



**North Carolina
Archaeological Society**

Newsletter

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Milton F. Perry and the Archaeology of Restoration at Fort Macon State Park

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From 1947 to 1969, historical archaeology flourished in North Carolina. This 22-year period represents a first generation of experienced and professionally trained archaeologists who excavated historic-period sites with formal, scientific excavation methods. Archaeological investigations during this period were primarily conducted for the purpose of the restoration and development of public historic sites. J. C. Harrington investigated Fort Raleigh National Historic Site; William Tarlton dug with Harrington at Somerset Place; Morley Williams excavated Tryon Palace; Frank Albright tested numerous lots within Old Salem; and Lawrence Lee and Stanley South excavated at Brunswick Town and other historic sites in North Carolina during the 1960s. All of these men were either professionally trained or were career archaeologists, but all had previous excavation experience before these projects.

Another historic site that utilized archaeological investigations as part of its restoration during this era was Fort

Macon State Park, located north of Atlantic Beach in Carteret County. Fort Macon was built between 1826 and 1834 as part of a chain of permanent coastal fortifications along the coast of the United States (later known as the "Third System"). It was the third fortification constructed to guard the entrance to Beaufort Inlet and Beaufort Harbor, North Carolina's only major deep-water ocean port, replacing the small, masonry structure known as Fort Hampton, which had previously replaced the eighteenth-century Fort Dobbs (shown on Sauthier's 1770 map of Beaufort). However, due to limited funding by the U.S. Congress, Fort Macon was garrisoned infrequently, often only by a single ordinance sergeant who acted as caretaker of the facility.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when Fort Sumter (in Charleston, SC) was fired upon. On April 14, a local militia from Beaufort seized Fort Macon. North Carolina Confederate forces held the fort for just over a year, until April 26, 1862, when it was surrendered to Union forces after sustaining heavy damages from

continued bombing. The Union Army occupied Fort Macon for the remainder of the Civil War. Following the war, the U.S. Army used the fort as both a civil and military prison until it was deactivated in 1877. Troops were briefly stationed at the fort during the Spanish-American War in the summer of 1898. In 1903, the U.S. Army finally abandoned Fort Macon, declaring the facility totally obsolete.

In 1924, a Congressional Act sold Fort Macon to the State of North Carolina for one dollar to be used in the establishment of a state park system. Between 1934 and 1935, the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) restored much of the fort and installed public facilities, allowing Fort Macon to officially open on May 1, 1936 as North Carolina's first functioning state park. Fort Macon State Park was leased by the U.S. Army and briefly garrisoned with troops during World War II, but reopened to the public in October 1946. Today, Fort Macon is North Carolina's most visited state park with over one million annual visitors.

The State Parks system (then part of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development) hired Milton F. Perry in March 1952 as the Curator of Fort Macon to conduct restoration work on the fort. A native of Bertie County, North Carolina, Perry graduated from William & Mary in 1950 with an undergraduate degree in history. For a time he was employed as an assistant in the craft shop at Colonial Williamsburg, but later worked as the archaeological assistant in charge of the archaeological laboratory. He knew the value that archaeological research as an investigative technique could bring to the fort restoration from his previous experience at Colonial Williamsburg. The goal of the restoration project was to return a portion of the fort to its original appearance prior to the 1862 bombardment by the Union Army. In May 1952, Perry described his role in the project as "doing historical research; collecting maps, pictures, sketches, etc.; chasing down legends and stories; and excavating in the fort area."

What did Perry's excavations reveal? His archaeological discoveries at the fort have been distilled from weekly reports he sent to Mr. T. W. Morse, then Superintendent of State Parks, as well as newspaper articles that appeared in the *Raleigh News and Observer* and the *Carteret County News-Times*. Perry's investigations primarily focused on three locations: the glacis, the parade ground, and the covertway (all visible on Figure 1). Test holes placed on the western glacis (defined as a slope leading down from a fortification) revealed two brick platforms, plaster, a number of cut nails, and glass and ceramic fragments. Perry interpreted this area as the location of a former building that had been used for living quarters, though he did not specify to when it dated. Excavations on the parade ground uncovered an alternate gun platform that dated to 1898. Finally, Perry conducted extensive probing on the covertway and along Front I to locate the second hotshot furnace built in 1845. The foundation of the second hotshot furnace was not found, but Perry did note detecting an iron plate buried two feet below the surface along Front V.

