

Southport Historical Society

Spring 2007

From the President's Pen.

May is here and it's time for **Southport Heritage Days - 2007**. This year we will focus on Celebrating the Arts of Southport. Our meeting on May 24 at the Community Building will be the kick-off event for a weekend-long look at our artistic heritage.

Our society will sponsor three special guided walking tours - May 25 at 2 p.m., May 26 at 10 a.m. and again on May 27 at 2 p.m. The tour will be based on a fine piece of art that was stitched together by members of the society. **The Bicentennial Quilt** was proudly displayed for the first time on the Founder's Day, May 30, 1992 as we celebrated Smithville/Southport's 200th anniversary. It now hangs in the city's visitors center. Each square represents a story from Southport's history.

In 1998 the society published *Southport Secrets*, a book that tells the story behind each of the quilt squares. Just as many people created the quilt, so was the writing of the book under the direction of Donald Johnson.

The fundraising tour will take you on walk past many of the places shown on the quilt and the price - \$12 - will include a copy of the book and refreshments. A knowledgeable guide will make history come alive as you enjoy this unique opportunity to learn Southport secrets.

Southport Secret Tours will begin each day in Keziah Park next to the visitors center. Reservations are not necessary, but if you are planning to come an e-mail to the society at shs@ec.rr.com or a telephone call to the visitors center at 457-7927 would be helpful in planning sufficient guides and refreshments.

Our **Heritage Stone** for 2007 will honor artist Donald Johnson. There will be a small exhibit of his work at our May 24 meeting. Don was very active in the society and served as our president. We are pleased to honor him with a stone for our Heritage Walkway this year.

Watch the State Port Pilot for other events planned by the Heritage Days committee. Celebrating Southport has become an annual festivity during Memorial Day weekend. This will be the fifth year for Heritage Days and it has become a time we all look forward to as we look at various aspects of our local history.

We are about to start the cleaning and repair of some of the tombstones in the **Old Smithville Burying Ground**. Marvin Johnson will be heading up this part of our restoration project. Help is still needed for general maintenance of the grounds. Look for more information inside.

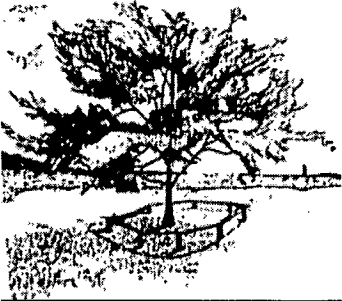
As you will remember from the last issue, Susie has relinquished her Whittler's Bench column in favor of hearing memories from you for the "**Looking Back**" section. We invite you to submit your essays for upcoming issues of the Whittler's Bench.

I personally look forward to seeing many of you at our meeting on May 24, on the Southport Secret tours, and at other Heritage Days events!

Pat Kirkman

The Whittler's Bench

"Bringing Our Past Into The Present"



THE WHITTLER'S BENCH

is a quarterly publication of the Southport Historical Society a 501 3-c non-profit organization
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OFFICERS:

President: Pat Kirkman
 Vice President: Musette Steck
 Secretary: Ginny Cannon
 Treasurer: Phil Fravel
 Archivist: Larry Maisel

DIRECTORS:

Cathy Fravel
 Karen Knighton
 Don Parker

MISSION STATEMENT:

The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us a better understanding of our state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of our American heritage.

We further cooperate with the city of Southport to preserve the town's records and archives, and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers.

We endeavor to provide programs of historical interest at regular meetings, publish articles and books for the purpose of education and encourage community participation in the preservation of our heritage.

Southport Historical Society was established January, 1976 and maintains the Old Jail Museum located at 318 E. Nash Street Southport, NC

Noteworthy . . .

Meeting Dates . . .

Our next covered dish dinner meeting is scheduled for **May 24** at the **Southport Community Building** beginning at 6:30 p.m. This will be the kick-off for Southport Heritage Days May 24-28. You might want to mark your calendar for these future meeting dates: **September 27 and November 15**. You sure don't want to miss any of that good cooking and our interesting programs!

