



Fort Defiance *Chronicle*



Summer Issue

June 2025

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

fortdefiancenc@gmail.com

historicfortdefiancenc.org

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Tar Heel Historical Dance Troop



The Tar Heel Historical Dance Troop will be at Fort Defiance on June 14, 2025, beginning at 12:30. This group has been dancing together for about two years. The group originally called "The Lost Arts Club," came together to learn some historical skills like knitting and sewing, however, it became more of a get together. They then became acquainted with Hart's Square, a collection of 19th century log cabins located in Hickory, NC. The "Lost Arts Club" then became the Tar Heel Historian's Club. They did English Country dancing and "absolutely loved it." Since that time, they have become both a 4-H Club and Tar Heel Club and are sponsored by Historic Burke Foundation and meets in Lenoir. They are between 8 and 18 years of age and have approximately 30 members.

Bring a bagged lunch and a chair and join us for this **FREE** event.

Picnic tables are available but limited. Tours of the historic house will be available for the usual fee of \$7.00 for adults, children 6-14 \$5.00 and children 5 and under are free.



Molly Switzer ASU Internship At Fort Defiance

Molly is a current master's student at Appalachian State University studying Public History. After spending the last few years in Boone, Molly has developed a strong connection to Appalachia and loves both the scenery and the communities that surround the area. After spending years visiting historic sites and cultivating interests within the field, Molly is excited to begin her internship at Fort Defiance and further develop her abilities and skills in the field!



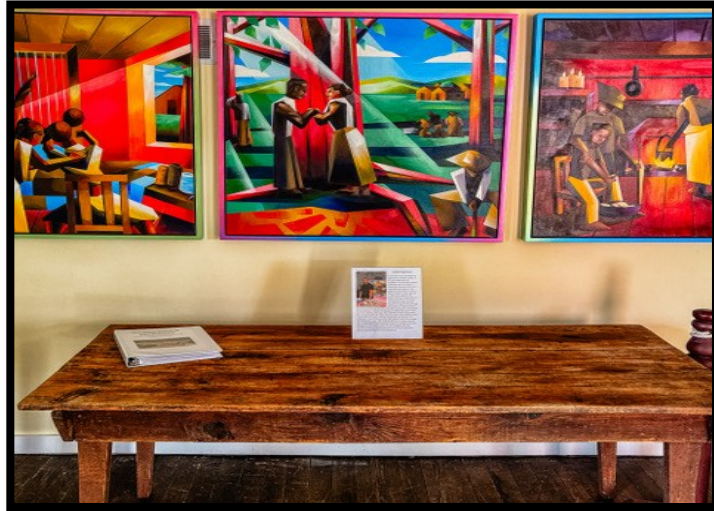
The Lenoir Rangers Returned



The Lenoir Rangers returned on March 22 for a two-day living history event. Exhibits and demonstrations were available throughout the day such as 18th-century fishing kit, drilling, black powder demonstrations, pine needle basking making and others. Due to the burning band no demonstrations requiring an open flame could take place. Vendors such as Dragon Fly Traders from Spruce Pine, NC and Tanawha Trading Post, had 18th-century reproduction items, and reenactment supplies available to sell to the public. Some members of the Lenoir Rangers came from Florida and West Virginia. October event is in the planning stages.



Artist Installation and Presentation



Photos provided by Monty Combs

A new art installation commemorating the enslaved individuals who lived and worked at Fort Defiance was unveiled during a public dedication ceremony on Saturday, March 29th at 11:00 AM. The installation, created by artist Israel Solomon, a descendant of one of the plantations enslaved workers, serves as a testament to the profound impact these individuals had on the economic foundation of both the Lenoir family and Caldwell County. This multifaceted approach offers visitors a nuanced understanding of the enslaved experience at Fort Defiance, within the broader Appalachian region, and along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, offering a more comprehensive and inclusive narrative of the site and trail's history.

The artwork will stand as a permanent memorial in the exhibit room dedicated to telling the stories of the enslaved people who worked the land. The installation recognizes resilience and tradition while incorporating the surrounding landscape.

