

## Local World War II History Preservation Accomplishments

### Involving Governments of the City of Wilmington and New Hanover County, North Carolina

#### Timeline, 1946 to Present

September 11, 2017

1946 - City of Wilmington acquires the Second & Orange Streets WWII USO building from Federal Government, opens it as Community Center. City still owns it.

ca. 1990 - City works with local group and State highway department to dedicate historical marker to WWII shipyard at Carolina Beach Rd. & Shipyard Blvd.

ca. Early 1990's - City collaborated on successful effort to have Community Arts Center (name changed) placed on National Register of Historic Places.

ca. Early 1990's - County Commission and American Legion Post 10 dedicate memorial in Hugh MacRae Park to wartime dead. City, County and Post 10 collaborate on installation of portrait montages in public buildings honoring Wilmington's Medal of Honor recipients.

1995 - City participates with Battleship North Carolina and private parties to commemorate 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of end of WWII.

1997 - City plans to demolish the CAC and sell property to St. John's Art Museum (across the street) which would build on the property. Immediate opposition forms: Thalian Association, which manages the building for the City; ad hoc Community Arts Center Accord; and native Wilmingtonian historian Wilbur Jones, new resident. City withholds action.

1997/8 - New Hanover County Commission acquires land for Veterans Park which will contain new high school named for Vietnam War Wilmington Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Eugene Ashley, and new middle school for Wilmington WWII Medal of Honor recipient Col. Charles P. Murray, Jr.

1997-2000 - Pressure by the three parties (Jones now chairs the newly formed WWII Wilmington Home Front Heritage Coalition and takes the lead) on City Council and

staff continues. City Council and senior staff save the building.

1998 - New Hanover County School Board officially names Murray Middle School. County Commission names park's thoroughfare street William D. Halyburton, Jr. Drive, for Wilmington Navy Medal of Honor posthumous recipient.

1999 - City and County governments participate in 18-month long, 125-event Wartime Wilmington Commemoration.

2000 - City Council votes 7-0 to save, renovate, and preserve the CAC as a WWII site and community venue. City paints the building's exterior the original colors.

2001 - City, County, and County School Board elected officials participate in Veterans Park groundbreaking for Murray Middle School and Ashley High School.

2001 - City officials participate in CAC 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with WWII-themed events and USO big band swing dance.

2002 - City installs historic marker at Shipyard Blvd. and Carolina Beach Rd. at site of first German prisoner of war camp (1944).

2002/05/08 - City collaborated with WWII Wilmington Coalition to produce three editions of the "World War II Heritage Guide Map of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina." City donated \$6,500 in 2008.

2003 - School Board dedicates new masonry memorial at New Hanover High School honoring its WWII Medal of Honor graduates, Murray and Halyburton.

2004 - City dedicates new William D. Halyburton, Jr. Memorial (natural) Park.

2004 - County's Cape Fear Museum of History & Science opens permanent WWII exhibit.

2005 - City Council appropriates \$2.1 million to renovate and restore (to WWII appearance) the CAC.

2005-Present - City, County, and School Board elected officials participate in numerous WWII historic preservation and dedication events in HBHUSO/CAC as speakers, including (partial):

Late Wilmingtonian WWII veteran John Burney WWII memorabilia collection, 2010;  
New Hanover County Aviators Memorial, 2010;  
National (Washington) WWII Memorial giclee, 2013;  
WWII veterans meet-and-greet jamborees, 2005/09;  
WWII-USO type big-band swing dances, 2006/09/12/15;  
Memorial plaques to Murray-Halyburton and 248 County WWII dead, 2012;  
Memorial to Wilmingtonian Lt. Gen. George Boylan, USAF, WWII bomber pilot,  
2016.

2006 - City Council renames the building the Hannah Block Historic  
USO/Community Arts Center (HBHUSO/CAC). Block, a wartime entertainment  
fixture there, is known as “Mrs. WWII Wilmington.”

2007 - City-approved and authorized HBHUSO/CAC renovation and restoration  
work begins. All activities are relocated.

2008 - City Council and County Commission unanimously pass resolutions  
proclaiming Wilmington as “America’s WWII City.” Continuing project to seek  
national recognition begins, led by WWII Wilmington Home Front Heritage Coalition  
(now a 501c3, all-volunteer preservation organization).

2008 - Over July 4<sup>th</sup> Star Spangled Weekend, City and County elected officials  
participate in HBHUSO/CAC re-dedication of renovated and restored building with  
WWII themed events and USO swing dance. City’s \$2.1 million is augmented by  
thousands raised by private parties to turn lobby area into mini-museum of the home  
front - perfect example of public-private partnership.

2008 - City dedicates new historic marker at 10<sup>th</sup> & Ann Sts. site of second German  
POW camp (1944).

2008 - City Council creates HBHUSO/CAC Advisory Board consisting of private  
sector representatives from the arts and history communities to monitor and advise  
the Council on the building’s operations, maintenance, and welfare, and appoints first  
9-member board.

2008-Present - City continues to provide maintenance, upkeep, and graphics/design  
support for the HBHUSO/CAC and WWII-related activities.

2010 - City Council and County Commission endorse congressional legislation (introduced by Rep. McIntyre) that would designate Wilmington as the first “American WWII City.” McIntyre again, and Sens. Burr and Tillis, and Rep. Rouzer, also would introduce similar legislation.

2011 - City officials participate in HBHUSO/CAC 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary salute to area Battle of the Bulge veterans and educational experience for elementary school students.

2012 - City, County and School Board elected officials participate in re-dedication of Medal of Honor memorial garden at New Hanover High School.

2013/15 - City installs new lobby track lighting to highlight museum exhibits.

2014 - City, County, and School Board collaborate with private parties to preserve and relocate County’s lone memorial to its World War I dead.

2016 - City donates \$5,000 for HBHUSO/CAC’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. WWII Coalition and Thalian Association Community Theater present a Veterans Day weekend of original musical play, “Mrs. WWII Wilmington: We Fell in Love at the USO.” City officials participate.

2017 - City currently working with HBHUSO/CAC manager to install new rehearsal room floor and interior security cameras to protect WWII exhibits access.

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Compiled by World War II Wilmington Home Front Heritage Coalition  
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