



# JOURNAL

Vol. XXXI 2024



Photographers of 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century New Bern



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# JOURNAL OF THE NEW BERN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## **Editor's Note: Living in the Candy Store for History**

**George Howard**

**W**ith this being my first year to serve as the editor for the New Bern Historical Society Journal (HSJ), I wanted to start by thanking the HSJ Committee and the staff of the New Bern Historical Society for their help and guidance (and patience) as we worked through the process of selecting topics, soliciting authors, editing drafts and assembling what we hope will be a most interesting Journal for 2024. As someone with an interest in history, this whole process has helped me more fully appreciate the experience of living in New Bern, where it is like “living in the candy store for history.” This year’s edition has seven articles, each focusing on a different and fascinating part of our shared past.

The lead article by Ken McCotter focuses on the contributions of Colonel Joseph Leech to the establishment of New Bern. Leech was certainly a man for all seasons, in the pre-revolutionary period serving in the Colonial Assembly and as a Colonel in Tryon’s militia. With the separation from England, he swiftly transitioned to service as the president of the newly established Council of State for North Carolina, Mayor of New Bern, justice of the peace, field officer for the Craven County minutemen, representative to the constitutional convention held in Hillsborough, and early supporter for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (whew, wonder what he did on the weekends!). Reading Ken’s article makes one appreciate that New Bern and North Carolina would not be what they are without Colonel Leech’s many contributions.

Bernard George continues his years-long contributions to the HSJ, and this year is joined by his wife Brenda as a co-author, with a wonderful description of the development of the Black church community prior to 1800. This article underscores remarkable diversity between the Black churches in New Bern, some founded directly in the Black community and others “spun off” of churches attended by both Black

and White community members. The article also describes the powerful future contributions of these Black churches in the emancipation and civil rights eras. In the conclusion to his article, Bernard and Brenda appropriately note that “New Bern’s African American churches have historically been rallying points for the spiritual, political, and economic well-being of their communities.”

One of my most interesting on-going discussions in the development of articles has been with Mark Sandvigen, who raised the fascinating issue that while New Bern was somewhat spared by its early fall and occupation by the Union forces in the Civil War, it also made the town more dependent on the resources of the Union Army. With the termination of the war, many of the Union forces returned to their homes, and their withdrawal (and the withdrawal of their resources) introduced many challenges described in Mark’s article on the reconstruction period in New Bern as it worked through the period to become “a beacon of hope and prosperity” in eastern North Carolina.

If there is a single thing that eastern North Carolina has a true abundance of, it is our wonderful state pine tree. George Evans’ article describes the development of the lumber mills in New Bern around 1900, one of the first major industries in town. A particularly interesting part of George’s article is how these entrepreneurs transitioned the yellow pine from being considered an inferior product to becoming the premium wood that is the foundation for many of our homes today. Much as our homes are built on the foundation of the yellow pine, George’s article documents how our town was in part built on the foundation of these early lumber mills.

Early in this year it was easy to see that no edition of the HSJ would be complete without a contribution of the Historical Society’s own historian – Claudia Houston. Claudia has been a frequent contributor to the HSJ, and this year has tackled providing the early history of photography in New Bern. As the technology of photography progressed over the period from the 1840’s through the 1880’s, New Bern was blessed by a remarkable diversity of photographers who contributed to documentation of this important period of New Bern History.

As a child of the period of desegregation of schools in North Carolina, I was particularly drawn to the information in Susan Cook's article on the development and strengthening of schools serving the African American community in New Bern as they became "Jewels in the Crown" of the education of New Bern children Her article also describes the bitter-sweet process as these jewels moved through the period of desegregation. Particularly for those of my generation, her article provides vital insights to how we became the people (and the town) that we are.

My first year as the editor began with Jim Hodges, the Curator for the New Bern Historical Society, announcing that he was stepping down from the HSJ Committee. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Jim's years-long contributions to the HSJ, or to overstate the deep appreciation for these contributions from all who have worked with him. While I join in this appreciation, I will also say that his stepping down did introduce a bit of panic to the "new guy." This panic was offset by Jim's graceful and powerful contribution of an article to this year's Journal on the Federal Buildings in New Bern. Jim remains a wizard of how to tell a story with pictures, and this year's contribution describing these important buildings in our community is no exception.

And while we are discussing people stepping down, it is important that we all take a minute to thank Jay DeLoach who stepped down after 5 years serving as the previous editor of the HSJ. I have particularly appreciated his guidance and advice, and have learned from the review of the excellent product developed under his hand as editor. Again, we all owe a debt of gratitude to Jay for his leadership as editor and his continued service as a committee member.

I close this note where I began, by expressing my appreciation to the HSJ Committee and to the staff of the Historical Society in the partnership to develop an edition that we all hope enriches your understanding of the history of our town.



## **CRAVEN COUNTY'S LUMBER INDUSTRY ENTERS THE 20TH CENTURY**

**George Evans**

**A**s the nineteenth century ended, the New Bern area looked very different from today. Now New Bern's picturesque historic center is largely retail and residential. Then, New Bern was an industrial city, with multiple lumber mills and their wharves lining the banks of its two rivers. There were also mills in James City and Bridgeton, and elsewhere in the county. Lumber was regularly shipped, usually by schooners or barges, to places like New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.

### **Timber and Sawmills**

Timber and wood products had been a key part of Craven County's economy since colonial times. Abundant longleaf pines provided tar, pitch and turpentine, and large logs for masts and spars. But the supply of accessible longleaf pines declined. So did the demand, as shipbuilding evolved from wood to metal. Nevertheless, after the Civil War, lumber and wood products emerged as the primary industry in Craven County, bringing entrepreneurs, capital and fresh economic opportunities. While wood products continue today to be important locally, their heyday of growth was roughly the years 1890-1910. Sanborn insurance maps of 1908 show many changes from the 1898 maps, with new buildings and new names. High demand, infinite yellow pine resources and improved technology caused this industry to explode. New Bern was linked by rivers and sounds to the Atlantic, and by 1857, by rail with Morehead City, Goldsboro and beyond. Thanks to its location at the junction of the Trent and Neuse Rivers, railroad connections and relative lack of Civil War damage, New Bern became the industry hub in eastern North Carolina. Sawmills had been a long-standing part of Craven's past. There were mills in colonial times-indeed, Baron Christoph von Graffenried built

one in 1710-1711. As early as 1816, a steam powered mill was in operation, and others followed. In 1848, Union Point Steam Factory began producing sashes, blinds and doors at the foot of East Front Street. A similar business, Steam Variety Works, soon followed. Around 1850, New Bern cabinetmaker George Bishop advertised window sashes, blinds and panel doors made at his Broad Street shop, using steam machinery.

New technology hastened growth of this business. Portable steam sawmills could be set up temporarily in remote locations. Forest workers, often African-American or European immigrants, used steam powered derricks, skidders and log loaders. Temporary and permanent railways were constructed in remote areas, allowing the movement of logs to nearby creeks and rivers for water transport to sawmills. Band saws gradually replaced many circular saws. Improved planing saws and specialized woodworking machines allowed more precise cutting. By the 1890s most woodworking machines were mass produced. Dry kilns became widely used to reduce moisture from green logs, making the wood easier to cut and reducing warping. Electricity, often generated at the mill, provided lighting which allowed night working hours.

## **Yellow Pine**

Eastern North Carolina forests were filled with yellow pine, which had historically been considered an inferior wood for boards. But through the efforts of industry giant John L. Roper Lumber Company, of Norfolk, Virginia, yellow pine, marketed as “North Carolina pine,” became known as a premium lumber product. In 1897, Roper led efforts to create the North Carolina Pine Association, a trade association that established uniform sizes and grades for boards, and other marketing guidelines. Thus, this once neglected wood was transformed into a preferred product. Author William Barber describes what followed as a “green gold rush” to acquire timberland. Large parcels, often thought to be of little value, because of remoteness were snapped up.



## **Early Mills**

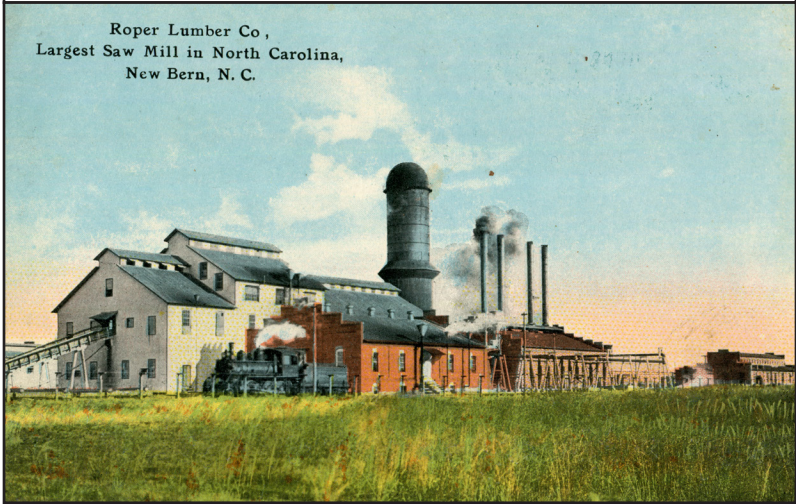
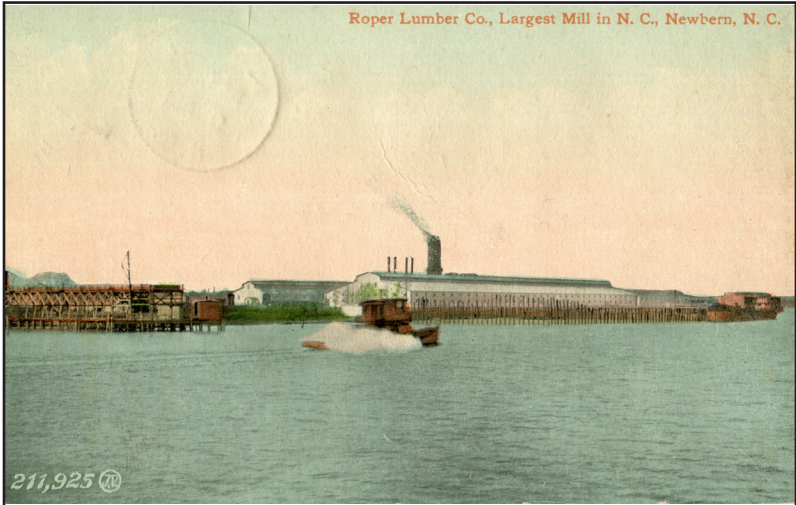
Many details about early lumber businesses have been lost due to time. But newspaper articles, Sanborn insurance maps and other sources provide parts of the story. Pioneer Daniel Stimson, a native of Maine and former Union soldier, arrived in New Bern in 1864. He built a sawmill at the foot of King Street and another nearby. His early mill burned in 1873, and two later mills burned in 1889. After his death, his business was reportedly sold for \$50,000 in 1890. Samuel Ratcliff had a mill nearby. David Congdon, another early leader and one-time partner of Stimson, built sawmills in the 1870s. He had a saw and planing mill, just north of the Neuse railroad bridge, near Stimpson's lumber yard. Congdon later bought a pulp mill, which he eventually sold to Carolina Wood Pulp Company.

