

Federal Point Historic Preservation Society

P.O. Box 623, Carolina Beach, North Carolina 28428

Newsletter

Volume 11 No. 11

November, 2004

Darlene Bright, editor

November Meeting

Frances Elizabeth, Last Sailing Cape Fear River Pilot Boat

The Federal Point Historic Preservation Society's regular monthly meeting will be held on Monday, November 15, 2004, 7:30 pm, at the Federal Point History Center, 1121-A North Lake Park Blvd., Carolina Beach, adjacent to the Carolina Beach Town Hall.

Nathan Henry, Underwater Archaeologist with the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Underwater Archaeology Branch, will speak on Cape Fear River Pilot Boat, *Frances Elizabeth*. A sailing schooner when it began service in 1870, delivered river pilots such as J. J. Atkins and J. O. Daniels to guide ships in and out of the Cape Fear River. It was converted to internal combustion engine propulsion in 1910. The *Frances Elizabeth*, which may have been the last sailing pilot boat on the Cape Fear River, sank in the river and is currently being examined and researched by Nathan Henry and the rest of the State Underwater Archaeology Branch.

Members and the general public are cordially invited. Refreshments will be served following the meeting.

Last Month

Underwater Archaeologist, Chris Southerly, presented a very thorough overview of the Blackbeard shipwreck project off Beaufort, North Carolina. Chris gave an update on special technology being implemented to excavate the site and monitor natural dynamics, which are continuously threatening the shipwreck.

Chris does an excellent job with the Underwater Archaeology Unit. We are fortunate to have him on the team.

Message From Your President

Patricia Gray Bolander

A special THANKS to all who came out for The Newton Cemetery cleanup: Linda Newton, Mary Jo McKetrik, Pat Bolander, Frances Griffin, Sylvia Snook, Ann Hertzler, John Gordon, Richard Graham, and Leslie Bright, and Sue Wooten. We also had three members of the Fort Fisher Chapter, UDC, who tended the three known graves of Pilots/Blockade Runners buried in The Newton Cemetery. The historic sign was taken down and Linda will see to its repair. It had lasted five years before erosion started its deterioration. It was a beautiful morning for the end of October - nice Krispy Kreme donuts and coffee added to our congenial group.

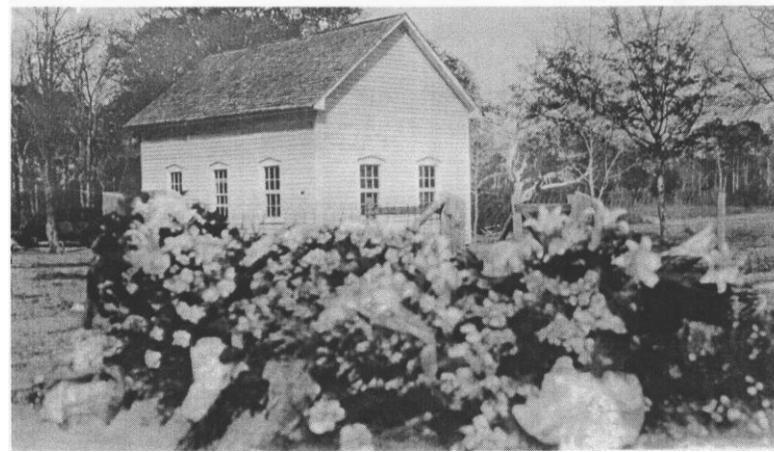
Be sure to see the new pictorial views of our area in postcards by Peter Doran, a local artist, in our gift shop. These are also suitable for framing.

A Blessed Thanksgiving holiday to each and every member of our Federal Point Preservation Society. I will be spending mine with that new granddaughter, Rinske GRAY Bolander, in California. Remember our Troops and their families in your Thanksgiving Blessings.

Historic Federal Point Church
From *The Wilmington News*, February 23, 1956
By Jim Hardie, Staff Writer

The historic old Federal Point Methodist Church was abandoned because it was located in the area designated as a "safety zone" for the Sunny Point Army Terminal. According to an agreement between the church and the government, the graveyard beside the church can still be used, and the government will provide maintenance for the burial ground. At the time, there were about 30 members of the church and the pastor was Douglas Nathan Byrd, a ministerial student at High Point College. The building was erected between 1910-12, and was located some 300 yards northeast of the site of the original "Meeting House."

