

Brunswick County libraries over next two months

# Traveling historic exhibit goes on display

By Lee Hinnant  
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The sixth edition of a traveling exhibit highlighting the region’s endangered historic sites will make its way to three Brunswick County libraries over the next two months.

Created by the Historic Wilmington Foundation, the exhibit showcases the 2017 list of the region’s 12 most-threatened historic places and also provides background on all the previous lists.

“It is the foundation’s firm belief that the display greatly expands and extends the discussion about the need to protect and preserve our irreplaceable historic resources because it travels around the three-county region the foundation serves,” said director George Edwards in a prepared statement.

The traveling exhibit will appear in county libraries of Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties, as well as Thalian Hall.

“The display was also developed with the idea that it would involve the viewer and motivate people to think about the buildings and sites in their towns and neighborhoods that are important and should be saved,” Edwards added.

This year’s endangered list includes the John N. Smith Cemetery in Southport and the World War I-era rifle target pit at Caswell Beach.

The Smith cemetery is the final resting place for several noteworthy residents, including Frank Gordon, the county’s first black educator; Ephraim Swain, Brunswick’s first black magistrate; and “Nehi” Gore, the legendary “Gentle Giant” who was nearly eight feet tall.

Supporters of the cemetery are trying to raise the money to locate and properly mark hundreds of undocumented graves.

“We see increased concern about the small private and public cemeteries across the region,” said foundation board president Walker Abney. “Cemeteries return as a thematic nomination this year, last listed in 2015. We have had individual cemeteries listed over the years and the wood grave markers of Brunswick County listed as threat since 2010, but collectively we see increased concern and appeals/requests to recognize these very valuable historic resources that mean so much to people.”

To learn more about the Smith cemetery, visit [www.johnsmithcemetery.org](http://www.johnsmithcemetery.org).

Also on this year’s list is the century-old rifle target pit, which was once part of Fort Caswell and now adjoins Oak Island Golf Course in the Caswell Dunes subdivision.

Back in the day, target operators manned the pit and held up metal targets on long poles. Soldiers used the pit to learn long-range marksmanship before being shipped off to Europe.

Efforts to save the structure from the ravages of time and tree roots started in 2011. Supporters raised the money to partially stabilize the walls and take out offending trees. They are working to gather enough funds for a permanent, engineered solution for the long walls that frame the structure.

More information about the range restoration is available at [www.caswellriflerange.com](http://www.caswellriflerange.com)

## Exhibit

The travelling exhibit will be at the Leland library August 30 through September 20. It will be at the Ocean Isle library from September 20 through October 11. From October 11 through November 1, the exhibit will be at the Harper Library in downtown Southport.

The foundation is in its 51st year of calling attention to the area’s historic resources and the 12th year of issuing the “threatened” list.

“Historic preservation is an important community value in southeastern North Carolina,” Abney said. “The exhibit expands our ability to educate the public and property owners on the advantages of preservation versus demolition.”

To learn more about the foundation, visit [www.historicwilmington.org](http://www.historicwilmington.org).

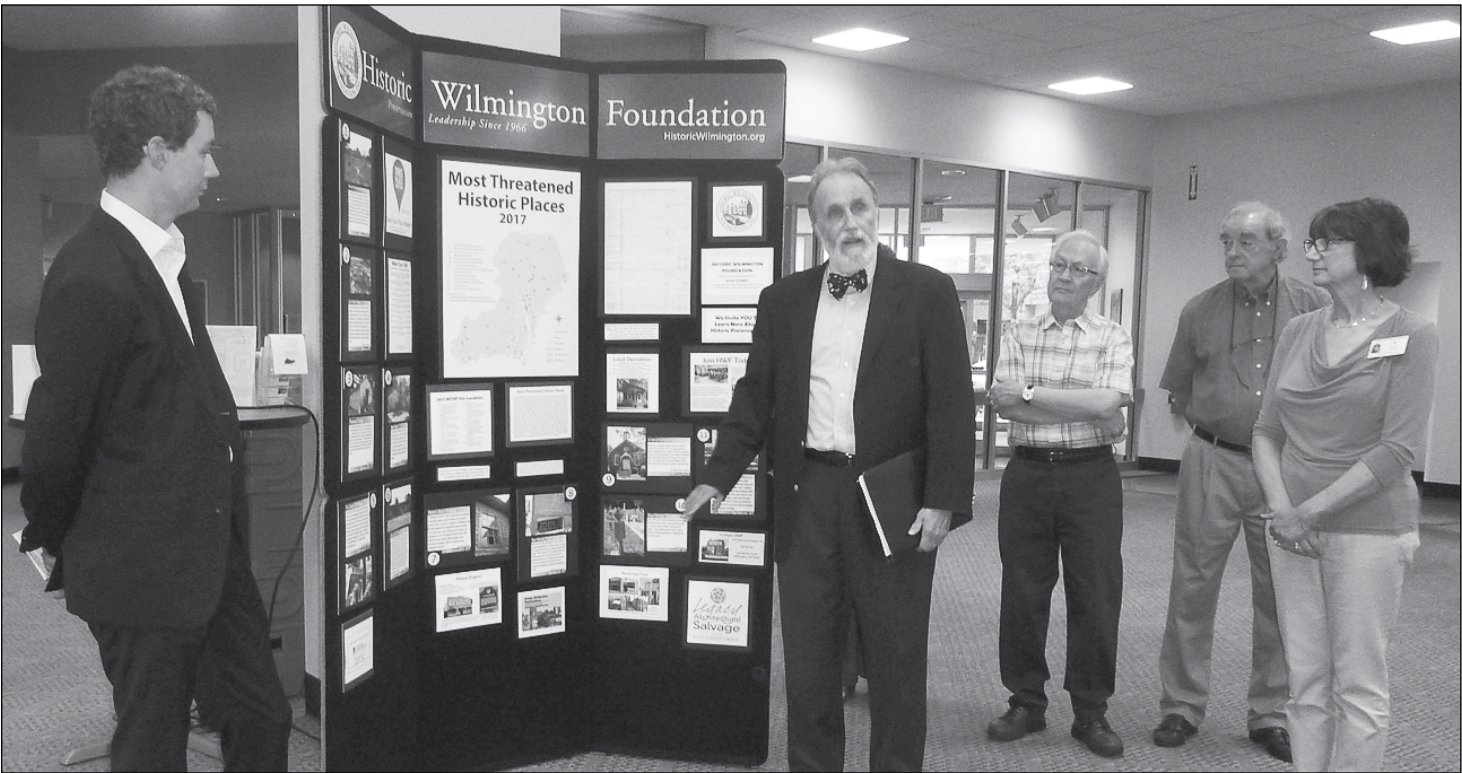


Photo contributed

**George Edwards (center) speaks about the traveling exhibit of threatened historic places. The display will make its way to three Brunswick County libraries from August 30 through November 1.**



**The John N. Smith Cemetery in Southport is the only one in Brunswick County that interred African-Americans.**



**The rifle target pit formerly part of Fort Caswell is one of the few remaining physical reminders of the Great War.**

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**George Edwards – Foundation director**