## **Blades Brothers**

The most prominent lumbermen were James and William Blades, originally from Bishopville, in eastern Maryland. William's home on Johnson and Middle Streets remains a lasting testament to local craftsmen and the wealth this industry brought to New Bern. William began a sawmill business in Maryland, which James joined, but the tree supply was limited. After exploring the entire southeastern coast for better opportunities, they began buying timberland near Bath, North Carolina, around 1883. They first established mills in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. In 1886, they leased a sawmill on the south side of the Trent River and began buying land along the Neuse. They incorporated a lumber business in New Bern with J.S. Clark in 1892, and built a sawmill on the Neuse River, just behind their duplex home on East Front Street. After Clark died in 1895, the company became Blades Lumber Company. In 1902, American Lumberman published an extensive article praising the Blades family, and describing how yellow pine had attained commercial success. In 1903, the Blades consolidated several sawmills into one large mill on the banks of the Neuse.

At the height of their success, the Blades sold most of their holdings, except those in Elizabeth City, to Roper Lumber in 1906. The transaction included 200,000 acres in Craven and surrounding counties,

seven sawmills, a planing mill, fifty miles of railroad, three tugboats and seven barges. The Blades continued to operate on a smaller scale, building a mill in Bridgeton around 1908. They continued with many



**Postcard Images of the Roper Lumber Company.**

From the Richardson Collection

other business ventures in New Bern, including the underwriting of the five story Elks Building.

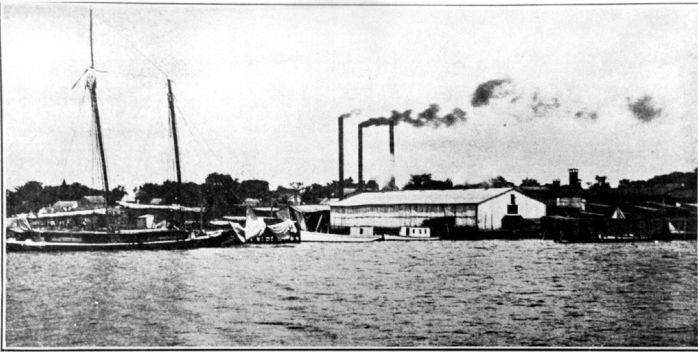
### **Roper Lumber**

Roper already had two mills in Craven, one purchased from David Congdon. In 1900 it built a sawmill, called the Winthrop Mill, on Adams Creek on the lower Neuse, below Havelock. Roper consolidated its holdings and built an enormous new mill on the Neuse, north of Queen Street, in 1909. A 35-mile railroad connected this mill with Jones and Onslow counties. It sold this mill to the Rowland Lumber Company in 1921. That mill was one of the sources of New Bern's great fire of 1922.

### **Other Lumber Companies**

An 1893 New Bern business directory showed twelve saw and planing mills, two large shingle mills and two barrel factories. In the 1890s, the Hawk family from Easton and Allentown, Pennsylvania established the Pine Lumber Company. The 1898 Sanborn map referred to their mill, which was near Crescent Street, as the Henry Hawk mill. A fire burned this mill in 1905, but it was quickly rebuilt. Pine had approximately 30,000 acres of land under its control. S.E. Sullivan had a sawmill on the Trent River, opposite Blades. Munger and Bennett built a sawmill in James City, and expanded its capacity in 1905. Ipock, Broaddus and Ives operated a sawmill on the Neuse, with Ipock selling out in 1895. R.F. Broaddus and C.L. Ives added lumber machines to an existing shingle mill. John Lokey and B.S. Hearn operated Broad Creek Lumber Company. Lokey lived in Riverdale, about eight miles south of New Bern. Lokey and Harrison Cannon later had a mill in Riverdale and sold lumber in Camden, New Jersey, and elsewhere. After Lokey died in 1902, Cannon moved the business to South Carolina.

In 1904, a mill operated by J. F. Basnight burned in James City, and northern businessmen bought him out. They created the New Bern Lumber Company and built a large new mill. The primary shareholder was H.C. Turner of Malone, New York, who reportedly ran seven mills in New York and Quebec with his brothers. Carolina



## **THE ELM CITY LUMBER CO.**

**Manufacturers and  
Wholesale Dealers**

**North Carolina Pine  
Rough or Dressed**

**Rail and Water Shipments  
New Bern, N. C.**

Wood Pulp Company began in 1905. It bought a pulp mill in James City previously owned by J.W. Gray and David Congdon. Pulp was to be made from cypress and sent north to be processed into paper.

After Goldsboro Lumber built a sawmill in Dover, a tiny town on the railroad, by 1890 it had grown rapidly in size. Other local lumber businesses of the era included the Warren Ellis shingle mill, Elm City Lumber, Z.F. Prettyman Lumber, Moody and Roberts, Hamilton Lumber, Trent Lumber and A. Lee and Company. The 1908 Sanborn maps showed that Moody Lumber off South Front, near the railroad bridge, had become the new Elm City Lumber complex. Roper Lumber predominated along the Neuse.

### **Other Wood Products**

Cut lumber was not the only wood product. The Ellis shingle mill, for example, produced shingles for roofing and siding. Businesses continued to make sashes and blinds, as well as moldings, flooring, mantles and other home construction products. Locally produced barrels,

boxes and crates were needed for shipment of fish and vegetables. Gum tree wood, while plentiful, was also considered inferior, useful mainly for telegraph poles, fencing and railroad ties. However, S.H. Gray Manufacturing made wooden plates from gum wood, up to 100,000 per day. It claimed to be the only such factory in the world. The North Carolina Stave Company, begun in 1905 with capital from New York, planned to make barrel staves from gum. The barrels were to be used primarily by the American Sugar Refinery, which processed Caribbean sugar cane. The owner expected a new process to produce up to 500,000 staves a week. Unfortunately, in the following year, the plant burned and the company ended.

## **Hazards**

Newspaper articles documented the many hazards these businesses encountered. There were obvious dangers to workers who were sometimes cut by saws. Harvesting and transporting logs from forests and swamps was of course dangerous. As noted, fires were quite common. Dry kilns often caught fire, destroying buildings, equipment and lumber stock. In June 1900, fire destroyed New Bern Wooden Package Works, a business that had just begun in March. In 1902, the Sullivan Mill burned. So did the Trent Lumber Company, owned by the Thompson Brothers of Philadelphia, leading to insolvency. Boilers sometime exploded. In 1904, an explosion at Sullivan Mill in James City killed seven people. There was also storm damage, such as from hurricanes in 1893 and 1899. Finally, there were financial hazards. There was an economic panic in 1893. A bank panic in 1907 caused the demand for lumber to plummet. Roper scaled back its operations dramatically in December 1907.

## **After 1910**

Craven County's lumber business did continue to thrive after 1910. By 1910, New Bern's lumber industry reportedly employed almost 5000 workers, and could produce about 175,000,000 board feet of cut boards annually. A 1902 Raleigh newspaper article had estimated annual production then as 70,000,000 board feet. (A "board foot" is the volume of wood in a piece twelve inches square, and one inch thick. One contemporary estimate was that 100,000 board feet would

be enough to build 12-15 houses.) It was the largest lumber producing location in North Carolina.

Even in 1920, there were sixteen lumber mills in the New Bern vicinity. However, changing market demand, a gradual decrease in the supply of accessible trees and better port facilities elsewhere did change the picture. The economic effects of World War I reduced demand, a trend which may have led to Roper's sale of its large mill in 1921. As the twentieth century began, New Bern, with its shallow rivers, became a far less competitive port than Wilmington, with its deep water capacity.

## **Conclusion**

While the sawmills are gone, lumber remains a significant component of the local economy. Historically the importance of this industry to Craven County is obvious – at a time when eastern North Carolina was devastated after the Civil War, forests provided a lifesaving source of jobs and income for many years. The lumber boom brought others to the area, providing the labor and capital needed to harvest and process the region's valuable wood assets.

## **References**

Much of this material is based on North Carolina newspaper articles, available on newspapers.com, especially the New Berne Weekly Journal and The Daily Journal of New Bern. More comprehensive articles were in the October 3, 1899, January 2, 1905 and June 12, 1905 Weekly Journal. Another summary article was in the May 11, 1893 issue of The Commonwealth (Scotland Neck, N.C.).

**About the author:** George Evans is a retired attorney who moved to New Bern after practicing in Charlotte and Winston-Salem. He was a history major at the University of the South (Sewanee) and attended law school at the University of Virginia.



## **JEWELS IN THE CROWN: WEST STREET GRADED SCHOOL AND J.T. BARBER HIGH SCHOOL**

**Susan McEnally Jackson Cook**

**A**fter the Civil War ended, Black civic leaders saw education for their children as one of the great needs going forward. “We want to be an educated people and an intelligent people .... We want to read and write and acquire those accomplishments which will enable us to discharge the duties of life as citizens.”

The North Carolina Constitution of 1868 did indeed envision a system of tuition-free public schools open for at least four months per year. Funding would be provided from poll taxes and from a small state fund to assist in opening schools. Only seven years later (1875), a constitutional amendment mandated separate but equal facilities. Not surprisingly, great disparity developed despite the word equal. However, as the beginning of the twentieth century neared, some advances were on the horizon. The newly constructed West Street Graded School (1907 – 1969) and, later, the J.T. Barber High School (1956-1970) became sources of great pride for New Bern’s Black community during these years of strict school segregation.

### **The West Street Graded School**

An early reference to this school appears in an autobiography written by I. P. Hatch, who was born of former slaves. Hatch recalls beginning school at age six at the Red Schoolhouse which would have been in 1877 or 1878. He says that in 1884 a new two-story wooden school was built called the West Street Graded School. He continued at this new school and completed the eighth grade there. This school may have replaced the Red Schoolhouse. According to a city directory from 1880-1881 New Bern already had three Black schools. Little is known about them but perhaps one was the Red Schoolhouse.

A referendum in 1883 authorized New Bern to establish a special



WEST STREET GRADED SCHOOL

property tax to support local schools with funding along racial lines. Both Black and white taxpayers voted favorably for this segregated system with segregated boards of trustees. Despite adversity and unequal funding, the Black community was pressing on. For unknown reasons, by 1900, the only Black public school identified in city school reports was the West Street Graded School.

John Thomas Barber became principal in 1905. In mid-January of that year, the school was destroyed by fire. Barber, a native of nearby Jones County and a graduate of Shaw University, strongly believed that an opportunity to learn was “the birthright of every American child.” With this passionate belief, he campaigned tirelessly for a brick building to replace the original wooden structure. He was successful and the new brick building also named West Street Graded School opened in 1908. As the first brick school in NC for the education of Black children it was a major milestone toward equality.

