

# FORT MACON RAMPARTS

A newsletter of the Friends of Fort Macon

Volume V, Issue 3 Fall 1998

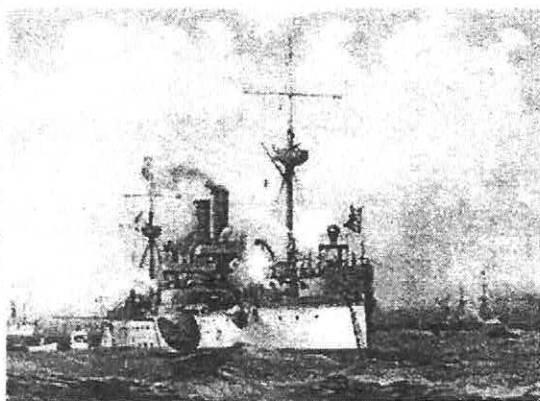
## FORT MACON AND THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

### Part I - Preparing the Fort For War

by Paul Branch

One hundred years ago this year, the United States and Spain engaged in a brief war which has come to be known as the Spanish-American War. It is frequently overlooked by all but the most serious of historians and yet is of great importance because, as a result of it, the United States entered the global scene for the first time as a world power. While a few people have probably heard of the once-famous battlecry "Remember the Maine," or the

than a decade earlier when President Grover Cleveland convened a special board of fortifications in 1885 under Secretary of War William C. Endicott to revitalize the country's seacoast defenses based on the new generation of modern weaponry being developed



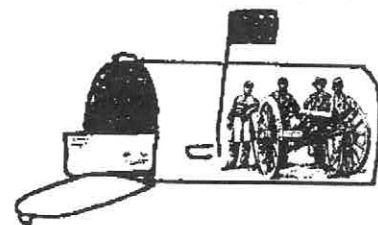
USS Maine at anchor in Havana Harbor

throughout the world at this time. This new weaponry for seacoast defense (modern rapid-fire breech-loading cannons utilizing newly-developed smokeless

powder ammunition) had the capability of defeating the new generation of modern steam powered armored warships which were appearing in the last decades of the 19th Century. Augmenting this arsenal would be other developments in harbor defense spawned directly from the American Civil War, including minefields, torpedo boats,

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## A LETTER FROM FORT MACON



Following is the second of a series of letters written by "Jeannie" Coues, the wife of the post war Fort Macon surgeon and renowned naturalist, Dr. Elliott Coues. At this time, the Fort was being used as a Federal prison. The soldiers at the Fort served as guards to forestall any escape of prisoners.

*Fort Macon, North Carolina  
April 16, 1869*

*My Dear Sister:*

*I have been taking a hard gallop on the beach this evening, and my hand trembles so I can scarcely write. Your paper, note and pattern all came to hand. I am too busy to make the aprons for some time, but will after a while. I was sorry to hear Mr. Dean's father was dead, but I suppose he was very old.*

*We have had a terrible tragedy here since last I wrote, and indeed that has been partly the reason for my long silence. Three weeks ago one of the young officers who had just arrived at the Fort that day had been spending the evening in our quarters. He went out for a few min-*

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*Dues Change Effective January 1,  
see page 5*

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search lights and floating batteries.

Because of the scope and cost of such an ambitious defensive program, only the larger and more prominent harbors on the U.S. coast, 26 in number, were scheduled by the Endicott Board to receive these new defenses. In North Carolina, Wilmington's Fort Caswell was included as one of the 26 sites under this new program. However, Beaufort Harbor's Fort Macon was not. Beaufort had simply not developed as a commercial trade center of any significant importance in the post-war era to warrant inclusion in the new defensive system. Instead, it was the Endicott Board's decision that the existing defenses of secondary ports such as Beaufort would be left as they were until the advent of some war emergency, at which time they could be provided with temporary defenses to last only for the duration of the war emergency. Such was the climate of military thinking when war clouds began to gather in early 1898.

