

THE WHITTLES BENCH

is a publication of
the Southport Historical Society
a 501 3-c non-profit organiza-
tion

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us a better understanding of our state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of our American heritage.

We further cooperate with the city of Southport to preserve the town's records and archives, and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers.

We endeavor to provide programs of historical interest at regular meetings, publish articles and books for the purpose of education and encourage community participation in the preservation of our heritage.

Southport Historical Society

was established
January, 1976
and maintains the
Old Jail Museum
located at
318 E. Nash Street
Southport, NC

The Whittler's Bench



Summer is Slippin' Away . . .

We are sliding in just under the "summer" wire with this newsletter (it's not Labor Day yet!). We will quickly be inundated with all things "autumn" as Halloween scary things appear in the stores along with pumpkins and Thanksgiving turkeys! We are looking forward to our September 24 dinner meeting and seeing everyone again after our summer break. Work has been going on at the Old Burying Ground and our docents have been very faithful at the Old Jail Museum throughout these hot days. We had a successful Kitchen Tour event in cooperation with Downtown Southport, Inc. in June and our cannon, "Thor", has been firing regularly and looked really good in the 4th of July parade! Our website has been revitalized and the Home Tour committee has been busy lining up the December 12 tour at their summer meetings. The board has been meeting and plans have been made. Keep reading for more details on all these and other "doings". So as we slide into September, we are looking forward to cooler weather and more SHS activities. Thanks to all of you who keep the society's motor running year 'round!

Pat Kirkman, President

Membership Dinner Meeting . . . September 24

"Getting from Here to There with History Research"

or "How to look up stuff when you don't have a clue!"



Our guest speaker is Beverly Tetterton, special collections and research librarian at the New Hanover County Public Library in Wilmington. She is a long-time volunteer at the Historic Wilmington Foundation and served on Wilmington's Historic District Commission for a decade. Her interests include historic preservation, local history, family history and architectural history. She authored *Wilmington: Lost But Not Forgotten* and *Wilmington Historic District Design Guidelines*. Beverly will guide us to the right paths for looking up historical events, family names and genealogy, and basic tips on how to use local resources. Her expertise is based on over 25 years of research and library experience. Don't miss this opportunity to become better informed about historical research.

. . . and we'll enjoy a potluck supper!

Bring your favorite dish to share as we begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Southport Community Building. Invite a friend or neighbor to come and enjoy this evening with you!

. . . looking forward to seeing you September 24

Welcome to Our *NEW* Members . . .

These have joined the society since our last newsletter in the Winter. We are delighted to have these new members and look forward to their involvement in the society. Thanks for your support!

John Innis	Dan & Charen Fink	Frank & Nancy Marchetti	Bill & Martha Johnson
Herbert Gant	Roger & Dolores Matson	Rodney & Emily Humphreys	Rich & Helen Palazzi
Debra Kincheloe	John Lynch	Joanne Valente	Edana Schmidt
Damon Scofield	Ed & Roxie Smith	Kathleen & Michael Fox	

In Remembrance . . .

We were saddened by the death of one of our charter members (1976) - **Bill Dunn** earlier this year. Bill was the brother-in-law of SHS co-founder **Susie Carson**. We send our sympathy to his wife **Thelma** and son **Steve**.



Missing "Miss Susie" . . .

September 1 marks the one year anniversary of the death of our dear friend and founder, **Susie Carson**. We have missed her so much this year—it was always so easy to just “ask Miss Susie” when any question came up about local history or “who’s who” in Southport. She was a treasure, she is still in our hearts.

Old Smithville Burying Grounds . . .

Three years ago the society took on the reclamation of the Old Smithville Burying Grounds as an ongoing project with vice president, **Musette Steck** at the helm. What an outstanding job she has done along with so many volunteers who have raked millions of leaves, pulled many a tough vine from the shrubbery, cut back the overgrown azaleas, trimmed tree branches, cleaned tombstones, reset markers, uncovered buried stones, adopted a plot, cleaned and painted rusty fences, chipped away at stubborn stucco, hauled bags of debris, picked up fallen branches, dealt with poison ivy, whacked weeds, cleaned old bricks and wheeled the wheelbarrow. A million thanks to each of you who lent a hand!

The change in the appearance of the cemetery has been remarkable. Many visitors and local folks have commented on how much better it looks. Established when the town was laid out in 1792, the burying ground is a treasure trove of Southport history. It is an important part of our “showplace Southport” and deserves continued respect and care.

