THE PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

History is defined as “a systematic written account of events, particularly of those affecting a nation.” My first message to you will then be in the form of a narrative of events concerning our city.

A century ago the inhabitants of this community and the surrounding areas were overburdened with the complexities of a new citizenship in a nation floundering in its embryonic stage. Wilmington at this time was a small community growing to present-day standards, but at that time, the four thousand citizens molded together to form a town of great prominence. It was one of the leading cotton export centers of the world, one of the great river ports in America, the cultural center of the “Piedmont” state, and an area already rich in historical heritage. It was vital in transportation because it was the terminus for two railroads, the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad and the Wilmington & Manchester Railroad as well as being the hub of many highways and plank roads.

In the fall of 1861, the Confederate States of America was only a few months old. Already the capital had been moved from Montgomery, Alabama to Richmond, Virginia. Several great conflicts had passed; Fort Sumter, South Carolina; Phillipi, West Virginia; Big Bethel, Virginia; Boonsville, Missouri; (Bull Run) Manassas Junction, Virginia; Carthage, Missouri; Wilson’s Creek, Missouri; Bull’s Bluff, Virginia; and the Union forces had captured Forts Clark and Hatteras on Pamlico Sound in North Carolina. Although the first battle of Manassas was the largest battle to date, all of the small battles and skirmishes added much to the sorrow of the youthful country.

Locally the feeling of patriotism and enthusiasm was progressing at a fevered pitch. Fort Johnston at Smithville (Southport) had been captured, for the second time. Men from Wilmington and Smithville captured the forts on January 9 and 11 and again on April 18. The Wilmington Light Infantry under the command of Col. John Cantwell reoccupied the forts, the second time, a month before North Carolina seceded from the Union. On April 22, 1861, Major W. H. C. Whiting assumed command of setting up the defenses of the Cape Fear Area. One of his first commands was to assign his brother-in-law, Captain Charles Bolles, to proceed to build “a large and commanding battery” at the tip of Confederate Point (Federal Point) protecting New Inlet and the Cape Fear River. This was finished by early summer and named Battery Bolles in honor of the commander. The W. L. I. occupied the battery after their removal from Fort Caswell. It was later re-named Battery Buchanan in honor of Admiral Franklin Buchanan hero of the C. S. S. Virginia (Merrimac) and the battle of Mobile Bay. This was the actual beginning of Fort Fisher, although Col. Will Lamb did not arrive in Wilmington until July 4, 1862 to begin construction of the actual fort.

Whiting’s next objective was to fortify the east and southeast boundary of the city, as well as the river banks along the Cape Fear River. He had the opinion that attack would always come by way of Masonboro, and this would truly have been the easiest route. Therefore, gun batteries, earthworks, etc., were being constructed along a mile and one half section in the pine thicket beyond the city. Interior defenses were also planned, as well as river obstructions.

Whiting even had the women of the “Fort City” engaged in activities of preparedness. His diary included a letter to his friend General Pierre Beauregard that “I have started the ladies of Wilmington to making cartridge belts and sand bags, and that keeps their little hearts quiet and happy.”

In August of 1861, the C. S. A. Government proclaimed each a Department of the Confederate States. Thus, this state became the Department of North Carolina. Each Department was divided into districts. New Hanover County, as well as several surrounding counties comprised the Cape Fear District. Previous to this act, Major R. C. Gatlin was appointed Commanding the Southern Department of Coastal Defense with headquarters in Wilmington, North Carolina. In August, he was promoted to Brig. General to command the recently organized Department of North Carolina and Coastal Defense Forces of the state. These headquarters were also assigned to be in Wilmington. On September 3, 1861, Brig. General Joseph B. Anderson assumed command of the Cape Fear District, since Whiting had been re-assigned to the front lines in Virginia.

Mr. Robert Rankin was an early leader in the city to organize for the safety and welfare of the citizens. Mr. Robert Strange, A. J. deRosset, and W. C. Thomas were later appointed as representatives for a Committee of Safety for the town of Wilmington. S. D. Wallace, Esq., was selected as secretary for the Committee. He was notified early in September that these headquarters were to be assigned in this town, and also that the coastal defenses were to be constructed.

