

THE WHITTAKER'S BENCH

Southport Historical Society

Volume XXVII, Number 5

November, 2003

November Meeting

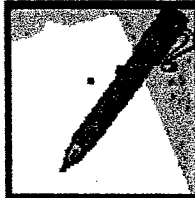
The SHS will gather for the November meeting at the Southport Community Building on Thursday, November 20th.

Social and set up is from 6:00 – 6:30 p.m.; potluck dinner is at 6:30 p.m.

LOOKING AHEAD...
January 22 Meeting
At Fort Caswell
Buffet Dinner - \$10

SHS Officers &

President	
Peter Wyckoff	457-5599
Vice-President	
Pat Kirkman	457-0579
Secretary	
Karen Knighton	454-8018
Treasurer	
Wolf Furstenau	278-4050
Historian/Archivist	
Marilyn Lessin	457-0004
Directors	
Shirley Wilson	454-4327
Musette Steck	253-3855
Bob Lucas	457-6723



PRESIDENT'S PARAGRAPH

Who has stopped by the Old Jail recently and seen the fine new steel bar front doors? They are certainly imposing! The other interior steel work is completed and we move on to further restoration tasks. Only seven months to go – and we are still on target. Of course, our poor Treasurer, Wolf, cringes each time the Board meets and we tell him how much more money we plan to spend. It will all be worth it though when the work is all done and we really have the Southport Historical Society Museum open to the public. Please start searching your photo albums and attics for old photos of the jail and memorabilia that you will be willing to share. Photos can be scanned and duplicated so that you get to keep the originals.

Speaking of old photos, please try out this web site <http://www.southport-nc.com/history/oldphoto/cardshow.htm> to see some excellent old photos of Southport. They are so very unique.

November Meeting

The SHS will gather for the November meeting at the Southport Community Building on Thursday, November 20th. Social and set-up is from 6:00 – 6:30 p.m.; potluck dinner is at 6:30 p.m. Our program this month will be the unveiling of "Joshua's Legacy", recognizing the authors, and hearing selected readings.

There also will be an opportunity to do all of your Christmas gift shopping; multi-volumes of "Joshua's Legacy", Southport throws, and all of our other fine quality history volumes. Remember, SHS members receive a discount on all of their purchases.

Thanksgiving

The November meeting is only one week before Thanksgiving Day, and I want to give thanks here for the opportunity to work with such a wonderful, enthusiastic, creative, and hard working Executive Board. These are not secret meetings; all of you are welcome to join in and see the Board in action and how much gets packed into the two-hour monthly meetings. Your in-put is always welcome.

And a Merry and Blessed Christmas

To all of you who are far flung from Southport and to whom I will be unable to wish a "Merry Christmas" in person, let me do that now. *MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR.*

Peter Wyckoff



OFFICER ELECTIONS

The nominating committee submits the following slate of officers for 2004:

Peter Wyckoff, President
Karen Knighton, Secretary
Shirley Wilson, Director

Pat Kirkman, V. President
Marilyn Lessin, Historian/archivist

Further nominations will be accepted from the floor and elections will be held at the November meeting.

Marilyn Lessin,
Chairman, Nominating Committee



LOOKING BACK - THE HISTORY PAGE

Susan Carson, Editor

Everybody loves to read about Bald Head Island and for this issue of "Looking Back" I feel very privileged to have a memoir of Michael Boyd, the great grandson of one of the early owners of the island. Mike holds the copyright on his article, but has given me permission to use it here. He holds a copyright to avoid seeing the article reprinted in some promotion literature that does not give credit where credit is due. I have encouraged him in that because that is what has happened in the past to some of my writings that were not copyrighted.

Michael's wife, Rosie Fisher Boyd, is a native of Brunswick County and a member of our society. She spent some of her early years in Southport and her brother, Edward, was in my first grade class. Her mother's family were Varnams of Brunswick County and she still has many relatives in the area. She and Mike live at Holden Beach.

Thomas Frank Boyd, Bald Head Island Owner with a Vision by Michael Boyd

Some of my earliest memories are of hearing Boyd family members, as well as family friends and associates, tell exciting, adventurous, and colorful stories about visits to Bald Head Island during the time the island was owned by my Great Grandfather, Thomas Frank Boyd, from 1915 to 1936.

Written history aside, family hand-me-down history has always held that Frank (as his friends called him) purchased the entire island, along with Middle Island, for \$40,000 cash, a 250-acre farm located at Rocky Point, and a 50-gallon barrel of whiskey, which I suspect he may have made himself. That was quite a deal even in 1915.

To this day, occasionally an old timer will show up at my door and, with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye, tell me of some exciting adventure he had on the island with my father, S.C. Boyd, Jr. (known as Jack) way back in the 1930's. These stories range from narrowly escaping injury from an angry, snorting wild boar to wonderful stories of romance. My grandfather, D.C. ("Cliff") Boyd met and married my grandmother, Ida Varnam, on the island in 1916. My wife Rosie's father, Sullivan Fisher, courted and married Rosie's mother, Mary Varnam, there in 1917.

