as big as our parlor. . . . Our bunks are made of wooden side pieces covered with canvass and are exquisitely comfortable.

Private Henry Clapp returned to Boston after his nine months of service in the Union Army and that was enough of the military for him. Unlike many of his peers, he did not re-enlist. Again, he was no warrior. Still, Henry's letters coupled with John Barden's meticulous editing provide a uniquely valuable perspective on New Bern during the Civil War. I should emphasize that the book's appeal is not limited just to Civil War buffs. Anyone interested in human behavior and the human condition will enjoy this intimate and charming accounting of one young man's experiences in mid-nineteenth-century America.

Richard Lore