

FORT MACON RAMPARTS

a newsletter of the Friends of Fort Macon Fall 1996
Volume III, Issue 2

THE CHICAMACOMICO RACES A PRELUDE TO COURAGE

by Bennett R. Moss

When we think of the men who fought in the Civil War, America's bloodiest conflict, words such as bravery and valor automatically come to mind. But unlike the basic instincts for self preservation and fear of the unknown, courage must be learned. It is only after enduring and surviving several encounters with danger, that the courage to face danger with confidence and resolution gradually evolves. When green troops led by inexperienced officers first engage in battle, bravado can be quickly superseded by sheer panic. No better example of this exists than on the Outer Banks of North Carolina during the first months of the Civil War.

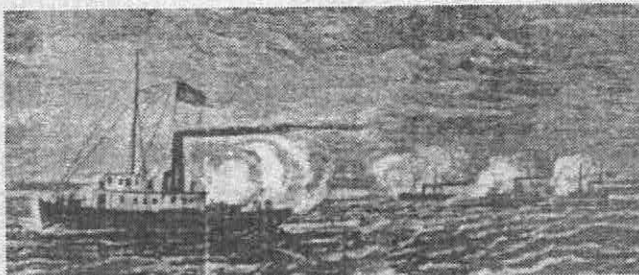
On August 27, 1861, only four and a half months after a secessionist militia unit from Beaufort seized FORT MACON, a Union task force attacked and captured two hastily constructed and lightly armed Confederate forts protecting Hatteras Inlet.

When Forts Hatteras and Clark fell, the Confederates also abandoned their forts on Ocracoke and Oregon inlets, and removed their remaining troops to Roanoke Island, about 50 miles north of Hatteras, to await, with considerable trepidation, the next move on the part of the Federals.

It should be pointed out that this successful Union incursion on the Outer Banks occurred a full five months before the much larger Burnside Expedition arrived on Hatteras Island.

Safeguarding this Federal toehold on the Outer Banks were about 900 infantry of the 9th and 20th New York Volunteers under the command of Colonel Rush

Hawkins. They were later reinforced by about 600 men of the 20th Indiana and a company of the 1st U.S. Artillery. The Federals also had the support of five, mostly small, armed naval vessels. These forces did not imbue Col. Hawkins with much of a sense of security, as he was convinced that the Confederates on Roanoke Island were assembling a larger force with which to recapture their lost forts.



Capture by Confederate steamers of the Union tug *Fanny* in Pamlico Sound, October 1, 1861. (Harpers Weekly)

In order to thwart what he believed to be the enemy's plans, Hawkins ordered Colonel W.L. Brown to move the 600 men of his Twentieth Indiana Regiment to just north of the Outer Banks village of Chicamacomico, near the present day location of Rodanthe. This move would provide an early warning of the expected Confederate attack, and would make it more difficult for them to organize their assault on Hatteras.

Two days after the Indiana regiment arrived at Chicamacomico, the Federal tug *Fanny* was sent from Hatteras with supplies, equipment, and rations for the troops of the 20th Indiana. Aboard the *Fanny* was a precious supply of drinking water, which was in very short supply on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

On the opposing side, Confederate

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CIVIL WAR MORTARS AT FORT MACON

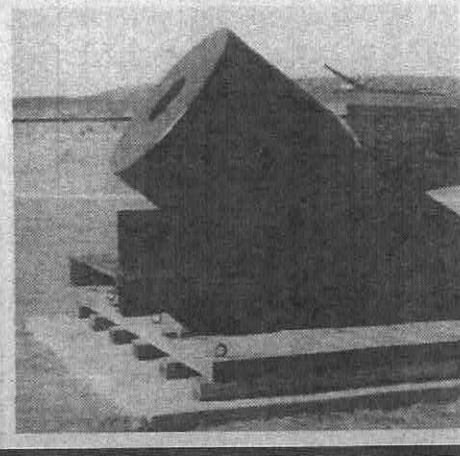
by Paul Branch

A major project undertaken by the Friends is the making of a replica gun carriage, or bed, for one of the two 10-inch siege mortars currently sitting on stone blocks in the Fort parade ground.

Many visitors to the Fort pass by these venerable old weapons without realizing they are cannon. Indeed, one visitor noticed the cannonballs welded into their mouths and asked if they were some sort of cannonball holders! True, they are not the kind of cannon one normally sees in movies about the Civil War, and without the beds they would have had when in actual use they are even less recognizable as cannon. But they deserve far more notice and respect than they get today, because they are the Fort's only surviving cannon left in the 20th Century of over 50 cannon of various types which once comprised Fort Macon's original armament.

