

Southport Historical Society

Winter 2007

From the President's Pen . . .

What does your membership in the Southport Historical Society mean to you? Is it just one of several organizations you belong to because it seemed the thing to do when you moved to the area? Is it a holdover from your classes with Miss Susie and you just keep renewing every year? Is it a back-burner organization that you "someday" intend to bring to the forefront and really get involved in? Is it a peer issue—all your close friends or neighbors are members, so you joined too? Is it a business related advantage—"...oh, by-the-way we are members of the local historical society"...? Is it a continuation of your love for history in school or your love of travel to historical places? Is it an avenue for you to meet more folks in the area and enjoy a good meal five times a year? Is it a curiosity to know more about the local history through the programs presented? Is it a way that you can actively involve yourself in an organization with a mission in which you have confidence and thereby want to be a part of its enhancement?

If you answered "yes" to one, some or all of these questions, that is sufficient reason to maintain your membership, so please don't drop out! You are welcome as a member whatever your reason. However, we are hoping that more and more of you will answer a resounding "YES" to that last question. Now that we are off to a new year—beginning our 31st year of existence—we are looking for more involvement from our now 360 plus membership and looking forward to adding to that with our "407 in '07" membership campaign. Look through this newsletter for the "**OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!**" doors you can open if you will accept the challenge to become more active in the society.

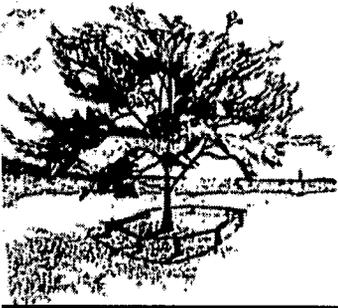
We are probably the largest organization in the area—unless it's the Newcomers Club!—and that should give us a great advantage in helping Southport maintain the charm and quality of living that we either were born to or were lucky enough to find later in life. I am not at all reluctant about letting it be known that we are a strong group of folks who could carry a lot of clout in decisions made about our town and what is happening here. My intention here is not to berate the politics and governing of Southport, but to extend to our city leaders (of which most are members of the society) an invitation to accept the assistance, expertise and dedication we can bring to the table. A table that can be a "banquet feast" of good things to preserve our heritage, educate our citizens and visitors and participate in the salvation of those things that mean "Southport" to each of us.

Specifically, I am, on behalf of the society, offering to the city an opportunity to work together in the establishment of the best use of Fort Johnston. Since the "deal was sealed" with the signing of the deed over to the city on September 5, 2006 little has been done as far as planning, not to mention implementing the use of the property. Our aldermen go into "retreat" on March 10 to, among other things, consider plans for Ft. Johnston. Many interested citizens have been asked and have offered to become involved with the Ft. Johnston Committee. We, the society, have an excellent representative, **Don Parker**, who has great insight and administrative skills to assist the city mothers and fathers make and implement viable plans. The society wants to be a part of the process! We've been waiting six months already, let's move forward, let's use all willing and available help, let's "get'er'done"! If you have opportunity, please let the aldermen know how you feel about this issue.

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
 P. O. Box 10014
 Southport, NC 28461
 E-mail: shs@ec.rr.com
 Website: southporthistoricalsociety.com
 Telephone contact: 910-457-0579 or 910-454-0437

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

Meeting Dates . . .

Our next covered dish dinner meeting is scheduled for **MARCH 29** at the **Southport Community Building**. You might want to mark your still-new 2007 calendar for these future meeting dates: **May 24, September 27 and November 15**. You sure don't want to miss any of that good cooking and our interesting programs! How long has it been since you've been to a meeting? **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"**

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. We are so happy to have **Marty Loughlin** as our "webmaster" now. You may contact her by e-mail at marty28461@gmail.com if you have any comments. **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"**

Membership . . .

Congratulations to longtime member, **Margaret Harper**, who recently celebrated her 90th birthday!

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! **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"** (Encourage your friends and family to become members.)

**Fran Carlsen
 Mike and Joy Clifton
 Tom & Joyce Cotton
 Susan Davis
 Ann Price**

**John & Patricia Eide
 Latitia Grant
 Mike & Pauline Morrison
 River Road Animal Hospital**

**NEW LIFE MEMBERS:
 James & Aileen Boyer**

Dues, Dues, Dues . . .