Artist Statement

It is an honor to be awarded the opportunity to create a body of work that celebrates the ancestors of Fort Defiance. When presented with this project, I wanted to ensure the work that I produced was based on the realities of what slavery was for Black America, but also wanted to reflect the resilience and beauty of black culture which is a theme that many of my works are inspired by. Being made aware that I have family heritage and roots from this plantation, I know that family, togetherness, and faith were a part of the people of Fort Defiance. I believe this because I understand the love that our family shares this day. These themes are portrayed within the work along with the reality of sorrow, pain and heartbreak that comes from our history. Families being split up and sold, over-exhaustion, and mourning loved ones gone to soon are coupled with mentorship, faith, and preservice. It is my hope that this work is a reminder of the challenges that our ancestors survived through, but also honors their lives, the struggles that they overcame, and their descendants that live on to this day and continue to break barriers while prospering.

About the Artist

Israel Solomon is a visual artist based in Indianapolis, Indiana, whose unique style has often been compared to cubism. He earned his Masters degree in art education from Marian University in 2019 and has collaborated with organizations including the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Major League Soccer, and Starbucks. His work has been acquired by the Indiana State Museum, Eskenazi Hospital, and IU McKinley Law School.

The Unmarked Burials of the Enslaved at Fort Defiance

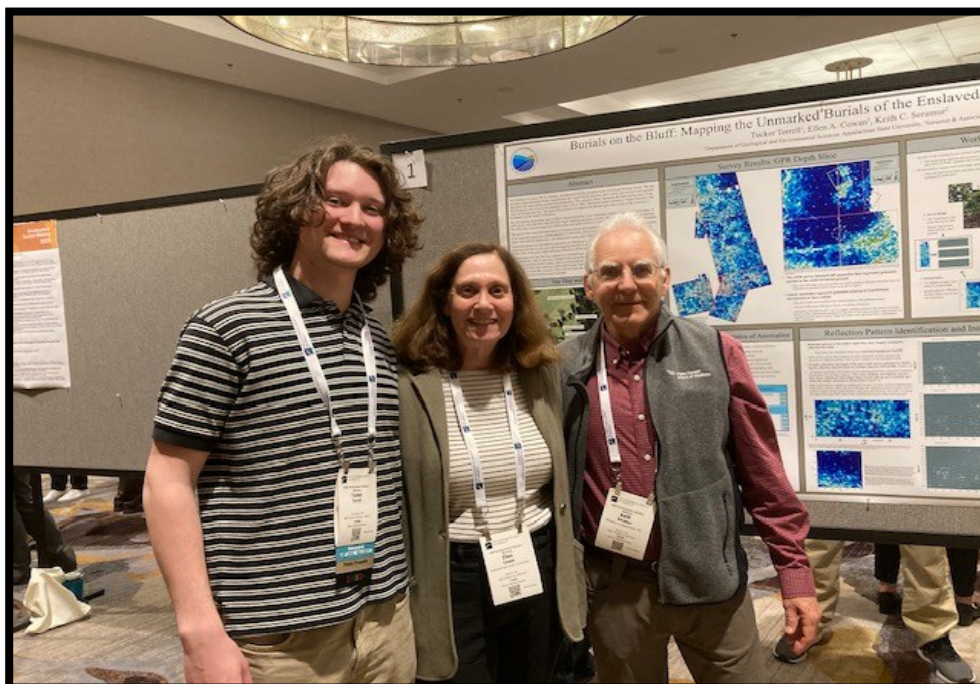
In 2024, Tucker Terrell, a senior at Appalachian State University majoring in Environmental Geology, under the mentorship of Dr. Ellen Cowen and Keith Seramur, GP of the Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences at Appalachian State University, began working on his senior thesis. His goal was to map unmarked burials and the outbuildings that housed enslaved individuals using ground-penetrating radar (GPR). This method creates images of the subsurface by analyzing variations in soil properties, making GPR the gold-standard technique for locating potential unmarked burials.

While historical records do not specify the number of burials at Fort Defiance, the site's history suggests that as many as forty enslaved people may have lived there at any time. High mortality rates associated with childbirth were common, indicating that the burial site may contain numerous graves, ranging from infants to adults.

