

The ghost tower in Arsenal Park marked where the northwest tower of the Fayetteville Arsenal once stood. Photo by Tony Wooten

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Fayetteville's Ghost Tower Reappears

The city landmark is being moved to a more visible site as construction continues of the NC History Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction. The $87 million project is to open in early 2028.

BY PAUL WOOLVERTON

In May 2026, workers attached a crane to Fayetteville's 35-foot Ghost Tower. They lifted it from the remnants of the city's Civil War Confederate arsenal and gingerly moved it to a temporary spot about 480 feet south.

The steel structure had perched above the old arsenal's northwest corner since Fayetteville sculptor David McCune and his metal fabrication company built it in 1992, *The Fayetteville Observer* reported over the years.

It's being moved for the construction of the $87 million NC History Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction—described on the project's website as "The Museum of the Future." Construction of the History Center followed its 2022 groundbreaking ceremony in Arsenal Park on the grounds of the Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex in Fayetteville's Haymount neighborhood

The tower is being moved because its original location was too close to the History Center's main building, spokesman Marc Barnes said. The final location will also make the tower more visible, the History Center's website said.

Construction is expected to wrap by the end of 2027, and a grand opening is planned for early 2028, Barnes said. The History Center is being paid for with money from the state legislature, Cumberland County, the City of Fayetteville, and private donations.



A rendering of the Civil War exhibit area in the museum building of the North Carolina Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction being built in Fayetteville.



A rendering of the the antebellum exhibit area.



Fayetteville's Ghost Tower is placed at a temporary location on May 22, 2026, during construction of the NC History Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction. The tower will eventually be placed on the stonework on the lower-left of the picture. That stonework is the foundation of a corner tower of a former arsenal that the United States built in the 1800s, and that the Confederate states used from to manufacture weapons for the Civil War. Photo by Dorien Caldwell



A rendering of the emancipation exhibit area at the North Carolina Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction.

The NC History Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction has been promoted as more than a museum. Barnes listed two main goals:

Teaching the history as understood by peer-reviewed, university- and Smithsonian-level historians.

Gathering stories from across North Carolina from the descendants of families who lived here during the Civil War and post-war Reconstruction times.

"The history and the family stories will be combined to give a true picture of the time before, during, and after the American Civil War through the experiences of an entire state," Barnes said.

Besides the rise of the 60,000-square-foot museum building along the Martin Luther King Jr. Freeway, the most visible sign of the project may be the relocation of the Ghost Tower.

When it was erected, the tower stood over the foundation of one of the arsenal's original four towers, and matched the original's octagonal footprint and shape. The structure was designed to provide Arsenal Park visitors an idea of what the towers looked like.

The United States government built the arsenal prior to the Civil War to defend the nation following the British invasion in the War of 1812, historians say. After the Civil War got underway in spring 1861, a militia seized the arsenal and from then to 1865 it produced weapons for the South's rebellion.

Union forces led by Gen. William T. Sherman destroyed the arsenal in 1865.

In the 1980s, construction of the Central Business District Loop—which now is the MLK Jr. Freeway—sliced through most of the old arsenal grounds to speed traffic past downtown Fayetteville, according to aerial photography from 1982 and a 3D model of the arsenal created by Dorien Caldwell, the History Center's director of design development.

Whatever was left of the arsenal's main building, which was in the middle, and the remains of the buildings and walls of the north, south and east sides are long gone. The brick and stone foundations of the western wall and buildings remain. They show the outlines of the arsenal's engine house, some manufacturing shops, and the northwest and southwest corner towers.

In 1992, the newly installed Ghost Tower at the northwest tower's foundation became a landmark that drivers noted as they passed the CBD Loop's Hay Street interchange.

Over the decades, trees grew tall between the tower and the freeway, obscuring the tower from view. Now the trees have been cut down. By the time that the History Center construction finishes in 2027, the Ghost Tower should travel a few more feet and reach its final destination over the foundation of the arsenal's southwest corner.

The tower will be closer to the MLK Jr. Freeway and more prominent than it was through most of its tenure in Arsenal Park. DF

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