

FORT MACON RAMPARTS

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Blackbeard's Visit to Beaufort Inlet

by David Moore

Did the infamous North Carolina free booter maroon some of his crew on Bogue Bank near the site of present day Fort Macon?

Until recently, probably many of the visitors to Fort Macon State Park have never thought much about the historical events which occurred within sight of Beaufort Inlet during the century before the fort was constructed. In the summer of 1718, the pirate Edward Thatch, better known as Blackbeard, ran two of his ships aground on the bar just off this inlet. Some of the pirates who were left behind later declared that Blackbeard had lost the vessels as part of a plan to break up their company. Planned or not, Blackbeard was able to effectively reduce his crew but leave the area with most, if not all, of the plunder that his large crew had accumulated up to that point. On his way out of the area, he marooned a number of pirates who undoubtedly disagreed with the plan. Were these unfortunate corsairs abandoned on the bank in the vicinity where the foundations for Fort Macon were laid a hundred years later?

We don't know for sure about the early life of the man who became a pirate icon. His home is generally accepted as Bristol, England, but there is some evidence to suggest London and even Philadelphia as his

place of origin. Even his real name is shrouded with questions. Edward Teach is the way most authors have referred to the pirate, but a close examination of the documents generated during the period of his activities reveal his name as Thatch (or some phonetic derivation thereof, i.e., Thach, Thache, etc.). In fact, it is spelled one of these ways well over ninety percent of the time. One source reported that Thatch served as a privateer out of Jamaica during Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), but this has not been substantiated by any other documents. In any event, information concerning the man's background before launching his piratical career remains vague.

The first mention of a pirate by this name appears to have been in the Boston News-Letter in October-November 1717. He was almost certainly sailing as a pirate earlier and under the command of Benjamin Hornigold, but the documents are silent before this date on anything concerning Blackbeard. On the other hand, we can trace Hornigold's pirating activities back to as early as 1714, though we cannot say for certain when the two joined forces. Also during this period Major Stede Bonnet joined with Hornigold and Thatch. Most

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THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD AT FORT MACON

by Paul Branch

A very important, and very often overlooked, aspect of Fort Macon's history is the ante-bellum period between the completion of the fort in 1834 and the beginning



Capt. Robert E. Lee in 1845

of the Civil War in 1861. Yet these were years of considerable importance, and what follows is a brief overview of the new fort and its pre-Civil War use.

In June, 1833 Brevet Major R.M. Kirby and Company G, 1st U.S. Artillery, arrived at Beaufort

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sources have reported that Bonnet did not join with Blackbeard until Spring of 1718, but documents prove that he was with the two other pirates off the Delaware Capes and Philadelphia as early as October, 1717.

Pirates were some of the original "snowbirds". When the weather started to get cooler off the ports of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, the pirates began making their way south. We have reports of these pirates taking ships all along the route to as far south as St. Vincent just west of Barbados in the Windward Islands of the West Indies. Here Hornigold and Thatch captured the French slave ship *Concorde* out of Nantes, France and heading toward Martinique with a cargo of slaves. Blackbeard was immediately placed in command of the slaver and soon after, Hornigold and some of his crew left the company to claim the recently issued King's pardon which would absolve the pirates of all of their crimes. However Thatch added more guns to his prize with every ship he plundered thereafter and he soon had a floating fortress with reportedly forty cannon. He renamed the ship the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and soon had a flotilla of four vessels and between three and four hundred pirates. We lose touch with Blackbeard after this for about three months. He appears again in early April around the Bay of Honduras where he takes several more ships before heading north past Cuba, past the Bahamas, and up the eastern seaboard. This voyage can easily be argued as Blackbeard's

greatest pirating achievement.

Around the middle of May 1718, Blackbeard's flotilla arrived off the colonial port of Charleston, South Carolina. After taking the pilot boat and almost every ship coming in and out of the port for at least a week, Thatch dispatched a ransom demand to Governor Robert Johnson for a chest of medicines. It has been debated for years why the pirates settled for this paltry amount of loot when they were obviously in a po-