After the fire, the immediate need was to find a location for continuing the education of the displaced students. At a school board meeting,





January 20, 1905, Superintendent H.B Craven was authorized to provide “such quarters as may be necessary” to complete the term and continue schooling. Although locations were not specified, Mr. Craven later indicated that this was done quickly and that the scholars lost little class time. Some students must have met at the still standing old Red Schoolhouse because a newspaper ad appeared in June 1906 recruiting for a teacher to fill a vacancy there. It is unlikely, though, that all students were or could be accommodated there as Barber was commended several times for his leadership in dealing with the “widely dispersed” classes.

How many students were involved during the unsettled transitional period? Again, this is uncertain. Estimated enrollment ranged from seventy-five students in 1901 to about 470 in 1908 at the newly opened brick structure. A concurrent estimate for white students at their school on Academy Green was 633. During these years North

Carolina still had no required compulsory school laws, and the typical grade range was first through eighth grade.

Before construction of a new school, legal and financial difficulties had to be addressed. In March 1906 the Superintendent of the School Trustees Board announced that no funds were available. However by January 1907, the board announced that over \$2000 was on hand for rebuilding. Ultimately, a commemorative cornerstone was laid in June 1908 and classes began meeting there in October. The cost was \$6,400, and the building was considered to be among the best Black graded school buildings in the state.

### **New Laws, a growing population**

In 1913 the first statewide compulsory attendance law was passed requiring that all youth ages 8 – 12 attend school continuously for four months. Also, New Bern's Black population was increasing. Adding to the need for more space was the format of the graded school system. Requirements called for a set curriculum in an organized and sequential program to be taught in separate classrooms for each grade. Anticipating these growing needs, a second large brick building had already been constructed on school grounds by 1913.

Later, in 1922-23 an additional 50-foot lot was purchased and a one-story brick building was constructed. After that, the school campus of three buildings included eighteen classrooms, an auditorium, a library, and two classrooms for domestic science. In 1925, an accredited "high school department" was added to the mix with the first class of nine females and one male graduating that same year.

Gradually from 1919-1942 state laws increased the length of the school term from six to nine months, required attendance until the age of sixteen, and added a 12th grade. Clearly more space was needed. The solution was to relocate the high school on a new campus. The new principal, Frederick R. Danyus, dealt with this challenge following the retirement of Mr. Barber in 1944.

Once again, some West Street classes had to be dispersed in the interim. In 1951, the seventh and eighth grades were temporarily housed in one of the first buildings completed for the new high school,

and some lower-level classes met in a wing of the old Industrial Academy. The high school program remained at West Street until the new high school opened in 1955. At that time the seventh and eighth graders returned to the West Street campus. The new high school was named J.T. Barber High School, a fitting tribute to this man who had contributed so much for the Black community.

## **Remembering Contributions**

West Street School was a cherished and vital part of the community. The building provided more than classrooms. During the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1922, the school served as a food distribution center; Barber and others served free meals in the school cafeteria; displaced women were sheltered there; and the school provided a place for neighborhood gatherings. During Mr. Danyus' tenure in the late 1940s, the school's brick mason class and their teacher, Jasper Hayes, helped construct the building now known as the Jasper G. Hayes Omega Center.

Arabelle Bryant, a teacher and media specialist at West Street for over 30 years, commented in 2010, "As African-Americans in this city, we will always... remember that it all began with the West Street Graded School. Those buildings stood from 1905 to 1974, but the influence will always live in the hearts of those who attended and worked in those structures." Former student Carol Bonner Becton recalled, "I knew I was in the Negro school, the colored school, but because of Mr. Barber and others we were not only educated, we were nurtured. Within our community we had the luxury of our teachers really knowing our parents and our teachers really knowing us. We were not just tolerated, we were loved."

After the high school moved, Mr. Danyus continued on as principal at what was now an elementary school with 7th and 8th grades. Fire struck again in 1969, destroying the historic 1907 brick structure. Newly constructed classrooms, an office and a library complex opened in 1971. Three years later the school was renamed and dedicated as the F.R. Danyus School. Throughout the 1970s and in the 1980s the school was an integrated school serving New Bern's fifth grade students. Then, due to population shifts, it was closed permanently



on June 30, 1991. After being used for a time as a Head Start Center, in 1923 it was declared surplus property and was recently purchased by the city of New Bern.

### **J.T. Barber High School**

In 1951, construction began on the new J.T. Barber High School. The contemporary design by local architect Raymond Fuson was constructed in three phases and was located on Cobb Street in a midcentury-African American neighborhood known as Jackson Terrace. Seventh and eighth graders from West Street began attending after the first wing was completed. During this period, it was sometimes referred to as J. T. Barber Junior High School. The remainder of the building was completed by 1955, and high school classes were moved there at the beginning of the 1955-1956 school year. The sprawling brick structure housed an auditorium, cafeteria, gymnasium, a band and chorus music wing, and twenty-five classrooms. School grounds came to include a large athletic field, a basketball court, and a baseball diamond.

Wallace Booker, a teacher from West Street School, was the first principal serving until 1963. Grover C. Fields assumed leadership and remained until the two New Bern high schools were fully integrated in 1970. The first senior class to graduate from the new school wrote in their class yearbook history “four years ago a crew of 87 boys and 67 girls set sail for a four-year cruise on the Steamship West Street

High.” They were the first class to spend all four years at this shiny new high school.

The curriculum at J.T. Barber included standard liberal arts as well as some vocational classes. Students excelled with many becoming successful in fields such as medicine, law, engineering, education, social work, and art. The band and majorettes thrilled the local community in all downtown parades. Numerous special interest clubs were formed, homecoming parades, proms, cheer leading, senior class activities, all depicted in the yearbook, *The Warrior*.

Some interests were outside the walls of the school, and some students became interested in political issues. The NAACP in New Bern had organized a youth council that consisted mostly of J. T. Barber students. On March 17, 1960, a number of these students participated in a sit-in at two downtown restaurants. Twenty-nine protestors including the students were arrested. Black businesses and the NAACP paid the bail, and the charges were subsequently dropped. Student participant Alfred “Pops” Barfield later said that some of the parents of the youth council members were “less than thrilled” with their children’s involvement in the protests.

The J.T. Barber Warriors were in the AAA division of the Black North Carolina High School Athletic Conference. The football team won the championship in 1956, a first for New Bern. Several athletes achieved professional and national successes. Seven-foot basketball star Walt Bellamy played college basketball, participated on the winning US 1960 Olympics team, and was inducted into the American Basketball Hall of Fame in 1993. Bob Mann played for the Detroit Lions and was inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame. Aaron “Pete” Martin, moved on to pro football with the Los Angeles Rams and the Philadelphia Eagles. John “Johnnie” Pearsall became a New York City professional heavyweight boxer.

### **Changing times**

Although the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that segregated schools were unconstitutional, the state and New Bern delayed as long as possible. Then in 1964, a “freedom of choice plan” was put into place.



**Selected Yearbook Cover Images from the Class of 1915 to the Class of 1970.**

Mr. H. J. McDonald, school superintendent at the time, remembers that students from grades seven through twelve “had the privilege” of selecting the school they wished to attend.” That first year, only four J.T. Barber students chose attend the white New Bern High School. He notes that all of these children were coming from homes of college-educated parents. One of them, Gwendolyn Bryan, recalled, “For the first year, I couldn’t eat my breakfast. There was that lump in my throat.” By the time she graduated, she had come to appreciate

certain excellent teachers who influenced her life. The first Black student to graduate from New Bern High was Andrew Davis who chose to transfer for his senior year and graduated in 1966.

Finally the federal government required North Carolina to stop prevaricating on full integration; and as of the 1970-71 school year all high school students in New Bern, Black or white, attended the already existing New Bern High School. The J. T. Barber building was repurposed as a fully integrated junior high school; then a middle school, and in 1990 it became J.T. Barber Elementary School with grades K-5. In 2023, consideration was given to closing the school due to changing demographics. Passionate pleas were made to keep the school open and it will remain open as a K-5 Restart School. Fortunately the building was placed on the Register of Historic Places in 2006, affording it some level of historic preservation.

In 2021, the last graduating class from J.T. Barber had a grand fiftieth celebration with the theme “Embracing the Warriors Journey with Pride.” These comments say it all. From Linda Simmons-Henry “The direction in which education starts a man/woman will determine his/her future life. The teachers we had at J.T. Barber set that precedent for us and wanted each one of us to succeed. We stand on so many great shoulders.” From others, “The students of J.T. Barber from 1955 through 1970 have reason to celebrate. J. T. Barber High students have proudly served the New Bern community since graduating on June 3, 1970, and remain committed to educational, cultural, and civic activities that enrich our community through public service. This year we are honored to commemorate 50 years, a historical milestone since graduating from this African-American institution.”

## Important Sources

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Arabelle Bryant, “West Street School; mother of public schools for African-Americans in New Bern,” April 26, 2010. <https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/nccueagles/west-street-school-mother-of-public-schools-for-af-t5606.html>

**About the Author:** Susan McEnally Jackson Cook is a proud graduate of New Bern public schools and attended the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, completed with a Ph.D. in Library and Information Science. She happily returned to live in New Bern after a career in teaching and public librarianship.



## PHOTOGRAPHERS OF 19TH CENTURY NEW BERN

### Claudia Houston

In the twenty-first century, taking photos is common and we rarely think about how photographs were taken in the past. In 1839, French artist Louis J.M. Daguerre introduced a photographic process that reached North Carolina in the 1840s and became the predominant style of photography during that era. Initially, daguerreotype photography was used for landscapes, but American photographers helped to create a new profession-the daguerreotypist.

The first daguerreotypists in North Carolina were itinerants, traveling to the more populated areas of the state like New Bern via horse, wagons, and stagecoach. The first known itinerant photographer in North Carolina was Dr. Davis in 1842 in Halifax. In 1843, the first photographer arrived in New Bern and by the end of the nineteenth century there had been twenty-five more. A total of six hundred photographers practiced in North Carolina during that same time period.

James Joyner arrived in New Bern and advertised in the *New Bernian* and *Carolina Advocate* newspapers on November 25, 1843, that he was “now prepared to take Daguerreotypes. Likeness with every variety of colours, equal to any in the country and cheap.”<sup>1</sup> On January 23, 1844, he advertised, “LOOK AT THIS! I shall be in Newbern in about two or three weeks during which time I will take Daguerreotype Portraits at a small advance of what the materials cost me. I will furnish an accurate likeness fitted up in a fine morocco case on silver plate for 3 dollars-in frames for two dollars and fifty cents. N.B. Portraits taken equally well in cloudy as in fair weather.”<sup>2</sup>

James Burney, 1847 daguerreotypist artist, announced he had taken rooms on the corner of Broad and Hancock Streets, where he was “to take Daguerreotype likenesses equal to any taken in the Northern cities, or in the world.”<sup>3</sup>



1865. 1865. Pollock Alley, New Bern, N. C.  
Showing some of the Officers and Men of the 20th Mass. Vol. Regt.  
Resented by Col. M. Drannan to Loyal Legion

**1865 photograph by Jesse Cowling taken on Pollock Street.**

James S. Woodbridge from New York City traveled to New Bern in 1848 and occupied rooms on Craven Street. He left the city briefly, but returned in 1850 with a brand-new innovation he claimed would improve the quality of Daguerrean art. He opened a “Skylight Daguerre” on Craven Street where he had constructed a MAMMOTH SKYLIGHT at his own expense stating it was the only one in North Carolina. He equipped his studio with a large sized camera boasting that it would produce images in a manner unknown in this area. But by April 22, 1851, he notified local citizens that he had sold everything connected to his business to E.M. Ferguson who continued to operate the studio.

