LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc.

BULLETIN

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As the season ends and we approach the final meeting of the year it is well to summarize what has been accomplished in furthering the objectives of the Society during this period.

The collection of historic papers and relics continues to grow to such an extent that it has become necessary to add the position of archivist to the list of officers since cataloging and indexing the collection has become too big an undertaking for the secretary to assume as well as her other duties. We are anxious to have any pictures or documents relating to past events of this section and the membership is asked to bear this in mind.

The history of the Lower Cape Fear has been publicized particularly by the tour which was arranged for the North Carolina Society of County and Local Historians in October.

Our own knowledge has been enhanced by the excellent lecture given by Miss Gertrude S. Carraway on the "Tryon Palace Restoration" and by the lecture illustrated with beautiful color slides on the "Early Architecture of Eastern North Carolina" given by Miss Mildred Johnson and Mr. R. V. Asbury. Also the lecture on "Old Brunswick Town" by Mr. Stanley South with a tour of the excavations added first hand information on this important work being done by the State Department of Historic Sites in this area.

The "Exhibition of Early American Portraits" in March was important not only for the pleasure of seeing the works themselves but also because it has given the Society an opportunity to record them in photographic reproduction with the Art Reference Library of the Frick Museum in New York, in the collection of photographs of early North Carolina portraits of The Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of North Carolina, and also in our own society's collection. Great interest was shown in all these events and they were all well attended, sometimes in spite of inclement weather.

It is not always possible to uncover forgotten facts of our history but this past season has been rich in discoveries. The first which occurred as a result of the Tour planned for the North Carolina Society of County and Local Historians was the knowledge that there still exists elements from Gov. Nathaniel Rice's house on his Winnabow plantation. The second discovery resulted from Mr. Leslie Boney, Jr.'s invitation to the members to inspect the remains of Jacobs Run which had been exposed during the excavation for the foundation of the Willetts Building at Second and Market Streets. It was astounding to those who attended the February meeting on "The Early Architecture of Eastern North Carolina" to see Mr. R. V. Asbury's beautiful colored slides of the underground tunnel called Jacobs Run. It proved to be an arched brick passageway six and one-half feet high with a flooring of cypress blocks over which ran a clear stream of water. Mr. Asbury was able to follow the subterranean passage for a distance of five hundred feet. Needless to say this discovery has given new life to the old traditions of underground tunnels which were reputed to connect several old Wilmington houses with the river. In this issue of The Bulletin is an article by Mrs. Boyd Quarles in which she associates Jacobs Run with the tannery business which flourished here well over a century ago. While less romantic than the traditions of quick escapes and contraband goods it is still an interesting supposition. It is regrettable that the fascinating brick passageway had to be covered over once again and perhaps forever but we are glad it has been documented with the splendid photographs of Mr. Asbury. The third discovery was that of one of Wilmington's first citizens, Samuel Marshall, who had been all but forgotten. In our effort to find early portraits one of the few portraits of a member of Wilmington's Safety Committee during the Revolution came to light. Through the efforts of Mrs. Ida B. Kellam in preparing the catalogue for the exhibition many facts concerning this resident of the Cape Fear who owned property in Wilmington as early as 1760—were unearthed. As far as this writer knows there is no existing likeness of an early Colonial Swann, Ashe, Jones, Howe, deRosset, Moore or Watters. There is not even a portrait of such important and relatively late personages as Cornelius Harrett II or Gov. William Tryon. That is the reason the portrait of Samuel Marshall is of such historical significance. Here is a man whose personality and physical appearance we can recognize from a portrait painted from life—a man who took an active part in the formative years of New Hanover County and who married the granddaughter of John Watson to whom the original grant of land for the property on which the Town of Wilmington was laid out was given. The Society hopes that the portrait of Samuel Marshall will be the first of many which will be rediscovered through the efforts of our membership. They should all be photographed, catalogued and filed for their preservation. After the great importance of this documentation has been brought to the attention of the membership it is hoped that they will advise any officer or director of any portrait, miniature or drawing of which they know.

This has been a season of expanded activities and greater support for those activities than ever before. The loss of some members has been more than compensated by the gain of new ones so that our present membership is larger than it ever has been. It is our hope that interested persons in adjoining counties all of which are included in that area known as the Lower Cape Fear will join with us in our task of collecting, preserving and disseminating knowledge of the history of this river valley. We have a big job ahead of us and need the support of all interested citizens. Fortunately there is an awakening interest in history in North Carolina which has been stimulated by the beautiful restoration work in Old Salem and in New Bern. The way has been shown and the Society hopes the Lower Cape Fear area will follow the lead. We look forward to the day when the Society will have a permanent home and a museum, when Gov. Fisher will join with the Battleground of Moore's Creek as another National Military Park in our district and when the Old Brunswick Town Historic Site is completed.