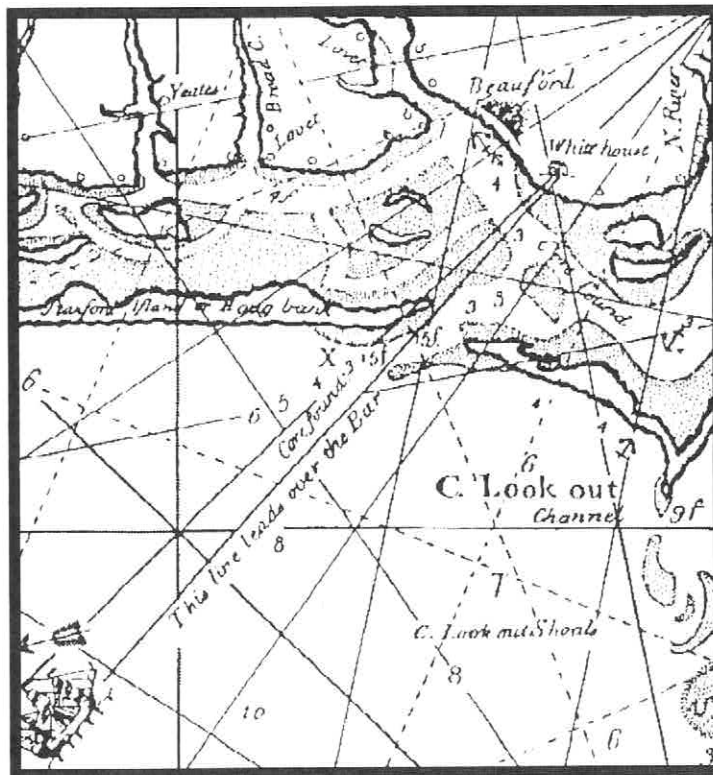


Chart by James Wimble - 1738

sition to demand much more. The pirates also took what was reported to have been between £1,000 and £1,500 worth of gold and silver coins from the ships while off Charleston, but it still remains a mystery why Blackbeard settled for this comparatively small amount of loot.

Less than a week after leaving the waters off Charleston, the pirate flotilla arrived off Topsail Inlet, later Old Topsail, and presently Beaufort Inlet. David Harriot, who had been the original captain of the sloop

Adventure when captured by Blackbeard near the Bay of Honduras, provides the best description of the events in a deposition recorded shortly before he was killed during an escape attempt from Charleston several months later and published in London in 1719.

...about six Days after they left the Bar of Charles-Town, they arrived at Topsail-Inlet in North Carolina, having then under their Command the said Ship Queen Anne's Revenge, the Sloop commanded by Richards, this Deponent's Sloop, commanded by one Capt. Hands, one of the said Pirate Crew, and a small empty Sloop which they found near the Havana.... That the next Morning after they had all got safe into Topsail-Inlet, except Thatch, the said Thatch's ship Queen Anne's Revenge run a-ground off of the Bar of Topsail-Inlet, and the said Thatch sent his Quarter-Master to command this Deponent's Sloop to come to his Assistance; but she run a-ground likewise about Gun-shot from the said Thatch, before his said Sloop could come to their Assistance, and both the said Thatch's Ship and this Deponent's Sloop were wreck'd; and the said Thatch and all the other Sloop's Companies went on board the Revenge, afterwards called the Royal James, and on board the other Sloop they found empty off the Havana.

"Twas generally believed the said Thatch run his Vessel a-ground on purpose to break up the Companies, and to secure what Moneys and Effects he had got for himself and such other of them as he had most

*Value for. That after the said ship and this Deponent's sloop were so cast away, this Deponent requested the said Thatch to let him have a Boat, and a few Hands, to go to some inhabited Place in North Carolina, or to Virginia, there being very few and poor inhabitants in Topsail-Inlet, where they were; and desired the said Thatch to make this Deponent some Satisfaction for his said Sloop; Both which said Thatch promised to do. But instead thereof, ordered this Deponent, with about sixteen more, to be put on shore on a small Sandy Hill or Bank, a League distant from the Main; on which Place there was no Inhabitant, nor Provisions. Where this Deponent and the rest remained two Nights and one Day, and expected to perish; for that said Thatch took away their Boat. That said Thatch having taken what Number of Men he thought fit along with him, he set sail from Topsail-Inlet in the small Spanish Sloop, about eight Guns mounted, forty White Men, and sixty Negroes, and left the **Revenge** belonging to Bonnet there...*

In addition to the many significant details revealed in this document, it is interesting to examine his statement that about seventeen of the pirates were "...put on shore on a small Sandy Hill or Bank, a League distant from the Main; on which Place there was no Inhabitant, nor Provisions." Was this small sandy hill or bank the east end of present-day Bogue Bank? Or were the pirates marooned on a sand bar within the inlet itself? Several 19th century charts of the area indicate that such dry shoals existed at times in the inlet and even had names. The 1738 James Wimble chart that shows the inlet in some detail just two decades after the event indicates that the recognized channel during the period was positioned

just off Bogue Bank. With this in mind it would appear that the east end of Bogue would have been the most logical place to maroon anyone any distance "from the main" on their way out of the harbor.

