

Fort Defiance

Chronicle

Summer Issue

June 2022

Fort Defiance
P.O. Box 686
Lenoir, NC 28645
828-758-1671

Board Of Directors

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President

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Ike Forester

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Newsletter

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John Hawkins

Sandra Watts

Kelly Coffey

Barbara Freiman



Fort Defiance offers a large outdoor space for an affordable fee to large groups looking for a place to have family reunions, birthday parties, weddings and picnics. It's also a great day trip for senior groups and school groups. Picnic tables are available for use under the picnic shelter and public restrooms are available.

For more information, contact Fort Defiance at 828-758-1671 or email

fortdefiancenc@gmail.com to discuss.



Lunch & Learn Programs

June 11, 2022 at 12:00 pm

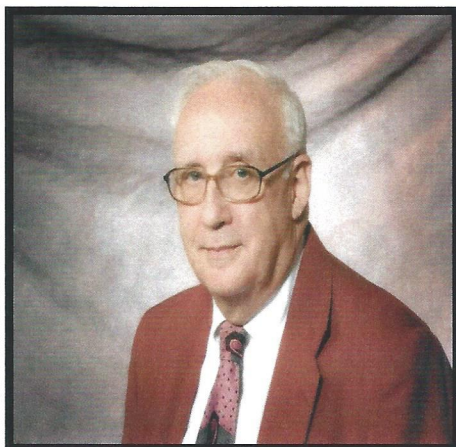
William Caldwell, Park Guide at the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and with the National Park Service

William Caldwell, will be giving a program entitled **“That Heathen Race: Backcountry Growth and Cultural Distinction.”** The settlements along the Carolina backcountry and spilling over the Blue Ridge Mountains were a unique culture formed through conflict and competition. Where did these settlers come from, what brought them to the frontiers, and how would they impact the course of the American Revolution? An information table will be available from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm with **the program beginning at 12:00 pm.**



Garrett Jackson, June 25, 2022 at 12:00 pm

Using replica instruments to help the audience understand the toils and excitement the early settlers had with surveying the land, Garrett will show how a basic understanding of geometry is all one needed to know in order to create boundary lines and divide up the land. Garrett will also discuss survey jobs taken on by William Lenoir and how the occupation was one of the most lucrative professions of Colonial and Federal periods.



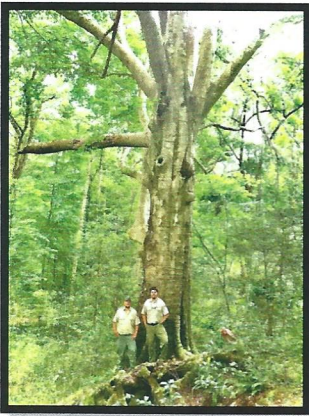
John Hawkins, July 9, 2022 at 12:00 pm

John Hawkins will present **“Down in the Valley”**. How did Happy Valley get its name? What is the difference between Happy Valley and Yadkin Valley? Long-time Valley resident, Eliza Bishop, will be present also to share her knowledge.

Living Treasures Thrive at Fort Defiance

by Julie Mullis

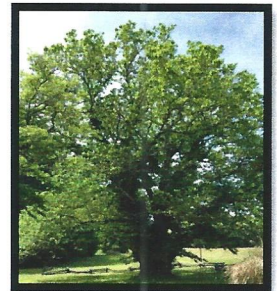
Fort Defiance is often touted as a rare and exciting historic site to visit because over 90%—around 300—of the artifacts displayed in the house are original to the family with many belonging to General William and Ann Lenoir and their children who began building the house in 1788. Less known but just as intriguing are the living artifacts that adorn the property surrounding the house. William Lenoir and his descendants who called Fort Defiance home, like Thomas Jefferson, dabbled in horticulture. William Lenoir procured during his travels then planted many of the trees still thriving on the property, but the most spectacular one would have been old and grand well before he and his family chose to build their home beside the former site of Fort Defiance, the stockade erected to protect the settlers from attacks by the Cherokee and Catawba native people.



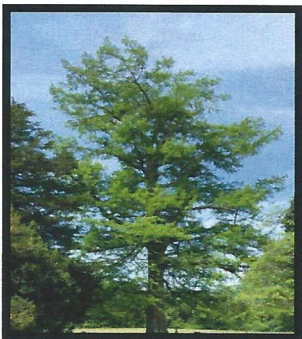
At the back left corner of the yard is the champion American beech tree of North Carolina that was likely mature and majestic when William Lenoir and his growing family made their home near it. An age estimate made by the US Forest Service puts it at around 550-570 years old. It grows on a steep slope that cuts down from the yard to Fort Creek below, so over the years, the dirt around its trunk-sized roots has washed away, creating a maze of openings below the tree that could easily serve as hobbit homes. Ike Forester, great-great grandson of William Lenoir's grandson Rufus Theodore Lenoir, Sr. and his wife Sarah Lenora Gwyn Lenoir (who was called Sallie), remembers playing in the root tunnels when he visited the house as a child. The trunk of this smooth-barked tree is 109 feet tall with a crown spread of 92 feet and a trunk circumference of right under 16 feet. That is large enough for three adults to link arms around and hug as they balance on the roots. The branches are as thick as the lower trunks of the mature offspring beech trees nearby.

