

FORT MACON RAMPARTS

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ROBERT E. LEE AT FORT MACON

by Paul Branch

One of the most persisting rumors about Fort Macon's early years is that Robert E. Lee was responsible for building the fort. It is also rumored Lee had the system of stone jetties currently on the beach around the fort built to protect it from shore erosion. Well, one out of two is not bad! Lee did not build Fort Macon but he did have a role to play in the Fort's early years. He was responsible for initiating the system of stone jetties which still protect the fort from the sea to this day.



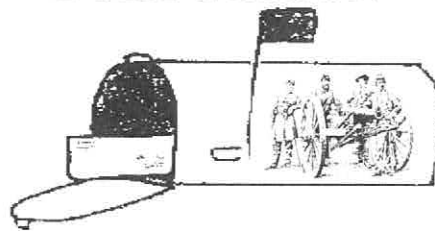
Robert E. Lee in 1845.

So what exactly is Lee's connection to Fort Macon? When was he at the Fort? What exactly did he do? The following is a summary of how the paths of Lee and Fort Macon did cross. He faced some difficult problems when he arrived at Fort Macon and the manner in which he solved them as an engineer is interesting.

When construction began on Fort Macon in 1826, Robert E. Lee was 19 years old and completing his freshman year as a cadet at West Point. After being graduated from West Point in 1829, Lee served as assistant engineer in the construction of Fort Pulaski, Georgia, during 1829-31, and the defenses of Hampton Roads during 1831-34. He next held a staff position in the Engineer Department in Washington, and in 1837 was assigned a project for the improvement of navigation at St. Louis and the Mississippi River. When work on this project was suspended in 1840, Lee returned to Washington for a new assignment.

While young Lee was being shifted back and forth between various Engineer Department projects, Fort Macon was completed by other engineers in 1834. It was then garrisoned until 1836, and afterward sat in the charge of an Ordinance Sergeant acting as caretaker. However, an inspection in June, 1839 by the engineer in charge of seacoast forts in the Carolinas, Captain A. J. Swift, disclosed Fort Macon

LETTERS FROM FORT MACON



The writer of these letters, James A. Graham, was a member of the 27th North Carolina Infantry, Company G (Orange Guards). This unit arrived at Fort Macon in April 1861. The unit was transferred in January 1862, when it joined in the defense of New Bern, NC, against an expected attack by the Union forces of General Ambrose Burnside. In the second of these letters Graham describes his flight following the defeat of the Confederate forces at New Bern.

Fort Lane, N.C.
March 7th 1862

My Dear Father

I received your very welcome letter last night. I am not yet fully determined as to what course I shall pursue about my adjutant's office, but think that I will return to my company in a week or two.

I would rather be with my old company than any company I know of; for it is the best drilled company I ever saw and one of the best companies I ever saw in every particular.

I will not go into the ranks again
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to be in need of numerous repairs as well as protection from shore erosion. Swift was subsequently transferred elsewhere so that during most of 1840 no engineer officer was available to determine a detailed analysis of the repairs and costs needed at Fort Macon.

Finally in October, 1840, 32-year old Captain Robert E. Lee arrived in Washington, available for assignment following the suspension of the St. Louis projects. With no permanent engineer projects currently available for him until the following spring, the Engineer Department gave him the only assignment it had readily available - an inspection of Forts Macon and Caswell in North Carolina, and Fort Moultrie in South Carolina. In light of Captain Swift's inspection of the previous year, Lee's objectives at Fort Macon were to plan some means of securing the fort against the encroachment of the sea, and to formulate what repairs and costs were necessary for the fort itself.

Lee arrived in Beaufort in late November or early December, 1840. The weather was inclement but he began his inspection of the fort and its site as best he could. Doubtless he was assisted when necessary by the fort's caretaker, Ordinance Sergeant Peter D. Stewart.

In studying the erosion along the eastern end of Bogue Banks, where Fort Macon was located, Lee found the problem to be quite serious. The sea had steadily eaten away at the beach and point until it was right at the tip of the fort's glacis (the earthen mound which surrounds the fort). Further erosion would soon eat into the glacis and eventually threaten the fort itself. Since Fort Macon's predecessor on Bogue Point, Fort Hampton, had been totally washed away by this same process only fifteen years earlier, it was imperative the erosion be arrested as soon as possible so that Fort Macon did not share a similar fate.

Lee spent time studying the dynamics of the wind, sea and currents as they acted upon Bogue Point. He also gained information from local people and sea pilots as to changes of Beaufort Inlet over the years. He found the erosion problems originated from several causes. First, Beaufort Inlet underwent a cycle of changes over periods of decades. The channel shifted constantly while Bogue Point and Shackleford Point, on the opposite side, changed in relation to each other. At different times the two points built out or receded from each other. At other times one built up while the other receded, and vice versa. Thus the very nature of the beach at Bogue Point was quite unpredictable.

