

FORT MACON RAMPARTS

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THE LIFE OF COLONEL MOSES JAMES WHITE

by: Paul Branch

On October 5, 1861, a tall, gawky-looking uniformed officer with a gaunt, boyish face stepped from a boat onto the wharf at Fort Macon and paused to look over his new command. Twenty-seven year old Moses J. White, newly promoted to the rank of Colonel of Artillery, had arrived from Kentucky to assume command of Fort Macon. He would be Fort Macon's last Confederate commander. The road that brought him to this moment was one full of pride and hope for a young man who had devoted his life to service in the military. The road after he left Fort Macon for the last time seven months later would be one of suffering, frustration and finally death.

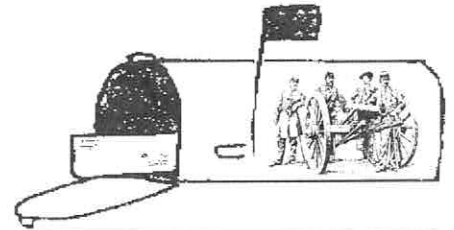
Moses James White was born August 6, 1835, the eldest of four children born to Dr. Franklin and Emily White, of Vicksburg, Mississippi. In his early years, White grew up in Vicksburg to be a lanky teenager six feet two inches in height. Of his early schooling, his father would write that the boy's education "has been by a combination of manual labor and attention to his studies and I can say that industry is fixed in him as a habit." As he progressed

through his teen years, young Moses' focus centered on the military for a career, starting with the hope he might attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

In March 1853, White's father and a number of prominent citizens of Vicksburg applied to Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War and himself a Mississippian, to appoint Moses to West Point should a vacancy occur. Because no vacancy immediately came open, 18-year-old Moses was sent east and began studies at the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, VA, on October 13, 1853. After one year as a student here, Moses' big opportunity finally came in the summer of 1854. A vacant West Point cadetship occurred for the district of Mississippi Congressman G. R. Singleton. Because it was customary for congressmen to fill such vacancies, Singleton nominated young Moses.

Thus, Moses J. White left William and Mary and attended West Point on September 1, 1854. His record at the military academy was impressive, ranking fifth in his class for his first two years and second in his last two years. On

LETTERS FROM FORT MACON



This is part of a series of letters written by soldiers stationed at Fort Macon. The writer of these letters, David Thompson, was a member of the 27th North Carolina Infantry, Company G (the Orange Guards) from Orange County, North Carolina. This unit was at Fort Macon from April 1861 until February 1862, when it was sent to New Bern, North Carolina, to help defend against an expected attack from the Union forces of General Ambrose Burnside.

In spite of David Thompson's limited literary skills, his letters help us appreciate the difficulties and dangers of a 19th century soldier's life.

Fort Macon
Sept. the 13, 1861

Dear Mother

I though that I would write a short letter to let you know that I am not taken by the Yankees yet, as you expected I was or would be when we ever attack; nor I dont expect to be while I stay here. We might have been taken three weeks ago with such a fors as they had at Hatteras. We now have about 3000 men on the island 750 in

Continued on page 5

***Don't Forget
The Ice Cream Social
April 25 - See Page 4***

Continued from page 1

July 1, 1858, he was graduated second in his class of 27 members and commissioned in the U.S. Army as Brevet 2nd Lieutenant of Ordnance. However, there was a dark cloud over what seemed to be the beginning of an otherwise promising career. The first manifestation of the disease that would ultimately kill him, epilepsy, appeared in this same year.

Nevertheless, White served as Assistant Ordnance Officer at the Baton Rouge Arsenal in 1859 and went on as commander of the Fort Union Ordnance Depot, New Mexico, during 1859-60. During 1860-61, however, he was forced to take a sick leave of absence from his duties. His health was already beginning to deteriorate.

With the secession of Mississippi from the Union on January 9, 1861, Lieutenant White decided to follow his home state. He resigned his commission in the U.S. Army on February 7, 1861, and offered his services to the Confederacy. On March 16, he was appointed 1st Lieutenant in the Confederate Corps of Artillery, which he accepted on April 10. On July 1 he was ordered to report for duty as ordnance officer on the staff of Major General Leonidas Polk, commanding the military department embracing west Tennessee, northern Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, and east Arkansas. Here White participated in early Confederate operations in Missouri and at Columbus, Kentucky, in August and September.