At the beginning of 1898, the U.S. and Spain were at odds over the question of independence for Spain's colony of Cuba. While U.S. sympathies lay strongly with the Cuban revolutionaries seeking to overthrow Spanish rule of their country, President William McKinley stopped short of direct U.S. intervention against Spain. Then, on February 15, 1898, the destruction of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor by an explosion attributed at the time to Spanish sabotage set the U.S. and Spain on a collision course for war. Over the next several weeks, though, came the realization the U.S. had a long distance to go to be prepared for a war with one of the

European powers. The country's Regular Army, numbering only 28,000 men, had to be increased ten-fold by the mobilization of state national guards and volunteers. The most immediate concern, however, was the potential threat of the Spanish Navy. For the first time since the War of 1812, the U.S. would be fighting a foreign enemy with a naval capacity of attacking the U.S. coast. If properly fitted out for battle, the Spanish fleet of modern



Capt. William E. Craighill, US Engineers,  
who prepared Fort Macon's defenses  
in the Spanish-American War

armored steam warships had the potential of being a formidable opponent. Thus the danger to U.S. seaports, especially those on the Gulf and southeastern Atlantic coasts, was quite real. Unfortunately, the U.S. coast defenses were likewise unprepared for this threat. The Endicott Board's seacoast defense program of the 1880's had never come close to being finished in 1898 for the 26 primary U.S. seaports, nor had any consideration for temporary defenses for secondary seaports like Beaufort been given.

Despite these drawbacks, the U.S. rose to the occasion. On March 9, 1898, a massive National Defense appropriation was passed by Congress to beef up the military. At the

beginning of April, as the prospect of war became more certain, Army engineers were given orders to examine, prepare or push to completion the necessary seacoast defenses for the country's security. The Regular Army was mobilized and increased in strength. On April 19, Congress authorized U.S. intervention on behalf of Cuba. In effect, this constituted a declaration of war. On April 23, President McKinley issued the first call to the states for 125,000 volunteers. The next day Spain declared war on the U.S., which formally reciprocated on April 25.

Long before this rush of events, the citizens of Beaufort and Morehead City had grown concerned for their safety in the event of war. On February 15, 1898 (only hours before the *Maine* would be destroyed at Havana), the editors of the *Beaufort Herald-Dispatch* wrote Senator Marion C. Butler expressing concern over Fort Macon, "which at present, is in a dilapidated condition with a lone sentry in charge of it." Butler pressed the Secretary of War on the matter but was told on March 9 that Beaufort Harbor was not included in the Endicott Board's defenses and that no other appropriations were currently available for Fort Macon's repair. However, the clamor of the citizens of Beaufort and Morehead grew louder over the next several weeks so that at the beginning of April, 1898, Congressmen Harry Skinner and W. F. Stroud both forwarded communications on the subject to the War Department, including a petition from local citizens. The *Raleigh Morning Post* commented that "a harbor which the government experts decide and report to be worth of the expenditure

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utes and the next we heard, was several shots. Elliott rushed out and in a minute a dead soldier was brought in and in another minute came men bearing Lt. Alexander shot through the lung. There had been an alarm of fire and Lt. Alexander rushed upon the ramparts to extinguish it. When one of the sentinels outside the moat challenged him, not hearing the reply, he fired at him and also at a soldier who ran to the rescue - killing the latter instantly.

Such a night I never passed. I was the only lady at the Fort and he wanted me with him. I never witnessed such excruciating agony in my life. He lingered 24 hours. He was a young boy - only 20 years old - and life looked very bright. But when I told him he was dying he met it very bravely, and after I had talked with him a while he seemed perfectly resigned. I had never thought to be permitted to point a dying soul to Christ. He was a bright, handsome boy, the pet of the whole regiment and his mother's darling. His body was embalmed and sent to his father - General Alexander, who is stationed in Minnesota. Such an occurrence would be shocking enough in a community, but when it happens among a few people shut up in a Fort and isolated from the rest of the world, it seems doubly awful.

About ten days ago I went up to New Bern to have my teeth filled. The dentist worked on them four days and then my mouth got so sore I had to come home. It will cost seventy five dollars to have them put in order. I do wish Elliott would consent to my having a false upper set.

We have been so stirred up lately that I have accomplished very little. I have bought some cambric to make a baby dress for Laura but don't know when I shall get up courage enough

to make it. My machine works splendidly. My literary efforts have been confined lately to correcting manuscript for Elliott. He is working hard all the time, and in a certain select circle is already looked up to as an authority. He is publishing constantly, but the scientific articles you wouldn't care for, and the literary articles I can't send for we never have more than one number of a magazine or paper and those Elliott always sends to his mother.