The smoothness of the bark is often interrupted with carved initials that have turned into scars with their age. Many of the initials contain the last letter L for Lenoir though surprisingly, there is no sign of RTL or TEDDY, for Teddy Lenoir, who was known as the most mischievous of Rufus and Sallie's grandsons. Teddy, or Rufus Theodore Lenoir, III, was one of two sons of Rufus T. Lenoir, Jr. and Clyde Turnmire Lenoir, who were the fourth generation of Lenoir's to live at the Fort. Teddy as a child was fond of writing his name and initials in the books and carving his name on family heirloom furniture handed down from the General's generation. These marks can still be seen on some of the artifacts displayed in the house. The tree in the last decade has shown more and more signs of aging including mushrooms growing from some roots and a hollowed, decaying trunk and branches, but it still bears a canopy of soft leaves that turn beige and rustle in the tree's spreading canopy throughout winter.

There are several trees on the estate that William Lenoir likely planted, including a sprawling Italian chestnut tree that still bears viable nuts. Younger chestnut trees have sprouted from the nuts that germinated, so prickly chestnuts are plentiful throughout the yard in the fall.



There is also a bald cypress tree he likely brought up from the swamplands of Eastern NC during one of his many trips to New Bern, Fayetteville, or Tarboro to serve in the state senate. It too bears seeds. Though it is not planted in a swampy area, the tree is still surrounded by pointy knees. Knees are a special adaptation where parts of the roots grow above ground in cone-like protrusions that allow the trees growing in CO2-poor water and soils to still get the air they need.



In the yard between the picnic shelter and the Italian chestnut tree is a thicket of tall, thick boxwoods that like all boxwoods, smell faintly of dog urine. Interspersed within and around them are walnut and hickory trees. This area was called the Grove or nut grove in the many descriptions of the yard by Lenoir family members, and likely the rock-hard hickory nuts were gathered and cracked to harvest the tasty nut meat inside. The chestnuts were likely left in their green hulls until the sticky black tar-like goo below the hulls dried, then these nuts were also cracked to get the rich-flavored black walnuts.

Looking across the field from the Italian chestnut tree is a thick stand of bamboo. Bamboo thickets can live for centuries, spreading through rhizomes in the ground but producing strong and straight canes useful as stakes and poles on a farm. This patch likely served generations of Lenoir's not only in providing farm tools, but by offering solace. Entering a bamboo stand is like entering another dimension where everything runs in vertical lines with soft filtered light and quietness as footsteps are masked by the layers of soft golden brown fallen leaves on the ground.

Like the bamboo, the Eastern cedar trees and boxwoods found in the family cemetery stay green year around and were likely planted there on purpose. It was customary to plant evergreen trees such as cedars, hollies, and boxwoods beside new graves to represent the hope of everlasting life for the deceased. Eastern cedar trees rarely grow naturally above 3000 feet in elevation, so in the higher Blue Ridge mountains, stumbling across a patch of cedar trees is often a sign of being in a long-forgotten cemetery.

Many women who lived in the house were known for their love of flower gardening. During the first generation in the house, that would have been Ann and Mira, the daughter who lived there her entire life instead of marrying. Ann was reputed to be especially fond of white roses. During the second generation, Thomas' wife Louisa was not only a gardener but also well known for her skills with herbal and folk remedies. Their youngest daughter Sarah, fondly known as Aunt Sade, like Mira, chose not to marry and lived her life at the Fort. She also enjoyed gardening and treating family with herbal treatments. During the third generation, the family gardener was Rufus's wife Sallie as well as Aunt Sade.



Sarah Gwyn Lenoir
1833-1914

Sallie Lenoir was a prolific writer. In a poetic essay titled "Fort Defiance" published in 1903, she describes the flower bedecked walkway that once led from the center of the south-facing piazza of the house to the "secluded nook" past the Grove which was known as "The Lovers' Retreat". According to Ike Forester, there was a huge hemlock tree surrounded by a brick circular walkway which was enclosed by huge tree-sized boxwoods, giving the nook privacy.