Jonathan Whaley began operating a jewelry and watchmaking store at 35-37 Craven Street in New Bern in 1852 but it no longer stands. (This building stood near the parking lot across from Mitchell Hardware). Over the years, various photographers advertised that they were “over or above Mr. Whaley’s Jewelry store,” including B. F. Harrison in

1853, S. B. Brush in 1854-1855, and G. A. Jeffers in 1854.

Jesse Cowling of Virginia established his Gallery on Craven Street in 1856 above Mr. Whaley's store, stating he would remain there for only a short time. This photo taken of Cowling's studio, was cited for years as being at the Craven Street address, however, it was actually taken at Cowling's new studio on Pollock Street. The tower of First Baptist Church, Middle Street, can be seen in the background. This gallery stood near the corner of Middle and Pollock Streets. If you look closely at this photo, you will see a man in the upstairs window. Was he a Union soldier there to have his photo taken?

Cowling advertised a new type of photograph-the ambrotype. He explained that "the ambrotype is made on glass-is a new and beautiful style of Picture and colored equal to an oil painting... it takes about one-fourth of the time required for a daguerreotype and it is believed they cannot fade."<sup>4</sup> Cowling's brother George arrived in New Bern in 1860 and assisted him at the studio. George enlisted in the Confederate Army on June 3, 1861, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, Co K. He died on July 15, 1862, from wounds received at Malvern Hill. Jesse stayed in New Bern during the Civil War but he, his wife and child were all victims of the yellow fever epidemic in 1864.

Despite the fact that these photographers were producing daguerreotypes, only two known photos of New Bern exist that were taken prior to the 1862 Union occupation of the city during the Civil War. These photographs show the ruins of the Craven County Courthouse which stood in the middle of the intersection of Broad and Middle Streets and was destroyed by fire in the early morning of January 15, 1861. The New Bern Historical Society has copies of these photos, but they are not credited with a photographer's name and it is unknown whether the originals still exist.

One of the best-known photographers in North Carolina was John Watson. He began as a daguerreotypist in Richmond and permanently relocated to New Bern in 1857. He was on Craven Street also and produced ambrotypes as well as a new type of photograph known as a melainotype. It was a modification of the ambrotype process and was extremely popular during the Civil War due to its durability. On



**The only known photographs of New Bern prior to Union Occupation during the Civil War.**

January 14, 1858, Watson announced that he had “renovated and refitted...for the advancement of the Photographic Art; his Daguerrean Gallery over the Store of J. Whaley on Craven Street.”<sup>5</sup>

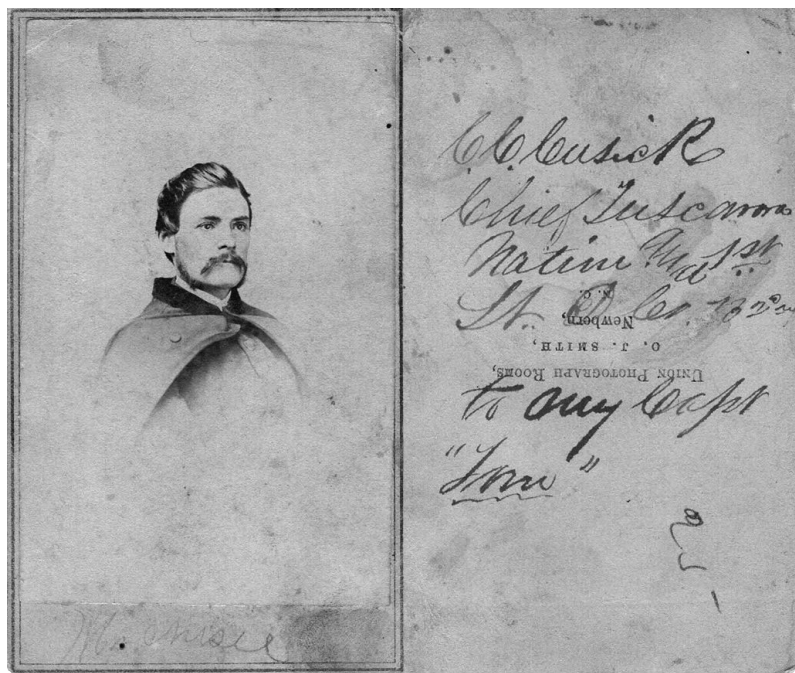
During 1860, Watson notified residents that he would be discontinuing his business. But by September 28, 1860, it was announced that Watson had returned and was refitting his Gallery on Craven Street where he would make miniatures into life-sized photographs.

But by September 1861, Watson told his customers to call on him only between the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. as he would be drilling with a local military company after 5. In October 1861, Watson placed another notice in the paper informing the public that he had renovated and refitted his gallery and was able to: take all types of photos; enlarge small pictures; and color them in oil, watercolors, or India Ink.

Watson joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery, 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Company F of the Confederate Army in New Bern on January 27, 1862. On January 15, 1865, he was captured by Union Troops at Fort Fisher. Watson was sent to Elmira prison in New York as a prisoner of war but returned home in July after signing an oath of allegiance. Watson then moved his studio to Fayetteville Street in Raleigh where he remained for over twenty years and was the leading photographer there until he died on April 4, 1889.

In the 1850s and early 1860s OJ Smith opened a gallery in New Bern under the name of *Union Photo Rooms* in partnership with Lucien M. Stayner. The NC Department of Archives has over thirty-five photographs in its collection by OJ Smith, most are photographs around the town of Union-occupied New Bern. What is unusual about these photos is that Smith and Stayner’s names are stamped on the back which was not a routine practice at the time. In 1862, Moses Sanford Chapin also took photos of Union forces at the *Union Art* gallery at an unknown address in New Bern.

By the 1860s, Daguerreotypes began to be replaced by less expensive methods of photography, like the tintype and the carte-de-visite. The tintype was the most prevalent form of images during the Civil War years. However, the carte-de-visite, a photograph mounted on



**Photograph (both front and back) by O. J. Smith of Lt. Cornelius C. Cusick, Tuscarora Company, 132<sup>nd</sup> New York Infantry.**

cardboard stock the size of a calling card was the most popular in New Bern, particularly among Union soldiers. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, post Civil War, the carte-de-visite was the most popular form of photography across the state and its popularity led to the development of the family photograph album.

Few African Americans became photographers in late nineteenth century in North Carolina. Several performed odd jobs in the studios of white photographers but by 1870 a few African American men served as apprentices. In 1870, Horace Davis, identified at various times as mulatto or Black, resided in New Bern with his mother and sister in the home of Moses Patterson, a wealthy white grocer. Horace's occupation was listed in the 1870 census as "works in photograph gallery" though this gallery was unidentified. Things changed

in the next year or two when he went to work for photographer ES Wormell.

Electis Springer Wormell, enlisted in the Union's 5<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry, Co C on 21 January 1861. He was injured at the Battle of Gaines Mills and mustered out in 1863 with the rank of sergeant. The 1870 Census records list ES and his wife as residents of Portland, Maine. However, local newspaper records indicate that the Wormells were in New Bern by 1871 and had a photography studio on Craven Street.

October 1871 Freedman Bank records reveal that Davis was working for Wormell. By 1880 Horace Davis was operating his own studio in Raleigh; the Oak City Photographic Gallery on Hargett Street. He ran this gallery for two years before moving to Virginia where he remained in the photography business. It is believed that Davis was the first non-white to work as a photographer and to run a permanent gallery in the state.

While the 1860s and 1870s saw an increase in the number of new professional photographers, only a handful of them continued post Civil War. There was however a resurgence of commercial photography during that time. Though there were still itinerant photographers, resident photographers increased along with the population of the state as new towns and cities emerged. The most renowned artists tended to reside in the state's larger towns. Most specialized in portraiture, but some also made outdoor views and sold them as stereographs, which was an increasingly popular medium of the time. Rufus Morgan who practiced from 1869-1879 and Edward Gerock who practiced from 1877 – early 1900s were the most successful newcomers in the field of photography between the end of the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century not only in New Bern but statewide as well.

Rufus Morgan, an itinerant photographer originally from Virginia, opened a gallery in New Bern when he was just twenty-three years old. He began to specialize in stereographs which were made by a camera with two lenses that simultaneously took two photographs of the subject from slightly different angles. The resulting double image when observed through a special viewer called a stereoscope, caused the observer's left and right eyes to resolve the double image



**A stereograph photograph of First Presbyterian Church taken by Rufus Morgan.**

into a single image which was three-dimensional. Stereographs were extremely popular during the mid-nineteenth century. Morgan began to travel throughout the state and across the nation. In 1873, Morgan married Mary Devereaux Clarke, daughter of noted author, Mary Bayard Deveraux Clarke, and Colonel William J. Clarke, attorney.

In 1879, Morgan decided that photography was not lucrative and went west to operate a bee yard. He was going to send for his wife and children once he was established in California. Unfortunately, he picked and ate poisonous wild mushrooms, dying two days later. His daughter, Bayard Morgan (Wootten), five years old at the time, would later become one of the most famous photographers of the twentieth century.

Edward Gerock, besides owning a photography studio, was a guiding force in training two photographers who would go on to later fame, Ignatius Brock and Bayard Wootten. This black and white photograph of the surviving West Wing of Tryon Palace is by Edward Gerock, who was active in New Bern from 1877 until the early 1900s. Gerock photographed street scenes, but was known to do portraits as well, like this unidentified couple. Gerock's studio was established in 1900 and located where the Elks Building stands today, on the corner of Middle and Pollock Streets. Gerock died in 1906 and is interred at Cedar Grove Cemetery.





**Black and white photographs by Edward Gerock of the west wing of Tryon Palace (left panel) and of an unidentified couple (right panel).**

Color photograph on left by Anthony Giardino.

The nineteenth century began with itinerant daguerreotypists and as the photographic process changed, so did the photographers. Many established studios prior to and during the Union occupation of New Bern. But, following the end of the Civil War the subjects of photos changed from battlefield related to more commercial photography, resulting in fewer photographers. With the dawn of the twentieth century, two giants in photography, Ignatius Brock and Bayard Wootten would emerge in New Bern and North Carolina. Who could have predicted that by the twenty-first century we would be taking photographs on our phones and the most common photographs would be “selfies.” What will come next?

## **Names, Dates and Descriptions of Photographers**

In 19th Century New Bern, North Carolina

Burney, James 1847-itinerant daguerreotypist. Located on the corner of Broad and Hancock, one door west of Washington Hotel

Brush, S.B. 1854-1855-itinerant daguerreotypist, Craven Street

Chapin, Moses Sanford 1862-native of Massachusetts. 1863-1866-a daguerreotypist during the Civil War. Worked at Union Art Gallery in New Bern with Union Occupying forces.

