

# FORT MACON RAMPARTS

A publication of the Friends of Fort Macon

Volume VI, Issue 1 Spring 1999

## FORT MACON AND THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Part II, The Troops Arrive

by Paul Branch

*This is the second part of an article describing the role played by Fort Macon during the Spanish-American War of 1898. The first part of the article, which dealt with the re-arming of the Fort in preparation for the assignment of a new garrison, was published in the last issue of Ramparts.*

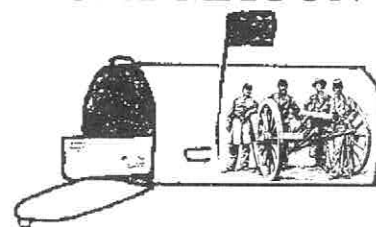
The first troops assigned were a small detachment of twenty men of the 6th U. S. Artillery. Obviously, these few men would not be sufficient to offer much defense for the Fort and the strategic harbor which the Fort guarded. Additional troops were needed.

When President McKinley's first call for volunteers was made to the states, North Carolina Governor Daniel L. Russell was asked to provide two regiments of infantry and a battery of artillery as the state's quota. Two regiments of North Carolina National Guard were quickly earmarked for this duty but Russell requested the artillery battery be changed to a battalion of black infantry. It turned out that across the nation, black citizens saw

the war as a chance to show their patriotism, and to earn equality and respect as first class citizens in the eyes of the white community. The eagerness with which thousands of black men volunteered for service could not be ignored. In North Carolina, Governor Russell was particularly sympathetic to their cause since his election in 1896 had in large measure been made possible by the political "fusion" of black Republicans and Populists. The enthusiastic martial spirit of the black community and his political indebtedness caused Russell to push for authorization for mustering a black infantry battalion for federal service in addition to the two white National Guard regiments already called up. The War Department consented and a battalion of three infantry companies, dubbed "Russell's Black Battalion," was immediately formed. Russell also took a further step which, though politically motivated, was progressive for its time. He appointed a complete slate of black commissioned officers to lead the battalion.

*Continued on page 2*

## LETTERS FROM FORT MACON



This is the third installment 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.

Ft. Macon N.C.  
June 14th 1869

*My dear Louise -*

*I have been reading Browning's "The Ring and the Book" all the morning, and as I laid it down just now I thought about Owen's calling poetry "rough reading," meaning of course the uneven lines. That set me to thinking about you and so I will write a few lines.*

*My steel pen is lost and I am forced to resort to a lead. A letter from Laura a week or so ago announces the advent of a baby girl - but of course you know of it already. Early this morning I made a lemon cake that is enough to make one "holler." I wish the children could run into my cupboard and get a piece of fruit cake that I am trying to dispose of. All the spring I have intended trying my skill at a fruit*

*Continued on page 3*

*Don't forget the Ice Cream Social  
April 25th - See Page 4*

*Continued from page 1*

Up until now, prevailing War Department policy had been that black troops must fight under white officers. This was an ongoing point of contention with the black community across the nation which demanded the right of having black officers leading black troops. "No officers, no fight!" was a rallying cry by the black community in the early weeks of the war. Ultimately, only three states (Illinois, Kansas and North Carolina) would listen by mustering in large units of black troops with black officers. Russell's Black Battalion appears to have been the first large black volunteer unit to enter U.S. service with all black officers. Command of the battalion was given to Major James H. Young, of Raleigh. A graduate of Shaw University, Young was a prominent educator, black Republican legislator, editor of the *Raleigh Gazette*, and an important ally of Governor Russell.

Despite the progressive overtones, the black battalion was largely viewed by the white community with a mixture of curiosity, suspicion and disdain.

These were times of great racial unrest in North Carolina where the fires of resentment on the part of whites still smoldered in the wake of Reconstruction. To many, the carpetbaggers, "scalawags," blacks and Republicans of the Reconstruction Era were all lumped together as being responsible for the turbulence of those years. Now the current era of "Fusion Politics" in the

state as characterized by the Russell administration seemed in some ways to be an attempt to return to those days. Russell's political enemies in the Democratic Party sought to use his liberal attitude toward blacks as a means to weaken him by playing upon the fears of a return to "Negro rule." Unfortunately, the Black Battalion was to become a tempting target to use in



Major James H. Young

discrediting Russell. All parties involved, including Major Young and his men, realized that in many ways the Black Battalion was an experiment which would end either in credit or discredit.