Second, Lee found that waves striking Bogue Banks obliquely with the prevailing southwest winds dislodged beach sand and carried it away parallel to the beach to the east. Known today as the longshore current, or littoral drift,

this constant scouring action was a source of continuous erosion of the beach.

A third factor involved was the effect of storms. Hurricanes, nor'easters, and heavy storm tides did great damage to the beach each year. Since the Fort had been built, hurricane storm surges had washed completely over Bogue Banks just west of the fort, leaving it temporarily isolated on a little island.

All these factors combined to show Lee that manmade stabilization efforts were necessary to preserve the site of Fort Macon and prevent it from washing into the sea as its predecessor, Fort Hampton, had done.

Lee was not the first engineer to face these powerful natural forces at Fort Macon. While the fort was being constructed, its superintending engineer had sought to control them. Breakwaters of pilings filled with brush and brick bats had been built on the beach during 1833-34. They produced a large degree of success in causing the accretion of sand on the beach and halting the erosion. By 1840, however, Lee found the pilings and brush had decayed away and the bricks were scattered by wave action. Clearly such temporary structures were not the answer to the problem. Substantial permanent structures were the only suitable means to combat the erosion problem.

As it turned out, the Engineer Department had recently constructed permanent stone jetties resting on a grillage of palmetto log timbers at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. They had been highly successful. Other breakwaters had also been built at Fort Caswell. As a result, Lee felt such structures held the key to preserving the site of Fort Macon.

His recommendation therefore was to use two similar stone jetties on the beach in front of the fort. Jetty 1 was to be placed near Bogue Point southeast of the fort. Jetty 2 would be placed 1160 feet west of Jetty 1. Each would consist of palmetto logs sunk in a line perpendicular to the



A 1950 view of Jetty No. 1, as built by Capt. Lee.
This was later covered by additional rock.

beach. On these would be piled stones of heavy granite or limestone.

The idea behind the jetties was that being at right angles to the beach they would disrupt the flow of sand in the littoral drift from west to east. This would cause sand to build up on their western sides extending westward in front of the fort and beyond.

Lee felt these measures would stop the erosion and save the fort site. Now to address the repairs needed on the fort itself.

Editors note: Because of its length, this article about Robert E. Lee's work at Fort Macon will be concluded in our next issue of the Ramparts. It should be noted that the curriculum at West Point was oriented toward engineering. Before the Civil War most top graduates of West Point were assigned to the Engineer Department of the Army. Lee graduated second in his class in 1829.

The author of this article, Paul Branch, is the Ranger/Historian at Fort Macon State Park.

ORIGINAL JETTIES WEREN'T CHEAP

The following letter was written by Henry Cooke, the Beaufort Customs Officer, to his sons in 1834, the year that the original construction of Fort Macon was completed.

Feb. 13th 1834

My last to you was forwarded by the last mail and although I have no prospect of sending this ... before the time I expect to depart for the Western Country, yet according to my usual mode, I have thought proper to make the attempt for your amusement.

William Morse and Sallie Walker were married last night, at which there was a high frolic. The Big Belle of 150 Tons built by William R. Belle, nearly in front of his house (?) for himself, B. Leecraft, F. L. King, John F. Jones and Jona Mace sailed from here 2 1/2 days past for Barbados with a cargo of lumber - Mathais Phelps master, Caleb C. Bell and George Robinson mates and James Rumley the super cargo. The merchants complained much of hard times, but as there is a prospect of an appropriation of \$170,000 to erect break-waters around the fort, and many have engaged in making turpentine they are much encouraged in the hope of good business.

The idea of emigration has increased so much that

property of all kinds is at the most surprising reduced prices. Enforced sales of property, renders the greatest sacrifices. A large company of 70 odd from North River and several from Bogue Sound are leaving their homes this Spring and the next Fall and in Beaufort the cry for emigration is very general...

Although the cited cost figure is probably greatly exaggerated, the need for breakwaters around the fort was recognized long before Robert E. Lee came upon the scene in 1840. We are indebted to Friends member Giles Willis for uncovering this letter in the archives of the state of Texas, where Henry Cooke's descendants ultimately settled.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT YOUR MONEY

The year 2002 is now drawing to a close. This will be remembered as one of the most successful years in the history of the Friends of Fort Macon and, of course, for the wonderful object of all of our endeavors - Fort Macon itself. At long last, the restoration work on the Fort has been completed, putting the Fort in better shape than at any time since before the Civil War. And what wonderful new educational exhibits have now been installed!