E-Mail Addresses . . .

shs@ec.rr.com

As events and information of interest come to our attention we send out periodic e-mails to those of you who have given us your e-mail address. If you are not receiving e-mails and would like to be included, please e-mail the society at shs@ec.rr.com. We do not share our addresses with other organizations or solicitors, so you can be assured that we will protect your e-mail address.

SHS Website . . .

www.southporthistoricalsociety.com

Yes, we do have a website and we invite you to take a look at it and give us any suggestions you might have to enhance it. **Marty Loughlin** is our "webmaster". You may contact her by e-mail at marty28461@gmail.com if you have any comments.

Membership . . .

We welcome these new members who have joined since the last newsletter was mailed. We are delighted to have each of you and look forward to your involvement in our organization!

Allen Christensen
Charles & Nancy Christianson
Roxanne Granger
Ann & Ron Thompson
Grayle & Bill Allen
Amanda O'Conner
Tom & Alclaytese Frink

Donna Giles
Neal & Karen Sage
Friends of the Library
Robert & Carleen Sowers

NEW LIFE MEMBERS:
James & Rebecca Smith

Membership Directory: We are not publishing a printed directory book for 2007, but you may request a directory by e-mail (shs@ec.rr.com) and download your own copy. For those of you without computers, let us know and we will provide a printed copy. **The directory may not be used for soliciting purposes.** Please respect your fellow members' privacy.

"407 in 07" Membership Campaign

We are making an effort to increase our membership to at least 407 in 2007. Won't you help by enlisting your friends, family and neighbors as new members. Use the membership application on the cover of this newsletter to bring more folks into the society.

At the Old Jail . . .

" JAILBIRDS"

. . . wanted to spend hot summer afternoons in air conditioned "confinement!" We have opened the Old Jail for public tours on Wednesday and Saturdays 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. and we need you to help " guard" the "joint"! It's easy to find, just go "up the river" always! Two volunteers are needed each day to welcome visitors to our newly renovated jail. Please consider "doin' some time" and call **Shirley Wilson at 454-4327** or e-mail us at shs@ec.rr.com All the "hard time" in renovating is over - now we can "release" a long drawn-out sigh and enjoy the "rewards" of all the hard work of the past few years. So don't "bail" out on us. We hope you'll feel "convicted" to "serve a term". Just one more "sentence" please.

We're waiting to hear from you!



Special thanks to these guys who have "served a lot of time" maintaining the grounds and building! Irv Green, Marvin Johnson and Norman Carathanas

Book News . . .

We are delighted to report that **Susie Carson** and **Larry Maisel's** new book *Leila Jane: A Very Gentle Lady* is selling very well. Susie and Larry have been featured at several book signings and will be available at our May 24 meeting to sign books that you may purchase there.

If you are away from Southport and would like to order the book, please e-mail us at shs@ec.rr.com or call 910-457-0579 or 910-457-6629. The member's price for the book is \$12 plus \$2.50 shipping cost. You may find them around town at the Visitor's Center, the Old Jail Museum (on open days) and at Susie's house! These are outlets for the society where you may purchase the books at member prices.

PRICE REDUCTIONS COMING SOON!

The book committee and your board are in the process of re-evaluating the prices on our large inventory of books. We will be announcing soon new prices for titles that we have been publishing over the years. You will receive an e-mail if you are on the e-mail list and a printed list in the next newsletter.

THINK BOOKS WHEN YOU THINK GIFTS!

Susie's books as well as our outstanding cookbook *Classic Southport Cooking* by **Lewis Hardee, Jr.** will make excellent souvenir gifts for your visitors this summer or for special occasions throughout the year. Our other books of special interest may be just the thing too! Go to our website for a listing of the available books and prices www.southporthistoricalsociety.com or come by the Old Jail Museum.



Cathy and Phil Fravel shown here at the South-

Visitor Center Volunteers . . .

port Visitors Center head up our Sunday volunteers from the society to welcome visitors to Southport on Sunday afternoons from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m.

Thanks to these folks who volunteer their time along with the **Fravels: Ed & Dianne Boguskie, Jim & Ruth Smith, Kate & Ennis Hardin, Barbara & Richard Colwell, Susan & Sandy Toth, Chuck & Elizabeth Pollock,**

Dorothy Johnston, Becky Lucas, Mary Walker, Shirley Wilson, Dinah Snead, Victoria Hogan and Gail Clifton.