The only other source to mention this marooning in any detail is *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* first published by a Captain Charles Johnson in 1724. Johnson wrote in a later edition that in the process of leaving the area, Blackbeard "...takes seventeen others and maroons them upon a small sandy island, about a league from the Main, where there was neither bird, beast or herb for their subsistence, and where they must have perished if Major Bonnet had not two days after taken them off."

After wrecking two of his ships and marooning part of his crew, Blackbeard left the Beaufort Inlet area and traveled north to Ocracoke where he set up his base of operations for the next few months. He was eventually killed in November 1718 by an expedition sent down from the neighboring colony of Virginia. To examine all of the legends, myths, and folklore surrounding the various exploits of this notorious pirate, one would think that he must have been "a-pyrating" for at least several years. And indeed he might have been, but after investigating his life strictly from the primary source documents, we can only trace his activities for about fourteen months. Even so, we should feel fortunate that many of these historical events took place here in North Carolina. And indeed, we now have the opportunity to further these investigations through the archaeological record as we continue to develop the Blackbeard Shipwreck Project and initiate the excavation of what is believed to be the remains of his

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DON'T KILL THE MOMENTUM !

We are on a roll! If you have been to the Fort this year, you have seen the physical evidence of what the Friends have accomplished. But what is more important, but not yet evident, is the changes that have taken place on the part of the State Parks Division. They are working hard to get the repair work started on the Fort. They are also working with other state organizations to increase the funds available for Fort restoration work. The Friends of Fort Macon have provided the impetus for this new attitude in Raleigh. It wouldn't have happened without a large and vocal membership behind us.

This is not the time to slack off by failing to renew your membership. All memberships, except Lifetime Memberships, expire at the end of the calendar year. Without a paid clerical staff and a large budget for postage, we cannot afford to maintain memberships on an anniversary date system. Thus, your membership will be expiring at the end of December, unless you are a new member who has joined since the first of September of this year.

With the approach of the holidays, consider giving a membership in the Friends as an appropriate gift. Think how much more appreciated such a gift will be instead of an inedible fruit cake for aunt Sallie, or a hideous Christmas tie for cousin Leo. And while you are at it, give yourself the best gift of all, a Lifetime Membership, the gift that lasts!

Wagner's music is better than it sounds. *Mark Twain*

FRIENDS TACKLE NEW PROJECTS

Most of the projects that the Friends of Fort Macon have undertaken in recent years have been connected with the tools of war. A large reproduction cannon, the restoration of the original hot shot furnace, and the steel carriages for our two large Civil War mortars are the most obvious examples.

Now is the time to focus our attention on how Civil War and Spanish-American War soldiers lived while stationed at Fort Macon. Our next project will be the restoration of the original 1834 bake oven located in one of the Fort's casemates. Bread was truly the staff of life for these soldiers. During the Confederate occupation of the Fort, an inept baker produced loaves that were hard enough to be fired from the cannons. The soldiers were on the verge of a mutiny, as they refused to eat the bread, and demanded to be issued the wheat flour instead. When our new bake oven is complete, some of our members may want to see if they can produce better bread than the Confederate baker did.

Another project in the planning stage is the restoration of the 1846 Fort Macon kitchen, with its five-kettle cooking range. As with the bake oven, the cooking range will be operational, given a supply of firewood. Also being planned is a reproduction of the Commissary and Subsistence storeroom. This will feature barrels, boxes, crates, sacks, etc. Naturally, these projects will depend upon the availability of funds. Your Finance Committee is hard at work trying to find some "angels." Wish them well !!

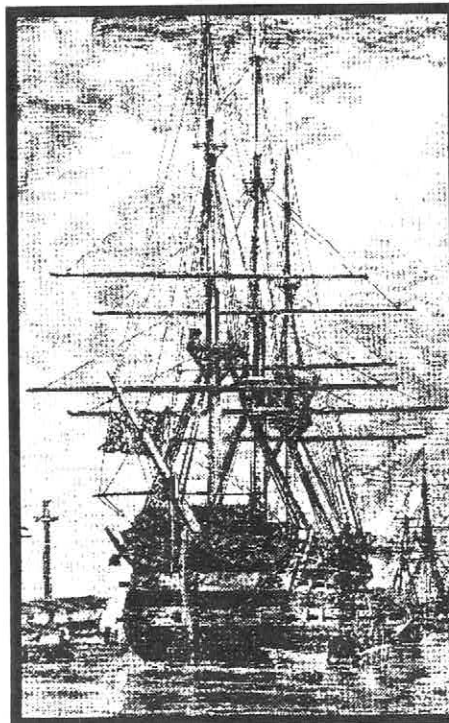
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flagship *Queen Anne's Revenge* just offshore and within sight of the ramparts of Fort Macon.