These mortars were first brought to Fort Macon in June, 1862, by the Union Army after the Fort was recaptured from the Confederates and were a part of the Fort's armament until beyond the turn of the cen-

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Colonel A.E. Wright was in command of the North Carolinians and the recently arrived Third Georgia Regiment. For naval support, the Southerners had their "Mosquito Fleet" of five shallow draft steamers. These were mostly side-wheel river boats with only minimal armament and no trained gunners. The Mosquito Fleet was under the command of Commodore W.F. Lynch, a former U.S. Navy Captain.

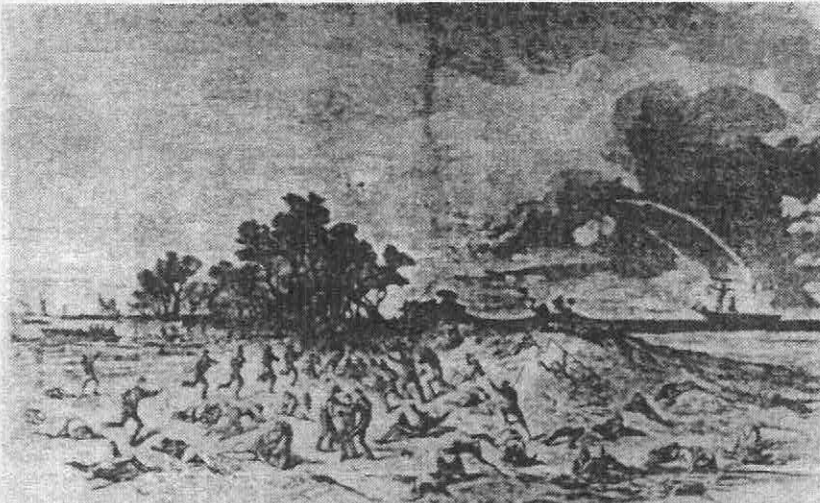
Colonel Wright was quite certain that the Federals, with what he believed was their greater strength, were preparing to attack his position on Roanoke Island. When the Confederate commander heard that a small Union vessel was in the area, he "determined at once to intercept and capture her, and if possible to learn the intention of the enemy, who were evidently meditating some hostile movement upon his position."

What ensued could not exactly be described as a titanic battle between great warships. Three vessels of the Mosquito Fleet, including the former canal tug boat *Junaluska*, descended upon the *Fanny* with guns blazing. After a half-hour chase and about two dozen shots, one shell managed to land on the deck of the *Fanny*. This was sufficient to cause the Captain and crew of the *Fanny* to take to their small boat, leaving behind some forty soldiers to take care of themselves as best they could. The capture of the *Fanny* was the first capture of a Union warship by Confederate arms anywhere in the Civil War. The equipment on board the *Fanny* had an estimated value of \$150,000. But nothing on board would have been of more value to the Union troops ashore than the supply of drinking water which she carried. It was only after the prisoners from the captured *Fanny* were questioned that Col. Wright learned of the enemy force at Chicamacomico. This served to confirm his worst fears. But to his credit, he and Commodore Lynch decided to strike the first blow.

The Confederate plan was quite ambitious for such an inexperienced force. Using all available vessels, including towed

launches and barges, the 3rd Georgia Infantry would be landed to the north of the Federals at Chicamacomico, while Colonel Henry Shaw's 8th North Carolina Regiment would be landed to the south, thereby cutting off the Union escape. After eliminating this enemy concentration, the Confederates could then march south to destroy the Cape Hatteras lighthouse and recapture Forts Clark and Hatteras.

After three days of preparation, the Confederate expedition embarked after midnight in the early hours of October 5,



The U.S.S. *Monticello* shelling Confederate troops during the "Chicamacomico Races," October 6, 1861. (Harpers Weekly)

1861. After steaming down Pamlico Sound, the little fleet arrived off of Chicamacomico just after sunrise. It was at this point that the comedy of errors began.

The Confederates should have been landed a couple of miles above the Union camp so that they could assemble and organize their assault in good military order. Instead, they had to wade ashore through more than a mile of shallow water while in full view of the Union forces, who were lined up in battle formation on the beach. At this critical moment, Col. Brown, the Union commander, observed half of the invading fleet continuing to steam south, apparently intending to encircle and trap his forces.