Cowling, George 1860-native of Virginia and brother to Jesse Cowling. Enlisted in Confederate Army, 2nd Inf, Co K. Died in July, 1862 of wounds at Malvern Hill.

Cowling, Jesse L. 1856-1861-native of Virginia. Daguerreotypist and ambrotype maker. Initially on Craven Street over Whaley's store. Later on, Pollock Street.

Jesse, his wife, and child all died in Yellow Fever epidemic.

Davis, Horace-1872-1878-African American who had apprenticed with unknown photographer prior to working with ES Wormell on Craven Street. He was the first of his race to work as a photographer in the State. He was the proprietor of Oak City Photographic Gallery on Hargett Street in Raleigh for two years before he and his family moved to Virginia.

Dodge, Charles W. 1863-may have been from Boston, Massachusetts and he may have been a Union Soldier. Operated Dodge's Photo Rooms

Doty, Lorenzo 1855-itinerant daguerreotypist with gallery on Craven Street

Ferguson, E.M. 1851-1852-Daguerreotypist in gallery on Craven Street

Gerock, Edward 1877-early 1900's. In partnership with Ignatius W. Brock, 1891. Bayard Wootten apprenticed in his studio, 1905.

Hammond, S. H. 1853-native of New York. Itinerant daguerreotypier. Operated gallery in NYC and then Skylight Gallery on Craven Street.

Harrison, Benjamin Franklin 1853-1854-Gallery above Whaley's Jewelry Store-Craven Street

Heywood, John D. 1867-1869-Operated J.D. Heywood's Photographic Rooms. Publisher of Stereographs, on Craven Street

Jeffers, George Abben-1854-1855-native of New York. Itinerant daguerreotypier. Operated gallery above Mr. Whaley's store on Craven Street.

Joyner, James-1843-first of itinerant daguerreotypers to come to New Bern. His office was on the third story of the north-east corner of the Devereaux Building. (the Brick Block building on Craven Street)

Leland, Edwin J. 1862-occupied rooms in Brick Block building, Craven Street. Took photographs of Union soldiers in New Bern.

Martin, J. Saul 1869-listed in New Bern Directory

Morgan, Rufus 1869-native of Virginia. Itinerant, one of the state's foremost stereographic artists. Large collection of his stereographs is housed in the North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, UNC

Smith, O.J. 1860-1866-Operated Union Photo Rooms in partnership with Lucien M. Stayner

Stayner, Lucien M. 1864-Operated Union Photo Rooms in partnership with O.J. Smith

Thompson, William Cushing 1865-native of Massachusetts. Joined Union Army at Newburyport-48th Massachusetts Regiment, Co A. 1865-Operated a photography studio in New Bern. Address and gallery name unknown.

Walters, Thomas 1888-native of Pennsylvania. In gallery above Duffy's drugstore on northwest corner of Middle and Pollock Streets

Watson, J.W. 1856-native of Virginia. Operated in rooms above Whaley's Jewelry store on Craven Street. Considered to be the "Father

of Photography in North Carolina”

Winstead, Francis Marion 1890’s-Winstead’s Photograph Gallery, northwest corner of Pollock and Middle Street

Woodbridge, J.S. 1851-native of New York City. Itinerant Daguerreotypist. (1848-1850), occupied rooms in Durand Building on Craven Street. (Building was on old Tryon Place Drive-burned down in fire) 1851 – Operated skylight Daguerrean gallery on Craven Street.

Wormell, Electis Springer 1872-1878-native of Maine. Wormell’s Picture Gallery on Craven Street.

**About the Author:** Claudia Houston loves history, genealogy, writing and research. She utilizes all those skills as a Board Member and Historian for the New Bern Historical Society, writing monthly stories for the New Bern Magazine, articles for the NBHS Journal and co-managing the NBHS Facebook Page. She holds a degree in History from the State University College of New Paltz, NY and a Master of Public Administration degree from PACE University.



## JOSEPH LEECH, COLONIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Charles K. McCotter, Jr.

Joseph Leech, one of New Bern's first entrepreneurs, came to New Bern from Philadelphia in 1750. He quickly established himself as a merchant and a leader. He began purchasing land and became one of the largest landowners in the area. Leech owned 30,780 acres in Craven County and a total of 44,481 acres in eight counties. Leech was one of many Craven County patriots who assisted in winning independence from England and establishing a new nation, the United States of America.

### Leech's Ferry in Craven County

Because early travel and commerce in coastal North Carolina depended on water and water crossings, Leech purchased two islands, called Hog Island, on the south side of the Neuse River on which he farmed and established a ferry. It became known as Leech's Ferry and the island was soon known as Leech's Island. The two islands were comprised of almost 1,000 acres of freshwater marsh, forest, and high ground. Today, they are of environmental, historical, recreational, and agricultural significance. Hog Island abounds with wildlife and natural resources. Pilings of the bridge part of the ferry landing are still visible on both the south and north sides of Hog Island.

Leech's Ferry was formerly known as Graves Ferry, established by Richard Graves sometime before 1730, and perhaps before the founding of New Bern. Leech's Ferry was located two miles above New Bern and just below Batchelor's Creek crossing from the south bank of the Neuse to the north bank of the Neuse at Swift Creek. Leech's Ferry later became known as Nelson's Ferry. Ferries were a vital link in the transportation system of coastal North Carolina.



**Hog Island location of Leech's Ferry**  
 1901 U. S. Geological Survey Map, New Bern, N. C.

**Exports**

North Carolina's coastal waters produced ample quantities of oysters and fish. Herring, shad, sturgeon, and drum were shipped to the West Indies. Oysters became delicacies up north. In New Bern, Thomas Haslan and Leech built tanneries where skins and hides from farm animals, deer and other game were processed. Craven County businessmen exported naval stores, such as tar, turpentine, pitch, and resin. Other exports included lumber products, hides, corn, and rice.

**Colonial Assembly**

Leech served as a member of the Colonial Assembly from 1761 to 1765, during the administration of Colonial Governor Arthur Dobbs. Leech submitted to the Colonial Assembly the bill, ratified on March

6, 1764, that established New Bern Academy. He then served as a trustee of the academy.

### **Regulator Troubles**

Leech was a colonel of Colonial Governor Tryon's militia during the Regulator troubles. The Regulator Movement in North Carolina backcountry was an uprising to make the political process fairer and more equal. The Regulators stormed the September 1770 session of superior court at Hillsborough. By November, reports reached New Bern that the Regulators, upset by taxes levied to build Tryon Palace, intended to march on New Bern to force the assembly to pass reform legislation. Also, they voiced ominous threats of "laying New Bern in ashes." Therefore, Governor Tryon ordered Colonel Leech to muster the Craven militia and begin fortifying New Bern.

Forming a royal force from the eastern counties, Tryon left New Bern with 300 troops, including the Craven militia to rendezvous with other militia troops. Tryon's forces defeated the Regulators at the Battle of Alamance on May 16, 1771. Tryon was hailed for a "glorious and signal Victory... over a very formidable Body of lawless Desperadoes..." Unfortunately, Craven suffered the heaviest casualty rate among the royal troops, fourteen wounded and three dead.

### **St. John's Masonic Lodge No. 3**

St. John's Masonic Lodge No. 3 played an important role in the early development of New Bern, providing many leaders civically, politically, and for the patriot cause of the American Revolution. Leech was one of the original petitioners seeking to obtain the Charter for St. John's Lodge from the Grand Lodge of England. The charter was granted in 1772, and the original hangs on the wall in St. John's Lodge. In it, Martin Howard, the Colonial Chief Justice was named as Master, Leech (spelled Leach in the charter) was named as Senior Warden and Richard Cogdell as Junior. Warden.

### **Provincial Congresses**

As dissatisfaction with British rule grew, Leech served as a delegate to the First, Second and Third Provincial Congresses (1774-1775).

The provincial congresses were extralegal assemblies patterned after the colonial Lower House and led the transition from royal to state government in North Carolina.

The First Provincial Congress to be held in America in open defiance of royal authority met in New Bern, the state capital, on August 25, 1774. The First Provincial Congress addressed grievances against the Crown, and passed twenty-eight resolutions, later known as the New Bern Resolves. Principles within the resolutions included the right to a jury trial, and groundwork for the foundation of a bill of rights. Delegates were elected to the First Continental Congress to be held in Philadelphia in September 1774 and “were instructed to present the resolves to the First Continental Congress as actionable redress of grievances against the Royal Crown.”

### **Revolutionary War**

During the Revolutionary War, Leech served as a member of two sessions of the Council of State 1777-1779 and 1784-1786. On January 16, 1777, when Richard Caswell was inaugurated as the first Governor of the State of North Carolina, Leech was inducted as a member of the Council of State. Later, in 1788 and 1789, he served as president of the council.

Leech also served as a justice of the peace, a member of the Craven County New Bern Committee of Safety, and a field officer of the Craven County minutemen with the rank of colonel. Leech was named a judge of the admiralty court; he was one of two custodians of Palace Square in New Bern in 1787.

### **North Carolina’s Ratification of the United States Constitution**

Leech represented Craven County at the constitutional conventions in Hillsborough in 1788 and Fayetteville in November 1789. He favored and fought for the ratification of the United States Constitution, which would provide a national government capable of promoting American interests abroad; protecting property at home; promoting a sound currency; regulating trade uniformly; and, along with the recently enacted Bill of Rights, would provide for the right of jury trial and other individual protections.



## **Supporter of Public Education in North Carolina**

Twenty-five years after introducing the bill in the Colonial Assembly to establish the New Bern Academy, Leech supported the establishment of the University of North Carolina, a public university, in 1789.

## **Establishment of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina**

Leech was an active member of Christ Episcopal Church in New Bern and was a church delegate to the 1790 convention held to establish the Episcopal church in North Carolina.

## **President George Washington's 1791 Visit to New Bern**

When President George Washington visited New Bern on April 20-21, 1791, he was met at West's Ferry (later Kemps Ferry and Street's Ferry respectively) on the Neuse River by an official delegation of eight men from New Bern that included, Mayor Leech and Dr. Isaac Guion, Master of St John's Lodge. Leech, as a Mason and as Mayor of New Bern, and Guion, as Master of St. John's Lodge, each gave welcoming addresses to President Washington. Washington wrote back, responding to both. Washington attended a ball at Tryon Palace but left early to attend another ball, at the home of Mayor Leech on East Front Street.

## **Family**

Leech married Mary Jones, daughter of Frederick and Mary Vail Jones. He and Mary had three children: daughter Mary (Polly) Jones Leech, son George Merrick Leech, and daughter Frances Ann Leech. Upon the death of his wife Mary, Leech married her cousin also named Mary Dorothy Mosley Vail.

Leech's daughter Mary Jones (Polly) Leech married Richard Dobbs Spaight, who a year later, signed the United States Constitution in 1789. Spaight served as North Carolina's Governor from 1792 to 1795. As the wife of the governor, Mary Leech Spaight, lead the first dance with President George Washington in 1791 when he visited New Bern.

Richard Dobbs Spaight was fatally shot and killed on March 3,

1801, by John Stanley in the infamous, Spaight-Stanley duel over a matter of honor.

