



The great drama of the Civil War played out in no small measure in North Carolina. The fierceness of fighting on land and sea, the tenuous nature of battlefield conquest or debilitating injury, and the hairline balance of a negotiated peace all were scenes to unfold in North Carolina. The exclusive Civil War 150th Anniversary Bus Tour Oct. 24-26 will visit locales where great events occurred and is part of the North Carolina Civil War 150 commemoration, led by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. Historian Mark Bradley, considered the authoritative source on North Carolina and the Civil War, will be the on-bus tour guide, sharing talks and presentations.

"We're coming into the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War and this is the perfect time to learn more about North Carolina and the Civil War," observes Bradley, author of "Last Stand in the Carolinas: The Battle of Bentonville" and "This Astounding Close: The Road to Bennett Place." "We're getting a head start," Bradley says. "Be the first on your block to observe the 1865 Sesquicentennial."

"Among topics, the tour will cover Sherman's March through North Carolina and the crucial battles of Fort Fisher, Wyse Fork, Averasboro and Bentonville, in addition to the occupation of Raleigh and the largest troop surrender of the war at the Bennett Place near Durham, 17 days after the surrender at Appomattox Court House," Bradley adds. "Civil War and North Carolina history buffs won't want to miss this rare opportunity."

"There are a lot of ways to 'know' history, but the best way to 'feel' history is to be where it happened and to walk in the footsteps of those who made it happen," says Cultural Resources Deputy Secretary Dr. Kevin Cherry. "This special bus tour provides just that opportunity during an important anniversary year. We have tried to crystallize the story of those all-important last few months into one stimulating weekend at six of the state's most important historic sites. It is going to be a powerful experience."

Historic State Capitol, Raleigh The weekend starts with a tour and catered dinner in the Rotunda of the National Historic Landmark State Capitol in Raleigh at 5:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 24. Early arrivals can enjoy a curator-led tour of the Civil War exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of History at 3 p.m. That evening, the bus departs for Wilmington for a Saturday tour of Fort Fisher, then travels to Kinston for a tour of the CSS Neuse Civil War Interpretive Center. Saturday evening at Bentonville Battlefield in Four Oaks will include a Civil War era camp dinner. After overnight in Smithfield, Sunday offers a tour of Bennett Place in Durham before returning to Raleigh.

"Confederate Gen. Joseph Johnston and Union Gen. William Sherman reviewed their troops in April 1865, just days apart, each standing near the stature of George Washington at the State Capitol," Bradley adds. "That's where Gov. Vance learned of Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender from Gen. Johnston, which inspired Vance to send a peace commission to Sherman."

Among troops reviewed were U.S. Colored Troops that had been assigned to Gen. Charles Paine and joined Gen. Sherman's Carolina's Campaign. "That was the first USCT involvement with Sherman, who did not have much use for black troops," Bradley notes. "There was an entire division and when they marched through town even Sherman and others were impressed with the sharpness of the USCT."

Fort Fisher, Kure Beach At Fort Fisher, near Wilmington, visitors will explore the land-and-sea-facing site where the Confederacy fought for its survival. "Gen. Lee told Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, that if Fort Fisher fell, he couldn't supply his army and the cause would collapse," Bradley explains. But Union commanders understood that Fort Fisher, which was known as the Gibraltar of the South, needed to fall.

"There was a huge naval bombardment on December 24-25, and in January's second attack it was overwhelming," Bradley observes. "The attack on Fort Fisher was the largest combined U.S. Army and Navy operation until World War II. It was the most intensive naval bombardment of the Civil War."

Fort Fisher is acres of earth and sand, which was ideal for absorbing heavy artillery fire. "The Confederates learned that the Union Navy was very powerful after it reduced the brick and mortar Fort Pulaski in Savannah to rubble. The Confederates figured out that sand was abundant and effective," Bradley continues.

"It's not unheard of for someone to look out the back door of the visitor's center or come in off the tour and ask, 'Where's the fort?'" observes Fort Fisher historian Ray Flowers. "Col. William Lamb, post commander and chief architect of Fort Fisher, may have been a little precocious. It may have appeared formidable, but he may have had more fort than he could reasonably hope to defend," Flowers concludes. Participants will also see the firing of a cannon that could propel a cannonball a mile into the sea.

Lamb made good use of the mounds of sand turned into rooms for war. "There were numerous magazines and bombproofs throughout the fort," Flowers says. "All told, there were some 14,500 square feet of munitions storage and protection within. These rooms were not uniform, but each battery ideally would have provided protection for a company of men."

