

## The Whittler's Bench

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Publication of the Southport Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

**OFFICERS:**

President: Musette Steck  
Vice President: Don Parker  
Secretary: Tom Izod  
Treasurer: Phil Fravel

**DIRECTORS:**

Charles Christianson  
Martha Johnson  
Betsie Lytton  
Joni Schinske

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas.

We 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.

### Musings from Musette, President SHS

When I accepted the nomination to be president of the Southport Historical Society I had no idea how much would be expected of me. Some seem to think that all the information on the Internet about our fair, little town was automatically transferred to my memory cells when I accepted the nomination. Others seem to think that all of Susie Carson's knowledge and experiences came with the office of president of the Southport Historical Society.

During a forty-minute period on June 20<sup>th</sup>, I had a call from a video reporter with National Geographic who wanted to know where Stede Bonnet lived when he brought his ship up Bonnet's Creek for repairs. Then a lawyer from Raleigh called and wanted to know what structures had been on the Intracoastal Waterway before the Fishmeal Factory. Last October I got a call from a Piedmont reporter who wanted to know the sites where a man's leg was buried at one cemetery and his body another.

Calls like that are in addition to regular calls about Thor, our cannon, and requests to know the address of where a great-uncle lived. Locals have called to tell me that a tombstone had fallen in the Old Burying ground or that there was a strange metal box with a map in it hidden in the hole of a tree, but no one called to tell me that a whole section of the fence had been removed from the Old Burying Ground and that a front-loader was going back and forth inside the fence. I saw this last incident myself and learned that a very respected vault company was charged with a request to reinter someone from the Old Burying Ground to the Northwood Cemetery. They had to bring a load of dirt to fill the hole of the removed vault.

Fortunately, all questions are not asked of me. The Old jail has many informed docents who give answers while conducting the jail tour. This year, the docents are: Candace Bland, Dottie Capriotti, Norm Carathanasis, Nancy and Charles Christianson, Earle Crotts, Jim Crum, Bonnie Ericson, Marty Folding, Libby Garner, Sandra Griffith, Dick Hart, Connie Hendrix, Anne Marie Hurcomb, Bill and Martha Johnson, Shirley Johnston, Karen Knighton, Gerri and Harley Lemons, Jim McNeil, Dick Slease, Barbara Smith, Musette Steck, Bob Surrige, Ron Thompson, Theresa Walker, Rita Wissinger, Bev Wyckoff, and Trudy Young. One of our earliest and most faithful docent, Gene Lasinski died earlier this year. He is really missed.

For many years the SHS has manned the Visitors Center on Sunday afternoons under the leadership of Phil Fravel. This year Kate and Ennis Hardin, Mary Walker, Shirley Wilson, Ed and Diane Boguskie, Dorothy Johnson, Becky Lucas, Jim and Ruth Smith, and Chuck and Elizabeth Pollock have helped answer the

various questions of visitors to Southport. Also within the Garrison the SHS exhibit room has volunteers Dan and Charen Fink to answer questions. Thank you goes to all the volunteers and without whom, including any I have missed naming, the SHS would not be able to answer any questions. If you are interested in becoming part of this knowledgeable group please contact me.

In November the SHS will help the NC Maritime Museum at Southport entertain the North Carolina Maritime Historical Council's Conference. The Old Jail and cemetery will be one of the council's choices of elective activities. Extra volunteers will be needed, so please consider offering your services.

The speaker for our September 26 Meeting, Claudia Stack, has won awards for a documentary she produced on Rosenwald Schools. "Under the Kudzu" is a documentary that focused on two schools that were typical of the Rosenwald school movement. Rosenwald schools were African American schools built during segregation by communities who used matching grant funds and building plans provided by the Rosenwald Fund. Over 5,000 school buildings were built between 1913 and 1932. During that era African American communities in North Carolina organized to build 813 Rosenwald schools, the highest number of any state. The movement was particularly strong in Southeastern North Carolina. "Under the Kudzu" traces the history of the Canetuck Rosenwald School, a primary school, and the Pender County Training School, a high school.



