

**THE WHITTLES BENCH**

is a publication of  
the Southport Historical Society  
a 501(c)(3)  
non-profit organization  
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**DIRECTORS:**

Tom Izod  
Nancy Heihecker  
Trudy Young

**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.

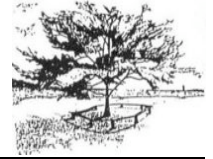
We further cooperate with the city of Southport to preserve the town's records and archives, and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers.

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

# The Whittler's Bench



## *So What's Going on with the Garrison? . . .*

It has been almost two years now, since our society put a proposal for installing cannon at Fort Johnston and operating a museum and a learning center for young people before Southport Aldermen's Ft. Johnston Committee. We've had no response, as yet.

The city's Board of Aldermen did send the replica cannon portion to the State Division of Archives and History for a decision on whether that body would approve pursuing the idea, but even if the state says "OK," the Ft. Johnston Committee, or the full board of Aldermen could kill it. The city received our whole proposal 20 months ago. Your board's patience has just about run out.



## *Membership Dinner Meeting . . . September 23rd*

### *Next two speakers to tell of fearless coastal heroes*

We are all in for some interesting tales at our next two general meetings. On September 23 we'll hear from Rev. P.D. Midgett who, in addition to his ministerial duties, is an avid videographer and producer of historic videos.

P.D. grew up on the outer Banks in an area known for its shipwrecks and, in days of yore, the daring exploits of the U. S. Lifesaving Service, which — like the old Lighthouse Service — eventually became part of the Coast Guard.

There are sections of the Outer Banks in which it seems at least half the people are named Midgett, and in a few villages it doesn't just *seem* that way, it *is!* P.D. Midgett's family was in on the lifesaving effort from the outset, something he has documented in an award-winning video production. Having grown up amidst all of that, P.D. has also long been fascinated with lifesaving heroes in our area, especially Capts. J.L. Watts and Dunbar Davis, who alternated as the heads of the Oak Island and the Bald Head life Saving Stations. Like lifesaving crewmen all along the coast, local men risked — and often lost — their lives while seeking to save others.

On November 18 the author of arguably the best book yet written about the Blockade Runners of the War Between the States, Southport native, Jim McNeil, will be our speaker. In addition to being the author of *Masters of the Shoals*, he happens to be the sister of our society's board member, Trudy Young.

On the cover of his book are these words about the men who kept open the Cape Fear Harbor when the Union imposed the blockade of Confederate ports in 1862: "Soon heroes emerged to unshackle the blockade — daring harbor pilots and ship captains who risked their lives and precious cargo as they attempted to run past Union ships and guns. Their stories...have become the stuff of legend." That's a mild introduction for the exciting stories between the covers of *Masters of the Shoals*. Those men of whom he writes came from Southport (then called Smithville) and Federal Point and the future course of a war was in their hands.

In his other life, Jim McNeil is an engineering consultant, dealing with highly technical matters, but his writing and speaking engagements are nothing like a technical paper. He brings to life the history which took place a stone's throw and a century and a half away. Don't miss either of these presentations!

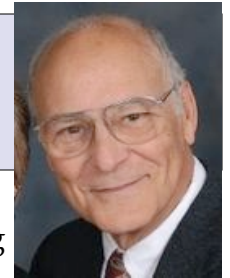
## *Old jail gets a make over....* Dick Slease

As you may be aware, we have solicited bids to clean the bars and paint them and the window frames on the second floor of the Old Jail. We accepted the low bid, submitted by Marvin Johnson, who, I am told, did a significant amount of work on the Old Jail in the past. The bid was for twelve windows : sand and/or wire brush, prime and paint all metal surfaces of bars on upstairs windows with Rustoleum oil base enamel. Clean, reprime, and paint all outside wood surfaces of upstairs windows with Olympic Premium (25 yr.) exterior latex paint.



## *President's Corner: Christmas Tour Doesn't Just Happen* By Larry Maisel

When 1,200 or so people come to the Christmas Tour of Homes each year, it's easy to forget that it doesn't all happen automatically. Yes, Southport has been having this great event for more than 20 years. But let me let you in on something: It's not easy. And it's getting harder to get homes.



Of course, a tour without homes wouldn't work. It's never happened yet, but someday it could. And all of us would have to share the blame. This year the homes were slow to come. We have a Home Tour Committee to line up homes, and they begin that job in the early part of each year, but some years it's very tough. This started out to be one of those years.