Visitors to Fort
Macon will be able to
easily observe any boats
working over
the site once the
excavation
begins.

But while you are watching this work over the next few years, take time to look around at the "small sandy hills" surrounding the fort and try to envision a handful of pirates wandering around through the dunes wishing they were anywhere but there.

David Moore is a nautical archaeologist and maritime historian for the North Carolina Maritime Museum and is currently on the Board of Directors of the Friends of Fort Macon.



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Barracks as the intended garrison of Fort Macon, that was then nearing completion by the Engineer Department. The superintending engineer of the fort project reported the new fort would be completed by the end of the year, but Major Kirby discovered much to his surprise and dismay that one very important aspect of the fort had been overlooked by the War Department—where would its garrison be quartered? No exterior barracks had been built and the fort's interior casemates were only damp bare-brick rooms with no finish work or amenities. This was pointed out and finally the War Department was forced to extend construction another year to fit out 18 of the casemates with flooring and plastering for the reception of troops. Finally, the fort was "finished" in 1834 and Major Kirby, still protesting the unhealthiness of quartering troops in damp casemates, moved his company into the fort on December 4, 1834.

Company G numbered 59 officers and men, including a 2nd Lieutenant named John Bankhead Magruder who would go on to achieve considerable fame in the Civil War at Yorktown and Galveston. The new fort in which these men now found themselves was hardly defensible. Just as the troop accommodations had been overlooked by the War Department, so too had the means of defense. The new fort had no cannons, no cannon mounts and none of the three intended hot shot furnaces for defense. Only three 6-pounder field guns which the company itself had brought were available for defense. After Kirby pointed this out to the Engineer Department, a formal armament plan was eventually

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developed that called for the installation of eleven 32 pounders, seventeen 24 pounders, eight 18 pounders, eight 18 pounder- carronades, three 8- inch howitzers and four 10- inch mortars for a total of 51 guns. While this looked fine on paper, the realities of Congressional economizing dictated that neither Fort Macon nor any other of its sister forts would ever be fully armed with its planned armament. What Fort Macon actually received were only seventeen 24 pounders with only 10 gun carriages. The Engineer Department was authorized to build only 14 temporary gun mounts for those guns and only one hot shot furnace, which was to be located in the parade ground. However, before these items were on hand, Major Kirby and his company were ordered to leave for Florida on February 2, 1836, to participate in the Second Seminole War. They also left their field guns behind at Fort Macon.

For the next six years, Fort Macon remained ungarrisoned except for soldiers detailed as caretakers. Usually these caretakers were ordnance sergeants whose main task was to look after and care for the fort's weaponry. There were periodic visits from inspecting engineers as well.

In December, 1840, Engineer Captain Robert E. Lee made one such inspection of Fort Macon.

Lee's reports of the inspection to the Engineer Department left little doubt Fort Macon needed more attention. The casemates leaked from a defective water system. The magazines were too damp. Modifications were necessary to the fort's three entrances and its counterfire galleries to make them more defen-

sible. Adjustments were needed to the height of the parapet walls. Permanent brick and stone gun mounts were needed for a total of 54 guns, along with a second hot shot furnace. Outside the fort, shore erosion was threatening the fort site and needed to be arrested by the construction of two permanent stone jetties.

The recommendations of Lee's reports sparked a second construction phase of alteration and modification at Fort Macon. These began in June, 1841 and lasted through September, 1846. During this period all the items contained in Lee's reports were addressed, including the expansion of Lee's shore erosion recommendation of two permanent jetties to six at various points to preserve the beach. Some unforeseen items also had to be addressed. Chief among these was the alarming discovery that the weight of the earth parapet on top of the citadel was pushing the scarp (or exterior) wall of the citadel outward. This necessitated very extensive, costly repairs to excavate the earth fill on top of the citadel and relieve the pressure with concrete fill and masonry buttresses called counterforts. Another unforeseen expense involved the permanent gun mounts, that at first consisted only of granite pintle stones and traverses. Firing the guns in target practice loosened the pintle stones. All had to be repaired by enclosing each pintle stone in a brick "bed."

