

# Fort Defiance

## Chronicle

Spring Issue

April 2021

**Fort Defiance**

**P.O. Box 686**

**Lenoir, NC  
28645**

**828-758-1671**

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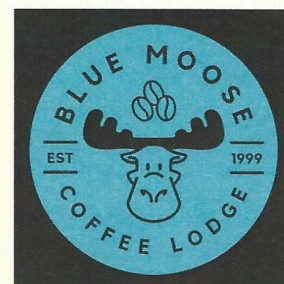
## William Lenoir's 270th Birthday Celebration

**Saturday May 8th, 2021**



**Carolina Thunder Mugs  
Brushy Mountain Buddies  
Pat and Kay Crouch  
Love Like This  
AJ Benett - Colonial Fiddle**

Please join us in celebrating William Lenoir's 270th birthday Saturday May 8th 11am- 6pm. There will be music, food trucks, and a one day only showing of original textiles from the Lenoir family. Admission will be \$10 per adult and \$5 per child for children 6-15 children 5 and under are free and members are free (membership card will have to be shown for free admission). Admission includes a tour of the house, a one day showing of original textiles, and enjoying the music on the grounds for the day. Some picnic tables will be available for use on the grounds, but tables are limited. We strongly encourage you to bring your own blanket or seating if planning to stay for a long period of time. Covid Guidelines will be observed. Follow us on Facebook for event updates.



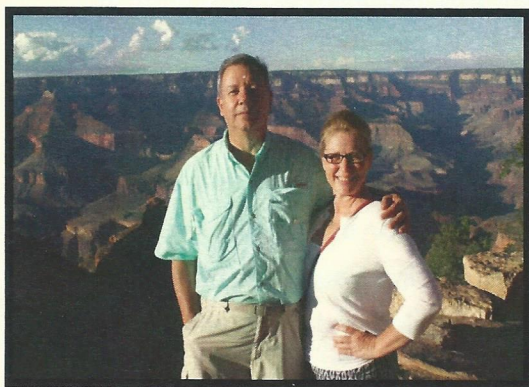
## Board of Directors



Sandra Watts

My name is Sandra Watts, and I was born in Caldwell County in the old Blackwelder Hospital. My father worked at Bernhardt Furniture and my mother worked at the Blue Bell. I have always been a resident of Wilkes County, living in the community of Boomer. I live on a small farm that has been in my family for four generations. I am retired after 38 years in the banking industry ending my career as branch manager of SunTrust Bank in North Wilkesboro. In addition to being a volunteer and acting President of the Board for Fort Defiance, I am on the Board of the Boomer Volunteer Fire Department where I hold the office of Treasurer, I am the team leader for the Boomer Fire Corps., and member of the medical responder team. I also serve as a board member of the North Carolina Genealogical Society. My hobbies include quilting, cross stitching and chasing my family tree. My significant other is Steve McCord who is retired from the North Carolina Highway Patrol and together we have three dogs and two birds.

One Sunday, I took my parents for a drive on Hwy 268 and we soon found ourselves at the Colonial Christmas event that was held annually at the Fort. Not long after that I met Becky Forester and for the past 20 years, I have been a volunteer in some capacity. My first event as a docent was a Colonial Christmas event. It was the second weekend in December. It was a cold and cloudy day and reenactors were camping on the grounds cooking a pig on a spit. The grounds were quite except for the chatter of the reenactors. Pretty soon, one of them took out their bag pipes and played "Amazing Grace." I felt sure that was as close to 1792 as I was ever going to be. I immediately fell in love with the story of William Lenoir and his accomplishments.



Ike Forester

My name is Ike Forester. I was born and still reside in Wilkes County, NC and have been associated with Fort Defiance, it seems in some capacity, all of my life. I am a Certified Public Accountant, graduating from NC State University and own a firm in North Wilkesboro where I have been practicing for forty-three years. I am a fourth-great-grandson of General William Lenoir.