Had Col. Brown been more experienced, and his Indiana troops more seasoned, he might have exulted in the opportunity to wipe out the disadvantaged Georgia regiment struggling through the water. He would then have the remaining Confederate troops trapped between his own forces

and the Union reinforcements which he had sent for when the approaching Mosquito Fleet was first observed. But instead, Col. Brown ordered his men to withdraw all the way to Fort Hatteras. Thus began the famous "Chicamacomico Races."

Col. Brown no doubt expected his men to withdraw in good military order. But the scene that followed was one of hundreds of men fleeing in disarray and in various degrees of terror. The Indiana soldiers had more than a hostile enemy to contend with. It was a hot, cloudless morning and most of the men had empty canteens. Before long, their heavy woolen uniforms and most of their equipment were discarded as the men struggled through the soft sand.

The Georgia troops were in hot pursuit, attempting to fire at their fleeing opponents as they ran. The gap between the two forces widened somewhat when many of the Georgia troops paused to pillage the abandoned Union camp before resuming their pursuit. The Confederates were deriding the Yankees for discarding their uniforms, but before the day ended they were doing the same thing.

Mixed in with the fleeing Hoosiers were dozens of civilians who had taken an oath of loyalty to the Union, and were fearful of being hung as traitors if captured by the Confederates. One of the Indiana soldiers later described the scene:

"The sun was shining on the white sand of the beach, heating the air as if it were a furnace. The first ten miles was terrible. No water, the men unused to long marches, the sand heavy, their feet sinking into it at every step. As the regiment moved along, man after man would stagger from the ranks and fall upon the hot sand. Looking back, I saw our Colonel trudging along with his men, having given up his horse to a sick soldier. But the most sorrowful sight of all was the Islanders leaving their homes from fear of the enemy. They could be seen in groups, sometimes with little carts carrying their provisions, but mostly with nothing, fleeing for dear life; mothers carrying their babes, fathers leading along the boys,

grandfathers and grandmothers straggling along from homes they had left behind. Relying on our protection, they had been our friends, but in an evil hour we had been compelled to leave them."

The same soldier went on to describe the maddening thirst as the morning and afternoon wore on: "In every clump of bushes I would find men utterly exhausted. The enemy's vessels were now nearly opposite, steaming down the Sound to cut off our retreat. I would tell them this, but they would say 'they did not care, they would die there', so utterly hopeless did they seem."

By late afternoon, the Confederate fleet had gotten far enough south of the fleeing Federals to attempt a landing of Col. Shaw's 8th North Carolina Regiment. But the vessels had run aground far out in the Sound, and the soldiers were not able to wade ashore because much of the intervening waters were too deep. Thus, the planned Confederate trap was never sprung. The fleeing Yankees were unaware of this development because the very sight of the Rebel fleet had caused most of them to move over to the ocean side of the banks and out of sight of the aborted landing.

The 3rd Georgia Regiment was also unaware of this development. They continued their pursuit, dragging two howitzers through the soft sand, expecting that the North Carolina regiment would soon intercept the fleeing Yankees. Occasionally they would encounter stragglers. Several who resisted were killed or wounded, while about forty others were taken prisoner. The Georgia soldiers continued the chase until darkness fell.

The retreat of the 20th Indiana continued until midnight, when they finally reached the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. There they found a supply of water, and the lighthouse itself became a fortified refuge. The exhausted soldiers had covered more than 23 miles since their "strategic withdrawal" began that morning.

The 3rd Georgia had made camp for the night about nine miles from the lighthouse, still unaware that Col. Shaw's regiment had not closed the trap. At dawn they resumed their pursuit. Believing that the enemy would by that time have been stopped by the North Carolinians, the Georgians were anxious to be there when the Yankees were forced to surrender. As they approached the lighthouse after several

hours of marching, they first learned of the failure of the North Carolinians to effect a landing. This unwelcome news caused Col. Wright to order his men to begin a withdrawal back to Chicamacomico.

