



The Beaufort Female Benevolent Society Turns 200

Being touched with sympathy and commiseration for the suffering and destitute condition of many young females who are often presented to our observation; and being under a confident persuasion that it is a solemn duty binding upon all who have the means to extend practical beneficence to the helpless and needy; and desiring to fill up the space of time allotted to us with duty and usefulness, that at the close of our probationary state we may not then appear to have lived altogether in vain, we subscribers do promise to unite our efforts and associate for the purpose of being constituted into a Female Asylum. The rules and regulations of which shall be thereafter adopted by the subscribers. And as soon as a competent number of these shall be obtained they shall form a convention at some suitable time and place.

Thus reads the Original Subscription of the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society,



founded in 1814. Beneath said subscription is a row of signatures that reads like a Who's Who of historic downtown Beaufort – women with last names like Fripp, Verdier, Barnwell, and Means.

Still Benevolent After All These Years

Written by Editor

Tuesday, 04 November 2014 12:50 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 November 2014 07:48

Beaufort historian Gerhard Speiler wrote about the BFBS in 2001, citing a handwritten, unsigned document relating to its founding on July 4th, 1814. It reads: "Only 14 women met at the Episcopal Church (St. Helena's) for the purpose of organizing. A minister led in prayer. July 5th they met again with Mrs. Gen. E. Barnwell and many more joined. It was then decided to assist destitute female children, under a board of directoresses . . . The Society was often spoken of as The Asylum, as it dealt mostly with children. The adults meetings were often held at churches – one being the Tabernacle (Baptist) Church on Craven Street..."

Most of the members came from well-to-do families, and eventually they managed to



acquire an entire city block of downtown Beaufort. During the Civil War, their property was confiscated by the US Government, but afterwards the ladies were able to regain possession. In 1895, they built a house and leased it for many years, using the income to help the needy. Tenants included the Clover Club, which operated a circulating library, and also an infirmary. Funds from the 1982 sale of the house continue to provide relief for people in need to this day.

Two weeks ago, the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society celebrated its 200th Anniversary with a tea party at the Verdier House. There are 35 active members, each of whom was voted in, and while membership doesn't automatically pass from mother to daughter, there are many families who have several generations represented. According to its constitution, "the object of this society shall be a united effort toward charity when calls are made upon this society from worthy applicants and upon investigation by our social worker." We're told the Society currently serves five important charities in our community: CODA, CAPA, Friends of Caroline Hospice, Help and Family Promise.

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Congratulations, ladies of the Beaufort Female Benevolent Society. We raise our teacups to a proud local legacy and another two centuries of service!