

THE WHITTAKER'S BENCH

Southport Historical Society

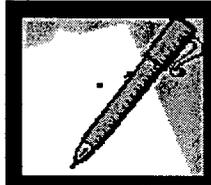
January 2006

Please Note

There was no board meeting during November/December so there are no meeting highlights or Treasurer's report available for this newsletter.

Incoming SHS Officers & Directors

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| President | |
| Pat Kirkman | 457-0579 |
| Vice-President | |
| Musette Steck | 253-3855 |
| Secretary | |
| Ginny Cannon | 278-5553 |
| Treasurer | |
| Phil Fravel | 457-4794 |
| Historian/Archivist | |
| Larry Maisel | 457-6222 |
| Directors | |
| Karen Knighton | 454-8018 |
| Cathy Fravel | 457-4794 |
| Don Parker | 253-9703 |



PRESIDENT'S PARAGRAPH

To paraphrase the old Alka-Seltzer commercial, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing", I can't believe that I've done the whole thing.

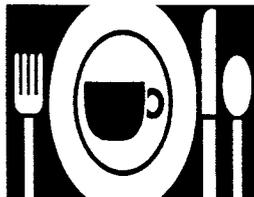
Four years as president of the Southport Historical Society, and now time to turn over the gavel to Pat Kirkman, newly elected at the November meeting. Wow! Time to look back a bit.

Without a doubt, the most singular stride the Society has taken is the virtual completion of the Old Jail restoration and the opening of the Old Jail Museum. Following close in magnitude have been continuation of publishing, the ever successful Christmas Tour of Homes, and as a direct result, the financial health of the Society. Each of these has followed the goals of the Society; to preserve and to educate. The Old Jail has been preserved and is now an educational tool; the books published have served to preserve the history of Southport and to educate about the way it was; the Tour has permitted thousands to learn more about our preserved old homes and to possibly spark an interest in learning more about the legacy of the city. And, the financial health of the Society has permitted a doubling of the scholarships available to the youth of Brunswick County.

Were it not for the volunteers, believe me, none of it could have happened. I'm not even going to try to name them. That would be courting disaster. Just stand with me and give them an ovation.

Four years, and now I look forward to working with Pat and the exciting things that she has planned.

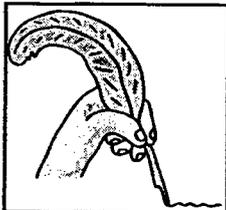
Peter Wyckoff



January Meeting

Please join us for our regular potluck dinner and meeting on January 26 at Southport Baptist Church.

As usual, we will meet at 6:00 pm for a social time with dinner at 6:30. Our program promises to be an interesting look at the history and current activities of the United Daughters of the Confederacy by SHS member Brenda Birmelin. Brenda and a colleague will be dressed in confederate attire and will share information about women during the confederacy. One of the current projects of the UDOC is the reprinting of a book "North Carolina Women of the Confederacy" which was originally published in 1926. This book is a fascinating collection of writings and memoirs of women who lived during the confederacy.



Scholarship Essay

Each year the SHS sponsors the Susan Sellars Carson Scholarship which provides a \$1000 academic scholarship to a graduating senior from South Brunswick High School. This year's winner was Daniel Amirall who wrote about Abraham Galloway's role in Southeastern North Carolina history. We are pleased to print his excellent paper.

"The Eventful Life of Abraham H. Galloway" - by Daniel Amirall

Abraham Galloway was a catalyst in the progression towards civil rights in southeastern North Carolina. Galloway was an African American who, in 33 short years, grew from being a slave to becoming one of the most influential black political activists of his time.

Abraham Galloway was born in Smithville (later known as Southport), North Carolina in 1837. He had a white father and black mother and was born into slavery. He spent the first 20 years of his life serving his white masters in Brunswick and New Hanover Counties. At the age of 20 he stowed away on a schooner to Philadelphia an escaped slavery by running to Canada. Despite the risk of being returned to his "owner" under the Fugitive Slave Law, he crossed the border into Ohio and became a key advocate against slavery. He gave antislavery speeches and developed ties with abolitionist leaders in New England. (Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* 185) These experiences nurtured the leadership skills that he would later call upon as an African American activist in North Carolina.