Did I tell you that she bought me a black lace shawl in Paris and that I am expecting it every day? Elliott's brother, Dr. Coues of the Navy, that you remember I told you about, has been ordered to the Mediterranean Squadron, and at last accounts was the guest of the Marquis de Monthelon, The French Minister to Lisbon.

Edie is gaining in beauty and precociousness every day. About a week ago Martha brought her in after having a secret interview with her in the kitchen, and said: "Now Edie, Dancy, Dancy," where the little tot cut out into the middle of the room, with one hand on her side and the other above her head, like a regular little ballet girl, and danced around and round and shuffled her dear little buttoned boots like everything. And now every time the drum sounds she dances regularly. You asked me a while since to send you pieces of her dresses. I still keep her in white and shall for two or three years yet. I think it the prettiest thing for children and for grown people too, for that matter. I shall not come North this summer, unless perhaps we should have the yellow fever here. This is a very healthy place. In fact, Beaufort is the watering place for North Carolina, and besides that we can't afford to travel this summer. One way and another our expenses are enormous.

Elliott keeps two horses and we have splendid canters on the beach. Two days ago we went 10 miles away in a sailboat to see a whale that had been harpooned and was lying on the beach. It was 50 feet long, and when the roof of its mouth was cut off and placed on the beach it formed an arch high enough for me to stand erect under. I knew whales were large but how large I never realized until it loomed up before me. Elliott is very fond of sailing, hunting, etc, and we frequently go out on excursions.

I was going to write a letter to Mother but couldn't you send this scrawl to her and save the trouble of writing expressly. Is she keeping house? You never say a word about Frank or what he is doing.

*( End of letter missing. )*

We are deeply indebted to Mr. David Dean of Rochester, New York, who has graciously permitted us to publish these letters from his private collection. David Dean is descended from Jeannie's sister Louise.



### THOSE GOLDEN YEARS!

I'm at the age where food has taken the place of sex in my life. In fact, I've just had a mirror put over my kitchen table.

Rodney Dangerfield

The years between fifty and seventy are the hardest. You are always being asked to do things, and yet you are not decrepit enough to turn them down. T. S. Eliot

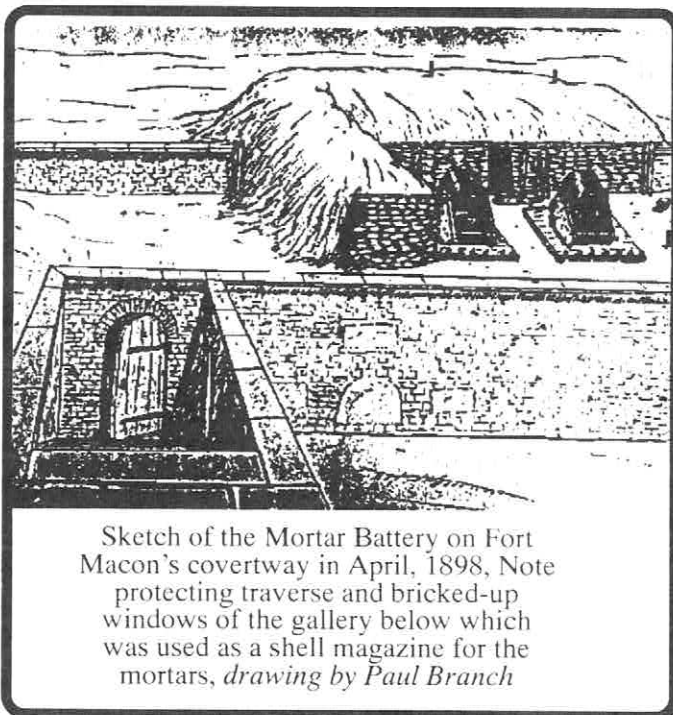
*Continued from page 2*

of three millions of dollars to improve, is surely worthy of protection."