Many events took place in the months to follow happening simultaneously, yet was a case of Yellow Fever, complacency, graft, etc., but late in November 1862 General Whiting returned to the town a century ago. At that time this town was engulfed with the fury of war. The importance of Wilmington became so immense overnight that many of its citizens could not cope with the situation. We are practically in the same position today. Wilmington, once again, is at the crossroads. It no longer is a leading cultural center, hub of transportation, etc., but very easily can become a “giant” if its citizens possess the desire.

However, with the U. S. S. North Carolina permanently berthed in our neighborhood; the work steadily progressing at Brunswick; the construction of an Exhibit Hall nearing completion at Fort Fisher; The County Commissioners and City Council both approving the transfer of the County Museum to City Hall for a joint City-County Museum; the Wilmington Historic Tours, once again, being revived; and possibly a permanent home for the Historical Society in the near future, we are proving that the citizens of this area are able to cope with the present situation. We can, once again, make Wilmington a city of prominence and prestige! The membership of this Society can and must do their share by uniting in fostering the efforts to promote and support these movements for the enhancement of our city.

General Robert E. Lee made a gigantic statement in the waning months of 1864. He stated that Wilmington “must be protected and preserved at all cost.” These words are still true and symbolic today. Are we “big” enough for the task?

— R. Jack Davis
MEETING

Time and Place: Wednesday, November 8, 1961, St. Andrews-Covenant Presbyterian Church, 8:00 P.M.

Speaker: Mr. Louis T. Moore.

Topic: "The Historical Significance of Third Street."

Mr. Moore, a founder of this Society and chairman of the New Hanover County Historical Commission, needs no introduction to the membership. His work in the historical field has served the Cape Fear well.

BOOKS

The Dram Tree, A Nod by Hamilton Cochran (The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1961—286 pp, $3.50.)

Set in the thunderous action of the Civil War, this novel of high adventure and romance follows the lusty career of Jeff Ryall, the handsome captain of the Banshee, fastest of the Confederate blockade runners and scourge of the Federal fleet.

Jeff, the son of sea-faring folk, gains a monumental reputation in the South by risking his life to run cargoes of munitions, clothing and drugs from Bermuda to the North Carolina coast in a valiant effort to equip the Southern armies. His is a saga of fiery action at sea and on land, of high adventure behind the wheel of battle-rigged paddleswheelers and high intrigue in the drawing rooms of Wilmington society.

The fortunes of Jeff parallel those of the Confederacy, and his personal life comes into high jeopardy as the South begins to crumble. The climactic battle for Fort Fisher epitomizes the Civil War at its bloodiest and most fever-pitched.

GIFTS RECEIVED

WE ACKNOWLEDGE with appreciation, gifts to the Society from Louis T. Moore, Ludlow P. Strong, Mrs. John Pickrell, Mrs. Leon R. Pierce, Miss Caroline D. Flanner, George Winston Smith, Louis R. Deos, and Mrs. P. W. Delano.
NEW HANOVER COUNTY MUSEUM

As early as January 1896, the secretary of the Daughters of the Confederacy inscribed in her minutes that “the nearest work to our hearts is the preservation of the relics and history of those days so sad and yet so glorious.” Our youngest members cannot now realize the necessity for nor the value of these things as they will do in after years, so it behooves us who are older to teach them both by precept and example, and every single member should save everything of this kind for our collection. It was before the Ladies Memorial Society merged with the United Daughters of the Confederacy, so the movement began with the latter group.

In January 1897, Mrs. William M. Parsley, president, urged the members to continue gathering and preserving Confederate relics including “pictures, papers and letters and other articles.” At the December meeting of the same year, a letter was read from T. D. Meares, secretary of the Wilmington Light Infantry in which they not only offered the room, but agreed to provide a glass case for the relics. This offer was accepted and in January, 1898 the Daughters appropriated the sum of twenty-five dollars to the use of the museum committee, consisting of Mrs. Martin Willard, Mrs. Junius Davis, Miss Kate T. Cantwell, Mrs. Isabel Savage, and Miss Bessie L. Wiggins. At the March meeting in 1898 the committee reported that the museum was established, windows were secured by “iron grating” and twenty-five interesting relics had been received.