Sallie mentions that around the entrance to the nook were roses and lilac bushes, and in the early part of the day were the "clean, pure faces of the morning-glories which run amok over everything". Flowers growing along the walkway from the house to the secluded nook included, "the old spicy pinks" as well as sweet Williams, tulips, hyacinths, hollyhocks, jump-up Johnnies, blue cornflowers, sweet peas, poppies, and annunciation lilies.

Though the walkway with such a profusion of flowers is long gone, there are now persimmon trees scattered around the property that bear branches of cherry-sized orange fruit each fall. Though these trees are fairly young, there were likely persimmon trees in the same area for generations as they are native trees prized for their fruit once frost sweetens the bitterness of the pulp and skin that makes your mouth feel like it has turned inside out. Once turned sweet, they are sought after for eating raw and well as for making puddings, sweetening cakes, and fermenting into beer.

Fruit trees were important to William Lenoir and to the next three generation of Lenoir's that followed. According to Richard Alexander Shrader's UNC-Chapel Hill 1970 dissertation, *William Lenoir, 1751-1839*, General Lenoir grafted branches from apple trees with fine-tasting apples onto young trees he planted and named them for their parent trees or their original owners. One was named "Father Abraham" after the tree it was grafted from and another was called, "General's Apple" since the original tree belonged to General Joseph McDowell. He made brandy from apples and peaches and whiskey from rye and corn grown on his land in his stills. He agreed to rent one of his stills to a neighbor to make "good peach brandy" with the peaches he grew in exchange for a third of the brandy from the harvest. Being right after the American Revolutionary War, trade with the British Isles, including for rum, was still prohibited, Shrader explains, so North Carolinians were encouraged to distill whiskey and brandy locally. Later William Lenoir and other anti-Federalists would rally against Alexander Hamilton's federal excise taxes, especially the one that taxed the sale of distilled alcohol since that was one of the few sources of hard currency in rural areas of the South.



William Lenoir's grandson Rufus, Sr. also enjoyed grafting local heirloom varieties of apples in an orchard he planted northwest of the house. In 1879, the orchard contained 60 bearing apple trees on seven acres of land. Varieties included "Specked Clarks", "Little Tender Cheese", "Hard Sweet Apple", "Pear Apple", "Grand Mother Cheese", "Queen", and "White Winter Sweet". One of his apple trees had four separate varieties of apples grafted onto it. His recipe for grafting wax included English rosin, beeswax, and tallow. He also planted pear, plum, apricot, crabapple, and quince trees.

Between 1785 and his death in 1839, William Lenoir was often the largest landowner in western NC. He owned at times over 11,000 acres of land throughout Wilkes County and stretching beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains all the way north to the banks of the Duck River in TN. He rented much of his land holdings to neighbors, requiring them to plant corn, wheat, rye, and peach trees, fence in the land, and build a cabin. They paid him part of their yield. He also cared about the conservation and improvement of the land they rented from him. Part of the contract specified that the tenants were to preserve the timber and other natural resources and that they were to plant rye that could be plowed back into the soil to improve it.

The house, fondly called Fort Defiance, that William Lenoir had built and the land he acquired became the legacy to six more generations of Lenoir's. Each generation cared for it in ways that best suited the demands of the time. His grandson and Thomas's oldest son, William Avery, bought more western land, including a 1450 acre tract that included Beech Mountain and the majestic Grandfather Mountain, both now in Avery County, NC., as reported by Maurice York in his 1979 UNC Chapel Hill dissertation, *The Many Faces of Fort Defiance*. William's three brothers, Thomas, Walter, and Rufus, acquired this land when William died in 1861. As he grew infirm from old age and war injuries, Walter took on the task of selling the land containing Grandfather Mountain to a group of investors of the Linville Land Improvement Company that included Samuel T. Kelsey and Donald and Hugh MacCrae. In a letter to Kelsey, his love for the mountain land and desire to conserve the aesthetic allure was apparent. He proposed a lower price for the land if they would allow him to play a part in its management. He suggested keeping the land pristine without timbering the slopes or building on the mountain itself except for a single road that would allow visitors to enjoy its views. Though the mountain was timbered after his death, many of his other suggestions have been met. Today, approximately 2700 acres are managed by the NC State Park system, 1300 are protected by the Nature Conservancy, and 720 are managed as an educational conservation campus attraction by the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

Likewise, the house and the grounds immediately surrounding the Lenoir homesite are preserved and interpreted by the nonprofit organization Fort Defiance, Inc. Not only do visitors get a chance to learn about the rich legacy, engaging stories, and well-preserved artifacts of the Lenoir family, they can sit below the shade and serenity of trees and shrubs that have stood there from the beginning of this family's stories—and that matured steadily as the stories slowly unfolded

Improvements Continue



Before

Much needed repairs are now completed to the driveway of Fort Defiance. A big thank you to the Hogan Family Foundation and a private donation from Mike Bernhardt. The Hogan Family Foundation also funded the new gate that was installed in 2020. Faw Grading did the repair work.



