



History

As one of the oldest cities in North Carolina (1740) and once the largest city in North Carolina, Wilmington has had a role in almost every development in American history. From the revolutionary war, through the Civil War, WWII, the Civil Rights era and more, Wilmington has been involved. Southeast North Carolina is a living history museum that the professional historian and amateur historian will enjoy.

Revolutionary War (Historic District Wilmington)

Wilmington hosted one of the early rebellions against British rule. A group of 500 men gathered at the waterfront in 1765 and protested against the Stamp Act which led to the resignation by the stamp collector. During the war Lord Cornwallis used the city as his headquarters before leaving in April 1781 for his fateful march to surrender in Yorktown.

Antebellum Period

The period leading up to the Civil War was an era of prosperity as Wilmington's port grew. Many of the beautiful homes date to this period. The Bellamy Mansion and Burgin-Wright house are two examples and open for tours.

Civil War

Wilmington played a critical role in this war as the last port open for the Confederacy. It kept the Rebel forces supplied as the speedy Blockade Runners would slip past the Union blockade. Once this lifeline ended the confederacy fell, a short 45 days later. You can get the whole story at Fort Fisher in Kure Beach and at the Cape Fear Museum near Downtown Wilmington. If you visit the Cameron Art Museum you will be at the site of the Forks Road Battle, the battle for Wilmington, February 20, 1865.

If you pass through Monkey Junction you will pass a spot that highlights the divisiveness of this war. It is said that as the Confederates retreated from Fort Fisher one soldier stopped by to say hello to his mother. The next day as the Union Forces went by another soldier stopped to see his mother, the same mother that greeted her other son the day before.

1898

Wilmington's lowest point came in 1898 when America experienced its only coup. By that time much of the pain of the Civil War had passed and Wilmington was a thriving city with an integrated government and integrated police force. But that would not do for some. Segregationists came to town and on November 10, 1898 forced the resignation of elected city leaders and declared that Wilmington would be segregated from thence forth. A memorial stands at the entrance to downtown Wilmington

World War II

Wilmington was busy during the Second World War and a prolific boat builder. The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company built and delivered 243 ships to the allied war effort. It was also home to a POW camp. A historic marker at Shipyard and Carolina Beach Road memorializes that service.

Modern Era

From the early 1800s Wilmington was a railroad town. At one time the world's longest railroad the Wilmington and Weldon was based here. In 1960 the Railroad merged into the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and its headquarters left town. The Wilmington Railroad Museum can provide more of this history. That loss forced Civic Leaders to recruit new business and to diversify the economy. A film company, now EUE productions (with regular tours), opened in 1984 and the arrival of I-40 in 1990 greatly expanded the tourism industry.

Today

Wilmington is a diverse and interesting community and a magnet for people from all over the country. During college sports seasons you will see the pennants of schools from across the nation. As you search the Passport you will find a wide range of activities reflecting a population with diverse interests (events.enjoywilmington.com).

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