The museum was the scene of what was termed the Mrs. Stonewall Jackson Tea, in October 1899. The newspaper reported that many interested people inspected the Confederate Museum for the first time. The museum was occupying two choice rooms at the Wilmington Light Infantry Armory. “Among the treasures in the museum might be mentioned the telegraphic instrument which sent the last sad message of defeat. It was on the same rough pine table on which it was mounted when in use by the commanding general, W. H. C. Whiting, in the house at the corner of Market and Third streets belonging to the DeRosset family, and which was the Confederate Headquarters. The ladies appropriated one glass case to the several articles which belonged to General Whit- ing; his uniform in perfect preservation, his sword, spurs, walking cane, etc.” Other items listed included a “minnie ball which passed through a portion of Colonel William L. DeRosset’s body and he later found it in his pants’ pocket; many uniform coats, one of which belonged to Colonel P. Mal- lett; several pictures of the battle of Fort Fisher; swords belonging to Captain James I. Metts and Colonel J. J. Hedrick; relics of the ladies in those days, one item being “a bonnet for which was paid $45 unrimmed, and used by a war time bride.” Besides the probably 1,000 articles of value which are exhibited in the cases, the walls had the appearance of a picture gallery. There were portraits of Generals R. E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, W. H. C. Whiting, many colonels, captains, lieutenants, and a host of gallant fellows who wore the jacket of gray without a star or stripe.” There were portraits of General Joe Johnston, Colonel Gaston Meares, Colonel William M. Parsley, Major James Stevenson, Captain Brooks and many others. Also photographs of the “Water Witch,” the Yankee Gunboat captured by Captain Joseph Price, and the blockade runner “Lynx,” the wreck of which is still to be found on Carolina Beach. There were a great number of war time newspapers. The Wilmington Messenger, Sunday, November 5, 1899 announced that the museum was open every Friday afternoon for inspection by visitors and for the “reception of donations and loans.” People outside of the city were requested to send their loans to Captain J. I. Metts.

The minutes of the Daughters of the Confederacy continued to record gifts to the museum. In 1902 they received “Major Reilly’s two swords and a photograph of Captain Maffitt.” In 1904 they received a blue print copy of the Battle of Shiloh, a photograph of Miss Winnie Davis, a uniform and accessories worn by Major James H. Hill and a pair of epaulettes once owned by General Whiting. In 1905 Mrs. A. A. Watson gave the museum the table, chest and trunk used by

(Continued on Page 6)
FORT FISHER NATIONAL PARK PROPOSED (1907-1910)

By Ava L. Honeycutt, Jr.

Representatives of the Fort Fisher Survivors' Association appeared on January 16, 1909 at a "Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, House of Representatives, Sixtieth Congress, Second Session," held in Washington, D. C. The seven men of the Blue and the Gray implored the subcommittee to approve the request for a $40,000.00 appropriation to purchase three or four hundred acres of the Fort Fisher site for the establishment of a national park. One can readily understand the survivors' motivation, their desire to perpetuate the most important and exciting incident in their lives. It is more difficult to grasp the deep feeling, the eternal friendship, and undying brotherly love which the former enemies felt for each other forty-four years after the bloody Battles of Fort Fisher. Today, after nearly a hundred years of beach erosion and other destruction, we can all feel a great sense of loss in the failure of the Fort Fisher survivors to obtain a favorable report on the bill to establish their memorial park.

The Honorable Hannibal L. Godwin, Congressman from the Sixth Congressional District of North Carolina, introduced the Civil War veterans to the sub-committee. Godwin began by reading the H.R. 9131 to Establish A National Park at Fort Fisher, North Carolina, as follows:

Be it enacted, etc., That the Secretary of War is hereby authorized and empowered to acquire, by purchase or otherwise, the site of Fort Fisher, in the county of New Hanover, and State of North Carolina, comprising a tract of land between three and four hundred acres in extent, adjacent to and surrounding the ruins of the said Fort Fisher.

Sec. 2. That the said lands and premises above mentioned are hereby constituted and set apart as a national park or reservation, under such rules and regulations as may be adopted and promulgated by the Secretary of War.

