

# Bentonville--site for learning

By CHRIS REICHART

Members of Rosalyn Lomax's English 271 class took a field trip to Bentonville Battleground on February 27, 1992.

The trip showed students some of the history of the Civil War by relating it to the literature of the time.

Students saw a film about the history of Bentonville; then some students gave oral presentations about Civil War authors Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, their lives and works.

The battleground, located in Johnston County, is the site of the largest Civil War battle fought in North Carolina.

The Battle of Bentonville, occurring from March 19 until March 21, 1865, also was the last major battle of the Civil War.

Union General William T. Sherman, returning from his infamous "march to the sea," advanced north through South Carolina to meet General Ulysses S. Grant in Virginia.

Although he had encountered minor skirmishes throughout the South, Sherman did not meet with any considerable Confederate opposition as he continued northward through the battle-torn South.

Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston was ordered to unite widely scattered soldiers in North Carolina in an attempt to prevent



ENG 271 students stand in front of the Harper House which they toured as part of their field trip in winter quarter. PHOTO: Chris Reichart

Sherman from meeting Grant in Virginia.

Johnston, whose army of 20,000 men was less than half the size of Sherman's, realized that he would have to wait until Sherman's army split into 2 groups before attacking.

Johnston seized his opportunity when bad road conditions forced Sherman's army into two wings of 30,000 each.

On March 18, 1865, Johnston learned that Sherman's 2 armies had been separated by a half-day's march, so he set up his for a surprise attack near the village of Bentonville.



Monument at Bentonville Battlefield commemorates contributions of North Carolinians during the Civil War. PHOTO: Martin Cox

The next day, on March 19, one half of the Union army fell into Johnston's trap.

At first, the Confederates were successful, overrunning large numbers of Union troops.

As the battle progressed, however, the Union forces managed to hold their lines, forcing Johnston's army back to their original positions.

On March 20, Sherman's right wing arrived, putting an end to any Confederate hope of victory.

The battle raged on for two days, however, until the outnumbered

Confederate army was forced to retreat towards Smithfield.

Instead of following the battered Confederates, Sherman led his army into Goldsboro for food and supplies.

On April 26 Johnston surrendered to Sherman near Durham, ending the fighting in the Carolinas.

Visitors to the battleground today can tour Harper House, a farmhouse formerly owned by John and Amy Harper and used as a field hospital during the Civil War.

The visitors center contains several static



Students saw Union trenches while on their field trip. PHOTO: Chris Reichart

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