### **Pioneer and Leader**

Leech was a soldier, patriot, farmer, lumberman, merchant, land-owner, and entrepreneur. A pioneer and leader, Leech set an example of the American spirit upon which the United States is founded. Joseph Leech died in 1803 and is buried at the Clermont Estate Cemetery.

**About the Author:** Charles K. McCotter, Jr. is an attorney in New Bern and retired United States Magistrate Judge. He is a member of Hog Island, LLC, the present owner of Hog Island. McCotter has reviewed several hundred deeds, in- and out-conveyances of Colonial Joseph Leech reviewing boundary descriptions, and to understand the development of the area.

The author thanks Jo Aiken for providing early research on Hog Island, Rob Overman for furnishing early maps and title information on Hog Island, and Bob Ainsley for providing information on Colonel Leech's participation in the Provincial Congresses, and Jay DeLoach for guidance in preparation of this article.



**THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM:  
A HISTORY OF NEW BERN'S AFRICAN AMERICAN  
CHURCHES**

**Bernard and Brenda George**

**I**n his book “The Black Church: This is Our Story, This Is Our Song” Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes:

The Black Church was the cultural cauldron that Black people created to combat a system designed to crush their spirit. Collectively and with enormous effort, they refused to allow that to happen. And the culture they created was sublime, awesome, majestic, lofty, glorious, and at all points subversive of the larger culture of enslavement that sought to destroy their humanity. The miracle of African American survival can be traced directly to the miraculous ways that our ancestors reinvented the religion that their “masters” thought would keep them subservient. Rather, that religion enabled them and their descendants to learn, to grow, to develop, to interpret and reinvent the world in which they were trapped; it enabled them to bide their time — ultimately, time for them to fight for their freedom, and for us to continue the fight for ours.

There is no aspect of local and regional history that has not involved significant contributions by African Americans. New Bern’s early exploration and founding was aided by Black guides, and historians have identified local Black patriots who served in the Revolutionary War. New Bern’s early development as one of the largest cities in the state was due in large part to its productive African American citizens, both slave and free. As the Civil War ended, religion was one area in which African Americans in New Bern quickly asserted their independence.

The African American church is the embodiment of a spiritual

tradition that conveyed a message of hope for souls yearning for freedom, equality and a better future. Forbidden to meet without white supervision, enslaved persons in the late eighteenth century gathered secretly in wooded areas known as “hush harbors” to worship a transcendent entity who offered not only salvation, but the thing they sought most — freedom. The meetings would include cultural practices such as dance, African shouts and rhythms. Spirituals created and shared by slaves often held double meanings, speaking to religious salvation and justice but also conveying hidden messages concerning freedom.

During the antebellum period African Americans, both slave and free, generally worshipped in churches established and led by white Christians. In some cases, they were required to sit in the back or the balcony of what was basically a segregated church. In other cases, they were only allowed to attend separate gatherings led by white preachers whose sermons were based on the command in Ephesians and Colossians, “slaves, obey your earthly master.” Such sermons sought to promote passivity and compliance among the enslaved.

The nation’s first independent Black denominations were formed in response to increasingly overt acts of racial discrimination by white congregations. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1816. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church was established in New York City in 1821. The most significant era of Black church development did not occur until the Civil War and Reconstruction, as northern-based churches moved into the states of the collapsing Confederacy. New Bern, which had the largest free Black population of any city or county in antebellum North Carolina, became the epicenter of Black church growth during that period. The city directory for 1880-1881 listed eight “colored” churches in New Bern: Zion’s AME Church, Clinton Chapel, Bethel AME Church, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Cedar Grove Baptist Church, St. Cyprian’s Church, Second Presbyterian, and the Christian Church.

## **The Methodist Churches**

The Methodist movement had opposed slavery since its founding under John Wesley, and early Methodist ministers openly preached



**St. Peter's AME Zion Church**

against slavery. Membership was encouraged for African Americans, slave and free. It is little wonder then that African Americans in New Bern, as elsewhere, were attracted to Methodism. From its inception in 1772, New Bern's Methodist Church was the primary church of Blacks in the area. By 1843, there were 1,087 members of New Bern's Methodist Church – 803 of whom were Black. Though served by one minister and meeting in the same building, Black and white Methodists of New Bern apparently met separately long before the congregation officially divided along racial lines. Bishop Francis Asbury gave a brief account of Sunday services in New Bern in his journal of February 8, 1807, when he preached to the whites on John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...

and to the Africans on Ephesians 6:5-8

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear... just as you would obey Christ. Obey them... as slaves of Christ... Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving

the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

The congregation split in 1845 when white Methodists built a new church. Although the large Black congregation became the sole occupants of the old church building, they continued to be assigned white ministers as pastors. Minutes of the 1846 North Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South record the two ministers assigned to New Bern, as Samuel S. Bryant for the white congregation, and Allen S. Andrews for the “People of colour.” Minutes of the 1847 Conference record the name “Centenary” for the white congregation of 256 members and “Andrew Church” (a.k.a. Andrew Chapel) for the Black congregation of 800 members worshipping in the old church on Hancock Street.

***St. Peter’s AME Zion Church*** – Listed in the 1880 city directory as *Zion’s AME Church*, Andrew Chapel became the first AME Zion church in the South in 1864. Reverend James Walker Hood was the congregation’s first African American pastor. Later, Hood became the seventeenth Bishop in the AME Zion church and was instrumental in founding many Black churches throughout the South.

Hood was very active in political and community affairs. He helped establish the first African American Masonic lodge in North Carolina and as a delegate to the 1867 Constitutional Convention of North Carolina helped write what was called “Hood’s Constitution.” A strong advocate for education, Hood served three years as the assistant superintendent of public instruction and was a founder of Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina.

In July 1874, the members of Andrew Chapel purchased a lot on the south side of Queen Street across from Cedar Grove Cemetery. Construction began during the summer of 1879 and the new church was dedicated on August 22, 1886. The new church was named St. Peter’s AME Zion Church; the Andrew Chapel church building was relinquished to New Bern’s white Methodists and subsequently demolished. Today St. Peter’s is recognized as the Mother Church of Zion Methodism in the South.

***Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church*** — *Clinton Chapel* was organized as an AME Zion Church in 1864 and named in honor of Bishop J.J. Clinton, founding Bishop of the North Carolina Conference of the AME Zion Church. The first pastor was Rev. Henry W. Jones. In 1865 Amos York, who would become the second pastor of Clinton Chapel, was ordained an elder in the denomination. During the Civil War, York had been Assistant Secretary to Vincent Colyer, who served as the Army's Superintendent of the Poor in New Bern. Described by Colyer as an escaped slave who was a "leading man among his people" and an "intelligent and worthy Christian," Amos York was elected to the New Bern Board of Aldermen in 1874. The original Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church building was constructed on Crooked Street (now Church Street) under the pastorate of Reverend M.V. Marable. The land was purchased on March 14, 1879, and the structure completed in 1882. The present church building was erected in 1966 under the leadership of Reverend Charles H. Ewing.

***Rue Chapel AME Church*** — George Rue, a New Bern native and former member of Andrew Chapel, returned to New Bern in 1865 as a representative of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Rue gathered a congregation, including a significant number of people from Andrew Chapel, and met at a site near Cedar Grove Cemetery. Established as *Bethel AME Church*, New Bern was reported as a regular station of the AME Church at the May 1866 meeting of the denomination's South Carolina Conference. After Rue's untimely death in 1867, the congregation continued to meet at what was informally known as "Rev. George Rue's Chapel." The cornerstone of the new church at the corner of Cypress Street and Bragg Alley (now Howard Street) was laid on August 15, 1873. The church was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1922, and a new church was built on the northwest corner of Elm and Oak Streets. Following condemnation of part of the church property by the town housing authority for construction of the Craven Terrace project in 1939, the congregation tore down the building, brick by brick, and rebuilt it about 114 feet to the north, facing Oak Street. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997, the church was closed by the denomination after years of declining membership.



**St. John's Missionary Baptist Church**

### **The Baptist Churches**

***St. John's Missionary Baptist Church*** — Listed in the 1880 city directory as *Mt. Zion Baptist Church*, St. John's is believed to be the oldest Black Baptist congregation in New Bern. By some accounts, its origin is linked to that of Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church. Established in 1865, St. John's Church purchased property in the Long Wharf neighborhood of New Bern in 1869. At the turn of the century, the Rev. Luke P. Martin Sr. (c. 1839-1919) served as minister. Martin, a Civil War veteran born in Plymouth, North Carolina, became a prominent pastor and first moderator of the New Bern Eastern Missionary Baptist Association. The current brick Neoclassical Revival style edifice was completed in 1926.

***First Missionary Baptist Church*** — Founded in 1869, First Missionary Baptist Church was originally named *Cedar Grove Baptist Church*. The first edifice, a small white frame building located in the southeast





**First Missionary Baptist Church**

section of Greenwood Cemetery, was destroyed by fire in March 1905. At the time of the fire the church owned the block extending from Smith Street to West Street (facing Cypress Street). Donations were solicited for a new church building that was completed in 1908. The church was again threatened by fire in 1922, when flames of the Great Fire of New Bern reached the steps of the church. Thankfully, no harm came to the structure and the church doors were opened to house victims left homeless by the fire. In 1995 it was determined that extensive work would be necessary to address numerous safety concerns, and the church was closed for renovation. The pastor of First Baptist Church in downtown New Bern offered the use of its chapel for Sunday morning services. Six years later, a grateful congregation returned home to Cypress Street where a service of dedication for the annex was held. Work on the main church building was completed in 2003.

## **The Episcopal Church**

***St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church*** — Christ Episcopal Church, the first church established in New Bern, began offering Sunday evening services for New Bern's African American community around 1825, and by 1846 the congregation was increasing in numbers and prospering. Their original place of worship was a frame building that stood at the intersection of Johnson and Metcalf Streets near the entrance to Cedar Grove Cemetery. The building was purchased by the Christ Episcopal Church parish-sponsored Mission to Negroes in New Bern and on June 1, 1866, it was organized independently as St. Cyprian's Church. Within two years church membership grew from 15 to 120 congregants. The original edifice was demolished in 1910 to make way for a new structure designed by Herbert Woodley Simpson, a local architect who did residential, religious and institutional work in town. St. Cyprian's served as an emergency hospital during the Great Fire of 1922, when much of the Black community was destroyed.

## **The Presbyterian Church**

***Ebenezer Presbyterian Church*** – New Bern's First Presbyterian Church was organized in 1817 with 13 founding members. Slaves and free Blacks were members before the Civil War, and some continued their membership for years after the war. Listed in the 1880 city directory as *Second Presbyterian*, the "Ebenezer Colored Presbyterian Church" was organized on November 24, 1878, with eleven members. The new congregation met in the Congregational School House, then standing on the corner of Johnson and Middle Streets. The first church, erected on Pasteur Street at a reported cost of \$1,800 for the church and lot, was dedicated on November 7, 1880. Destroyed by the Great Fire of 1922, the church was rebuilt on Bern Street in 1924.

