



THE WHITTIER'S BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER FIVE, NOVEMBER 1995

REGULAR MEETING

The November meeting will be a Potluck Dinner, to be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, November 16, 1995 (a week early because of Thanksgiving). It will be in the Parish Hall of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church located at the junction of NC 211 and NC 133, and will be hosted by Marilyn Lessin and Eleanor Loughlin. Although the food and fellowship are the main purposes of this meeting, we will also have a program, obtained from the North Carolina Museum of History by Gehrig Spencer of Ft. Fisher, on all of the N.C. State Historic Sites. Bring your favorite dish--hope to see you all there!

TIDBITS OF NEWS

It is with pride that we note that the Southport Historical Society is rapidly becoming a society of published authors. Below is a list of those who come immediately to mind. If you know of someone who has been left off the list, PLEASE call 457-6940 and add that name to the list. It can be updated in the next issue.

1. Bill Reaves with many books of history of the lower Cape Fear and also many newspaper columns and articles. To us he is best known for our very popular Chronology of Smithville-Southport, Volumes I and II. He is now hard at work on a third volume in the series.
2. Dot Schmidt with her Cemeteries of Southport and Surrounding Area.
3. Kathryn Carson Kalmanson, the first editor of "Whittier's Bench." She has had articles published in the "Pelican Post" and in "Whittier's Bench." Her longest published article to date was for the Film and Literature Quarterly in Maryland.
4. Brooks Newton Priek with her award-winning book Haunted Wilmington and the Cape Fear Coast. She has written extensively for Wilmington Coast Magazine, Encore, and various other magazines and papers. We will soon carry an article by her in "Whittier's Bench."
5. Lois and Jerry Gable, publishers and editors of the "Pelican Post," a very popular local publication that has subscribers in many states.
6. Wolfgang Furstenau, who has recently written a history of Long Beach. If you have not already done so, you will probably want to buy a copy from the Southport Maritime Museum or the Little Professor Book Center and let him autograph it for you. It is well researched and well written.

7. Lewis J. Hardee, Jr., who has recently released his family history book, Three Southern Families. This makes for good reading even if you are not descended from either the Davis, Jones, or Hardee families that he writes about. It is definitely not just a "family tree" listing.

8. Chris Suiter, who has written for the "Pelican Post" and is editor of "Whittler's Bench."

9. Susan Carson, author of Joshua's Dream and two other smaller books. She has also written articles for Media Magazine, the "Pelican Post," and the Wilmington Morning Star. She won the Old Wilmington Cup for Joshua's Dream and is now working on a sequel to that book.

We encourage you to become a published author also. If you will send in your contribution to local history, we will publish it in "Whittler's Bench." Anyone who has an "Old Southport" story to tell is invited to send it in for publication. Some very good articles used in past issues have been from Nonie Rogers, Harold Watson, Jeff Brooks, Lula McKeithan, D.I. Watson, Leila Pigott, and others. Don't you want to join this "Author's Parade?" We still have a few articles in the file awaiting publication, but we want MORE!

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNIVERSARY

Our organization will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in January. A committee has been appointed to see that we celebrate in style. Please call Cheryl Daniel at 457-6053 with your suggestions.

"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

NOVEMBER 1995



You are in for a treat in the history section of this issue. Bill Reaves has given us some newspaper articles that give details about the old Quarantine Station that was located out in the Cape Fear. You can see part of the old station as you make the trip to and from Federal Point on the Ferry. The Reaves articles will help you understand the purpose of the station and some of the activities that went on. Many of you have asked questions about the station, so this will help answer them. Others have been unable to distinguish between the station and the Quarantine Office that was on the waterskirt at the foot of Atlantic Avenue. The article will also help with that.

There is yet another article about an Old Southport citizen and a typical happening for those who have worked on the treacherous Cape Fear River.

When you see Bill be sure to tell him how much we appreciate all the good material he sends our way.

WILLIAM LARSEN, SOUTHPORT FISHERMAN, LOST FIVE DAYS
IN AN OPEN FISHING SMACK, WITHOUT FOOD
OR WATER.

