

# Fort Defiance

## Chronicle

Fall Issue

October 2021

### Fort Defiance

P.O. Box 686

Lenoir, NC 28645

828-758-1671

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### North Carolina Sassenach Tours

During the months of July and August, Fort Defiance was treated for several weekends to the presence of the North Carolina Sassenach Tours company from West Jefferson. Lead by Beth Pittman and Carolyn Baker and inspired by the Diana Gabaldon's Outlander series of novels the tour travels the Yadkin River valley from Wilkes up into Boone following the adventures of the protagonists of the book series. Fort Defiance has been added to the tour as it is the foremost 18th century home in the area and represents the frontier flavor of the novels' time frame. Fort Defiance was able to drum up a bit more of the 18th century by having reenactors on hand to meet and greet several of the tours when they came through. The tour will include Fort Defiance again next season. The next Diana Gabaldon novel in the series is to be set during the events of the Battle of Kings Mountain. This should make Fort Defiance even more central to the tour's goal and the Fort will do everything possible to roll out the carpet for the Sassenach tours next year. To find more information about the tours the website is <http://ncsassenachtours.com/>



**Horseless Carriages Meet Colonial Elegance**

Late in the day on September 11<sup>th</sup> Fort Defiance was graced by a visit from the Horseless Carriage club. The club features vehicles that predate 1916. The club was founded in 1937 and its goal is the preservation and promotion of these unique antique vehicles. The club made special arrangements to visit Fort Defiance and showed up at 3pm and stayed for about two hours. There were around thirty vehicles and almost 80 participants involved. Tours of the house were conducted from the front and back porches and after learning about the house and its historic inhabitants the club members had a walkthrough of the house and grounds. Board members who attended the event were Doug Davis, Bob Kogut, Monty Minton and Stephen Rauchfuss. Volunteers were John Hawkins, and Donna Minton. Thank you all for making it possible for this to have gone so smoothly.



## The dedication of Mildred McDowell Jones



**Mildred McDowell Jones  
1905-1993**

One can only speculate what the future of Fort Defiance would have been if Mildred McDowell Jones had not responded to a vision she had after attending a meeting of the Caldwell County Historical Society in 1964. The subject of the program was preservation. After returning to her home in Happy Valley, Jones said she saw a vision of a preserved Fort Defiance and she began to act on her vision.

Knowing that the premises were still occupied by Andrew and Faunie Lenoir, Mildred took it upon herself to see if they would be willing to sell the house which was fast falling into dilapidation. After some bargaining, they agreed to sell the building, five acres of land, and most of the furnishing for \$15,000. Joe J. Steel, a Lenoir banker, served as fund-raiser and Jones said he did a superior job. Then the task of preserving began.

Elected chairperson of the project, Jones began to campaign like a woman possessed. She did newspaper and radio interviews in Lenoir and North Wilkesboro. She gave programs for civic clubs and any other organization that would let her. She tells of speaking to a DAR group in Morganton as well as interested people in Boone and Blowing Rock. She recalls waiting in the cold to tour groups or individuals who wanted to see what was going on. She would not stop. "I knew it was now or never. I spoke to all the people who wanted me to and to a whole lot who didn't," she quipped. "I wrote and recorded jingles such as 'Lenoir's our city, /Caldwell's our County. / Please give us money/of your bounty.'" She credits State Senator Dennis Cook and Earl Tate, State Representative with securing \$20,000 in state money which was added to a \$5,000 contribution from the Richardson Foundation. It was estimated that the preservation would cost \$35,000 to \$40,000.

What some of the groups didn't know was that Jones was in constant pain, and she would go to her home after speaking, where

she would stay in bed until she had to go again. Eventually, her health failed to the point that she went to California where she stayed for a year. When she returned, she remained in Caldwell Memorial Hospital for three months, and eventually she had surgery at Duke. Her doctors told her she would never walk again, but they didn't reckon with her spunk and determination.