One notable member of Ebenezer was George H. White, a lawyer who served in the North Carolina House of Representatives and the North Carolina Senate before being elected to the first of two four-year terms as district solicitor for the Second Judicial District. White moved to Tarboro to run for office in what was known as the "Black Second" Congressional District. Elected in 1896 and 1898, he was the only Black representative in Congress at the time. After the passage



**Ebenezer Presbyterian Church**

of legislation disfranchising Black voters, White declined nomination to a third term. He made his mark on the nation’s history with his stirring “Farewell to Congress” speech in 1901, as he declared that “Phoenix-like he (the negro) will rise up some day and come again (to Congress).” White was the last Black member of Congress for twenty-eight years.

### **The Christian Church**

***West Street Congregational Christian Church*** – From its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, African Americans have been involved in the movement whose churches are variously known as Christian Churches, Churches of Christ, and Disciples of Christ. Listed in the 1880 city directory as the *Christian Church*, West Street Congregational Christian Church was founded in 1872. Originally named Watson Tabernacle, the church was located behind Good Shepherd Hospital on Tin Cup Alley (now Darst Avenue). In 1890-

1891 the church relocated to its present site on West Street and the church name was changed at that time.

## **Conclusion**

New Bern's African American churches have historically been rallying points for the spiritual, political, and economic well-being of their communities. Due to segregation, churches often functioned as meeting places, social centers and lecture halls for a variety of activities important to the lives of Black citizens. Churches gave African Americans some of their first experiences in setting up their own institutions – including schools, credit unions, and fraternal organizations. They stood up for human dignity and justice during Reconstruction and Jim Crow and helped secure the passage of landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black churches sometimes became the target of racial violence as they sought to inspire, educate and empower communities of color. In January 1965, three members of the local Ku Klux Klan bombed two of the cars of NAACP members holding a rally at St. Peter's AME Zion Church.

Professor Jonathan Walton, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, makes the point that for more than 300 years the Black church in America has provided a haven for Black Christians in a nation shadowed by the legacy of slavery and a society that remains defined by race and class. Undeterred, African American churches continue to give voice to people still searching for equality and justice, still working towards a more inclusive tomorrow.

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**About the Author:** Bernard George, a retired city planner and Eastern NC historian, earned a Political Science degree from North Carolina Central University. He is a native New Bernian and avid historian who traces his Craven County George-family roots back to the early-18th Century.



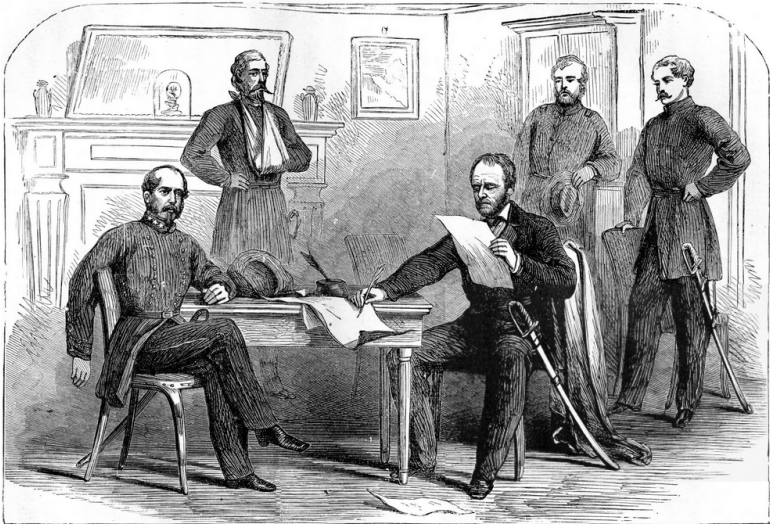
## THE ENCHANTMENT OF NEW BERN, 1865-1867: A SOUTHERN GEM AHEAD OF ITS TIME

Mark Sandvigen

As the rest of the South lay in the ashes of war, struggling to rebuild, New Bern emerged as a phoenix, its charm and vibrancy intact. This coastal North Carolina town was not just surviving; it was thriving. This article explores how New Bern, with its rich history, diverse culture, and strategic advantages, became a beacon of hope and prosperity during a tumultuous period in American history.

### Historical Context

On April the 26, 1865, General Joseph E. Johnson, defied his Commander in Chief, President Jefferson Davis, and surrendered the remaining Confederate forces in the Carolinas Campaign to U.S. Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman at Bennet's Farm, Durham Station.



SURRENDER OF GENERAL JOHNSON TO GENERAL SHERMAN.

The cessation of hostilities between the North and South began what historians view as a long and tumultuous 12-year Reconstruction era from 1865-1877. Reconstruction, in its simplest form, was the readmission of the eleven Southern, or “Confederate States”, back into the Union.

Nationally, the process of reconstruction was hampered by lack of any meaningful historical precedent. As stated in a London Times editorial on June 28, 1865, “The work of reconstruction, after four years of civil war, must ever be arduous and protracted, but the task which now devolves on President Andrew Johnson’s Government is formidable beyond all precedent. It is not only the magnitude of its scale, but also in the depth to which its effects have penetrated...” North Carolina worked through the many steps required to meet Reconstruction Acts and was readmitted to the Union July 4, 1868.

On May 9, 1865, the US Department of Treasury issued new rules and regulations titled “Concerning Commercial Intercourse with and in Insurrectionary States.” These regulations were to ensure the Confederacy, and the South, could not rise again. Items were prohibited to prevent the ability to make war; however, most items had significant commercial and economic use also. Items that were prohibited under *Regulation II. Prohibited Articles. Except for US Government usage* included “Arms, ammunition, all articles for which ammunition is manufactured, gray uniforms and cloth, locomotives, cars, railroad iron, and machinery for operating railroads, telegraph wires, insulators, and instruments for operating telegraph lines.” For any student of the Civil War, Sherman’s scorched earth policy destroyed all these forms of communication. These prohibitions would last until North Carolina could regain control of her railroads in October 1865. However, the economic damage to early recovery was already done.

### **New Bern and the intervening years**

New Bern and Craven County remained unique in the aftermath of the war. Having been one of the earliest Union victories, New Bern had been occupied since 1862. Due to occupation, New Bern would be spared the widespread destruction faced elsewhere in North Carolina, the South, and Border States.



New Bern and Craven County would continue to benefit from Union military governorships and federal agencies like the Freedmen's Bureau that provided federal currency. This flow of federal dollars somewhat mitigated the economic crash and hyper-inflation experienced by other Confederate States. The availability of capital would be crucial to the rebuilding of New Bern and Craven County largely due to the collapse of Confederate currencies, bonds, and treasury certificates.

### **Craven County's Economic Adaption**

If New Bern and Craven County had these advantages, what slowed immediate economic recovery? Two factors – labor and population displacement.

Many young men who left to fight for the Confederacy never returned, some estimates place this to as high as four percent in North Carolina. These young men were either killed or missing in action, died of disease, or had left the South for good. These losses would leave large agricultural tracts in Craven County either fallow or vacant. For those residents of New Bern and Craven County allowed to return to their homes and properties, it became a problem of rebuilding and finding people to work. The most immediate problem in 1865 was that despite the impact of the federal agencies, New Bern and Craven County were cash poor. The war's effects on infrastructure, population, the loss of slave capital, coupled with an economic depression greatly affected the ability to recover.

To rebuild and alleviate the labor shortage, white farmers went to the most readily available labor source which was the Black population of newly settled James City. However, enticing former slaves to come back and work the properties where they had formerly been enslaved failed.

Assuming Craven County mirrored the rest of North Carolina's census figures in the late 1860s, over two-thirds of these Eastern North Carolina farms were less than one hundred acres. Farmers were left with few options given the problems of having no money to pay for labor and a former slave-labor force that wanted their own property.

In the decade between 1860 and 1870, improved acreage declined from 53,345 to 45,039 acres. In real dollars this translated into a decline in farm values from \$1,376,387 in 1860 to \$844,404 by 1870 (\$52,081,986 to \$20,244,360 in today's dollars).

### **Economic Recovery**

One solution to the problem of labor would find its solution in 1867 by the introduction of the first Sharecropper contracts. Another solution to the labor problem was farmers shifting to crops such as cotton, tobacco, and rice because they brought premium prices despite greater price volatility. A look at the agricultural output in bushels, bales, pounds and based on loss of labor paints and interesting picture:

Year	Irish Potatoes, Bushels	Sweet Potatoes, Bushels	Wheat, Bushels	Cotton, Bales	Tobacco, Pounds	Rice, Pounds
1860	9,575	144,577	4,540	817	780	32,113
1870	5,254	112,217	3,310	3,809	4,765	55,386

Using the spot prices in 1867 for North Carolina, potatoes sold for 80¢/bushel while rice sold for 15¢/lb. To put this into perspective, there are approximately 60 lbs. per bushel giving the farmer \$9 per bushel for rice as opposed to 80¢ per bushel for potatoes.

The third solution to the labor shortage for farmers was truck farming where small-acreage family farmers who grew a variety of vegetables and fruits. These fruits and vegetables would be delivered by horse-drawn wagons to sell at growers' markets in New Bern or other localities in Craven County.

### **Gifts of the Rivers**

The one constant in New Bern's history has been its maritime industry. Reviving quickly after the war, deep-draft shipping firms that had originally served New Bern returned, and shallower draft craft served the localities further upstream. This supply chain, more than anything else, quickly revived New Bern's fortunes by exporting its traditional agricultural products and naval stores. New Bern's waterfront also acted as an import hub for provisions of all types ranging from soap

to crackers. In addition, New Bern's port facilities acted as a terminus for travelers arriving from and transiting to the North.

This storm of economic reconstruction and population expansion would continue while Craven County's internal transportation infrastructure remained in a shambles. This would remain the case until an effective state government could be reestablished in 1867. The newly established government of North Carolina would have to deal with issues faced by Craven County to maintain its economic momentum – better roads, additional bridges, and ferry crossings. Unfortunately, these would all be balanced against the more war-torn areas of North Carolina and were slow to be funded and implemented. The maritime lines of communication would remain mainstays of New Bern's and Craven County's economy until the turn of the century.

### **New Bern's Economic Boom – Architecture and Urban Development**

The problem of labor did not just affect farmers or the maritime industry; in Alan D. Watson's landmark book, "A History of New Bern and Craven County," he points out labor and business shortages in an expanding economy appeared throughout New Bern and Craven County. In January 1866, some six months after the final surrender documents were approved, New Bern's city clerk listed the following trades, professions, and business needed by the City of New Bern. Job postings were made for nearly all professions and positions including over 419 for skilled trades (including 159 public carmen, 117 hucksters, 25 carpenters, and 15 mantua makers), and 132 professionals (including 90 merchants, 13 lawyers, and 8 [physicians]). In addition, projections were made for 135 new businesses, including 24 barrooms, 12 boarding houses, 9 turpentine distilleries, and 6 market stalls and meat sellers.

### **Population Shifts and Expansion**

The war caused significant population displacement and shifts. During the civil war, the Union still admitted over twenty-three million immigrants from across Europe and Asia. The displacement of Black American's suddenly cast them into a society where heretofore they

had no status. More importantly, however, was the North was trying to convert a wartime economy back into a consumer economy.