Source: THE SUNDAY STAR-NEWS MAGAZINE, Wilmington, N.C., February 2, 1930.
Article written by W. W. Anderson.

Dim horizons fading into the blue-rose of a morning sky. Choppy waves bouncing and jostling in frenzied races for a distant shore. A soft but menacing breeze enticing each wave with storm-laden invendos. A blurred sea giving up nothing but an echoing wash as mounting sheets of water slapped the sides of a lone green boat. A boat with a waterlogged motor and a fisherman without food. Lost on the breast of the Atlantic. Thus William Larsen found himself one morning the early part of January.

Five days and nights without food or water, tossed on capricious waves and engulfed by ravenous troughs of the Atlantic; five days and nights in an open 16-foot boat with only seven packs of cigarets and 100 miles to the nearest point of land would be an episode in any one's life. And so it was with fisherman Larsen.

The 23-year-old boy spoke quietly of his acquaintance with the Atlantic, which became intimate during those five days, and recounted the story with no more braggartism than he would have in telling of a catch of a boat-load of fish.

Larsen came to Southport for commercial fishing and there struck a friendship with two Lovegren brothers. It was November. The trio used two powerful motor boats for their trade and it was in one of these the placid boy who calls Ridgefield, New Jersey, his home went adrift Wednesday night, January 8. He was picked up Sunday afternoon 85 miles out at 5 o'clock by the United States cutter MODOC with its base at Wilmington and set ashore at Southport Monday morning at 8 o'clock in the midst of a cheering group of fishermen and women with whom he had made friends during the two short months he had been in the seaport village.

ALONE ON THE ATLANTIC.

The two Lovegrens and Larsen left Southport Wednesday morning to make their usual run and the course took them approximately 20 miles from the lightship Frying Pan off the shoals of the mouth of the Cape Fear River. The day was fair and when the sun had sunk behind a gently rolling sea, the fishermen found only a 2,000-pound catch, which was in Larsen's green boat. Another fisherman was anchored in the vicinity and the three decided to tie up to his smack, sleep until morning, and continue the catch.

Accordingly, the Lovegren brothers tied to the smack and Larsen tied to the taffrail of the Lovegren boat. Room was scant in the cabin of the smack and Larsen, a son of a fisherman and hardened to the sea, volunteered to spend the calm night in the open boat with the 2,000 pounds of fish. He stepped into the dory, gave a cursory glance at the other motor boat and the smack, hunched his oilskins about him and went to sleep.

In the morning he woke under an ominous sky, the unbroken surface of the Atlantic stretching out like an enormous plate, and no companions or boat in sight. Larsen took stock of his gasoline and found seven gallons and then tried to start his motor with the firm belief he was but a few miles off shore. But the boat had shipped water during the night and the engine was wet. Larsen ran up distress signals.

Larsen, still under the impression he was but a short distance from shore, tinkered with his engine in vain attempts to start it but the salty water had done well its work and the cloudy sky offered no welcome sun to dry the soaked coils

. . . The lone fisherman attempted to make a sail to take him to shore. This failed for he found he lacked the necessary material so he contented himself by working on the motor, hoping he could pick out the lightship that night and that the motor would have dried sufficiently to start.

That night the bosom of the bluejack Atlantic heaved and vexed waves hurled themselves with vengeance against the small boat in which a fisherman clung with a frail hope for life.

"The storm increased," said Larsen as he sat with one leg swinging easily from a table," and in a few hours it grew into the worst storm I had ever seen. Each wave broke over me with a crash that sounded like a tender of coal being dumped in the boat. The night was black and the wind carried the waves high. I could feel myself dropping down between the huge watery walls and then flung toward the black void where the stars should have been.

FIGHTING MOUNTAINOUS SEAS.