At about this time, the Ninth New York Regiment, which had been sent from Fort Hatteras in response to Col. Brown's urgent message of the previous day, had arrived at the lighthouse. They now began to chase the retreating Georgians! The 3rd Georgia, although moving with alacrity, presented a more orderly sight than did the Indiana troops of the prior day. However, that picture was soon to change. An officer of the 3rd Georgia described what happened:

"After marching only a few miles upon our return, a Federal steamer anchored off the coast and opened upon us with shell, shot, and grape shot. They fired the first gun at 5 minutes after 1 o'clock, and continued to fire until dark, throwing by Commodore Lynch's count 441 shot. It was a miracle that numbers of us were not killed. One man of the 'Burke Guards' and Clay Moore of my company were slightly wounded. We marched 18 miles to reach our camp, after marching at least half that distance in pursuit of the enemy during the morning. It was severe, I assure you. We marched upon the Sound side of the beach and of course a great part of the way, across the little inlets, through water 2 and 3 feet deep, I marched till mired down, then I took off my pants, shoes and socks — which made me much lighter. Most of us did this, and most of us can walk with difficulty yet because of sore feet. Those that took it barefooted stood the march the best. It was said to be the *Monticello* that attacked us. Of course we could offer no resistance, for they kept 3 or 4 large sized guns belching forth death and destruction at us without any compunctions and we had to march down the beach and take it."

Apparently the combination of a rolling ship, inexperienced gunners, moving targets, and intervening sand dunes prevented any serious casualties among the Georgians in spite of the large number of rounds fired. With all of the shot and shell that were fired, the Union gunners would have found it inconceivable that they had done so little damage to the enemy. Perhaps the smoke in their eyes from their own guns caused the Federals to be blinded. For whatever reason, they reported to higher headquarters that, "several officers were killed, and the shore for a distance of four miles was strewn with killed and wounded."

This made for good reading in the Northern press.

The Georgians managed to reach the waiting Mosquito Fleet ahead of their pursuers with little lost but their clothes and their pride. Not only did the Confederates abandon Chicamacomico, but soon afterwards so too did the Federals, who returned to Fort Hatteras to regroup. Thus the "Chicamacomico Races" ended with everyone back where they started. Each side felt they had foiled a major enemy offensive, and had succeeded in spite of being outnumbered by no less than two to one by their opponent.

During the remainder of 1861 the two sides eyed each other warily, but avoided contact. It was not until the following February that Roanoke Island would be attacked by the newly arrived forces of the Burnside expedition.

Stay tuned.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

1996 has been a good year for the Friends of Fort Macon. Our friendship has made a big difference for Fort Macon. The cannon is in place on the ramparts. The hot shot furnace is completed. The idea and beginning of volunteer efforts has been born and the training of a group of us will be happening soon. Our board meetings, finance meetings and regular monthly meetings have been well attended and productive.

If you have any ideas or suggestions please call and let me share them. We have built this organization together.

Please pass the word that it is always with pride we ask friends and neighbors to "Support the Fort". Thank you one and all.

Kathryn Cloud...

HOT SHOT HEROES

Our missing hot shot furnace is back where it belongs! Back in 1836, the furnace was first built to enable the soldiers at Fort Macon to fire red hot cannon balls at attacking wooden warships in order to set them on fire. This was a vital component of any coastal fortification during the days of wooden warships. Fort Macon had at least two such furnaces prior to the Civil War.

The Civil War marked the end of the era of the wooden warship. The hot shot furnaces thereafter became obsolete. Those at Fort Macon were dismantled by 1867. The goal of our preservation effort is to restore the Fort to its original condition at the start of the Civil War. It thus became a high priority for the Friends of Fort Macon to rebuild the hot shot furnace that once stood on the Fort's parade ground.

Fortunately for us all, an angel appeared in the form of the Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association. These wonderful people donated \$15,000 toward the cost of constructing the replica furnace. Ad-

ditional funds were received in the form of a grant from the Division of Archives and History.