The new Brunswick County Training School at Southport, with the old school standing adjacent to it in 1920's.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

September 26: General Meeting, 6:30 pm, Speaker Claudia Stack. **There will be no covered dinner.**

October 10 – November 14: Thursdays at 9:30 am, Harper Library: Southport History 101

November 9: NC Maritime History Council Annual Conference,

SHS "Living Voices of the Past" Tour: Old Burying Grounds & Old Jail, 2:00 pm

November 21: General Meeting, 6:30pm

December 14: Christmas Tour of Homes, 2:00 pm to 7:00 pm

## Fort Johnston – A Legacy of Service

*By Don Parker*

It has been just over 268 years ago since Royal Governor Gabriel Johnston successfully urged the North Carolina General Assembly to enact legislation for the construction of “Johnston’s Fort” on the Lower Cape Fear to be large enough for at least 24 cannons and to be financed by powder money collected at Port Brunswick. Initially developed and constructed to serve as defense against Spanish attack, Fort Johnston’s history is replete with change and renovation designed to meet evolving threats over two centuries.

Despite Governor Johnston’s proclamation in 1749 that Fort Johnston was complete, a succession of political and military leaders would subsequently inspect the fort and determine that it required additional resources to serve as a viable defensive position. Thus, Fort Johnston’s purpose would change over time and the number of troops stationed there would ebb and flow depending on the wars on the doorstep. Similarly, resources would only be appropriated to improve the garrison when Fort Johnston’s usefulness was clearly evident to the collective defense.

Fort Johnston has played a role, whether major or minor, in virtually every American conflict since its inception as a protector of Brunswick Town and Orton Plantation. The French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and World War II all touched Fort Johnston in some manner. Each one of these conflicts recreated Fort Johnston to meet the requirements of the day and Fort Johnston and its commanders reflected the agility to respond. You can add Vietnam, Cold War, Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan to this legacy when you consider Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point’s (MOTSU) role in supporting these more modern era wars. Wow! What a legacy.

It is interesting to note that in 1880 the federal government withdrew troops from the garrison. Yet it continued to own and maintain the fort despite an attempt in 1900 by the City of Southport to gain ownership and subsequent local attempts to turn the Garrison into a public park. Several activities occupied Fort Johnston during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century including the Signal Service, the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Lighthouses, the USO during WWII, and the Air Force’s Air-Sea Rescue Service from 1951-53. In 1955, Fort Johnston was made a part of the U.S. Army’s newly constructed Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point and it served to provide residential quarters for MOTSU’s soldiers and their families. Throughout this period, residents of Southport enjoyed social and recreational activities at Fort Johnston and coexisted with their various intermittent neighbors in a mutually agreeable manner. Indeed, an agreement was reached in 1912 to allow Southport to use a portion of the Garrison House as its first library with an initial collection of 400 books. Further, the USO building, constructed in 1941, was transferred to the City after WWII and it became the City’s Community Building until it burned down in January 1995. The current Community Building is on the same footprint as the former USO building.

It is only fitting that with the transfer of Fort Johnston from the federal government, the City of Southport has fully opened the facility to the public. With the introduction of the Visitors Center and museum in the Garrison House, the development of the North Carolina Maritime Museum, renovated tennis courts, and the continued popularity of the Community Building, this ole fort continues to serve.

Under formal agreement with the City, the Southport Historical Society maintains an area in the east wing of the Garrison House. A storage area serves as an archival repository and a display area serves as an adjunct to the City Museum. Recently, SHS volunteers moved the original storefront of Fullwood’s Grocery from a storage location behind the Ports of Call restaurant into the Garrison House for eventual display. Fullwood’s was located on Howe Street and was one of several groceries that served Southport’s residents in the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s. The idea is to highlight Southport’s downtown commercial legacy around this storefront display, along with other displays, both permanent and rotating, within the Society’s portion of the Garrison House.

Ft. Johnston, cont.

Folks, the transformation has begun! Under Joni Schinske's leadership, a small hung-go team (w/ Betsie Lytton and Martha Johnson) has undertaken the revitalization of the SHS area of the Garrison House.

The small room is being transformed into an artifact storage area while the larger area is being prepared as a research room (photo attached). The grocery storefront has been moved in the museum area to provide a better display when the museum area is re-worked.

