



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
5152 NEW BRITTON LP NW. ASH, NC 28420
brunswickcountyhistoricalsociety.org

VOLUME LXIV

MAY 2025

NUMBER 2

Organized June 21, 1956

MISSION STATEMENT

To collect, preserve, study, evaluate and publicize the history of Brunswick County, NC. To devote meetings to presentation of materials about Brunswick County and the Lower Cape Fear through lectures, slides, and discussion. To publish a newsletter which contains news of the Society's activities, research papers and articles that pertain to genealogy.

Society Officers For the 2019 - 2024 Term

President: James Green
Vice-President: Gwen Causey
Acting Secretary: Gwen Causey
Treasurer: Bob Armour
Directors:
Dave Lewis

Newsletter Editor: Dave Lewis
Webmaster: Charles Clemmons
brunswickcountyhistoricalsociety.org



MAY MEETING TO BE HELD AT BEMC IN SUPPLY, NC MAY 12, 2025 at 7:30 P.M.

The next meeting of the *Brunswick County Historical Society* will be held on Monday, May 12th, at the Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation Building, 795 Ocean Highway West, Supply, NC. The meeting begins at 7:30 P.M. We always meet the 2nd Monday in February, May, August and November.

Publication of the *NEWSLETTER* began with Volume I, Number 1, printed September 1961. A complete set of the Newsletters from September 1961 to current dates may be viewed on the BCHS website by selecting "Newsletters" in the right navigation panel. The collection also can be found in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill, NC and at the New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Room in Wilmington, NC. There were no publications of Volume 17, #3 & 4 (1977) and Volume 18, #1 (1978).

Dues

DUES were payable in January 2025 and now are considered past due unless you are a **Life Member**. The annual dues are \$15.00 for an active member or \$150.00 to become a Life Member. Checks may be mailed to the *BCHS* in care of Bob Armour or bring check or cash to the February meeting. Use the membership application found on page 7 for contact changes. Make checks payable to the **Brunswick County Historical Society**. Please address questions of your membership status thru our website.

Program

Our speaker for the May meeting will be Kristin Rhan. Her program will be, "Flora and Fauna of the Green Swamp Through a Photographer's Lens."

Kristin is a wildlife and nature photographer based in coastal North Carolina. She is a member of North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA) and a Top 100 winner in the

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NANPA Showcase 2023: a semi-finalist in the NANPA 2021, 2022 and 2023 Showcases; a South Carolina Artist in Residence 2023 with South Carolina state parks; the featured artist at the Town of Ocean Isle Beach, NC town hall, and has been published in North Carolina Wildlife Resources Council Wildlife in the North Carolina magazine.

Kristin grew up in Augusta, Georgia and graduated from Clemson and NC State universities. In 2001, she became a homeowner at Ocean Isle Beach and became a full-time resident in 2014.

Conservation Highlights from The Nature Conservancy in NC

The Green Swamp is made up of longleaf pine savannas with a diverse herb layer, including many orchids and carnivorous (insectivorous) plants. The preserve is almost 15,655 acres, but most of it is a dense evergreen shrub bog called pocosin, which is a type of wetland dominated by dense shrubs such as gallberry, titi and sweetbay.

The Green Swamp contains at least 14 different species of insectivorous plants, including extensive populations of Venus flytraps, sundew, butterworts, bladderworts and four species of pitcher plants. The preserve is also home to many rare animals, including the American alligator, Bachman's sparrow and Hessel's hairstreak butterfly.

The Nature Conservancy's many management activities at the Green Swamp include controlled burning and restoring pine plantations to longleaf pine savannas and woodlands. The plants in the Green Swamp are adapted to fire, which means they survive or even require fire in their life cycles. Many sprout back from their roots or bulbs, and some rely on conditions after a fire to thrive. There are several plants that have a closer connection to fire to complete their life cycle. Pond pine cones burst and release seeds only after exposure to high temperatures experienced during fires, and wiregrass flowers vigorously after a growing season fire. Plants growing in savannas, including carnivorous (insectivorous) plants, require ample sunlight and reduced competition to thrive, and many plants, including the longleaf pine, need bare mineral soil to germinate.

