

Region of Responsibility

We thought you might like to know—The Museum of the Cape is one of seven museums in the Division of State History Museums. We are one of three regional museums and our exhibits reflect a 20 county region. This series focuses on the history of those counties within our region of responsibility.



The 20 Counties in alphabetical order:

1. Anson
2. Bladen
3. Brunswick
4. Columbus
5. Cumberland
6. Duplin
7. Harnett
8. Hoke
9. Lee
10. Montgomery
11. Moore
12. New Hanover
13. Onslow
14. Pender
15. Richmond
16. Robeson
17. Sampson
18. Scotland
19. Stanly
20. Union

A Brief History of Lee County

Lee County is known for its brickmaking. Their brick companies have earned the county their moniker, "Brick Capital of the U.S.A." The mixture of sand and clay that dominate the area provide two important ingredients for making bricks.

Lee County was formed from parts of Moore and Chatham counties in 1907, and is named for Robert E. Lee. Geographically, the county's location sits precariously on the fall line dividing the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain. Geologically, coal was commercially mined in the county beginning in 1855. This was Egypt Coal Mine. In addition, local mineral deposits provided investors with the opportunity to establish the Endor Iron Furnace as early as 1862. Iron produced there made cannonballs, and other ordnance, for the Confederacy. It outlasted the war to eventually become "one of the South's largest and best-equipped iron furnaces along with a rolling mill and foundry."

Early history of the area, with regards to the American Indians, have yet to be fully studied. With its proximity to the Cape Fear River, its European settlers were largely Scottish, along with people of African descent who likely were the enslaved of settlers. The confluence of the Deep and Haw rivers create the counties northern border, but it also creates the start of the Cape Fear River.

Lee County is also known for its railway line. What started in 1855 as the Chatham Railroad eventually became known as the Raleigh & Augusta Airline Railroad, whose chief engineer was Colonel Charles O. Sanford, for whom the county seat is named. This created the impetus for growth.



The same clay that makes bricks, also provides potters with economic opportunities. In 2002, the first Sanford Pottery Festival was celebrated.