Gotta' Red Dot ????????

Membership renewal dues are payable in January of each year. Most of you have renewed, but there are still a few we have not heard from as of this mailing. If there is a red dot on your mailing label, we haven't received your dues. There is a renewal form on the back cover of this newsletter. When you pay your dues for 2007 why not use that as a reminder to enlist someone else to join the society! Thank you for your continued support of the Southport Historical Society.



Bob Lucas and Peter Wyckoff - Jail Dedication July 4, 2004

In Remembrance . . .

We are indeed saddened by the deaths due to cancer of two of our dedicated members, **Peter Wyckoff** and **Bob Lucas**. Peter was our immediate past president and was especially instrumental in the renovation of the Old Jail during his 4-year term of office. Bob served a 3-year term as a director on our board and used many opportunities to promote the society. Our sincere sympathy is extended to Beverly and Becky and their families. We will certainly miss these two fine gentlemen who have made lasting contributions and were such good friends to the historical society.

Book News . . .

A Gentle Lady Coming Soon!

In a few weeks you will have a chance to meet someone who was dear to someone who is dear to all of us. Lelia Jane Sellers lived in Southport for 50 years, from 1920 to 1970, during which her accomplishments included giving birth to our **"Miss Susie Sellers Carson."**

Co-authored by Miss Susie and **Larry Maisel**, *Lelia Jane; A Very Gentle Lady*, weaves together Lelia Jane Sellers' life and what was happening in Southport and Brunswick County in that half-century.

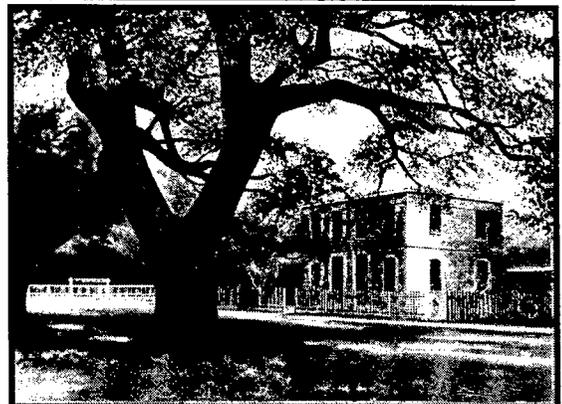
The book is the result of something over 16 hours of interviews which Larry did with Miss Susie, and therefore is largely reminiscences of her mother, the Sellers family, and both their quiet times and some adventures, told in her words. There are a few surprises, one of which shows that, while her mother may have been a very gentle lady, in her childhood, our Miss Susie wasn't always gentle, particularly in one incident with her sister, **Thelma!**

The book provides a look at not only her mother's early life in Supply and near Holden Beach, but how Southport families dealt with the Great Depression, two world wars, and the thriving business community now long gone. From accident-prone Susie to floating slabs of bacon, this latest publication by the Southport Historical Society will make for interesting reading.

"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!" We really need two or three members who will work with **Chris and Debbie Suiter** and **Ken and Carolee Morris** on our book committee. We need to "open more doors" of places to sell our publications, so if you have an interest in marketing and maintaining our book inventory please let us know!

At the Old Jail . . .

The Old Jail Museum is now closed for visits until the Spring except for special events. The advisory board for the jail continues to work on new exhibits and make future plans for the museum. As we think toward Spring and reopening on a regular basis, we will need volunteer docents for Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. Please be thinking about your involvement and let us know if you will be willing to "go to jail" and do some "good time" for the society! **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"**



This photo is of a painting by Bryan Varnam available through the society. Inquire at shs@ec.rr.com or 457-0579



Looking Back with Susie Carson . . .

