

The Lost Carolina City

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Anyone reading about the early history of Carteret County might come upon mention of something called Carolina City. It obviously does not still exist, but there is one reminder of it that people might notice as they pass along Arendell Street in Morehead City. This is a state historical marker entitled “Carolina City” located between Carteret Community College and the N.C. Marine Fisheries complex. The marker states that Carolina City was a “large Confederate camp that extended over an area of 1 sq. mi.” during the War Between the States. This is not true. Carolina City was an actual town like Morehead City, not a military camp. In fact, Carolina and Morehead Cities were rivals. What follows is the story of Carolina City.

In the 1850’s, the land where Morehead and Carolina Cities were founded was undeveloped and broken up into a number of large tracts owned by a handful of local families. At this time, John Motley Morehead, statesman, former legislator and governor, and president of the North Carolina Railroad, took an interest in Beaufort Harbor as a potential place for building a town and seaport facility. Such a facility would develop the harbor into an important deep-water port that would be of immense value to the state, especially if at some future date the port could be linked by rail with the rest of the budding North Carolina Railroad system. On the west side of the Newport River across from the town of Beaufort, Mr. Morehead’s attention became fixed upon Shepherd’s Point, a long peninsula of land formed by Bogue Sound and Calico Creek that was an ideal place for a port town. Large ships of 18-foot draft could reach Shepherd’s Point while Beaufort was only capable of handling ships of nine to ten foot draft.

So impressed was Morehead with the potential of Shepherd’s Point for a port that about February 1, 1852, he sent a friend to purchase the necessary land from its owners, the Arendell family. On this land he hoped to build a port town that would turn Beaufort Harbor into a major facility for the state. The sale of the 600 acres comprising Shepherd’s Point was completed in 1853.

Meanwhile, other eastern North Carolina businessmen also saw the potential for a port town and development in Carteret County. Thomas R. Underwood and John M. Rose, of Fayetteville, with the backing of the New York firm of Smith and Colby, had visions of a port opening into Beaufort Harbor with the possible future expansion of the railroad system to support it. Although Morehead’s associates had beaten them to first choice of Shepherd’s Point, these men found ships of 12-foot draft could still reach three miles up Bogue Sound from the harbor in the area of present-day 35th Street. In June, 1853, an association of investors formed the Carolina City Land Company. The investors included Underwood, John D. Williams, A. A. McKethan, N. A. Stedman, George L. Stevenson, and William H. Washington.

On November 5, 1853, the Carolina City Land Company purchased 904 acres of land three miles west of Shepard's Point from its owner, Henry G. Cutler, for \$10,000. The tract had over one and a half miles of water frontage along the shore of Bogue Sound. It also extended inland encompassing much of the land known today as Oaksmith Acres, Camp Glenn and Mandy Farms. Part of the tract was surveyed and plotted out for streets and lots

The 1854-55 session of the General Assembly authorized a railroad extension, known as the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, from Goldsboro to terminate at Beaufort Harbor. When passage rights were cleared for the new railroad to Carteret County, the Carolina City Land Company suffered a major blow. Given John M. Morehead's association with the North Carolina Railroad, the stockholders of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad decided to terminate the railroad not at Carolina City's site but Morehead's development at Shepherd's Point, with its deep water access. All was not lost for the Carolina City Land Company, however. The railroad would at least pass through the intended site of Carolina City.

This decision was the go-ahead for Morehead and other associates, who had formed the Shepherd's Point Land Company, to develop the port town Morehead had envisioned. This company was incorporated February 2, 1857, by the General Assembly. On November 11, 1857, the sale of lots began in the new town, which took the name of Morehead City after its founder. Sixty lots were sold initially for a total of \$13,000.

Meanwhile, not to be outdone, Carolina City had also gotten off to a good start. A town site with lots and streets was staked out extending 4500 feet along Bogue Sound and about 3700 feet inland to the present Mandy Farms area. There were ten streets running east to west extending from the sound: Water, Morehead, Railroad, Washington, Gilmer, Stevenson, Thompson, McKeithan, Williams and Cutler. When the railroad was completed in June, 1858, it passed through Railroad Street on its way to Morehead City. Twelve streets ran north to south: Sanders, McDaniels, Caldwell, Adams, Stedman, Jerkins, Whitford, Stanley, Pemberton, Jackson, Worth and Cook. Of these latter streets, Whitford was the main road into town, extending from the town docks northward through the northern edge of the town. Most of these streets bore the names of the stockholders in the Carolina City Land Company.