These changes resulted in an influx of people looking for opportunities in Craven County and New Bern. Craven County would see a 26% increase in population from its 1860 numbers of 16,268 to an 1870 estimate of 20,516. New Bern itself would see its population grow from 5,432 in 1860 to 5,849 in 1870. Other than Black Americans, many of these people were recent immigrants, northern professionals such as doctors, lawyers, businessmen, bankers, and government agents who flocked to New Bern in search of opportunity.

### **Social and Political Environment**

Military occupation, US Government intervention, and lack of effective representation at the state and federal levels created a hodgepodge of local rules, regulations, and ordinances. New Bern's government was impaired by the disorganizing effects of the war. However, under military occupation, New Bern was able to retain a semblance of government with a mayor and commissioners.

The two most pressing problems for New Bern's government were sanitation (garbage) and lack of law enforcement. According to the *New Bern Daily Times*, this lack of law enforcement did not prevent New Bern's mayor and commissioners from issuing ordinances covering everything from throwing rocks, washing livestock next to town pumps and wells, bathing in the Neuse off Pollack Str (public nudity), curfews, and dog licenses. As of November 10, 1865, there were twenty-four town ordinances in all, with more to come.

With government comes the cost of paying for what it provides. New Bern would see taxes levied, via ordinances, on businesses, professions, and trade within the city limits of New Bern. The classes of taxes which are the most interesting are those levied against leisure activities ranging from bowling to billiards and against theater troops to circuses. Of course, the old standbys of liquor and tobacco taxes still made their storied appearances.

By late 1865, New Bern would play host to concerts, musicals, plays and circuses. By 1866, there was enough financial excess in New

Bern that philanthropy as a “noble work” was gaining traction. In a May 1866 article in *The New Berne Daily Times*, the citizens of New Bern decided to divert “money paid for public amusement into a channel of benevolence.” Benevolent societies would divert money, which heretofore had been spent for amusement, to elevating “ragged, hungry, uneducated orphans and distressed widows.”

As with any society, there were some constants that made it through the war unscathed. One constant is that New Bern, and its newspaper, *The Daily Times*, remained the lifeblood of the community and would become the lifeblood of reconstruction and a return to normalcy. The other constant was societal grievances. These protests had existed before the Civil War and were once-again raising their ugly heads. Opinion pieces in the *Times* about prostitution, non-church going folk, horse manure in the streets, lemonade stands crowding the sidewalks, street vendors competing with brick-and-mortar stores, and public drunkenness all found their way into the newspaper and, in some cases, onto the agenda of the mayor.

## **Conclusions**

No matter how one looks at Reconstruction, it was a convergence of competing events. The struggle to be accepted back into the Union, an economy in disarray with little or no working capital, and national displacement of approximately 4.5 million people, and a severely weakened infrastructure was nothing short of daunting. New Bern and Craven County were fortunate in having been occupied because rebuilding was quicker than in most of North Carolina. The types of prewar industries present in New Bern and Craven County were key – naval stores, agriculture, lumber, and skilled trades reduced what could have been a decade’s long recovery to an enviable economic reconstruction in less than 18 months. New Bern and Craven County were truly “Gems Ahead of Their Times.”

**About the Author:** Mark Sandvigen graduated from Southern Oregon University, served in the U.S. Navy on surface combatants, and earned three Masters degrees. Upon retirement from the Navy, he held executive engineering and management positions. Now fully retired, he is an active participant in veterans organizations in New Bern. Due to his family's service in WWI, he researches, writes, and visits the cemeteries, port cities, and battlefields of the Great War.



## THE NEW BERN FEDERAL BUILDING

**Jim Hodges**

New Bern's first federal building is credited to the legislative efforts of Congressman F.M. Simmons in 1886. The building located on the northwest corner of Pollock and Craven Streets was completed April 1, 1897 and served as the post office, courthouse, and custom house. The Federal government eventually outgrew this facility and sold it to the City of New Bern in 1936 for use as its city hall.

The proposed site for the new federal building was the southwest corner of Middle and New Streets. However, this location was historically significant because it was occupied by the John Wright Stanly House. It is certainly worthy to note that the house was built 1779-1783 and passed on to a succession of owners until acquired by James Augustus Bryan in 1884. After his death, his heirs sold the site in 1932 to the government for the new federal building. The Stanly House was fortunately not demolished but moved around the corner to New Street where it served as the New Bern Public Library from 1935-1966. In 1966, the Tryon Palace Commission acquired the house and relocated it to its third location on the 300 block of George Street.

In 1933, local resident and Congressman Charles L. Abernathy secured the funding for the new federal building at a cost estimated between \$260,000 and \$325,000. The United States was struggling due to the Great Depression and this significant expense for a small town in eastern North Carolina caught the attention and disdain of nationally syndicated cowboy-philosopher and humorist Will Rogers. This was met with fierce rebuttal from the citizens of New Bern who ultimately invited him to the eventual dedication of the new facility. Will Rogers never came to New Bern.

Construction started in 1933 and the structure was first occupied in 1935, signifying a local example of public buildings built under the Public Works Administration (PWA). Representing a New York City

architectural firm, New Bern native Robert Fleet Smallwood was the attending architect for the new facility. Murch Brothers Construction Company based out of St. Louis, Missouri was the general contractor. The 35,000-square-foot three-story building conforms to the Georgian Revival architectural style that incorporates Colonial-era influences and Classical design elements. The steel frame and masonry structure has a red brick veneer exterior with limestone trim and a granite base. The steeply pitched slate roof is topped with a prominent wooden cupola with a copper roof. Federally-funded artwork was created by commissioned artist David J. Silvette who painted a series of murals representing liberty, justice, and freedom that were installed in the courtroom on the south wall in 1938.

The primary purpose of the building was a United States Post Office and Federal Court House, as well as, a custom house for a period of time. During World War II, the second and third floors were occupied by the United States Marine Corps Command Contingent. In 1973, the federal building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource in the New Bern Historic District. In 1992, the post office vacated the building and relocated to a larger and more adaptive facility on Glenburnie Boulevard. Ownership was transferred to the U.S. General Services Administration in 2004 and extensive renovation was initiated. Today, the federal building serves as the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina.

Content for this article was gleaned from Wikipedia, Kellenberger Room blog “The Cowboy and the Congressman” by John Green, Peter Sandbeck’s “The Historic Architecture of New Bern and Craven County”, and the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.





**John Wright Stanly House**

Original location on the southwest corner of Middle & New Streets. Relocated to New Street in 1932



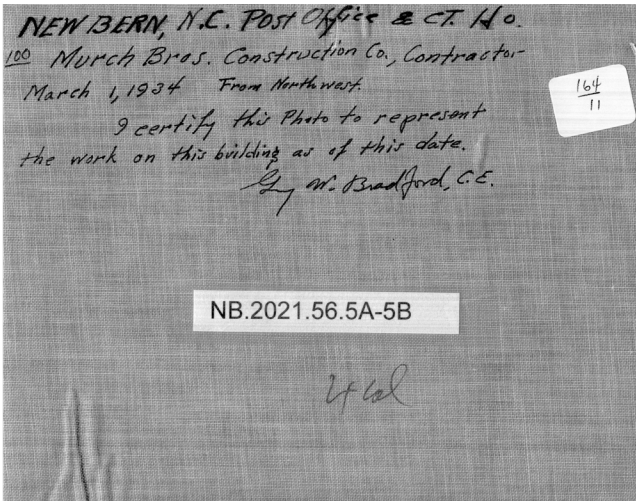
**Federal building construction site**

Viewing northeast. St. Paul Catholic Church and Centenary Methodist Church in background. December 1, 1933



**Federal building construction site**

Viewing southeast. Centenary Methodist Church background left. March 1, 1934

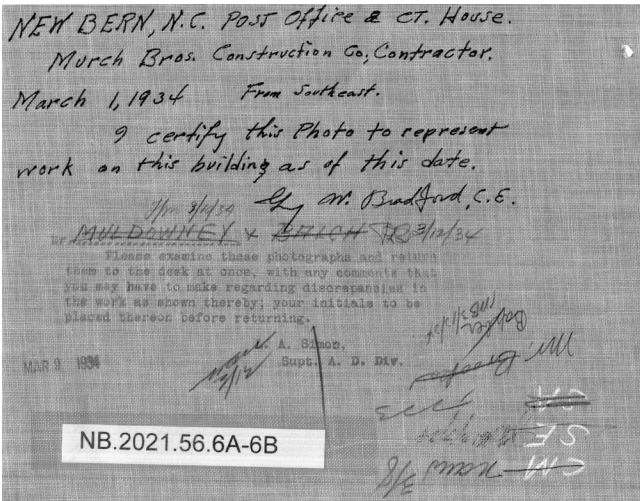


**Progress report update verification. March 1, 1934**

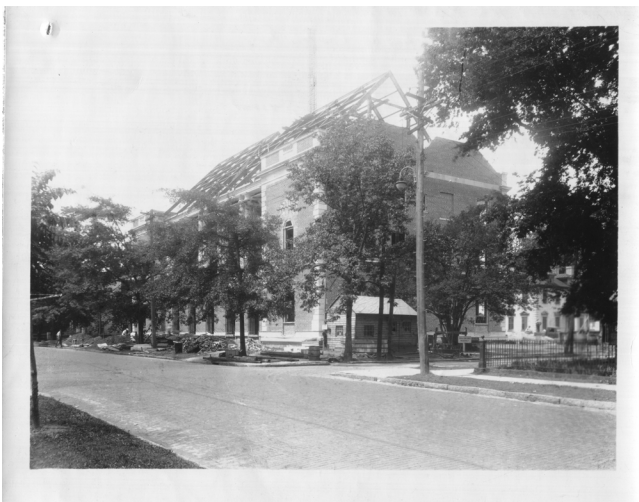


**Federal building construction site**

Viewing northwest. First Presbyterian Church background center. March 1, 1934



**Progress report update verification. March 1, 1934**



**Federal building construction site**

Viewing southwest. Roof trusses being installed on federal building. John Wright Stanly House relocated to New Street on right. June 1, 1934



**Federal building construction site**

Viewing west-southwest. Cupola construction underway. July 1, 1934



**Federal building construction site**

Viewing west-southwest. September 1, 1934

Images courtesy of the New Bern Preservation Foundation. The New Bern Historical Society has in its collection a portfolio of thirty-three original photographs relating to the construction of the federal building on the southwest corner of Middle and New Streets in New Bern. The Black & white images measuring approximately 9 x 7 inches with a reinforced mesh backing are documented on the reverse side and were submitted as progress report updates most likely directed to the Murch Brothers Construction Company in St. Louis, Missouri. It is the pleasure of the New Bern Historical Society to share a few of these rarely seen photographs with you.

**About the Author:** Jim Hodges attended UNC Chapel Hill earning an undergraduate degree in Chemistry and a post graduate dental degree. After serving as a U.S. Army dentist and enjoying several years of international travel, Jim returned to New Bern and practiced dentistry until his retirement in 2012. He is passionate about New Bern and its rich history as the Curator of the New Bern Historical Society.



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