I became heavily involved with the Fort when I began serving on the Board of Directors in 1999. I am a past president of the Board and currently serve as the Fort's treasurer. My greatest accomplishment however was being allowed to be the former Executive Director's husband. I'm sure most of you knew Becky. Over the years mine and Becky's love of history and genealogy led to us acquiring thousands of documents, journals, and letters most of which pertain to the Lenoir family. We were always searching through these documents to uncover new information to incorporate into the tours. I still get calls and letters from Lenoir family members around the country searching for family information.

In addition to volunteering at the Fort my free time is best spent fly-fishing or in the woods searching for wild mushroom for the dinner table.

## The Plantation At Fort Defiance

By Kelly Coffey

Although a tour of Fort Defiance focuses on the house, many visitors have questions about the plantation. How many acres did the plantation cover? What crops did Lenoir grow? Some knowledge about the plantation lands, as well as Lenoir's agricultural practices in managing these lands, can aid in an interpretation of the entire Fort Defiance site.

### Washington and Lenoir

The Fort Defiance house was constructed during George Washington's administration, and, like many Americans of his time, William Lenoir greatly admired our first president. Volunteers at Fort Defiance are familiar with the Mt. Vernon painting in the house, as well as the framed Washington autograph that Lenoir acquired and considered one of his most valuable possessions. Although Washington and Lenoir never met, their lives exhibit a number of parallels and corresponding events, especially concerning the management of their plantations. Both men served in the Revolutionary War, became political leaders after the War, and were honored for their public service by having a city named after them. But perhaps the greatest similarity between the two men had to do with their attitude and approach toward their plantations. Each utilized his lands for more than a single cash crop by experimenting with a variety of crops and related businesses. Unlike many of their farming neighbors, Lenoir and Washington were also entrepreneurs who explored various means of adding value to the crops they grew.

### Land Speculation and Tenant Farming

Both William Lenoir and George Washington began their careers as surveyors and land speculators. Because Lenoir arrived in northwestern North Carolina a few years before widespread settlement of the area, he was able to acquire thousands of untouched acres (10,250 acres in 1780), eventually selling much of it to settlers who would develop the land themselves for agriculture. Before he sold land, however, Lenoir frequently would rent a land parcel to a tenant in order to prepare the land for farming, and thus increase its value. His records frequently refer to contracts whereby tenants were required to clear the land, erect a fence, build a cabin, plant fruit trees, and pay him a portion of the crop (usually corn) for each acre planted. Consequently, as long as the tenant lived on the property, Lenoir had a steady source of income from the land. If, however, the tenant left the area and moved west (which happened quite often), Lenoir could sell the land at a considerable profit because the tenant had made the required improvements, thus increasing the value of the land. In this manner, Lenoir received agricultural income from hundreds of acres, without being directly involved in all the crop production himself.

The fact that Lenoir owned thousands of acres of speculative lands, and rented many acres to tenants, obscures the size of the Fort Defiance plantation itself (i.e. the acreage where Lenoir was directly involved in its cultivation). The acreage of the original tract on which the Fort Defiance house was built might be a clue to the plantation's size. When Lenoir pur-

chased the tract of land that included the old fort, it consisted of two hundred acres. Although not conclusive, two hundred acres in agricultural production seems to fit with Lenoir's descriptions of his farming activities.

Another possible way to gauge the size of the Fort Defiance plantation is to look at the number of slaves. The assumption can be made that as more land was cultivated, more slaves would be needed. In 1780 Lenoir owned three slaves and acquired an additional one by 1784. By 1790, 12 slaves lived and work at Fort Defiance. This number increased to 25, eight years later. By 1820s, Lenoir was becoming elderly and apparently began to diminish the scale of his various enterprises. He distributed land to his children and reduced the number of his slaves to 17. When Lenoir's son, Thomas, returned to manage Fort Defiance, the plantation enterprises seem to rebound, as records show that the number of slaves increased to 52 in 1831. In summary, an analysis of the slave numbers implies that the size of the Fort Defiance plantation probably varied over the years.

