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## A brush with Kinston's past

February 27, 2006

MICHAEL ABERNETHY

*STAFF WRITER*

Stephen McCall never thought painting would take him 150 years into Lenoir County's history.

A sale of prints of his painting, "Surrender of the 15th Connecticut at Wyse Fork," by Lenoir County's Historical Preservation Group (HPG) proved Sunday that the unexpected is possible.

"I started getting into Civil War reenactment after I got my master's," McCall said, explaining his love of battlefield paintings. "I started by going out as a Civil War artist. Most artists did sketches of the battle fields, and that's what I did. I had no idea I'd get this far with it."

Originally painted in 1994 for Dr. Charles Classen, McCall's painting depicts the March 8, 1865, event with vibrant swaths of blues, reds and smoky grays as troops mount against each other.

By that time, he had perfected his technique of reconstructing battlefield scenes by snapping photos of reenactments and "collecting them into a maze of imageries" before he would begin painting.

But the Battle of Wyse Fork left him in a peculiar dilemma. The Nash County native and **East Carolina University** graduate didn't have a reenactment to help him stage the painting. For the first time, McCall was forced to paint himself into a scene by having a friend take pictures of him in various poses in Confederate and Union uniforms.

If you look closely, you will see that the crimson-bearded soldier in the foreground bears a striking resemblance to the artist.

It's not quite the kind of immortality McCall intended when he was commissioned for the painting, but he says he's glad to be a part of preserving history for generations to come.

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"You just want to embrace something you had nothing to do with except your heritage," McCall said to those who came to purchase one of only 125 prints at the Kinston-Lenoir County Public Library. "There's a sense of immortality in it. We want to give our children part of ourselves. We want to be able to project ourselves longer than what we have on this place."

The sale of McCall's prints kicks off a busy week for the HPG. Saturday and Sunday mark a huge undertaking as the group stages a massive reenactment of the Wyse Fork battle — and the last Union surrender of the Civil War — in Kinston, with many community groups and booths to be in place on and around the field.

Byrd Humphreys, a member of the Battlefield Commission, said McCall's painting was an appropriate way to get things started.

"You just don't get pictures of Civil War action," Humphreys said. "As far as I know, there were no pictures taken during the actual battles. This is action of Wyse Fork. There's nothing like it anywhere else."

The group plans to print a few more of McCall's paintings in the coming months. A second painting, of Hoke's flank attack, should be available by Christmas.

In the meantime, McCall, now living with his wife and two sons in Barbersville, Va., is busying himself by preserving tomorrow's history today.

Through the website [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com), he is painting pictures of soldiers and events in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"The whole nation changed after 9/11," McCall said. "I just wanted to do something to support the troops. I send them the paintings. The whole website is just a big morale booster for the soldiers."

Michael Abernethy can be reached at (252) 527-3191, Ext. 273, or at [mabernethy@freedomenc.com](mailto:mabernethy@freedomenc.com).

If you go:

What: Battle of Wyse Fork Reenactment

Where: Measley Road, off of N.C. 258 South in Kinston

When: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday

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