The GPR survey detected 105 anomalies representing potential burials in the enslaved burial grounds, which are organized into five groups across the wooded area. The predominant burial orientation is East-West, although three burials outside the main groups tend North-South. Rectangular reflection patterns in the shallow depth slices were essential for locating the burial groups.

Tucker presented a poster that can be seen in the picture below that will be on permanent display at the Fort. This poster along with Tucker's research was presented at the Southeastern Section of the Geological Society of America conference in Harrisonburg, VA. Because of his research Tucker was a winner at the undergraduate Research Day at Appalachian. He received a nice certificate and a frame for his diploma as a prize. It is nice to see this recognition both for him and for the history preserved at Fort Defiance.

Tucker's research uncovered crucial aspects of Fort Defiance's history that have been overlooked. By identifying the burial grounds, his work will allow descendants of the enslaved population to reconnect with their heritage. Tucker will graduate in May.



Tucker Terrell, Dr. Ellen Cowen and Keith Seramur, PG



84-46 U. S. Navy Yard, S. Co., 6 January 1945.
U. S. S. LENOIR, (AKA 74), Port Bow, Down View.

USS Lenoir (aka 74)

What does Lenoir County, NC, the town of Lenoir, NC and the USS Lenoir Attack Cargo Ship have in common? The answer is William Lenoir. The USS Lenoir was named after Lenoir County, NC and the distant City of Lenoir North Carolina which are both named for the patriot William Lenoir. Lenoir County is in the eastern part of North Carolina. It was formed in 1791 from the southern part of Dobbs County with its county seat being Kingston, NC. The town of Lenoir, NC is in the foothills of NC and is the county seat of Caldwell County. The county was formed in 1841 from parts of Burke County and Wilkes County. It was named for Joseph Caldwell, presiding professor and the first president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

This article will focus on the USS Lenoir Attack Cargo Ship. It was built by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Corporation in Wilmington NC. The ship was laid down for construction on September 7, 1943, and was launched on September 6, 1944. Placed in full commission December 30, 1944, with Marcus L. Whitford, USNR in command.

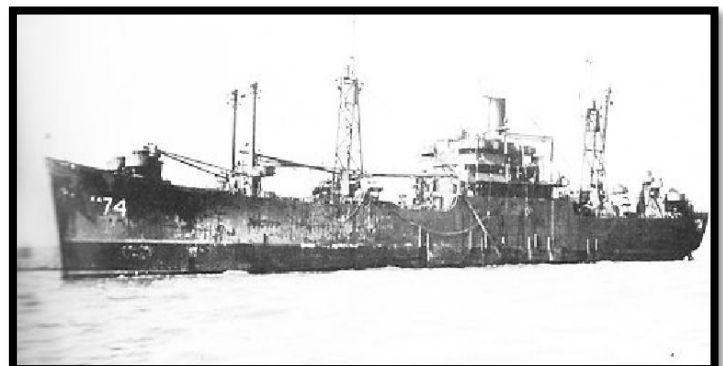
World War II, 1945 - The USS Lenoir departed Norfolk VA on January 21, 1945, and arrived at Pearl Harbor on February 20, 1945. After touching Eniwetok on March 22 to 25, she sailed from Ulithi which was a major United States Navy base at the Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands in the western Pacific Ocean, to the north of New Guinea during World War II. The base was built to support the island-hopping Pacific War efforts of the Allied nations fighting the Empire of Japan. In terms

of the number of ships at one base, Naval Base Ulithi was the largest naval base in the world in 1944 and 1945, with over 600 ships at times. Then departing Ulithi on April 13 for the Okinawa landings arriving off Hagushi beach on April 17th. Hagushi bay was the primary unloading point for American supplies during the invasion of Okinawa during World War II.. Within 72 hours she had discharged her cargo; though coming under attack, she sustained no battle damage. She then voyaged to Saipan, Guadalcanal, and Guam, and arrived at San Francisco on July 10, 1945.