Situated among the scrub oaks and long leaf pines in this remote area of New Hanover County, the quaint, three-room frame church might be the "Mother" Methodist Church in North Carolina. There are no records available to confirm, or discredit, Federal Point Methodist Church as being the original Methodist Church in the state. At any rate, the church is definitely more than 112 years old, and may possibly be 162 years



old. Some of the valuable old records in the basement of the historic old New Hanover County Courthouse, which date back to the early 1700's, throw some light on the subject, but there are years which slipped by unrecorded, leaving a vast area of unknown which only speculation can fill. To take historical facts and add to them what is known of the habits and customs of the people of that time, throw in one's speculation, and you come out with a blend of history and lore as colorful as the sky, the sea and the sand, together, which make up the island.

On July 14, 1725, the Commonwealth of North Carolina deeded to Maurice Moore, "500 acres, more or less," at the southeastern corner of New Hanover County. That 500 acres today takes in Kure Beach and Fort Fisher. Moore acquired the land because as a major in the army, he had led some troops across the Cape Fear River and landed in the vicinity of Sugar Loaf Hill, a few hundred yards north of Federal Point. Moore expressed the desire to establish a settlement around Sugar Loaf and Federal Point, and did so. At the same time he got the land for a settlement at Federal Point, Major Moore was building a plantation on a bluff overlooking the Cape Fear River, just north of Orton Plantation. You can travel the old Ethel-Dow road today, and the land around Sugar Loaf Hill and Federal Point looks the same as it probably did when Major Maurice Moore landed his troops around 1712.

It wasn't until the spring of 1735 that the 500 acres which Moore had acquired, changed hands. Thomas Merrick took over the vast stretch of sandy wasteland from Moore. Merrick had two daughters, Dorothy and Sarah. In his will, Merrick directed that all his land be divided equally between his daughters. Dorothy died without marrying, and Sarah was sole heir to the acres of sand, bordered on the south and the east by the ocean, on the west by the Cape Fear River, and on the north by a boundary line. There were Indians scattered about the area during this time, and some of them lived north of the Merrick tract. Direct descendants of the Indians who lived in that area, are still scattered through the county. Old sailing schooners passed Federal Point during those days, some of them carrying pirates, and some carrying belligerent Spaniards.

Sarah Merrick married Samuel Ashe, Jr., and in 1788, they sold the southern half of their land to Archibald McLaine, and in 1792, they sold the remaining tract to William Mosely. Mosely didn't hold onto the 300 acres he bought very long because on April 12, 1794, he sold his holdings at Federal Point to Joseph Newton. Some 49 years had passed from the time the state gave 500 acres to Major Maurice Moore, and Joseph Newton bought 300 acres of the same tract. It was on the 300 acres bought by Joseph Newton that the Federal Point Methodist Church was built. It is entirely possible that a hand full of people began holding simple worship services on the land of Joseph Newton, soon after he bought it. This speculation is strengthened by the knowledge that a settlement existed at Federal Point during that time, and there is reason to believe those

settlers were religious. Being far removed from the church facilities afforded by Wilmington, it is reasonable to assume they had their own make-shift services. They may have congregated at Newton's home on Sundays, then sometime later built a small meeting place which came to be known as the "Meeting House."

New Hanover County Historian Louis T. Moore has no records on the Federal Point Methodist Church. Moore, a direct descendant of Maurice Moore, the original owner of the land, agrees that a group could have held church meetings at Joseph Newton's home as early as 1794, "But I doubt it. It is more likely that Federal Point Methodist Church was organized in the early eighteen hundreds, following the arrival of the Rev. William Meredith," Moore said. The Rev. Mr. Meredith came to Wilmington in 1797, and is regarded as the first Methodist minister in this area. Grace Methodist Church, which was organized in Wilmington by the Rev. Mr. Meredith in 1797, is considered by historian Moore, as being the oldest Methodist Church in the state. There is no doubt that the arrival of the Rev. Mr. Meredith in this area affected the Methodist movement in this section, but there is still the contention that a group was meeting at Joseph Newton's home before the Rev. Mr. Meredith came.