Given the racial and political climate, state officials had to be careful in their treatment of the battalion during its mustering in. The first question was where to muster it in?

It was felt this would be best accomplished in a part of the state away from large populations of whites where there would be less likelihood of any racial trouble. Colonel B. S. Royster of the State Adjutant General's Office toured the eastern part of the state to select a suitable campground for the battalion. After consulting with Army officers and engineers at Fort Caswell he learned

of the situation at Fort Caswell's sub-post of Fort Macon. Not only were more troops needed there, but it was also remote and situated in an area with only a small white population. The decision was made that Fort Macon would be the site of the battalion's camp.

During May, arrangements were made for the battalion to go into camp and be equipped at Fort Macon. Lieutenant Francis C. Marshall of the U.S. Army had a camp of 50 tents in preparation outside the fort when on May 30 the three companies of the battalion, totaling 380 men, arrived at Morehead City aboard a specially chartered train. The battalion took possession of its camp and was formally mustered into service. Fort Macon now had a

suitable garrison. Taking a look at the overall situation as it now stood, the entire defense of Beaufort Harbor which the Army had thrown together was an incredible hodgepodge. A handful of white artillerymen from the U.S. Regular Army, supported by black state infantry troops, were to offer defense

*Continued on page 4*

*Continued from page 1*

cake, and about two weeks ago I made one. It took most of one day to make it, and what with tasting it and eating fruit, etc, I was sick as death of it when it was done, even though it was all my fancy painted it.

Edith is the only child at the Post now and is fast being spoiled. Several of the officers keep a private paper of candy for her and she trots around to the different rooms and asks for "tan tan" every morning as soon as she is dressed.

It is pretty warm here now, or would be were it not for the sea breeze. I ride my little pony every evening, when it is pleasant. Martha's voice is wafted to me just now, remarking to Hannah, who is ironing with a good deal of emphasis - "What you makin sech a noise for? When I hears any person poundin so with their flats, I know they ain't ironing much." Contemptuous snort from Hannah.

The flesh grows weak.

Ajeu,

Jeannie

✂ ✂ ✂

Saturday Morning  
Ft. Macon, N.C.  
June, 1869

Dear Sister:

Yours of the 15th was received two days ago. Yesterday morning in the balm and blossoming I walked on the beach and put your pretty verses in my memory. You ask if I am engaged in vanities. I am rebosoming old shirts. The weather is pretty warm. We are having an Italian awning put up this morning and I am to scallop it and bind with red.

Have just finished Ring and the Book. It grows on me. When I have

digested it shall read again. Am arrayed in clean and stiff striped wrapper. Have just finished some pique dresses for the bairn who is stretched under the mosquito netting sound asleep. I have analyzed every flower that grows hereabouts. I am laboring under the disadvantage of a gold pen...the only form in which gold is unwelcome.

Doesn't Sterling talk yet? And are Owen and A. going to school, and has O got his front tooth yet? Did it ever occur to you that I might like to hear about Frank...

J. C.

Where is my indelible marker?

✂ ✂ ✂

Fort Macon  
Aug. 30, 1869

Dear Louise:

I have been down again for the past few days with dysentery. I had hoped to get through the summer without it. I overheard Elliott saying to someone that he was confident that I could never undergo a prolonged attack such as I had for several months last year, and I am of the same opinion. However, I am not worried about it and hope to be about in a few days.

Edith is well. About a month ago she had a violent attack of croup. She was put to bed at seven o'clock as usual, seemingly in perfect health. About an hour afterward I heard a whistling, choking noise that, although I had never heard it before, my heart told me was the croup. We ran to her and found her little face purple, her eyes set, and strangling. Then followed a few awful minutes. People heard me screaming and came running in. In

a few minutes the medicine made her throw up the phlegm, she being meantime in a hot mustard bath. After that she seemed very much relieved and had no return of the strangling, though she was very sick for several days. She is entirely well now and is this present moment engaged in flying a kite.

