THE GAUSE PLANTATION
at OCEAN ISLE BEACH

ITS TOMB &

THE TOMB RAIDERS

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THE GAUSE PLANTATION

In 1751, William Gause, Sr. purchased land in Brunswick County and established the Gause plantation. The Gauses built a two-story manor house atop a high hill overlooking a channel separated from the Atlantic Ocean by a few hundred feet of marshland and what today is Ocean Isle Beach. The size of the plantation was several thousand acres. The manor house was located on Gause Landing Road (a few hundred yards from today's Ocean Isle bridge). The Gause Manor house was described as "a great and solid two-story affair, built entirely of heart lumber."

The plantation prospered and became known as Gause Manor. Soon there were five Gause sons: William Junior, John, Needham, Charles, and Benjamin. Charles moved to Smithville (now Southport) in the Spring of 1790 and was one of the founders of that city. Three of the Gause children:

William Jr., John and Charles fought in the Revolutionary War, in which William lost a leg.
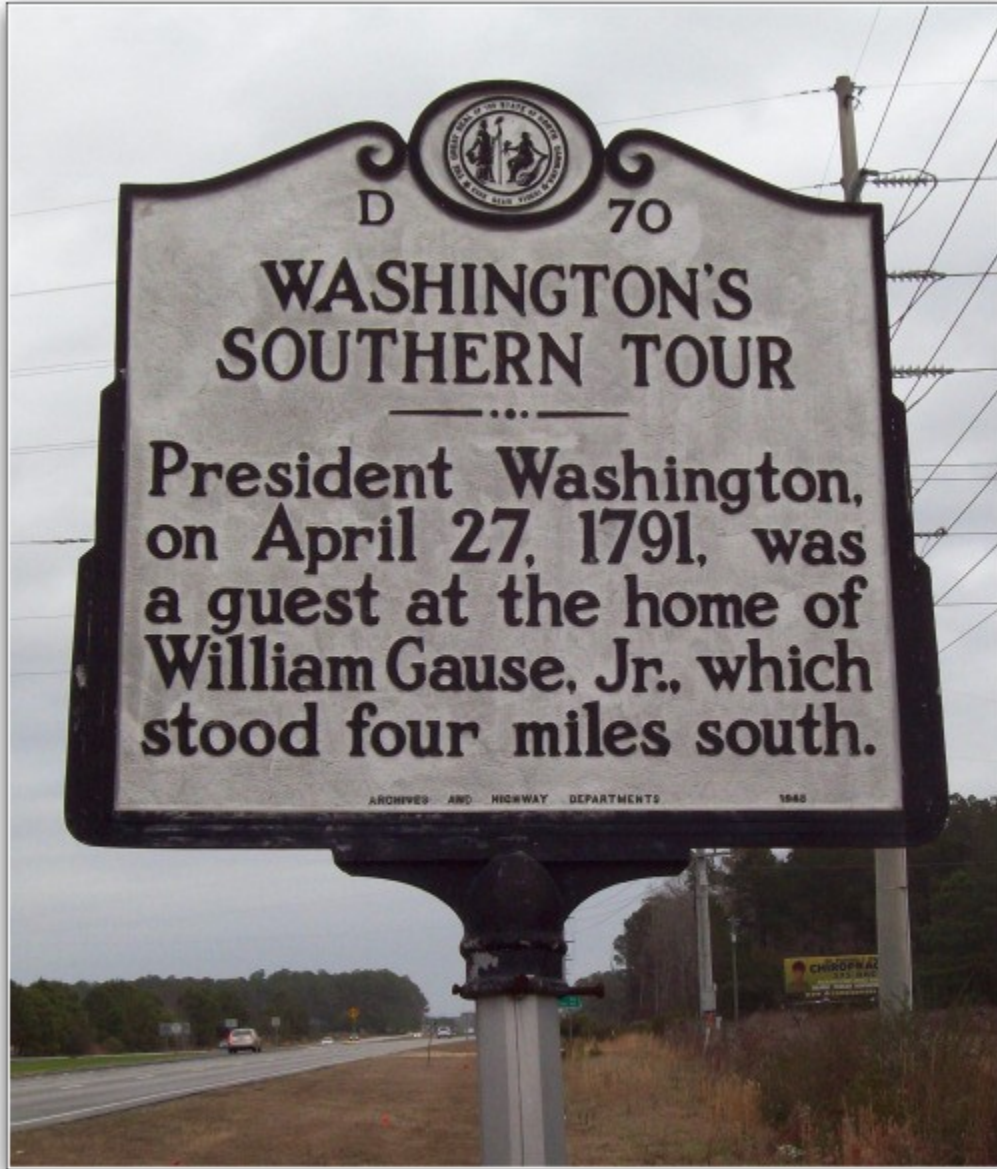
President George Washington visited Gause Manor on one of his horseback Southern tours. In his diary Washington wrote: "Breakfasted at Wm. Gause's, a little out of the direct road 14 miles (from the last stop).