### Tobacco

Throughout the colonial period and into the early national era, tobacco was a major cash crop in the Chesapeake area and the Carolinas. Like George Washington and other counterparts in the east, Lenoir grew a substantial crop of tobacco on his plantation. Fayetteville is frequently mentioned in his records as the market for the crop- being traded there for salt, molasses, and household goods. Lenoir apparently had several market options for tobacco. A trip to Richmond Virginia on another matter provided him a chance to sell his tobacco there as well.



Tobacco production had drawbacks. The plant drained the soil of nutrients, requiring planters to frequently prepare fresh ground in order to keep yields at the same levels as previous years. In addition, dependence on a single crop was a gamble, as market conditions and prices fluctuated. Both Washington and Lenoir recognized these facts and began to diversify their plantations. Such an approach was unusual at the time, as most planters were unwilling to risk investing in a different crop. Tobacco could be a gamble, but its familiarity made it seem less risky than an unknown crop. Washington, however, soon minimized his tobacco production; and by 1822, a listing of the major crops at Fort Defiance did not include tobacco.

### Corn in Many Forms

As Washington and Lenoir began to diversify their agricultural production, Washington emphasized wheat production, while Lenoir found corn to be a lucrative crop.

Corn is usually perceived as a subsistence crop- grown to feed the family, slaves, and livestock. Nevertheless the grain also proved to be a significant source of income for Lenoir. Like tobacco, Lenoir could use corn as currency to buy other goods. Corn grown at Fort Defiance was traded for goods, both locally as well as in Fayetteville and Hillsborough. A considerable amount of corn was sold to his neighbors. In 1807 a drought reduced crop yields in the Yadkin Valley. Shrader notes, "in order to encourage his neighbors to save their own crops and to keep them from pestering him about buying his corn, William circulated a rumor that he might sell corn for the high price of \$2 per bushel. Few buyers came to Fort Defiance that summer to buy produce, but those but those who did were surprised to find that Lenoir only charged \$1 per bushel."

"Visitors to the modern -day Mt. Vernon historical site will find a reconstructed distillery, built to interpret another one of George Washington's endeavors- whiskey production. William Lenoir also discovered that his corn was more lucrative as a value-added product, i.e., when it was transformed into meal or whiskey. In 1783, Lenoir constructed a gristmill to process his corn crop into meal (he also built a sawmill at the same time). He turned the mill into a business as well, milling his neighbors' corn for a portion of the finished product. A few years later, in 1786, Lenoir found yet another use for his corn crop. At the end of the Revolution, the British were not inclined to accommodate American interests. Americans were unable to trade in the British West Indies, and thus, were unable to import rum- a popular drink at the time. Consequently, whiskey, made from corn or rye, became popular among the former colonists. Like Washington, Lenoir took advantage of the trade situation, constructed his own distillery, and soon was selling corn in liquid form. The production of corn & whiskey literally fed another agricultural enterprise- hogs. Corn mash, a byproduct of whiskey-making, was readily consumed by hogs and proved to be an excellent means of fattening the live stock before slaughter.



## Fruits

Brandy, a distilled product of fruit, also proved to be profitable. Fruit production was an important component of the Fort Defiance plantation, both for the fruit itself and for its use in Lenoir's liquor production. Peaches are mentioned in connection with brandy more than any other fruit, probably because the fruit could be grown so easily. The peach was an Old -World fruit that grew prolifically when introduced to the Americas. Orchards planted with hundreds of trees would produce bountiful yields with little care in the eighteenth century. The quality of the peaches was of no concern as they were often fed to livestock or crushed to extract the juice. Apple production, on the other hand, required more effort to produce a useful product. Lenoir experimented with different varieties. His records mention two - 1) "Father Abraham" a popular variety of his time that is still cultivated today; and 2) "General's Apple," probably a local seedling variety that Lenoir named himself, after receiving it from General Joseph McDowell. Lenoir frequently required his tenants to plant peach and apples or-

chards as a term of their tenancy. One agreement specified that the tenant would plant "100 apple trees and a peach orchard."