The indelible pencil was received all right and acknowledged next day in a long letter. The wintergreens were sparingly partaken of at short intervals, and went straight to the spot. I was delighted to know that you had such a good time at home. I think it must be very pleasant to be invited out so much and have people glad to see you. Elliott has just made me a present of a silver tea set with an urn to match. Tea pot, water pot, sugar bowl, cream pitcher and slop bowl lined with gold, handsomely chased, each piece marked Cowes in old English characters - to be used every day.

I believe I told you we were keeping house. One of the unmarried officers lives with us. Our dinner today is - a pair of wart chickens, a large baked fish, stuffed with Irish potatoes and eggs, and garnished with slices of lemon, the usual vegetables, and grapes for dessert. My dinner is milk porridge. In a fishing excursion the other day I caught 7 immense blue fish just as fast as I could pull them in. No bait is used, just a piece of white or red cloth sewed on

( end of letter missing )

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

*Continued from page 2*

from an obsolete 68-year old fort, against modern armored Spanish warships, using obsolete 35-year old muzzle-loading Civil War guns!

Meanwhile, the political intrigue surrounding Russell's Black Battalion did not end with its arrival at Fort Macon. On May 25, 1898, President McKinley issued a second call to the states for 75,000 more volunteers. Under this call, North Carolina would be able to call up additional troops and Governor Russell seized the opportunity to please his black constituents across the state by calling more black volunteers into service. It was decided that seven additional companies would be formed and added to the three already at Fort Macon to expand the Black Battalion into a full regiment. Most of the new companies would be made up of groups of volunteers selected from 14 towns across the state. As with the battalion, all regimental officers would be black. Arrangements were made for 190 more tents and equipment to be sent to Fort Macon for them, and orders were issued for the new companies to rendezvous at Fort Macon on June 30. At first there was a question whether there was room for a camp of ten companies numbering over 1000 men outside the fort but all were easily accommodated. In July, the ten companies were formally mustered into service as the Third North Carolina Infantry, with Major Young promoted as its colonel.

Life at Fort Macon now settled down to routine camp life and garrison duty. One of the officers of the 3rd N.C. wrote soon after his arrival: "We are having a good time and getting plenty to eat, three meals a day. There are no hard times here. Uncle Sam gives us beef, meats, meal, flour, and sometimes when we are in a hurry and have not time to

cook bread, we have hard bread, better known as 'hard tack'. Drill twice a day. Go on duty 9:30 a.m. and drill until 12:30. Dress parade at 4 o'clock p.m." *The Morehead City Pilot* reporting on the 3rd N.C.'s camp, now known as Camp Russell in honor of the Governor, stated: "The health of the camp is excellent, and the men all seem contented and happy. They have comfortable quarters, are well fed, well drilled, and perform light duties." Soon the men became well known for their fine performance on parade. At first there were some restrictions on the movements of the black soldiers, however. Initially they were not allowed to go inside the fort, which was occupied by Lieutenant Bishop's detachment of white Regular artillerymen. For a time they were also not allowed to go into Morehead City or Beaufort, although this was later changed. As was inevitable with any military command, there were losses and changes to personnel during the summer. One black recruit drowned in the surf only the morning after his arrival at camp. Another died in September. A total of eleven men deserted during the summer. During the firing of a salute from Fort Macon's guns on the Fourth of July, a premature discharge severely injured one of Lieutenant Bishop's white Regular artillerymen. On July 15, Lieutenant Bishop and his detachment of men from Battery C, 6th U.S. Artillery, were ordered back to Fort Caswell. They were replaced by a smaller detachment of 12 men and a sergeant from Battery I, 2nd U.S. Artillery.

The local reaction to all the events going on at Fort Macon, meanwhile, was one of great curiosity. Although the reservation was normally closed to the public, at one point enterprising parishioners of the Methodist

*Continued on page 5*

## Mark Your Calendar for the Ice Cream Social

On Sunday, April 25, we will be observing the 137th anniversary of the Battle of Fort Macon with our annual membership meeting and ice cream social at the Fort.

If you are tired of the winter blah's and are ready for a good time, this will be the place to do it! The whole event will be dedicated to entertaining you. There will be all the ice cream and brownies you can eat, good music, demonstrations by Park Rangers in historic costume, and who knows what else. If you haven't been out to the Fort recently, come see all the changes that have taken place. We think you will be impressed.

The meeting will begin at 2:00 in the afternoon inside the Fort. We will have a large tent, so don't worry about the weather.

So come on out on April 25, and bring a friend. For the small price of a membership, they too can have a great time. See you there!

