



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

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POTLUCK FOR BLOCKADE RUNNERS

You will not have to run and we will not block the doors; therefore, plan to attend our next get together and share one of your favorite meals.

WHEN: Beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday November 11, 1993 (Veterans Day).

WHERE: In the Parish Hall of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church located at the junction of 211 and 133 (on the corner of the Doshier cut off road and the highway to Supply).

WHO: You'all bring a covered dish and some friends to join with your fellow members and neighbors.

WHAT: Following mealtime, there will be an interesting program telling about Civil War blockade runners traversing the Cape Fear.

FORT JOHNSTON

Our last meeting on Fort Johnston was a success. If you missed it, there is a video available to borrow at the Library and at the Southport Maritime Museum. The cookie extravaganza and social was terrific; however, there are no longer any leftovers available.

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"Looking Back" - The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

NOVEMBER 1993



NOTE: Following the History Page you will find an announcement by Roy Pollitt. I call your attention to the fact that Roy is a member of our Society and he is the one who gave us such a wonderful collection of genealogy books that are now a part of the collection at the Southport Branch of the Public Library. These cover a wide range of information and many states. If you are looking for "dead relatives", you just might find them at the library in the books Roy gave! Thank you again, Roy.

PLANS are in the making for a real bang-up Founders Day 1994. We'll release the plans soon. We will need lots of help. And, if you know someone whose ancestors were in Southport before the Civil War, please, please give us their addresses. We should get the invitations out real soon so that those invited can make up their schedules.

IN MEMORIAM: We extend our deep sympathy to the family of Society member, Mrs. Sarah "Peggy" Elizabeth Young, of Leland, who died on September 25, 1993. Mrs. Young will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

ANOTHER NOTE: Anytime you have something you would like to see in WHITTILERS BENCH, please send it along and I will include it as soon as I can work it in.

In response to a former request such as the above, Bill Reaves has sent in several items. I am using one in this issue and have some others for later issues. I also have an interesting "biography" of an early Smithville lot holder, John Gambier Scull, sent in by member, Robert P. Carter. I think we should use this about the time we have Founders Day 1994. Don't give up, Bob. I haven't lost it!

FROM BILL REAVES

In April 1861, a young college teacher in New Orleans, named James Ryder Randall, read of the attack on Federal troops as they passed through Baltimore, and that night wrote the famous Civil War poem that begins, "The despot's heel is on thy shore, ... Maryland, my Maryland!" It was soon published, set to music, and became a popular rallying song throughout the South.

Randall, a native of Baltimore, was only 22 years old when the war began. Health prevented him from serving in the Confederate armed forces, but wishing to participate, he left teaching and took various war-related positions. He came to Wilmington in September 1863, and was employed by a firm that owned many blockade runners. He became friendly with many of the ships' captains, and took many excursions between Wilmington and Smithville when the ships were on their way out.

He wrote frequently to his charming sweetheart, Kate, who remained with her family near

Hamburg, S. C. Her father and Randall thought the port of Wilmington an unsuitable place for her to live during the latter part of the war. His letters include many interesting facts about life on the Cape Fear River in the closing years of the war. They are preserved in the Southern Historical Collection, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

On June 3, 1864, Randall wrote: "I have just returned from Smithville. Smithville is situated angularly about midway between Forts Fisher and Caswell, perhaps a few miles nearer to the latter. It is a pretty considerable village, having a Court House, church and Hotel. In spite of unlimited sand, it is quite a handsome settlement, abounding in a glorious growth of live oak and other shade trees. Immediately flanking the village, is Battery Pender, mounting four guns...The bay or Sound is constantly swarming with tiny sailboats performing their missions of pleasure or duty with gay pennons and snowy wings... Nothing can be more invigorating than those pure, dustless winds which burst healthily from the sea.

