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BLACK BUILDERS IN NEW BERN, 1790-1840

Julie Hipps

New Bern, a bustling port town, supported a burgeoning building industry between the years 1790 and 1840. Fine examples of domestic and public architecture as well as less impressive vernacular frame houses typified the era. New Bern builders developed a distinctive style, featuring a side-hall floor plan, simple exterior, and elaborate interior. These Federal style structures were constructed in part by a group of slave artisans owned and hired by the town's free black and white carpenters and masons.

A cluster of artisans dominated New Bern's antebellum building industry. These artisans collaborated on building projects, and few buildings can be attributed to a single architect or builder. Prominent carpenters John Dewey, Martin Stevenson, John M. Oliver, Asa King, Uriah Sandy, and Hardy B. Lane worked alongside the masons Bennett Flanner, Wallace Moore, Joshua Mitchell, and free black Donum Mumford (Montfort). New Bern's period of prosperity and growth ended in the late 1820s and 1830s when economic decline struck Craven County and eastern North Carolina.

On simple building projects, clients and builders worked together. Sometimes, New Bernians displayed their wealth via their stylishly detailed houses constructed with fine and costly materials. In these instances, the client depended on a master builder for designs, supplies, materials, and supervision of labor. Sometimes the homeowner's slaves worked under the supervision of the builder. Builders also augmented the workforce with their own enslaved laborers and hired slaves. On the work site, skilled and unskilled, bonded and free, black and white

people all contributed toward the completion of the project. This commingling distinguished the building trade from other businesses in New Bern.

Carpenters dominated the workforce and ranged in skill and expertise. On-the-job carpenters secured the proper amount of timber, set out, cut, marked and joined the framing, pegged the framing together to form walls and roof, supervised the raising of the heavy frame, applied the wood shingle roof, covered the frame with weatherboard, and laid the floor. Inside carpenters made and installed doors, moldings, window and door frames, wainscoting, baseboards, mantels, and cornices. The carpenter tools included axes, augurs, chisels, hammers, compasses, adzes, saws, and planes. Some masters shared tools with the slaves, while others provided slaves their own tools. These tools accompanied the slave in the event of sale or hire (Bishir, *Black Builders* 429). Carpenters in New Bern, competent in more than one craft, also worked as cabinetmakers, coopers, ship carpenters, and house movers.

New Bern supported fewer brick makers and bricklayers than carpenters. The brick makers dug and refined clay, molded and dried bricks, made, stacked, and fired the kiln, and glazed the bricks. Brick makers burned lime from oyster shells or limestone and then mixed lime and sand for mortar. Laborers dug and worked the clay, filled molds, carried bricks, and loaded and unloaded kilns. Bricklayers and masons specialized in the related trades of plastering and house painting.

Black and white, free and bonded, skilled and unskilled, artisans and laborers, a panoply of people affected the construction of domestic and public buildings in New Bern between 1790 and 1840. The extent of black contribution to this flourishing industry can be measured by identifying the black builders and workmen and describing their workdays and activities.

Productive participation in a craft necessitated acquisition of the appropriate skills. Artisan training in New

Bern loosely followed the apprentice, journeyman, master sequence. The state imposed no legal regulations regarding quality or duration of instruction, and New Bern lacked a professional guild to regulate the craft. Some youths entered apprenticeship solely to learn the trade. These informal arrangements, sealed with as little as a handshake, endured from two to four years. Orphaned children, bound by the court, sustained their indenture until age 21, although not all young people fulfilled the contract. On September 14, 1831, Alexander Mitchell advertised:

Five cents reward—all persons forewarned from harbouring or employing my indentured apprentice Byran Ellickson and Benjamin Ellickson, above reward but no cost will be paid for deliverance to me. (NBS September 14, 1831)

Builder John Dewey offered five dollars reward for his runaway described as

indentured apprentice William Little, about 18 years of age, five feet three inches high—had on a suit of blue broad cloth clothes, and took with him two other suits of light homespun. (CFR February 29, 1812)

Some apprentices appealed to the courts regarding unsatisfactory indentures. John W. Nelson filed the following statement on August 22, 1822:

“Mr. Gabriel M. Rains, Take notice that I shall apply to Craven County Court in August to be discharged from my apprenticeship to you on these grounds. Vz.: 1st That you have treated me ill in not giving me proper cloathing & provisions & in placing me at meals after your family as if I was unworthy of eating at the same table & set me to labor not belonging to the trade of a cabinet maker. 2^{ndly} That you have not

instructed me properly in the trade of a Cabinet Maker & that from want of attention and want of skill you cannot properly instruct me. 3rd That you have permitted your wife falsely to charge me with theft without protecting me or silencing her abuse as you ought to have done. Newbern August 1, 1822 John W. Nelson." (Jones)

The state applied legal regulations to the apprenticeship of free Negro children. In 1762 the colonial assembly required all free baseborn children bound out until age 21, and all masters and mistresses to provide adequate food, clothing, lodging, necessities, and instruction in reading and writing. In 1826 state law mandated the county court to secure the apprenticeship of children of free Negroes or mulattoes, whose parent cannot prove habitual and meaningful employment. Court records document this prescription of free black children:

"Matilda Porter is without any means of maintaining her family and has four children of an age to be bound out. We therefore command you, that you make known to the said Matilda Porter that she have and produce said children before the Justices of our said court at the Court house in New Bern on the second Monday of November next and then & there appear & shew cause if any she has, why the said children should not be bound out to learn some useful trade. . . she is burthensome to the neighbourhood in which she resides, and having no property or visible means of maintaining her family." (Jones)

Then, in 1838, the courts deleted the educational requirement from the contracts bonding free black children. As a consequence, the blacks and mulattoes, proficient in their craft, lacked critical reading and writing skills. Undaunted by this handicap, illiterate master mason Donum Mumford maintained a plastering and masonry business.

Likewise, Lewis Sawyer, apprenticed in 1826 and also illiterate, sustained a carpentry career in the 1850s (Gwynn 32). Restrictions did not deter free black John Rice Green from his literacy. This New Bernian acquired his reading skills "with the assistance of a blind man, whom, at times, he led through the street" (Green 12). Green, carrying a copy of *Webster's Elementary Spelling Book*, called out the letters of words to the blind man who would then pronounce the words to the black man.