"I worked with all my strength to throw the fish overboard and make the boat as light as possible and as the mountainous waves crashed down on the boat, I grabbed the bucket and started bailing. If that bucket had not been in the boat, neither I nor the boat would have lasted for each wave that broke over her filled the boat half full. I bailed the entire night and well through the next day until the storm quieted. Twice in the blackness of the night I was washed overboard and by some freak chance managed to climb back in the boat. My hands were cut and bleeding where the bucket had gouged into the flesh and my arms were scraped and bruised by attempts to hang onto the boat. When I went over the second time I thought: ' Oh hell, let her go' but I suppose I still had the desire to see land again and I struggled back into the craft. I wasn't afraid. There was nothing to be afraid about. There I was and I was doing all I could."

The amiable fisherman looked at his hands which still showed deep red scars, rubbed them, and continued his account of his five days' hermitage at sea.

During the storm, the bottle of water washed overboard and Larsen was left with nothing but seven packs of cigarets. "I don't believe I could have made out," he said, "if I had not had the smokes. They and matches were in a waterproof jar and by chance were in the boat. They kept me up but toward the last I was almost too nervous to light one. My nerves were about gone but physically I was in fair condition. Of course I had had no food since Wednesday night, or water for that matter, but I made out pretty well.

"The weather was discouraging. Not a ray of sunshine came through the sky during the entire time I was out. Not a bit of warmth to dry out the useless motor. Fog and cold and a bare misty drizzle of rain made drifting miserable, much more than clear weather would have been. I realized I was at the mercy of the sea if the motor did not dry but I still failed to realize I was 100 miles off shore. Again I tried to make a sail but failed and so I hoisted another signal.

. . . "Ship after ship ran by. I knew it was useless to exert myself for had they seen me that would have stopped. I had no way of attracting attention except by the signals I had made and so I waited, hoping one of the ships would see me. I was almost directly in the course of the steamers take but just off enough for them to overlook me. I planned what I would do if the motor dried. There was enough gas in the tank to make a run for a ship if I saw one. If the coils dried and a ship came into sight, I would try to make her. But the weather balked me and the motor stayed wet. Twelve ships went by and with each one went one more hope of rescue. I slept fitfully but was bothered no more by heavy seas."

SLEEPLESS DAYS AND NIGHTS.

Larsen has spent most of his life on the water and explained his father was a seaman with many days on high seas to his credit. In the living room as he talked, the "intelligent and honest foreigner," as a Southport friend characterized him, looked the hardiest specimen of young manhood. His slight mustache gave him the faintest appearance of dapperness; his English was precise and terse. He wasted no words and appeared a bit shy as he told of himself, but Southport, the fishing town that snuggles under sea oaks on the very sands that are washed by the Atlantic, regards him as a hero and as one well fit to hold a prominent place in their community. He is but a young boy, tossed about five days in the midst of a ravenous sea without food or drink, who returns to his port and goes calmly about his duties of mending nets and catching fish as if he had merely dreamed his horrible experiences.

The second night was sleepless and the next day was spent in anxious anticipation, a pleading, almost voracious eye, watching each shadowy steamer, as it made its way to some distant port, pass far to one side, its crew unconscious of the derelict a short distance away.

Larsen had seen twelve steamers go by and late Sunday afternoon the Danish steamer IVAR showed its grey shape on the horizon, steaming in a direct line for the green boat which held a fatigued and almost helpless fisherman.

Bearing down on the tiny craft, the IVAR sighted the distress signals and laid to. She was bound for Cuba and the captain offered, almost commanded Larsen to get aboard. But Larsen refused. He had come to Southport to fish and as long as there was the faintest chance of putting back in that port, he was determined to complete the season. He asked for food and when the captain of the IVAR saw the futility of the argument, the food was passed over. Larsen asked for gasoline to use when his engine dried but no gasoline was aboard the Danish ship. The matter was debated.

Then a lookout on board the IVAR reported a craft on the horizon. The telescope showed it to be the MODOC. The captain of the Ivar ordered bombs, flares and rockets to be set off and after some signalling, the MODOC answered it was coming. This was about 85 miles south of the lightship.