"After exchanging civilities and imbibing some excellent tea, I strolled about the village for several hours. Nearly all the dwellings have been impressed for Government use, but a considerable number of spruce residences remain for private habitation. Of these, the Flag Officer has the handsomest. At the Naval Hospital, I met some friends, surgical and otherwise. They insisted upon my remaining for dinner - such a dinner! Tough beef and hard tack on tin platters and the oiliest chicory coffee in tin cups. As there was an excellent meal awaiting me at the Flag Officer's, imagine the horror of the situation! Through mere form I mumbled a few desperate morsels and then fled incontinently. My hegira was stopped at the Army Hospital where I was treated to a goblet of fresh buttermilk. Some of the convalescents at this Hospital had just brought in an enormous turtle. Poor fellow! his throat was cut and he dangled from a beam bloodily. Ever and anon, some child would poke him with a stick and, in spite of his extremity, he struck out his flippers with the vim of a prize-fighter. Here, too, the patients have a pet eagle called "Jack". He struts about like a sentinel, perfectly amicable to the denizens, but woe betide any stray pig or baby. Having enough for one day, with the municipality of Smithville, I sauntered back to the Commodore's. The salt air began to influence me drowsily, and, after a few futile attempts at reading an old number of Harper's Magazine, I sunk into a profound slumber.

"At half past five in the afternoon, I was awakened by artillery firing and, rising, found that a detachment from Battery Pender were experimenting with a new field piece. They essayed to strike a barrel in the water, about a mile and a half distant, but the practice was miserable. A little later, a fishing party was extemporized and we departed in the Commodore's boat and crew. Almost a mile from the house is the Steamer KATE and a famous fishing ground for all the neighborhood. We lashed our boat alongside one of the sunken paddle wheels and prepared for action. The ladies were unlucky, but the oarsmen and the "Poet" had capital sport, snaring a magnificent bunch of blue fish, trout, croakers, and perch. They were all large fish in great repute. Frequently I would turn from the contemplation of my tackle, and wish you and your mother could have been with us by the KATE. One of the ladies made a horrible pun, observing that my good fortune was "attributable to having the KATE by my side." She was punished immediately thereafter, for a strapping big shark gobbled up her hook and nearly pulled her from the boat. Poor Mrs. Lynch was quite upset by this adventure, the more so as Mr. Shark splashed about a half gallon of water over her as he floundered to extricate himself.

"Early the next morning, guns were heard outside. About 6 o'clock the LUCY, from Nassau, rounded the point by Caswell and steamed up to the city. The boatsmen went out after crabs and clams and were absent the greater part of the day. The drowsiness I spoke of completely subdued me; so much so, that out of the solid day I cut an enormous slice of sleep. In the afternoon, we went out to the usual fishing ground and had similiar success. At early dawn of the ensuing day, the heavy boom of cannon bespoke evil for some blockade runner. Sure enough, at sunrise, a large steamer was soon stranded about two miles below Fort Campbell. One signal station telegraphed to another, and very soon we were informed that the ill-fated steamer was the GEORGIANNA McCRAW from Nassau, on her first voyage, which has proved disastrous. One of our small gunboats, the YADKIN, immediately hastened to her assistance, but finding that she was too far gone, returned. Embarking upon the YADKIN, I bade adieu to Smithville and felt quite glad at the prospect of once more ensconcing myself in my den in Wilmington, and the more because I hoped to hear from my bonnie Katie..."

James Ryder Randall left Wilmington before the final battles of Fort Fisher. Following the war, he became associated with a newspaper in Augusta, Georgia, and married his Kate in 1866. He died in 1908, and a small volume of his poems appeared posthumously. While in Wilmington, Randall wrote a poem MY BONNY KATE, which records the course of their love affair since he met her a year before in Charleston, S. C.

(NOTES: Battery Pender was built by Company G., 40th Regiment, in 1862, just north of Smithville...The Hotel mentioned was probably at the foot of Howe Street, and one of the Hospitals was probably adjacent to Fort Johnston. The steamer KATE, sometime before Dec. 1862, ran aground and went to pieces near Fiddler's Drain, now called Bonnet's Creek, on the north edge of Smithville.)

Thank you, Bill, for the above article. We can always count on you to come through with a good item of history!

ANNOUNCING !



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