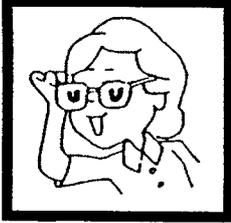
In 1862, Galloway returned to North Carolina to the city of New Bern and initiated his first chapter in North Carolina civil rights history. He began his work in espionage as a chief intelligence agent or what would today be called a "spymaster". The superintendent of Negro affairs, Vincent Colyer, reported that the black operatives "were invaluable and almost indispensable," in the Union's war effort in that area. (186) Galloway was a conduit for communication between thousands of refugee slaves and Union commanding officers in New Bern. His network extended thirty to three hundred miles behind enemy lines. (Cecelski, *Abraham H. Galloway* 51)

Galloway's power as a leader grew with his demonstrations of patience, intelligence, and prudence, coupled with fiery yet steadfast convictions. "Black Carolinians crowded around him as if he were a prophet." (53) Galloway became a grassroots organizer, a coalition builder, and one of the most powerful orators of his time. The freedmen and women he personally instructed in politics in turn became key political activists during the Reconstruction. (Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* 188) He assiduously worked with refugee slaves to help organize schools, relief societies, self-help associations, and churches. These organizations would become the cornerstones of black political life and sow the seeds for the black civil rights movement a hundred years later.

Galloway organized one of the first black militias in New Bern during the Civil War. This achievement was especially incredible because it took place before President Lincoln sanctioned black military membership in the Union Army. The more than 5,000 African Americans assembled in New Bern became the core of the 35th, 36th, and 37th regiments, and of the United States Colored Troops, or African Brigade. (Cecelski, *Abraham H. Galloway* 45) Galloway made bold claims about the might of the black population, proclaiming that the Union had "failed to take Richmond with 200,000 white soldiers," but they "would soon take it with twenty thousand Negroes." (Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* 189) Galloway envisioned America during the Reconstruction period, at a time when the war was far from over. Galloway demanded political rights for blacks, including the right to vote. He boldly declared, "if this should be refused them at the ballot box [,] they would have it at the cartridge box!" (190) He organized a state chapter and five local chapters of the Equal Rights League in North Carolina and achieved political recognition on the national level.

After the Civil War, Galloway was chosen by the former slaves in southeastern North Carolina to represent them in the statewide Freedmen's Convention in Raleigh. At this new post Galloway drew up a series of resolutions calling for education and equal protection under the law for the freedman. (Powell 272) His aggressive style of debating and the "personal influence given him by his fearlessness and audacity, always secured him a hearing," claimed white reporter John Dennet. He was also said to be "perhaps the most remarkable person among the delegates." (Cecelski *Waterman's Song* 194)

Continued on page 4



LOOKING BACK - THE HISTORY PAGE

Susan Carson, Editor

I am pleased to share with you a story about a truly remarkable woman who is part of the history of Brunswick County and Southport. Her name is Mary Lena Varnum Fisher and she lived "the old way" with no electricity, no plumbing, no gas and no car until her death in 1985. Mary Fisher and her husband married in 1917 and he served in the Lighthouse Service for many years. They lived on Baldhead Island and on Cape Romain in S.C. before moving back to Maco in 1936. Here is her story as told by her daughter, Rosie Fisher Boyd, and recently shared with me.

"Another Maco Story"

Our younger people won't remember this but I bet a lot of you older folks will. Maybe you were driving down Highway 74-74 when suddenly you saw this vision from out of the past walking down the road. She was a little woman walking fast with her hair in a bun, no hat, but wearing a long dress. She had no car so she did a lot of walking and whenever she had to go a long distance, such as Wilmington or Southport, you would see her standing beside the road waving her little American flag. That's how she would hitchhike! Although sometimes she would walk the 13 miles to Wilmington and one time she even walked to Southport.

She lived in a small house down a path in the woods near Highway 74-76. The house she lived in was built in the early 60's. Before this new home was built, the old home place sat up on a hill overlooking the highway with large trees in the yard, a water pump out front, and an American flag blowing in the breeze. It was indeed a beautiful place back then. She had no electricity so she cooked on an old wood cook stove and got her heat from a wood stove. Her husband passed away in 1956 and her children were all grown and, although they would come and visit and help her when they could, she had to do all of the work herself. She chopped her own wood, worked in her garden, washed her clothes on an old wash board. She was a hard working woman. She did not own a washing machine or an iron except for an old black iron that she would heat on the wood stove. She did not own a TV or dishwasher or even a radio. She made her own clothes on an old manual, foot treadle Singer sewing machine that belonged to her mother. She wasn't into fashion and always wore her long dresses.