Animals also have adaptations to fire, and much like some plants, certain animals, such as Bachman sparrows, gopher frogs and woodpeckers, require

post-fire habitat conditions.

Nathan Crooker/Crocker Sixth Generation from Mayflower Passenger, Frances Eaton

Source: *The Mayflower Quarterly*, published November 1990. Written by: Virginia Sellers Oliver. Transcribed as written.

In the *Five Generations, Vol. 1*, the genealogy of Frances Eaton shows Rachel Eaton having married Joseph Ramsden; Daniel Ramsden married Hannah Caswell; Samuel Ramsden married Martha Bowker; Mary, the daughter of Samuel and Martha, married Daniel Crooker; Daniel and Mary had, among other children, a son named Nathan. My story is about Nathan, my 4 great-grandfather. I found him to be an interesting person.

Nathan's wife was named Mary. To date, I have not learned her family name. Nathan and Mary had three children; Nathan, Jr., Lemuel, and Lucy. I found no record of Nathan, Jr. after 1790. Lemuel appeared in the 1820 census for Brunswick County, NC with himself age 26-45; 1 female under 10; 1 female 10-16; and his wife, 26-45. Lucy is my connection to Nathan. She married Sedgwick Springs, the second lighthouse keeper of Bald Head Island, Brunswick County, NC. He became the lighthouse keeper after having served in the Revolutionary War. Lucy and Sedgwick had eight (8) children; Mary Ann, b. 9 Jan. 1792, m. Frederick Furpless on 9 July 1812; Nathan, b. 12 Mar. 1795; Lemuel, b. 28 Feb. 1798; m. (1) Mary Bell, 20 May 1821, (2) Francis (sic) Dennis of Georgetown, SC on Apr. 1857; James, b. 19 Sept. 1801; Christian Ann, b. 19 Dec. 1802; Seth, b. 15 Apr. 1805; Ruth, B. Jan. 1807; and my ancestor, Julia Ann, b. June 1809, m. William Raymond Sellers, 1 Feb. 1827.

Nathan might have been lost to posterity except for my researching the *Account of Duties on Imports at Port Brunswick* which I will refer to later on in this article.

On 3 June 1779, Nathan Crocker was listed as Captain of the Boat Felton, Providence, 2 swivels, 8 men for whom a Letter of Marque had been granted by the governor of Rhode Island. (*Civil and Military List of Rhode Island 1800-1850*; also *War of the Revolution. Letters of Marque by Gov-*

ernor of Rhode Island by Joseph Jencks Smith.) Nathan was acting in the capacity of a Revolutionary War Privateer; a member of the civilian navy that was created to assist against the very large British Navy.

In the 1782 census for Rhode Island, Nathan Crocker was shown with 2 males 0-15; 1 male 22-49; 1 female 0-15; 1 female 22-49. This fit his family as we knew it.

On Tuesday, June 28, 1785, the sloop *Good Friend*, Nathan Crocker, Master, entered the port of Brunswick from Rhode Island with a cargo for Francis Brice. (*Account of Duties on Imports at Port Brunswick* from the 8th of January 1785 to the Fourth of July.)

On 17 Oct. 1785, Nathan was master of the same ship for the same merchant only this time the ship was from Guadalupe with rum, molasses, brown sugar, and gin. He also carried 270 gallons of molasses for himself.

Nathan also commanded ships for merchants, Mallett & Mumford of NC. He sailed to such ports as Martinique, Guadalupe, St. Bartholomew, Eustasia and returned from London on one of his trips via Limington. The cargo leaving NC was nearly always naval stores. On the return trip the cargo was West India Rum, molasses, sugar and listed on the manifest was enumerated and unenumerated currency.

In 1789 Nathan purchased one-quarter of the brig Julian. The bill of sale for the brig Julian was proved in the New Hanover County, NC court on 11 April 1789. By January 1789 Nathan was in business with Daniel Mallet.

Recorded in Deed Book K, p. 239-41, New Hanover County, NC, is a deed from Nathan Crocker, the elder, to his sons, Nathan and Lemuel for "all that Lot of Land in the Town of Wilmington on the eastside of Front Street between Orange & Ann Streets..." 6 Oct. 1790.