As with prehistoric Native American spear points and stone tools, artifacts from the Civil War often arouse public interest and attract attention. Perry also established

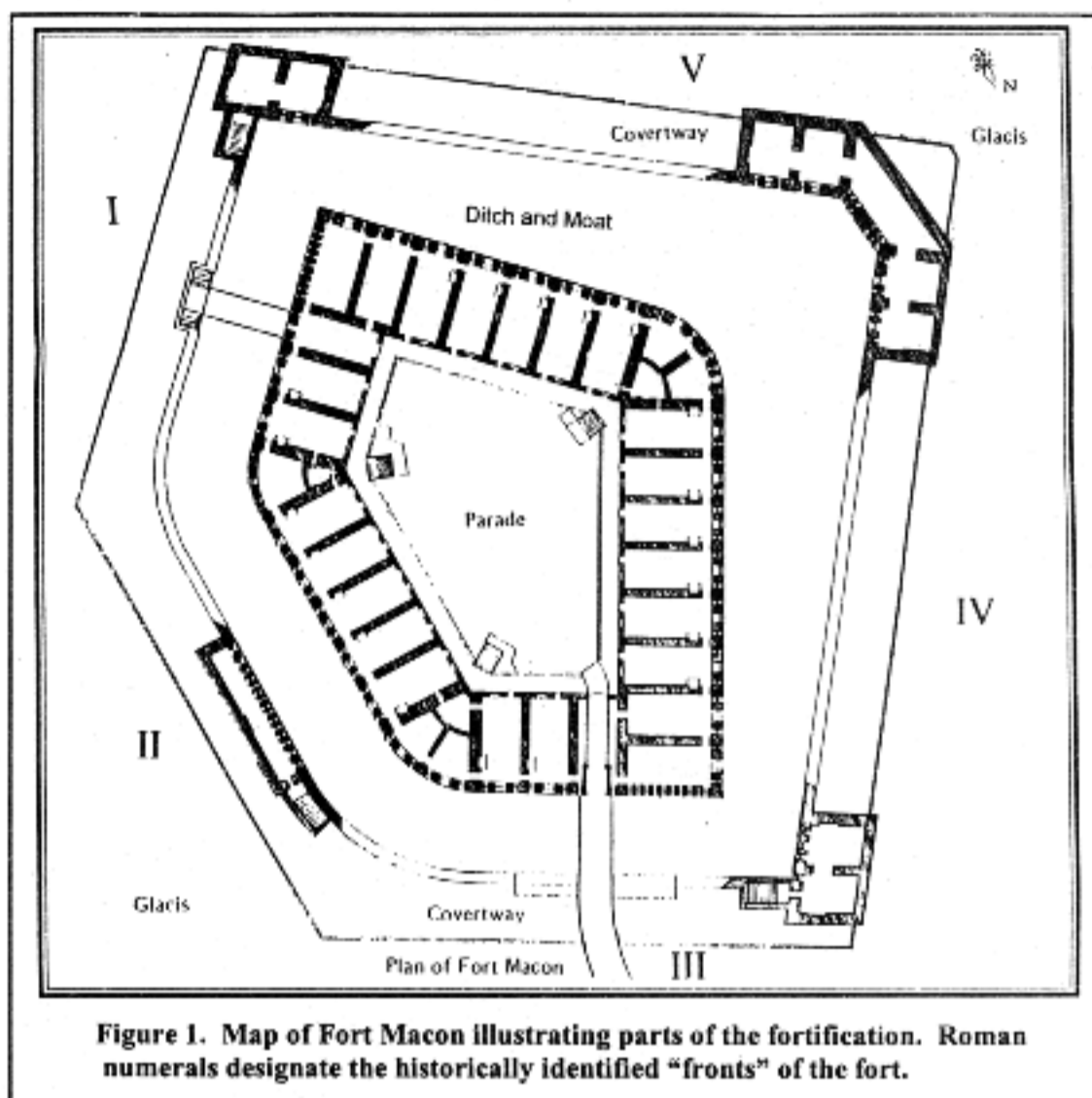


Figure 1. Map of Fort Macon illustrating parts of the fortification. Roman numerals designate the historically identified "fronts" of the fort.