But the work of the Friends is far from finished. With more than a million visitors a year to the Fort, a visitors educational center is badly needed. Although Fort Macon usually has more visitors than any other state park in North Carolina, it is one of the few parks without a visitor center. We have a beautiful set of construction drawings for the Center, so all we need is for the state government to find the money to build it. And that is where you come in.

There are more than 30 parks in the North Carolina state parks system. They all need a slice from the state's fiscal pie, and the pie has actually gotten smaller in the last two years. How will the state make its allocation of funds? We are not located in a large metropolitan area as are some other parks. But what we do have is a large, active support group that carries a lot of weight! In other words, we've got you! The \$10 your membership adds to our treasury is useful, but not critical. What is critical is the fact of your support when you renew your membership for 2003. It is only the size of our membership that influences the politicians and administrators in the state capital.

So when you receive your membership renewal notice prior to the end of the year, please consider the great progress you have helped us make in the past, and what wonderful work lies ahead if you will continue to work with us. When you renew your membership, please remember it's not just about your money.

Continued from page 1

for if I am not re-elected to my present office I am not compelled to go into the ranks, but can quit and go to work recruiting on my own part. If I am re-elected and a better place offers afterwards I can take it then, but I think it would be rather the better plan to make sure of what I have. I must re-enlist again, for I could not stay at home contented and not bear my part while the war lasts. I will write again in a few days and let you know what I have determined really to do. Even if I should keep my place as Adjutant I will not want a horse as our present enlistment will be out in two or three months at the farthest and I may not be Adjutant in the next Regiment that we are put in.

We had a snow storm this morning for about three or four hours but about mid-day the sun came out and the snow is already gone, though it is still pretty cold. Our men are living in tents, but seem to like this better than Fort Macon. As it is so near warm weather I think they will not build winter Quarters; for we do not know where we may be sent to as soon as the spring opens. I think it is very likely that we will stay here until our time is out.

I can very easily sell my saddle to Maj. Gilmer or Lt. Col. Singletary for what it cost me.

There is nothing new.

Love to all. Write soon to

Your affectionate Son
James A. Graham

P.S. Our men were paid off yesterday. I will send you \$300 of mine by the first chance.

Please tell Mr Parks to make me a pair of heavy shoes like those he made for me last August. Tell him to make them 1/2 inch longer than he did the others.

I want them made as soon as possible for I am beginning to need them

Your

J.A.G.

Kinston March 15th 1862

My Dear Mother

I write to you this morning to let you know that I am safe. I have since heard that Willie is also safe, but have not seen him. A gentleman told me just

now that he knew him to be safe. Time will determine. I hope he is safe but have my doubts about it. I do not think he is killed, but he may be a prisoner. He was on the right where the hardest fighting was but I understand he was not engaged in it at all.

The enemy, 24,000 strong, came upon us about half past 7 o'clock yesterday morning. We numbered about 6,000 and were behind our entrenchments about 5 miles below Newbern. The strongest part of the attack was made upon our right. Our Regiment was upon the extreme left and was not much engaged but the shell fell thick and fast around us. It was terrible, but our men stood it nobly. There was but one man killed and three or four wounded in our regiment. About 10 o'clock the enemy turned our right flank and we were ordered to retreat and such a mess I never saw. I endeavored to get our men together, but every man was looking out for himself; we retreated to Newbern, but the enemy got there in their gun boats almost as soon as we did on land. We saw that we could not hold it and therefore set the town on fire and retreated to this place. I retreated with the regiment for four or five miles when the alarm was given that the enemy were upon us. We then scattered through the woods and every man took care of himself. I waded through several creeks and ditches about waist deep and at last came up with some of our cavalry and rode behind them to this place. We afterwards found out that this was a false alarm. All of the men in our company have come in except four or five. I suppose they will come in during the day unless they are prisoners, for none of our men were killed when I left them. Capt. Brem's Artillery was cut almost all to pieces, I understand, and their guns taken. We had 16 pieces of artillery and lost nearly everyone of them. We lost under 50 men killed, among them Lt. Col. Hoke 33rd Reg't and between 50 and 100 wounded. The loss of the enemy was 500 or 600. We took one or two prisoners. I do not know how many prisoners they took. I lost every thing I had except my uniform I have got on and my overcoat. I do not know whether Aleck escaped or not as I left him at our camp when we went to the entrenchments and I have not seen or heard of him since except that he came over to Newberne soon yesterday morning. I got here about 12 o'clock last night and went up to Uncle John's and got a pretty good night's rest. I did not sleep more than one hour and a half in the 48

hours before that and was wet to the skin nearly all the time. I have got along pretty well but am so tired and broken down now that I can hardly stand. I wish that you would send me two shirts (check) two pairs of drawers and two or three pairs of socks for I have not had on any clean clothes in a week and am as dirty as a hog and have no clothes to change. I would write more but am so tired and broken down that I can hardly stand. I will write again tomorrow.