Why? Because getting people to agree to have their homes as part of the tour is a tough sell in many, if not most cases. Why is that? For several reasons, some based on imagined problems. For instance, an excuse regularly heard is, "I don't want that many people coming into my house, knocking things over and breaking them." A few companions to that are: "I don't want people coming in and stealing some of my things when they think no one is watching." and "Oh, sure, we'll be having who knows who coming through and "casing" it out, and then breaking in a stealing our stuff later." Still another is: "What if it rains? I'm not going to have all those muddy feet ruining our home." And then there are the really hard core refusals: "Over my dead body! or "Don't even ask!"

Let's set the record straight: In 21 years of home tours, not one thing has ever been broken or stolen during the tour, and no home has ever been broken into later. As for the muddy feet, if there is rain or snow (it's happened!) the Historical Society will provide something to keep those 2,400 feet from touching your carpet.. A personal note: The first time Amy and I had our home on the tour, there was no rain or snow, but we had taken delivery on a new, round Oriental rug that our dining room table sits on *the day before the tour!* We watched in wonder as not one foot touched that rug the whole five hours of the tour. Without even being asked, people walked around the edge of it!

That should eliminate several excuses, but there are a couple of others. When asked, people say, "But my home *isn't historic.*" Please help us make it clear that it's the Christmas Tour of Homes, not of *historic* homes. The next excuse is tougher and is an unintended consequence of some amazingly beautiful decorating efforts that some homes — both new homes and older ones — have had in the recent past. That has led to, "Our home is nothing like some of those you had on the tour last time," or "I can't begin to spend enough to try to match the decorations that I saw last year."

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By Musette Steck

Gullah/Geechee is not something you hear very often, unless you're taking a history tour of Coastal South Carolina or maybe Georgia. But that's changing fast. You may remember in March of last year, Eulis Willis spoke at one of our meetings and revealed that the Gullah people — brought from West Africa to the southeastern coast of the U.S. as slaves — were along the coast in Brunswick County too. He also pointed out that the descendants of those Gullah slaves live in the Carolinas; the descendants of the Geechees mostly in Georgia. The people from whom they descend were part of a culture which originated in Sierra Leone, where crops of rice, indigo and cotton had flourished for centuries. They brought their knowledge of how to grow those crops with them.



Recently an effort (which our historical society has supported) to preserve this heritage, has resulted in the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission. On the weekend of August 13-14, Southport hosted the commission's quarterly meeting. The delegates to the federally-appointed commission and invited guests were given a bus tour along N.C. 133 where the rice-based Gullah culture was the strongest.

Stops were made between Orton Plantation and Moore's Chapel A.M.E. Zion. Later the group of 60 participants were served a delicious Gullah supper by Taylor's Restaurant of Southport at the Community Building, the use of which was given gratis by the city; Brunswick County paid for the catered meal.

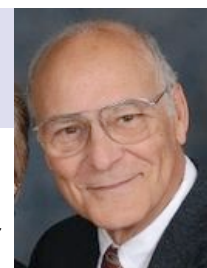
Saturday morning, the Commission convened at the Brunswick Resource Center where they held their business meeting, heard reports from different states and had an open discussion session with the public. A staff member of the National Park Service in Washington, DC briefed the group on how rural areas can preserve their history, while encouraging the commercial side of cultural tourism.

More information is available at [www.nps.gov/guge](http://www.nps.gov/guge).

## Tale of Father's Sorrow was really Mother's

By Larry Maisel

In the legendary musical, *Porgy 'n' Bess* there's a song, *It Ain't Necessarily So*. It's not only musicals in which that's the case, it's true in local history too, and one of our members has uncovered what the rest of us missed.



There are two stories from the 1800s in which three children in a family died within a three-day period. In October, 1873 it was in the John Davis family, where diphtheria took three children. In 1876, it occurred in the Woodlock family. And here's where it gets interesting, and where a story long-thought to be true turned out not to be. We wouldn't know that if it were not for some diligent research by one of our members, Bill Johnson. He even came up with the June 6, 1876 edition of the *Carolina Watchmen* of Salisbury, which carried the story on the front page.



It's long been thought that the father, Sergeant John Woodlock, stationed at Ft. Johnston, committed suicide when overcome by the death from diphtheria of three of his four daughters: Emma Josephine on September 26, Marian on the 28<sup>th</sup> and Esther Sarah on the 29<sup>th</sup>. It isn't true. The late Bill Reaves, historian and researcher for the *Wilmington Star-News* put the story in his chronology of Southport history, and I must admit that it's in my book, *Before We Were Quaint*. It turns out that it's true that he committed suicide, but it was in early June, when a man from out of town, who had been supplying meat for Ft. Johnston for some time, wasn't getting paid, and came to the fort on the steamer, *Dixie*, to collect what was owed him. Apparently Sgt. Woodlock invited him to dinner at his home near the fort and afterward told the man to wait until he walked over to the office to get the money. A few minutes later a gunshot was heard, and when the meatcutter and two soldiers ran to the scene, they found Woodlock dead in his office, with a pistol still clutched in his hand. Woodlock apparently didn't have the money, but had spent it.