The term journeyman designated artisans who, having finished their training, worked for another. Skilled artisans, with the means to open a shop or take on independent projects, advanced to the status of master builder. Successful builders owned property and slaves, took on apprentices, hired journeymen, and completed large projects. In New Bern everybody, from master builder to unskilled slave, functioned within a fluid and flexible hierarchy. For example, an artisan serving as master at one work site performed carpentry in another; or a mason, upon completing a bricklaying job one day, hauled debris the next.

In New Bern the term architect referred to any house-carpenter or builder skilled in adapting pattern book designs, drawings for a client, and supervising the execution of the project. Master builders or architects in New Bern merited high regard. In 1821 Christ Church consecrated their newly completed building with a ceremony to lay the cornerstone. Architects Martin Stevenson and Thomas Gooding, followed by master masons Wallace Moore and Bennett Flanner, marched near the head of the procession behind the vestry and building committee (CC July 14, 1821). Martin Stevenson, known as a hardworking and successful merchant, carpenter and valued citizen of New Bern, supervised the construction of the church. "Idleness knew him not," and "if driving nails and shaving the plains hardened his hands they did not his heart, and added worth to his name" (Whitford 157). Not all builders enjoyed the high esteem of Moore and Flanner, as alcohol consumption hindered some work crews. Considering the

long hot workday, supervisors supplied rum as a thirst quencher. Accounts of construction expenses include quarts or drams for workers (Bishir, *Architects* 98). New Bernians characterized acclaimed antebellum builder Asa King as a "very pleasant man when sober" (Sandbeck, *Historic Architecture* 90). James Boon, a free black Louisburg carpenter, maintained a fine reputation, "but for the liquor" (Franklin, James Boon 163). Boon purchased brandy, wine and whiskey, usually monthly, by the half gallon (Franklin 179). New Bern carpenter and master builder Hardy B. Lane waxed philosophical about his trade in his observation that "it does not take the biggest fool you ever saw in your life to make a carpenter" (Whitford 329).

Slavery sustained the foundations of the building industry in New Bern. Builders purchased, sold, manumitted and apprenticed slaves. White carpenters and masons Hardy B. Lane, Elijah Clark, Josiah Mitchell, Martin Stevenson, and John Dewey maintained a slave workforce. Free black artisans Donum Mumford, James Y. Green, William Handcock, Robert Lisbon, and businessman John C. Stanly also invested in slave craftsmen and laborers. Slaves gained their construction skills in a particularly casual manner. Some slaves merely received on-the-job training, others were bonded out.

Slave owners apprenticed their chattel to black and white artisans, expecting to augment the slave's value for sale or hire. On March 1, 1810, Stephen B. Forbes "bound a mulatto boy named George as a house carpenter to John M. Oliver for the term of four years" (Jones). Allen Backhouse posted a reward for the return of Sam, who "was raised by the Subscriber and is by trade a Carpenter;--he is also something of a Seaman" (CC January 31, 1821). Likewise, Thomas Marks offered a reward for the return of the mulatto man, named John, "a carpenter by Trade" (CFR April 25, 1818).

Work site supervisors typically assigned simple chores to slaves. William Hollister, a prosperous and influential New Bernian merchant and businessman, per-

sonally supervised the erection of his house on Broad Street. He supplemented regular contract labor with his own slaves. His records show that while Jack carted bricks, Brissington carted lumber, and Jerry and Chs. (Charles) attended masons. Ward was responsible "for fitting up [the] fireplace" (Hollister). Hollister regularly calculated the profitability of using his slaves for carting, shoveling, hauling, and construction work. This diligence in accounting for the earnings of his slaves indicates that Hollister rented out at least some of his 26 slaves for a profit (Sandbeck: William Hollister 13). Hollister's builder Hardy B. Lane owned seven slaves; possibly his carpenter slave Bill worked at the Hollister construction site.

Most slaves performed menial chores; a few tackled specialized tasks. John Daves, a carpenter, "worked with his own hands" on his home (Whitford 315). John Daves was also a brick maker, military officer, port collector, and port and survey inspector. Daves, in a letter written to John Haywood in 1800, characterized his slave Jim as "the most experienced house mover in New Bern." The slave Ulysses trained as a plasterer under his master Donum Mumford (Bishir, *Black Builders* 433).

Skilled slaves were sold frequently. Park Lawrence, a New Bernian carpenter slave, was sold first to the Lawrence family and then to the Hatch family; and three masters owned carpenter slave John Marshall before he ran away in 1817 (Hollister). Skilled slaves fetched a high sale price, as

genuinely first-rate carpenters brought two to three times as much as prime field hands on the auction block, and others did well for themselves and their masters when hired out. (Genovese 390)

In 1814 house carpenter Jacob was "esteemed to be a most valuable Negro, having sold some years since for 800 dollars" (Bishir, *Black Builders* 429). John Oliver advertised the sale of "three house carpenters, equal perhaps to any in

Newbern" (CC May 26, 1821). Merchants Samuel and Joseph Oliver (not related to carpenter John M. Oliver) advertised "three valuable Negro Carpenters, (equal to any in the State,)" (CC May 23, 1823), and auctioneer MB Lente advertised the upcoming sale of "a first rate house carpenter" (CC March 27, 1824). William Hollister advertised the sale of "ten Negroes, consisting of men, women and children—one of the men is a valuable carpenter" (NBS February 6, 1830). Hollister served as the executor of the estate of Samuel Oliver; the slaves were sold as part of the estate.

Some masters permitted their skilled slaves to raise funds, save money, and purchase their freedom. Others emancipated skilled slaves for benevolent reasons. In 1811, New Bernian William Conway manumitted his "Negro Man Slave named Bachus (Simmons), a Carpenter by trade, and also his wife a negroe woman named Sukey" (Byrd 87). In 1812 William B. Green emancipated James York Green, a mulatto slave and "a tolerable workman at the Carpenters trade, a sober, honest and industrious fellow" (Byrd 89). In 1814 carpenter John Oliver freed his Negro slave Thomas K. Green (Greer?), and in 1816, Donum Mumford emancipated Abraham Moody Russell Allen. Bacchus, James, and Abraham remained in New Bern to pursue careers as craftsmen.