Post-war Activities, 1945-1946 – The ship returned to Pearl Harbor on August 25 to embark men of the Army 6th Division for Japan, arriving there on October 22. She departed on November 4, for Portland, Oregon, arriving on the 18th. She then sailed from Alameda, CA, for Qingdao, China and Jinsen, Korea, on a “Magic Carpet” voyage. She then returned to San Francisco on March 11, 1946, and sailed on to Norfolk, VA and was decommissioned there on June 13, 1946, and was sold to a private company called Lykes Brothers Steamship Company. She was sold several times after that with the name being changed each time. Then in 1971 the ship was sold for the last time and broken up for scrap.

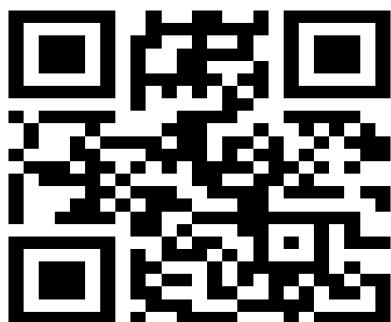
The USS Lenoir was 459 feet and 2 inches in length and ran at a speed of 16.5 knots. Her armament was one single 5”/38 caliber dual purpose gun mount, four twin 40 mm gun mounts and 16 single 20 mm gun mounts. She received one battle star award for her service in World War II. She carried 23 officers and 224 enlistees.

In October 1994, a 50-year reunion was held in Kingston, NC for the men who served on this ship. One veteran by the name of Richard “Rod” Johnston said. “You’ve never seen or heard anything until you’ve watched a battleship shoot her 5-inch guns over and over and over. First there’s flash, then the ship drops down like it’s going under and then there’s the boom. Imagine a freight train going over your head” he added. “That’s what it was like.”





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A MEMBER**



By becoming a member, or renewing an existing membership, it helps keep the story of General William Lenoir and Fort Defiance alive. Memberships allow the site to provide visitors and school groups with unique experience. The site can also continue its goal to preserve, research and enhance the land, buildings and artifacts of Fort Defiance. **Memberships are for a one-year period from January 1 through December 31.** For more information on becoming a member, **see page 7** of this newsletter, then take a moment to fill out the portion at the bottom and send a check payable to **Fort Defiance** to Fort Defiance Inc, P.O. Box 686, Lenoir, NC 28645, or pay by using the QR Code or visiting the website at www.historicfortdefiance.org to show support. Continued patronage is essential to the success of Fort Defiance.

Thank You
**FOR YOUR
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Board Highlights

The board of directors met on Thursday, May 8, 2025. The following members were in attendance: Bob Kogut, Sandra Watts, Tina Triplett, Nell Fisher, Steve Rauchfuss.

- ◆ Molly Switzer, Intern from Appalachian State University shared with the group that through May 8, 2025 Fort Defiance had 57 members. The number of visitors through the end of April that toured the house numbered 150.
- ◆ Sandra Watts discussed the grants written so far were to the Bernhardt Furniture Foundation, Lenoir Service League, and the Hogan Family Foundation.
- ◆ Sandra Watts discussed past events and future events. The Overlanders will visit on June 7th and 8th, the annual meeting has been set for Saturday, September 27th at 12:30, and the Celtic Festival has been set for Saturday, October 11 with a rain date of October 18th.
- ◆ Jennifer Cathey with the North Carolina Preservation Office will visit on Friday, May 16th.
- ◆ The tea party event sponsored by the Rendezvous Mountain DAR, Tucker's Barn DAR and Carolina Emerald DAR was a huge success. Approximately 250 people were in attendance.

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Your support is vitally important to the operation of Fort Defiance. **THANK YOU!** The following members have joined for **2025**:

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Nell Fisher
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Katherine Bravo
Reba Whittington

Militia/Family

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Lissa Taylor Holsclaw
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Fort Defiance, Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit organization. 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 Fort Defiance, Inc., P. O. Box 686, Lenoir, NC 28645. Payments can also be made by credit card on the Site's website, www.historicfortdefiancenc.org.

_____ Patriot/Individual \$20-39

_____ Militia/Family \$40-74

Family is defined as two parents and their dependent children.

_____ Lieutenant/Supporter \$75-99

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Contact Fort Defiance at fortdefiancenc@gmail.com or call 828-758-1671.

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Please Come Visit Soon!

Fort Defiance is located 1.8 miles 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)

Children 5 and under free

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