2006 was the year of celebrating our 30th anniversary and it also marked thirty years of writing the "Looking Back" column for Susie. So she has decided to step aside and let you, the members, become the writers. Keeping up with her weekly column in the Wilmington Star-News and fielding all those telephone calls and visits she gets from folks far and wide asking questions about Southport history and looking for "long lost" relatives is about all she can handle now. We agree with Susie that this will be a good forum for those of you who would like to send us your recollections, reflections and relevant thoughts. **"BIG OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"** We'll be looking to hear from those of you who have been in Southport "forever" as well as those who have been lucky enough to find this special place later in life. Don't be bashful now, if you want to share your special memories and experiences, we'll be happy to "publish" you and if you send a picture, we'll even use that! You may e-mail your contribution to shs@ec.rr.com or mail it to SHS, P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461. Our next edition of the Whittler's Bench will go out in mid-May. Many of you spent a lot of time in Susie's classes, so we know you're interested in our local history and maybe there's been something or someone you just been itching to write about, so please let us hear from you! Susie says if you don't respond, we'll just have to go back and republish all her stuff again! Thirty years worth!



The Old Burying Ground . . .

MUCH PROGRESS MUCH PUBLICITY MUCH HELP

As 2007 gets underway so does our project to revitalize the Old Smithville Burying Grounds. Our workdays last fall and now into this year have already made quite a difference in the appearance of the cemetery! Pansies were planted on our January 26 workday. **Musette Steck** is the chairman of the following steering committee that has begun its work to make this project as significant as our restoration of the Old Jail. Thank you, committee, for your interest and dedication!

- Charles Christensen** - Secretary
- Susan Davis** - Stabilization of Copings
- Marvin Johnson** - Stone and Ironwork Conservation
- Kathy Johnstone** - Curator

- Jim McKee** - Plot Survey
- Dinah Sneed** - Adopt-a-Plot
- Trudy Young** - Curator

"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"

Now we need more and more of you to join us in this exciting undertaking (no pun intended!). Consider these ways you might become involved and let us hear from you. **Musette** will be happy to answer any general questions, so give her a call at 454-0437 or one of the following for more specific details.

Adopt-a-Plot is the method by which a clean-up volunteer will have the opportunity to maintain a specific plot year-round by keeping it free of weeds, leaves, and wind-blown trash. We are permitted only to *maintain* the plots, not to *enhance* them. This will be further explained should you choose to become a caretaker. After working a couple of times during our workdays several people have already selected their favorite plot. **Trudy** and **Kathy**, our curators, seem to be kin to or know about every family represented there, so they keep us on track as to which plots are "adoptable" and which are still maintained by family members. Call **Dinah** at 454-4068 for details about adopting a plot.

Restoration and conservation of the stones seem to be foremost in the mind of the general public. **Marvin** has met with the superintendent of the historic Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, Eric Kozen. Eric has actually repaired many of Oakdale's markers which were vandalized. He is willing to come meet with our volunteers and train us for on-the-spot restoration. Call Marvin at 253-4413 if you are interested in this aspect of the project, and we'll let you know when the training date has been set.



Historically Speaking with the Archivist . . .

113 E. Bay Street - Capt. J.J. Adkins House

A Series Featuring Southport Homes
by **Larry Maisel**

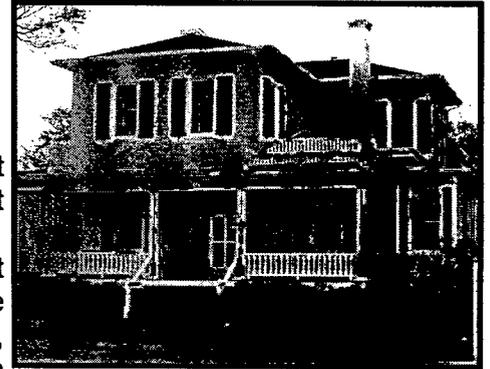
Capt. Adkins View Got Better

There are not many houses on Bay Street that don't have a great view of the water, but one owned by Capt. J. J. Adkins, a river pilot, got even better around 1900.

His home at 113 E. Bay Street began as a one-story structure, not unlike the Taylor house which is next door. Look closely and you can see the similarity. The Adkins house was built in the latter part of the 1800s. What is interesting is that the second story covered all but the front room on the northeast corner. At the same time a small extension was added on that same corner, and a bay window on the other side of the house.