While Jones was disabled, Margaret Harper, who was vice-chairman, assumed a leadership role. Harper did a photographic presentation which called attention to the project, and she began to write articles for the newspaper chronicling the progress. These articles became the basis for a book, *Fort Defiance and the General*. In 1967, a dinner-dance at the old Lenoir Country Club given in honor of Jones and Harper served as a fund-raiser. What started as preservation turned into restoration, and the completed project cost approximately ten times the estimated amount.

In 1971, when it seems that the project had reached a financial impasse. Fort Defiance, Inc. was formed. Jones was made a life-time board member, a position she still proudly notes. Bill Lamparter was the first president, and Jones quickly commends his excellent leadership. It was a proud day on September 23, 1978, when Jones, Harper, and other dignitaries cut the ribbon at the dedication of the restored Fort Defiance.

Jones is a life-time member of the Caldwell County Historical Society and the only honorary life-time member of the Caldwell County Genealogical Society. In the past few years, health has limited her activities; however, she still holds an interest in history, St. James Episcopal Church, and her friends and neighbors. She is called the patron saint of the 26h Re-enactment, and with a twinkler in her eye, she says, "I'm certainly not a saint and not much of a patron." In addition, she has donated a bell to the Chapel of Rest, another preserved landmark which has much meaning to her. Among her many prized possessions is a letter she received from Mrs. Ed Allen complimenting her on her one-woman campaign which resulted in securing the \$20,000 from the state government.

"I hope my vision of a preserved Fort Defiance as history will lead to many interesting things for future generations. I hope that the future generations can see some of my memories of the Happy Valley of my childhood which I felt was virtually a Fairyland. When I returned to the Valley in the 1940's so many of the beautiful homes had fallen to the ravages of time and fire. The memory served as a catalyst for the restoration of Fort Defiance."

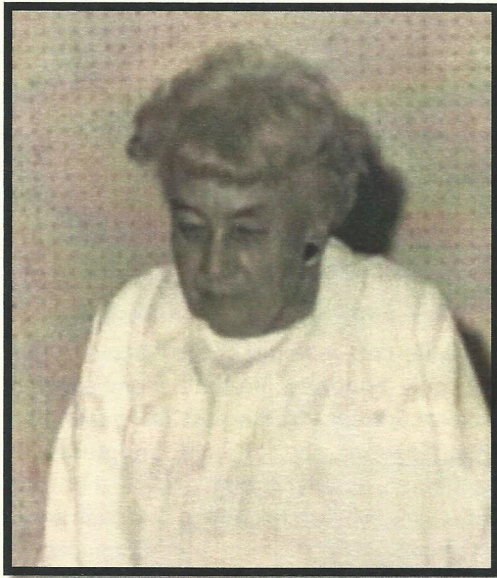
Margaret Harper was quoted as saying: "Once Fort Defiance is restored to its ancient state, Mildred Jones and I will feel free to 'pass away' as suits our private convenience. Harper passed away in 1984, and Mildred comments on her own "private convenience" as follows:

(Continued on page 4)

"I first saw the light of day in Caldwell County at Gables Inn, the home of my great-great-grandfather, Catlett Jones. I will end my stay on earth in the cemetery of the Chapel of Rest which is located on the estate of Edmund Jones, brother of Catlett Jones, and the ancestor of my late husband. Happy Valley is both my Alpha and my Omega."

Did others see the vision of a preserved Fort Defiance before Mildred McDowell Jones did but failed to act on it? If Jones had not acted on her vision, would the vision have been given to another? Would anyone else have worked as diligently and untiringly to make the vision a reality? One can only speculate.

[John O. Hawkins, originally published on June 25, 1992, *Lenoir News Topic*.]



**Margaret Harper**  
1895-1984

### Miss Marg: A Dynamo for Fort Defiance

Vivacious 81-year-old Margaret Harper of Lenoir may well be the prototype perpetual motion machine.

"Staying in the hospital and laying about can tax your strength," she said recently after a hospital stint for heart trouble.

She would appear to have little in common with the once-crumbling, kudzu-covered 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion with which she has become inextricably bound.