The society brings this project to an end after the pre-Labor Day clean-up on Saturday, September 5 (8:30-11:30 a.m.). Our goals have been met and we have invested nearly \$14,000 in the reclamation. As a city-owned property, regular maintenance and upkeep are not a priority due to lack of manpower and funds. Perhaps it's time for Southport citizens, especially those who have family members buried there, to form a “Friends of the Old Burying Grounds” organization under the guidance of the city authorities to insure that this unique place does not go unattended and unappreciated.



It has been a rewarding experience for the society to help preserve the burying grounds as well as the Old Brunswick County Jail. These projects have enabled us to fulfill our mission to encourage the preservation of Southport's historic buildings, monuments and markers. We would also like to thank the State Port Pilot, Suzi Drake in particular, for the good coverage of our efforts and achievements in this project (see August 26 edition). We appreciate the city allowing us to take care of the grounds these past three years and thanks again to each person who participated in this successful venture - it could have never happened without you!

Local History Classes September 8 - October 6



Bert Felton teaching his Colonial history session

There are a few spaces left in the upcoming Tuesday evening classes beginning September 8 and continuing through October 6.

Bert Felton will talk about Colonial and seafaring history along the Cape Fear including a day trip to Old Brunswick Town. Following will be two sessions of antebellum and Civil War history by **Pat Kirkman**. **Larry Maisel** will complete the course with his sessions bringing us up through the 20th century.

The course is designed to hit the highlights of Southport and surrounding area history. The cost is \$25 per person and includes a copy of Susie Carson's history of Southport, *Joshua's Dream*.

Classes will be held in the Garrison building and space is limited. Call Larry Maisel at 457-6222 if you would like to attend. Call today!



So What's Going on with the Garrison? . . .

We are disappointed to report - "not much"! Following is the text of a letter to the editor at the State Port Pilot from Pat Kirkman, President of SHS:

On February 4 the Southport Historical Society delivered a proposal to establish a city museum and learning center in the Garrison House to the city aldermen's Ft. Johnston committee for consideration. The committee in turn presented the proposal at the February 12 aldermen's meeting. Since then the proposal has been stalled in the process of consideration and study for six months. (You can review our proposal by e-mailing the society at shs@ec.rr.com for a copy).

The society is delighted that after a flurry of activity, anxiety and many meetings, the Maritime Museum was able to acquire space in the surrounding buildings, but the Garrison house itself remains unused except for public restrooms and office space for two or three city employees. We do appreciate that the city has allowed the society to use the building on occasion for our local history classes. The Wednesday market and movie nights on the lawn are enjoyable but there could be so much more to attract the public to Ft. Johnston.

On July 25 the city's Ft. Johnston Committee consisting of aldermen, Ed Boguski, Donnie Potter and Jim Brown held an open meeting that several SHS members attended to consider best use of the Garrison. The aldermen did decide to recommend to the full board that the building not be rented out to the general public for private functions. After almost two hours of discussion, the closing comment from the committee was that they would schedule a workshop to discuss it some more and that's the last we've heard. They did agree that "time was of the essence" in determining how to best use the facility based on the criteria for acquiring the property from the Federal Lands to Parks Service in 2006.

It would certainly seem that three years is ample time to come up with a plan for opening this historically valuable building for the intended purpose of making it a public historic site. We are still hoping the city will allow the society to be a "friend" by donating our time, money and volunteers to develop the Ft. Johnston Historic Park and Garrison Learning Center. Along with the Maritime Museum this could be an outstanding complex and attraction for the city of Southport. The society is ready, willing and able - let's hope the aldermen will soon release us from our dangling position!

Historically speaking . . . by our Archivist - Larry Maisel

Margaret Hood Was Not Afraid of Sharks

Margaret Hood, a daughter of Capt Charlie Swan, spent as much time as she could in the water. Her younger brother Reese says she would float in the ocean most of the day. “She’d get out there with those waves breaking and she looked like a balloon bobbing. Once in a while she’d have to paddle a little to meet the breakers, but she could swim!”



