

THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XXI, NUMBER SIX, NOVEMBER 1996

REGULAR MEETING

The November meeting will be a Potluck Dinner, to be held at 6:30 p.m., Thursday, November 21, 1996 in the Parish Hall of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church at the junction of NC 211 and NC 133. Everyone should bring a covered dish and all of the family---guests are always welcome. (We are trying to convince Orie Gore to buy his wife Mary a bigger collards pot for Christmas, in time for the January meeting! This time, be sure to get at the front of the line or you won't get any!) The program will be given by Sandy Jackson from the Ft. Fisher Underwater Archeology Lab; he will talk about the building by the Corps of Engineers of the swash dam, known locally as the "Rocks," across New Inlet by Ft. Fisher.

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members Charles and Elizabeth Pollock of Southport. Enjoy the dinner!

CLASS OF '37 HAS REUNION

The Class of '37 of the old Southport High School held a reunion on October 10, 1996. The gathering which was held at the Chart House Restaurant in Southport was attended by class members Samuel Holden, Mayzel Lewis Keith, Lucy Anderson Avant, Jack Hickman, Helen Dean Sutton Smith (and husband Francis), Lawrence Willing, Robert Marlowe, Mary Catherine Northrop Marlowe, and Susie Sellers Carson. It was a very special time for the whole bunch, after all these 59 years as they discussed "the good old days," talked about beloved teachers and classmates, and made plans for a big 60th Anniversary in 1997.

A collection was taken and given to the Southport Public Library to be used to purchase children's poetry books in memory of classmate, Elnora H. Rogers, who was also a charter member of Southport Historical Society. "Nonie," as she was always affectionately called, loved poetry and children. Books of poetry for children seemed to be a fitting memorial to Nonie, who died this past February.

"Looking Back" - The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

NOVEMBER 1996



Your "Looking Back" editor has a special interest in the following reminiscence because it was given to her by her sister Thelma Sellers Dunn. It will come as a surprise to Thelma because I am sure she has forgotten that she gave it to me so long ago. But anyway I do appreciate her sharing what it was like to grow up in Old Southport. I hope that others will follow her example and submit items for publication.

GROWING UP IN SOUTHPORT - Thelma S. Dunn

Growing up in Southport was a very easy life. Everyone knew most people in town, especially if they had children in school.

On summer nights several children would meet behind the old courthouse (now City Hall) and play hide and seek behind the big oak trees until it was time to go home to bed. We did most of our playing in groups - not running around trying to see what we could destroy.

There was an area just off West Street that was a sandhill where we played cowboys and Indians. It has since then been made into a street.

The Oak Grove (now Franklin Square Park) was another favorite place to play. Here under the oak trees we would take rakes out there and rake an area and make believe it was rooms in a house. The raked up leaves served as the walls of each room. When we got thirsty we had a pump to get water from. We had to use our imaginations in those "good ole days" because we did not have money for expensive toys.

When we had money for it, it was a real treat to go to Watson's Pharmacy on what we called Front Street (actually Moore Street). We could get an ice cream cone for a nickel. Watson's had a soda jerk named Johnnie Simmons and he liked to make up different mixtures for us. My favorite was orange-pineapple ice cream. Johnnie named that one "Moonlight Cocktail".

And we have an item from our "Wilmington Correspondent" - Bill Reaves. What would we do without his contributions! This comes from the Jan. 30, 1913 issue of the Evening Dispatch:

"A recent analysis by the United States Government of the water taken from the pump in Franklin Square, this city, reveals the fact that it is the purest water ever analyzed in the United States laboratories. The well is 146 feet deep."

"The pump in Franklin Square is being rebuilt and a new concrete curb being put around it, and a drinking basin made for draft animals."

An editorial written by Howard C. Curtis, editor of the SOUTHPORT LEADER in 1909.