—HENRY JAY MacMILLAN
ANNUAL MEETING

Place and Time: Sorensis Club, 116 N. Third St., 8:00 P.M., May 15, 1959.
(Please note change in date and place of meeting).

Topic: Some Problems in Writing State and Local History.
Speaker: Dr. Hugh T. Leffler, Department of History, University of North Carolina.

Dr. Hugh T. Leffler is one of the State’s most outstanding historians. In 1938 he joined the staff of the University of North Carolina as Professor of History and in 1955 he was appointed Kenan Professor. He has written many North Carolina histories, including text books for public schools and colleges. In 1954 (with A. B. Newsome) he published North Carolina: The History of a Southern State. This book won the 1954 Mayflower Award and he was given the “Award of Merit” by the American Association for State and Local History. In 1954 Dr. Leffler was awarded a Charles A. Cannon cup for his contribution to State history.

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. J. T. Best 218 N. 17th Street
Miss Anne Katherine Scott Bland Veterans Adm. Hospital
Fayetteville, N. C.
Miss Cornelia Brady 408 Church Street
Mrs. Frederick S. Burr 315 S. 2nd Street
Mrs. Bruce B. Cameron 522 Forest Hills Drive
Miss Elizabeth R. Clarke 15 N. 15th Street
Mrs. Robert F. Coleman 1922 Chestnut Street
Mrs. R. P. Doorley 209 N. 27th Street
Mrs. Gertrude Knox Galloway R.F.D. 2, Box 261, Leland
Miss Sallie Hutton 125 S. Fifth Avenue
Mr. Hooper Johnson P. O. Box 905
Miss Sallie B. Knox R.F.D. 2, Box 261, Leland
Miss Louisa Lanier 221 N. Fifth Avenue
Mrs. Rivers Lawther 1908 Princess Street
Miss Cynthia K. Lewis 2709 Jackson Street
Mrs. Edward M. McEachen P. O. Box 286
Mrs. Jessie H. Newbold 1 Church Street
Mrs. Alice D. Peck 2216 Oleander Drive
Mr. H. B. Register P. O. Box 112
Mrs. W. T. Smith 512 Grace Street
Miss Carrie Toomer 125 South Fifth Avenue
Miss Betty Sue Westbrook 1901 Chestnut Street
Mr. Edward Y. Wootten Oleander Ct. Apts., S-F
Miss Mary W. Wootten Oleander Ct. Apts., S-F
Mr. J. Laurens Wright P. O. Box 5, Wrightsville Beach
Mrs. J. Laurens Wright P. O. Box 5, Wrightsville Beach

AMENDMENT TO THE BYLAWS

At the meeting held February 18, 1959, the Society adopted the following amendments to the Bylaws:

ARTICLE IV. Officers
Sec. 1: The Officers of the Society shall consist of a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and an Archivist.

ARTICLE VI. Duties of Officers
Sec. 3: The Secretary shall keep the minutes of all meetings of the Society and of the Board of Directors, and shall perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Board of Directors.

Sec. 6: The Archivist shall be responsible to the Society for the cataloging and custody of the materials given to the Society, which materials shall be deposited in a fireproof building as soon as possible, upon receipt of same.

JOINING THE SOCIETY

Please remember to tell your friends that the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Inc., is open to all interested in the history and welfare of North Carolina. No special invitation to join is necessary. The signing of an application card is not requisite. Anyone wishing to join may do so by sending a check or money order (or giving cash) to any director. There are four classes of paid memberships: Regular, $2.00 per year; Contributing, $5.00 per year; Sustaining, $10.00 per year, and Life, $100 paid once. It is suggested that if anyone offers to pay any member, the member take the money, giving the applicant his personal receipt, and then send the money to our Treasurer or Secretary. On receipt of money by the Treasurer or Secretary, a Membership card will be mailed the new member.

MOORES CREEK NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

The Visitor’s Center at Moores Creek National Military Park was dedicated Saturday afternoon, May 2nd, at 2 o’clock. Members of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society were invited to attend.
The Tryon Palace restoration in New Bern was opened to the public on April 10, 1759, marking the completion of a project that started nearly 40 years ago.

Hours of admission are: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Sundays, 1:30-4:00 p.m. On Mondays the Palace will be closed.

The price of admission is $2.00 per person; this includes a two-hour trip through the Palace, guided by hostesses in Colonial costume.