Hundreds of miles to the east, meanwhile, the fall of Hatteras Inlet, N.C., to Union forces in August 1861, disclosed many weaknesses in North Carolina coastal defenses. Among these was a lack of officers trained in ordnance and artillery in the forts defending the state's coast. The last several officers to command Fort Macon had all been men from civilian pursuits with no formal military training. Upon the resignation on September 25 of Lieutenant Colonel John L. Bridgers as Fort Macon's commandant, the need for an experienced artillery officer to command the fort was recognized. Accordingly, the Confederate War Department promoted Lieutenant White to the rank of temporary Colonel on September 30 and transferred him to the Department of North Carolina to take command of Fort Macon. He assumed command on October 5.

It was inevitable that Union forces would eventually return to attack the coast of North Carolina. During February and

March 1862, Union Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside's expedition swept through the northeast sound region of the state's coast and then captured New Bern on March 14. From this point, Burnside dispatched part of his forces under Brigadier General John G. Parke to capture Fort Macon and secure Beaufort Harbor. Colonel White and the fort garrison were now cut off. White had his men conduct what delaying tactics were possible and withdrew to the safety of the fort.

Parke's forces captured Morehead City on March 23 and Beaufort on March 26. A demand for the fort's surrender on March 23 was refused by Colonel White. Parke's forces landed on Bogue Banks and besieged the fort on April 12. They erected emplacements for siege artillery to bombard the fort into submission.

As the Confederates made their defensive preparations, an unfortunate incident took place in the fort. Finding one of his men had been a baker before the war, White ordered that the rations of flour normally issued to the garrison companies would instead be used to bake bread for the garrison in the fort's bake oven as an economy measure. At first the garrison was in favor of the change. However, the baker's bread continually turned out burned and inedible. Soon the men were clamoring for the flour ration to be returned to them. Even the commanders of the garrison's five companies and the fort medical officer sided with the men. Thinking he had the fort's best interest in hand, White insisted the bread baking continue. After several days,

the discontent among the men over the bread reached a state of near-mutiny. The company commanders stated unless White returned the normal issue of flour to the men they were prepared to seize the flour rations from the Commissary if necessary. White was furious but found no other recourse but to rescind the order for baked bread.

The "Bread Incident" left many feelings of discontent and ill-will at a time when the garrison needed to focus full attention on the enemy. White's inflexible sense of duty was a product of being a West Point-educated professional soldier of the old Regular Army where orders were obeyed without question. As such, he had run headlong into the unpredictable, fiercely independent spirit of green, nonprofessional



Moses J. White, date unknown

volunteer citizen-soldiers with all their suspicions about fussy "West P'inters." Such culture clashes were not limited to Fort Macon, but would appear elsewhere many times, especially in the early part of the war.

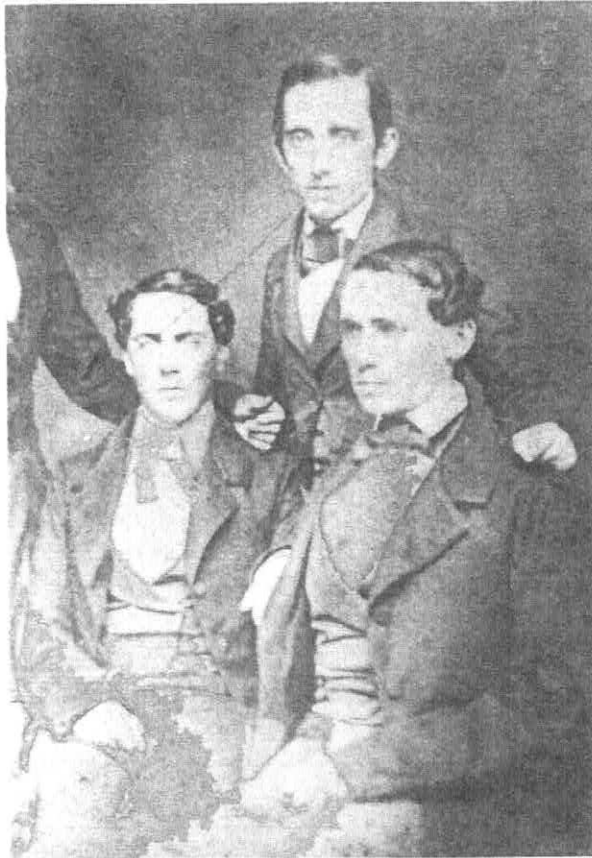
One other problem of White's leadership during the siege was his reluctance to freely use the fort's superior armament against the Union forces as they prepared their siege works. With a limited supply of powder and ammunition on hand, and a definite need to conserve what he had for a potentially lengthy siege, White kept a tight rein on the use of the fort's guns to shell the Union positions. His was a difficult situation, weighing the need to conserve with the need to impede the progress of the enemy. When it was clear the fort's desultory fire was having little effect, White and his company commanders met on April 21. At their insistence, he allowed them to use the fort's guns at their discretion to vigorously shell the Union positions. For the remainder of the siege the fort's cannonades were more effective, but by this time most of the work to the Union siege batteries was nearing completion.