Love to all. I hope to see you again some of these days.

Your affectionate Son
James A. Graham

Kinston March 19th 1862

My Dear Mother

I received the box of provisions you sent me by Aleck Kirkland to day and am very much obliged, for we are without anything to eat and I was living around promiscuously. The blankets and comforter also were very acceptable, for I have been sleeping on the floor with a carpet bag for a pillow and instead of undressing to go to bed I put on my overcoat which was all the bedclothes I had, but I have become accustomed to rough living during the last week. I have not had my clothes off since last Wednesday night except last Friday night when I stayed at Uncle John's. I could have gotten a very good bed at Uncle John's all the time, but thought it best to be near our Regiment so as to be ready at any time if we were called on. We will get into our tents in a few more days and then we will be better fixed. The fight we had the other day has taught me one thing and that is never to carry anything more with me than I absolutely need and can carry on my back in case of necessity.

It will not do to play soldier and gentleman at the same time. In order to be a soldier you must take it rough. Our men are pretty well rested and ready and I might even say, anxious to be at the enemy again in order to wipe out the remembrance of the run we made.

They all say they would rather die than run from the

Yankees again. It is a wonder the Yankees did not take us all for they had 27,000 and we only about 4,000.

Anything sent to our company would be acceptable, but Capt. Webb requested me to say to you that the Quarter Master had supplied our men or would supply them with clothing in a day or two.

I saw brother Joe and Willie today. They are both very well. Willie did not reach here till Sunday morning. Just before the battle one of his men remarked "that it was a right big fight when three or four men got to fighting, but he did not know how it would be when three or four thousand got at it."

We do not know what was the loss in killed or wounded on either side yet. Col. C. M. Avery (33rd Regt) was taken prisoner and Major Carmichael (26th Regt) killed. We lost only one man in our company. He was taken prisoner. His name was Weinand a dutch man who joined us just before we left Hillsboro. I do not know how long we will stay here or what we will do. There is nothing new. As it is past Bed time I must close.

Love to all. Write soon to

Your affectionate Son
James A. Graham

This concludes our coverage of the wartime letters of James A. Graham. James Augustus Graham was a college student prior to enlisting in Orange County at age 20, on April 20, 1861. Mustered in as a Corporal, he was promoted to Sergeant on May 8, 1861. He was promoted to Orderly Sergeant on July 19, 1861 and was elected 3rd Lieutenant on August 17, 1861. He was elected 2nd Lieutenant on December 5, 1862, and was promoted to 1st Lieutenant on April 25, 1863. He was wounded in the knee at Bristoe Station, Virginia, on October 14, 1863. After returning to duty, he was wounded in the right thigh and left knee at the Wilderness, Virginia, on May 5, 1864. He returned to duty prior to November 1, 1864. He was present or accounted for until he surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on April 9, 1865.

James A. Graham was a member of a politically prominent family of Orange County, North Carolina. His wartime letters were part of a collection previously published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1928.

Lawyers should never marry other lawyers. This is called
inbreeding, from which come idiot children and more lawyers.

David Wayne to Katherine Hepburn in *Adam's Rib*

OUTSIDE THE FORT WALLS

There were several important facilities located outside the walls of Fort Macon. Some were constructed before the Civil War, and some were constructed after the War. None of these facilities exist today, but they were all a part of the history of Fort Macon. In this issue, we will present a brief sketch of the Bogue Banks Lighthouse originally located adjacent to the Fort.

In the first half of the 19th century, the federal government instituted a safe navigation program by installing lighthouses, lightships and beacons to help mariners avoid natural hazards. Although Beaufort was rapidly becoming the second major port in North Carolina, at mid-century it's harbor still had no navigational aids to guide ships through the three entrances to its tricky main channel. Finally on August 31, 1852, Congress authorized \$5000 to establish a light station on the easternmost point of Bogue Banks. In October of 1852, a Lighthouse Board was also established to facilitate the development and improvement of the system of lighthouses.

In the summer of 1854, Captain Daniel P. Woodbury of the Army Corps of Engineers, who was then at Fort Macon engaged in operations to control shore erosion, received the go-ahead for construction of a lighthouse. Woodbury selected a site near the point of Bogue Banks on a spit of land about 200 yards northwest of Fort Macon.