## Horses

Horsereading was a popular 18th-century sport in the South, and both Washington and Lenoir found racehorses to be a profitable part of their farming enterprises. Lenoir received many inquiries whenever he announced that his thoroughbred, Young Whirligig, was available for stud. Some equestrians in the area would apparently go to any length to own a Lenoir horse. In 1786, Lenoir's bay horse disappeared. His neighbors reported seeing a young man from another community with it. Lenoir followed several leads, crossed the Blue Ridge into present-day Watauga County, found the thief, and discovered that the man had stolen, not only the bay horse, but also a sorrel horse that Lenoir had not even realized was missing. A plantation, by definition, implies the production of a single crop. Fort Defiance, however, cannot be defined by a single crop, and William Lenoir was not a typical planter. Seeing opportunities beyond conventional tobacco production, he expanded his plantation to include a variety of crops and livestock for the market. In addition to the enterprises described above, Lenoir's records also show a substantial amount of wheat, rye, oats, and flax being grown at Fort Defiance. Although William Lenoir probably had little knowledge of George Washington's plantation management strategy, the fact that the two men shared a similar approach is noteworthy. Both aimed, not only to diversify their crops and livestock, but also to increase their income by processing their raw commodities into more finished products. Had William Lenoir realized how much he had in common with Washington, his admiration for the man, no doubt, would have been even greater.



*The source material for this article come primarily from Richard Shrader's UNC-Chapel Hill Ph. D thesis "William Lenoir, 1751-1839." Information on Washington's plantation was drawn from George Washington: Pioneer Farmer, by Alan & Donna Jean Fusonie (both of whom, incidentally, graduated from Lenoir Rhyne College).*



## March—Women's History Month Laura Lenoir Norwood



Rock of Ages by Laura Lenoir Norwood

On June 18, 1839, in Hillsborough, NC, Laura Leah Caroline Lenoir, daughter of Col. Thomas Lenoir, wife of Joseph Caldwell Norwood, gave birth to her second child and second daughter. During the economic downturn of the mid-1840's, Mr. Norwood's mercantile business failed, and the family moved to Caldwell County, settling on property in the city of Lenoir provided by Mrs. Norwood's father. They were among the founders of St. James' Episcopal Church in Lenoir.

With the impending outbreak of the war between the states, Laura organized the women of county to sew uniforms and provide provisions for the men of the county who were volunteering for the war. She was chosen to present the Hibriten Guards flag, which was made from blue silk and painted with the State Seal of NC.

Laura began her study of art with Sarah Rankin, daughter of Rev. Jesse Rankin, a local Presbyterian minister. Miss Rankin directed her attention to painting on canvas, for which, according to her obituary, "she developed a rare talent and a passionate devotion." She attended St. Mary's School in Raleigh and was later a teacher there. She also attended Cooper Institute and The Academy of Design in New York. She spent a year at the Arts schools of Berlin and Dresden.

In 1870 she became instrumental in bringing to Lenoir that celebrated artist-priest, the Rev. Johannes A. Oertel under whom she studied. Much of Rev. Oertel's artwork can be seen at St. James' Episcopal Church in Lenoir. At various times she had charge of the Art Departments of Judson Institute of Alabama, the Episcopal In-

stitute of Columbia, Tennessee, and the Southern Institute of Buena Vista, Virginia. The last three and one-half decades of her life saw her assume the head of the art department at Davenport College, as well as serving as a mission teacher for poor children of all races at the Chapel of Peace in Whitnel. She was an early supporter of the Vespers Reading Club and the Pioneer Library, one of the first circulating libraries in this part of North Carolina.

In 1908 her health began to fail, and she retired from her position at Davenport College. In 1915, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and she died the following summer on July 20.