In the North Carolina antebellum building industry, the key to the use of slaves lay as much in hiring as in owning them. Builders, black and white, deterred by the expense of slave ownership, found slave hiring a reasonable and convenient alternative. Builders and artisans, hiring slaves to augment their workforce, rented slaves by the day, month, or year. Masters who rented out their slaves assumed certain risks. Away from the master's protection, hired slaves faced potential neglect, abuse, or injury. The hired slave's exposure to new ideas, people, and places also posed a hazard to the master. Such exposure not only threatened to entice the slave away from his bondage, it augmented the hired slave's life skills, necessary for suc-

cess in the outside world. Working alongside free men with similar skills, hired slaves grew accustomed to white society, easing assimilation as a fugitive.

Some skilled slaves hired out their own time and lived in semi-independence. These hired slaves rendered a portion of their earnings to their masters but retained the cash gratuities that white people called "bribes—for good or fast work" (Genovese 393). William Hollister consistently recorded gratuities in his account books. On December 31, 1840, for example, he listed gratuities and Christmas presents in the same line item.

William Hollister complemented his slave labor force with hired slaves who executed duties similar to those assigned to his own men. For example, on April 8, 1840, he paid Steven \$4.72 for "waiting on Brick Layers." Hollister, a shipper, hired out his slaves for wharf and warehouse work as well as to ship captains. On November 10, 1840, he calculated the profitability of "Jerry's wages on board steamboat *Beaufort*." When Hollister calculated the profitability of renting his Negroes, he did not distinguish between the maritime and construction workers.

Public building projects, administered by an appointed committee, depended upon hired slave labor. Committee members Francis Hawks, Elijah Clark, Asa Jones, and Dr. Hatch directed the construction of the New Bern jail in 1821. Their plan included solid masonry walls, with stone doors, window sills and lintels. The New Bern Treasurer's Account records designate local craftsmen liable for the job and list line items for hired free Negro and slave labor. Negroes were hired for half-days, three-quarter days, and by the month. In some cases the hired laborer was paid directly, in others the owner received payment. The hired slaves carted bricks, planks, clay, dirt, and debris. After the completion of the jail, the town continued to hire slaves for street repairs and maintenance.

In both public and domestic construction projects, unskilled hired slaves typically carted, hauled, or shoveled. Some owners like John R. Donnell, a New Bern judge, in-

vested in skilled slaves with the intention of profiting from their rental. In his records he set up an account for each of his slave artisans with line items for each man's purchase price, tools, and profit and loss incurred. He

credited the slave for both money handed over ("wages") and for work done for him. If the slave failed to meet Donnell's expectations, then he "owed" his master, and Donnell determined how it would be made up. (Bishir, *Black Builders* 442)

Donnell set up accounts for carpenters Simon and Ben. Donnell purchased Ben from John Oliver in 1823 for \$615 and supplied Ben with a set of tools. In 1824 Ben was leased to Martin Stevenson for one month at a rate of \$18.00, and Donnell compensated Ben at a rate of \$1.50 per week. Donnell planned to net \$12.00 from this arrangement. At this rate it would take the Judge four years to recoup Ben's purchase price. Ben enjoyed certain freedoms and responsibilities on the job, as he allocated his earnings in order to clothe, house, and feed himself.

Other hired slaves appreciated even greater liberties. Carpenter Jack Dewey was hired out by his New Bern owner to planter Paul Cameron in 1834 for six months at a rate of \$100. Dewey worked for Cameron in Hillsborough and in Raleigh and commuted from town to town (Bishir, *Black Builders* 445). Other New Bern citizens owned and hired out their slaves. Planter William P. Moore advertised in December 1820 that sundry Negroes "will be hired for the year." Likewise, T. P. and J. Burguyn advertised five house carpenters for hire in 1838, and Robert Primrose advertised "two carpenters William and Romio" for hire in 1850.

Slaves and hired slaves supported New Bern's building industry as skilled carpenters, masons, and as manual laborers. Free blacks affected the industry not only as unskilled laborers, but also as skilled carpenters, masons, and master builders who owned and hired slaves. Generally

free blacks entered the trade through the compulsory apprenticeship system. Some free black parents, facing obligatory and arbitrary indenture, preferred to select the trade and master for their children. John C. Stanly, a wealthy free Negro businessman, took apprentices in many trades, acting as a guardian and protector for these children. Stanly bonded at least 10 apprentices to the carpenter trade between 1804 and 1817, ostensibly to work on his current building projects.

Free blacks, concerned with the threat of abduction and re-enslavement, guarded their freedom papers, keeping them close at hand. Craven County Courts granted John C. Stanly's freedom in 1795, but Stanly felt pressure to appear before the North Carolina General Assembly in 1798 to petition a special act recognizing his freedom in the event that he became separated from his freedom papers (Schweninger 165). James Boon, a free black Louisburg carpenter, appealed to his clients for letters of recommendation. When traveling, these letters accompanied Boon for his protection. After answering to suspicions regarding his freedom, black carpenter Emanuel Hails documented his status in a number of places. He filed this affidavit in the Craven Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions in 1809:

"This is to certify that I have known a certain black man by the name of Emanuel Hails this ten or twelve years and he has always passed as free, and I have never known anything of him but that he has been an honest and hardworking person ever since he has been in his place; also I believe him to be as feasible a person as any whatsoever. Given from under my hand this 17th day of September, 1807."

Thomas O. Bryan. (Franklin 49)

In 1820 free blacks comprised 18 percent of New Bern's total population. Typically in North Carolina, free blacks lived in rural areas, but in Craven County, New Bern supported the highest concentration of free black

people. Refugee slaves congregated in New Bern, hoping to blend in, remain unnoticed, avoid capture, and assume the status of a free black. Antebellum New Bern served as a haven for fugitive slaves, who flocked to the town via the rivers and waterways. New Bern's active mercantile economy provided ample opportunities for employment. Blacks worked as boatmen, street vendors, coopers, blacksmiths, cooks, domestics and stevedores, and they made barrels, hoops, staves, shingles, rails, posts, and pails.

