The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society was incorporated in June 1956. The official certificate of incorporation stated under "Section III, Objects and Purposes—This corporation is organized to be operated exclusively for literary and educational purposes. To this end said corporation shall collect and preserve records and materials and disseminate knowledge and information pertaining to the history of the Lower Cape Fear, State of North Carolina, and the United States of America". The Society has lived up to these objectives in a variety of ways and surely one of its most significant contributions to the community was the creation and the maintenance of the archives.

In March 1981 the Zebulon Latimer House sustained a fire, which was followed days later by the death of the Archivist, Ida Brooks Kellam. These two events set into motion sweeping changes which dramatically altered the Archives' staff, facility, collection size, and policy. For over two years a volunteer group has been hard at work to put the Archives in good working order and to arrange the collected records in a way that they are not only preserved but easily accessible. It has been an onerous task which demanded countless hours of careful reading of thousands of papers and as a result of the smoke and soot, which clung to every exposed surface after the fire, it was also a very dirty job. As of May 1983 the transformation of the Archives is almost complete so it seems fitting to report to the membership on "The State of the Archives".

Any report on the Archives must begin with a tribute to the late Archivist, Mrs. Kellam, whose vision and service created and maintained the Archives and whose imprint is left on every collection. Although Mrs. Kellam was bolstered and assisted by her colleagues such as Elizabeth F. McKoy, Leora H. McEachern, Leslie N. Boney, Jr., Henry Jay MacMillan, Andrew H. Harriss, Jr., Louis Toomer Moore, Virginia Bellamy Ruffin, Janet Seapker, R. V. Asbury, Bill Reaves, Donald Lennon, Ruth Savage Walker, Katherine Howell, Winfield Sapp, Winston Broadfoot, and Walser Allen it was she alone who shouldered the responsibility of maintaining the Archives and she brought to that office sincere commitment and indefatigable dedication. She served without compensation as a volunteer on an almost full time basis and made it her business to uphold a high standard of professional excellence. She combined her knowledge of genealogy and local history with meticulous attention to detail and as a result amassed an awesome array of well documented facts concerning local people, places, and events, which were compiled, cross-indexed, catalogued, and deposited in well maintained and well organized files. As Archivist she also answered thousands of queries through a lively correspondence with researchers, historians, and genealogists and shared her materials with anyone in search for answers. The quality and spirit of her work enhanced the Society's reputation and it is unlikely that it will ever again enjoy the volunteer service of such a competent dedicated individual.

In 1979 Mrs. Kellam's declining health made it impossible for her to continue working in the Latimer House Archives. At the time of the fire about a third of the collection was at Mrs. Kellam's house and the rest was locked up in the Archives Room and for all practical purposes inaccessible. Dust collected and new acquisitions piled up unattended. In March 1981 the Wilmington Fire Department entered the Archives Room to find that the collections were safe, but the room was shrouded with a light layer of ash. While reconstruction of the burned portions of Latimer House went on, a fine film of saw dust and plaster dust added to the problems of the new volunteer archival task force composed of Leora H. McEachern, Ruth Savage Walker, Lynn Graham, and the Archivist. The first task at hand was a monumental clean-up which took months. The newly named Ida Brooks Kellam Memorial Archives were formally displayed at the official opening of Latimer House in October 1981.

After Mrs. Kellam's death it was learned that she had bequeathed her "Lower Cape Fear Collection" to the Society. James D. Carr and his wife, Rosalie, and Janet Seapker inventoried every item in Mrs. Kellam's house.

