

THE WHITTAKER'S BENCH

Southport Historical Society

Volume XXVI, Number 1

January, 2002

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MEETING - January 24th, 6:30pm

The 2002 Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Dinner will be held on Thursday, January 24, at 6:30 p.m. at Trinity United Methodist Church on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Nash Street, across the street from the Post Office in Southport. This will also be the Election of Officers, so be sure to come and help "throw the rascals out!"

Our speaker will be Harry Warren, the Director on the new North Carolina Museum of Forestry in Whiteville. You will recall that Harry, in his previous role with the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington, gave us a wonderful show on the 20th Century in Wilmington. Now he has his own museum (and subject) and should be even better.



PRESIDENT'S NOTES

In my last Note as President, I will try a very brief summation of my four-year term.. Highlights: Of course, Miss Susie's Joshua Potts Monument tops the list – a long time coming! (Using our historical perspective, however, we do have to remember that Joshua was a (gasp!) "developer"— the squatters living in little shacks around the ruins of Fort Johnston undoubtedly thought that he and his friends were ruining the neighborhood!)

Second would be our continuing success as an income-producing entity. Our annual gross income from book sales, fund raisers, and dues is now in the \$40 thousand plus range, led by the very successful Second Annual Christmas Tour of Homes, and the Memorial Day Antique Show. Our membership is around 300 (we're never sure how many people are included in the "family" memberships.). Hopefully this success will continue, since the events are annual.

Lowlights: First (and worst), unfortunately, is the loss of too many of our most stalwart members, and especially Bill Reaves, author of our four Chronology books. It is a sad fact of life that Historical Society members are rarely young ...

Second was our failure to get across the message that historical ambiance is critical to a town like Southport. One only has to look at the scale of the new constructions everywhere and you will see how badly we were defeated.

In our organization, former presidents have tended to vanish into thin air when their terms ended. I hope I won't do that but I certainly understand their feelings – burned out!

Chris Suiter

SHS Officers & Directors

President
Chris Suiter 457-6629

Vice-President
Peter Wyckoff 457-5599

Secretary
Pat Kirkman 457-0579

Treasurer
Wolf Furstenau 278-4050

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Susie Carson 457-6940

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Ann Brown 457-6710
Becky Felton 457-5302
Dick Hughes 253-9877

"The Whittler's Bench" prepared by
Becky & Bert Felton, Ann Brown



The Whittler's Bench Southport Historical Society

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LOOKING BACK - THE HISTORY PAGE

Susan Carson, Editor



As most of you know, Bill Reaves was our first lifetime member. He was given this membership by the then Board of Directors because he gave the program for our first regular meeting and was very interested in our Society. Later Bill was to write four volumes of Southport Chronology, using items found in old newspapers. He was never paid for any of his work for us, but gave his time and effort willingly. Bill died on November 6, 2000.

For the "Looking Back" column in this issue, I have chosen to use a little history he wrote of the publication of the first volume of his "Chronology", back in 1978.

History of the Southport Chronologies Bill Reaves

With a very small treasury and a lot of perseverance, the Southport Historical Society published its first book in 1978 entitled SOUTHPORT (SMITHVILLE) - A CHRONOLOGY - VOLUME I (1520 - 1817). With very little knowledge of the how-to and work involved, the Society jumped in because of their enthusiasm and their thoughts of the importance of the preservation of the community's very long and important history.

Just imagine, a book about the formative years of the town of Smithville! The work began with the author, Bill Reaves, ex-employee of the Brunswick Town State Historic Site, who had collected a large amount of research materials on "The City by the Sea." Arrangements were made with the Postal Instant Press (P.I.P.), owned by Nelda and Charlie Illick, in Wilmington, to copy the pages typed by the author, along with designing a nice cover picturing the honorable Benjamin Smith, the town's namesake, and a few photos and maps for inside the book. After a short time, a large number of boxes were hauled from Wilmington to the board room of the then Southport Public Library, and a call went out to the "troops" to assemble for an old-fashioned game of "Follow the Leader." Without any problems and lots of energy, a group assembled and worked for two or three days in the assembly of the book.