Looking Back : Reminiscences from our members . . .

In keeping with this year's Southport Heritage Days theme, "Celebrating the Arts of Southport" we are including these excerpts from an essay by Lewis Hardee, Jr. which will be forthcoming in its entirety in a new book he is writing about life in Southport. Thank you, Lew for sharing these memories of Southport native, Waters Thompson.

An Artist, A Friend . . . Remembered

On a Sunday in June 1966, evening worship had just concluded at the Baptist Church. The congregation was exiting down the brick stairs and getting into their cars. Suddenly, the scream of the town fire alarm broke the soft quiet of the twilight. It seemed to some that ambulances were everywhere. One raced up Howe Street and turned onto West Street heading to Mr. Rob Thompson's house. Old Mr. Rob had been in bad shape for some time; everyone assumed something had happened to him. Instead, it was about his son who had dropped dead on the kitchen floor while preparing their dinner.

On Monday my mother telephoned me in Chapel Hill where I was in graduate school. "I have sad news for you. Waters died last evening."

This simply stunned me. Waters was the most widely talented person I had ever known, the wittiest, the most brilliant, the most provocative. He was an accomplished painter; just take a look at his paintings that hang in the City Hall and in Southport homes. He was a commanding actor; his portrayal of Horace Giddens in *The Little Foxes* on the stage of Thalian Hall in Wilmington would convince anyone of that. He was a dancer and singer; one of the first questions asked as we were planning our periodic revues was, "Where shall we put Waters' tropical number?" He was a dazzling raconteur. I often refer to him as the Noel Coward of Southport. He was also among the vainest persons I have ever known, a maddening procrastinator, the most complicated.

I inherited Waters as a friend from my mother and her generation. He always ran with the young crowd, those who liked to party on the weekends. The Southport high life in those days was hardly glittering, limited to church, an occasional event by some club or other, coffee around a wooden table at Mack's Cafe in the afternoon. When the young generation married and became tied down with family and church responsibilities, he moved on to the next generation.

* * *

He was a powerful swimmer and grew up in the swift currents of the Cape Fear. I am told that over at the beach if Waters was bathing, men much younger refused to come out of the ocean, ashamed to let their wives or girl friends see their flabby bodies by comparison. Sometimes I would arrive at his dock to find him on the floor of the office doing sit-ups. "It's hard to keep your stomach flat when you pass forty," he said.

During my childhood Waters was a fixture about town. I can see him now sitting at the wheel of his father's monstrous, wobbly 1940s Packard sedan driving about town; later it was a white 1960s Chevrolet coupe. He never completely mastered the skill of driving. You'd see him driving around the sandy streets of town at a steady twenty miles per hour around puffing cigarettes gaily. He'd stomp on the brakes and screech to a halt only a few yards before he wished to stop. Once my mother was out front of our house shaking out a dust mop, her head tied in a kerchief when Waters drove past. He slammed on brakes. Dust flew from the wheels.

"What you getting ready to do, Dottie?" he cried out. "Haunt a house?!" then sped away.

* * *

His paintings were remarkable, especially the watercolors, the magnolias and birds in particular. The seriousness, or lack of it, with which he took his talent still puzzles me. On one hand, he raised parakeets, blue and green, and studied taxidermy as Audubon had done to learn aviary bone structure. His painting, "Lesser Birds of Paradise," that hangs in the City of Southport permanent art collection, is simply exquisite. On the other hand, he often displayed a shocking indifference to his works. He rarely bothered to sign them, and when he did it was usually just "WT."

* * *

He still speaks to all who knew him. I still remember words he spoke from our last conversation, driving down Howe Street:

"I don't mind dying. I just hope I won't know what everybody's doing back here—everyone partying and having a good time and I'm not there."



**Waters Thompson
1909-1966**

This photo is from a self portrait. The painting was found in very poor condition by family members cleaning out a shed many years after his death. There are plans for restoration.

Historically Speaking with the Archivist . . .