On April 23, General Burnside himself arrived to witness the final stage of the siege. He offered White another chance to surrender, which was refused. However, White accepted the offer of a parley on Shackleford Banks with Burnside the following morning. At this meeting, Burnside personally tried to persuade White to give up, but the Colonel resolved to fight.

Just after dawn on April 25, the Union batteries opened fire on the fort. The fort soon returned fire and the bombardment raged almost eleven hours. During the morning Colonel White was very active. Unmindful of his own safety, he visited every gun, shouting encouragement and reminding his men of their duty to state and country. He even visited the exposed batteries on the fort's outer wall several times to check on his men and encourage them. By early afternoon, however, his frail health was exhausted. He was forced to turn command of the fort over to the senior captain at 1 p.m. and retire to his quarters to regain his strength.

As the afternoon wore on, it was clear the fort could not hold out. White and his company commanders met and decided surrender was their only option. Accordingly, about

4:30 p.m. a flag of truce was displayed. A suspension of hostilities was granted for the night until General Burnside decided surrender terms. The following morning of April 26, Burnside decided to release the garrison on parole of honor with their personal effects and belongings. Colonel White came aboard Burnside's flagship early to sign the terms. During the subsequent surrender of the fort, White was so mortified in having lost the fort that Burnside graciously forbade his troops from cheering to spare the young colonel's feelings.



Moses White on right, date unknown

After returning to Confederate lines on parole, White returned to Mississippi to visit his family. After being exchanged, he was ordered on September 22, 1862, to report to Major General T. H. Holmes, commanding the Trans-Mississippi Department, as Chief of Artillery and Ordnance. Unfortunately, White's health was in rapid decline. General Holmes noted on October 26 that White had reported for duty but "the painful disease with which he is afflicted disqualified him from any trust at all commensurate with his rank. His mind, I think, is seriously impaired. I have appointed Maj. G. H. Hill chief of ordnance and artillery, Colonel White assuring me that his health would not permit him to act in that capacity."

On November 27, White was then ordered to Pocahontas, Arkansas, to organize a brigade of cavalry. White duly commanded a brigade containing the 3rd and 4th Missouri Cavalry

regiments but was unable to lead it in a raid in January 1863. The brigade was subsequently broken up.

White apparently spent most of 1863 on sick leave. In November 1863, he spent some time in a hospital at Richmond, Va. During his return to the Trans-Mississippi Department, the epileptic attacks were so bad he sent in his resignation on December 2, believing he would never be fit for duty again. Three days later, however, he withdrew his resignation and continued on sick leave. He had no choice but to remain in the Army. The confiscation of his personal property by Union authorities in Mississippi left him dependent on his Army pay for support.

In 1864, White learned of a doctor in London specializing in the treatment of epilepsy. It was his last hope. He suc-

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

ceeded in securing assignment to duty on December 2, 1864, with the Confederate Purchasing Department in London. By the time these orders bypassed Union-held territory to reach him in Mississippi, it was January 1865. With all ports of the Confederacy now in Union hands, he started off as a private citizen for New Orleans, apparently hoping to secure passage on a steamer for Europe.

He never reached his destination. While passing through Natchez, Mississippi, White's health evaporated. At one of the homes there, he lay dying. Word of this somehow reached his family in Vicksburg. His sister, Lucy E. White, was able to obtain permission from Union authorities to pass through the lines to nurse him back to health (family legend says General U. S. Grant made the arrangement). Her efforts were in vain. Moses died at Natchez at age 29 on January 29, 1865. Reverend J. B. Stratton of the Natchez Presbyterian Church con-

ducted the funeral two days later. Unfortunately no record has been found of the location of his grave. Even the alumni records of his beloved West Point incorrectly list the year of his death as 1864.

During his brief, tormented life, White did not marry. During the siege of Fort Macon, General Burnside's secretary noted that White had "a lady love" living in Beaufort. Her name is not known, and doubtless he never saw her again after leaving Fort Macon.