. . . The IVAR then left Larsen as the MODOC came alongside and the fisherman was taken aboard the cutter and returned to Southport. The thirteenth ship, the MODOC, had snatched this man, marooned in a boat on the merciless sea, from possible starvation or drowning. Eleven ships had passed, the twelfth could offer nothing but passage away from home and friends --- it could give food --- and the thirteenth brought Larsen back to his beloved nets.

THE WELCOME HOME.

Southport reminds one of an old-world city with its many rambling cottages squatting on the sands from which sprout wire grass and oaks, their boughs bent and gnarled by the ravages of voracious winds, desolate trees that bow themselves humbly toward the inland as in obeisance to enemy gods of the greedy sea. A few modern stores dot the main road but on the water front are great reels where nets are dried and the sands and piers are flecked with barnacled boats that bring in their daily load of fish to be sold to the fisheries near the village.

Storms had beaten the paint from the huts along the water front where a few palms idle in the poignant air and waves leave the shining sand where Larsen set his foot after his five long days on the open sea.

The citizens turned out en masse when they learned of the rescue. Spars of old wrecks jutting from the water seemed an echo of what might have been the fate of the fisherman Larsen but for the ship that found a path on the pathless sea. Tears were shed when Larsen was helped ashore and shouts of joy rang from those who knew him as the quiet and well-mannered fisherman who had come to their midst from the north. There was a common bond and they accorded Larsen a welcome they would have given one of their own.

And Larsen continues his partnership with the two Lovegren brothers. They mend their nets and make their catches as if the season had been unbroken by the near tragedy. Larsen splices strands of rope with his eyes fixed on the dim horizon of the sea, and as the sun sank down in marsh grass, he finished his story.

THE SUNDAY STAR-NEWS MAGAZINE SECTION, Wilmington, N.C., 2-16-1930.
Written by John Marshall.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TEN-HOUSE COMMUNITY IN THE CAPE FEAR RIVER
United States Quarantine Station

Ten trim white houses, erected along boulevards and side-streets of wooden planking, standing like some many-legged marine monster on long black creosoted pilings in mid-stream, where the Cape Fear river, off the bay at Southport, widens abruptly in preparation for the tortuous rush through the dangerous Frying Pan Shoals - such is the Cape Fear Quarantine station of the U.S. government Public Health Service.

Driving down to the river through Southport, strangely mixed town of modern homes and old sea-houses with out-look towers between the chimneys, one passes through a magnificent grove of venerable oaks, interlaced boughs and wind twisted trunks forming a cool cathedral, and comes upon the waterfront with its huge creels, hung with drying nets, and the broad bay stretching away to the harbor mouth.

Straight ahead is old Fort Caswell, a little to the right the slim tower of Cape Fear light on Bald Head Island, then a sunken schooner, with its fractured mast and torn rigging sticking gauntly above the tide, a low lying island of marsh and palmetto, a long black line of breakwater rocks, and then the Quarantine Station - trim white city on stilts.

Immediately next to the old Stuart House, a famous old sailors' hospice only recently closed after 125 years of serving dinners known in all the odd corners of the globe for their excellence, there is a two-story building, the dispensary and general offices on the mainland of the Station. There I met Acting Surgeon J. Arthur Doshier, retired major of the U.S. Army, and Jens Berg, who for 32 continuous years has been custodian of the Station.

EXPLOSION RECOUNTED.

"It was a pleasure to take me over 'the' station." Walking out a long pier, lined with lobster-trap like fishing equipment, we went aboard a ship-shape tender and shoved off for the station. The few minutes necessary to cover the intervening space between the town on stilts and the Southport wharves passed quickly, as the custodian recounted the explosion off Frying Pan Shoals of the oil tanker SHREVEPORT, which resulted in the sudden unloading at the Quarantine Hospital of 29 injured survivors of the crew, several of whom had gone mad under the terrific strain of the marine disaster.

Docking at the station, tender and party were coolly eyed by a flock of voracious beaked grey gulls. One sat atop each piling, and none of them moved or deigned other than a usual stretching of broad wings upon our approach.

