

In the summer of 1783 a Spanish nobleman, Francisco de Miranda, visited New Bern. He arrived just in time to witness the town's celebration of peace. He noted the event along with the record of the pretty women he saw and sometimes conquered; which proves beyond doubt that the fiesta competing, as it were, with other interests, made quite an impression. It took place on June 17, and Miranda describes it in his Spanish diary in full.

"This day (he writes) the suspension of hostilities and the preliminary treaty of peace with England were announced throughout the vicinity by sound of drum from a company of armed militia (each soldier with his dress and rifle of a different sort), and by the discharge of four field pieces, which had been brought up beforehand for the purpose.

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About one o'clock, at the end of the ceremony there was a barbecue (that is, a roast pig) and a barrel of rum, which the crowd consumed promiscuously, the first magistrates and better-class people of the country along with the crudest and lowest classes, shaking hands and drinking from the same glass; it is impossible to conceive without seeing it a more democratic assemblage, and one which fulfills to a greater extent what the poets and historians of Greece tell us of similar events among those free peoples. At the conclusion, some were drunk; they scuffed readily with one another, and one was wounded. At night everyone retired to sleep--with which, and the burning of some empty barrels for a bonfire, the celebration ended.

Socially, New Bern made the most of the dying days of the grand century.

Such families as the Spaight, Nashes,

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and Stanlys, and frequent visitors like  
Wilmington's Archibald Macchaine and  
Edenton's brilliant James Iredell, made  
the town a center of post-Revolutionary  
gaiety. New Bern's generous hospitality  
impressed everyone, whether over a rattl-  
ing tea tackle, a mid-afternoon dinner,  
or a lavish late breakfast. So frequent  
were invitations, wrote Iredell, that he  
seldom ate at his own lodging. "By the  
way," he remarked in a letter, "I think  
this breakfasting invitation very conven-  
ient: it has equal kindness in it, and  
is less troublesome and expensive."  
Weddings were always gala occasions. An  
account has survived of a particularly  
festive one--the marriage of Daniel Carthy  
and Sarah Haslen in 1791--which Miss  
Amaryllis Sitgreaves called "the hand-  
somest...in New Bern since I can remember"  
Off the waterfront home was anchored a  
brightly lighted vessel whose guns boomed

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in salute until the ceremony started. They spoke as the bride--dressed in white lustring, a coat founced with gauze, and a small white chip hat"-- was excorted downstairs. Tea followed the ceremony, then dancing. And after that, the guests walked in, in couples, upstairs "to a very elegant set supper" while a drummer and fifer played at the door. Two large square wedding cakes sat on the ends of the table. For four days the dances, teas, and musical entertainments continued. On the fifth the gentlemen of the weddding party concluded the festivities with a "relish" on board the vessel. After such a thorough celebration, the marriage vows were well remembered--at least so it would seem from the dashing Miranda's complaint:

The women, particularly the married ones, observe a monastic seclusion,

and such submission to their husbands as I have never seen. They dress neatly, and all their life is domestic. As soon as they marry they separate themselves from all intimate friendships, and their attentions are centered entirely upon the care of their house and family; the first year as married women they spend in the role of lovers, the second as nursemaids, and the third and remaining years as housekeepers. The spinsters on the other hand enjoy complete liberty, and go walking along wherever they please, without their steps being watched.