displays at Fort Macon with a number of the artifacts he recovered from the excavations, as well as artifacts he collected from the beaches surrounding the fort. Perry patrolled the beaches regularly for artifacts, once even returning with a "wheelbarrow full of relics." Figure 2

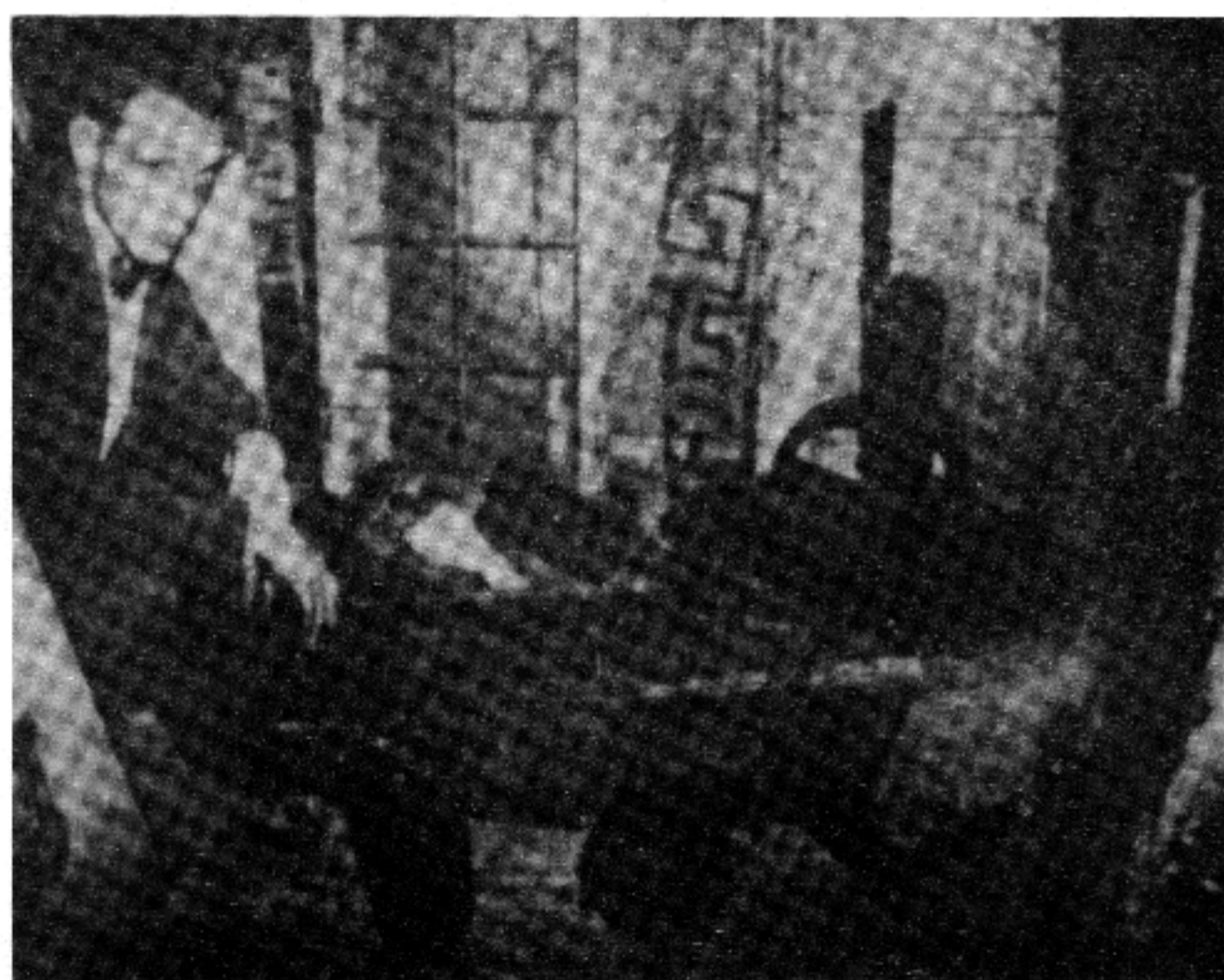


Figure 2. Photograph of William Perry with artifacts recovered from Fort Macon State Park that appeared in the May 4, 1952, *Raleigh News and Observer* (Courtesy of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History).