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BULLETIN

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DIRECTORS
Terms Expiring May 1983: Dr. Melton McLaurin, Mrs. Albert F. Perry, Mrs. William W. Stanfield, Jr., Mrs. Thomas H. Wright, Jr.
Terms Expiring May 1984: Mr. James Carr, Miss Margaret T. Hall, Dr. Frank B. Hall, Mrs. Walker Taylor III, Mr. James Robert Warren.
Terms Expiring May 1985: Mr. Robert F. Coleman III, Mrs. Hugh Daughtry, Mrs. Peter R. Davis, Mr. Jack Dunn, Mrs. David Leughlin.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN
Candlelight Tour and Wassail Bowl, House Restoration Committee, and Incorporators' Garden — Mr. James Robert Warren; Latimer House — Mr. John Robert Lane; Bulletin and Book — Mrs. John Cashman; Membership — Mr. Robert F. Coleman III; Publicity — Mrs. Peter R. Davis; Long Range Planning — Dr. Landon B. Anderson; Hospitality — Mrs. Walker Taylor III and Miss Margaret T. Hall; Nominating — Mrs. William W. Stanfield, Jr.

Latimer House: Headquarters of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Inc., 126 S. Third Street, Wilmington, N.C. 28401 — Telephone: 762-0492. Mrs. Jean Scott, Tour Guide. The House is open free of charge to members Tuesday - Saturday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. The Archives are available for use on Thursdays by appointment — Telephone: 343-1225.

In Memoriam
Leora Hiatt McEachern
1909 — 1982

Leora McEachern was a constant friend to the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. She served as its president, editor of and contributor to the Bulletin, chairman of the Clarendon Award Committee, advisor to and genealogist for the Archives, and as an active contributing member of the Publications Committee which produced Cape Fear Adventure.

At times she was gadfly to the Board of Directors ever eager to remind them that she perceived the Bulletin and the Archives as the Society’s top priorities.

Future generations will know an author named Leora Hiatt McEachern through her published books, but those who were fortunate enough to know “Billie”, the human being, will remember a delightful person of warm heart and lively mind whose trademark was outspoken forthrightness couched in common sense, humor, wisdom, and sincere affection.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Your confidence in me, as evidenced by electing me to a second term as President, is deeply appreciated. I hope I can fulfill that confidence and your expectations.

This past year was marked with mainly good news. Mrs. Cashman’s Cape Fear Adventure was published. Its popularity was such that the stores were almost immediately swept clean. Early in 1983 it was decided to have a second printing of that unique and fascinating book.

The exterior of Latimer House was completely renovated and painted. It won two awards for its appearance.

Our Archives were inspected by the State Museum of History staff and found to be among the best local Society Archives in North Carolina. A program of consolidation, filing and preservation was suggested and later approved and funded by the Board of Directors.

Plans for a garden and enhancement of the grounds around Latimer House are being developed.

Weather adversely affected the Candlelight Tour. Indeed, it is a tribute to the attractiveness of the tour that we did as well as we did under the circumstances.

Disappointing were Wassail Bowl attendance and further erosion of membership.

On the whole, however, it was a rather good year.

Looking ahead we shall strive to implement the recommendations of Dr. Anderson’s Long Range Planning Committee.

The second printing of Cape Fear Adventure is arriving at stores in Cape Fear Country now.

Administration and finances of the Society will be further consolidated and routines established.

Under the chairmanship of Mr. Robert Coleman III we hope to reverse the decline in membership. He needs your assistance in recruiting new members, in clarifying the confusion between our Society and the Historic Wilmington Foundation. Our Society needs your participation on committees, as docents, and attendance at our functions.

Mrs. Cashman will continue to enhance our Archives. With Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Graham assisting, screening of incoming material, its cataloging and filing in secure stowage will be the major undertaking. We hope to improve facilities for those using the Archives.

Carrying out the plans for the garden will, hopefully, be done this year. Funding may be a problem.

Mr. Warren has located a consultant on period interior furnishings. Obtaining his services in the near future is unlikely due to more immediate demands of our limited finances.

A reorganization of the Latimer House Committee, chaired by Mr. Robert Lane, is taking place. Essentially that committee will be a group of subcommittees, each with its own function. The House Chairman will coordinate the subcommittees’ plans and work. This provides greater opportunity for membership activity, as well as further enhance the house as the Society’s headquarter and Archives, and as a Museum House.