Miss Marg, as friends call her, has devoted more than 10 years to rescuing Fort Defiance from the kudzu menace that beset the one-gracious post-Revolutionary War home of General William Lenoir.

When the project began in 1964, Miss Marg help start both money raising and restoration plans.

She says she's a "perpetual vice-president" of the project.

"I've been at it so long I can't imagine it'll ever be done—but I'm sure it will," she said.

The Caldwell Historical Society bought Fort Defiance from the Lenoir family in 1965, and began to restore and rebuild, inside

and out. "This house had been changed tremendously inside—they wanted it put back precisely as it was," Miss Marg said.

And silver-haired Miss Harper is doing her best to assure restoration goes on. Her publicity articles about the project for local newspapers prompted the chairman of Fort Defiance Inc. to suggest she write a book. She did.

The publication last month of "Fort Defiance and General Lenoir" was the culmination of three years of writing and editing. Profits from book sales at \$4 a copy, will go for Fort Defiance work.

Many of the book's photographs were taken by Miss Marg, who confesses she "always hankered to do photography." In this art she is a relative novice.

The visual arts, however, are Miss Marg's forte.

A Lenoir native, she finished high school there and then attended a women's college in Greensboro and the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia, where she studied visual illustration. She free-lanced as a commercial artist in New York City until 1939, when her mother's ill health brought her back to Lenoir. She never left again.

The Harper family had a prominent role in settling the area that is now Lenoir. Miss Marg's great-grandfather, the Rev. Jesse Rankin, was the first regular minister at the town's First Presbyterian Church, and Miss Marg still lives in the house Rankin bought when he first came to Lenoir. Her father established the first furniture store in Lenoir, which, she says, is "a furniture-business town."

Miss Marg's penchant for history is evident in the "memory room" she helps run at First Presbyterian, in which she and her family have always belonged. The room houses a display of church history including early photographs and stained-glass windows from one of the original buildings.

Soon Miss Marg will be writing again, publicizing the need for money to complete Fort Defiance restoration by next summer and open it to visitors.

She claims her family's deep roots in Lenoir have little to do with her interest in the General Lenoir home.

"I just got involved," she said. "When you get a lion by the tail, you just don't turn him loose."

Written by Laurie Watson.

Published in *The Charlotte Observer*  
on January 16, 1977.

## Origins of the Lenoir Family

As most descendants are now aware, the surname Lenoir is of French origin, and means literally "the black", a term formerly applied to any individual with dark hair and complexion, much as we use the adjective "dark". It was probably first assumed as a personal surname by a remote medieval ancestor in the old French province of Brittany, once a separate dukedom in the Middle Ages, lying just across the English Channel from the south coast of England. The people of Brittany, called Bretons, are of a racial origin different from that of the inhabitants of the rest of France, and speak a French dialect that is almost a separate language, derived in part from Celtic origins and akin to the language spoken by the Welsh and formerly by the Cornish. Because Brittany has a long coastline, many Bretons have been mariners or fishermen for centuries. The largest city of the province is the important seaport of Nantes, and it was with this city and its neighborhood that our Lenoir ancestors were associated, as indicated by the legend which accompanies the family coat-of arms, "Le Noir de Nantes".

In the Middle Ages the Lenoirs seem to have belonged to the minor nobility of Brittany, owning small estates, and holding various public offices. At the Reformation some of them embraced the new Protestant faith and became Huguenots, the term applied to the French Calvinists of the time. In the religious troubles of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century a large number of the Huguenots were driven from France to find refuge in some of the Protestant nations of Europe, especially Switzerland, the Netherlands, and England, and in the English colonies in America.