We have established Monday mornings as our workday (9:00 - 12:00). If you want to stop by and assist or just take a look at progress, the team will be there on Monday mornings.



## SHS obtains letter from Smithville's Founder to his young son.

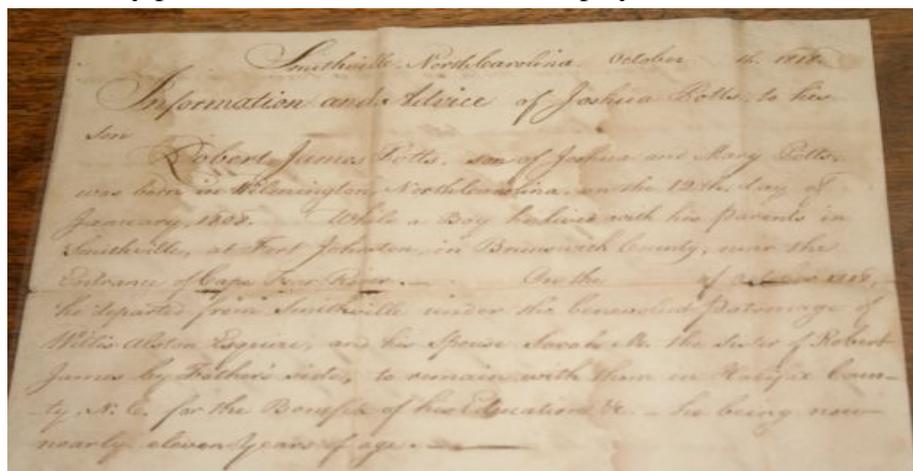
By Larry Maisel

A piece of luck brought a very special artifact to the SHS when a rare document curator at a New York auction house became curious about it and about where Smithville, NC was. That resulted in an inquiry to the society and from that first step we were able to obtain the actual copy of a poignant letter Joshua Potts wrote to his 10 year old son, Robert James Potts, who was being sent to live with family friends to obtain an education.

The letter gives no details other than to say that the move was made necessary by the "unfortunate life which your parents have experienced." This statement comes in a section of the letter dealing with eventual inheritances to Robert James, his brother, and sister. Joshua explained that all that would be inherited eventually would be some houses and lots in Smithville and Wilmington, which were of no great value, at the time, but might be when he came of age.

The boy was being sent to live with the Alston family in Halifax County. It reminds the boy to use his manners, and obey both the Alstons, (his sister and her husband Willis) and to study hard. He also gives him advice about choosing friends and even dealing with slaves as playmates.

The document is in fragile condition, but still legible. The SHS board gave the go-ahead to bid on it. But since it was part of the auction of several hundred items, which were to be sold a combined on-line and live auction in the gallery, we hired the curator who alerted us to it to bid on our behalf, which he did successfully. Once correctly preserved the letter will be on displayed from time to time in the Garrison.



## Christmas Tour of Homes

By Phil Fravel



It is time again to plan for the Historical Society's Christmas Tour of Homes. The tour is held annually, and is a fund-raising event for the Society. Proceeds are used to further our mission to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and to promote a better appreciation of our heritage. Funds from this event will enable the Society to continue to maintain the Old Jail on Nash Street. The Tour also provides funds for scholarships at South Brunswick High School.

An incredible amount of time and effort by the Home Tour committee members and the homeowners goes into organizing the Tour. The Home Tour committee greatly appreciates the members' and Homeowners support and interest in the Tour. This year's Tour will take place on December 14, 2013 from 2pm to 7pm, with tickets priced at \$10 in advance and \$15 the day of the tour. And if you want to mark your calendar for future Home Tours, it is always held on the Second Saturday in December.

As always, we are in need of Homes for the Tour, so if you are willing to have your home on the tour please contact Shirley Wilson or Phil Fravel or contact the Society from our website, <http://www.southporthistoricalsociety.org>

The SHS want to express their deepest sympathy to the Fravel family for the recent death of Cathy Fravel, a long time SHS member and dedicated volunteer for the Tour of Homes.