After



Still time To Signup

Fort Defiance is hosting a Charity Golf Tournament at the Lenoir Golf Club on June 17, 2022. Platinum Package (4 person) \$180.00, Gold Package (3 person) \$140.00, Silver Package (2 person) \$95.00 and Bronze Package (1 person) \$50.00. Prizes for closest to the pin and hole-in-one provided by The Hickory Crawdads.

Any one interested in playing or sponsoring a hole,
contact Fort Defiance
at 828-758-1671 or fortdefiancenc@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Like all non-profit entities, volunteers are a vital part of the day to day activities. Activities for volunteers include giving tours of the house, working with social media, updating the website, researching assigned topics, assisting at events, or working on the grounds. Any talent or skill can be utilized.

For more information in becoming a Fort Defiance volunteer, contact Sandra Watts or Eugene Trantham at 828-758-1671 or email fortdefiancenc@gmail.com.

Board Highlights

- ◆ The board of directors met on May 11, 2022. Board members in attendance were: Ike Forester, Monty Minton, Stephen Rauchfuss, Doug Davis, Tina Triplett, Nell Fisher, Bill Karr and Sandra Watts.
- ◆ Site Director Eugene Trantham gave a update on the golf tournament that is being held on June 17th. More players and hole sponsors are needed. Eugene also reported on a couple of fundraisers that he has planned for next year.
- ◆ Tina Triplett reported that the textile inventory is now complete and she would soon start working on the contents of the house. She is also looking into resupplying items for purchase in the Visitor Center.
- ◆ Sandra Watts reported that paint for the summer kitchen has been purchased and the project has started. Also repairs to the driveway have been completed. One grant request has been submitted with two others on the horizon. The "Living History Days" are in the planning stage for the Caldwell County School students for the last week in September. Contact will need to be made with the different schools to determine the number of students that will participate. Boy Scout Grayson Peel wants to do improvements to the storage on the back of the Visitor Center as a Eagle Scout project.
- ◆ Monty Minton stated that the heating and air in the Visitor Center needs to be replaced. He also reported that the siding for the house should be here soon. The board will need to look for someone that can put it on the house. Paint for the house has been donated and should be applied by a professional painter. Monty also reported that a quote for new shingles for the roof was outside the present budget and the search continues.
- ◆ Nell Fisher reported that markers have been purchased to identify the tree and plants on the grounds. She will contact the NC Forester Service for assistance in identifying the trees.
- ◆ Bill Karr had a friend come out to the site to digitize a map of Walter Lenoir's Property in Watauga County. The map was donated by Steven Sudderth and due to its brittle condition it was difficult to use.

FRIENDS OF FORT DEFIANCE

Your support is vitally important to the operation of Fort Defiance. THANK YOU

The following members have joined for 2022:

Patriot/Individual

Karen Barlow-Goodsell (in memory of Becky Forester)
Oscar L. Doberiner
Wanda Prince

Militia/Family

Betty Buss
Dottie Darsie
Lisa Holsclaw (In memory of revolutionary ancestor Colonel Isaac Lee)

Lieutenant

Captain/Patron

Steven Rauchfuss & Lynn Hall (In memory of Hal and Joyce Hall and Art and Mary Rauchfuss)
Monty & Brenda Combs
Neil D & Jo T. Beach
Chuck Forester
Eric & Pamela Helton
Steve McCord
John O. Hawkins
Tina Triplett
Sandra Watts
Jerry & Millie Brooks

Colonel/ Sponsor

Samuel L. & Sandra B. Ramsey
Monte & Donna Minton
James Pennell

General/ Benefactor

Building Lab. LLC
Barbara Freiman
C. Yorke Lawson

Matching Funds Contributors

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

Specified Donations

Covington Foundation (Roof)
Stevens Family Foundation (Roof)

Please become a "Friend of Fort Defiance". Memberships are available for individuals, families, and corporations who are looking to support local history and tourism. 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.

Fort Defiance, Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit entity. Anyone wanting to become a member of the "Friends of Fort Defiance" should send a check made payable to Fort Defiance, Inc. and mail it along with the membership form to P. O. Box 686, Lenoir, NC 28645.

Contact Fort Defiance at fortdefiancenc@gmail.com or call 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: _____ Email _____

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.



Presorted Standard
Postage & Fees Paid
Fort Defiance Inc.
Permit No. 28, 28645

Fort Defiance
P.O. Box 686
Lenoir, NC 28645