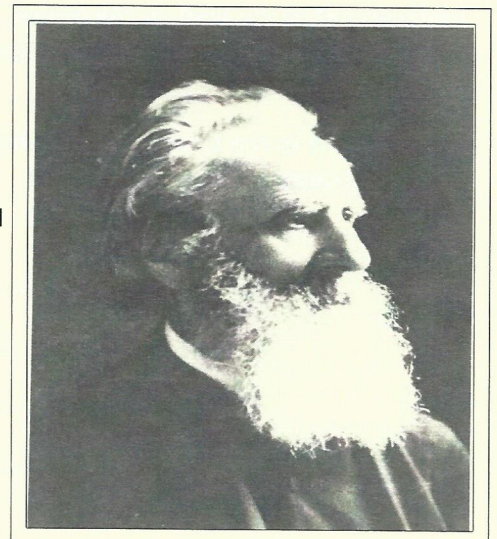
Although she is called an artist, none of her original work is known to survive. On display at Fort Defiance is a copy she made of Oertel's classic painting "Rock of Ages." About her artistic output, her obituary has the following to say: "So much of her time was given to imparting her art that she found little leisure for doing original work of her own. One picture, however, 'The Happy Valley,' the property of Captain Edward Jones of Lenoir, has been greatly admired."

Of her personality, her obituary is quoted: "Miss Norwood was one of those cheery, bright natures that brought sunshine wherever she came. Her intelligence, her conversational powers, and her gentle and wholesome sense of humor made her a delightful companion, and she was a welcomed and honored guest in every circle. Among the 'older set' of her acquaintances, there is none to take her place."

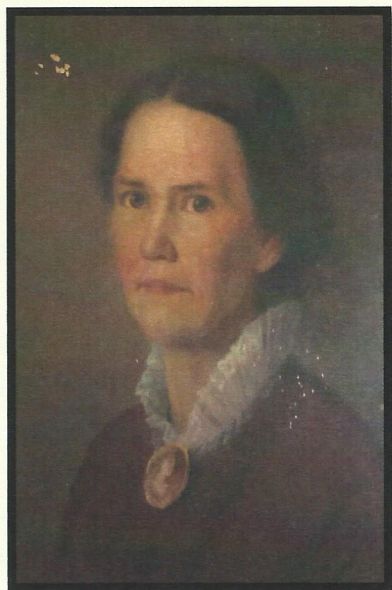
*John O. Hawkins*

*Based on research done by Jeff Stepp, Allan Poe, and Miss Norwood's obituary, in the Lenoir News, dated July 25, 1916.*

Johannes A. Oertel



## March—Women's History Month Sarah Joyce Lenoir



**Sarah Joyce Lenoir**  
**(Aunt Sade) (1821-1899)**

Daughter of Thomas Lenoir & Selina Avery. She never married and lived at Fort Defiance her entire adult life. Born 3/15/1821, died 1/21/1899. She was omitted from the genealogy tables in Happy Valley as she had no children; however, I doubt anyone was more responsible for the success and happiness of the Lenoir family during her life. She was an honor graduate of Salem College, the Moravian college "for females" in Winston-Salem, NC. She was the recipient of most of the letters from brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews which have been preserved in the Lenoir collections. She was a confidante of the whole family. It was Aunt Sade who knew which seeds from the garden to save for next year's crop and how to preserve them. She baby-sat when the other adults went visiting. She was with her sister Mary Ann Lenoir Gwyn in Elkin, NC when her babies were born and at the Fort when Rufus & Sarah's were born. She was nurse, gardener and peace maker, unassuming and efficient and generous. Nieces borrowed her jewelry for parties. She died from complications after a fall down the stairs at Fort Defiance at age 77 from which she never fully recovered. She was "Aunt" to all who knew her whether family or friend. She is buried in the family cemetery at Fort Defiance.