After than, we, crossed the boundary line between North & South Carolina about half after 12 o'clock which is 10 miles from the Gause Manor." The entry was dated, "Wednesday, April 27, 1791." Note: Washington's final destination on this tour was Georgetown, S. C. A road marker on Hwy, 17 acknowledges this part of Ocean Isle history.
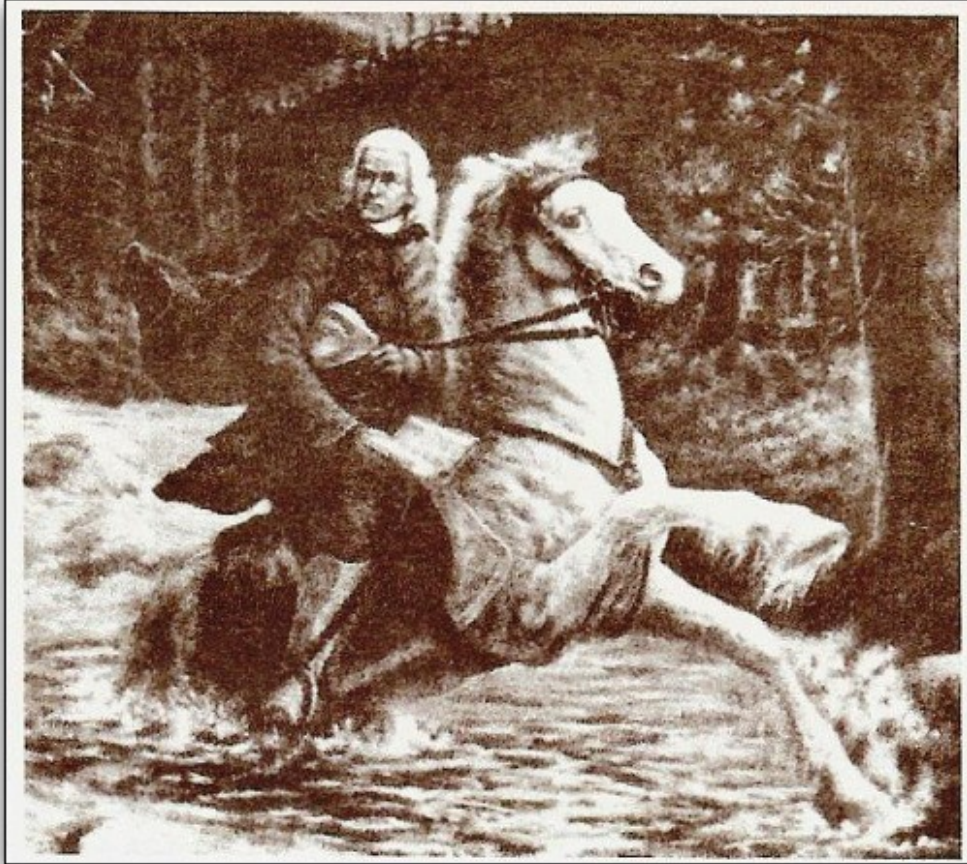
Bishop Francis Asbury, circuit-riding Methodist preacher who rode his way to fame up and down the Coastal Carolinas for 50 years often stayed at the Gause Manor. In his diary, he wrote that he had preached at William Gause's manor house in 1801, The Bishop goes on to say: "At this great house, most pleasantly situated on the Brunswick Coast at Gause Town, where I had looked forward to again greeting my once dear friend, William, death had stolen a march on me." Several years later, the indefatigable

Bishop came back to Gause Manor, where he writes: "I lodged at John Gause's. Our host is a local minister, and, I trust, a dear child of God."

What happened to Gause's Manor? The popular explanation is that fire destroyed the structure. There is no credible date for the fire.

THE GAUSE TOMB

One of the most unusual burial arrangements in the history of Brunswick County is the Gause tomb, which is located in the woods a few miles from the site of the old Gause Manor at Gause Landing.

The burial vault is of masonry construction, with brick walls 18 inches thick. The bricks were brought in from England by the Gauses for building the

vault as well as other buildings and structures they owned. This is how Brick Landing got its name. The structure is about three feet high, but extends about that same depth below the ground. It is a full 30 feet in circumference (15 feet X 15 feet). There is a jagged hole torn through the thick tomb, and is just enough to admit a grown person. Once the floor too was bricked but vandals have scattered the flooring bricks looking for valuables. Near the back of the burial mound and situated against what is an air vent (looks like a chimney) is a 2 foot hole dug into the earth surrounding it. Vandals had dug it, looking for anything of value.