New Bern "whites continually viewed free blacks with suspicion" (Watson 308) and as a threat to the town's social structure and job market. In the early 1800s New Bern town commissioners passed ordinances forbidding blacks from the butcher business and from peddling cakes, tobacco, and liquor in the streets. In 1815 the town commissioners passed ordinances limiting the number of slaves allowed to hire out and obliging slave owners to purchase licenses for hired slaves. In 1817 the commissioners ordered hired slaves to wear a numbered metal identification badge.

Freed blacks frequently left family members behind in slavery. Some purchased enslaved family members to later secure their freedom. Craven County courts required proper paperwork, proof of the meritorious conduct, and the posting of a bond fee before manumission. Carpenter and former slave James Y. Green purchased his mother Violet and his brother Rigdon and then later petitioned for their freedom. Carpenter and former slave Robert Lisbon purchased his daughter Myrtylla from Frederick Divoux and then appealed to the Courts for her freedom in 1813. White planter and turpentine distiller and Myrtylla's former owner Asa Jones paid Myrtylla's bond fee. Robert bought his wife Venus from John C. Osborne and then secured her manumission and that of his daughter Evilina in 1816. Again Asa Jones and Frederick Divoux contributed to the bond fee.

These free black craftsmen and businessmen developed a support network by posting bond fees for one an-

other. John Carruthers Stanly, a free black businessman, actively sought the manumission of many of his slaves, particularly women and children and proved instrumental in securing the freedom of some slaves owned by his contemporaries. When Stanly petitioned for the freedom of his slave Lydia and her children, James Y. Green and Bacchus Simmons each contributed toward the fee. James Y. Green paid the bond fee for Abraham M. R. Allen, the nephew and slave of Donum Mumford.

The career of Donum Mumford (Montford), free black bricklayer and mason, models the relationship between free black artisans, enslaved labor, and the white professional community. As a free black businessman, farmer, and former slave owned by John Wright Stanly and freed in 1771, Mumford supervised a sizeable workforce of slaves, hired slaves, free blacks, and apprentices. Described as a "dark mullata" or "copper-colored," Mumford sustained a prestigious career as a master mason, because "when ever a job was to be done expeditiously, he was apt to be employed, as he could always throw upon it a force sufficient for its rapid execution" (Miller 51). In this way, Donum, who could not read or write, assumed more than a modicum of status among New Bern builders.

Mumford took at least 10 apprentices during his career. He took Garrison Hasle (1807) and Henry Duncan (1824) as apprentice bricklayers and Jacob Harris (1807), Charles Mosley (1811), John Mosley (1811), Richard Pettipher (1816), and Richard Johnson (1834) as plasterers. He also took spinsters Patesse Hassel (1807) and Polly and Abby Johnson (1834). On April 8, 1826, Mumford advertised a five cents reward for the return of his runaway apprentice Bill Spellman.

The 1820 manuscript census lists six people in the Mumford household engaged in agriculture and eight engaged in manufacturing, as well as eight male and 14 female slaves; and in 1830 Mumford owned 10 slaves. As a slave master, Mumford freed Douglas in 1811 and Nelson in 1828 and sold his slave Betty to Asa Jones for \$601.50 in

1821. Nineteenth-century author John Whitford (143) makes the observation that "Negroes at New Bern owned slaves and had no more compunction respecting it than did a regular white speculator." Loren Schweningen, writing some 140 years later, confirms this surmise in regard to John C. Stanly's attitude toward slavery.

Mumford mentions three slaves in his will written in June of 1838. He leaves his woman Dinah, her son Alexander, and his man Isaac to his wife Hannah. Upon the death of Hannah, the will provided for the emancipation of Isaac:

For his long and meritorious services and should he fail in an application to the Superior Court or the Legislature of the State to obtain his emancipation there I desire any Executor to give Isaac a pass to some of the northern states and one hundred dollars in cash.

As a successful mason and plasterer, Mumford participated in the construction of the Craven County jail during the years 1821 to 1825. Mumford and his crew labored alongside the crews of masons Joshua Mitchell and John M. Oliver. The building committee approved the purchase of over 300,000 bricks from Mumford and merchant Stephen B. Forbes. Elijah Clark, on behalf of the committee, also purchased 101,000 common bricks and 582 water table bricks from Philadelphia as well as stone ballast, nails, sheet lead, lintels, window sills, and lime. Unskilled slave and free Negro laborers carted and hauled these materials from the wharves to the Craven Street worksite. Upon completion of the jail, Mumford continued to work for the town on street repairs and maintenance.

The building committee preferred the high quality imported brick for the facing of the building, utilizing local bricks for back up work and partition walls. William Hollister imported bricks from New York for his home on Broad Street, although the town had several brickyards along Lawson's Creek and New South Front Street. Brick

making generated some business in antebellum New Bern, evidenced by early nineteenth-century advertisements:

John and Thos. H. Daves - Have on hand a quantity of Water Bricks, which they will sell at a reduced price for cash or good notes. They will also rent for one year or term of years their brickyard now in good order, equal to any in the country, for the convenience of its situation and the quality of its clay. (CFR February 25, 1811)

When Nathan Tisdale mortgaged his brickyard in 1813, it maintained "one hundred and six thousand burnt brick and one hundred and twenty thousand unburnt brick" (CFR March 20, 1813). William Saunders opened a new bricklaying business in New Bern in 1810, and he guaranteed "any person wishing to employ him may depend upon its being done well, executed neatly and with dispatch" (CFR February 12, 1810).

The flourishing New Bern economy supported considerable building efforts and population growth. Christ Episcopal Church parish discovered that the sanctuary, built in 1752, could not accommodate church members. In 1820 the church posted this notice: "To builders - Proposals will be received for erecting at New Bern an Episcopal Church. By order of Jno. F. Burgwin, New Bern" (CC November 18, 1820). Responsibilities at the Craven County jail construction site prohibited Mumford, a Christ Church communicant, from working on this project. However, Mumford

contracted to pull down the old colonial Church which stood on the corner of the lot on which the new Church was constructed. He fell and broke his leg. A superstition arose that this, and the dangerous condition of the Church, were a punishment for this act of desecration of Christ Church. (Roberts 8)

The church, completed in 1825, needed roof repairs by 1832. A committee composed of Bennett Flanner, Joshua Mitchell, Francis Sparrow, Hardy B. Lane, and Donum Mumford examined the repaired structure, and they concluded

the repairs to be perfectly secure from the most remote danger and that its condition is such to warrant the presence of the greatest possible assemblage. (Whitford 270-71)

Whitford felt compelled to defend Mumford's appointment to the prestigious committee and wrote that Mumford was "well spoken of," and free blacks "were all held as worthy citizens."