J. J. Adkins was a businessman as well as a pilot, and was a partner in several ventures, including the Cape Fear Coaling and Contracting Company in 1890 and the Cape Fear Towing Company in 1895. That latter firm brought the first steam-powered tugboat to Southport. Capt. Adkins was also one of the pilots who put up money to purchase the first powered pilot boats.

J. J. Adkins was an active fellow and just before the Spanish-American War he was one of several men involved in getting guns into Cuba for use by the patriot rebels there.



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. **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"** - We are looking for a few members who would like to help with this program as Larry is ready to pass it on. If you would like to open this door of opportunity, give him a call to get the details. We need you!

From the Chronicles . . .

The society has published a set of four chronologies edited by Bill Reaves that cover happenings in Smithville/Southport from 1520 to 1970. Fascinating reading! A limited number of these sets are now on sale for \$25. They are

January 10, 1826: General Benjamin Smith, former Governor of North Carolina, died at Smithville. Formerly a large landowner and prime benefactor of the State University, in his last years he lived in poverty.

January 1848: James A. Mason purchased the old "Benjamin Smith Mansion", occupied by Governor Edward Dudley as a summer residence, and converted it to a hostelry called "Mason's Hotel".

February 1761: Colonial Governor Arthur Dobbs issued an order when he learned that King George III had ascended the throne that "the militia be drawn out and a triple discharge from Fort Johnston of 21 guns and from all the ships in the river."

February 28, 1864: The famous U.S. Navy Lieutenant William B. Cushing made a daring raid on Smithville. An attempt was made to capture General Herbert, but fortunately the general was in Washington. An engineer officer was captured in his stead and taken to Cushing's vessel, the "Monticello".

February 1903: Ready for Tourists—"With good lights on our streets, a deep well of pure water, our streets and sidewalks repaired and improved, to which we may add a cool and refreshing sea breeze, fresh from the Atlantic Ocean at all times, Southport can throw open her doors of welcome to the visitors next summer."

March 12, 1875: A debating society was organized for the benefit of the young men of Smithville

March 13, 1880: The ladies of Smithville, to the number of 100 or more, sent a petition to the county commissioners asking them to prohibit the sale of liquors in that town, and an election for a "Wet" or "Dry" ticket was ordered to be held.

March 1915: The Southport Board of Aldermen signed a contract for the construction of a water and sewer system for the city.

March 29th Program . . .

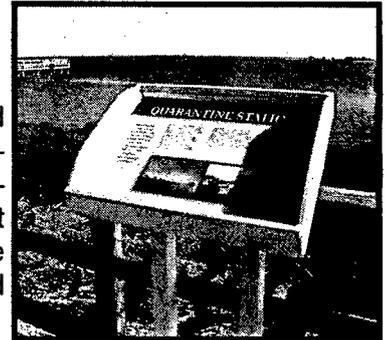
Bobby Williamson, from Shallotte, will speak at our March 29th dinner meeting. His family has lived in Brunswick County for seven generations and has an interesting history. Bobby is a serious historian, teaching a course on the Shallotte and South Brunswick area, at Brunswick Community College. He is a very entertaining speaker and you will certainly enjoy his talk which will focus on the water link that joined Shallotte, Southport and Wilmington before there were roads. Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about our county's history.

*Seventh Generation
Brunswick County
Historian to Speak*

The evening starts with a covered dish dinner at 6:30 at the Southport Community Building. Bring your favorite dishes and a guest or two! **"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"** to introduce someone else to the benefits of belonging to Southport Historical Society!

Historical Trail Signs . . .

For the past three years the Southport Historical Society (SHS) has participated in a community-wide committee which applies for grants and designs and produces signs about Southport history. Funding for this project is from the NC Department of Natural Resources and its State Parks and Recreation Department program. \$15,000 has been approved for projects in Southport. Signs are erected near specific historical or ecological locations. Many signs are located along the Southport River Walk and others at locations throughout town.



