

Neuse, CSS ^[1]

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by Leslie S. Bright, 2006



Remains of the hull of the ironclad CSS *Neuse* on display at the CSS *Neuse* State Historic Site in Kinston. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Historic Sites Division.

In October 1862 the Confederate navy commissioned the building of the ironclad ^[2] gunboat CSS *Neuse* to strengthen southern defenses and prevent Union occupation of the sounds and rivers of North Carolina. One of 22 ironclad warships commissioned by the Confederacy ^[3], the *Neuse* was designed by naval contractor John L. Porter ^[4] and built by Howard and Ellis, shipbuilders of New Bern. It was constructed near the town of Whitehall (now Seven Springs) on the Neuse River ^[5], for which it was named. A sister ship, the CSS *Albemarle* ^[6], was built simultaneously on the Roanoke River ^[7]. The ironclad concept had been proven in the battle between the USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* ^[8] at Hampton Roads in the spring of 1862. Construction of these superior, armored floating batteries with a built-on ram was intended to reduce the advantage of the much larger U.S. Navy's fleet of warships.

On 22 Apr. 1864, in an attempt to navigate downstream and retake the town of New Bern from Union forces, the recently completed *Neuse* ran aground on a sandbar one-half mile below Kinston. It remained stuck there for almost a month. During this period, its support troops were transferred from Kinston to Virginia, preventing a second attempt to retake New Bern when the *Neuse* was finally freed. On 12 Mar. 1865, as the Confederacy was collapsing, Cdr. Joseph Price, on orders from Gen. Braxton Bragg ^[9], ordered his crew to shell advancing enemy cavalry and then burn the *Neuse* to prevent its capture. Before fire consumed the vessel, a loaded gun discharged and blew a hole in the *Neuse*, which sank rapidly. Shortly after the war, machinery and armor were salvaged from the *Neuse*. After settling on the river bottom, it lay undisturbed except for shifting sands and slight exposure during periods of low water until 1961.

Driven by curiosity and a rumor that a barrel of gold could be found on the old gunboat, three Kinston men began a salvage project that lasted until June 1963. By the time the *Neuse* was cut into three sections and transported five miles to Governor Caswell Park in Kinston, a great number of citizens, groups, clubs, and political leaders, including the governor of North Carolina, had contributed in some way to the recovery of the *Neuse*. Artifacts and hull remains are on display at the CSS *Neuse* State Historic Site ^[10] and Governor Richard Caswell Memorial in Kinston.

2012 Update: On June 23, 2012, the CSS *Neuse* is moving to a new, climate controlled environment. More information is available at "CSS ^[11] *Neuse* on the Move" ^[11]" (North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources.)

References:

Leslie S. Bright, William H. Rowland, and James C. Bardon, *C.S.S. Neuse: A Question of Iron and Time* (1981).

William N. Still Jr., *Confederate Shipbuilding* (1987).

Still, *Iron Afloat: The Story of the Confederate Armorclads* (1985).

Additional References:

NC Historic Sites: CSS *Neuse* & Governor Caswell Memorial: <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/neuse/neuse.htm> ^[10]

"CSS *Neuse* on the move." North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/education-learning/topics/css-neuse> ^[12]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[19]

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/neuse-css>

[2] <https://ncpedia.org/ironclads>

[3] <https://ncpedia.org/confederate-party>

[4] <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0850/>

[5] <https://ncpedia.org/rivers/neuse>

[6] <https://ncpedia.org/albemarle-css>

[7] <https://ncpedia.org/rivers/roanoke>

[8] <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/civilwar/n-at-cst/hr-james/9mar62.htm>

[9] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/bragg-braxton>

[10] <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/neuse/neuse.htm>

[11] <http://www.ncdcr.gov/CSSNeuse.aspx>

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