Whether as a result of the clamoring is not clear, but on April 3, Captain William E. Craighill, Wilmington District Engineer, was ordered to examine Fort Macon and place its armament in order. He arrived at Beaufort with an assistant on April 6. Once at Fort Macon, Craighill found the old fort to be in a dilapidated condition and in charge of only a single caretaker, Ordnance Sergeant Isaac B. Henry. The post had not been garrisoned since April, 1877, at the end of Reconstruction. The only major armament remaining in the fort at this time was of Civil War vintage, consisting of two 100-pounder Parrott Rifle cannons dating from 1863, and two 10-inch mortars dating from 1862. There were also two Civil War 12-pounder "Napoleon" field guns without gun carriages lying on the ground outside the fort.

Craighill put a force of 40 men to work in the fort to prepare it for defense. The casemates were cleaned out and made ready for occupation. One of the 100-pounder Parrott Rifles was moved to the southeast front of the citadel bearing on the bar while the other remained at the northeast angle bearing on the channel and sounds. They were provided with splinter-proof traverses (earthen mounds to shield against enfilade fire) for protection. The two 10-inch siege mortars were grouped into a separate battery adjacent to the south angle of the covertway where they were provided with firing platforms and an

'L' shaped traverse for protection. The counterfire gallery under the south angle was turned into a shell magazine for them, with its gunports bricked up. To control drainage of the fort's Ditch, especially with a new magazine in one of the low-lying counterfire galleries, workers raised the level of the ditch all around by at least one foot and left a drainage channel through its center. Craighill also requested of the Ordnance Department that six rifled field guns be sent to Fort Macon as secondary armament, but was told that none were available.



Sketch of the Mortar Battery on Fort Macon's covertway in April, 1898, Note protecting traverse and bricked-up windows of the gallery below which was used as a shell magazine for the mortars, *drawing by Paul Branch*

While these repairs were going on, the local people watched first with great interest and then disdain. They at first thought they would be getting a first class defense with a "mosquito fleet" to protect Beaufort Harbor and two large rapid-fire guns. Rumors stated up to 200 men were working to get Fort Macon in shape for defense. These hopes were soon dashed when it was learned only 40 men were working at the fort to remount its old, rusty

Civil War guns. Once again it was felt Beaufort Harbor had been snubbed by the War Department. The engineer work force was dubbed the "Tin Bucket Brigade" and their work declared to be a "perfect farce." The State's newspapers took up the issue for a time but there were no plans forthcoming from the War Department to add any further defenses to Beaufort Harbor.

Unmindful of the local resentment, Engineer Captain Craighill concluded the work he had been ordered to do and reported on April 25 that the fort was ready for troops and ammunition. The work force was ordered to Fort Caswell, at Southport, and Craighill was granted an allotment of \$2000 from the National Defense appropriation bill to pay for the work done. As for troops to man and guard the armament, Battery C, 6th U.S. Artillery, was ordered up from Washington Barracks to be split up for garrison duty between Fort Macon and Fort Caswell at Southport. Following the battery's arrival at Fort Caswell on May 12, 2nd Lieutenant Harry G. Bishop and 20 men from the battery were sent to Fort Macon on May 16, which would serve as a sub-post of Fort Caswell.

There were still some loose ends to clear up for Fort Macon's defense, however. Captain Craighill inspected the fort during May and found other repairs which had to be made. Among other things, the exposed position of the mortar battery as set up on the fort covertway, and the small size of the garrison (only 21 men) made it necessary to move the mortars inside the citadel, where they were set up on new firing plat-

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## Membership Form

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

Fee Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Member's Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street or P.O.Box \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Donor, if gift \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Categories and Fees

Individual/Family - \$10.00      Lifetime (Individual) - \$100.00

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

**Friends of Fort Macon, P.O.Box 651, Beaufort, NC 28516-0651**

## CAST A VOTE FOR THE FORT

This past year has been a breakthrough year for the FRIENDS and for Fort Macon. With the help of State Senator Beverly Perdue and the rest of our legislative delegation, we were able to obtain the first significant allocation of funds for repairing the Fort. We were able to get \$2 million dollars to begin the long needed repair work. Another \$2 million now looks like a strong possibility. This is the first time in more than twenty years that the State has committed to major repairs on the Fort. A contract has been signed, and we expect the work to begin this month.

How were we able to succeed in obtaining these funds after so many years of failure? The answer is obvious. Numbers! It is only in the last few years that we have become large enough to wield influence in the State Capitol. In effect, every member of the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON is seen as a voter casting a vote for the Fort. There are many competing uses for the limited funds available in the State coffers. With more than 1300 mem-

bers, we represent more "voters" than do many other worthy causes.