The Breton ancestry of the Lenoirs of the southern United States is certain, but the generation-by-generation line of descent has not yet been firmly proven, although research into the matter continues. On the basis of evidence so far found, it appears virtually certain that we descend from a Lenoir family in the vicinity of Nantes that produced several Huguenot clergymen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, members of which fled to Switzerland, the Netherlands, and America. The Swiss branch of family has for centuries preserved the tradition that their ancestor who first settled in Switzerland had a brother who migrated to America, and that brother was almost certainly Isaac Lenoir, a Huguenot who with his wife arrived in New York in 1696, when their oldest son Isaac was baptized in, the Huguenot church of that city. Shortly after, Isaac and family settled in Jamaica on Long Island, later moving to Philadelphia and perhaps to New Jersey, where he acquired extensive lands. He is described at various times as a merchant and as an innkeeper, and in addition was a ship-owner, which fits with the tradition among the southern Lenoirs that their immigrant ancestor perished at sea in his own ship. He was almost certainly the father of our first proven ancestor, Thomas Lenoir, who was probably born about 1700 and in early life also followed the sea, in the ancient Breton tradition. The pursuit of a mariner's profession eventually led him to the port of Yorktown in Virginia where he found a wife in the person of Mourning Crawley, daughter of Robert Crawley, a well-to-do planter in York County, near Williamsburg, then the capital of colonial Virginia. Mourning's grandfather, the first Robert Crawley, had come to Virginia about 1670 from Ireland, had accumulated a valuable estate, and became one of the early vestrymen of Bruton parish, whose handsome parish church at Williamsburg is now the most noted colonial church surviving in the United States.

After marriage Thomas Lenoir abandoned the sea and became a tobacco planter for the remainder of his life. In the course of marriage of 35 years, he and Mourning and their family resided in several locations in the colony of Virginia, eventually reaching Brunswick County, where their youngest child William was born in 1751. About 1760 they moved to the Tar River in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, where Thomas died in 1765, survived by his widow and ten children, who soon became scattered in a wide variety of different locations. Mourning survived her husband for more than a quarter of a century, dying at an advanced age in the home of her daughter Mrs. Leah Norwood in Franklin County, North Carolina.

From Thomas Lenoir and his wife, Mourning Crawley, are descended the Lenoir families of the southern states, as well as many families of other names. Of their four daughters, Ann married Robert Westmoreland and died in Spartanburg County, South Carolina, at the age of 92; Betty married John Latimer and eventually settled in Hancock County, Georgia; Leah married Robert Whitaker and John Norwood, and died in Franklin County, North Carolina at the age of 94; while Mary, the youngest, married William Perry and lived in eastern North Carolina. Many of the descendants of these lines have been traced, forming an important and worthy part of the Lenoir family.

Of the six boys of Thomas and Mourning, one died unmarried; the remaining five married and raised families. Robert, the eldest, remained in Brunswick County, Virginia; Thomas Jr., Isaac and John settled in South Carolina, in the valley of the Wateree River below Camden; while William, the youngest, remained in North Carolina, where he had a distinguished public career and founded the Fort Defiance branch of the family.

From Virginia and the Carolinas, the grandchildren of the first Thomas Lenoir soon spread throughout the South into every Southern state east of the Mississippi, and a little later beyond that great river into Missouri, Louisiana, and Texas. Subsequent generations, especially after the Civil War, migrated to still other locations, and by the 1870's extended to California. A century later the ever-increasing number of descendants had become scattered throughout the nation and the world and even into outer space, in the person of Bill Lenoir the astronaut, of the Tennessee branch of the Fort Defiance family.

It would be a fair assessment of the descendants of the first Thomas Lenoir to say that, on the whole, they have displayed, generation after generation, a remarkable degree of intelligence, talent, and phenomenal success in both public and private life. Few families have maintained more consistently successful a reputation for worth and excellence.

**Written by Allan Lenoir Poe**

**1926-2006**

Allan Lenoir Poe, was a descendant of General William Lenoir, who had an avid interest in the history of the area and the genealogy of not only his but all local families. Stories are told that as a child he would interview older people in not only Caldwell but also surrounding counties, making copious notes of any information they had. An avid student of the official records, he was often able to use their notes to separate truth from legend.