Mumford owned several houses and lots in New Bern and a farm on the outskirts of town. In 1817 Mumford purchased a lot on the Northeast corner of George and New streets facing the home of William Hollister. He continued to purchase lots on this block over the next decade until his holdings extended to the corner of Broad and George streets. Between 1828 and 1836 Mumford also acquired land on the north side of the Neuse River.

By 1830 New Bern was overtaken by an economic depression. The building industry declined, prompting many builders to relocate or abandon the business. Carpenter and master builder Asa King left New Bern for Alabama; mason Bennett Flanner relocated to Wilmington and worked as a merchant; Martin Stevenson opened a funeral business in New Bern. In 1839 Hardy B. Lane remained in the construction business and worked for William Hollister. Lane clearly understood the hard times when David Paton requested some first-class joiners, and Lane responded that "he doubted one such man could be found in New Bern" (Bishir, *Architects* 103).

Hard times also struck Donum Mumford as he began to suffer financially. By November 1827 Mumford owed \$748.61 on a note, and by April 1831, he accumulated debts

to Elizabeth Harget, John Whitford, and James Morgan. He also obliged John C. Stanly a "considerable sum." In 1831 Mumford deeded to John C. Stanly the following property:

Old woman Dianah and her sons John and Alexander, 2 horses, one mare and colt 15 head of cattle, 20 head of hogs, 1 riding chair, 4 cartwheels, the whole of my house & kitchen furniture, two scouts, one canoe, one third of a herring suin (?), one half acres of land on Broad Creek purchased of Dixon, crop of corn peas, fodder potatoes now planting, also wood and lumber --in payment of debt.

Some of this property must have reverted back to Mumford, because in his will he left Dinah, her son Alexander, and the kitchen and house furniture to his wife Hannah. Household belongings remaining in the estate also included mahogany furniture, pictures of Napoleon and Christ, dining table, a secretary, family Bible, silver spoons, oyster dishes, as well as tools (Bishir, Black Builders 451).

The parish register at Christ Church lists the burial ceremony of Donum Mumford on July 12, 1838, and that of his 75-year-old wife on May 23, 1846. Mumford's property then went to his nephew Abraham Moody, who continued to work as a plasterer in New Bern.

Other free blacks trained in antebellum New Bern continued their craft in town. These others, however, did not achieve the professional and social esteem attained by Mumford. William Handcock began as an apprentice to Uriah Sandy in 1817 at age 14. In 1841 William Hollister paid Handcock \$29.60 for "sundry jobs," and by 1850 Handcock operated as a carpenter in New Bern and owned four slaves. James Y. Green progressed from slavery to a career as a carpenter and contractor. He amassed enough wealth to support four slaves in 1830, a number of apprentices, and to accumulate property in Craven County. For-

mer New Bern apprentices Robert Hazel and Lewis Sawyer also entered the carpentry business. Bacchus Simmons, former slave and carpenter, took two carpenter apprentices in 1821.

Nineteenth-century architecture, arts and crafts, and trades depended upon the apprenticeship system to train artisans and skilled laborers. The minutes of the Craven County Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions and Craven County Apprentice Bonds and Records document the apprenticeship agreements. Craven County bond documents record the apprentice's name, trade, age, the master's name, but not the master's race. Some describe the apprentice as orphan, free person of color, free black, base-born free Negro, certain lad of color, free mulatto, or free person of color. Others hold information concerning the child's parentage and length of indenture.

The apprentice records are helpful, but they disclose very little about slaves and apprentice agreements that circumvented the court sanctioned contract. For example, Donum Mumford bypassed the system as he trained his slave Ulysses as a plasterer and neglected to complete the apprentice contract for his runaway Bill Spellman. Furthermore, the likelihood exists that other carpenters and masons took apprentices without filing paperwork with the county.

Free blacks comprised 12 percent of the almost 90 total carpenters, bricklayers, and masons. Negroes account for 51 percent of the apprentices to these trades. Of the artisans contributing to the building industry, the masons figure only 12 percent. Apprentices to the masonry trades account for only one percent of the total, and Donum Mumford held the vast majority of these indentures. Carpenters outnumbered masons, as frame buildings outnumbered brick. Lumber, the building material of choice, was plentiful and cheap. Brickmaking, on the other hand, was both time-consuming and labor-intensive.

With more black apprentices available to fewer black masters, white masters also took Negro apprentices, and in

a few cases black and white apprentices lived and worked in the same shop. For example, in John Dewey's carpentry shop, free Negro Daniel Mosley joined white apprentice John Parks in 1811, and in 1812 white apprentice William Little joined the group. John Dewey took a total of 10 apprentices between 1792 and 1817, two free black and eight white. Uriah Sandy's black apprentices James Thornton and William Hancock worked with Elijah Moore in 1817. Sandy, assisted by John Dewey and Martin Stevenson, supervised the construction of First Presbyterian Church between 1819 and 1822. These crews and apprentices benefited from the exposure to an exemplar of Federal architecture that holds its place as "one of the true high-water marks of New Bern architecture" (Sandbeck, *Historic Architecture* 250).

Mandatory apprenticeship separated parents and siblings. In 1811 Charles Mosley was apprenticed to bricklayer Donum Mumford, and his brother Daniel to John Dewey, a carpenter. In 1821 Jacob Copes was apprenticed to Robert Woods as a farmer, and his brother Elijah apprenticed to James Y. Green as a carpenter. The orphans Nelson and William Mitchell split in 1825 when James Y. Green took Nelson as a carpenter and James Macilroy took William as a farmer. Sometimes siblings remained together, as Henry and Robert Hazle both were apprenticed to James Y. Green in 1815, and John C. Stanly took the Braddock brothers in 1804.