The streets divided Carolina City up into squares of 300 feet by 300 feet. Each square contained eight 75- by 75-foot lots and four 75- by 150-foot lots. There were a total of 1308 lots in the site. Whole squares were set aside by the founders for both a school and a park, while other lots were earmarked for use by Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Sale of lots began and totaled \$17,000.

Growth was not rapid, but was steady. A town landing was built on the sound. It was supplemented by a spur line of the railroad. The spur line branched off the main line and extended to the landing, which would have been located approximately in the present-day N.C. Marine Fisheries property. The most important building in Carolina City was a hotel built by John Parrott, of Kinston. It was a fine three-story hotel that

occupied an entire square between Railroad and Washington Streets. The Carolina Hotel soon became a popular resort for visitors arriving by rail or water. A steamship line from New Bern brought passengers directly to the landing where they could be lodged at the hotel. A turpentine works went into operation and a small post office was even established

Over the next several years leading up to the eve of the War Between the States, Morehead City developed slightly more rapidly than Carolina City by virtue of its railroad terminus and deep water port. On February 20, 1861, Morehead City was incorporated. Still, the two towns remained very close in size. The 1860 Census showed Morehead had 31 families with a population of 165 whites, four free blacks and 147 slaves. Carolina City's size was close to that of rival Morehead City. The 1860 Census showed 25 families with a population of 149 whites and six free blacks (no slave total was listed).

When the War Between the States began in 1861, the development and sales of lots at Carolina City came to an abrupt halt. Confederate troops established themselves in the area, occupying Fort Macon and Bogue Banks for war. Soon the large numbers of soldiers stationed in exposed encampments on the wind-swept banks became plagued by disease. Sick lists were particularly high for the Seventh and Twenty-sixth North Carolina Regiments and Company H, Tenth North Carolina, all of whom were stationed to guard Bogue Banks against possible enemy landings. Accordingly, the Carolina Hotel was taken over by the Army for use as a hospital in September, 1861.

Soon the Seventh and Twenty-sixth Regiments each had over one hundred men at the hospital, forcing the over-taxed hospital workers to make an appeal in the newspapers to local ladies for assistance and donations of goods to help the sick. Local ladies aid societies quickly responded and did everything within their power to attend to the sufferers. Nevertheless, a considerable number of men died, including one company that lost nine men in one week.

During October 3-4, 1861, the Seventh North Carolina Regiment crossed over from Bogue Banks to Carolina City, where they established a temporary camp nearby named Camp Argyle. Little is known about this camp as to its exact location or extent. The Seventh North Carolina remained at Camp Argyle until December 4, 1861, when it finally moved to Newport to permanent winter quarters.

Meanwhile, during November 26-28, 1861, the Twenty-sixth North Carolina likewise crossed over to Carolina City from Bogue Banks to go into winter quarters. This regiment established an encampment known as Camp Vance after its commander, Colonel Zebulon B. Vance, who later became governor of North Carolina. Camp Vance was a large, permanent winter encampment established just east of Carolina City. It consisted of wooden barracks buildings with brick chimneys. The regiment did not remain here the entire winter, however. With the appearance of the expedition of Union General Ambrose E. Burnside in North Carolina waters, the Twenty-sixth North Carolina

was withdrawn to protect New Bern on January 26, 1862, leaving Camp Vance abandoned. However, throughout the winter of 1861-62, the Carolina Hotel continued to be used as a hospital for soldiers of the garrison of nearby Fort Macon up through March, 1862.

On March 14, 1862, however, the Union forces of Brig. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside captured New Bern, leaving the five companies of Fort Macon's garrison the only Confederate forces remaining in the area. Burnside turned his attention to the capture of Fort Macon and Beaufort Harbor. He intended to accomplish this by sending down from New Bern one a brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. John G. Parke.

Anticipating this movement, however, a party of Confederate soldiers sent out from the garrison of Fort Macon on March 18 burned the railroad bridge over the Newport River to hamper the Union advance. On their way back to the fort, the party also put the torch to the Carolina Hotel, the turpentine distillery and the barracks of Camp Vance, burning them to the ground to prevent their use by Union forces.