Members of The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Inc., will visit the Palace on Sunday, May 17th, and are asked to assemble on the parking lot opposite St. Paul’s Episcopal Church at Market and 16th Streets. Each member is requested to make his own arrangements regarding transportation and luncheon. Possibly a box luncheon might be the most feasible.

The trip from Wilmington to New Bern and return requires seven hours by automobile, two for the guided trip through the Palace, and one for luncheon and rest.

The cost of the original Palace was about $75,000, and less than three years were required to build it. The cost of the restoration was $3,227,000, and required seven years after the first publication of the restoration proposal.

The Royal Colony of North Carolina had no fixed Capital until 1770, when New Bern was designated. There records of meetings of the Assembly in Bath (1698), Brunswick (1754), New Bern (1759), and other towns. The first meeting of the Assembly held in New Bern was in 1738.

In 1758, Arthur Dobbs (Governor from 1754–1759) bought Russellborough (formerly as a part of Orton Plantation), and on February 12, 1767, it was deeded to Gov. William Tryon, who succeeded to the Governorship on the death of Governor Dobbs in March, 1766.

After Russellborough became the fixed residence of the Royal Governors, Brunswick was the unofficial Capital of North Carolina, although Assembly meetings were held in various other places (including Wilmington), until New Bern was designated the permanent Capital of North Carolina in 1770. The open resistance in Wilmington and Brunswick to the stamp Act of 1765 probably had no small part in the decision to designate New Bern as Capital.

Lt. Com. William Tryon came to North Carolina in 1764 as Lieutenant-Governor and, in 1766 recommended the removal of the Capital to New Bern.

On Jan. 9, 1767 the contract for the Palace was let, the architect being John Hawks, an English architect who had come over to North Carolina with Gov. Tryon. The Palace was occupied by the Governor and his family in June 1769. The Palace consisted of a main building in which the Assembly Room and the rooms intended as the Royal Residence were located, an East Wing, with an office for the Governor’s secretary, the kitchen, and bedrooms for the staff, and a West Wing which contained the Stable. The Wings were connected to the main building by colonades.

The original furniture belonged to Gov. Tryon. When he was transferred to New York in 1771, he took it with him, and later it was burned. However, he left a complete inventory, which enabled the Restoration to get similar furnishings. It is probable that the furniture in the Palace when it fell into the hands of the Revolutionists, belonged to Gov. Josiah Martin who succeeded Gov. Tryon. One side chair, that once was in the Palace, now is in the Colonial Dames’ House in Wilmington. This chair is one of the very few pieces, if not the only piece existing that has been authenticated as having been in the Palace.

On August 25, 1774, the first Provincial Convention of North Carolina met in the Palace. This was the first Provincial Convention held anywhere in defiance of the British Government.

On January 15, 1777, Gov. Richard Caswell and other State officials elected (by the Independent Assembly) under North Carolina’s first Constitution were inaugurated in the Palace, and the first Independent State Assembly met there April 7, 1777. The Independent Assembly continued to meet there until 1787, when the State Capital moved to Raleigh, the American Revolution, the State Legislature was continued to meet there until 1787. The Capital was moved to Raleigh.

On February 27, 1798 the Main Building was destroyed by fire. One hundred and thirty years after the fire, many patriotic societies and citizens became interested in the ruins, and began to take steps towards the restoration. In 1922, the North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America erected a marble monument remaining part of the Palace. In 1926, the State Regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution appointed a State D.A.R. Committee for Tryon Palace. In 1935, Miss Gertrude S. Carraway, (President-General of the National Society of the D.A.R., 1955–1956, now Honorary President-General) tried to get Government funds for the restoration. In 1939, the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities was organized, the original drawings of the Palace made by John Hawks the supervising architect were found, and the North Carolina Garden Club, Inc., issued: "Old Homes and Gardens of North Carolina." Mrs. James Edwin Latham was one of the compilers. Also in 1939, the new Bern Board of Aldermen appointed a six-member New Bern Historical Commission, Miss Carraway Chairman.

On January 26, 1944, Mrs. James Edwin Latham (Maude Moore Latham) set up the first of the trust funds given by her for the Restoration, and the State made its first appropriation in 1944. Altogether (to date, Mr. and Mrs. Latham and their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Kellenberger have given $8,000,000, and the State has appropriated $227,000. The Palace was presented to the State at a meeting of The North Carolina General Assembly held in the restored Council Chamber on April 8, 1956, and the State will assist in the cost of maintenance and operation of the Palace.