It is stated in *Shipwrecks of South Carolina and Georgia* by E. Lee Spence, Doctor of Marine Histories, that:

"The vessel Wilmington, Captain Crocker (or Croker), bound from Savannah to Liverpool, was lost off Tybee, Georgia in October 1793."

In the Dept. of Archives, Suitland division, Washington, DC; in the Record Group, **RG36-**

Records of the Customs Service Outward Foreign Cargo Manifest, Savannah. Brig Wilmington, Sept. 25, 1793, Nathan Crocker is given as master of the ship and he signed the manifest "N. Crocker." The cargo was "staves and headings."

I quote from *Abstracts from Newspapers of Wilmington, North Carolina, 1765-1775, and 1788-1797*, Vol 1, p. 61, year 1795;

"(501) Wilmington, September 24. On Thursday the 3d instant, Captain N. Crocker, of the schooner William Henry of Wilmington, spoke with the schooner Illinois... all well."

Nathan's wife, Mary died after April 1820. In April 1820 she petitioned the Brunswick County Court for letters to administer the estate of her husband, Nathan "long since deceased." She was trying to obtain money that had been awarded to him by the U.S. Government as a result of his commanding a vessel for merchants from Charleston, SC, by the name of Daniel O'Hara and Sons. She had given her power of attorney to Daniel O'Hara to collect the money but had been informed that it must be accompanied by letters of administration on her husband's estate before the money could be given to her. She delayed taking this action until April 1820.

I was curious, since the award came from the government in "Washington City" and started to investigate the circumstances. My research led me to some interesting information and history.

Jay's treaty with England in 1794 gave their commercial interests equal rights in America with the French. France considered this an act of hostility and during the years of the French Revolution (1789-1799) many of our merchant ships, that entered French waters, were plundered, attacked and destroyed by privateers under suspicion that they carried British goods. There existed an undeclared war with America. As a result of this spoilage, America armed her merchant ships. After that, fewer ships were harmed. On 30 Sept. 1800 a Franco-American treaty was signed which ended the hostility. On April 30, 1803 a bargain was agreed upon whereby we purchased Louisiana (all the western territory, actually) from France for 60,000,000 francs (\$15,000,000) but 20,000,000 francs were kept by France for our government to pay those in America who had claims against

France for the spoilage during the French Revolution. This money was then awarded to those who had suffered under the hands of France. Among those who were awarded money was Daniel O'Hara for Daniel O'Hara and Sons for when Nathan had commanded a vessel. So, the money Mary Crooker was trying to obtain was due Nathan as a result of the *French Spoliation Award* and the money was being held in Washington City (now Washington, DC).

I found this information fascinating and an insight into the man, Nathan Crooker/Crocker.

Virginia Sellers Oliver's note: A member of the family of Crocker of Barnstable, Massachusetts, ie, Rowland Crocker, was in the Naval Stores Business in Wilmington, NC. He died in 1762 at which time letters of administration were issued to Cornelius Crocker in Barnstable, Mass. to administer the estate of Roland Crocker of Wilmington, NC. However, his brother Joseph went to NC to act as administrator and the inventory of his estate was dated in 1763. There are records to indicate that Cornelius and Joseph also sailed between Massachusetts and NC with Cornelius being owner of a ship named *Abigail* which was built in New England in 1764 and registered in Boston. Various members of the Crocker family of Barnstable were recorded as having been in the port of Brunswick, NC.

Virginia Sellers Oliver, G.G.R.S', is a former testing specialist with the Montgomery County Public Schools and graduated from Andrew Jackson University in Nashville, Tennessee. Virginia and her husband, Arville L. Oliver have two children, Caroline Ewing and Allen Oliver, DMin. She is a descendant of Francis Eaton. The family lives in Wheaton, Md.

Memorial Day, Monday, May 26, 2025 National Moment of Remembrance

The National Moment of Remembrance is an annual event when Americans pause for a minute of silence at 3 p.m. on Memorial Day. The 3 p.m. time was chosen because it is when many Americans are enjoying their freedoms on the national

holiday. It is intended to be a unifying act of remembrance for Americans of all ages. The National Moment of Remembrance Act became law in 2000.