## Friends of Friends Make Generous Donations

The Friends of Fort Macon acknowledge with appreciation the following major contributors to our projects in 1998:

MR. & MRS. DEAN PROPER  
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF  
CULTURAL RESOURCES  
CARTERET COUNTY BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS

Because of friends like these we can continue to support the Fort with outstanding educational exhibits.

Church in Beaufort were able to raise money for the church by arranging a boat trip to the fort and a view of the black troops for 25 cents a person. By August, restrictions on the troops going into town had been lifted and the sight of black soldiers became common. It was not long before racial trouble began to brew, however. Any town adjacent to a military camp could expect a certain degree of problems with soldiers getting into trouble and going astray. Ordinarily, this was to be expected but because these men were black soldiers from Governor Russell's pet regiment the problems were seized upon and broadcast with glee by the Democratic press across the state.

At first there were complaints of the black soldiers drinking whiskey on the train as they traveled to or from their homes on furlough. Then, on August 20, the *Morehead City Pilot* complained of the soldiers during the past week being permitted "to roam at large all over this city in squads of five to twenty, unaccompanied by any commissioned officer; to drink liquor, quarrel and fight among themselves and with others; to remain away from the camp overnight reveling in places of disrepute outside of the city limits . . ." In one instance, a soldier convicted of drunkenness and breaking out of jail with the help of another soldier was ordered to pay a fine. When he could not pay, the Marshall and several assistants went over to the 3rd N.C.'s camp to carry the offender back to jail. However, several hundred soldiers crowded around the authorities to prevent them from carrying away their comrade. This tense situation was finally averted when Colonel Young intervened and promised he would take care of having the condemned man given

military punishment himself. Other instances were cited of soldiers "insolently defying the authority of our city government, and insulting our citizens by their impudence and offensive language and conduct."

Such occurrences were commonplace in any "military town" but were conveniently blown out of proportion by the press as a means of disgracing Governor Russell. Numerous derogatory articles on the regiment can be found in state newspapers at this time. This criticism was not just limited to the soldiers but was also directed particularly at Colonel Young. *The Raleigh News and Observer* was the worst of the Democratic newspapers for attacking Young during both his political as well as military careers. Years later, even the *News and Observer's* editor Josephus Daniels had to admit that his paper had been "pretty severe" on Young, and that his men "made much better soldiers than anybody expected."

During the summer of 1898, American forces were victorious over both Spain's battle fleet at sea and its forces on land. On August 12, 1898, after a conflict of just over three and a half months the U.S. and Spain signed a peace protocol ending the war. The news actually came as a great disappointment to the men of the 3rd N.C. who had patiently awaited orders to go to Cuba to fight. Now they would be unable to prove themselves in battle. They feared the only military service which lay ahead of them now was dreary garrison and camp duty until they were mustered out of service. After all their enthusiasm for the chance to prove themselves in battle, this was a bitter pill to swallow.

The 3rd N.C. would remain at Fort Macon more than a month after the signing of the protocol until orders finally came transferring them to a camp at Knoxville. Camp Russell was

disbanded on September 14 and the next day three special trains carried the regiment away. Along the route, black citizens turned out to cheer the trains as they passed through. The *Morehead City Pilot* dourly summed up the local viewpoint: "Joy go with them and peace behind them." Unfortunately, the regiment's fears of being stuck now only in camp duty

*Continued on page 6*

## Financial Results Summary for 1998

### INCOME

Member Dues	\$ 9,580
Gifts & Grants	41,150
Fort Donation Box	7,120
Interest on deposits	580
Other	560

TOTAL INCOME 58,990

### EXPENDITURES

Membership Support	
Printing & Mailing	4,120
Office Operations	280
Computer Operations	1,290
Annual Meeting	1,200
Fort Exhibits	10,670
Fort Equip. & Operations	8,230

TOT. EXPENDITURES 25,790

NET INCOME 33,200


JAN 1 FUNDS BAL.	\$36,200
DEC 31 BALANCE	69,400
INCREASE	33,200

COMMENT: Friends of Fort Macon policy precludes borrowing of funds. Therefore, before a major project is undertaken, funds must be on hand. Often, money is raised in the year before it is expended. It is anticipated that most of the money on hand at the end of 1998 will be spent on major projects in 1999.

proved a reality. It was shifted between two different army camps before finally being mustered out in February, 1899. Trouble and controversy continued to plague the regiment to the end.