In 1945, Gov. Cherry appointed The Tryon Commission to supervise the re-erection of the Palace. The Commission consists of the Governor, the Attorney General, the Directors of the State Departments of Conservation and of Archives, the Mayor of New Bern, and the Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, ex-officio, plus 23 gubernatorial appointees. One of these appointees is Mrs. J. Laurence Sprunt of Wilmington and Orange, who is Great Gthr. Great Grandmother, Abner Nash, was Governor 1780-81, and who’s Great Grandfather, F. Nash, (Feb. 18, 1781-1858) one of the judges of North Carolina’s Supreme Court, 1844-1858, was the Governor. One of Mrs. Sprunt’s gifts to the Palace is a handsome portrait of Gov. Abner Nash, painted (from sketches and other data in Mr. Sprunt’s possession) by Mr. Henry Jay MacMillan, President of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Inc. The portrait hangs in a prominent position at the foot of the stairwell in the Main Building.

A series of ceremonies marked the opening of the Palace: April 8, the General Assembly of North Carolina met in the newly reconstructed Main Building; April 9, was Tryon Palace Commission Day; April 10, the Palace was opened to the public; April 14 was designated British Colonial Day; and the British Ambassador, Sir Harold Caccia, was the guest of honor and principal speaker.

Although the State of North Carolina, many patriotic organizations and individuals have helped in the Restoration, the State and the Nation are indebted principally to Mr. and Mrs. James Edwin Latham, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Kellenberger, and to Miss Gertrude S. Carraway, Director of the Tryon Palace Restoration. And a member of the Executive Board of the State Department of Archives and History.

Gov. Hodges, in his speech in the Palace on April 8 declared that although North Carolina had not matched her sister States in the preservation of her historic landmarks, almost every city in the State had developed some historical project if there is interest and determination, and that our efforts will be richly rewarded. Let us all rejoice that New Bern has had her efforts so rewarded.
WHY WAS JACOBS RUN TUNNEL BUILT?

Old Wilmington family records indicate that the famed Jacobs Run Tunnel, recently uncovered by a building contractor, was evidently named for Joseph Jacobs of Massachusetts, a builder and leather investor in tanneries, who built a home in Wilmington in 1803, having descendants here today.

Mr. Jacobs bought extensive properties in the Princess Street area where there was a winding stream and a clear spring of water called Willow Branch Spring flowing down toward the Cape Fear River. The spring was once walled with cypress logs to keep the earthen embankment on the slope from caving in.

Historical records show that Joseph Jacobs and his elder brother Benjamin, both Free Masons, built the St. Johns Masonic Lodge, now a tavern, on Orange Street.

City engineers have stated that no authentic records show when the old brick tunnel was built, nor for what purpose it was originated.

The history of tanneries in North Carolina states that hides were often placed in tunnels and dark, damp passageways chemically processed until ready for tanning into leather. Mr. Jacobs was the owner of a tannery and leather establishment in Wilmington, as was his son, William L. Jacobs.

Sprunt's Chronicles of the Lower Cape Fear tells of an old tanning mill at the foot of Jacobs Run Tunnel in 1826. The City now owns an old tanners' mill-stone dug up in Wilmington, authenticated by museum officials in Pennsylvania as an old edge mill tanning bark stone of almost pure silicon, valuable to tanning investors who once bought such stones from France for about fifty pounds.

R. V. Asbury, Jr., amateur photographer and architectural student, interested in local history, who lighted his way recently through the dark tunnel taking photographs, states that the tunnel measures only twenty-four inches in width, and six feet, six inches in height.

The compact hand-made bricks, varied in sizes, appear to have been cemented together all about the same time. Apparently, the same brick masons constructed the entire arched tunnel winding in one continuous narrow passage for several hundred feet to the Cape Fear River, ending about where James Sprunt said the tan-yard mill was situated.

It is probable that the same brick masons built the foundations of the St. Johns Masonic Lodge for the Jacobs brothers, using the same kind of oyster shell cement for both structures.

Mr. Asbury states that some of the original plank flooring of the tunnel, possibly cypress, has collapsed, and in places sand and sediment have entered the subterranean stream in its constant flow of tepid water.

Water bugs were the only form of life visible to the photographer. He stated that the air was humid and a scarcity of oxygen in some obscure recesses was relieved by the flowing shallow water.

Doubtless more research is needed in how the earlier Wilmingtonians conducted their lucrative tanning industries and leather goods exports, though a geophysicist examining the interior of the tunnel, could tell when and why the mysterious structure was built.

—MRS. BOYD QUARLES

Our thanks to Mrs. Quarles and Mr. Asbury.—Ed.