Wondering about the exact equality of one bird to every pier head, I was informed by the boatman that it was generally ascribed to a "Divine law of compensation."

DELOUSING SAILORS.

There are ten houses in the "city." A boat-house, with three tenders hoisted above a tide that flows ceaselessly below; a housing for the water station, with its 85-pound pressure system, capable of demolishing a wooden structure with its hydraulic force; the three houses where sailors are cared for, washed and deloused while their ship is being fumigated; the electric-power house, containing the station's complete lighting system, with its long rows of batteries and numerous appliances; then a laundry complete in every detail, and a regular living dwelling where the six attendants of the station quietly live out their bachelor's paradise of existence.

. . . This structure contains a kitchen, bedrooms, dining room, and a large lobby, the walls of which are lined with bookshelves, various instruments known to all men who make their way across the chartered and unchartered seas, and a rare collection of marine curiosities. The volumes in the sizable library are composed mainly of the Tauchnitz editions, but there are books of every tongue.

THE SEGREGATION WARD.

Then a carpenter shop and 400 feet away, along a narrow overwater boardwalk is the segregation ward. It too has its kitchen, bunks, and is, in short, a complete little world all to itself.

Should a sailor be found aboard a ship with a contagious disease, he would take up an entirely removed life in this home, with his attendant. It would be a comfortable existence, with books and good food, and the music from the radio in the lobby sounding across the intervening waters, but there would inexorably remain between him and the rest of the world that no-man's land of narrow boards.

Above the by no means unimposing city flies the yellow triangle of the U.S. Quarantine flag. Unfolding in the breeze, it flaunts the well-known caduceus, black fouled anchors replacing the usual staff with wings and entwined snakes.

WHAT THE STATION DOES.

The last report of the Cape Fear Quarantine Station showed that 59 vessels that had touched foreign ports had been stopped and examined. Thirty-one alien passengers and 1,455 alien seamen were given physical examinations by Dr. Doshier. Of the 45 cases admitted to the hospital, the report showed that a total of 339 relief days were used, and at a daily cost per patient of only \$1.70. The beneficiaries were classed as follows: Surgical cases, 12; physical examinations, 51; venereal cases, 53, and general, 312.

The station just doubled its activities during 1928, staying open at all hours, Sunday included, as a large number of its patients are fishermen whose exacting toil at sea prevents them from patronizing the dispensary at regular hours.

EXPLOSION OF THE SHREVEPORT.

The unusual case of the SHREVEPORT, which exploded and caught fire, wounding 29 survivors of the 50-odd crew, was given special treatment in the report. These men were brought into Southport by the Spanish steamer ALDECOA, which reported that three had been killed instantly by the explosion; one jumped overboard and was found 24 hours later clinging to a bit of wreckage, but died before reaching Charleston. One officer died on board the rescue ship, and the remaining 28, many of them seriously wounded, were taken to the Quarantine Station for treatment.

One member of the crew went violently insane, and a member of the force at the station was detailed to take him to Saint Elizabeth Hospital; another gave indication of mental derangement, and the third assistant engineer became insane upon arrival at the relief hospital, it was reported.

DOSHER A NOTED SURGEON.

Throughout the nine days that this unusual and typical emergency condition prevailed at the station, everything functioned perfectly, and the SHREVEPORT case generally proved the importance of keeping the station at the top-notch of perfection that it now maintains.

Dr. Doshier, who served with distinction in France for 11 months during the World War and who is nationally known for his successful operations in twice removing tumors from the brain, cooperates as surgeon of the station with the state and county health officers.

A tonsil and adenoid clinic held by him in conjunction with the county health officers of Brunswick was completed with unique success. Over 50 operations were done in a single day, and Custodian Berg, as station druggist, administered anesthetics. Dr. Doshier, who as chief sanitary officer at base hospital 114, Beau Desert, France, was discharged and, on returning to the States, immediately assumed charge of the Cape Fear Quarantine Station, has with Jenz Berg, been remarkably successful in his work with the medical authorities of Brunswick county. Recognition from the government, the state and the county has been accorded to the officers of the station in appreciation of this purely arbitrary service.