Moses James White thus passed into history. His frail health robbed him of the duty and service he sought so hard to offer. His life stands as yet another tragic story that was part of the most tragic period of American history.

Paul Branch is the Ranger/Historian at Fort Macon

DR. PHIL RETIRES

On February 1, Dr. Philip McKnelly retired as Director of the NC Division of Parks and Recreation to take a position as Executive Director of the National Association of State Park Directors.

Dr. Knelly is a native of Arkansas, and is a graduate of the University of Arkansas. He received a doctorate from Texas A&M University. He is a former professor at North Carolina State University.

McKnelly joined the NC Division of Parks and Recreation in 1985, and has been Director of the Division since 1989. We wish Dr. McKnelly well in his new role.

We look forward to working with the new Division Director so that together we can achieve our goals of preserving the Fort and developing it as the premier historical and educational site in the southeastern states.

At this time the condition of the fort is excellent. Our greatest need is for the funds to build a visitor educational center to present to more than a million visitors the unique history, culture, and maritime environment associated with Fort Macon.

MORE SUMMER CONCERTS

During the past six summers, our Friday evening concerts on the Fort parade ground have proved to be very popular with both residents and visitors. This year we will sponsor a total of six concerts on alternate Friday evenings beginning June 4 and continuing on through August 13.

The concert dates for 2004 are June 4 and 18; July 2, 16, and 30; and August 13. All Friday concerts begin promptly at 7:00 PM and end at 8:00. There is no charge for admission, but donations are welcomed. The six groups of talented performers will present a variety of musical styles, all of which can be enjoyed by the entire family. A picnic supper on the grass can further contribute to an unforgettable experience.

If you are in the area on any of these concert dates, make a special point of coming to the Fort for some great music. The acoustics and the ambiance make the Fort the perfect venue for a delightful evening.

Y'ALL COME ON APRIL 25!

Each year the Friends commemorate the 1862 Battle of Fort Macon with our annual meeting and ice cream social on the Sunday closest to the April 25 anniversary date of that historic event.

The Ice Cream Social is your chance to get even on your annual membership dues. There will be free ice cream with all the toppings, all the delicious brownies you want, authentic historic demonstrations in period costumes, great music by talented performers, and a chance to view all of the Fort's new exhibit rooms.

This year, as a special treat, an eminent historian will present some interesting comments about the decision to build Fort Macon in 1828. This promises to be one of the best ice cream socials ever!

Ample free parking will be available in the expanded parking lot at the Fort. So there is no excuse for not coming to the Friend's major event of the year. And bring a friend or two! Mark your calendar for Sunday, April 25, at 2:00 in the afternoon. See you there!

Continued from page 1

the Fort and the balance posted about 8 miles up the beach they are posted there to mett them if they land on the beach. we have got one rifle cannon mounted and have two maore at Morehead City ready to bring over here. one of old Abs vesseles is lying out about four miles from here now it has been there ever since last saturday. they think that it is a blockade. we could hit it with the rifle cannon, but we dont want to let them know what sort of guns we have, without we could do her damage. We got our new guns yesterday they are the minne muscets they will shoot 1000 yds., they were taken at Manassas. Cap Webb says that he intends to have the best drilled company in the fort in two months, our company is the best drilled now except the G Grays. Bill Clark fetched the letter that you wrote he an Dunnigun is going home in the morning will send my letter by them. if they had come a day sooner I would have sent my dirty cloths home, but I had just sent them to Beaufort. Haley talks of sending some if he does I will send a shirt and a pare of dwars. we have got our winter cloths. two shirts, a pare of pants, a pare of dwara a good yarn coat and pare of soos I dont know wheather they will furnish socks or not if they dont I want cotton ones like the ones I have. I would rather have cotton ones than yarn. I was glad to heare that you had got a school started at Cedar Grove how many scholars have they what do they pay her.

I would like to come home before the forth Sunday but I dont recon I can get off. Webb will not let anyone go get awhile. Bil Booker & Henry Booker snd Burt is down here, they belong to Vances regiment. I am going up to thare camp next Sunday. I saw Saunders Miller this morning. He is down her on a visit he talks of staying a while. Bill Hall has the measels he is prety bad off with them. We have a right smart of work to do now since all the negrous has been taken away. we have some negrous from Hillsboro to cook for us. my sheet is about full. excuse bad writen.