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The only way I know to answer that is something akin to this: "No one expects every home to be like something out of a magazine. The tour is supposed to represent all types of homes in Southport, whether in the past or now." I can assure you that the Maisels couldn't afford to match some of the decorating displays, but we didn't feel embarrassed by that and don't feel that anyone else should. And if the society ever did have a tour of *historic homes*, and wanted to be really accurate, let me assure you, as a local historian, that there would be very few fancy decorations. Southport was never a wealthy, opulent town. In most homes, what few decorations there were had been mostly handmade."



Homes available in any year are limited by two rules. One, it must not have been on the tour in the past five years, and secondly, it must not be for sale at the time. There are good reasons for both. Another reason why getting homes is sometimes difficult, to be blunt about it, is that members of the society don't provide the committee with leads often enough. Nothing is worse than having someone say *—after the tour —* "Oh, I should have told you about Jane Doe's home." Folks are hesitant to make a call or knock on the door and ask even the residents whom they *do* know if they'd consider being on the tour. In truth, no one asking that in the past has ever been shot, bitten, maced or even cursed!

Since a great many of our members don't live in Southport's downtown area, they sometimes assume that they don't know any prospects for the tour. Actually, no matter where you may live, you probably do know people who live in the target area for the tour through the Kiwanis, Lions, or Rotary clubs or the Women's Club, garden clubs, or church. So ask. A great time is if you are visiting their house for one reason or another, even if only to deliver or pick up something. If you only glance inside, and it strikes you as a likely candidate, ask!!! All of us in the society benefit every time we gain another home for the tour. And if you can't help get homes for the tour, then volunteer to be a host or hostess. It's easy, and you'll meet an amazing array of people. Questions? Contact Marty Loughlin [Marty28461@gmail.com](mailto:Marty28461@gmail.com) or Phil Fravel [Finfannc@yahoo.com](mailto:Finfannc@yahoo.com).

## Tale of Father's Sorrow .....

Obviously his widow was devastated, losing both her children and now her husband. She took action, however, to save his reputation for posterity. His tombstone lists the date of his death as the day after the third daughter died. The story about his dying of grief was circulated in later years, probably by friends and relatives, to perpetuate the myth. Now, the myth dies, and I have some changes to make in the next edition of my book!



***Garrison 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary on November 13<sup>th</sup> (tentatively)***

The society is working with the city and talking with military re-enactors in hopes of a having a program to celebrate Fort Johnston's anniversary. Look for details in the Pilot, but save the date now.

***Business is booming at Old Jail***

Nancy Christianson, who has the vital job of making certain we have docents on hand during the times the Old Jail Museum is open, reports a considerable increase in the number of visitors, donations and book sales. "Our docents are very busy each day that we are open, and have been very enthusiastic and dependable," Nancy reports.



Something new is occurring on a trial basis at the facility. "We currently have the interest of an elementary school girl in volunteering at the jail and are giving her the opportunity to be there with her mom and under the supervision of two of our docents," Nancy reports. "Her name is Elaina Nobles and she is very enthusiastic and has learned the tour info very well. I have limited her hours at the jail as well as the number of days per month, but I think this is good public relations for the Society." Not only that, but it provides the society with a chance to not only expose young people to local history, but to involve them in informing others about it.

If you've ever volunteered at the jail, you know about the long-standing situation with the fire alarm beeping whenever there is a blip in electric service. That's been improved with installation of two new back-up batteries from the alarm company. Unfortunately, we still occasionally have the beeping but not as frequently as in the past.

The Old Jail Museum continues to receive police department patches from all over North Carolina as well as out of state. You can see them upstairs on the bulletin boards. Something else to see are the Garden and Heritage Stones, which are looking very nice and add to the interest people have in the building.

***Dues to Increase January 1st***

Our dues have remained at their current level for many years and going forward your board believes we will need your help in funding our future programs and preservation projects. Yearly dues for an individual will be raised to \$15 and a couple to \$25

***Membership Application . . . Invite a Friend to Join***

**SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_  
 New \_\_\_\_\_ or Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with your check to: P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461

Annual Dues: Individual \$10 Couple \$15 Student \$2 Business/Organization \$15 Sustaining \$25  
 Life Memberships: Individual \$150 - Couple/Business \$200