



Photos contributed

From left are Norma Eckard, Diana Fotinatos, Mary Sands, Jeanne Nelson, Lucia Lister, Donna Agopsowicz, Connie Hendrix, Maxine McCullar, Peggy Harris, Regent Diane Kuebert, District VII Director Lisa Pomeranz, Pat Gooding, Cindy Sellers, Martha Koletar, Annetta Clark, Joan Hall and Phyllis Wilson.



Norma Eckard is shown with World War I re-enactor Carl Mauney, dressed in full military uniform.

Brunswick Town NSDAR chapter remembers 100th anniversary of World War I

BY MARTHA KOLETAR

SPECIAL TO THE BEACON

On a beautiful spring day, under the shade of big old trees and with an ocean breeze blowing through their branches, members of the Brunswick Town Chapter NSDAR and the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range gathered for a special centennial commemorative event.

The group convened to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I, also remembered as The Great War. Fittingly, it was decided that the event would be held in front of a long ago abandoned rifle range target pit and storage area built in 1918 for soldiers to practice marksmanship before being shipped to Europe. This area is being restored by Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range. Homeowners living in the area, including DAR member Norma Eckard, first discovered the site. Since that first day of discovery, Norma has been actively involved in restoring this decaying piece of history.

Brunswick Town Regent Diane Kuebert welcomed DAR chapter members and guests. She began by reading a poem sent to her by NCS DAR Vice Regent Carole Weiss that came into widespread use during World War I, with the last line from a poem by Rudyard Kipling:

“They shall not grow old
As we that are left behind.
Age shall not weary them
Nor the years condemn
As the going down of the sun.
And in the morning
We will remember them,
Lest we forget.”

Although World War I began in 1915, the United States did not declare war on the German Empire until April 6, 1917, because of their increasing aggression towards our interests. America mobilized more than 4 million citizens during World War I that resulted in more than 110,000 deaths and 200,000 wounded.

“Today, we remember those who sacrificed their lives fighting in foreign lands and in the trenches where death was all around, and many did not return home,” said Kuebert. The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution had been foremost in making contributions during World War I. DAR Headquarters in Washington, D.C., loaned office space to the federal government and formed a War Relief Committee. A partner of the DAR during World War I was the American Red Cross, whose founder, Clara Barton, was a charter member of the DAR in 1890.

“In 1917, DAR members contributed over \$19,000 to the Red Cross Fund,” Kuebert continued. “Members across the country assembled and formed Red Cross Auxiliaries, where they recruited ladies in their communities who taught first aid classes and staffed Red Cross Community rooms knitting and sewing surgical hospital supplies for the wounded. They also made ‘comfort kits’ for the servicemen and clothes for the French and Belgian refugees. A DAR member, Jane Delano, founded the American Red Cross Nursing Services, was superintendent of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, and trained over 8,000 registered nurses for duty. When France ran out of chickens in 1917, DAR campaigned to ‘re-chickenize’ France to help mitigate food loss. The DAR also collected more than \$130,000 for the support of 3,600 French war orphans requiring food and shelter.”

Kuebert and Vice Regent Carol Jutte then presented the DAR Chapter Wreath in memory of those that served in harm’s way and sacrificed their lives in World War I.

Brunswick Town DAR Registrar Cindy Sellers then proudly showed the attendees a small Bible that had once belonged to her grand uncle, Earl W. Jones. It had “Active Duty Testament” on the cloth cover and was published by the New York Bible Society. Inside the front cover, with the date June 5, 1917, is a devotional from and signed by Col. Theodore Roosevelt, the eldest son of the President, who later served as a general in World War II.

He states: “The teachings of the New Testament are foreshadowed in Micah’s verse,” which says to Do Justice, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with Thy God. In Do Justice, he asks soldiers to “fight valiantly against the armies of Germany and Turkey for they represent evil on earth. Under Love Mercy, he says, “Treat prisoners well, succor the wounded, treat every woman as if she was your sister, care for the little children, and be tender to the old and helpless.” He says you will walk humbly “if you study the life and teachings of the Savior.”

On the opposite page, there is a hand-written letter by General John Pershing that read, “To the American Soldier. Aroused against a nation waging war in violation of all Christian principles, our people are fighting in the cause of Liberty. Hardship will be your lot, but trust in God will give you comfort; temptation will befall you, but the teachings of our Savior will give you strength. Let your valor as a soldier and your conduct as a man be an inspiration to your comrades and an honor to your country.” The letter is signed, Pershing Comdg.” Aug. 10, 1917.

After her reading, there was a special Time of Remembrance allowing members and guests to name and honor an ancestor who served in the war. Our Regent began by calling out the names of her grandfather and great uncle. She was following by about 20 people who called out other names to honor their service. Some added humorous anecdotes such as chapter member Lucia Lister, who still has her ancestor’s wool swimming skivvies.

Eckard then gave more details about the rifle target pit and storage area and the efforts being made to preserve this piece of history. The story of preserving the rifle pit and storage area began in 2011, when members of the Caswell Dunes Neighborhood Landscape Committee came upon a structure covered in weeds and tree limbs and dirt. They could not immediately identify the structure, but it piqued their curiosity. Eckard, a member of the committee,

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decided to seek help from a fellow DAR member, Gwen Causey, who is also a member of Friends of Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson. She quickly advised that the best person to contact was Jim McKee, historian and site manager of Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson, who identified the structure. McKee’s credentials are widely known and revered in Brunswick County and throughout the state.

Eckard took us through the preservation efforts beginning with cleaning soil and tree limbs off the floor of the pit. Later a group from the State Historic Preservation Office visited the site. The group included engineers, lawyers and others who advised a future preservation plan that included repair of the structure. Monies were raised toward this end and are ongoing. The state submitted a proposal to place the fort on the Natural List of Historic Places and that the rifle pit fit into that piece of history because it was once owned by Fort Caswell.

The rifle range was sold after World War II to the N. C. Baptist State Convention. The rifle range would be considered as a dis-contiguous part of the Fort Caswell Historic District that occupies a 760-acre area at the tip of a peninsula on the southeastern end of Oak Island in Brunswick County, including a one-half nautical mile

extension east into the Cape Fear River and south into the Atlantic Ocean. In May 2016, the rifle range landed on the Historic Wilmington Foundation’s “Most Threatened Historic Places” list. This inclusion will possibly help raise the public profile.

The preservation process goes on! Besides Eckard, other Brunswick Town DAR Chapter members have also been involved in the preservation project including chapter member and artist Helen Radcliffe, who has donated her paintings to raise money, and the late member Harriet Barlowe.

For those interested in learning more about the project, go to ftcaswellrifle-range@gmail.com. The site is packed full of information about the restoration process and how you can help.

World War I re-enactor Carl Mauney described the uniform he was wearing, from the steel helmet on his head, to the boots he was wearing. He demonstrated how to wear a gas mask and how to carry ammunition and other military gear.

As the ceremony came to a close, one left feeling that they had been blessed to be a part of a commemorative event that honored the brave soldiers of past who fought and died for the freedoms we enjoy today.

Martha Koletar is public relations chairwoman for the Brunswick Town Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. She can be reached through the website, ncdar.org/Brunswicktown_files/index.html.