Occasionally an apprentice served more than one master. Adam Culley went to John McLinden at age three, then in 1812 he apprenticed to Caesar Fulshire as a carpenter. Caesar, a black, lived a long time. According to census data in 1850, Caesar was 93 years old and a carpenter. Manuel Hayes took Bob Stringer as a carpenter in 1821, then in 1825 Bob was indentured to Emanuel Hall (Hails).

Not all masters indentured apprentices in just one trade. James Y. Green took six as carpenter apprentices plus Betsey Lindsey as a spinster and Rhoda Mitchell as a sempstress [seamstress]. Emanuel added Mahala, a spin-

ster, to his list of carpenter apprentices in 1813, and Bacchus Simmons apprenticed Mary Crawford, a spinster, and her brother Virgil as a carpenter in 1821.

White artisans outnumbered free black craftsmen by 88 percent, while whites in the overall population outnumbered free blacks by 82 percent. Percentage-wise, blacks and whites shared almost equal representation in the building industry; however, only one black tradesman, Donum Mumford, achieved a level of success comparable to contemporary white master craftsmen.

Blacks affected the building industry as a labor pool, as apprentices, and as artisans. The slave labor force played a crucial and integral role in the building industry, as the slaves hauled, carted, shoveled, and attended at the construction site and brickyard. African-American craftsmen, infused with African artistic heritage and woodcarving skill, also made a subtle impact on the architecture of New Bern. Scale, harmony of proportion, and overall design are the realm of the architect. Black artisans in New Bern contributed to the quality of detail, the fine curve of a stair bracket, an exquisitely carved cornice frieze, and precisely laid brick to enhance a structure with elegance, grace, and finish.

Black master craftsmen, artisans, slaves, and apprentices impacted and vitalized the building industry in New Bern. As laborers, artisans, and apprentices, they worked with white artisans and crews on the jobsite. They also affected the African-American community, as they cooperated to secure bond for the enslaved, acted as guardians to children facing mandatory and arbitrary indenture, and supported each other financially. In the hostile and restrictive milieu sustained by the empowered white community, the free blacks developed an infrastructure to pave a path from slave to master craftsman. Donum Mumford, James Y. Green, Bacchus Simmons, William Handcock, and others exemplify the perseverance that directed these people out of the shadows of oppression. The building industry, African American community, and the town of New Bern

would have suffered, save for these free black and enslaved craftsmen and laborers.

APPENDIX ONE: BLACK APPRENTICES 1790-1835

Name	Date	Bond Holder	Trade
Jim Bradock	9/14/1804	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Peter Bradock	9/14/1804	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Elijah Copes	2/9/1823	James Y. Green	Carpenter
Elijah Cowper	12/11/1817	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Adam Culley	9/18/1819	Caesar Fulshire	Carpenter
Lewis Dive	6/14/1821	Abraham Allen	Plasterer & Mason
George Donaldson	3/12/1804	Nathan Tisdale	Brick maker
Elijah Dove	6/14/1804	John C. Stanly	House Carpenter
John Dove	6/10/1807	John C. Stanly	Brick maker
Bill Dove	9/15/1815	James York Green	Carpenter
Henry Duncan	2/9/1824	Donum Montford	Bricklayer
Benj. Futterton	12/9/1816	James Y. Green	Carpenter
Elisha Gregory	9/10/1804	John C. Stanly	House Carpenter
Mackey Gregory	9/10/1804	John C. Stanly	House Carpenter
William Handcock	9/12/1817	Uriah Sandy	Carpenter
Daniel Hasle	9/19/1807	Thomas A. Green	Carpenter

Garrison Hasle	9/19/1807	Donum Montford	Bricklayer
Henry Hazle	9/15/1815	James York Green	Carpenter
Daniel Hazle	9/17/1804	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Robert Hazle	9/15/1815	James York Green	Carpenter
Jacob Harris	6/10/1807	Donum Montford	Plasterer & Mason
William Herritage	6/13/1820	Nathan L. Chapman	Carpenter
Richard Johnson	11/10/1834	Donum Montford	Plasterer
Simon Kees	12/17/1818	Robert Lisbon	Carpenter
George Keiser	9/14/1818	John C. Stanly	Carpenter & Cooper
Tom Long	9/9/1817	John Dewey	Carpenter
Jacob Massellon	3/9/1812	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Frederick Merrick	12/1824	Hardy B. Lane	Carpenter
Michael Mitchell	9/11/1815	Benjamin Morrison	House Carpenter
Nelson Mitchell	8/8/1825	James Y. Green	Carpenter
Thomas Mitchell	3/11/1811	Edward Meadows	Carpenter
Jim Moor	12/10/1811	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
Charles Mosley	9/9/1811	Donum Montford	Bricklayer
Daniel Mosley	9/9/1811	John Dewey	Carpenter
John Mosely	9/9/1811	Donum Montford	Plasterer
Henry Pettifer	8/12/1823	Bacchus Simmons	Carpenter
Lewis Pettiphor	9/10/1810	John C. Stanly	Carpenter

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Bond Holder</u>	<u>Trade</u>
Richard Pettipher (Pettiphor)	9/10/1816	Donum Mumford	Plasterer
Emanuel Power	9/15/1818	Emanuel Hails	Carpenter
Asa Pimikin	2/12/1826	John C. Stanly	Plasterer
Lewis Sawyer	5/9/1826	Edward Meadows	Carpenter
Bill Spellman		Donum Mumford	Bricklayer
David Spellman	1793	George Emmerson	Carpenter
Bob Strinter	6/14/1822	Manuel Hayes	Carpenter
Robert Stringer	5/13/1825	Emanuel Hall	Carpenter
Uriah Stringer	9/17/1807	John C. Stanly	Carpenter
James Thornton	9/11/1817	Uriah Sandy	Carpenter
John Tucker	9/14/1819	John C. Stanly	Carpenter & Cooper
James Willowby	1804	John C. Stanly	House Carpenter
Jacob (slave)	1814		Carpenter
Kit (slave)	1818		Carpenter
Sam (slave)	1820		Carpenter
Nathan (slave)	12/13/1811	William Green	Carpenter
George (slave)	11/18/1815	John M. Oliver	House Carpenter

APPENDIX TWO: FREE BLACK ARTISANS

Carpenters

Nathan Chapman
Caesar Fulshire
James Y. Green
Rigdon Green
Emanuel Hails
Robert Lisbon
Bacchus Simmons
George Stringer

Masons

Abraham Allen
Donum Montford

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A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER'S LETTER

Kenneth H. Brinson

By November 1864 the Confederate States of America was in the fourth year of the Civil War. Early victories and optimism had faded and were being replaced by losses and pessimism. It was during this time that First Lieutenant Edward J. Bowen penned a letter to his friend Benjamin F. Brinson pleading for assistance for Bowen's mother.