Sec. 3. That the sum of forty thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for the purpose of carrying into effect this act.

The three veterans from the North spoke first and Congressman Godwin presented them in the following order: John B. Jones of Utica, New York; Albert H. O'Brien of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Captain James Parker of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. They emphasized the importance of the Fort Fisher battles and the capture of Wilmington, the South's last supply line from the outside. The Union men pointed out that the association would see that the park was maintained and that monuments were erected.

The Rev. J. A. Smith of Wilmington, North Carolina, was the main speaker for the Gray. He began by quoting a Wilmington lady's grandson, who heard a professor of history in a famous London school say, 'one of the greatest land and

The final meeting was then adjourned and the Union veterans returned to their homes in the north by way of Petersburg, Richmond, and Washington, D. C. where they were received with appropriate honors.

On December 16, 1907 Congressman Godwin introduced the Fort Fisher National Park Bill in the House of Representatives during the sixtieth congress, first session. The bill was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs.

The Rev. J. A. Smith appeared on March 19, 1908 in Washington before the Committee on Military Affairs and spoke on behalf of the bill. It was said in the newspapers that a few of the members shed tears at Smith's remarks, but still the bill was referred to the committee.

The next day Rev. Smith visited President Roosevelt and gave him a photograph taken during the 1907 reunion of himself and B. F. Seelye of Clinton, New York. The President was told that Seelye had almost killed Smith during the Battle of Fort Fisher. In his response Smith emphasized in talking to the subcommittee the good feeling that then existed between the Blue and the Gray. He told the group of his trip last November to Utica, New York, where he addressed the commanders of the One Hundred and Seventeenth New York Regiment. Smith related:

... during the address I received a note from Mr. Seelye, the man who captured me. I told you of that when I was here before. After I was through with my address at Utica a note came to see Seelye as he met me at the station. It was something more furiously than is here, and he carried me to his home and said, 'I will join you in the house when I put up my horses,' and he went and put up his horses—he belonged to them. And then he came into the house where he threw both his arms around my neck, and with tears flowing down his cheeks he said, 'I love you better than any man on earth,' and turned to his wife and said, 'I thank God that I did not kill that braggart, Seelye,' and I said, 'Thank God I did not kill You.'

Rev. Smith felt that this attitude was typical of the feeling that then existed between the Blue and the Gray, and that the passing of the Fort Fisher bill would do more to perpetuate the peace than anything that had occurred since the Civil War.

Mr. H. C. McQueen, D. L. Gore, and Thomas D. Meares, all of Wilmington, made appeals to the subcommittee for the passage of the Fort Fisher bill. Mr. Godwin delivered the final remarks pointing to the fort's historical importance with reference to General Robert E. Lee's message to Colonel Lamb that Fort Fisher had to be held or he could not subdue his army; the determination of the Fort Fisher Survivors' Association to continue the fight; the fact that it secured a favorable report on the bill; and ended with the prediction that 100,000 people would visit the park every year.

It is not known why the subcommittee refused to return a favorable reply. It could be the large number of such bills (35) which were being discussed. So in the next session of congress Mr. Godwin re-introduced the bill with the requested appropriation reduced to $30,000.00. There was another hearing before the Committee on Military Affairs on January 19, 1910, at which H. C. McQueen, Rev. J. A. Smith, John B. Jones, Edwin H. Risley, and Major J. H. Reeves spoke for the Fort Fisher Park Bill. (Major Reeves of Washington, D. C. had been elected president of the association after the death of Colonel Lamb, the first president, and General Curtis, the second was appointed.) At the time the Senator Root of New York, with the endorsement of Senators L. S. Overman and Simmons of North Carolina, introduced the park bill in the senate.

Captain El. I. Brown of the United States Corps of Engineers of the Wilmington district was asked to prepare a report on the Fort Fisher site. The Wilmington Chamber of Commerce joined with the Utica trade bodies in endorsing the park. A committee composed of H. C. McQueen, Rev. J. A. Smith, John B. Jones, Edwin H. Risley, and Major J. H. Reeves were appointed by the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce to push the bill. They wrote Captain Brown a long letter informing him of the historical significance of Fort Fisher and the need for a national park at the site.