Back at Fort Macon, the departure of the 3rd N. C. left only the tiny detachment of Battery I, 2nd U.S. Artillery, still at the fort. At the beginning of October, 1898, this detachment was recalled to Fort Caswell. With all the excitement over, Ordnance Sergeant Isaac B. Henry was now alone again settling down to his peaceful duty as the sole caretaker of Fort Macon. Thus ended the fort's second occupation for war. Five years later the Army would close and abandon Fort Macon for good..

*Author Paul Branch is the Ranger/Historian at Fort Macon State Park.*



## Friends Board of Directors 1999

PRESIDENT	Bennett Moss
1st VICE PRES.	Grayden Paul Jr.
2nd VICE PRES.	Larry Richter
TREASURER	Betty Burke
SECRETARY	Gwyn Towles
COMMITTEE CHAIRS	
ARTIFACTS	Dave Pleace
ARCHAEOLOGY	David Moore
COMPUTER OPS.	Bob Donnan
MEMBERSHIPS	Ann Toohey
PROGRAMS	Carolyn Campbell
PUBLICITY	Nat Hill
VOLUNTEERS	Nancy Donnan
PAST PRESIDENT	Kathryn Cloud
PARK SUPERINTEND.	Jody Merritt
CCHS PRESIDENT	Les Ewen

Board Members serve without compensation for a one year term beginning January 1.

## SUMMER CONCERTS IN THE FORT

Last summer the FRIENDS sponsored a series of concerts inside the Fort on alternate Friday evenings. The concerts were so well received that the FRIENDS will make this an annual activity at Fort Macon. The operating costs of sponsoring these concerts is fully covered by donations from the appreciative audience. There is no cost to the FRIENDS treasury.

It is hard to imagine a more delightful experience than listening to good music inside the historic walls of Fort Macon. The acoustics are wonderful. Enjoying a picnic snack while reclining on a blanket or a lawn chair on a balmy summer evening is hard to beat.

If you will be in the area in June or July, you should plan to attend at least one concert. This year the dates are June 4 & 18, July 2, 16, & 30. All concerts are on Friday evenings at 7:00 PM.

## REPAIR WORK UNCOVERS WAR RELICS

The long awaited repair work on Fort Macon has begun in earnest. The work includes improving the drainage of the moat, and repairing the leaking roof.

The roof work involves the removal of 8 feet of earth in order to expose the original lead sheathing over the arched casemates. As the earth is removed, it is examined for artifacts. As one might expect, many shell fragments and other relics of the Battle of Fort Macon are being found. Even some tools from the original 1834 construction have been exposed.

Digging in the moat has revealed a mixture of battle debris and more mundane articles discarded over the years. A nice collection of bottles from different periods has emerged, including a snuff jar and other "medicinal" glass containers.

Many more relics are likely to be found as the work progresses. We expect that we will ultimately have the makings for one or more interesting new exhibits.