Other stories tell of terrific catches of oysters, clams and fish, and of huge scary storms, of ghosts and treasures, and of quiet gentle breezes. Carson Varnam, the well-known and much beloved shellfish dealer in Varnamtown, recently told me that his father, Corbett Varnam, would go over to Bald Head back in those days and stay for two or three months alone in a little hut on the beach, gathering clams and oysters. A boat would come over from Southport once or twice a week and purchase his catch.

Ethel Varnam, now in her 80's, still tells stories about swimming – yes, swimming – from Southport to Bald Head when the tide was just right, all the while the young Coast Guardsmen were shaking their heads in disbelief.

My favorite stories, though, came from my father who spent the first five years of his life on the island and then went back often. He said that by the time he was a teenager he knew the island as well as he did the back of his hand. He told me of finding solid gold coins on the sandy dunes during the early 30's and stated that he practically learned to walk climbing up and down the stairways of the Old Baldy lighthouse, while his mother kept demanding that he come down before he fell. He was taken off the island just before he was six in order to start school. It seems that he ended up with all of the toys of his little cousins because "poor little Jack", as his aunts called him, had been on that uninhabited island all of his life without toys and therefore they should all give him toys out of pity for him.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5...



TREASURER'S REPORT September-October 2003

INCOME

Book Sales	1,036.03
Cannon Committee Income	50.00
<i>Donations:</i>	
Donation to Hist. Soc.	25.00
Tour of Homes	500.00
TOTAL Donations	525.00
Income from Dues	65.00
Insurance: Premium Refund	6.50
Bank Interest	5.36
NC Sales Tax Collected	6.52
Postage & Shipping Charge	4.00
Dividend	<u>20.54</u>
Income Total	\$1,718.95

EXPENSES

<i>Cannon:</i>	
Brochures, Certificates	7.68
Photography	39.95
Powder, primers, supplies	217.00
TOTAL Cannon	264.63
Meetings: Hall Rental	150.00
Newsletter	205.00
<i>Old Jail:</i>	
Building Permit	37.00
Restoration Work	100.00
Tools	67.76
Yard Maintenance	50.00
TOTAL Old Jail	254.76
Postage	41.03
Printing: SHS Pamphlet	45.37
Quarterly Sales Tax Return	8.46
S. Carson Scholarship Award	1,000.00
Sales Taxes Paid	<u>4.29</u>
Expense Total	\$1,973.54

Wolf Furstenau
Treasurer

2003 CHRISTMAS TOUR OF HOMES



Our major fund raiser is just around the corner, December 13th, and the Home Tour Committee (Peter Wyckoff, Pat Kirkman, Ginny Noble, Cathy & Phil Fravel, Kate Hardin, Susan Toth, Celeste Plassman, Randy Jones and Judy Crotts) have been busy for several months working out all the details. We are looking forward to another successful tour to enable the Society to complete the renovations on the Old Jail by July 4, 2004 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the building. Nine homes will be on the tour this year and Wilmington Trolley Company will provide a free shuttle around town. Our appreciation goes these homeowners for supporting the Society by opening their homes to us:

Cornelia Rogers - 319 N. Atlantic Avenue
David & Suzy Atkinson - 306 E. West Street
Gene Britt - 319 S. Burrington Street
Barry & Stuart Callari - 106 W. Nash Street
David & Judy Hodson - 111 N. Caswell Avenue
Nick & Nancy Kern & Pam Worthley - 415 S. Burrington Avenue
Perry & Suzanne Hunt - 316 St. George Street
Buddy & Debbie Barnes - 425 W. West Street
Garrett & Donna Albertson - 229 N. Caswell Avenue

Tickets will be available November 15 at a cost of \$10 in advance and \$15 on the day of the tour. They may be purchased in Southport at the Visitors Center and Franklin Square Gallery and in Wilmington at Latimer House. You may also purchase tickets at our November 20 dinner meeting. A special thanks goes to Southport Realty, Tidemark Realty and Margaret Rudd & Associates for their generous donations to help underwrite printing costs for tour brochures.

Mark your calendars and make plans now to be a part of this festive day in Southport! We trust that many Society members will support this fund raising effort.

SHS BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS



- Agreed to purchase a page in the new book from the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society on the Cape Fear region.
- Provided an update to the city aldermen regarding the work at the Old Jail.
- Agreed to solicit sandblasting and painting bids for additional jail work.
- Approved the final copy for the printing of *Joshua's Legacy*. Books will be available for purchase at the November general meeting.
- Agreed to hold the January meeting at Ft. Caswell.
- Approved \$150 for the Adopt a School program at Southport Elementary for the purchase of history books, videos and maps.
- Agreed to pursue sponsoring an antique roadshow during the Easter Spring Festival 2004.