While these repairs were in progress, with the end of the Second Seminole War in May, 1842, meant the return of Army units to the forts and military posts for garrison duty. On July 28, 1842, Company F, 3rd U.S. Artillery arrived at Fort Macon as its new garrison.

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LEADERSHIP TALENT NEEDED

The FRIENDS OF FORT MACON is managed by a Board of Directors of eighteen members. They serve for one year, beginning January 1. Although most Board members agree to serve more than one term, there usually are several vacancies. If you are willing to serve, please call Bennett Moss at 728-5256

TOUR GUIDE TRAINING PLANNED

There have been many positive developments for the Friends this year, but none have been more rewarding than the initiation of a volunteer tour guide program. A training program for the first guides was conducted this past February. The result has exceeded even our most optimistic expectations. Our overworked Park Rangers have been supported by Friends volunteers conducting tours of the Fort, or leading nature hikes for Park visitors.

Among our members who have been participating in this program are: Nancy Donnan, Jack Ferenback, Sue and Bob Wolfe, Emil Cekada, and Ann Reeves. Their enthusiasm for this work is obvious. The Rangers are so pleased with the results that they are offering to train another group of volunteers to begin conducting tours next Spring. This will be a great opportunity for more members of the Friends to experience the satisfaction of providing an important service to the public in a most enjoyable way. Classroom training will be followed by observing the Rangers giving tours, followed by On-The-Job training. Uniform shirts and caps will be provided. To sign up or get more information, call Nancy Donnan at 728-5495.

ENCOURAGING NEWS ON FORT REPAIRS

There is bad news and good news to report on the struggle to get desperately needed preservation work started on Fort Macon. First, the bad news. In August, consulting architects thoroughly examined the Fort's condition, and they estimated that the repairs would cost \$13.9 million. This is more than double the estimate made six years earlier.

The sheer enormity of the problem has sent a wake-up call to Raleigh. The fact has finally sunk in that deterioration is not a static condition. The longer you wait, the worse it gets. You cannot defer an expenditure without multiplying the ultimate cost.

Now for the good news. State Parks director Phil McKnelly has asked the State Budget Office to tap into its Repairs and Renovations Reserve to fund the Fort repairs. The Friends have written to the Governor and to several of our state legislators in support of this proposal. State Senator Beverly Perdue, who has been a long-time supporter of Fort Macon, has taken up the cause once again. Senator Perdue is one of the most influential members of the State Senate, and also sits on the important Joint Legislative Committee on Governmental Operations.

Senator Perdue has pledged her every effort to obtain a substantial portion of the needed funds before the end of the year.

After many years of seemingly futile struggle, our efforts are finally beginning to produce some reason for optimism. We will keep you posted.

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During its stay of over two years, the company included several officers who later became famous. 1st Lieutenant, Edward O.C. Ord, became a major general in the Union Army, commanding successively the XIII, VIII, and XVIII Corps, and the Army of the James in various campaigns in the Western and Eastern theaters. Its 2nd Lieutenant, Alexander P. Stewart, served prominently in the Confederate Army as a corps commander with the rank of lieutenant general in the Army of Tennessee. Its Brevet 2nd Lieutenant, Samuel G. French, was later a major general in the Confederate Army in both the Western and Eastern theaters.

The stay of Company F at Fort Macon was quite difficult with all the workmen and materials of the Engineer Department crowded into the fort at the same time. At one point there was talk of moving the soldiers completely out of the fort so that repairs could be made to the casemates, but this was never carried out. Fortunately, most of the heavier repairs to the fort were completed by the engineers before February 8, 1844, when a portion of Company B, 3rd U.S. Artillery, arrived to join Company F at Fort Macon.

The commander of Company B, Captain John R. Vinton, took charge of the post and, during his brief stay, enjoyed life at Fort Macon more than perhaps any other post commander. He lived, as did all the ante-bellum post commanders, in a large two-story house known as the Eliason House, 600 yards west of the fort. An intelligent, refined man, Vinton undertook the educating of two young drummer boys of the garrison and also of his 9-year-old son who came to live with him. He even had his most cherished possession, a piano, shipped down from the North. Vinton enjoyed keeping com-

pany with the eastern North Carolina gentry who spent the summers at Beaufort, and the piano proved to be the hit of parties he hosted for them at his house. Both he and his son wrote a series of letters now in the collection of Duke University which tell of numerous charming incidents of life at ante-bellum Fort Macon. Unfortunately, Vinton's tenure at Fort Macon was short because orders came reassigning the garrison to other duty. Company F left in October, 1844, followed in November by Vinton and Company B. Three years later, Vinton would go on to become one of the few American officers to be killed in action during the Mexican War.