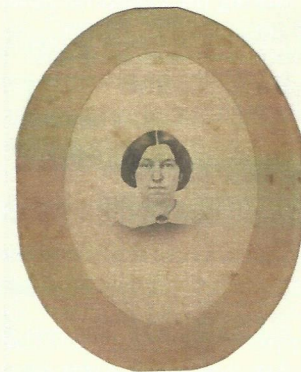
## Board Highlights

The board met on February 17, 2021

- ◆ Acknowledgement was given to the receipt of a grant from the Hogan Foundation toward the new roof of the picnic shelter.
- ◆ Preparations to begin in the celebration of William Lenoir's 270th birthday Saturday, May 8th.
- ◆ Campaign has begun to find funding to help with the replacement of the roof on the house. A grant request was mailed to the Marion Stedman Covington Foundation.
- ◆ Maintenance to the driveway is pending and upgrades to the restroom facilities are needed.

## Receipts From Cornelia Lenoir's

**Cornerlia Isabella Christian was born January 15, 1827 in Augusta County Virginia. She married Walter Waightstill Lenoir on June 10, 1856 and is buried at Fort Defiance.**



### Sponge Cake

10 eggs, 1lb. Of sugar, half the receipt of eggs in flour, season to your taste. Beat the sugar and yolks together, the whites into a stiff froth, then add them to the yolks. Stir the flour in slowly but beat no more.

### Nothings ( Meringues)

Whites of 2 eggs, 1 eggshell full of sugar, one of milk, a piece of butter the size of a hickory nut, flour enough to make a dough. Roll them and fry in lard.

### Tea Cake

1 egg, 1 cup of sugar, 1/2 cup of butter, one cup of sour milk or cream, a heaping teaspoon of cream of tartar, 1 teaspoon of soda put in the milk. Flour to make it like pound cake batter. Bake.

# FRIENDS OF FORT DEFIANCE

The following members have joined for 2021:

## Patriot/Individual

Wanda Prince  
Oscar Dobereiner

## Lieutenant/Supporter

Stephen Rauchfuss

## Militia/Family

John Hawkins  
Nell Fisher & Bill Karr  
R Kelly Coffey

## Colonel/Sponsor

## Captain/Patron

Mary Kincaid  
Dr. John W. & Hanna Thuss  
Joe & Frances Delk  
Lucy F. McCarl  
Chuck Forester In Honor of Ike Forester  
Samuel & Sandra Ramsey  
Jerry & Millie Brooks  
David B Smith

## General/ Benefactor

Building Laboratory, LLC

Interested in becoming a Friend of Fort Defiance? Memberships are available for individuals, families, and corporations who are looking to support local history. Each level of membership comes with perks when visiting Fort Defiance. For example, free admission when visiting on regular days of operation, discounts for special event admission, discounts in the gift shop and discounts on ground rentals. Each member will receive a membership card and a copy of the bi-monthly newsletter via mail or email.

Anyone wanting to become a member should send dues in payment to Fort Defiance, P. O. Box 686, Lenoir, NC 28645.

Contact Kristen Robbins at [fortdefiance@gmail.com](mailto:fortdefiance@gmail.com)  
or 828-758-1671.

-----Detach here-----

\_\_\_\_\_ Patriot/Individual    \$20-39

\_\_\_\_\_ Militia/Family                    \$40-74

Family is defined as two parents and their dependent children.

\_\_\_\_\_ Lieutenant/Supporter            \$75-99

\_\_\_\_\_ Captain/Patron            \$100-499

\_\_\_\_\_ Colonel/Sponsor            \$500-999

\_\_\_\_\_ General/Benefactor \$1000-up

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

# **Please Come Visit Soon!**

Fort Defiance is located past the former Patterson School on Hwy 268.

## **Hours of Operation**

April-October Thursday - Saturday 10 AM-4 PM  
Sunday 1 PM - 4 PM

November-March Saturday & Sunday 10 AM - 4 PM

## **Admission**

\$7 per Adult

\$5 for children (Ages 6 -15)

**Like us on Facebook and Follow us on Instagram.**

To schedule a group of 10 or more, please call for an appointment. Please join us for the 270th Birthday Celebration for William Lenoir on Saturday May 8th, 2021.



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P.O. Box 686  
Lenoir, NC 28645