ON CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

When any well informed observer notices a disposition on the part of municipal authorities to preserve and safeguard natural decorative features such as trees and to perpetuate historical landmarks unaltered and to add various improvements that will tend to make a town more attractive, he realizes that that town is destined always to have a unique individuality and charm above other towns. More than that, this characteristic often includes and carries with it a genuine commercial asset. The people who live in such a town are proud of it and prefer to spend their lives there, and visitors always come back.

Many a man would not hesitate to sacrifice a century-old tree because it partially concealed his view of a railroad train. We can recall any number of towns near home where the streets have been entirely denuded of trees in the first instance with the idea that the result enhanced the metropolitan aspect of the embryo city...

Southport already a naturally beautiful little city could be made more so but it is to be hoped that when the inevitable growth to a larger and greater municipality comes that this natural beauty will not be sacrificed to commercialism.

The above quote is taken from the Introduction to The Architecture of Southport, by Carl Lounsbury, 1979.


Southport High School

THOS. H. FRANKS, A. B., Principal.

—SOUTHPORT, N. C., May 5, 1910.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:-

This is to certify that Miss Annie May Woodside has completed with much credit Colaw and Ellwood's Advanced School Arithmetic; Wentworth's New School Algebra through Proportion; Wentworth's Plane Geometry; Collar and Daniell's Beginner's Latin, with four books of Caesar, five chapters of Cicero, and some work in Jones Latin Prose Composition; Lockwood and Emerson's Composition and Rhetoric, with the College Requirements in literature; Swinton's Word Book; Tarr's Physical Geography; Montgomery's English History; Meyer's General History, and Hart's Essentials of American History.



NOTE FROM SUSIE: The above was found among some old papers which Miss Annie May Woodside gave me before her death in 1981. From Southport High School she went on to graduate from what was then a State woman's college in Greensboro. I cannot remember the exact name, except that "Normal School" was part of it. She taught school for a short while and then worked in the local bank until she was chosen Superintendent of Brunswick County Schools, becoming the first woman superintendent of schools in North Carolina. Miss Annie May was active in community and church affairs. She was also very interested in the history of Southport and did what she could to preserve it. From the time she was nine years old until her death, she resided in the house at 413 East Bay Street, which was the old Fort Johnston Hospital.

FROM THE FILES OF BILL REAVES: Yes, we once had a railroad!

11-20-1911 D

ALL ABOARD

FOR

SOUTHPORT!

NOVEMBER 23rd, 1911.

First Passenger Train over the Wilmington, Brunswick & Southern Railroad into the Historic Capital of Brunswick.

Take a day off and ride through the vast domains of undeveloped country lying at our doors and which is destined to early become the trucking paradise of the Old North State.

Patriotic Speeches by Statesmen and Orators, Boat Races and Parades, Grand Display of Battleships, Foot Races, Base Ball, Military Drills, Free Dinner and an Old Fashioned Barbecue of Beef, Pork, Mutton, Venison, 'Possum, etc., including all the good things grown and produced in Brunswick County.

**A GOOD TIME GUARANTEED EVERYBODY AND
PERFECT ORDER INSURED.**

Southport is full of historic interest, while Fort Caswell just across the bay is one of the finest on the South Atlantic Seaboard. Boats will run between Southport and Fort Caswell every fifteen minutes during the day, thus furnishing the public an opportunity to visit this interesting harbor of defense such as no other occasion will ever offer.

**DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RIDE ON THE
FIRST PASSENGER TRAIN THROUGH
BRUNSWICK COUNTY.**

into the City of Southport; Meet Old Friends and renew the acquaintances of by-gone days

**TRAINS LEAVE UNION STATION, WILMINGTON, AT
8.00 A. M. and 8.30 A. M.**

FARE FOR THE ROUND TRIP AS FOLLOWS:

Wilmington, \$1.00; Navassa, \$1.00; Jackey's Creek, \$1.00; El Paso, \$1.00; Town Creek, 75 Cents; Brunswick, 75 Cents; Bolivia, 50 Cents; Loughlin, 50 Cents; Goresville, 50 Cents; Coolvale, 40 Cents; Atwood 25 Cents.

