

# Historian Paints Little River Past

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Fear area. Moving down the coast through Little River, the soldiers by land, women and children by boat, the explorers settled at Waccamaw Neck, where the Waccamaw River meets the Ocean, naming their camp San Miguel del Gualdape. The subsequent bitter winter resulted in deaths and desertion, and survivors returned to the West Indies, discouraged by their Carolina experience.

Fishing villages sprang up, however, from Murrell's Inlet up through the North Carolina coast, and the islands and inlets that laced this coastline provided hiding places for pirates. Little River is said to have been visited by William Kidd, "Blackbeard," and Anne Bonney, among others.

There is more than one connection between Brunswick and Horry counties. An early 18th century traveler reported nothing between Murrell's Inlet and Ashe's in Little River, implying that an Ashe family operated a public house for travelers. The name has disappeared from Little River, but it undoubtedly came north to the Brunswick County community of Ash.

There are also a good many influential families of Little River who are numerous today in the South Brunswick Islands. Vereen is one, a French Huguenot family whose early members are buried in Vereen Memorial Gardens; others include the Gauses and John Bellamy, also French Huguenot, whose son built the elegant Wilmington home and whose other descendants populate south Brunswick County.

The area was not conducive to easy living, according to records. Most men struggled on small farms, growing a garden and small grains for their livestock.

Appraisers of the estate of one Josias Allston in 1777 found among his belongings indigo hooks and seed, an ox cart, yokes and chains, 70 head of black cattle, horses, 24 oxen and 134 slaves. Slaves in large numbers, by the way, were not typical of landowners in this area. Allston was a wealthy man!

Settlement all over Horry County was by individuals and families to whom the Crown gave 50 acres for each member of the household. They

were allowed to settle wherever they wanted to stake a claim. There was little competition, as this remote area offered minimal attraction to immigrants.

Little River's early population was not devoutly religious, according to Lewis. When the English preacher George Whitefield visited the village in 1740 and found people celebrating with music and dance, he reproved them soundly, preached at length and went to bed. No sooner had he retired than the fiddle music and dancing began again.

Gradually a healthy economy developed around Little River, derived from the forests and the waters. Fishing was second only to production of lumber and naval stores (the products of the pine tree), and Little River became so important a terminus on the shipping lane, it was nicknamed "Yankee Town."

The lumber industry flourished in the 1820s as the giant pines and cypresses of the county provided long, heavy beams needed for construction. It was said they dressed out beams measuring 90 feet long and 15 inches square at the small end.

These thriving industries were disrupted by the Civil War, as most able-bodied men served in Confederate forces. Salt became a prime product at this time and the practice of deriving it from ocean water was stepped up. Most military action in Little River involved the defense or destruction of its saltworks.

Development slowed to a standstill after the war; the naval stores industry faded and it became difficult to get lumber to the mill from the more remote parts of the forests.

Nevertheless, the 20th century ushered in new signs of progress. The Wilmington, Southport and Little River Steamboat Company built "The Sanders" in 1902 and it served five years before running aground.

A large general merchandising store was opened by Willie Stone across from the present Little River Methodist Church; and Lucian Bryan built the Little River Hotel and operated a fish house in the town as well.

As the century unfolded, several farsighted people saw the resort potential of the beach area. James Henry Rice's book, "The Glories of

the Carolina Coast" spoke of his belief that Little River was a sleeping giant.

A step toward the town's present prosperity came in the 1930s when the Intracoastal Waterway linked Little River with the interior of the county by water.

Along with increasing tourist trade, however, the area attracted a notorious element during Prohibition. Rum runners found the islands and inlets as appealing as had the earlier pirates and as would later

drug runners. Big black cars and strange city types showed up in Little River in those days, along with small boats that plied the waters at night between large ships and the shore.

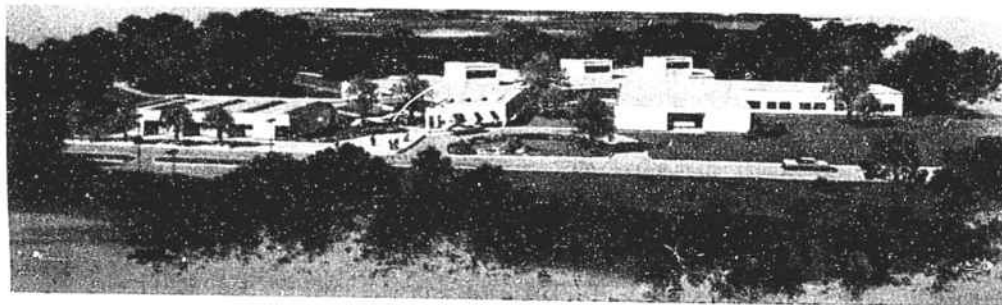
The last 20 years have seen constant growth in Little River, where a Blue Crab Festival annually brings visitors to the waterfront. Water and sewer lines have been the more recent improvements and the construction industry invigorates the economy.

Despite various moves to incor-

porate the community, Little River retains its quaint rural charm, more and more the target of tourist curiosity.

Lewis's history can only intensify this interest. She said her writing has been based on several sources, including the files of "The Independent Republic Quarterly" journal of the Horry County Historical Society, on whose board she serves. Other valuable resources were articles by C.B. Berry and Carl Bessent and files of the local newspapers.

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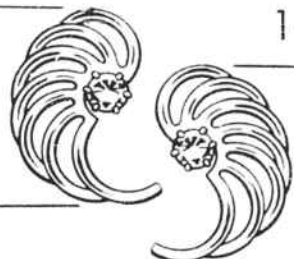
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