There are many ways to observe the National Moment of Remembrance, both formally and informally. The moment of silence can be observed more formally at places such as a veterans' cemetery, park or picnic ground and can include playing "Taps," the military bugle call that reflects on the glory of those who have shed blood for us. A bell can also be rung at the beginning and end of the one minute of remembrance. If you are driving and unable to stop, you can turn on your headlights for a minute.

Wilmington National Cemetery

Just two years after the Civil War, the US Government purchased 5 acres of land from a local Wilmington resident to construct a national cemetery. Remains were moved from Fort Fisher and the Wilmington City Cemetery, including the remains of the 557 Union Troops, (including 55 known and 502 unidentified), who died during the siege of the city. These troops are buried in the northwest section of the northwest section of the cemetery, and are distinguishable by headstones marked "U.S.C.T." or "US. Col. Inf."

The cemetery is located on the eastern edge of downtown Wilmington on Market Street and contains roughly 6000 burial plots. A Veteran's family is advised to contact the cemetery during time of need to determine if a plot is available. A small drive borders the perimeter of the rectangular parcel of land, with a small grassy island in the center which proudly displays the American Flag. A brick wall that was constructed in the late 1870's creates a quiet border for the western side of the cemetery, while a two-story superintendent's lodge house, a 1934 structure which replaced the original 1879 brick home guards the main gate.

The Wilmington National Cemetery is open to the public daily from sunrise to sunset although visitors should be advised that there are no full-time staff on the property. Visitors are asked to be respectful at all time when at the cemetery as these are considered hallowed grounds and a tribute to our nation's fallen soldiers. All are welcome to walk through the grounds and pay their respects.

How Shrimp Boat Building Got Started in Varnamtown

Written by: Weston Lloyd Varnam, January 1982. Transcribed as written.

Roland Varnam, my grandfather came from Portland, Maine and went up the Cape Fear River to the Black River and married an Indian girl. They had six sons, Sam, Roley, Billy, Jim, John, and Dave. They lived on an island in the Cape Fear River for awhile. Then they moved to Howels Point, or somewhere in the area. My Grandfather died there and was buried there. When my father was a small boy about ten years old, and his brother Dave eight they walked to Southport from Howels Point to where their brother Sam was living at that time.

While he was there in Southport he went down to the waterfront where a man called Mr. Manuel had a boat shop. He went in where the man was working and he asked my father would he like to come live with him. My father did not have anyone to look out for him at this time so he moved in with Mr. Manuel at the age of ten. He then went to work cleaning out the boat shop and learning about building boats. Some time later they moved to Wilmington. Dad stayed with Mr. Manuel until he died, then he moved to Varnamtown and started to build shrimp boats. He built them for many years and it followed in the family. My father had five sons and all five sons are boat builders. My brother Johnny Varnam has a son, Billy Varnam, who owns a boat yard called The B-Var boat yard and also my brother Hoyal Varnam has a son and son in-law, Harold Varnam and Richard Heil who owns a boat yard. Clyde Varnam, my brother was the first to own a boat yard. N.C. Bellamy owns one which branched out of the Varnam boat building.

There is quite a difference in the boats my father built than in the ones we build now. A boat like they build today would have taken my father two years to build. The boats dad built were much smaller in size. The biggest about forty feet long, twelve feet wide, about three feet deep with a round hull. The cost of it was between three hundred to four hundred dollars. The material my father used to build them with was one by two, twelve feet long oak strips called ribs, which was the framing. He had to steam them so he could

bend them to make the shape of the boat. One inch material was used for planking and decking, and two by sixes for deck beams and floor timbers. He used number eight square nails and number eight round nails galvanized. The boat had a six inch keel put together with three-eighth rod iron cut up for fasten.

The materials that the boats are built out of now are, the framing is four by eight, deck beams are four by twelve, and planking is two inches thick. They are double planked inside, ice bins are fiber glassed, and the keel is twelve inches wide. The use number twenty, sixteen's, eight's, and sixes stainless steel nails. The bolts are twelve's, ten's, eight's, seven and one half's, and sixes, all by one half and three fourth's, and five-eighths rod iron.