This tomb is one of the last vestiges of this prominent Brunswick County family. It lies nearly forgotten amidst a tangle of undergrowth. The old burying ground surrounds it. Scattered around the tomb within a couple-of-hundred yard radius are unnumbered, unmarked graves. The graves used to bear markers, some of marble, some of cypress. The ground however has swallowed all remaining markers.

WHOSE TOMB?

From the will of John Julius Gause, signed May, 3, 1836:

Item 9th, It is my request that my body should be placed in the vault with my two deceased wives until a new one can be built at the old family grounds on the Plantation let the residence of Samuel Gause, deceased Estate. Then, I request my Executors to have my own remains interred therein, those of my two wives. Mr. & Mrs. Bruard's, my children that are within the vault or interred in the old burying ground.

This I enjoin on my Executors to have carried into effect immediately after my death. I direct that a sum be reserved from my estate, sufficient to build a family vault for the interment of my remains and that of my families as hereinafter directed.

(Transcribed from the original will).

The Gause Tomb was built posthumously at the direction of this John Julius Gause will. His last testament and other accounts differ on other points, however, shrouding in perpetual mystery the identities of those buried in and around the vault. Some accounts say that his parents and others were posthumously placed within the vault, other accounts refute that claim. One tale, handed down over the years, claims that a number of Gauses died at the same time of some "real contagious" disease and were together buried in the vault. It has been reported that William Gause Sr. was moved to the vault, but modern researchers have never been able to verify that fact.

The will of John Julius Gause indicates the intent to have a new family vault built at the old family ground on the Plantation late the residence of Samuel Gause, dec. Estate. And have everything moved there at some future date. That future date was never met.

A 1962 article by Eugene Fallon printed in *The State Port Pilot* purported to tell the names of those who were originally entombed there: William, Charles, Benjamin, John and Needham Gause. Those buried nearby were also moved to the vault. Of the adjacent graves, he said the oldest was that of Samuel Russ, "born in Charleston, S. C., on July 7, 1790, d. 1829. But both Gause's will and an eyewitness account of an area genealogist somewhat contradict Fallon's article.

In a 1961 letter from one Gause researcher to another, area genealogical author Ida Brooks Kellam wrote C. B. Berry that she had taken the following information from the site of "the old Gause Cemetery where the big tomb is." There she had found two marble markers on the ground covered by leaves. The wording on one showed: Elizabeth Frierson, wif of Daniel P. Russ, born in Charleston, SC on July, 7, 1799, d. Aug. 13, 1829. The other stone nearby showed: Anson Randal, age 4 years, "so I presume he was a Russ, she wrote. "A few partially burned wooden markers" still standing showed the following, she said, but the inscriptions were very hard to make out. "Thomas Frink (Gause), Aug. 27, 1802". "Duncan M. Gause, died—17, 1808, 10 years, "S, B. B. Gause, born March 19, 1877m d, Ict, 26, 1885". "McN. Gause born March 10, 1863m died Sept., 15, 1863".

RAVAGED BY TOMB ROBBERS, VANDALS & TIME

Since the 1830s, vandals and treasure hunters have desecrated the vault and the old burying ground surrounding it. Its contents have long since disappeared; gaping, oblong holes nearby bear silent testimony to efforts to locate other graves.

There are local tales of pranksters scattering bones throughout the old Gause burying grounds and hanging skulls from tree limbs. The entry has been cut open. The rounded corners of the vault have been chipped away and a hole has been cut into one corner. It is a wonder that the tomb still exists at all.

The first wave of vandals did or did not get some buried valuables, depending on who is telling the story. The second nocturnal visitors, after

blasting through the thick walls of the tomb, entered and tore crumbling skeletons aside, searching perhaps for rings on the finger-bones and digging beneath the bones for valuables. These ghouls allegedly are the ones that spread the skeletons around and hung the skulls from the tree limbs. No grave robbers have ever been apprehended.

In an October 15, 1966 article in *The State Magazine,* writer Bill Sharp said a Gause ancestor had resealed the tomb and put over the door an inscribed stone. He may have been referring to a visit in 1923 from one Baldwin W. Gause of "somewhere in California". Reportedly he was a great-great-grandson of one of the Gauses buried in the tomb. This fellow hired Claude Gore, then 17, to help him clean up the graveyard. Gause collected the bones of his ancestors and burned them to put an end to the vandalism. Gore told a *Brunswick Beacon* reporter in 1976 that he had used a mirror to reflect sunlight into the tomb so Gause could see to clean it. Sharp wrote that the tomb had been "built with racks to hold a number of coffins."