DISEASE PREVENTION.

One of the important public health duties of the Federal Government is the prevention of the introduction and spread of infectious diseases in the United States from foreign countries. Due to the close relation of commerce to the public health in connection with the spread of epidemic diseases, it is necessary to keep advised currently as to the prevalence of diseases not only in the United States but in so far as is practicable throughout the entire world.

Seated at the dining room board of the station, and served by its remarkable and incomparable cook, old Boysie of the Stuart House kitchen of the Stuart House kitchen fame, Jenz Berg explained this constant interchange of sanitary information with personal reminiscences from his 32 years' experience with ships from every port.

Sighting the recent case of the parrot disease epidemic, he showed a report from the government naming all the ports infected, and ordering that the Cape Fear station embargo all parrots on ships presenting clearance cards from harbor cities shown as being infected with psittacosis.

A CREW OF "ROOKIES"

Bill Anderson, captain of the station's three tenders, decided to help along the journalistic questionnaire by admitting that, so far as he knew there was only one thing wrong with the station, or rather, with its employees.

"Ve can't get none of dem to stay at dis place," he said. It seemed, by Gott, that Engineer Ellis had only been with the station 10 years. Anderson himself had only been under its beneficent roofs for 27 years, and Knud Tobiasen had served a mere nothing of 37 years.

Jenz Berg continued explanation of the station system. There was in the fall of 1928 an epidemic of plague in India, particularly in the Bombay Presidency; a severe outbreak of dengue occurred in Athens and Piraeus in August and September of that year; yellow fever was reported in Brazil; a considerable number of cases of cholera occurred in India; meningococcus meningitis was prevalent in Chinese ports; the pandemic of influenza began on the Pacific coast, and diphtheria and scarlet fever incidence was higher during the year in practically all the European countries than in the year before. All these facts, with many others, were reported to the station situated only 18 miles below Wilmington, and telegraphic bulletins kept the data complete and up to date to the last minute.

THE SHOWER BATH GAUNTLET.

A boat entering the Cape Fear harbor is halted at the 400-foot long fumigation wharf. Its clearance cards are checked, and thus the officers of the station know what particular infections are likely to be aboard.

Regardless, however, of the results of the close examination given the men and vessel, the former are removed from the boat and run a veritable gauntlet of hot shower baths, delousing apparatus and personal inspection. If successful, clean clothes await them at the other end - and a clearance for the next port. Every ship touching a foreign port is fumigated every six months at the station, which handles by the way, all the foreign shipping between the stations at Norfolk and Savannah.

When a vessel is cleared of men, large buckets filled with burning sulphur are let down into the hold from every hatch on long chains. These chains permit the regulation of the buckets, which are not so easily extinguished by lack of oxygen. This feature is an invention of the Cape Fear Station and was perfected by Dr. Doshier and Jenz Berg.

RODENTS ARE VICTIMS, TOO.

Sulphur fumigation does two things, it was explained, the vessel is thoroughly sterilized --- and the rats are killed. Every vessel fumigated leaves behind her a record showing the number of dead rats found upon completion of the fumigation process.

The oldest function of the Public Health Service, medical relief to American merchant seaman and other legal beneficiaries, has now been continued without interruption for 131 years, but since the first act of Congress for this purpose was passed in 1794, the activities and interests of the service have extended to a wide field.

Studies on cancer, goiter, leprosy, malaria and nutritional diseases are made by the service, as well as blanket survey projects such as investigations of child-hygiene, stream pollution and shellfish sanitation.

The front-line fight against the introduction into this country of contagious diseases is carried on at the boundary outposts, the Quarantine Stations, and no one who has not visited one of these stations, remarked the infinite preparation for every possible emergency, the pride the personnel takes in the performance of their duties and the realization of its serious importance to the welfare of those who live in the interior as well as along the two coasts manifest by that personnel, can possibly understand the impression received by a visitor.

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