All these endeavors failed to persuade Congress to pass the park bill. By the next congress many of the leaders of the association were dead and the bill was not introduced again. Thus, the first noble efforts to establish a National Park at Fort Fisher failed. But the idea survived and today Fort Fisher is preserved as a State Historic Site. The men of the Blue and the Gray, who made great sacrifices for a worthy cause, will not be forgotten.
NEW HANOVER COUNTY MUSEUM (Continued from Page 3)

the Rev. A. A. Watson, Bishop of East Carolina, while he served as chaplain in the Second North Carolina Regiment, along with a piece of smokestack of the Merrimac, the first ironclad. Also a knife made from a piece of beef bone by Captain John Rankin, while he was in prison in Albany. Even the task of cleaning was recorded. At the October meeting, 1900, Mrs. T. E. Sprunt reported that the work of cleaning the museum had been accomplished with the help of Mrs. Martin Willard, Mrs. Huggins, and Mrs. John C. James. They were thanked for “their labor of love.” The chapter minutes give a very clear story of the beginning of the museum. They show that in 1918, General Metts encouraged the chapter to move its museum articles for “better preserving the relics.” Mrs. T. E. Sprunt helped in packing the articles which were sent to Raleigh in November, 1918.

In 1921 the minutes record the fact that the chapter had remodeled the room at the Wilmington Light Infantry Armory and again meetings were held there. For months they had been meeting in private homes. In 1931 they asked for permission to file records of veterans in the museum and this was granted. In 1933 they recorded the following: “Regrettting that many relics had never been returned from Raleigh, steps were taken for a personal visit to reclaim our own.” Mrs. W. M. Creasy and Rev. and Mrs. Andrew J. Howell were instrumental in bringing back many valuable items. In 1934 the chapter sponsored an effort to get F.W.A. funds to construct a fireproof library and museum. There were many later notations of articles given the chapter for the museum.

It was through the efforts of Rev. Andrew J. Howell, Chairman of the New Hanover Historical Commission, that the present location of the museum in the courthouse was obtained. He was vitally interested in having a museum containing relics of all periods in the life of the community. He secured small appropriations from the city and county governments and purchased additional showcases. Again it was opened one day each week for visitors with volunteer caretakers. Mrs. Howell and Mrs. Huggins usually acting in this capacity. Later Mr. Howell requested the North Carolina Sorosis to take over the care of the museum as one of their projects. This organization has made it possible for the New Hanover County Museum to be open three afternoons each week. Other items of different periods and places have been added to the collection. According to Mr. Howell’s records he and Mrs. Howell made a trip to Raleigh in the summer of 1930 and brought back some of the relics belonging to the Cape Fear Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy. In this he was acting with the support and approval of the chapter. In 1961 the City Council approved the removal of the museum to the second floor of the historic City Hall. The County governing body approved the move and agreed to give financial aid. The museum first known as the CONFEDERATE MUSEUM, and later merged into the NEW HANOVER

COUNTY MUSEUM (still containing a high percentage of the relics of the original collection), will have a new home. The efforts of those early members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy with the support of the veterans of the Wilmington Light Infantry, the work of the New Hanover Historical Commission, the cooperation of the Board of County Commissioners who provided housing quarters since the early 1830s, the work of the North Carolina Sorosis, (all covering a period of sixty-five years), and the combined efforts of the various organizations who worked for a suitable location for the museum in 1961—supported by the City Council, may be rewarded with a creditable museum in Wilmington. It is the desire of all interested groups that it will be under a proper governing body with an educational and cultural program for all citizens.

—IDA BROOKS KELLM

BOND ELECTION DAY IN NORTH CAROLINA

The membership is reminded that buildings and other facilities to be provided the Department of Archives and History and The State Library are vital to the efficient functioning of these agencies.

The proposed building will bring together under one roof those related services and materials now improperly and inadequately housed in SEVEN different structures. It will provide space to organize for use materials now stored and space for you, comfortably and conveniently, to consult and use ALL the materials.

Vote For Capital Improvement Bonds

LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA
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