319 N. Lord Street - Sarah Jane Cotton House A Series Featuring Southport Homes by Larry Maisel

There is a false notion about our society's Historic Plaque Program that I need to clarify. That notion is that only the large old homes of Southport qualify. This issue's featured home should clear up that idea.

The cottage at 319 N. Lord Street, was built in, or just before, 1889 by Thomas Rutland, who died a short time afterward. He must have known death was near, and before his death, he willed it to Sarah Jane Cotton, who apparently was his daughter. He had purchased the land from Asa Doshier, who owned most of that entire block at one time, as well as other tracts on the west side of Southport, including some of the area to the west, known as Barrow Hill. Doshier obtained most of it in a land grant at 12 ½ cents per acre!

The home has had few owners in its existence. "Miss Sarah Jane," who was widely known and loved by many, left it to her daughter Alice Cotton Davis. The present owner, Mrs. Catherine Davis, Alice Davis' niece, inherited it from her aunt.

Sarah Jane Cotton lived to be 100 years old, and was active in St. James AME Zion Church for many years. She once worked for the famous Kate Stuart, and later the Arrington family. The house has lost much of its earlier appearance, including a large porch. As a child, Susie Carson lived next door, and remembers a large cherry tree in the yard and a large fireplace within. In the kitchen of the home, Mrs. Cotton made fruit cakes which were purchased by many Southport residents.



The society sponsors the Plaque Program that provides plaques for homes in Southport that are at least 75 years old and meet other qualifications. Larry administers this program and if you're interested in a plaque call him at 457-6222. Also if you are interested in learning how to research house histories and assist the society with this program give Larry a call or e-mail us at shs@ec.rr.com.

From our Ft. Johnston Liaison, Don Parker:

Fort Johnston News . . .

Future involvement of the Society with Fort Johnston continues to move in positive directions. The Board met in the Garrison House on April 19th with City Alderman and Fort Johnston Committee Chairman, **Meezie Childs**. She was accompanied by City Tourism Director, **Randy Jones**. Ms. Childs outlined City intent with respect to SHS use and support to Fort Johnston. She committed the generous unfinished room at the end of the east wing of the Garrison House for use by the Society for archive and research material storage. This room will be for our exclusive use. Larry Maisel will research options for heating and cooling the area in order to protect historical documents.

The finished room adjacent to the storage area is intended for multi-use to include a study area for SHS. Ms. Childs welcomed SHS support in providing either static or rotating historical displays within this room, as well. She also encouraged the Society to develop a permanent historical display for the front room or main living area. The Board discussed several ideas for this project but considered a permanent and professional "wall-to-wall" historical depiction and narrative of Fort Johnston to be the most appropriate approach. All SHS initiatives are subject to City approval.

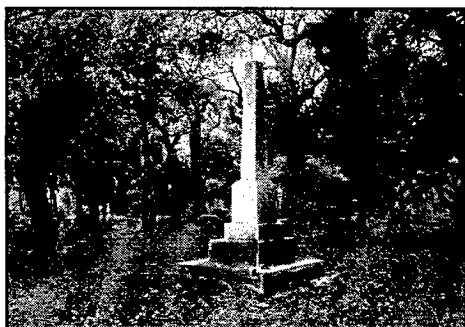
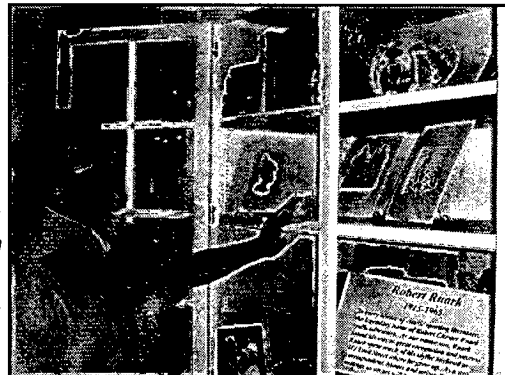
The next step is for me to work with City Manager, **Rob Gandy**, in developing a "Concession Agreement" for submission to the National Park Service. The National Park Service ultimately approves specific uses of Fort Johnston by non-City entities under the conditions of the conveyance of the property through the Federal Lands to Parks program. Once this critical process has been completed, the Society can develop the details for our involvement and stand up the necessary committees to begin work.

