

THE HISTORY OF FORT JOHNSTON



Fort Johnston was the first fort constructed in the state of North Carolina and named for Provincial Governor Gabriel Johnston. The Fort was built in 1749 by the British to defend the area from the French and Spanish. The abundant natural resources such as tar, pitch, turpentine, and tobacco put a target on this area. Ironically, when the Spaniards did attack in 1748, the Fort's construction wasn't finished and finding no one home, the Spaniards went up river and looted Brunswick Town instead.

There were conflicts to come and Fort Johnston would play at least a small role in almost all of them. In 1754, men from Fort Johnston were sent to help fight in the French and Indian Wars. In 1759, they fought against the Cherokee. When the Revolution broke out in 1775, a large group of patriots stormed the Fort and burned most of the structures in defiance of the British. George Washington and his congress supported rebuilding Fort Johnston and in 1795 enough work had been done to allow Southport's citizens to use it as a meeting place for their first documented Fourth of July celebration.

In 1810, the Fort saw extensive renovations, including the construction of the present day Garrison House. During the Civil War, Confederates occupied the Fort which was the hub for recruitment and training. The Fort also provided some protection to blockade runners. (Confederate cargo ships that smuggled goods past Union ships which blocked waterways.) During this time, the Fort was occasionally called Fort Branch, and Fort Pender, but Fort Johnston would be the only name that stuck.

When the Civil War ended, so did the life of the Fort as a seacoast defense. Since June of 1881, the Fort's buildings have been variously used by the US Signal Corps, the Weather Bureau (National Weather Service), the US Army Corps of Engineers and the US Surveying Corps. In the 1950's officers from an air rescue unit of the US Air Force stayed here. The Fort was transferred to Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal in 1955.

The federal government transferred the property to the City of Southport in 2006. The Garrison House of the Fort is the only surviving structure and is now home to the Fort Johnston-Southport Museum and Visitors' Center, and the Southport Historical Society.

Fort Johnston is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thank you for visiting this historic Fort!

