

Emmy Russ

The Importance of a Port Town

Families strolled past me, dressed in their nicest attire. Parents and older siblings were corralling young ones and making sure they remained quiet as they entered the grand chapel before us. The sturdy brick walls and large, lofty windows gave the building a regal aura, and I was anxious to enter. Then, I opened my eyes. The brick walls were now old, but perfectly intact, and there were only holes where the windows had been. However, I still felt a sense of astonishment when I looked up at St. Philip's church. The church is one of the buildings that was preserved as part of Brunswick Town. The historic town sits in the Southeastern region of North Carolina, and holds a rich history. From its initial rise and fall in the 1700s, its rejuvenation in the 1800s, and eventual preservation in the 1900s, the town has played a significant role in American and North Carolinian history.

Brunswick Town was founded in the year 1726, and its ports on the Cape Fear River made it vital to the surrounding areas (North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties). It was most known for exporting products that were vital to the construction and restoration of ships, such as tar, pitch, and turpentine made from the area's longleaf pines (North Carolina Pioneers). Due to its importance, it became the political center of the region, and colonial assemblies were often held in the courthouse (North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties). Considering the prominence of the area, it's no surprise that it saw political turmoil, including one of the earliest protests of the Stamp Act.

In 1765, England imposed the infamous Stamp Act on the colonists, which required that paper goods be marked with a stamp that the colonists had to buy from England. Many people were unhappy with this expense, and the citizens of Brunswick Town decided to do something about it. When a ship carrying stamps from England docked at one of their ports, protesters met it with muskets in hand, refusing to let the stamps be unloaded, and they didn't let up until the ship left (Pope & DeGroot, 2006). Protests of the Stamp Tax occurred throughout the original thirteen colonies, and it was eventually repealed, but that didn't mean Brunswick Town was at peace.

In March of 1776, British soldiers raided Brunswick Town. After this, many citizens started to relocate to the surrounding areas, such as Wilmington and New Bern. The British raided the town again in May of 1776, but it was almost entirely abandoned (North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties), and it stayed deserted until the Civil War. In 1861, the Confederate Army built Fort Anderson on the ruins of Brunswick Town, and the location was a key part of Wilmington's river defense (North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties).

The site remained untouched for almost another century. Then, in the late 1950s, archaeologists began to unearth the remains of Brunswick Town. More than 25 buildings were uncovered from the 1950s-1970s (North Carolina Pioneers). However, the discovery isn't over. In 2022, Brunswick Town received a \$500,000 preservation grant through the Historic Preservation Fund. This will be used to recover more of the town by using modern technology like ground-penetrating radar, and to educate people about the site (*Brunswick Town Fort Anderson...*, 2022). This education is vital.

Brunswick Town serves as an important memorial to the past and the creation of the USA. We should all acknowledge the toil of the hardworking colonists that built lives there, and the courage of everyone who fought there, in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Without them, and people like them, I would not get to enjoy the life that I have today. That is why preservation is so important. Without the preservation of this little town, a large chunk of history is lost. And when history is pushed to the wayside for modern developments, the past is disregarded. The people of Brunswick Town, and their resilience, is disregarded. As is written on a plaque near St. Philips Church:

“For there are deeds that should not pass away,

And names that should not wither.”

Works Cited

- Brunswick Town Fort Anderson to receive Federal Preservation grant.* (2022, August 16). NC DNCR. <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2022/08/16/brunswick-town-fort-anderson-receive-federal-preservation-grant>
- North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties. (n.d.). *Brunswick Town and Fort Anderson* | *NC Historic sites*. North Carolina Historic Sites. Retrieved January 18, 2025, from <https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/brunswick-town-and-fort-anderson/history>
- North Carolina Pioneers. (n.d.). *Brunswick Town and Fort Anderson*. Retrieved January 18, 2025, from <https://northcarolinapioneers.com/brunswick-town-and-fort-anderson/>
- Pope, M., & DeGroot, J. (2006). *Tales of the Silver Coast: A Secret History of North Carolina* [Excerpt]. In *Island Life NC*. <https://islandlifenc.com/nc-first-in-rebellion/>