The prospects of our involvement are exciting and we look forward to enhancing the historical legacies of Southport through pro-active work with the City in showcasing Fort Johnston.

We welcome our members' input and comments on the society's involvement with the city in Ft. Johnston Garrison project. Please call Don at 253-9703 or e-mail us at shs@ec.rr.com.

May 24th Program . . .

Elmer Norwood, shown here looking over the Robert Ruark exhibit on display at the Garrison, will present our program on May 24 as a kick-off to Southport Heritage Days - "Celebrating the Arts of Southport". Ruark's contributions as a novelist and in particular his book *The Old Man and the Boy* about his boyhood days in Southport certainly qualify him as an "artist with words". Elmer is a self-described Ruark "fan" of many years who has a large collection of memorabilia on the writer and teaches courses on Ruark's life and writings at Brunswick Community College. A short video of a Ruark interview will be shown along with some of Elmer's collection. Also included in the evening's program will be the winner of our annual scholarship award, **Carla Wall**, reading her winning essay. The newest stone for our Heritage Walk in honor of society past president and artist, **Don Johnson** will be unveiled. A collection of Don's artwork will also be on display. Be sure to come to the Community Building with your covered dish at 6:30 p.m. and be a part of the beginning of Southport Heritage Days - 2007. Please don't feel restricted to bringing "home-cooked" dishes - we like "store-bought" too!



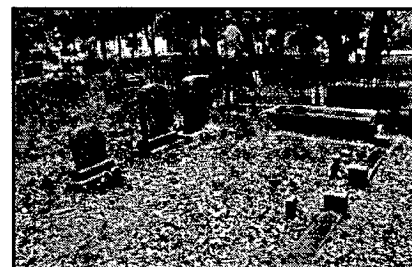
The Old Burying Ground . . .

Dinah Snead writes: "We currently have 12 people signed up for the "Adopt-a-Plot" program but have had inquiries from as far away as Virginia. And there are varied reasons for why people chose the plots they did. I selected mine because it had nine babies in it and someone needed to take care of those babies; another woman selected hers

because the people buried there shared her maiden name; several people selected plots because they contained remains of Confederate soldiers; another person is taking care of a grave of a one-week-old baby; another is taking the care of a plot with two little boys in it; another person is taking care of a plot containing a large family that also has in it graves of two sets of 3-month-old twins. So it looks like the babies have stolen the hearts of the Adopt-a-Plot friends. Every time there is something in the *Pilot* or in our newsletter, I start getting a flurry of calls from persons who want to adopt a plot. What nice people I have had the privilege to talk to!" **If you would like to "Adopt-a-Plot" at the Old Burying Ground give Dinah a call at 454-4068. She will give you all the details for taking care of a plot or gravesite.**

CLEAN-UP DAYS - May 19 & May 26

Bring your rakes, brooms, clippers and weed trimmers to the Old Burying Ground between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. on these dates to **help us clean graves of veterans from all wars before Memorial Day.** If you can't stay the whole time, just come for an hour or two. We also need to rake new-fallen leaves from the oaks and we now have more bricks to clean thanks to a nice donation by David Forsythe to replace the "missing" bricks along with the rest of the original ones we received from the old City Works building. Of course, you are welcome to come to the cemetery anytime you wish to help us maintain this important part of our history. **We really need more of you to get behind this project!**

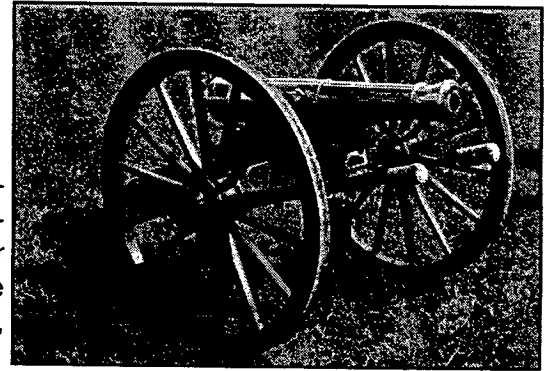


Questions, suggestions, comments or concerns? Call the project chairman, Musette Steck at 454-0437.