## THANK YOU "VAN"

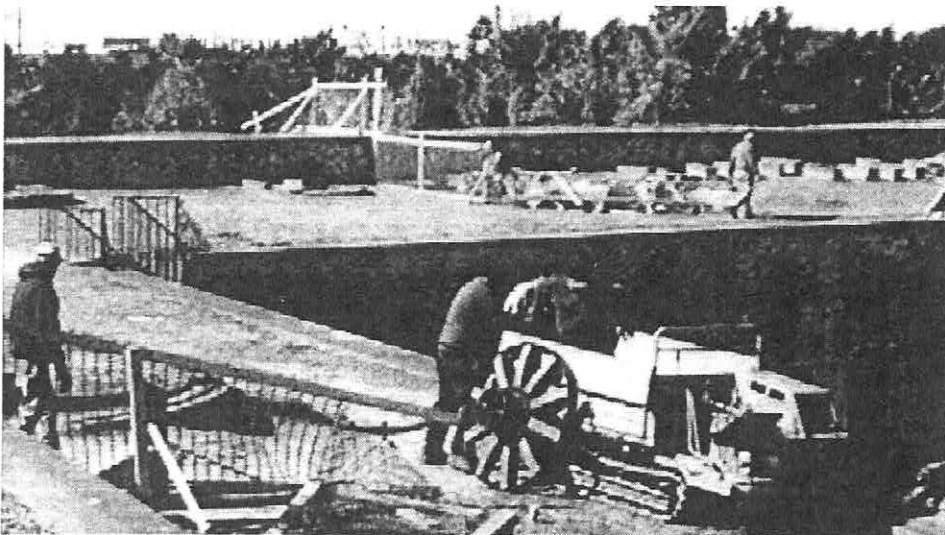
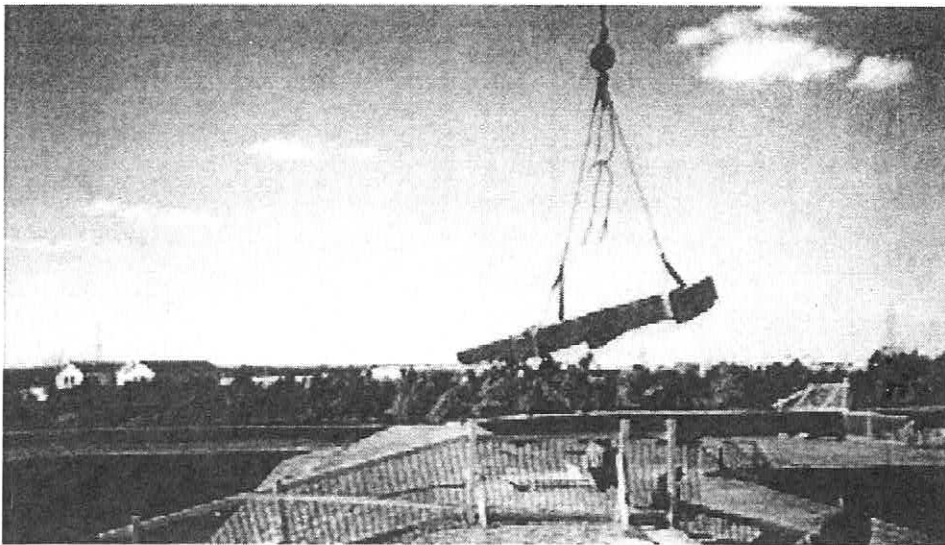
After many years on the Board of Directors of the FRIENDS, H.F."Van" van der Voort has decided to step down in order to devote his efforts to other interests.

Van served as the president of the FRIENDS for several years in the 1980's. During that time he spent more than two years trying to convince the Division of State Parks to allow the installation of a donation box at Fort Macon. After meeting with the Governor, Van finally succeeded in getting the needed authorization. In the years which have followed, the proceeds from the donation box have funded many of the displays in the

museum and other exhibits.

For the past six years, Van has served as chairman of the FRIENDS' Finance Committee. In that capacity he has played the leading role in raising funds for the construction of many of the replicas of important features that were part of the Fort during the Civil War period.

Much of what the Friends have accomplished in recent years is a direct product of what Van has done. Although Van is no longer on the FRIENDS Board, he remains a Lifetime Member and will no doubt be available for advice and counsel when needed. THANK YOU VAN!



Repair work at Fort Macon

## CANNONS AND KITCHENS

If you have seen our replica of a Civil War 32-pounder cannon lately, you have probably noticed some rotted spots on the wooden carriage. The problem can be corrected, but the cannon needed to go into the Park's maintenance shop to do the work. As you can see by this photo, it took some major equipment to remove the cannon from the ramparts. We expect the cannon to be back in the Fort soon.

While repairs proceed on our first cannon, our second cannon is rapidly nearing completion. This cannon will differ from the first in that it will have a smooth bore rather than a rifled bore. Also, the conditions that produced the maintenance problems with the first cannon will be avoided on the new one. The new cannon is an extremely generous gift to the Friends from Mickey and Dean Proper of Beaufort.

The five kettle kitchen range from 1834 will soon be replicated in its original location. All of the materials are now on hand, and the brick mason has been contacted. Just as soon as the mason and our Artifacts chairman are both available at the same time, the work will commence. We expect completion this Spring.

We are also prepared to proceed with the bake oven replica, but we are unable to get into the casemate where the oven was originally located until the repair work on the roof above is completed. This may take two years or more. Meanwhile, other projects are in the offing. Please stay with us and keep up your support.

### 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**