

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON FORT BUTLER

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by

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Mrs. Edward Hunt Brumby, Sr. conferred with members of the Historic Sites Division staff, Department of Archives and History, on August 4, 1966, to ascertain the present status of research on Fort Butler. Largely as a result of Mrs. Brumby's efforts the 1965 General Assembly appropriated to the Department of Archives and History \$6,000 to be used for research and a feasibility study regarding the Fort Butler Site.

During the fall and winter of 1965-1966 the Staff Historian, Mrs. Elizabeth W. Wilborn, conducted a research survey among depositories in North Carolina and other states for the purpose of locating records bearing on Fort Butler and the Cherokee Removal of 1838. Letters of inquiry were written to the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Georgia Department of Archives and History and the Georgia Historical Commission, the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Chattanooga Public Library (the John Ross Room), and the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the War Department in Washington, D. C. A member of the departmental staff, Mr. Robert O. Conway, traveled to Chattanooga and did research in the John Ross Cherokee collection in the public library of that city.

In addition, the following in-state depositories were searched: the North Carolina State Archives; the Duke University Manuscript Collection; the Southern Historical Collection, the North Carolina Collection and the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and the Cherokee records collection at Cherokee

The above preliminary work having been done, Mr. Jerry Cashion, a Ph. D. candidate in history at the University of North Carolina, was employed in April, 1966 to conduct systematic research. He has followed all known leads in and out of the state and, in addition, has researched extensively in Washington. Some of the materials in the National Archives have been copied on microfilm including 13 field notebooks relating specifically to Fort Butler and an additional notebook (discovered more recently in the National Archives) which in part relates to and clarifies the 13 notebooks. Several maps relating to Fort Butler were also discovered in the National Archives and photocopied for use here.

On March 17, 1966 the Staff Archaeologist, Mr. Stanley A. South, and his assistant visited Fort Butler and conducted exploratory archaeological research. A number of trenchers were opened which, however, failed to yield any positive archaeological information. The Archaeologist had prepared himself by reading the research notes, studying the maps, a customary procedure. When the historical research is completed so that the archaeologist will have the full picture, he will return and excavate more extensively.

As to the schedule for completing the historical and archaeological research, a matter of importance to our friends in Murphy who are waiting for our work to be completed so that they can plan for the next step in developing the Fort Butler site, we expect to be able to meet the following time table:

1. October 1, 1966 - Finish the historical research.
2. November 1, 1966 - Complete archaeological research phase.
3. January 1, 1967 - Complete historical and archaeological research reports.
4. February 1, 1967 - Complete recommendations, based on the research findings, for the development of Fort Butler.

We are loath to draw tentative conclusions at this point, before the research is completed, or to make recommendations for the future development of the Fort Butler site. However, it may be helpful to the friends and sponsors of the project for us to point out as early as possible any alternatives that we see at this stage of research and evaluation. We are glad to do this in order that preliminary planning on the local scene need not be delayed until the final reports and recommendations are made next winter.

The results of research thus far are meager as to descriptive data and precise information. In the end there may or may not be enough information to justify reconstructing the fort. As far as we have learned thus far, Fort Butler was not a fortress with a stockade but rather an informal collection of small buildings and open space. We have not yet been able to determine its full importance in comparison to other Cherokee Removal forts. It may prove to be of limited historical significance; or on the other hand, when all the evidence is in, it may prove to be of very great importance. There is another possibility that research will not yield enough information for us to make a valid judgment as to its importance in the chapter of history of which it was a part.

All these questions affect the final conclusions and recommendations concerning Fort Butler, but they appear to have little effect on the initial problem--that of acquiring and preserving the site. Unquestionably, regardless of what the final report will recommend in other respects, we will recommend that the Fort Butler site be preserved and appropriately developed.

Let us outline the alternative possibilities that now present themselves.

1. Before the current research project is completed, we may uncover ample specific information about the fort which would justify planning for a complete reconstruction. We may also find that Fort Butler is compellingly important in history, which would justify consideration of a State Historic Site or even a Federal project. This is however a very doubtful prospect.

2. Sufficient information may be gathered to make it possible to reconstruct Fort Butler authentically but not enough to prove a high degree of historical importance. In this case it would be a project for local and private sponsorship primarily. Such a project would not justify a State or Federal project, although help might be obtained from either or both sources.

3. Research may show that there is not enough information to carry out an authentic reconstruction. In this case the project would devolve upon local agencies and local leadership, with a chance for outside help.

Regardless of which alternative in the end prevails, the first step in any case is to begin planning for land acquisition. In this initiative is indicated, as there is no tradition applying to such situations by which it might be expected that State or Federal agencies would take this initiative. Below follow several alternatives, all based on well-known prospects of joint action by the city, the historical society, civic and private interests, which might be considered:

1. The City of Murphy, with the city planning and recreation departments cooperating with the historical, civic, and private interests concerned, might consider the idea of a city or city-county park area around the Fort Butler site; such a park to consist of a relatively large tract of "open space" land developed for a combination of park and recreational and historical uses. In such a park complex Fort Butler could be properly developed either by means of complete reconstruction or by means of museum interpretation alone, whichever proves most practicable.

For such a project a Federal "Open Space" matching grant for land acquisition and development might be sought.

It is understood that a private landowner, Mr. F. C. Bourne, Sr., has contemplated donating several acres of property to a Fort Butler project. Would he be willing now to initiate the project by making his donation without further delay?

2. If the City does not desire to sponsor this project, possibly a private non-profit foundation could be organized to undertake it. The foundation could limit the project to the Fort Butler site or it might broaden out to include other valuable community services such as a general history museum in addition to the historic site alone.

3. The City or a non-profit organization might go ahead and begin acquiring as much of the Fort Butler as is available in order to prevent other development in the area, with the idea of holding it until long-range plans can be further considered.

It is probable that the findings of the current research project will result in the Archives and History Department taking a position of encouraging and assisting, as may be desired, local or private interests in some appropriate development of the Fort Butler site as a local project. We are ready and willing to begin that role at any time that the citizens of Murphy may desire to embark upon the project.