



News Release

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NEW EXHIBITS ON NORTH CAROLINA'S ONLY FIVE TERM GOVERNOR RICHARD CASWELL TO OPEN AT CSS NEUSE/RICHARD CASWELL MEMORIAL STATE HISTORIC SITE IN KINSTON AUG. 17

RALEIGH (August 6, 2007)—Back in the late 1700s when North Carolina was still an unsettled wilderness dotted with a few small settlements and its capitol was moving from place to place, Richard Caswell was elected governor a record five times, more than any other in the state's history. A Revolutionary War hero who walked with Washington, Jefferson and Adams, Caswell is now known as the "Father of the State." To honor him as well as recall our early history, the CSS Neuse/Richard Caswell Memorial State Historic Site in Kinston will open new exhibits on the governor, Revolutionary War hero and Kinston's founder at 11 a.m. **Friday, Aug. 17.** The public is invited to attend this free event, which will also feature tunes played by Tryon Palace's colonial fife and drum corps, a Revolutionary War cannon salute and remarks by U.S. Congressman Walter Jones.

Part of a week-long community celebration of the governor's life and career, the exhibit opening will also feature other speakers including Cultural Resources Secretary Libba Evans, East Carolina University College of Arts and Sciences Dean Emeritus Dr. Keats Sparrow, N.C. Historic Sites Director Keith Hardison, Site Manager Guy Smith and a local Daughters of the American Revolution member.

The new exhibits highlight Caswell's life in Kinston as well as his military and political career. Besides telling the story of his bravery in the Revolutionary War and his contributions to North Carolina as an important early American statesman and its first governor, it features a reproduction uniform similar to the one Caswell would have worn as a Revolutionary War major general.

One of Kinston's key early leaders, Richard Caswell was born in Maryland in 1729 but moved to North Carolina in the 1740s, settling in an area eventually known as Lenoir County. Though trained as a lawyer, Caswell worked as a surveyor when he was young, just as George Washington did. Later on, he operated a tannery and raised tobacco, indigo and other crops. His first wife was Mary McIllwean who died in 1757. Caswell then married Sarah Herriage, the daughter of a prominent Kinston attorney. Out of his 11 children, eight lived to adulthood.

In 1754 Richard Caswell was elected to the colonial assembly, where he served for 17 years. In 1762 Caswell introduced a bill in the assembly to establish the town of Kingston (now Kinston). An active member of the British colonial militia, he fought in the Battle of Alamance against the Regulators in 1771. When relations between the colonies and England began to sour in 1774, Caswell was elected to the Continental Congress. During the American Revolution, Caswell rejoined the military and became a war hero by leading patriot troops to victory at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in 1776.

Before the war's end, Caswell headed the committee whose members wrote the new state's constitution and was chosen to become North Carolina's first governor. During the war and in the years following, he would be elected governor for five one-year terms. Despite declining health, while in office Caswell dealt effectively with such challenges as the self-declared "State of Franklin," a western North Carolina region that tried to secede. In 1789, the governor died in from a fatal stroke while presiding over the state senate in Fayetteville. After a Masonic funeral service there, tradition says his body was returned to Kinston and buried in a family cemetery.

Glimpses into two of our nation's most pivotal wars may be found at the CSS Neuse/Gov. Caswell Memorial within the city of Kinston. Here visitors may learn about the celebrated life of Gov. Richard Caswell during the Revolutionary War and the early days of our state and have a chance to study the remains of the Confederate ironclad gunboat the CSS *Neuse*.

The CSS Neuse/Richard Caswell Memorial is located off U.S. 70. Take U.S. 70, west of downtown Kinston, exit on U.S. 70 Bus. East (W. Vernon Ave.). The site is located approximately one-half mile on the right. For more information on the state historic site, call 252/522-2091 or go to <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/neuse/neuse.htm>. Information on the August celebration of Gov. Caswell can be found at <http://www.historicalpreservationgroup.org/Gov.%20Richard%20Caswell%20Memorial%20Project.html>.

Administered by the Division of State Historic Sites, the CSS Neuse/Richard Caswell Memorial is part of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, a state agency dedicated to the promotion and protection of North Carolina's arts, history and culture through such programs as "History Happens Here". For more information, visit www.ncculture.com.

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