shows Perry with a few of these artifacts, including a cannon ball, a parrot shell, a strap hinge, and the lid from a child's coffin, recovered from the surface of a cemetery approximately one mile from the fort. He also searched for artifacts at Bentonville battleground. As was the restoration philosophy of the time, Perry attempted to use Civil War era artifacts in the restoration. He procured several "antique" iron locks and hinges from Morley Jeffers Williams, the landscape architect who from 1952-1958 conducted the archaeological investigation of Tryon Palace in New Bern. Perry also consulted with Williams as to the best type of brick to use in a reconstruction of the hotshot furnace, though this furnace was not reconstructed until many years later. And, he arranged to use the laboratory facilities at Tryon Palace to process the artifact he had recovered, noting that "I feel that Fort Macon will not have enough of these [artifacts] to warrant establishing a lab."

In May 1953, due to the lack of funds for further restoration work, Milton Perry left Fort Macon for a staff position with the West Point Military Academy Museum. Daniel W. Jones took over as Curator of Fort Macon State Park. But Perry's archaeological investigation as part of the restoration work was not, and has not been, forgotten. As part of the 21st Annual Meeting of the Archaeological

Society of North Carolina, sponsored by the New Bern Historical Society in February 1954, Jones presented a talk on Perry's archaeological investigations and restoration work at Fort Macon. Other featured speakers at that meeting included Morley Williams reporting on the excavation of Tryon Palace, Lawrence Lee discussing the potential of conducting excavations at Brunswick Town, and William S. Tarlton recounting the archaeological investigations and restoration of Somerset Place. Perry's excavations may have represented the earliest investigations conducted at Fort Macon, but more recent investigations by Tom Funk, Thomas Hargrove, and John Clauser certainly attest that there is much more that can be learned about the historic fortifications and landscape of Fort Macon State Park through additional archaeological research.

Acknowledgments. The authors wish to express their gratitude to Paul R. Branch, Jr. Curator of Fort Macon State Park, Steve Davis, Dee Nelms, and Pam Robbins for their time and assistance in the preparation of this article. However, any factual errors and the interpretations presented here are our own.



Dues Increase

Beginning January 2000 dues will change as follows:

Student	\$ 5	will change to	\$ 10
Regular	\$ 10	will change to	\$ 15
Family	\$ 15	will change to	\$ 20
Institution	\$ 25	will remain	\$ 25
Sustaining	\$ 25	will remain	\$ 25
Corporate	\$250	will remain	\$250
Life	\$250*	will remain	\$250

This is the first time NCAS has increased dues. We feel it is necessary now because of rising printing and postage costs, and other operating expenses.

*Changed at a former board of directors meeting from \$150.

1999 Annual Fall Meeting

Enclosed is the agenda for the 1999 Annual Fall Meeting to be held at the Maritime History Museum in Beaufort on Saturday, October 2nd.

There will be a reception Friday night at the Maritime History Museum, and everyone is invited to attend.

That same weekend there will be a Seafood Festival, so make your hotel reservations early. I have provided some hotel information on the back of the agenda under the map.

Although there will be no reservation for lunch, please RSVP to Dee Nelms @ 919/733-7342 for the reception and meeting so we can get a general idea of attendance.

We hope to see you all there.



1999 Election of Officers

The 1999 Election of Officers ballot is enclosed. Please return the ballot to Dee Nelms, NC Archaeological Society, 4619 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4619 by September 27th. Like last year, we will be taking nominations from the floor at the members meeting in Beaufort on October 2nd. You will get a chance to cast your vote at the meeting if you do not send it in by mail.

NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue	February 28
Summer Issue	May 31
Fall Issue	August 31
Winter Issue	November 30

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