BOOK REPORT

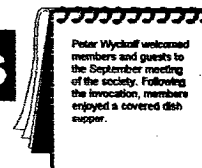
Proofs for *Joshua's Legacy* were reviewed on October 16 and the printer was given the go-ahead. We expect to have the books in hand during the first week of November.

At the October 16, 2003 Board of Directors' meeting the cost of our **Southport Coverlets** was reduced—just in time for Christmas shopping! The new retail price will be \$40.00. Members are, as always, entitled to a 10% discount. Available in Williamsburg Blue, Hunter Green and Cranberry Rd.

We continue to get requests for copies of *The History of Brunswick County North Carolina*, by Lawrence Lee. As you know, the book is currently sold out. We are desperately looking for a writer to bring the county history up to date so we can produce a revised text. Besides making the book available to the public again it will also give the Southport Historical Society the rights to the book.

SEPTEMBER MEETING MINUTES

September 25, 2003



Peter Wyckoff welcomed members and guests to the September meeting of the society. Following the invocation, members enjoyed a covered dish supper.

Wilber Jones, a local Wilmington author, spoke about his latest book, *Sentimental Journey*. *Sentimental Journey* details Wilmington during World War II including information on the shipyard, airport, the railroad and its population growth. Copies of the books were available for sale at the close of the meeting.

Respectfully submitted, Karen Knighton



HISTORICAL QUERY

In an October letter J.F. Newber of Hampstead questions the notation **Carolina** on an 18th century map attributed to J.B. Homana. The name appears where Brunswick Town is located. It raises the question, Mr. Newber writes, that perhaps Carolina and Brunswick Town are one and the same and the former was an earlier name of the town. A copy of the Homana map appears on page 24 of the *Atlas of Historical Maps of Maryland 1608-1909*, catalog number Atlas G.1270 p3 1982 at the Randall Library of UNCW.

LOOKING BACK CONTINUED...



Years later he would grin from ear to ear when his now grownup cousins would kid him about being "poor little Jack" and his caper, and of him being called the "little wild boy from Bald Head". His little dog "Red" was also the subject of some tales. This dog, growling and with his teeth showing, stared down more than his share of the wild boar hogs that were ferocious and several times his size.

Thomas Frank Boyd was truly a man with a vision as he had development plans for Bald Head Island that may even surprise today's developers. Many stories have been told and written about the hotel he built on the island, mainly from lumber salvaged from a sunken supply vessel. Boats loaded with visitors would come over to the hotel for fun-filled weekends, followed by a Monday morning sales pitch from Frank, and yes, I do suspect that all the stories about "someone" making moonshine there are true.

"Papa", as his children and grandchildren called him, pursued his dreams of development for Bald Head until his death. World War I and the Great Depression were only minor setbacks to his zeal. Upon his death the decision was made by his family to let the island go. Many complicated reasons influenced their decision, with extremely high property taxes being among them, but I have always suspected that one of the chief reasons was my Great Grandmother's dislike of the bugs and other hardships that came with visiting or living on an uninhabited and undeveloped island such as Bald Head was back then. She was a city lady at heart. Little could she have known then that this writer, her great grandson, over half a century later would own and operate a pest control company that would do battle with the pesky little dictyoptera, the neuroptera, and siphonaptera, better known as cockroaches, ants and fleas, along with many other six-legged insects. Great progress has been made in this battle, but I'm afraid that total victory cannot be claimed. However the beauty and tranquility of Bald Head Island far exceeds the nuisance of a few bugs.

Every time I have set my feet on Bald Head Island I have thought about my Great Grandfather and have seemed to sense his tremendous dreams for his beloved island. Someone has written or said that if Thomas Frank Boyd had lived long enough, the North Carolina State Capital might have been located on Bald Head. There might be some truth in that statement!

If he could see Bald Head today, some 70 to 80 years later, I believe he would smile, laugh merrily, and voice hearty approval over how well the current owner and residents have preserved the stunning natural beauty and tranquility of the island, as it is still one of the most unique places in all of North Carolina. The white sandy beaches with gently pounding surf, soft comforting breezes, beautiful trees and flowers, winding trails, and an unhurried and serene way of life still greet visitors to the island. Most important, I feel, are the extremely nice, friendly, and truly appreciative people who are fortunate enough to live there. I'm thankful that I've had the opportunity to meet many of them.

If one looks closely, part of the now crumbled down foundation of the old Boyd Hotel can be found lying in the vegetation near the sign indicating where the hotel once stood. That's about all that's left of the old hotel, but the dreams and visions held by Thomas Frank Boyd for Bald Head Island have, for the most part, become a living reality for many of us who are his descendants, thanks to current developers and property owners.

As long as there are folks still living who remember Bald Head during the early 20th century, the wonderful stories and tales of fun, adventure, romance, treasure and ghosts will still be told. I'm proud that my Great Grandfather Thomas Frank Boyd will always be an integral part of the colorful history and development of such a wonderful place. He was truly a man with a vision.