Allan lived a very private life, avoiding the spotlight. Despite his guarded privacy, he was a tremendous help to many people, especially those who had a serious love for history and genealogy. His preferred means of communication was to type letters; after he could no longer use the typewriter, he would hand write page upon page using yellow legal-size pads.

He was a charter member of the Caldwell County Historical Society, and an honorary lifetime member of the Caldwell County Genealogical Society.

### BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

- The Board of Directors met August 10th at Fort Defiance. Members in attendance were, Bob Kogut, Steven Rauchfuss, Monty Minton, Ike Forester, Tina Triplett, Nell Fisher, Sandra Watts and Doug Davis. Site director, Jonathan Baird, was present.
- Neil Fisher reported on the visit by the NC Forestry Service to measure the American Beech tree and to give recommendations for the ongoing care of the tree.
- Neil Fisher gave an update to the moving of the Fort Defiance Historical Marker to a better location.
- Monte Minton, Steven Rauchfuss and Conrad Boudreau picked up the corner cabinet from the family of Gwyn Hunt Lenoir Moore.
- Some funds matching the Covington Foundation grant have been received.
- Hogan Foundation grant pending, and grant from the Bernhardt Foundation to make restroom improvements has been received.
- Mike Bernhardt made a donation to help with repairs to the driveway and has completed putting the singles on the ends of the picnic shelter.
- Tina Triplett finished the inventory of the books and reports six books missing.
- Neil Fisher and Sandra Watts met with the staff at the Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce to determine avenues of advertising through different websites.
- Ike Forester discussed the newspaper article concerning funding for possible restoration opportunities
- Preparations are being made to host the "Living History Days" for Caldwell County School students as well as a colonial event open to the public on September 25th and 26th.

### WISH LIST

1. Past Perfect Inventory Software, approximately \$2,000.
2. Office and Housekeeping supplies, i.e. printers ink for HP Office Jet Pro 8600 Premium, business envelopes, paper, file folders, cleaning supplies, toilet tissue, paper towels, soap, etc.
3. Volunteers—regular and occasional—docents, administrative skills as well as special skills such as grounds care, building repair, or cleaning.
5. Bottled water or soft drinks and snacks for volunteers.
6. Acid free boxes and acid free tissue paper.
7. Volunteer to help with website.

# FRIENDS OF FORT DEFIANCE

The following members have joined for 2021:

## Patriot/Individual

Wanda Prince  
Oscar Dobereiner  
Cheryl Hill Sanborn  
Lana H. Davidson  
Virginia Fox

## Militia/Family

John Hawkins  
Nell Fisher & Bill Karr  
R Kelly Coffey  
Betty Buss  
Jeanette A. Jacob

## Lieutenant

Stephen Rauchfuss

## Captain/Patron

Mary Kincaid  
Dr. John W. & Hanna Thuss  
Joe & Frances Delk  
Lucy F. McCarl  
Samuel & Sandra Ramsey  
Jerry & Millie Brooks  
David B Smith  
Jeff and Rita Joines  
Chuck Forester (In honor of Ike Forester)  
James Pennell  
Monty & Brenda Combs  
Catherine Lenoir Brown Simpson (In loving memory of Carol Jean Sellers Brown )

Tina Triplett (in Memory of Ned Triplett)  
Kim Browning (in Memory of Beck Phillips Forester)  
Barbara Freiman  
Steve McCord  
Cheryl & Darrell Keener  
Jean and Steve Branch  
Anne and T. G. Daniel.

## Colonel/ Sponsor

## General/ Benefactor

Building Labatory LLC

## Matching Funds Contributors

Steve and Jean Branch  
Eliza Bishop  
Liza Plaster  
Monte & Brenda Combs  
Joe & Francis Delk  
Brenda Bernhardt

## Specified Donations

Bernhardt Foundation (Restrooms)  
Mike Bernhardt (Driveway)  
Hogan Foundation (Driveway)  
Covington Foundation (Roof)

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 Fort Defiance at [fortdefiance@gmail.com](mailto:fortdefiance@gmail.com) or call 828-458-1671.

-----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 \_\_\_\_\_

# **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.



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