Today, the land around the Tomb and Old Burying Ground remains hidden in the woods on private property just off of Hale Swamp Road near the east end of the Ocean Isle Beach airport.

About the Authors
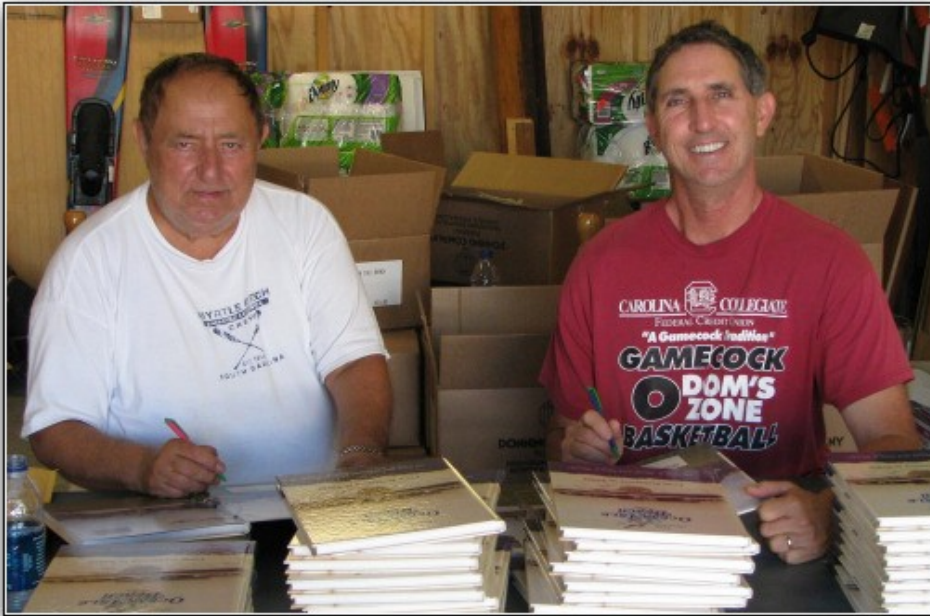
Dr. Fred David is a native of Whiteville, North Carolina in neighboring Columbus County, but today is a full-time resident of Ocean Isle Beach in Brunswick County. Fred spent most of the summers since 1965 at Ocean Isle Beach. He is a college professor, historian, and writer. He recently published twelve articles in the local *Brunswick Beacon* newspaper on "The History of Ocean Isle Beach from the year 10,000 BC to Today." He and his wife Joy have three children: Forest, Byron, and Meredith. Fred is an avid scuba diver and saltwater fisherman. From 1989 to 2006, he owned and operated the FOLLOW ME charter boat at Ocean Isle Beach and took many hundreds of people deep sea fishing. Fred currently serves as President of the Ocean Isle Beach Land Conservancy.

Vern J. Bender is a native of Saginaw, Michigan but has been a property owner at Ocean Isle Beach since 1979. Mr. Bender received a BS degree in marketing from Michigan State University and has over 30 years of executive level experience in retail management and marketing. He has held various national management positions with both Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Transamerica Commercial Finance Corp. He has a successful track record in managing turn-around and/or work-outs within the retail industry and the commercial finance industry. Mr. Bender owns the Bender Consulting Group, Inc. and is a local historian at Ocean Isle Beach.

Resources

For more of the fascinating stories, legends and facts about the history of Ocean Isle Beach, visit our website at:

http://www.OceanIsleHistory.com
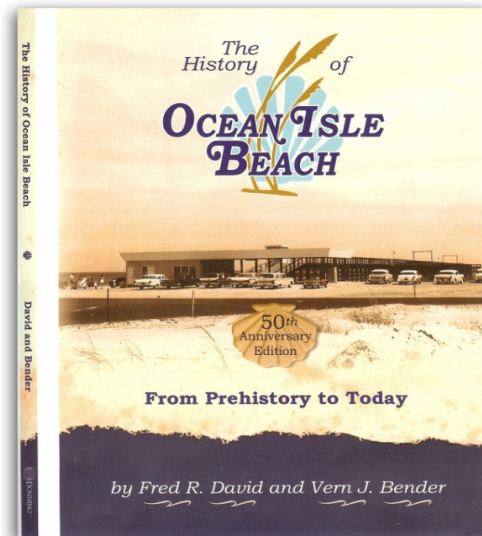
Our Book

"The History of Ocean Isle Beach

from Prehistory to Present "

Is available for order there, along with:

- **Rare Framed Prints and Photos**

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