Among the volunteers were Eleanor Smith, the Society's first president; Elizabeth Watkins, Dot Schmidt and her husband, H.A. (Smitty); Bob and Llena Thorsen; Kathryn Carson; Susie Sellars Carson; Pauline and John Swain; and the humble author, Bill. Others dropped in from time to time. You can well imagine a small room, with a long wooden meeting table stacked high with piles of printed pages in numerical order. With a lot of laughs and a lot of circles around the table, the books were slowly assembled. At the end of the table was Big Bill with the largest stapler he could find. Believe me, it took muscle to press that stapler with those long staples through about 150 pages. His left arm, after the project was completed, had a bicep Charles Atlas would have been proud of.

This did not end the job though. We had to cover the staples on the edge of the book with a strip of plastic tape in a lovely shade of blue to give the product of all our hard work a finished touch. Just about every store in the Southport area and in Wilmington suddenly ran out of their supply of blue plastic tape. What was going on?

Memories of those many circles around that long table remain among many of our present-day members. There are still chuckles when they think of getting mixed up in line because the one in front was getting tired and going too slow. Passing was forbidden! It did occur a couple of times and it took a while to straighten out the mixed-up pages. Another break-down in the system occurred during coffee or restroom breaks. Everything came to a halt! Some brave souls tried assembling two of three pages at the same time. In this day and times robots have been invented for this same kind of work, but what a memory we can enjoy today.

With a great deal of pride, the book (Volume I) went on sale on July 2, 1978 during Southport's annual Fourth of July celebration. The book was dedicated to Miss Annie May Woodside, "Southport's Lady of Quality," and she was given the honor of opening the book sales booth next to the "Old Curiosity Shop" on Howe Street.

Well, Volume II was printed without any of the fun and excitement as accompanied the first book. Now, we are having Volume III printed, and the author has also completed Volume IV to be offered in the future. Who would have ever thought that Southport (Smithville) had such a long history to relate? Don't be surprised to see one more, a volume V in a year or two. This will contain everything that was missed or researched since four volumes were published. What other town in North Carolina of Southport's size can boast of such an undertaking, beginning in 1978, and continuing yet today.

Note: The Southport Chronologies (Volumes I-IV) are available from the Southport Historical Society. Sadly, the "Old Curiosity Shop" on Howe Street referred to in the article has recently been torn down. Bill was unable to complete work on Volume V but ongoing research on his extensive archives may yield another book in the future.

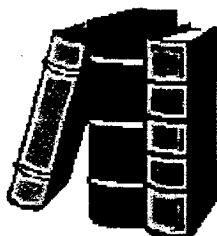


Christmas Tour Update



Christmas Tour Co-Chairmen
Kate Hardin and Cathy Fravel

A special thanks go to the co-chairmen of the Southport Historical Society Christmas Tour Committee, Cathy Fravel and Kate Hardin and all of the volunteers and home owners whose efforts contributed to the very successful tour in 2001. Over 1150 tickets were sold and seven homes were open to the public. Plans are already underway for the 2002 event and the hope is that we can have a tour of waterfront homes. Perhaps we could call it "Bay Watch" !! Remember that the proceeds from this, and other fundraising efforts, will contribute to the restoration of the Old Jail.



Book List

The Southport Historical Society is actively engaged in publishing books dealing with the history of the lower Cape Fear. Works listed are available for sale by the Society and at book stores in the area.

Architecture of Southport, by Carls Lounsbury \$15.00

Bald Head, by David Stick \$14.95

Cap'n Charlie and the Lights of the Lower Cape Fear, by Ethel Herring \$10.00

The Cemeteries of Southport, compiled by Dorcas W. Schmidt \$8.00

Fort Caswell in War and Peace, by Ethel Herring and Carolee Williams, revised by Kelli Williams \$16.95

A History of Brunswick County, by Lawrence Lee \$18.30

A History of Fort Johnston, by Wilson Anglely \$10.00

Guns for Cotton, by Thomas Boaz \$9.95

Joshua's Dream, by Susan Carson \$15.00

Long Beach, A North Carolina Town: Its Origin and History, by Wolf Furstenau \$17.95

Reminiscences of Wilmington and Smithville - Southport 1848-1900, by Dr. Walter G. Curtis \$12.95

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology Volume I, 1520-1887, by Bill Reaves \$15.00

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology Volume II, 1887-1920, by Bill Reaves \$15.00

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology Volume III, 1920-1740, by Bill Reaves \$15.00

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology Volume IV, 1941-1970, by Bill Reaves \$15.00

Southport Secrets, compiled by Donald K. Johnson \$12.95