Records indicate that Edward J. Bowen was born ca. 1833. In the 1850 Census he was listed as being 17 years of age. This date corresponds to the age of 27 given on his military enlistment. He was the son of Jesse G. Bowen and his wife Hollon Hardison. His father died when Edward was young. Growing up, he lived at various times with his mother, his grandfather Edward Bowen, and his uncle Thomas Bowen (mentioned in the letter). He was a student in School District 22 in the Bairds Creek area in 1841 and 1845.

Edward J. Bowen, a resident of Craven County, enlisted into the military, and on November 21, 1861, he was appointed First Lieutenant. He was assigned to Company K, North Carolina 31st Infantry Regiment. He served with this unit for three years. On October 16, 1864, he was reported as absent without leave. No further military records have been found.

After the war Edward was listed in the 1870 census living with his mother. His occupation was described as "Lumber Getter." There are no records indicating that he married.

Edward became a Charter Member of the Bayboro Lodge 331 of Free and Accepted Masons. He was selected to become the first Grand Master of this organization. In

Nov. 1st 1864

Dear Sir, Circumstances over which I have no control compel me to ask that of you which that in better days I could barely be expected, which is this, as you are aware I have to look after the subsistence of my mother & after I . . . have used all the economy possible & saved enough of the proceeds of my labor to pay a dozen prices I find that it is of no more use to me than blank paper. The addage of Shakepeir is now true, that judgement has flow to basilisk Beast and men have lost their reason, men who I have right informed that I had to expect in these times as much as my family needed without any change tells me now that for \$50 in green backs I or She can have 4 bbls corn & on no other terms. Now you know, that they knew it perfectly impossible for me or She to get that money. I have one more effort yet. I have but little confidence of success, now my request is this, can you manage any way to let me have 4 bbls for her which will make her meat and bread. If you can promise me then I can go to my post satisfied if ever my head will enable me and for it I will do anything in way of satisfying you for it in my power.

(Written vertically on margin)

I shall go tomorrow to try this last chance & if that and this fail my last effort is lost.

Hardly shall the very clothes off my person
rather than see my mother suffer for
want of something to eat, particularly for
me I have but little property but will
mortgage anything I have for the payment
of the value of that and if I have place
in your hands any amount of money
money with a bond that if you at any
any time that it does not please you I will
take it back & pay in current money or
property, I feel that I must do anything
rather than let her suffer if you can oblige
me in this, please write me back as soon
as it is by check in ten or twelve days & just
state what I must do to secure the payment
& I will at once comply & be under the same
obligation to you, Hoping that you may be
able to do greatly oblige me & my mother may with
your favorable consideration, I am with
great respect,
Dear Mother

I have made effort to go to your house but
was hindered by the Spy both times, I mean enough
thought to hear one of the children tell her father that it
was not how many hours there was a hindrance to
cause any one to suffer by my being in prison that
that is why I have not been to see you for some time
I was captured on 29th Sept & I hope not long

Bowen letter page two handwritten.

Freely shall the very clothes off my person go rather than see my mother suffer for want of something to eat. Unfortunately for me I have but little property but I will mortgage anything I have for the payment of the value of that amt, or I will place in your hands any amount of Confed money with a bond that if it turns out any time that it does not pay you I will take it back & pay in current money or property. I feel that I must do anything rather than let her suffer. If you can oblige me in this, please write me back tomorrow night by Dick in Uncle Toms name & just state what I must do to secure the payment & I will at once comply & be under renewed obligation to you. Hoping that you may be able to greatly oblige me & my petition may meet your favorable consideration. I am yours with great respect.

E. J. Bowen

B. F. Brinson, Esqr.

P. S. I have made effort to go to your house but was headed by the Spy both times. I was near enough tonight to hear one of the children tell hi . . . then that . . . knew how many geese there was. I don't intend to cause anyone to suffer by my being . . . that them, that is why I have not been to see you. W. E. Bennett was captured on 29th Sept & I hope not hurt. .

his will dated February 10, 1876, he left his estate to the Lodge "to be applied in the charitable purposes of said Lodge."

Edward J. Bowen died February 19, 1876. His remains were buried behind the Masonic Lodge in Bayboro, North Carolina.

Benjamin Franklin Brinson was born March 19, 1823, and died February 20, 1901. He was the son of Cason Brinson (III) and his wife Frances Green Brinson. Benjamin married Julia Bennett on April 8, 1848. She was born March 11, 1826, and died October 23, 1875. She was the daughter of William Bennett (Sr.) and his wife Barbara Brinson. The 1870 Census listed Benjamin and Julia and their eight children.