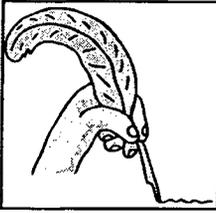
Mary Fisher was not an educated person as she dropped out of the third grade while living with her parents, Sam and Sarah Varnum, on Baldhead Island. In spite of her lack of education, she was somewhat of a mathematical genius. A person could ask her any math question and she could answer it. When her children were small, she was great at helping them with her homework.

During the early 40s things were hard and lots of people hitchhiking through Maco would stop by her home. Even though her family was poor, no one ever left her house hungry. Mary Lena Varnum Fisher was a lady and a good Christian woman. She never changed her way of dressing or her morals. During the 49 years she lived in Maco she was almost like a landmark and was a much loved and respected woman. She was, and is still, a Maco legend – and she was my mother. I like to think that God was happy to welcome her home on June 26, 1985.

BOOK NEWS



Our newest publication, *Classic Southport Cooking*, by long-time member Lewis Hardee, Jr. has been a great success. Our first printing of a thousand books was sold out in 90 days and more than half of our second thousand have also been sold. Several local businesses have books in stock and we are marketing it as "Southport's Signature Cookbook". We foresee this being a good money maker for the society for a long time to come. Members may buy copies from the society at a discounted price of \$18.50 including tax. We are looking for several members to form a publications committee to market and manage sales of all our books in the new year. If this sounds like a project you would be interested in, please let Pat Kirkman know and we will work out the details.



Scholarship Essay Continued

In 1867 the Reconstruction Acts were passed. These acts required that former Confederate states guarantee universal male suffrage as a condition of Union membership. During this transition period, Galloway leapt back into political action, in Wilmington, with renewed vigor. He addressed the people, inspiring and mobilizing the crowds. He secured a position as one of the thirteen elected delegates from the seven Cape Fear Counties to serve at the 1868 constitutional convention. He became one of only 13 blacks of the 120 elected representatives. In the eyes of many, the black contingency was considered a disgrace and a joke. In a supremely derogatory manner the Raleigh Newspaper the Sentinel [1866-1876] declared that true North Carolinians would blush "that a set of apes and hybrids should be holding a brutal carnival in her halls of legislation." (Martin) Despite this rampant racial prejudice, historian W. McKee Evens noted that Galloway was one of "a small group of active delegates who largely dominated the life of the convention." (Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* 196) Furthermore, Galloway did not limit himself to the job of delegate. He also served on the judiciary committee, as well as the committee for local government. Galloway championed popular election of the judiciary, deriding the existing local judiciary as "a bastard, born in sin and secession". He denounced railroad companies for not employing a single colored man, and called to task organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association, who drew distinctions between the races in their membership. (196)

In the spring election of 1868, Galloway was elected to the State Senate to represent Brunswick and New Hanover Counties. Soon after, he became the first black elector to a presidential convention in North Carolina history. When Galloway returned to Wilmington after the convention he found that the white supremacists in New Hanover had not been idle. The Ku Klux Klan was terrorizing African Americans to frighten them away from the polls. In 1868 another black militia was formed to protect blacks from this victimization. It seemed obvious to appoint Galloway as commander. Under this leadership, the Klan was kept discreetly quiet in Wilmington even as it raged out of control in the Carolina piedmont.

Galloway did not limit his campaigns for rights to the racial group with whom he identified. He gallantly introduced bills to amend the North Carolina constitution to allow women's suffrage, to grant women's rights, such as signing deeds and to protect women from abandonment and neglect by their spouses.

The peoples' political hero died suddenly of fever at the young age of 33 on September 1, 1870. He had just been reelected to the state senate and was currently a steady member of a biracial coalition in the local Republican Party. His funeral was that of a hero's. A half-mile long line of six thousand people on foot, horseback and in hundreds of carriages led a procession through downtown Wilmington up Market Street to the St. Paul's Episcopal Church. (Proquest) "It was the largest funeral in the state's history," (Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* 201) and the people who could not cram into the church overflowed into the nearby streets. Abraham Galloway was the people's hero, a man who fought valiantly against racism and prejudice. His visions of civil rights would not be fulfilled for another whole century, but the story of his fight against tyranny and the foundation he laid for change should never be forgotten.

Maritime Museum Programs



Programs of interest from the NC Maritime Museum of Southport. All of these programs begin at 7:00 pm and reservations are required (call 457-0003 or email made-line.spencer@ncmail.net)

January 17: Beverly Tettersington, will talk about her book Wilmington: Lost but Not Forgotten which provides a look into the architecture of the past.