CSS Neuse Interpretive Center, Kinston The often overlooked naval aspect of the Civil War will be reviewed at the CSS Neuse Interpretive Center in Kinston, home to the remnants of the ironclad CSS Neuse.

"Confederate Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory knew the Confederates couldn't match the Union Navy build-up and felt the Confederates needed a technological edge. He invested in ironclads and established a plan to build 50 to offset the imbalance with quality over quantity," Bradley explains. "The Neuse ran aground 30 minutes after launch and engaged only once in anger at the Battle of Wyse Fork." He notes, "The Neuse was a beautifully designed vessel for its time and place of use."

"The CSS Neuse was underwater for 99 years before being recovered in 1964," says Site Manager Matthew Young. "We have remaining 107 tons of the 1,500 ton ship. We have pieces of her iron armored plate and over 9,000 artifacts recovered of the remains."

In June 2012, the remains of the Neuse were moved from an outdoor display to a climate-controlled building in downtown Kinston. There, a museum is taking shape around it, the only Confederate commissioned ironclad above water. "We hope to be THE place to go to learn about the Civil War in eastern North Carolina," Young adds.

Bentonville Battlefield, Four Oaks The next stop at the well-preserved Bentonville Battlefield will find visitors at the site of the largest battle scene in North Carolina history. The battlefield covered 6,000 acres and had 80,000 combatants from March 16-19, 1865. But the distribution was 60,000 Federals to 20,000 Confederates. Although the fighting was so fierce as to shear bark off the trees, and even though the Confederates were successful initially, ultimately, superior numbers and superior equipment led to a Confederate defeat.

"If the Confederates had won Bentonville, it would not have changed the outcome of the war," Bradley says. "It would have ruined the reputations of some generals and been a blow to Gen. Sherman. There was a kind of Union panic when the Confederates launched the attack that drove back the Federals. A Bentonville victory also would have boosted Gen. Johnston, at least temporarily."

It was common for homes to be used as temporary field hospitals during the war, and the Union Army took over the Harper family home at Bentonville. The family of 11 lived upstairs while the bottom floor was used for soldier amputations, setting fractures, or other basic and immediate care.

"The Harpers and their older children did nurse wounded from both sides, but it was primarily the Union Army caring for the wounded at first," explains Bentonville Assistant Site Manager Derrick Brown. "Some of these wounded remained in the Harpers' care for several months after the battle, and 23 died in the Harpers' care."

Bennett Place, Durham The final stop Sunday is at Bennett Place on the edge of Durham is easily considered the site that ended combat in the Civil War with the surrender of four key Confederate states and 89,270 soldiers at the farm of James and Nancy Bennett.

"You can make a case that Bennett Place ended the Civil War," Bradley observes. "Lee was compelled to surrender; he was surrounded. Gen. Johnston and Gen. Sherman chose to negotiate and had an agreement that was considered too lenient and rejected by Washington. A second agreement reached April 26, 1865, was accepted. Johnston's surrender at Bennett Place was the largest surrender of the Civil War and persuaded other forces in the Deep South to lay down arms."

"It is safe to say the Bennetts were quite bitter about the war," says Bennett Place Site Manager John Guss. "They lost two sons and one son-in-law as a result, and their livelihood was destroyed. They were forced to sell much of their property and go into sharecropping after the war."

A central location between Sherman's headquarters in Raleigh and Johnston's headquarters in Hillsborough led to the selection of the Bennett farm for negotiations. In three separate meetings, military escorts of 200 cavalry accompanied Sherman and 60 cavalry escorts accompanied Johnston. It would have been difficult for the Bennetts, who worked their own land and were not slave owners, not to allow the meetings in their front yard.

"This bus tour comes on the eve of the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, giving participants a head start in learning about events in North Carolina during the war's final months," Bradley points out.

Reservations for the tour can be made at www.NCDCR.gov/CivilWarTour. The cost by Sept. 15 is \$375 per person based on double occupancy and \$455 per person for single occupancy. The cost after Sept. 15 is \$395 per person double occupancy and \$475 per person single occupancy. Friday night will be spent in the Holiday Inn Express & Suites University Center in Wilmington.

Saturday night will be spent at the Holiday Inn Express in Smithfield. The tour includes Friday and Saturday dinner. Continental breakfast is available at each hotel. Lunch will be on your own. Please note any special dietary needs with your reservation.

The N.C. Office of Archives and History administers the state's four year Civil War Sesquicentennial observance, which concludes in 2015. For additional information, please call (919) 807-7389. The Office of Archives and History is within the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources.

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