Our Cannon - "Thor" . . .

Thanks to Sandy Toth for the following:

"THOR", the nickname given to the Southport Historical Society's (SHS) full-scale replica of an 1841 bronze 6lb cannon has another busy schedule this year (which happens to be our 7th year). For those of you who are new to the Historical Society, and don't know the history of how the cannon came to Southport and ended up in SHS, here is a brief summary.

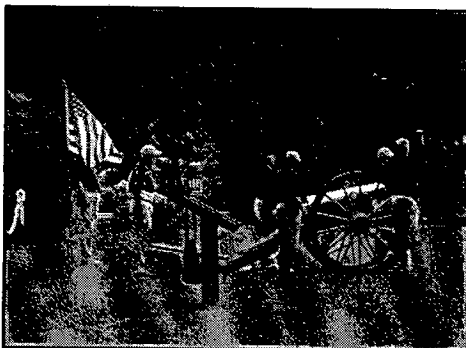


SHS had long recognized the need for a ceremonial cannon, especially to fire nautical salutes for any Tall Ships transiting to Wilmington for a courtesy visit and had actually budgeted \$350.00 to purchase a small salute cannon like those fired at football games after touchdowns. Anyhow, one of our members, **Sandy Toth**, had a close friend in Clifton, VA who had purchased the cannon and used it to celebrate special occasions at his home. He was looking to donate the cannon to an organization which would use it appropriately (i.e. fire it). Sandy, along with **Norm Carathanansis**, approached the SHS Board of Directors to see if something could be worked out. Norm and Sandy organized several friends, borrowed a trailer from Donny Shannon, a local re-enactor who had his own parrot gun, and went to Virginia to pick up "THOR" and deliver it to Southport where it was placed on display between the Southport Visitor Center and the Harper Library.

As time passed it became apparent that the Southport rain and salt spray was taking a toll on the bronze barrel and some protection from the elements would be necessary. The Southport Board of Aldermen were approached with an idea to build a small "shed" where the cannon was currently located to protect it. At the time we had no idea where the funds would come from, nor the materials, nor the labor; we were just asking the Aldermen to approve the concept, which they did. Well, as it turned out, Carolina Power & Light (CP&L), now Progress Energy, held an annual management team building exercise which would benefit the local community. **Rob Gandy**, the Southport City Manager, was asked what CP&L could do for the city. Rob suggested building a shed for the cannon. CP&L agreed after considering other options, and all the materials and labor were donated, complete with night lighting and an outdoor community bulletin board. "THOR" had a permanent home.

"THOR" has its own trailer and can be towed just about anywhere. Funds for the trailer were provided when "THOR" was leased as a prop for the movie "Gods and Generals" and "THOR" was towed to Staunton, VA where some of the battle scenes were filmed. "THOR" was invited to participate as part of a 50 cannon salute for the funeral of the second "Hunley" crew in Charleston, SC touted as the "last Confederate funeral". The only stipulation was that the crew needed to be in Confederate uniforms. SHS generously provided a uniform allowance for those crew members who were going and off we went.

The goal from the first time that the Board of Directors were approached was to ensure that "THOR" would not be a burden on the SHS budget. As such, at every event we ask that a donation to the Society be made to keep the costs down and have managed to turn it into a small fund-raiser for the Society. We average between 30-40 events per year and have become regulars at BSL's Celebration of the Lakes in May, our own 4th Of July Festival, the Yam Festival in Tabor City in October, and the Christmas Parade in Bladenboro in December. In between those events, we fire at weddings, anniversaries, other civic events, and cannon demonstrations at Fort Anderson and Fort Fisher.



Finally, all this would not be possible without our dedicated crew who all volunteer their time, energy, talents, and gas. There are 12 crew members and they are: **George Baker, Ed Boguskie, Norm Carathanansis, Bert Felton, Phil Fravel, Owen Garner, Marvin Johnson, Rhodes Messick, Elmer Norwood, Bob Plassman, Bruce Stenquist, and Sandy Toth**. We truly owe them, along with the **Southport Aldermen, Rob Gandy, and the Progress Energy Management Team**, a great deal of appreciation and gratitude for making "THOR" part of Southport lore.