February 21: Tommy Harrelson, Southport native, will present a program on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

March 21: Celia Rivenbark, humorist, author and columnist, will present her take on life as a Southerner.

April 18: Dr. Charles Peery of Charleston, SC will present a program on blockade running.



November Meeting Minutes

SHS General Membership Meeting—November 16, 2005—Southport Baptist Church

President Peter Wyckoff welcomed the members and guests and invited everyone to enjoy the covered dish dinner. The minutes of the previous meeting and treasurer's report were printed in the newsletter. Peter Wyckoff announced that the board had accepted Wolf Furstenau's resignation and commended Wolf on the outstanding job he had done for the society. He received a certificate of appreciation and a lifetime membership. Phil Fravel who was appointed by the board and was introduced to the membership as the new treasurer. SHS treasurers are appointed for an indefinite term and are not elected.

Cathy Fravel discussed the upcoming December 10 Tour of Homes. Volunteers are needed to help sale tickets at the Visitors Center the week prior to the tour. Tickets should be available the week of Nov. 20.

Beverly Wyckoff updated members on the Old Jail. It will be on the Tour of Homes and refreshments will be served there. Marilyn Lessin thanked the jail docents for their work and announced upcoming training sessions. The Jail will reopen in March. A wish list of items needed at the jail was printed in the newsletter.

Marilyn Lessin reported the following nominees for the 2006 offices:

President—Pat Kirkman

Vice President—Musette Steck

Secretary—Ginny Cannon

Archivist—Larry Maisel

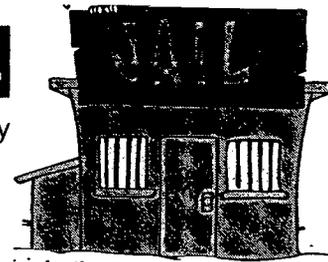
Director—Karen Knighton

Nominees were approved unanimously.

Pat Kirkman introduced Louis Hardee, Jr. a local author and our cookbook writer. Hardee spoke on "A Southport Homecoming" - reminiscing about his life growing up in Southport and showing photos from earlier times. Cookbooks were available for sale and L. Hardee was available for signing before and after the meeting.

Respectfully submitted—Karen Knighton

NEWS FROM THE OLD JAIL



What an exciting Holiday Season we have had at the Old Jail!! The Old Jail Advisory Board voted to have the Old Jail open during the SHS annual Tour of Homes on December 10, 2005. It was also voted to decorate the Old Jail, 1904 style. If you had a chance to view it that day, you really had a treat! The Advisory Committee all pitched in and decorated the Old Jail with all natural greenery, candles, oil lamps, strings of popcorn, cranberries and cotton. A wonderful time was enjoyed by all, stringing, hanging and placing all of our "1904 ornaments". The day of the Tour of Homes was a wonderful success. I want to thank the Advisory Board, all of the docents who had the fun of sharing the Old Jail with all of the visitors, and Norm Carathanasis and Marv Johnson who provided wonderful refreshments in the 1904 Room. I especially want to thank Mary Strickland, CEO of the Maritime Museum, who serves on the Advisory Board of the Old Jail, for all of her help making sure that all of our decorations were authentically 1904 Southport. What a wonderful day we had sharing the beautifully restored Old Jail with 200 plus visitors!

There will be many exciting things going on at the Old Jail this winter and you can be a part of the fun. The "1904 Family Life Room" will take shape this winter. Artifacts from the "Wish List" have been coming in slowly. There are still many things we need. The group will be putting the room together with the items we have, ready for viewing when we reopen in the Spring. If you would like to be a part of this exciting project, please call or email Beverly Wyckoff at 457-5599 or beverlywyckoff@bellsouth.net.

The Archive Task Force has much to do this winter in sorting and filling all of SHS accumulated "paper" and books. The wonderful news is for the first time ever, all of SHS's archival material in "under one roof" at the Old Jail. If you enjoy research and sorting historical material, call or email Marilyn Lesson at 457-00040 or dlessin@ec.rr.com.

It will be wonderful if all of the docents who enjoyed greeting visitors at the Old Jail this last summer will want to continue. The hope is that all will return and many more will be added. We will be having a docent training in the Spring, watch for the date.

We need many people to help keep our beautiful, restored Old Jail open for the public to enjoy and our exhibits ever growing and changing. Please join us in this great project.

Beverly Wyckoff, Curator