The early years during which Joseph Newton built his "homeplace" at Federal Point, are shrouded by mystery, and it isn't until the 1840s that we are able to pick up the chain of recorded events. Edward Newton, Jr., grandson of Joseph Newton, stipulated in his will, drawn January 15, 1844, that his entire 50 acre estate be left to his wife, Euphemia, "Except the Meeting House." It was on the 50 acres owned by Edward that the old Joseph Newton homeplace stood, and it was close to the homeplace that the Meeting House of the Federal Point Methodist stood. However, no mention is made of when the Meeting House was built, or when the people first got together and started holding religious services. We know that it was sometime between April 12, 1794, when Joseph Newton bought the land, and January 15, 1844, when Edward made reference to the Meeting House in his will.

There is considerable more history to the church especially the part it played in the War Between the States, when the cannons at nearby Fort Fisher rattled the very foundations the Meeting House stood on, but that is apart from the mystery of its beginning. It is a romantic history indeed, and a history which easily stirs the imagination, and returns our thoughts to those days of yesteryear.

Society Notes

- **Membership Information:** Renewal notices are being sent on the anniversary of your joining the Society. If you have been receiving a Newsletter, and we have not heard from you within 90 days of the billing date, your name will be placed in the inactive file and no Newsletter will be sent. Thanks to all who have responded promptly! Our renewals are up! Your support of our local preservation efforts with your membership is very important as it is the lifeblood of our organization.

Welcome New Members: Mary Jo and Col. (Ret.) Rodney Dean McKitrick, Carolina Beach, joined in September and Ron and Debbie Price, Kure Beach, joined in November.

- **History Center News!** The History Center is opened every Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm, or other times by appointment. If you wish to volunteer, please sign-up at the Monday meeting, or call me at 458-8684. We really need your help. Thanks to our volunteers: Pat Bolander - 13 hours; Jeannie Gordon - 10 hours; Leslie Bright - 14 hours; Darlene Bright - 32 hours, who greeted 24 visitors to our Center, answered many telephone inquiries, written correspondence, inventoried and filed donated books and other materials, cleaned & freshened the exhibit cases, shampooed the carpet, pressure washed the handicap ramp, along with other housekeeping duties.

- **From the Board of Directors.** The board has been meeting quarterly, with sessions on August 4 and October 4 so far this fiscal year. We have approved the current budget, authorized history center improvements (new chairs, podium) and initiated a variety of projects. Among our efforts is an ongoing program by Beth Keane to photograph older structures in the area that are endangered by redevelopment. You are encouraged to contact any board member or officer if you know of a Carolina Beach or Kure Beach structure that you feel needs to be photographed. The board is also supporting the 140th anniversary celebration of Ft. Fisher on January 15 and 16, 2005. We will be calling on society members to sell sausage dogs, provide help in parking cars and other volunteer efforts. You will be hearing more on this at our meetings and in future newsletters.

Our next board meeting will be January 10 at 9 a.m. at the history center. We will focus on re-energizing our committees and initiating new membership and publicity campaigns. As always, members of the society are welcome to attend.

● **Fort Fisher News!**

October, 2004 - September, 2005 - Captain Thomas J. Purdie's Uniform, a special exhibit featuring an artillery uniform worn by Confederate Col. Thomas J. Purdie, stationed at Fort Fisher early in the war. Purdie Battery, thought to be named in his honor, was the location of the famous Armstrong Cannon. The uniform, along with his saber, valise and canteen will be on loan from the Averasboro Battlefield Commission. This is an opportunity to see a very rare item!

Mid-November, 2004 - Armstrong Exhibit Unveiling, first official display of the massive English built cannon at Fort Fisher since the Civil War. It is returning to the historic site on loan from the US Army. The cannon was taken to the US Military Academy at West Point as a trophy of war in the fall of 1865. It is the only known surviving seacoast cannon from Fort Fisher.

For the latest info about programs at Fort Fisher call (910) 458-5538, or email at fisher@ncmail.net.

● **Attraction NEW 2005 Carolina Coast Dining & Value Guide** is now available! Treat yourself and your friends! Be among the first to get your money saving coupon book. This is one of our easiest and best fundraising projects - the books sell themselves. Everyone, please take a few books to sell and make this a successful fundraising experience.

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Secretary - Darlene Bright
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