## Tip Toe Thru The Tables

At the St James Service Club event of Tip Toe Thru The Tables, Nancy Christianson entered a table with Old Jail as its theme. The Tip Toe Thru The Tables event has many tables set up with many (about 25) different themes. Tickets are sold for some one to enter the event and included in the price are refreshments. Also included are tickets for the Chinese auction for about 25 items donated by local businesses. More raffle tickets are available for sale.

The Old Jail table was set with the blue ware plates and cups from the jail, with the accompanying flat ware. The spittoon held flowers in the center of the table. The blue ware stew pot, to the left, held some of the Historical Society's brochures and some new member forms. A nightstick along with the cut out book was between the stew pot and the spittoon. Some of the Societies books were shown next to the spittoon. Handcuffs held the napkins (there is now a handcuff display at the Old Jail). One of the jail kerosene lamps, a copy of the 1935 State Port Pilot, old keys from the Sheriff's department, and a picture of the Old Jail completed the table items. Charles Christianson dressed in the new prisoner's uniform that we received from the Brunswick County Jail also wearing handcuffs and leg irons. Ron Thompson came in for the second half wearing his 711 prisoner's uniform and a red nose (clown's nose). He talked to various visitors about being a docent. The table theme was to acquaint St. James with the Old Jail and to ask for docents to conduct the tours.



## The Old Jail

*By Nancy and Charles Christianson*

**New Sheriffs Display At Old Jail** - While we know that the membership has been waiting breathlessly to see what will be placed in the Old Jail display room for this year's theme, well, they can wait no longer. The room is open. As you remember, in 2011, there was the "Affairs of the Heart" movie display that had an original script from one of the actresses who lives in the area. Last year, the room held the railroad display of the Wilmington, Brunswick and Southern railroad that was a neighbor to the Old Jail in the 1911 to about the 1940 time frame.

This year, we have the "Behind the Badge" display. It is a time line of all the Sheriffs and Jailers (Keepers, Deputy Sheriffs) that worked with and at the Old Jail. Bill and Martha Johnson, and Nancy Christianson did the research (Johnsons did the old items, Christianson talked to the living people), Joni Schinske did the display design, Shirley Johnson, and Charles Christianson supported the display development. Joni took the gathered data and made it magic.

The Johnsons' research solved the mystery of the J. Russ name. Previously, we had a story on the wall of James Hardy Russ as a jailer and a sheriff. Research showed that J. A. Russ was the Sheriff, and James Hardy Russ was the Jailer. The time frame that both men were active was about the same (1930s). It was confusing enough that without knowing about the two men, one name with a J in front seemed like the same person. James Hardy Russ's son James Burnice Russ was also a jailer and deputy sheriff.

Also added to the room is a handcuff display. The table that was used to hold the railroad rail was modified to hold the collection of 8 different handcuffs. There is an arm and leg irons copied from the original San Quentin prison. Thumb cuffs that can also be toe cuffs. Replicas of pirate's handcuffs, and copies of the current metal ones are on display. It has been pointed out that many law agencies are now using plastic thrown away cuffs now (what fun are they?). Also in the display is a 20-pound ball and chain. It attached to the table leg, as it seemed appropriate, and it would not fit under the Plexiglas.



## Behind the Badges

*By Bill & Martha Johnson*

When the colonists first came to this new land, they brought with them a law enforcement system that had evolved for centuries in England. The original English shires had evolved into counties. The Shire Reeve (Sheriff) administered justice and was responsible for keeping peace, collecting taxes, and maintaining Gaols (Jails), among other duties.

Although the English had attempted settling North Carolina in 1587 on Roanoke Island, there was no permanent settlement in the state until 1655 when a Virginia farmer, Nathaniel Batts, decided to try his luck at finding better farmland by moving south.

In 1663, King Charles II awarded eight Lord Proprietors the Province of Carolina, which at that time included both North and South Carolina. In 1665, Sir John Yeamans established a permanent colony in the Cape Fear area. And in 1729, North and South Carolina became separate colonies.

In 1764, Brunswick County was formed from areas of Bladen and New Hanover counties. Because of the proximity of the port of Brunswick Town to Newton, or Wilmington, as it was later named, the pre-Brunswick County sheriffs seemed to have served New Hanover County. In fact, the first Sheriff of New Hanover was Cornelius Harnett, Sr., an innkeeper and owner of a ferry in Brunswick Town.