She related in an interview with James Harper, Jr., the editor of the State Port Pilot a number of years ago the tale of her daredevil swim from Bald Head to Southport at the wrong time of year, when she was only 15. “My Daddy didn’t want me to do it, because that time of year there are sharks in the Cape Fear River. But I took off one day, and I told my brothers to watch me. My oldest brother followed me in a boat, in case I got cramps. Just before I got to the dock in Southport, I got those bad cramps in my legs, but I knew enough how to handle myself in the water, and I got to the dock.” Miss Margaret, those who knew her say, was feisty until the end.

The penchant of Miss Margaret’s father, Capt. Charlie, for posing for pictures in front of Old Baldy with visitors to the island (often with pretty young ladies) has misled many, even some locals, into believing he was light keeper of Old Baldy. Actually, Capt. Charlie was transferred to Bald Head when the Cape Fear Light was being completed in 1903. He was the keeper of that light for more than 30 years.



Cape Fear Lighthouse - photo courtesy of www.southporttimes.com postcard collection.

News from the Old Jail . . .



Becky Lucas, Shirley Wilson, Nancy Christianson
Nancy Heilhecker, Barbara Reed and Pat Kirkman

The Old Jail Museum continues to attract visitors as our docents faithfully open the doors each Wednesday and Saturday from 12:30 until 3:30 in the afternoon. As of July 31 they have said “hello” to 1118 visitors! 697 of them visited in July. Donations amounting to \$1686.48 have been left in the box as of the end of July. You can certainly see that the museum is of benefit both for the pleasure of the public and the “treasure” of the society! Thanks so much to **Nancy Christianson** for her continued efforts in coordinating the docent schedule and to each of you who volunteer. The society appreciates you very much!

“THIS PLACE MATTERS!” The above photograph was taken on Memorial Day and submitted to the National Trust for Historic Preservation promotion of sites throughout the nation that citizens care about and want to preserve. The NTHP’s goal is “helping people protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them”. Two other photos of the Old Smithville Burying Ground and the Garrison at Ft. Johnston were also submitted.



Christmas Tour of Homes Plans in the Works . . .

Our Home Tour committee has been working throughout the summer and have eight homes committed for the tour on Saturday, December 12. The tour is our annual fundraiser and we are very fortunate to net over \$10,000 each year. We appreciate so much the homeowners who open their homes to 1200 people for one afternoon! **Debbie Parker** is the host/hostess coordinator and is already looking for folks who would like to take a shift and receive a complimentary ticket - if that's you please let Debbie know by e-mailing her at dparker14@ec.rr.com or calling 253-9703. There will be more information about the tour and ticket sales in November.



Our Website is "Revitalized" . . . www.southporthistoricalsociety.com



Thanks to Ben Celinski for answering the call for a SHS websmaster! He has done a great job of reorganizing and updating our website and will continue to keep it updated and fresh for us. We are still working on adding some photos, but everything else seems to be pretty well set up.

You are invited to check out the website at www.southporthistoricalsociety.com. Feel free to give us any feedback you like. We want it to be user friendly and we welcome any suggestions you might have to enhance or correct anything we've overlooked. We'll keep Ben busy!

It Happened 'Round Here . . . excerpts from the chronologies

November 1805—A Spanish ship, the *Bilboa*, appeared off Ft. Johnston during a storm. The crew of 20 men were arrested by Lt. John Fergus, commander of Ft. Johnston, and confined in the block house "under suspicion of having murdered their captain and mate at sea". The crew was sent to Charleston, S.C. for trial where they were released for lack of testimony against them.

July 1886—The "Hornet's Nest Riflemen" of Charlotte, N.C. arrived in Smithville for their annual encampment. The company numbered 45 men. A number of ladies and gentlemen from Charlotte accompanied the visiting military. The Charlotte Cornet Band, under the direction of Professors Baker and Nelson, accompanied the group. The military occupied the government barracks at Smithville. There were accommodations for the civilians at the Hotel Brunswick and several private boarding houses. The dance hall of the hotel was open at all times.

August 1911—The Navy Department was contemplating making Southport a great coaling station and harbor with up-to-date fortifications. The officials were planning to make Southport another Gibraltar.

Membership Application . . . Invite a Friend to Join

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Name(s) _____
 Address _____
 Telephone _____ E-Mail _____
 New _____ or Renewal _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Mail this form with your check to: P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461

Annual Dues: Individual \$10 Couple \$15 Student \$2 Business/Organization \$15 Sustaining \$25
 Life Memberships: Individual \$150 - Couple/Business \$200