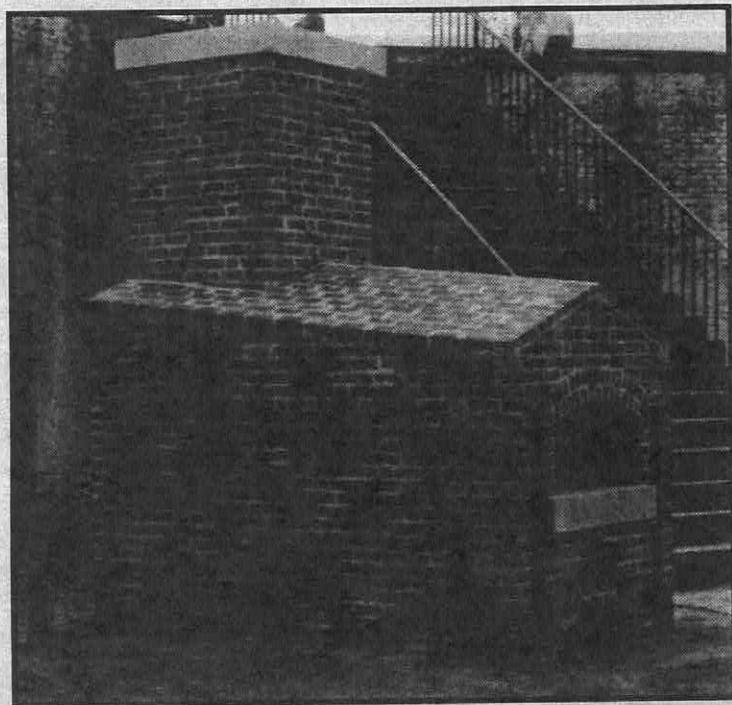
There are no existing plans, drawings, or photographs of the original hot shot furnace at Fort Macon. However, the foundation of that furnace was still in place, and Paul Branch, the Fort Historian, was able to locate drawings and plans for similar furnaces at other forts. With this information, member volunteer Howard Moberg was able to prepare a valuable set of construction drawings with which we could obtain cost estimates from contractors. That is when we got the bad news.

The construction estimate, plus the cost of special reproduction brick, exceeded \$40,000. This was about twice the amount of money that was available for the project. As a result, we began to have serious doubts as to whether or not we could proceed with the project, even though we had already purchased the bricks. Fortunately, before we were able to wallow too deeply in despair another player arrived on the scene.

Friends member David Pleace agreed to take another look at the project, which had been put on hold. David is a retired engineer, with considerable experience in the metal fabrication field. After preparing detailed engineering drawings of the metal components of the furnace, much of which are inside the furnace, David did some costing of his own. To our amazement and utter delight, David informed us that he, with the assistance of member J.O. Barbour, could fabricate all the metal components, and would personally direct and supervise all of the brick work. The net result of David's efforts was a saving of approximately \$20,000!!

We now have a wonderful replica of the original 1836 hot shot furnace, which exceeds our most optimistic expectations. Without the generous contribution of the Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association, this project could not have been started. Without the creative and tireless efforts of David Pleace, the project could not have been completed in 1996. Our profound gratitude is extended to every one who contributed to this undertaking.

THANK YOU!



WE ARE BURSTING WITH PRIDE FOR OUR JUST COMPLETED HOT SHOT FURNACE

Here it stands on the parade grounds, an exact replica of the furnace that stood there in 1865. Thanks to the dedication of **Mr. David Pleace** and the generosity of the **Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association** and the **N.C. Department of Cultural Resources** we now see our dream come true. Come see it!

HOLIDAYS ARE COMING

The holiday season is practically upon us. This knowledge often generates mixed emotions. The joy of the coming season is often tempered by the panicky realization that many gifts are still needed and time is getting short. Instead of giving gifts that may self-destruct on December 26,

why not give a gift that will last a whole year?

Yes, that's right — a gift membership in **THE FRIENDS OF FORT MACON!** What red-blooded male wouldn't prefer such a gift instead of another hideous Christmas necktie?

(Continued from page 1)

tury. They were the last guns still remaining in the Fort when they were given by the Army (minus their original beds) to the city of Raleigh in 1902 as monuments to sit in front of the old Soldier's Home.

In 1944 they were moved to the front of the Agriculture Building, and then were returned to Fort Macon in 1953. For years they sat on the parade ground in front of the Fort museum until finally being placed on the stone blocks during the Fort restoration of 1976-77. They have remained as such ever since. It has long been a part of Fort Macon State Park's interpretive master plan to remount both mortars on replica beds, but until now this has not been possible. However, the Friends have recently undertaken as their next project the fabrication of one replica mortar bed, to be followed at a later date by the second mortar bed.

The fabrication of the bed will be done by B & W Fiberglass, of Sea Level, who built our rifled 32-pounder. The completed mortars and beds will still occupy their present locations (within a few feet of the positions they last originally occupied at the turn of the century), but will be mounted on replica wooden firing platforms rather than stone blocks.

A mortar bed consists of large metal plates bolted together to support the mortar. Mortars do not fire horizontally as do regular cannon, but instead fire outward at a 45 degree or greater angle into the sky to drop explosive shells on enemy troops from above. The shells for one of these mortars weigh about 88 pounds each and can be fired by the mortar almost 2100 yards (1.2 miles).

