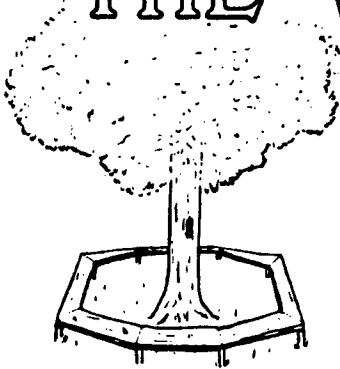


THE WHITTLERS BENCH



SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

501 N. Atlantic Ave. • SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA 28461

SEPTEMBER 3, 1987

SPECIAL EDITION! SPECIAL EVENT!

The Heritage Garden Project of the Southport Historical Society is to be recognized by the Brunswick County Committee for the celebration of the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution at a special ceremony at the Old Jail next Wednesday morning, September 9, at 9:30 A. M. We certainly hope that many of you will be present for the occasion. We are sorry that we could not give you more notice, but crowded schedules would not allow us to do otherwise.

The National Committee for the Bicentennial sent out guidelines for a "Living Legacy" to honor the Constitution and our Heritage Garden meets the criteria set out. If all goes as planned our Society will receive State and National recognition for the project, as well as the great satisfaction that will be ours for creating a thing of beauty for a long time to come.

To further tie the project with the Bicentennial, the Heritage Garden Committee had an enthusiastic meeting and made many ongoing plans. It was also decided that the name of the garden would be the Benjamin Smith Memorial Garden. For those of you who may not know, Benjamin Smith was one of the founders of Southport (then Smithville), a patriot, statesman, one-time Governor of North Carolina, aide de camp to General George Washington, and a member of the two North Carolina Constitutional Conventions, the last of which ratified the Constitution. At all times he was active in pushing for its adoption. Governor Smith began life as a member of a distinguished and wealthy family, he was well educated, he served his country well, but he died in Smithville broken in spirit, a pauper, with very few friends left. Today nothing in Southport honors his name, not even a street. We felt that such should be remedied. With your help we can make this garden a living beautiful tribute to his memory.

Watch the local paper for notices about other events to honor the Constitution. Of particular interest will be a special ceremony at Brunswick Town, during Autumn Days, on Saturday, September 26. Read about it in the State Port Pilot and Wilmington Morning Star, and then be a part of it. See you there.

On Wednesday, September 16, at 7:00 P. M., at the Southport Annex of Brunswick Technical College, our President, Susie Carson, will begin a 12-week course in the history of Brunswick County, with much emphasis on the history of Smithville/Southport. The class will meet once a week. You are invited to be a part of the class. Details may be had by calling Susie or the college (457-6324).

MEET SOME REAL "OLD TIMERS":

Many of Southport's oldest and most distinguished residents seldom receive the recognition they deserve. While we are busy preserving old houses and studying historic events, these venerable citizens go unnoticed. Sometimes they are overshadowed by flashy newcomers, but mostly they just wait quietly for someone to realize that they, too, have something to tell us about the past.

Who are these modest members of the community? Well, believe it or not, they are the many varieties of flowers, shrubs and trees that have graced the yards and streets of Southport for many generations. If you ask almost anyone to describe Southport, one of their first comments will be about the oak trees; these graceful old trees arching over the streets and shading our homes are probably more of a Southport trademark than any other feature. But a closer look at the yards and gardens of old houses around town will reveal that Southport people had some other favorite plants as well.

We rarely think of garden plants as items of historical interest, and yet there are a number of good reasons for doing so. First, most of Southport's old houses were built at a time when gardening and landscaping were considered an important domestic art, and people took great pride in the plants they grew to make their property more attractive. Therefore, if we want to preserve an authentic atmosphere, it isn't enough to save the buildings; we must surround them with appropriate plantings. Secondly, these plants can tell us a lot about the social customs of by-gone days in Southport. Today when we want flowers for holidays, weddings, funerals and other occasions, we usually call a florist, but until fairly recent times people made their floral arrangements from the flowers that grew in their gardens and nearby woods and fields. Now that modern production and shipping methods make the same blossoms and floral styles available in any part of the country, the use of local plant materials is another rapidly disappearing folk tradition. Finally, many of the old varieties of plants that our forebears grew are no longer being produced commercially. Unless special efforts are made to preserve these species, they will surely disappear forever.

For the modern gardener there is an immediate bonus in growing heirloom plants of the local area. These old-fashioned varieties usually offer maximum return in beauty and enjoyment from a minimum investment of time, effort and money. Since they are well-adapted to local conditions, they need relatively little maintenance and care, making them ideal for the gardener whose thumb is not so green and for those who have limited time to spend doing yardwork. And with just a little effort, anyone can put together a handsome collection of heirloom plants at little or no cost. In short, growing Southport's "flowers of yesteryear" can be a source of personal enjoyment as well as a contribution to community beautification and historic preservation.

by Flora F. Greensleeves, Heritage
Garden Consultant

Beginning with the October issue (regular) of Whittlers Bench, each issue will feature one or more of the special plants from the Heritage Garden Project. If you have other information about any of these plants, please call a committee member or write to the Society. We would especially like to know any other names you have for these plants, whether you live in Southport or any other part of the country. Let us know, too, if you remember any stories about the plant or can describe its use in gardens and floral arrangements.