For the next few years, Fort Macon was unoccupied except for its ordnance sergeant and the engineers completing their repairs. The end of the Mexican War once again freed numerous military units for garrison duty and in October, 1848, Company H, 2nd U.S. Artillery, arrived as Fort Macon's new garrison. Concerned for the well-being of his company, its commander, Captain Henry Swartwout, took a dim view of the condition of the quarters that had been unoccupied for several years and allowed to become run-down. He caustically wrote to the Quartermaster Department: "When it becomes necessary that an officer should be located on a sand bank, the Government should at least be willing to give him comfortable quarters." Swartwout was able to have a few repairs made, but after only a year, he and his company were ordered to Florida on October 2, 1849, to help quell another uprising of the Seminole Indians. This was Fort Macon's last ante-bellum garrison.

In the decade that followed the departure of Swartwout's company, Fort Macon remained ungarrisoned other than several successive

ordnance sergeants. Only a few repairs were made by the engineers during this time, although a 50-foot lighthouse was built northwest of the fort during 1854-55. A succession of engineers in charge of this section of the coast made periodic inspections, among whom were several of later fame. Captain George W. Cullum later served as a brigadier general in the Union Army and compiled the monumental *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point*. Lieutenant W.H.C. Whiting became a major general in the Confederate Army and was the defender of Fort Fisher, N.C. in 1865. Captain John G. Foster became a major general in the Union Army commanding the XVIII Corps and the Union Department of North Carolina. Foster also served in the Burnside Expedition into eastern North Carolina in 1862 where his knowledge of Fort Macon's layout and the locations of its gunpowder magazines proved invaluable for Union artillerymen during the bombardment of Fort Macon.

Largely, though, Fort Macon was neglected during this period because of Congressional economizing. It steadily deteriorated from disuse and the assaults of the elements. By the time the Civil War began in 1861, the Fort was in a deplorable condition. "It was at that time," wrote Engineer Captain Foster, "in bad repair: the woodwork of the quarters and barracks and of one of the drawbridges required renewing and painting, the iron work, and door and window fastenings were much rusted, the shingled interior slope was very much rotted, and the masonry in many places required repointing. The embankment of the Causeway needed re-

pairing, and the bridge across the canal to be rebuilt. A few guns (four, I believe) were mounted on the southeast, or sea front, but the carriages were decayed and weak."

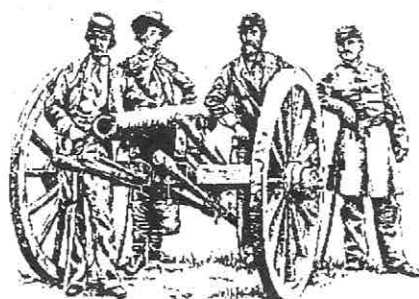
Such was the condition of Fort Macon at the end of the ante-bellum period in 1861. In the next edition of *Fort Macon Ramparts* an article will examine how Confederate soldiers first took over the fort at the beginning of the Civil War.

Paul Branch is the Ranger Historian at Fort Macon State Park



THANK YOU KATHRYN

After four and a half years of inspired leadership, Kathryn Cloud stepped down as president of the Friends of Fort Macon on July 1. Those of us who have been part of the Friends during this period have witnessed both a transformation of the Friends organization and the accomplishment of many important improvements at the Fort. Kathryn has agreed to remain on the Board of Directors, so we are not saying good bye, but we are saying thank you for a remarkable performance!



DISPATCH FROM HEADQUARTERS

It has been 20 years since the Friends of Fort Macon was formed in 1977. During this time there have been alternating periods of frantic activity and somnolence. We have been fortunate to have just experienced one of the most productive periods of the Friends existence, under the leadership of Kathryn Cloud.

Although we are occasionally blessed with great leadership, we should never lose sight of the fact that no organization can succeed except as a team effort. Every member of the Friends can play an important role in achieving our goal of preserving and enhancing our beloved Fort Macon. Over the next few months and years, there will be many opportunities for members to volunteer a few hours of extra time as we pursue our common objectives for the Fort. Working together to preserve our heritage is a very satisfying experience. Give it a try!

Bennett Moss



Life is like a dog-sled team.
If you ain't the lead dog,
the scenery never changes.

Lewis Grizzard