It is of note that two years following the formation of the County, the first formal act of defiance against the British Crown occurred in Brunswick Town in the County of Brunswick. This became known as the Stamp Act Rebellion. We know that Mr. Cornelius Harnett, later the first sheriff of New Hanover County, was present at this insurrection. It is unclear which person was officially acting as the new Brunswick County Sheriff during this event.

What we have inherited from the New Hanover County records is a complete list of the sheriffs who first served the area that later became Brunswick County in 1764:

1739-41	Cornelius Harnett, Sr.	1741-42	Thomas Clark
1743-44	John Sampson	1745-46	Robert Walker
1747-48	Lewis DeRosset	1749-52	Caleb Grainger
1753-56	John Davis, Jr.	1756-59	William Walker
1760-63	John Walker	1764-65	Arthur Benning

Twelve years after the formation of Brunswick County, the Second Continental Congress voted a resolution of independence from England in 1776; thus began the American Revolution. And so the County of Brunswick joined the battle for freedom from the British and grew as a thriving community peopled with planters and a few that made a living from the river and sea.

In *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River*, writer James Sprunt (1846-1924) states the following in regards to the Brunswick County seat:

“When the town of Old Brunswick dwindled away, there was no other town in the county. The county seat was at first established at Lockwood's Folly, but in 1805 the courthouse was removed to Smithville, where many of the old families, while retaining their plantations, built commodious and handsome residences.”

Thus, in 1805, Smithville became the county seat with the county's jail and a courthouse that housed most of the early records pertaining to land ownership, deeds, wills, and other important documents that told the history of this place in olden times.

In January 1865, Fort Fisher, the last bastion of defense for the Cape Fear River and lifeline for needed supplies for the Southern war effort, fell to Union troops. With the river now open to northern troops, some crossed the river into this community and proceeded to burn the court records and commit other malicious abuses against the citizens of the town. As a result, Brunswick County is referred to as a “burned county,” with most of its records prior to 1865 in ashes. This was the first 100 years of historical records for Brunswick County.

At best, the search for a documented past is a challenge, and sometimes glimpses may be found farther from home. A few records can be found among the State's documents in Raleigh; others can be found in the newspapers published in olden times around our state, especially in Wilmington and nearby counties. In fact, Bill Reaves put together a four-volume history of Southport based on such sources, and his work has been a blessing in trying to piece together a proper history of the town and of local law enforcement. The following piece appeared in Hall's Wilmington Gazette on Thursday, September 7, 1797:

*Will Be Sold*

*On Saturday the 9th of September next, at the Back House opposite Wilmington, Sundry Likely Negroes. Sold at the instance of James Fergus vs the administrators of James McAlester.*

*Thomas Leonard, Sheriff*

*Brunswick County, August 26*

There are numerous examples of advertisements in North Carolinian newspapers for sales and rewards offered for runaway slaves by the early Brunswick County Sheriffs.

It is unclear what the process was for hiring jailers or if there was ever an "official" position as Brunswick County Jailer in the distant past in Southport, although we occasionally come across a few names in the research of Bill Reaves.

Jailers had many responsibilities, including seeing that prisoners were housed, fed and taken to court when needed for trial. In later years, some of these men and women were members of the law enforcement community. In earlier times, they were ordinary members of the community, both black and white, who received some pay for doing this work.

If you consider that in most cases prisoners lived in the jail 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, there must have been a need for multiple jailers at any given time. I believe that is why, for example, we find three separate individuals listed as jailer in 1910.

It is interesting that the jailers who served the Southport facility had various occupations listed on the census records, none of them as "jailer." One example is Mr. James J. Loughlin, who lived in the "old" jail when it was still the "new" jail with his family and three prisoners in 1910. Mr. Loughlin listed his occupation as "merchant." And in the same year, we find that David Fulcher was "appointed" as the new jailer.

This job appeared to be demanding, at best, as seen in the case of jailer James Hardy Russ, who suffered three separate jail escapes between 1932 and 1938. In the last escape, three prisoners, including an accused murderer, beat the jailer before fleeing.