ROOTS, TWIGS & BRANCHES - the Genealogy Page

GOOD NEWS: Jim Ruark, one of our members in Wilmington, has agreed to help with our genealogy section. He "does computers" - and I don't - and he is putting our genealogy records into his computer. Eventually printouts will be available from him and from the Public Library, when all the details are worked out. You may deal directly with Jim if you wish, or you may write or call the Society's address. Jim's address is: J. B. Ruark, 1240-C Columbus Circle, Wilmington, N. C. 28403-3939. His telephone is (910) 251-0545. He also has an E-mail address: 102545,444@compuserve.com. We want so much to get all our old Southport families documented and entered. Please help. If you have questions, please call or write Jim and he will be glad to help.

You might be interested in knowing that Jim says he is my "probation officer"; that he agreed to do all this so I would get real busy on my next book of Southport history; that if I don't do that, then he is going to turn all this "stuff" back over to me! So you can bet your life that I am working away!

REMEMBER our Family Certificate program. For ten dollars and the necessary proof that your ancestor was in Southport by 1896 (for a Century certificate), or that your ancestor was in North Carolina by 1787 (Pioneer Certificate), you can obtain a certificate. These certificates make excellent Christmas or birthday gifts. Frames for the certificates can be purchased almost anywhere.

If you are working on your family history, you might be interested in knowing about the Bill Reaves Collection, donated by Bill Reaves to the North Carolina Room of the New Hanover County Public Library. This is a rich source for any one with ancestors in southeastern North Carolina.

Bill spent countless hours of research, clipping and organizing materials from old newspapers. In recent years Francey Wertz and Mary Shannon have also helped and we are grateful for their efforts.

Because of all this work a large and valuable collection has been produced. These tidbits of local history have been put into hundreds of file folders and stored at the library. There is a folder for each surname that Bill has found material for. They have not been sorted by family groups, but rather are available for the researcher to "search out" his or her ancestor in the general surname file. It is fascinating the information that can be found in these clippings that tell of marriages, deaths, births, business affairs, and other relevant activities of our ancestors. You may even find a "skeleton" or two for the family "closet".

The staff of the North Carolina Room of the New Hanover Library will be happy to tell you their requirements for searching these files. We are glad that we can have access to them. Our thanks to them, to Bill Reaves for coming up with the idea and for all the hours of work he has put into it, and to Frances and Mary from our Society who have helped on the project.

THE WHITTTLING TREE AT SOUTHPORT
AS VIEWED IN THE YEAR 1923.

THE WILMINGTON STAR, June 3, 1923.

Southport has a relic of the past in the old whittling tree, near the water front, which has been standing there for 35 years. This noted cedar has two graceful partners, cotton woods of a leafy nature.

Natives and visitors while their time away beneath the shade of the tree. Every year the benches must be renewed as the whittlers often take it in their heads to whittle them away.

Among the tales related about the famous tree is the number of knives used by the whittlers. It is said that the man in the nearby store sells two or three gross of knives every week. Another story runs that enough corn liquor has been drunk under the tree to float a battleship.

When the trees were recently named there were four in the group. They were, Woodrow Wilson, William McKinley, Bill Bryan and Warren Harding. According to Southport legend, the Harding tree would not grow and was unable to flourish among Democratic trees and country.

Very few remnants of this old art of whittling or carving remain in America or even in foreign countries. The Indian still carves his wooden fish-hook or his pipe stem just as the Polynesian works patterns on his paddle. Formerly whittling or carving was done in the open, as was an old custom as late as the colonies in old New England towns. Then the next stage was around the one local country store.

Of late years carving has gone out of fashion; a change has come about. Machine work, a cheaper method, has slowed out the individual contractor. "This has proved fatal to an art which can never flourish when done at so much a yard."

(Reaves note: How about a revival of the art of whittling by some of our retirees in Southport, and possibly a whittling contest during the Fourth of July Festival. Many could become a "chip off the old block" once again.)

(From the files of Bill Reaves, Wilmington, N.C., 1995)