Some have freezers, air conditioners, electric stoves, gas heat, two bath rooms, T.V., stereo radio, electric pilot, radar, loran with plotter, radio telephone, washing machine and dryer on them. The cost of a boat today runs from one hundred thousand to four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Tools my father used to build boats with were hand planes, drawing knife, hand saw, two foot rule, chisel, six inch clamp screws called C-clamps, hand brace, a few bits, level and a hacker, that was used first for chipping boxes in pines for turpentine, foot add, hatchet, and hammer, all worked by hand.

Tools used now are power saws, chain saws, electric sanders, power hammer, electric drills, C-clamps twelve and ten inches, beam clamps, electric planers, saber saws, radial arm saw, and many other carpenter tools.

Nets used for shrimping in the twenty's, thirties, and some of the forties.

At first flat nets were used altogether, size anywhere from fifteen feet to fifty five feet. The doors to spread the nets were made out of boards anywhere from twenty four inches to five feet long, the height from fourteen inches to thirty inches. They used leads on the nets to hold them down and corks to hold them open.

The boats had no wenches, the nets were all pulled in by hand. The catch was also pulled in by hand, unless they had too big of a catch, if so they had a bail net to bail the catch out of the net on to the boat. They had no try nets at all. Many of the

boats did not have a mast in them, all the work was done by hand.

Most of the boats had car motors for power. Some had Chrysler Marine engines in them. Sometimes if a man could afford it he would have a Lathrup or Palmer engine anywhere from twelve to forty horsepower.

Nets Used Now.

A variety of nets used now, Flats, Two Seams, Blooms, Mon-Goose, Texas Gib, Simi-Bloom, and many other ways. Nets are like a ladies dress, cut many different ways but basically all of them are nets in a funnel shape. Nets they use now are much larger in size, anywhere from forty to one-hundred feet long. Most boats pull two nets and some pull four. They pull the nets with steel towing cables and pull them in with a big wench.

The boats have big engines in them anywhere from two fifty to five hundred horsepower.

John Varnam born 1869 and died 1949. All of his sons are still living, Johnny Varnam, Hoyal Varnam, Clyde Varnam, Eddie Varnam, and Weston Varnam.

History Changes Names Over Time

Source: Wilmington StarNews. Written by a StarNews Staff Writer, January 29, 2005.

In the tiny coastal community of Varnamtown, you'll find all the trappings of small-town life – quiet streets, cozy houses, fishing boats. You'll also find – not surprisingly – plenty of Varnams. And, curiously enough, about as many Varnums.

So why the difference in the spelling? For newcomers and the just plain nosy, that question can breed all sorts of dramatic scenarios. Is it possible that by some weird coincidence two families with almost identical names settled in the same area, destined to share a co-existence steeped in confusion? Or is there a darker reason – perhaps a simmering family feud that exploded in a dramatic etymological split?

The family feud theory gets shot down almost immediately. The Varnums and Varnams I talked to were about as easy-going a group of folk as you'd ever want to meet. I couldn't imagine any of

them coming from stock that would settle differences at sword point. In fact, they are one big, happy family.

The difference of two little vowels has never been enough to spell trouble for this tight-knit clan whose ancestry in the United States can be traced back to a man named Ralph Farnum. Did I say Farnum? That's right. Farnum.

According to Lois Varnam Benton, who's been researching the family for more than two decades now, it didn't take very long after the 1635 arrival of Englishman Ralph Farnum in Maine for the family surname of Varnam, Varnum or in the case of some Florida-based descendents – Farnham. But we won't go there. Not today, anyway. Today we're sticking to Brunswick County, to save the writer from getting a headache.

Mrs. Benton says it was in Maine where the first documented name change took place, with the birth of Roland Varnum, whose father, Walton Stover Farnum changed the "F" to a "V" in his son's name for unknown reasons. Roland Varnum grew up to move to New Hanover County, Marry Betsy Eaton (of the Mayflower Eatons, Ms. Benton is proud to note) and move across the river to settle in Brunswick County.