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so that it could be determined by the terms of her will what went where. Boxes and boxes and boxes of materials were transported from Mrs. Kellam’s residence to the Latimer House and slowly and methodically the Archives staff went through each and every paper so that every item could be properly indentified and filed. Mrs. McEachern and Mrs. Walker took home countless boxes of file cards to determine their proper placement and during the winter of 1983 Jean Scott and Mary DeSisto, a volunteer, have alphabetized almost 10,000 cards on individuals. Since Lynn Graham had become well acquainted with the photographs in the Archives during her work as pictorial research assistant for Cape Fear Adventure she took on the task of cataloguing the photograph collection and obtained the assistance of New Hanover County Museum photograph specialist, Susan Krouse who made suggestions as to the proper preservation treatment and cataloguing of such a collection.

In November of 1982 John Ellington and Paul P. Hoffman of the Division of Archives and History in Raleigh came to Latimer House to evaluate the Archives. They concluded that the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society owned one of the most extensive and valuable local history collections within North Carolina and gave Mrs. Kellam high marks for having put into place a system which met the modern requirements of proper archival procedures. They made concrete suggestions as to how the Society could safeguard and maintain the collections and acting on this advice the Board of Directors voted to allocate $2,800 to purchase equipment and materials, which would protect valuable papers from the damage of fire, theft, light, dust, moisture, and acid. Proper supplies were ordered and have been received and almost three-fourth’s of the collection has been transferred into new protective containers.

After Mrs. Kellam’s death Leora Hiatt McEachern acted as an advisor to the Archives. Her familiarity with the materials and interest in the collections made her contribution an invaluable one and since her death in November 1982 her presence has been sorely missed. At present the Archives are staffed by three volunteers all of whom have only a limited time to give and none of whom are professionally trained as archivists. It is hoped that someday the Society will be in a position to hire a person skilled in library and archival procedures so that the professional standards put in place by Mrs. Kellam will be maintained for posterity. Presently, the Archives are open on Thursday from 10 AM until Noon during the months of September through May and by appointment. The Staff is well aware that longer hours are a desirable goal and it is hoped that this will become a reality in the near future.

Despite the limitations of the staff the membership should take tremendous pride in the Archives. Since the receipt of the Ida Brooks Kellam and Leora Hiatt McEachern gifts the collection size has almost doubled. The collection contains a melange of materials found in no other place which provide an extensive and diverse coverage of local history. The genealogy section is of particular importance and contains references to most families residing within Wilmington prior to 1850. There is a card file of almost ten thousand individuals plus genealogies, biographies, letters, diaries, journals, scrapbooks, obituaries, newsclippings, photographs, and miscellaneous personal memorabilia. There are also many records relating to early plantations, land transactions, block books as well as Elizabeth F. McKoy’s compilation of abstracts of early New Hanover County deeds which covers property in the areas of Black River, Campbell Lots, Federal Point, Holly Shelter Creek, Widow Moore’s Creek, Long Creek, North East River, Rockfish Creek, Sea Coast Land, Smith’s Creek, South River, The Thoroughfare, and inventories of saw mills and railroads. The library contains a good collection of books on local history including gravestone records, obituaries and marriages. There are also Bible records, maps, photographs, and files devoted to local architects and architecture, churches, physicians, theater, and the Revolutionary and Civil War.

The Ida Brooks Kellam Memorial Archives Room is not impressive to look at—it is small and crowded with a hodgepodge of mis-matched second hand furniture, but locked away in the steel file drawers is a priceless irreplaceable treasure—the records which tell the story of the people of the Lower Cape Fear; records which make names, dates, places and events come alive. As long as these historical documents are preserved and made available to the researcher the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society will be able “to disseminate knowledge and information pertaining to the history of the Lower Cape Fear”. It is hoped that the Archives will always be regarded as one of the Society’s greatest assets and that the membership will persevere in its mission “to collect and preserve records”.

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The Wassail Bowl will again be held in Latimer House, but we hope to make it more attractive in 1983.

The new officers and directors are of high caliber. They will refine and add to the groundwork laid by last year’s administration. 1983-84 should be one of the Society’s best.

BUT the officers and board cannot carry the load alone. Expanded membership, active participation on various committees, attendance at the Society’s functions all rest upon you, my fellow members.

Sincerely,
Frank Conlon