Photos and a brief history on each sign explain the story or importance of the site. Initial signs dealt specifically with such sites as the Cape Fear River, the Salt Marsh, Battery Island, the fishing industry, the T.M. Thompson house and the river pilots. Last year all the signs focused on Southport history and included sites such as: the Old Jail, the Burying Ground and the Brunswick County Training School. Currently an additional eight signs are being designed and are expected to be installed in late May or early June. Some of these signs focus on the crab factory and shrimp industry, black businesses and churches, the old railroad, and Franklin Square Park.



The SHS brochure, *Southport Trail, A Self-Guided Walking Tour*, includes a map of Southport, information about historic buildings and places of interest and identifies all of the historical markers with asterisks. It is available for residents and visitors at the Visitors Center. Why not take a few friends on the tour and get them interested in joining the society—**"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"**

A special "Thank You!" to these members of the society who have been instrumental in this project. **Karen Knighton, Carolyn Pryor, Musette Steck, Larry Maisel and Mary Strickland.** Job well done!

Events: Past & Upcoming . . .

March 20: Dr. Max Williams speaks on "Confederate Dreams and British Shipbuilders" at Southport Community Building - 7 p.m. sponsored by the Maritime Museum.

March 29: SHS DINNER MEETING (See inside for details)

March 29-May 3 Maritime Museum's "Spring into History" series Begins. Call Museum for details (457-0003)

April 17: Claiborn Young "Cruising the Intracoastal Waterway" Sponsored by Maritime Museum—7 p.m. Community Building

April 21-22: Coastal Water Watch will sponsor Earth Day events Including harbor cruises, walking tours, and exhibits. More information to follow in newspapers and e-mails.

April 29: 2-6 p.m. "A Taste of North Carolina Wines" with tastings and beach music on the river. Sponsored by Maritime Museum.

**SOUTHPORT HERITAGE DAYS ARE COMING
MAY 24 -28, 2007**

The theme for this year's Heritage Days will be
"Celebrating the Arts in Southport"

Past and present artists in many areas will be featured. The society will sponsor Southport Secrets Tours based on our "artistic" Bicentennial Quilt hanging in the visitors center and our book—*Southport Secrets*.

**2006 CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR
ANOTHER
SUCCESSFUL
YEAR!**



What a great day we had on December 9th. The weather was "crisp", the crowds were "ruly", the homes were "just too too" and the profits were "sweet"! Our annual fund raiser brought \$10,985 net into the treasury. Thanks again to all the homeowners and committee members who created another special day in charming Southport!

"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING!"

If you wanted to be a house host or hostess and missed that opportunity, here's your chance to sign up now for next year's tour! Call **Cathy Fravel** at 457-4794

Want to work on the committee for next year's tour? Call **Susan Toth** at 457-0760

Our Annual Meeting at Caswell was well attended and Cathy Fravel was elected to serve a second term as a board director. The State of the Society presentation reminded us of our achievements in 2006 and introduced our projects and theme for 2007 -"Bringing our Past into the Present". P. S. If you made a reservation and were unable to come, please honor that by sending a check for \$10 as the society did have to pay for your meal. Thanks for your consideration! Make check to SHS and send to P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461.

More "Opportunities Knocking!" . . .

Just in case you haven't been "knocked out" yet, here are some more "doors" you could open!

EDUCATION COMMITTEE: We would very much like to form a committee to plan programs and events for the benefit of students. Those of you with teaching and education backgrounds might be interested in helping us to create meaningful ways that we can reach into the schools. This might mean taking programs to the schools or presenting programs locally as the students come here on field trips. Please think about this opportunity to start something new in the society. We need you!

BRICK HAULING: Huh? Yes, we need four of you who have pick-up trucks to help haul bricks soon. The city will be giving us hundreds of brick from the century-old Water Department building across from Doshier Hospital for us to use at the Old Burying Grounds to repair boxed table stones and to define old graves and plots. If you have a truck and/or a strong body and would be willing to load or unload on a day's or so notice, call **Susan Davis** at 454-9491 or **Musette Steck** at 454-0437 We need you!

PHOTO COLLECTING: As we build our archival collection, we are very much interested in having photographs of early families in the area. If you have them or know families that might want to donate photos to the society, please be in touch with **Larry Maisel** at 457-6222. We need you!

WHAT DOES YOUR MEMBERSHIP MEAN TO YOU ?