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

This past summer has been very busy. The Park's visitors have enjoyed the cannon and the Hot Shot Furnace. The Friends' work on projects like these shows what the local citizens can do and also creates an awareness of the Friends' actions statewide.

The Friends of Fort Macon have provided the park with such wonderful support on many projects over the past years. Now we are looking at going into a new role with the Friends. We are beginning a program to utilize volunteers in the Park. At first, we hope to use the volunteers to help present programs on the Fort and also present nature programs. We hope this will allow us to do more programs in the off-season and meet the requests for programs in the spring. We look forward to compiling a list of interested people and in beginning the training this winter. I see the need for volunteers increasing even more when we get the Coastal Education Center completed. As we start this new program with the Friends, I look forward to exploring the new ideas that volunteers will generate.

Again, thank you for all of your help, and I hope everyone had a great summer!

Jody Merritt

WORK WITH THE RANGERS

With more than a million visitors to FORT MACON STATE PARK each year, the Park Rangers are hard pressed to conduct all of the educational programs that park visitors would like to enjoy. For the first time, the Park management is inviting individual members of the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON to become volunteer docents at the Park during the 1997 season.

Only a few volunteers can be accepted in each of three program areas this year. Based upon the experience of this first year, the volunteer program may be expanded in 1998. This year volunteers are needed to conduct nature tours (birds, turtles, etc.), and historic site tours of the Fort. In addition, volunteer coordinators are also needed.

All volunteers will receive ample training from the Park Rangers before there is any contact with the public. A comprehensive training program will be conducted in January and/or February at the Park. Volunteers will be provided with a volunteer vest and an identifying badge to wear while on duty. Sorry, no guns!

If you want to take advantage of this exciting opportunity, give your name to Bennett Moss, the FRIENDS Vice President. His number is (919)728-5256. He will make sure that you receive detailed information about the training program and schedule.



JOIN THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The FRIENDS organization is managed by a President and a Board of Directors consisting of fourteen members. Board members serve for a term of one year, beginning on January 1. Although most Board members are willing to serve for more than one term, there are usually several vacancies to be filled each year. If you are willing to be a part of this team, please call President Kathryn Cloud and let her know. Kathryn's phone number is 728-2704. Or you can drop her a note at the FRIENDS' mailing address.

FRIENDS OF FORT MACON BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 1996

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We're On The Net

Articles from past issues of the Fort Macon Ramparts can now be viewed on the Internet at:

<http://www.clis.com/friends/>

This has been made possible through a grant from Cape Lookout Internet Services.

Grants

The Friends of Fort Macon are very pleased to acknowledge the following grants for the Cannon Fund.

CAROLINA POWER AND LIGHT COMPANY \$5,000

This grant was awarded to the Friends through the efforts of P. J. Gay of Carolina Power and Light.

WACHOVIA BANK AND TRUST COMAPNY \$3,000

This grant was awarded through the efforts of David Stevens of Wachovia Bank.

CARTERET NEWS TIMES Donation of \$2,000

This contribution was made possible through Lockwood Phillips.

CENTURA BANK OF MOREHEAD CITY \$1,000

This donation was made possible through the efforts of George Dill of Centura Bank.

The above listing shows that corporations in our area care about Fort Macon's educational interpretation of history. We thank them very much.

TIME TO RENEW

As we approach the end of the calendar year, it is time for most of us to renew our memberships in the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON for 1997. This won't be necessary if you have taken out a new membership since September 1 or if you are a Lifetime Member. You can verify your status by looking at your mailing label. This has been a year of great accomplishment for the FRIENDS. Your membership has helped make that possible. Please stay with us so that we can have another great year. The government folks in Raleigh are definitely influenced by the size of our organization, so it is important that we keep our numbers up. If you would like to avoid the hassle of writing a check every year, why not consider a lifetime membership instead? The cost is only \$100. We promise you, it will make you feel good, and we will be happy too!

Membership Form

Check One: ☐ New Member(s) ☐ Renewal ☐ Gift Membership

Fee Enclosed \$ _____ Date: _____

Member's Name(s) _____

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Membership Categories and Fees

Individual - \$5.00 Family - \$10.00 Lifetime (ea.) - \$100.00

Business or Organization - \$25.00 Business Lifetime - \$500.00

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