On March 22, 1862, the advance guard of the Union forces of General Parke arrived at Carolina City in their advance from New Bern. The reaction of Union soldiers to what they found in the area was not favorable. During their march to Carolina City, its very name conjured up thoughts of a real city with shops, restaurants, theaters and so forth. Instead they found when they arrived only a small settlement that, along with Morehead City, was just struggling to survive.

One Union soldier writing to his brother described Carolina City as follows: "Said *city* did contain one large hotel—used as a hospital, a ten pin alley, a store—burned, a R. R. depot and some half dozen houses left standing." The regimental historian of the 5th Rhode Island Battalion also described the area: "Every locality in that country which contained so much as a blacksmith shop and a store, the principal staple in trade of which was always chain-lightning whiskey, was dubbed a city and looked upon as a future metropolis. Such is Morehead City, Carolina City, and Newport City, all within a distance of scarcely a dozen miles."

The reporter for the *New York Times*, accompanying the Union advance, was to write: "'Carolina City' is all on paper, there being only three or four miserable houses squatting upon burning sandy plains, and 'Morehead City' has only some twenty-five houses, upon an equally desolate location, and not to exceed 400 inhabitants, white and black. It will take a century, with such materials as now occupy this country, to raise it to a condition of activity and importance equal to Marblehead or Newport."

General Parke made Carolina City his headquarters during the siege of Fort Macon, probably establishing himself in the house of Christopher Lamb. His forces camped at Carolina City over the next few days, during which time Morehead City was captured on March 23 and Beaufort on March 26. While at Carolina City, the Union soldiers suffered considerably. Until the railroad bridge at Newport was rebuilt, their

supplies had to come by wagon train, which was frequently delayed by bad roads. Until their tents finally arrived, Union soldiers dug holes that were covered with boards for shelter, or built crude lean-to's with boards scavenged from the old turpentine works and other buildings. They were also forced to supplement their reduced rations with fish, oysters and clams that they purchased or caught in Bogue Sound. The woes of the soldiers were not solved until the Newport River railroad bridge was rebuilt on March 29 and a regular flow of supplies began to arrive by rail from New Bern.

From Carolina City, General Parke directed his operations against Fort Macon. The town wharf was used to ferry soldiers, siege guns, and supplies over to Bogue Banks on scows and small vessels. The heavy artillery used in siege against the fort were easily carried down to the city wharf by the railroad spur line. Here they were loaded directly aboard waiting scows to be transported across the sound to a camp set up on the banks at Hoop Pole Creek, opposite Carolina City. In addition, Parke established signal stations at Beaufort, Morehead and Carolina Cities and on Bogue Banks to rapidly relay messages and communications between the various parts of his scattered command.

Following the siege of Fort Macon, Union troops camped in and around both Carolina and Morehead Cities for the remainder of the war during their occupation of the area. The end of the war left North Carolina impoverished; its resources strained; and its people and fortunes scattered. With Carolina City, the drive to start over just did not gather momentum. Of its chief drawing cards, the hotel was now gone and with it any hope of reestablishing the resort industry. The railroad was financially plagued. Few people in these desperate post-war years now had the money or interest to make a start in Carolina City. Although a few more lots were sold over the years to give a total of 545 lots sold., the settlement never reached a point of sufficient size or industry to become incorporated as a functioning town as did Morehead City. In fact, in the 1870 Census, what residents remained were lumped under the heading "Morehead Township."

In these troubled times, what remained of the Carolina City Land Company came to financial ruin. The company was placed in receivership and John D. Davis appointed to sell off its holdings by the Superior Court of Carteret County during its 1889 spring term. The entire tract of unsold lots, streets and undeveloped land still held by the company was sold at private sale by Davis to a Mr. Jesse T. Eaton for \$700, which was registered March 28, 1889.

Thus Carolina City passed into history, its land going through the hands of different private owners. Part of the land became the North Carolina National Guard training encampment known as Camp Glenn in the early 20th century.

Now, of course, Carolina City land has long been absorbed into the corporate limits of its rival city. There is nothing today to show any evidence the town ever existed other than the inaccurate North Carolina highway marker at Arendell and 35th Streets. Carolina City is just one more of the "might-have-beens" in the long ranks of failed business ventures and dreams.