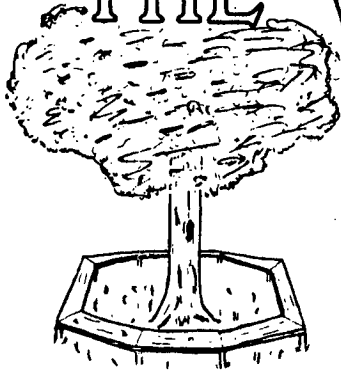


THE WHITTLERS BENCH



SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

P.O. BOX 10130, SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA 28461

JULY 18, 1985

JULY MEETING: The quarterly meeting to be held on July 25th at 7:30 P. M. in the Board Room of the Public Library will feature "The Monitor Search off Cape Hattress", a film produced by the Underwater Archaeology Department of Fort Fisher. The "Monitor" sank during a gale in December 1862 while under tow off Cape Hattress. Guests are welcome.

OLD JAIL AGAIN A FOURTH OF JULY ATTRACTION: More than 155 people registered as visitors to the Old Jail at the corner of Nash and Rhett Streets during the recent Fourth of July Festival. On display was memorabilia of author Robert C. Ruark, Jr. (1915-1965), including First Editions of all his books. These were made available to us by Dr. William Rabon. Also available were tombstone rubbings from the Old Southport Burying Ground through courtesy of the Franklin Square Art Gallery. Milton Prevost also made available for the display books of photographs taken from the popular column of the State Port Pilot, "The Way It Was".

Paul Sweeney and Milton Prevost thoroughly cleaned the grounds and mowed the grass. Jean Prevost, Eleanor Smith and others cleaned the interior. Eleanor Smith and Susie Carson arranged the Ruark exhibit, which, by the way, contained letters and pictures on loan from Mrs. Carl M. Kirby, Jr., present owner of the old Ruark (Adkins) homeplace. Susie also prepared a brief history of the Old Jail for the occasion. As it is probably of general interest. A copy of the history makes up the second page of this newsletter.

BILL REAVES' BOOK REPRINTED: SOUTHPORT (SMITHVILLE), A CHRONOLOGY, VOLUME I (1520-1887) by Bill Reaves, lifetime member of our Society, has been reprinted after much demand, and is now on sale at the price of \$15.00. Copies may be obtained from Eleanor Smith, Susie Carson, or Broadfoot Book Mark in Wilmington. After the cost of printing has been paid, the Society will be given a percentage from the sale of the books. This was our very first publication and has received wide acclaim. Volume II is in the making and will cover the period 1888 up until sometime about World War II. This volume is expected to be on sale July 4, 1986. Watch for it!

NORTH CAROLINA: REFLECTIONS OF FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, a book commissioned by Branch Banking and Trust Company in honor of the 400th Anniversary of the Roanoke voyages and colony, is a beautiful volume. Its pictures of North Carolina scenery are outstanding, and "The Illustrated Timeline" tracing the 400-year history of the state, by Thomas C. Parramore, a Winston native with a Ph. D. in history from UNC and now Associate Professor of History at Meredith College, is very unusual. The book contains many short articles by prominent North Carolinians such as author John Ehle, Basketball Coach Clarence "Big House" Gaines, and Dr. Craig Phillips, N. C. Supt. of Public Instruction. It is available in the Brunswick County Library and is a treasure.

OLD JAIL
(by Susie Carson)

The Town of Smithville was laid out in 1792 by Joshua Potts and Benjamin Smith, in accordance with an act of the Legislature which was then meeting in New Bern. The plan consisted of 100 half-acre lots; ten of the lots were set aside for public use and the other 90 were sold by public subscription. The city jail was built on one or more of these reserved lots. After the county seat was moved to Smithville in 1808 a court house was built on some of the reserved lots and paid for by public subscription instead of tax money. The town retained title to the courthouse building and either leased it to the county or gave it the right to use the courthouse building and the city jail. The jail was then located in the vicinity of our present police station, fire station and rescue squad buildings.

As far as we know, the wooden structure continued to be used by the county as its jail until 1849 when it was destroyed by fire set by an inmate who escaped from his second story cell. On October 10, 1850, bids were called for the construction of a county jail at Smithville, the building to be 30 by 22 feet, two stories high, with a garret. The building committee was made up of Dr. S. B. Everitt, S. N. Galloway, John Brown, Elijah Owen and Robert M. McRackan, all leading citizens of the town and county. It is quite evident from old newspaper accounts that the new jail called for in the bid specifications was not built immediately, but that some sort of temporary structure was used. We do not know its location. As late as 1879 there is a newspaper account that tells of eleven persons being crowded into a "one-room jail" at Smithville awaiting trial.

In 1904, the building which we now call the Old Jail was finally constructed for use as a county jail and located on land sold to the County by Miss Kate Stuart of Smithville. It housed prisoners until 1971 when it was replaced by the one-story brick building just to the rear, facing on Rhett Street. The county, however, used the building as offices for the Sheriff's Department until the county seat was moved to Bolivia in 1978.

Architecturally, the Old Jail is a two-story brick building laid in 1:6 bond and has a six-course belt dividing the two stories. The windows have segmental openings. The iron bars on the windows are apparently the original ones.