Listed elsewhere are the ten Sheriffs that served this area from 1739-1764 before the formation of Brunswick County. With the exception of a 30-year gap (1764-1796), the following names are known to have served as Brunswick County Sheriffs:

1796 Thomas Leonard	1799 John C. Baker	1800 John Gambier Scull
1819 Alfred Galloway	1833 Asa Russ	1837 William Hankins
1841-43 Robert W. Woodside	1846-55 James H. Allen	1866-68 Rufus Galloway
1869-72 Samuel Peyton Swain	1877 Rufus Galloway	1878-90 Edward Ward Taylor
1890-94 William Asbury Rourk	1894 Mr. McKeithan	1895-02 Daniel Russell Walker
1903-06 Peter Rourk, Jr.	1907-08 Jackson Stanland	1908-12 John Joseph Knox
1913-17 John Ellis Robinson	1920-23 Francis London Lewis	1924-27 Rufus Decatur White
1928-29 Francis London Lewis	1931-32 J.A. Russ	1933 Isham Danvis Harrelson
1935-37 J.A. Russ	1938-41 Dillon Lyonial Ganey	1942-45 Calvin Peel Willetts
1947 John Goodman White	1947-49 Walter M. Stanaland	1950-66 Edwin Vance Leonard
1966-74 Harold Willetts	1974-83 Herman Strong	1983-94 John Carr Davis
1994-08 Ronald E. Hewitt	2008-Present John W. Ingram	

## The Whittlers Bench, Volume XIX, Number 4, July 1994

### History of the "Old Jail" - Headquarters of Southport Historical Society

*Article by Susan Sellers Carson*

In 1904, the building, which we now call the "Old Jail", was finally constructed for use as a county jail and located on land sold to the county by Miss Kate Stuart of Smithville. It housed prisoners until 1971 when it was replaced by the one-story brick building just to the rear, facing Rhett Street. The county, however, used the building as offices for the sheriff's department until the county seat was moved to Bolivia in 1978.

Architecturally, the Old Jail is a two-story brick building laid out in 1:6 bond and has a six-course belt dividing the two stories. The windows have segmental openings. The iron bars on the windows are apparently the original ones.

While there were never any famous people held in the jail, there have been several instances when the Old Jail was in the news. One was back in July 1924 when C.W. Stewart and his son Elmer were held without bond in the Southport jail, charged with first degree murder of deputy U.S. Marshall Samuel Lilly of Wilmington and his assistant, Detective Sgt. Leon George of the Wilmington Police Force, who had gone to a remote section of Brunswick County to arrest the Stuarts for the illegal manufacture of liquor. Both Stewarts were convicted in the Brunswick County Courthouse two blocks from the jail. They were sentenced on a beautiful Sabbath afternoon in October 1924, and it is said that at the moment of sentencing the courthouse bell began to ring of its own volition. Father and son were executed in April 1925, but before their deaths both confessed in their own words to the slayings.

A sad story took place on the jail grounds a few years later when the little daughter of a prisoner accused of murdering his wife climbed up the outside pipes of the jail to talk to her daddy.

There was also the occasion when two prisoners beat up the jailer and his helper then escaped. Another incident happened when a prisoner who had gained "trustee" status was allowed to go on work release to Wilmington. When he returned to the jail for the night he realized that he had left the jail key in Wilmington and he could not let himself back in.

The most recent occasion when the Old Jail was in the public eye was during the filming of the movie, "Crimes of the Heart" in 1986. There is a scene in which Sissy Spacek, playing the role of Babe Botrell, a woman who has just shot her husband, is seen running down the stairs from the cells on the second floor. In the movie, the Courthouse was Southport's Masonic Lodge building at the corner of E. Nash and Dry streets one block from the Old Jail.

SUSAN SELLERS CARSON

"MISS SUSIE"

CHARTER MEMBER AND HISTORIAN

1990

#### POSTSCRIPT:

On June 1, 1998, the Southport Historical Society began extensive restoration of the structure. On June 1, 2005 the "Old Jail" was re-opened as the Old Jail Museum.