Fort Macon
Sept the 22nd/61

Dear Mother

As I was witing to go today I though I would write you a few lines I thought last that we would be fighting this morning we got the nus last night about 8 o'clock that thare was a Fleet left Fortress Monroe for Thursday morning for this place. General Gatlin got the nuse

through a spy that was in Linclns camps neare that place, as soon as the nuse came the whole garrison was roused and put to carrying sand bags & rail rode irons to make batteries to protect some of the most important guns, we worked had untill three o'clock this morning. thare are no sign of the Fleet as yet. but I wouldnt be mch suprised if we wasent attacted before many day but let them come. withar they come with a tremedioris fors they will find themselves decieved. we have done a great deal of work in fixin for them we have two rifled cannons mounted now. we have a battery to every important gun that we have. I never saw a set of men work so hard in my life as they did last night there was no detailing. (You must turn this sheet

about to get read it right I made a mistake in the page) to do they all went valentuarely. Colonel Briger said if the men fight like they worked. ther was no danger of them whipping us. The English consol of those ships that are in here are loaded with turpentine aready to sail, he went out to the blockade yesterday to know if he could pass out. they told him that he could not go past them. I dont know what they intend to do about it. the English man of ware that was here two or three weeks ago told them if the blockade bothered them that they would have to see them out.

Fort Macon
Sept. the 29 1861

Dear Mary

I wrote to Mother last sunday witch letter she has not recieved when she wrote her last. I recieved the box that Mr. Woods brought, yesterday morning I was glad to see apples & peaches in it as I had not had any for some time, they have become scarce and we dont get many the gloves allso came in good time. I was going to send for them soon. Mother wote something about making a jackett. I would likse to have one if she makes it I wont it made out of darkish or grayish cloth she spoke of Clarks. I recon it is the sort that I want I want it to have sleeves if I want any pants I will wite for them if I dont get another pare. I will want them after while (Mr Woods is going home in the morning I am going to send my summer cloths with him) also a little box of shells for Mary Woods tell her that I could not get any nic ones they have all been picked up I can get some nice ones after the next storm. that will be in a few days I will send you some more then. We had the biggest storm last fryday that I ever saw a fellow could hardley stand up out of doors I am down at the wharfs today I have to stay here all the time. Strud Faucett is with me there has just now about a doson lowland Gals started from the wharfe they are the hardest cases that I ever saw they row here evry sunday.

there are some verry nise ladies visit the Fort. I havent spoke to one since I have been here. All of our officers went to Newburn yesterday to the election of Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel and Major they elcted Singleterry Colonel Cap Sloan of the GG Lieutenant Colonel and another Singleterry major I dont recon he will take us away from the Fort I would rather stay now as I hav staid long. A felow belonging to one of the artilery companies here shot himself yesterday accidently he was on guard on his post when let his gun slip through his hand on the ground and it went off and tore the whole of one side of his head off he never lived ten minutes afterwards. I was surprised when I herd that Joch Corhn & Jake Allison had joined Millers company I suppose that Miller is going to Hyde County where I expect he will be needed. Jasper Haley is going to send some cloths in my box (they will be in a bag) I thought that it was a subscription school that Miz was teaching I recon she is a good teacher my sheet is about full. I will write more if I have time excuse mistakes write soon

Yours
David Thompson

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

FINANCIAL RESULTS SUMMARY FOR 2003

INCOME

Member Dues	\$7,875
Gifts & Grants	2,870
Fort Donation Box	4,256
Interest Income	3,191
Sales Tax Refunds	457
Other	575
TOTAL INCOME	\$19,224

EXPENDITURES

Membership Support	
Printing & Mailing	\$3,870
Computer/Office Ops	1,268
Membership Meetings	1,232
Contribs./Memberships	657
Exhibits/Artifacts	5,839
Support Fort/Park Ops	5,138
Other	239
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$18,243

NET INCOME \$982

2003 FUNDS

January 1 Balance	\$59,744
December 31 Balance	60,726
Increase for 2003	\$982

COMMENT

In 2003 the Friends continued to make important contributions to the educational exhibits and operations of the Fort while at the same time maintaining funds for a future replica of one of the married officers' houses outside of the Fort. Preliminary work on the site and the plans were completed during 2003.

Unlike in previous years, tourist development funds are no longer available from Carteret County to support operations of non profit organizations. This change in policy has somewhat restricted the funds available to the Friends for innovative programming.

We want to thank all of our members, especially our tour guides and other volunteers, who enable us to accomplish our mission without paid employees.