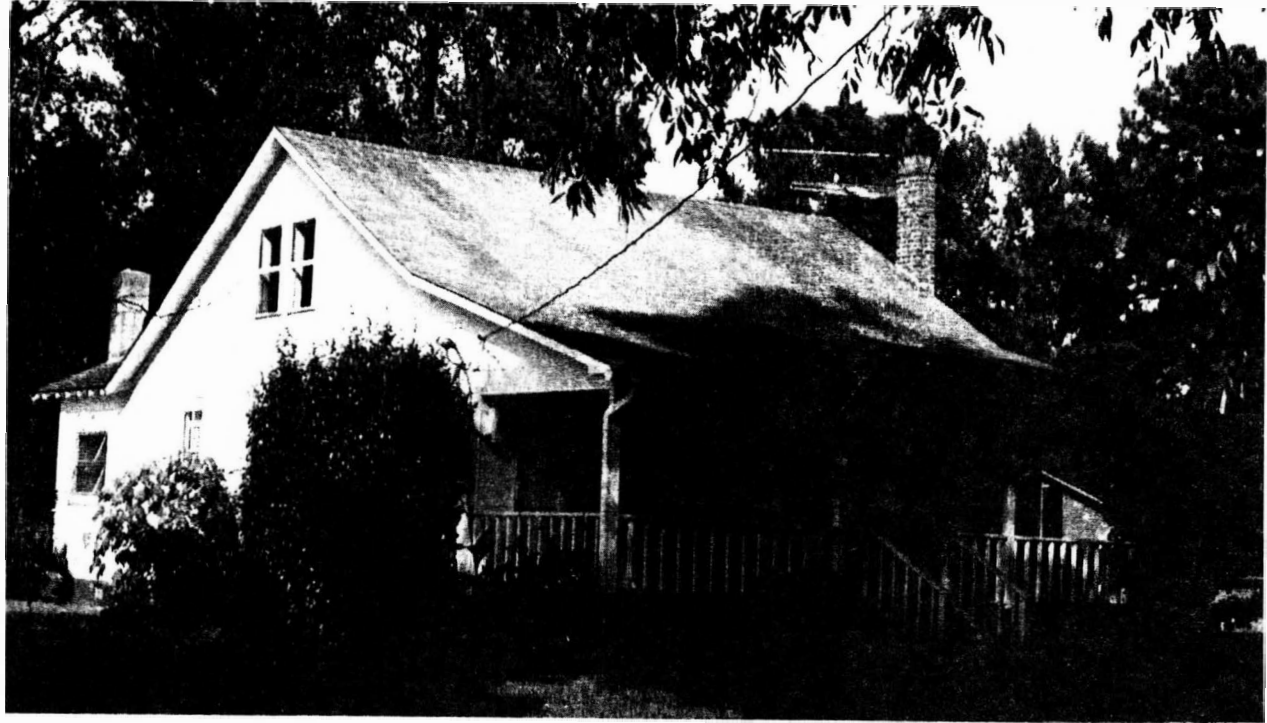
Benjamin and Julia owned several large tracts of land in the Bairds Creek area. The Deed Books contain numerous entries of land transactions undertaken by them. They owned slaves, but sold them four years before the Civil War started.

The Brinsons built and lived in a two-story house located next to Bairds Creek. The house has remained in the family to the present time. In 1977 Gilbert Franklin Brinson, Jr., the great-grandson of Benjamin and Julia, undertook a renovation of the house. It was during this time that the Edward J. Bowen letter was found hidden inside one of the walls.

Today the house is home to the family of Gilbert Franklin Brinson III, the great-great-grandson of Benjamin and Julia.

The family cemetery is located behind the house. Benjamin, his wife Julia, his mother Frances, and numerous members of the family are buried there.

William E. Bennett was born September 21, 1833, the son of William Bennett (Sr.) and his wife Barbara Brinson. He was the younger brother of Julia Bennett, who married Benjamin Franklin Brinson. He was listed as a student in School District 22 in 1845 along with Edward J. Bowen, his sister Julia, and 40 others, ages five to 21. Again, in the



Home of Benjamin Franklin Brinson. Photo by Brinson.

1850 Census, he was listed as a student.

William married Mary A. Caton on June 23, 1856. She was the daughter of James Caton and his wife Elizabeth Anderson. They became the parents of three sons.

William resided in the Bairds Creek area of Craven County when he enlisted in the military at age 28 on November 21, 1861. He was assigned to Company K of the North Carolina 31st Infantry Regiment. He mustered in with the rank of corporal. He was captured at the battle for Roanoke Island, North Carolina. On or about September 15, 1862, he was paroled in a prisoner exchange and returned to his unit. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant on October 8, 1863. During the battle at Fort Harrison, Virginia, he was captured a second time on or about September 30, 1864. No further military records have been found.

In 1865, the year the war ended, William was back at his home with his wife and children. Soon after his return, according to his wife, he "left home and just did not come back." He was declared dead by his wife in 1865; and his estate was settled in 1866. His wife Mary died in 1871.

All four of the men mentioned in the letter resided in the Bairds Creek area of Craven County, North Carolina. In 1872 that part of Craven County was incorporated into the newly formed Pamlico County. Edward, Benjamin, and William were members of Bethany Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arapahoe, North Carolina. Thomas Bowen became a minister in the same denomination.

The North Carolina 31st Infantry Regiment was organized at Hill's Point, Beaufort County, on September 19, 1861. John V. Jordan, age 33, from Craven County was appointed Colonel and Commander of the Regiment. Eleven companies, each containing approximately 100 men, and the Colonel's staff made up the Regiment with a total enrollment of approximately 1200 men.

The Regiment was active throughout the war. It was assigned to areas in or near Roanoke Island, Kinston, Greenville, Goldsboro, New Bern, Topsail Island, Wyse

Fork, Bentonville, and Statesville inside the state of North Carolina. Outside its home state the Regiment saw action at Charleston, South Carolina, and several areas in Virginia.

During some of the assignments given the Regiment, only portions of the unit were involved. On several occasions they were joined by troops from other units. Most of their assignments involved setting up defensive positions.

The Regiment was heavily involved in battles at Roanoke Island in 1862, Charleston, South Carolina, in 1863, and in the Petersburg-Richmond area of Virginia in 1864. They shared in some victories, but experienced numerous defeats.

The most difficult battle for the Regiment took place at Fort Harrison, Virginia, on September 29-30, 1864. The Union Forces captured the Fort on the 29th. The Confederate troops were ordered to retake it. On the 30th the Southern troops launched three successive attacks. They were repulsed each time with heavy losses. On the night of September 30, 1864, the 31st Infantry Regiment was under the command of a First Lieutenant, and approximately 60 men were present for duty.

Near the end of the war, the Regiment found itself under the command of General Joseph E. Johnston. These troops moved from Smithfield to Bentonville to set up an ambush for General William T. Sherman's army. This attempt failed and Johnston's troops moved to Raleigh, then to Chapel Hill, and finally to Bush Hill in Randolph County. At this point General Johnston negotiated the surrender of his army on April 28, 1865. The few survivors of the North Carolina 31st Infantry Regiment were paroled on May 2, 1865.

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