Even though we might have as much as \$4 million for repairs, that won't be enough to do half of the needed work. So stay with us and cast another vote for Fort Macon. Never forget, there is strength in numbers!

As explained elsewhere in this newsletter, the cost of an individual membership will increase to \$10 AFTER January 1, 1999. If you renew your membership before that date, you may renew at the old rate. Family memberships will remain as before. You will receive a renewal notice and membership envelope in the mail in about 30 days. For now, a Lifetime Membership will remain at \$100 per individual, and is an even greater bargain than before.

As the holiday season approaches, please consider giving gift memberships in the FRIENDS to all those hard-to-buy-for friends and relatives that you seldom see. Every time they receive a copy of the Ramparts, they will be reminded of your generosity.

## DUES TO INCREASE JANUARY 1

In its 20 year history, the basic dues for an individual member of the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON has remained unchanged at \$5 per year.

The cost of servicing each member comes from printing and mailing three issues of the Ramparts and notices of monthly luncheon meetings. The annual membership meeting and ice cream social at the Fort every April is also a membership related cost. All of our social functions — parties, luncheon meetings, concerts, bus trips, etc., — are completely paid for by those participating. No one working for the FRIENDS receives any payment.

In spite of very effective cost containment efforts (our postage rate is the lowest available), the cost of servicing each membership is almost \$7. In effect, our family members, who pay \$10, have been subsidizing our individual members.

Although we would like to keep our dues as low as possible in order to better attract new members, your Board of Directors feels that it would be fiscally irresponsible to continue losing money on all of our individual memberships. Therefore, beginning January 1, 1999, dues for all non-business members, both individuals and families will be \$10 per year.

Please note that all renewals for 1999 received before January 1 will be eligible for the old rate.

The cost of a Lifetime Membership will remain unchanged at \$100 per person which is now an even better bargain than before.

## MOST GENEROUS GIFTS!

As revealed in our previous issue of the RAMPARTS, we received a \$5,000 grant from the Department of Cultural Resources to help build a replica of the original 1834 bake oven.

Since then, we have received a \$10,000 grant from the Carteret County Board of Commissioners to be used for the reconstruction of the old kitchen/dining hall and for the restoration of the commissary store room.

In an incredibly generous action, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Proper transferred appreciated securities to our account. The Propers have specified that the proceeds are to be used for the acquisition of a new 32-pounder cannon. This is the largest gift that the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON have ever received. We are deeply grateful for this unprecedented generosity.

What the Propers have done could, on perhaps a smaller scale, set a pattern for others. By transferring appreciated securities to the Friends' account, there is no capital gains tax to be paid, yet the full value of the securities can be deducted as a charitable contribution. The result can be a significant contribution of lasting historical value, while at the same time reducing the financial impact on the donor.

We have more exciting projects on the drawing board. These are projects that should endure for well over a hundred years. Wouldn't it thrill your grandchildren to see your name on one of them!



The age of a woman doesn't mean a thing. The best tunes are played on the oldest fiddles.

*Sigmund Z. Engel*

## AN UNLEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The Confederate defenders of Fort Macon were seriously handicapped in preparing for the forthcoming attack of Union forces in early 1862. The Confederates were short of everything except courage and dedication. The following correspondence illustrates the severity of the problem as it existed in late 1861.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF NORTH CAROLINA  
Goldsborough, October 25, 1861

*Brig. Gen. D. H. Hill*

*General, your letter of this date has been received. A messenger was sent to Richmond by Colonel White with a requisition for long range guns, &c. That requisition I approved. Lieutenant Latham came back with a few musket cartridges, I believe. He was sent again to Richmond. This morning he telegraphs that he is at Weldon with powder and shells, but the agent refuses to forward them by the mail train. I have sent him an order to do so without fail. Probably they may reach Macon tonight. I have made so many requisitions on the Ordinance Department at Richmond for guns and powder without obtaining anything that I am not disposed to do so again. An 8-inch Columbiad is promised, but I do not know if Lieutenant Latham has it. I was much surprised to learn from Colonel White today that he has no provisions. It has been understood here that Fort Macon had a four months supply for 700 men. It is really culpable in the commissary to allow the fort to be put in such a*