In addition, Congress appropriated an extra \$1000 on August 3 of that year to establish a separate beacon to operate with the lighthouse. The separate beacon enabled mariners to navigate into the harbor by lining up the lights to find the channel.

The lighthouse took the form of a tower of red bricks 50 feet high with a red lantern for a light. A fourth order (medium size) Fresnel lens was used to intensify the beam. It was a fixed light with an illumination coverage of 270° of horizon, at a range of 12.5 miles out to sea.

Captain Woodbury completed the two lights late in the Spring of 1855, and put them into operation on May 20, 1855. The 1860 census listed Thomas Delmar as Lighthouse Keeper

For the next few years, the Bogue Banks lights performed well, guiding ships through the tricky inlet. The brick lighthouse might still be there if not for the Civil War. At the outbreak of the War in April 1861, Confederate forces seized Fort Macon. They extinguished the lights when Federal gunboats began to blockade the harbor later that year.

In March of 1862, Federal troops began operations to capture Fort Macon. They established siege positions within

half a mile of the Fort. The Confederate garrison made plans for a defense. A necessity was the destruction of all buildings outside the Fort which might block the fire of the Fort's guns on enemy ships in the harbor. That meant the lighthouse and the beacon had to go.

The two lights were destroyed by Confederate soldiers who dug around the bases of the structures and pulled them down. Both were destroyed on or about March 28, 1862.



After the end of the Civil War, efforts were made in 1867 and 1868 to reestablish the lights, and cost estimates were submitted to Congress. Unfortunately, the project was never included in the approved Federal budget. In 1869, the Bogue Banks lights were dropped from the official list of navigation lights.

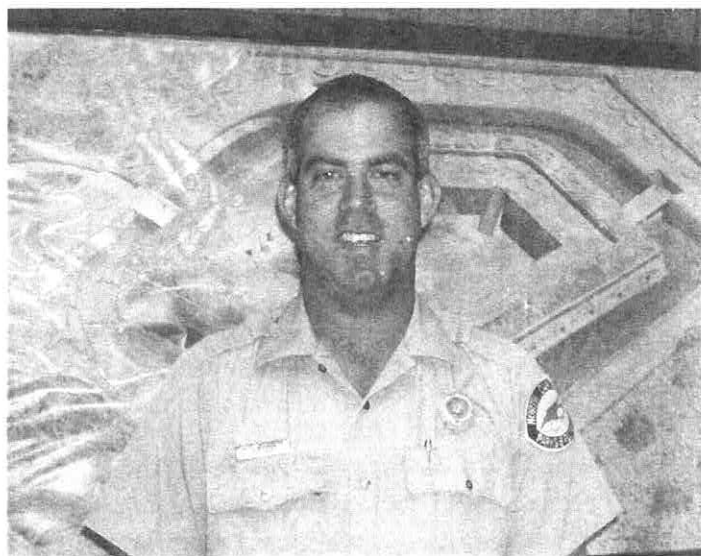
No artifacts or remains have ever been found, and the site is now occupied by the United States Coast Guard Base adjacent to Fort Macon

This item was excerpted from an article written by Ranger/Historian Paul Branch in June, 1986.



Some Civil War artifacts in one of the new exhibit rooms at the fort.

MEET YOUR FORT MACON STAFF



Meet Randy Newman - Park Ranger II at Fort Macon State Park.

Randy is involved in interpretation and education, natural resource management, law enforcement and maintenance of the park. This past year Randy supervised the seasonal employees, including the life guards at the Fort Macon beach. Randy's most noteworthy accomplishment is in environmental education for which he received the Distinguished Service Award for Science Education from the North Carolina Teachers Association in 1997. Randy also received the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Distinguished Service Award for Environmental Education in 2000.

Randy grew up in Aurora, N.C. He began working with the state parks as a park attendant in 1985 at Fort Macon State Park while he was still in college. After graduating in 1987 from East Carolina University with a degree in Natural Resource Management, he became a park ranger at Raven Rock State Park. In 1990 he returned to Fort Macon State Park as a Ranger II.

Randy and his wife Nicki are the proud parents of two future rangers, Hunter and Garrett.

The Friends of Fort Macon have enjoyed a close association with Randy and the other fine members of Fort Macon's staff. We will be pleased to introduce you to the rest of the staff in future issues of the Ramparts.

NEW EXHIBIT AT THE FORT



A new exhibit of World War II arms of the type issued to the soldiers at Ft. Macon

Generous contributions from John Kilroy, George Ipock, Herman Jennette, Jeffery Holleman, and others made this exhibit possible.

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