So where do the different endings in Varnum and Varnam play into all this? Chalk it up to poor bookkeeping. Ms. Benton said census takers bear some of the blame, with some recording both versions of the family surname. But doctors and midwives also bear some of responsibility for the dual spellings.

O'Neal Varnam, 67, can tell you all about that. Although born to Varnums, his name was listed on his birth certificate with alternate spelling. That has persisted with his own children. Mr. Varnam says by the time he realized that some of his little Varnams were – on paper – little Varnums, Social Security numbers had already been assigned. So he and his wife, Virginia, just left the names as they were. He said it seemed like too much of a hassle to change the name when the overall family considers the names interchangeable anyway.

So that's the story of how the Varnam and Varnum names came to coexist in Brunswick County. And while the mystery may be ended, some questions about the name still linger, but those are reserved for family members. "Is that with a 'u' or an 'a'?" laughs Virginia Varnam, "you get that ques-

tion 10 times a week.”

BCHS Meeting Minutes February 10, 2025

The Brunswick County Historical Society meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by the President, James Green. There were 15 members and 5 visitors in attendance.

The President led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

The President extended a welcome to all in attendance.

There were no minutes from the November, 2024 meeting.

The Treasurer reported a bank balance of \$10,051.96.

The President read a letter from Jared Harris inviting members to visit the Daniel Russell House in Winnabow, NC. He and his wife are renovating the house for occupancy.

The President read an article on the renovation of the Historic Reaves Chapel A.M.E. Church in Navassa, NC. Carol Jutte made a motion to donate \$2,000.00 to the restoration project. Seconded by Dave Lewis.

Announcements of upcoming events that are listed in the February, 2025 Newsletter. Ann Bokelman announced the Strawberry/Wine event on April 27, 2025 sponsored by The Old Bridge Preservation Society of Sunset Beach, NC.

The program was given by J.D. Lewis who spoke on the topic “The Revolutionary War in

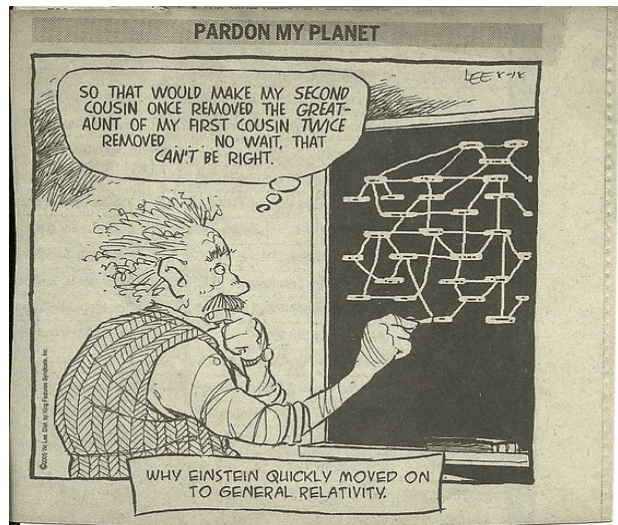
Our Neck of the Woods.” Using his website, www.carolana.com, he showed battles, officers, and results in Brunswick and New Hanover Counties in North Carolina and Horry County, SC.

Motion to adjourn.

Members present: Jimmy Green, Arty Phelps, Gwen Causey, Brian Clemmons, Carol Jutte, Glenn Kye, Ann Bokelman, Harvard Holden, Hulaine Holden, Dave Lewis, Judy Holden, David Holden, Richard Hollenbeck, Cindy Carter, J.D. Lewis.

Visitors Present: Michael Evans, Susan & David Scitz, Irene & Rudy Tucker

Gwen Causey, Acting Secretary



Membership Application ... Invite a Friend to Join Brunswick County Historical Society

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail _____

New: _____ Renewal _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Receive *Newsletter* by email: Y N

Annual Dues: Individual \$15 Life Membership \$150

Mail this form with your check to: 5152 New Britton LP Rd., Ash, NC 28420

Please submit any articles or information for future newsletters to Dave Lewis.

Email: davelewis@atmc.net

CALENDER OF EVENTS

BCHS Meetings: February 10, 2025
May 12, 2025
August 11, 2025
November 10, 2025



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