



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

(919) 457-6940

(919) 457-4712

VOLUME XVI, NUMBER Five

NOVEMBER 11, 1992

MEETING SET: The Southport Historical Society will meet on November 19, 1992, in Room 131 of the Brunswick Community College's Southport Annex on Lord Street. The speaker will be Robert B. Thompson, retired pilot, of Southport. Mr. Thompson will speak on the pilots and their history as an organization. Southport (Smithville) has long been fascinated by these men who for so long in our history have guided ships into our waters.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Members will be happy to know that Bill Reaves continues to work on Volume III of the Southport Chronology and that much progress is being made. Bill has completed a book for the Old New Hanover Genealogical Society, has indexed several other publications, and is always at work on one or more projects.

Susie Carson is relieved to announce that her book, Joshua's Dream: A Story of Old Southport, is scheduled for release on December 7, 1992 and December 12, 1992, by the publisher, C. P. & L. At the moment details are not available, but will be announced in the State Port Pilot. Also, inquiries may be directed to Ms. Vicki Spencer at C.P. & L. Visitors Center.

In the Winter Quarter at Brunswick Community College, Southport Annex, there will be a local history class on Brunswick County between the close of the Civil War and the end of World War II. This course will cover a six-week's period of class study. ALSO there will be a night class for a survey course in the history of Southport. The Southport class will run for twelve weeks. Plans are also underway for a course in North Carolina history in the Spring Quarter. You may call the Society's headquarters for more information.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: What do you want to see in 1993? The Executive Board would appreciate hearing your ideas and suggestions.

What is the key for ninety-three? Volunteers! Are there some folks on our membership list who are interested in a cemetery project, collecting oral histories, and video records, or doing historical research of any kind? And how about writing articles for the history page of Whittlers Bench? It is YOUR society; your ideas are needed - your help in carrying out projects is needed. Write or call the Society President.

Looking Back" - The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

NOVEMBER 11, 1992



EDITOR'S NOTE: I am elated to report that I have several "Growing Up In Southport" articles for the history page. The first one below is by D. I. Watson of Yaupon Beach. D. I. is the grandson of the beloved figure in Southport's history, Dr. D. I. Watson, medical doctor and pharmacist.

GROWING UP IN SOUTHPORT, by D. I. Watson

I was born June 1, 1917, on what is now North Howe Street, in a house my father built on a small farm. About 1920 he sold the property to E. H. Smith, a Southport attorney, and for years it was known as the "Lije Smith Place".

We then moved to a house he built at the corner of Howe and West Streets across from the Oak Grove (Franklin Square Park). I grew up there, and along with the other children in Southport came to view the Oak Grove as my playground. All of us children used it for playing one kind of game or another. My best times there were spent playing baseball. It was our ball diamond, of a sort. We used the trees for bases and if you hit a tree while batting you were automatically out. We had three town teams of boys. They were the Bowery Hill Nanny Goats, the Oak Grove Owls, and I can't remember the name of the other team. (Maybe one of our readers will remember and let us know.)

I started to school in what is now the Franklin Art Gallery building. I went through third grade there and then a fine new brick building was built on the corner of Nash and Dry Streets, the site of the present Post Office. I graduated from high school there.

My grandfather was an M.D. and a Pharmacist, and owned a drug store, Watson's Pharmacy, on Moore Street. (Today the building houses the restaurant, The Pharmacy). In those days most supplies were bought in bulk - such as castor oil. Sometimes my job was pouring castor oil from the large container into small bottles for retail. An icky job, and being able to scrape the leftover ice cream from the "empty" containers at the soda fountain was little compensation.

I learned to swim in the Cape Fear River at an early age. Our "beach" was called "Little Coney" and was a sandy spot in front of the Garrison. There was no street in front of the Garrison then and we had a lot more beach than is there now. The waterfront was lined with boats and fishhouses. We boys used to climb up to the crow's nest of the menhaden fish boats and dive off. I remember that Ben Finch was diving rather close behind me one time and dove on my head. And I still have the scar to prove it!

Shrimping was a big industry in Southport in the 30s and 40s. We used to head shrimp for 10 cents a bucket. I'm sure none of us got rich at it, but in those days a dime was a dime.

I remember the Steamer "Wilmington" that used to make excursion trips from Wilmington to Bald Head on Sundays. Occasionally I would have the money to make the trip from Southport to Bald Head and it was quite a treat. I would hurry home from church, eat my lunch and run down to the waterfront to catch the boat. It made a stop at Fort Caswell and at Bald Head before returning to Southport.

"LOOKING BACK", page 2

I remember the Amuzu Theater and and Mr. Price Furpless who, with his wife Lillie, operated it. If you had 15 cents you could go to the show and get a bag of peanuts, also. The show changed two or three times a week and we saw as many of them as we were able to afford.

In the 30s I learned to play a trumpet and was in a little jazz band. John Boyd Finch (who operated a NICE pool hall) would get some of us together after he closed at night and we would practice. John Boyd played the sax, John Shannon the piano, Robert Willing the banjo, Egan Hubbard the drums, and Lawrence Willing also played sax. We had a great time in our jam sessions and occasionally played for local dances.

It was a treat to go hunting, fishing and turtle egging on Bald Head. One day Gus Swan, James Wolfe and I decided to go hunting. We got together our food supplies and I "borrowed" my brother-in-law's gun (without his permission) and we set out in a small sailboat. The breeze was good and we were sailing right along, when between Battery Island and Bald Head, the boat capsized due to high winds. Overboard went our food and the gun we had put in a tow sack. We weren't worried about the food, we could get more of that, but we were mightily upset about the gun. Overboard we went and fortunately for me we got hold of the sack. We were able to sail on and went in to Buzzard Bay. Cap'n Johnny Potter and his boys were camping where we stopped and I told him about the gun. He knew what to do. He washed the gun off and then greased it and wrapped it up in lard. It worked! When we got back to Southport I put the gun back where it belonged and Dan didn't know for a long time what had happened - not until after I got the nerve to tell him what I had done.

In the 20s and 30s sports played a great part in our growing up in Southport - particularly baseball and basketball. We were first in the County to have a wooden basketball court. It was a raised platform (outdoors) just behind Franklin Art Gallery. We even had some bleachers of a sort for the spectators. Later a gym was built just behind the Masonic building and for years was the only gym in the county. As I recall, Southport has always had some good athletes.

I could probably go on and on - but this will tell you that I thought it was fun growing up in Southport.

YOU ARE INVITED by the Southport Woman's Club to attend their Charter Day Tea on November 22nd at the Southport Community Building, from 3 - 5 P. M. An historic skit will be presented.

DON'T FORGET to show up for the Robert Ruark Festival November 27 and 28. You'll have fun.