OUTSIDE THE WALLS

by Paul Branch, Ranger/Historian

Of all the buildings and structures which once comprised the Fort Macon military reservation, the only ones still standing today are the fort itself and a brick water cistern outside its walls. Yet while it was in use during the 19th century, the Post of Fort Macon was a small military city that, in addition to the fort itself, was comprised by many other supporting structures no longer standing today. What were these structures? Where were they located and what did they look like? This article is part of a series that will examine the various components of the Post of Fort Macon.

The Post Hospital

Prior to the War Between the States, Fort Macon's hospital was located in one of the fort casemates. Requests for a separate hospital building outside the fort finally resulted in permission being granted by the Quartermaster Department in August, 1843, for the fort commander, Captain William Wall, to construct a one-story building with two 20-foot by 24-foot wards separated by a hall eight to ten feet wide. The allowance of \$1000 to build the structure proved insufficient and construction was postponed. By the outbreak of the War Between the States, the hospital still had not been built.

Confederate soldiers established a post hospital after seizing the fort in April, 1861. It probably was in one of the old buildings outside the fort formerly used as officers quarters. Later a separate hospital building seems to have been built since an inspection report in July, 1861, noted "Hospital going up now." The following year it became necessary to reestablish the hospital back into the safety of one of the fort casemates on March 24, 1862, after Union forces besieged the fort. The new hospital building was apparently one of the outbuildings burned by the garrison at the beginning of the siege to clear the field of fire.

Later in the war after the fort's capture, Union soldiers established their own post hospital about 250 yards southwest of the fort on a sand dune. It was a flimsy wooden T-shaped building that had been floated over from Morehead City in sections. The front of the building was 52 feet long by fourteen feet wide, with a six-foot wide porch and veranda. The body of the "T" was fifty feet long by 22 feet wide, containing a 12-bed ward.

During its nearly ten years of use, the building was never substantial and soon had its foundations settling in the loose sand. In 1870, Assistant Surgeon Elliott Coues (famous 19th century ornithologist and naturalist, who was the post medical officer) described the building:

"The hospital is a disgrace to the service. . . the foundations have given away in all directions, and the building has settled unevenly in the sand; the flooring presents a rolling

surface, gaping here and there, the walls bulge outward and roof sags inward; none of the doors or windows can be closed tightly, the former have broken locks and hinges, or none at all; many of the window lights are unglazed; the wind and rain are freely admitted through openings in the roof and walls . . . The door leading to the porch has been nailed up, as the latter has gone to pieces . . . the veranda in front will shortly follow."

One fort commander, Captain G. M. Brayton, reported that "unless a man is very sick it is better to keep him in the quarters, poor, confined and uncomfortable as they are, than to send him to such a place." Another, Major Joseph Stewart, felt the hospital to be "such a building as no humane man would wish to use for his horses."

At last, in 1871 the Quartermaster Department ordered a new hospital to be built according to a standard plan adopted in 1867 by the Surgeon General's Office. The building was begun in September, 1871, but due to various changes and delays was not completed until August, 1872. Even then, a dispute took place between the Army and the contractors over changes made from the original specifications that delayed the formal acceptance of the building for months. It was finally accepted by the Army in 1873.

The new hospital was a fine facility located about 125 yards southwest from the southwest angle of the fort. It had a two-story administration building 33 feet long by 34 feet wide, containing rooms for storage, offices, dispensary, kitchen and dining area, dead room, and so forth. Attached on its west side was a wing 44 feet long by 24 feet wide containing a 12-bed ward and wash rooms. A 12-foot wide porch and veranda extended around the entire structure. According to one inspection report, the building cost \$10,000.

The new hospital was used only a few years. In 1877, the fort garrison was withdrawn at the end of Reconstruction and only an ordnance sergeant acting as a caretaker remained at the post until 1898. During this time, the hospital mostly sat vacant. As such it began to decay rapidly. The building and its foundations were further damaged in the hurricane of August 18, 1879. In 1890, the ordnance sergeant reported all the post building in a very bad condition. "The piazzas . . . around the Hospital are so much decayed as to make it dangerous to walk on them."

Presumably, the hospital was used again during the Spanish-American War occupation of the fort. In 1903, however, an inspector reported that the hospital and most of the other buildings outside the fort "are badly decayed and are gradually falling to pieces, and are probably not worthy of repairs."

In December, 1903, the Army withdrew the ordnance sergeant at Fort Macon and formally abandoned it. On March 9, 1904, the Engineer Department auctioned off most of the old buildings. The post hospital brought a total of \$210 at the auction. The building was either removed from the reservation or dismantled for its materials.