*strait. I have ordered supplies such as are here, and will forward others when received, but I would like to hear the explanation of the commissary for what really seems criminal neglect or something worse. I expect seventeen companies and a light battery here, but the Secretary of War forbids their being sent to the coast until we are certain where the enemy intends to attempt an attack. Other reinforcements will be forwarded if he lands. Very respectfully, your obedient servant,*

*R. C. GATLIN  
Brig. Gen., Commanding*

We are indebted to Friends member S. D. Latham of Belhaven N.C. for bringing this significant document of the War Between The States to our attention. Mr. Latham is the Adjutant of Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp 1695.



*You're only young once, but you can be immature forever.*

*John Greier*

When you are younger you get blamed for crimes you never committed, and when you're older you begin to get credit for virtues you never possessed. It evens itself out.

*I.E.Stone*

Old age is an excellent time for outrage. My goal is to say or do at least one outrageous thing every week.

*Maggie Kuhn*

We can be contacted via Email at:  
[friends@clis.com](mailto:friends@clis.com)

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forms in the parade ground. The lack of small secondary armament for the fort was solved by dragging out two old casemate carriages, still lying abandoned in one of the counterfire galleries since the 1870's, and jury-rigging them to mount the two 12-pounder Napoleon field guns still at the fort. These improvised pieces were mounted on the citadel to help cover the channel and land approaches. Craighill was granted another allotment of \$1000 to cover these new expenses. Of the total of \$3000 allotted to the defense of Fort Macon, all but \$216.65 was spent by July 1.

Thus by May, 1898, Fort Macon had at least some means, however limited, of defending Beaufort Harbor with a small armament and garrison. Obviously, Lieutenant Bishop and his 20 artillerymen were insufficient to offer much defense and additional troops were needed for their support. In our next issue we will describe the controversies regarding the troops sent to Fort Macon.

*Paul Branch is the Ranger/ Historian at Fort Macon*



The Board of Directors of the  
FRIENDS OF FORT MACON

wish you a

Joyous  
Holiday  
Season



## DISPATCH FROM HEADQUARTERS

As 1998 draws to a close, the FRIENDS OF FORT MACON can heave a mighty sigh of relief that an important hurdle has been crossed. The long awaited repair work on the Fort is scheduled to begin this month. So far we have \$2.7 million on hand, and another \$2 million committed. It is only because our membership is more than 1300 strong that we were able to persuade the State authorities to allocate this money to the Fort.

But don't get complacent. The amount of money so far committed won't get half of the job done. We must maintain our membership numbers. It is our only source of strength in the competition for limited State funds.

Our second priority is to provide educational exhibits for the many thousands of school children and tourists who visit the Fort each year. This year we have funded a new exhibit for the powder magazine, and have installed a lead roof on the Hot Shot Furnace. In addition to your membership dues, we have obtained more than \$40,000 in new grants and private donations to build replicas of the original 1834 bake oven, kitchen, and commissary room, and to build a new 32-pounder cannon.

In 1998 we have more than doubled our corps of enthusiastic volunteer tour guides. We have added a third issue of the Ramparts this year, along with a series of public concerts in the Fort during the Summer.

After 20 years, your Board of Directors feels that a modest increase in the annual dues in 1999 is warranted. The increase will affect fewer than half of our members. Please renew your membership and stay with us for another year of progress. The best is yet to come!

Bennett Moss

## TOUR GUIDE TRAINING PLANNED

One of the finest accomplishments of the FRIENDS has been the implementation of the Volunteer Tour Guide Program. Volunteer Tour Guides not only provide valuable support to our overworked Park Rangers, but the volunteers reap even greater benefits for themselves.

If you want to learn more about the history of Fort Macon, including its role in three wars, you should become a Volunteer Tour Guide. If you would like to refine your public speaking skills, you should become a Volunteer Tour Guide. If you would enjoy educating and entertaining both children and adults, you should definitely become a Volunteer Tour Guide.

This past year we had ten active, enthusiastic Volunteer Tour Guides in the program. But in order to give all of the volunteers plenty of flexibility in scheduling their tours, we need to increase our ranks even more as we head into the third year of the program. The Rangers are offering to train another group of volunteers in February 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 watching 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.