

THE WHITTLED BENCH

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

• SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA 28461

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REGULAR MEETING: This will be one of our famous Potluck Dinners and is to be held on Thursday, September 25, at 6:30 P. M. at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. (We sure do appreciate their allowing us to meet there so often.)

Bring a favorite dish or dishes, and a guest if you like, and join us there. You'll be glad you did! who knows? You may find some of that Old South cooking such as collards and cornbread, fried chicken, and Hopping John. If you are on a diet, be sure to fast on Wednesday so you can partake of these special dishes on Thursday.

AND - not only will the food be good, but we have two "Mystery Guests" who will be doing the program. That's all we can reveal right now, except there is a clue somewhere in this issue as to their identity. See if you can find it. If you do, don't tell anyone.

As you probably know, Chris and Debbie are in Montana at a National Park. They just might get back in time for this meeting. Chris said the park closes with the first snow in Montana. Let's all start wishing for an early snow in Montana.

Have you purchased a copy of Volume III of the Bill Reaves Chronology of Southport? If not, see Wolf Furstenau or visit the Southport Maritime Museum. Members get a 10% discount. Our books will also be on sale on Saturday, September 20, at a big Flea Market at Boiling Spring Lakes, sponsored by the BSL Fire Department Auxiliary.

Speaking of Bill Reaves, I am happy to report that he is doing much better and will probably be able to make the trip to Southport soon. We sure hope so. When you see him, be sure to thank him for all the history articles he keeps furnishing for our "Looking Back" column.

Of W I T S

A bit of 18th Century humor submitted by Charter Member, Kathryn Carson Kalmanson of Salisbury State University, Maryland. Thanks. We often need fillers such as this.

106. A devout Gentleman, being very earnest in his Prayers, in the Church, it happened that a Pick-Pocket being near him, stole away his *Watch*, who having ended his Prayers, mist it, and complained to his Friend, that his *Watch* was lost, while he was at Prayers; to which his Friend reply'd, *Had you watch'd as well as pray'd, your Watch had been secure, adding these following Lines.*

*He that a Watch will wear, this must he do,
Pocket his Watch, and watch his Pocket too.*



The Southport Historical Society needs your help.



We are gathering information for a story on the Cape Fear pilots who ran the Union blockade during the Civil War. We are seeking information on these men, such as photographs or old letters which tell of their exploits during the war. We would also appreciate other information about their lives. A preliminary list of these men appears below. Some names were likely omitted, so information about other Cape Fear pilots who ran the blockade would be greatly appreciated.

We are also seeking pictures of the steamers they piloted - photographs, paintings or other illustrations. A list of the vessels we have identified so far also appears below.

The Cape Fear Pilots Who Ran the Blockade, 1861 - 1865

Anderson, John William	Bensel, Joseph W.	Brinkman, Thomas W.
Burriss, Edward T. (Ned)	Burriss, George W.	Burriss, James T.
Burriss, Joseph Newton	Burriss, Thomas Gray	Craig, Charles W.
Craig, James William (Jim Billie)	Craig, Thomas. W.	Daniels, E. T.
Dosher, Charles Gause	Dosher, Julius	Dosher, Richard
Dyer, Thomas K.	Garrason, Thomas B.	Gause, Ephraim DeVaun
Grissom, Robert S.	Grissom, Thomas B.	Gutherie, Archibald M.
Hill, John	Howard, Henry	Morse, C. C. (Kit)
Newton, Joseph Henry	Potter, Julius W.	Price, Jacob A.
Savage, John R.	Swan, Henry G.	Sellers, Robert
Smith, C. G.	Springs, Joseph	St. George, William
Thompson, Joseph T.	Thompson, Thomas Mann, Jr.	

The Steamers They Piloted

Advance (Lord Clyde), Agnes E. Fry, Alice (Sirius), Armstrong, Atalanta (Atlanta), Banshee I, Banshee II, Calypso, City of Petersburg, Coquette, Condor, Cornubia (Lady Davis), Don, Elizabeth (Atlantic), Ella II, Emma II, Flora II, General Beauregard (Havelock), Georgiana McCaw, Hansa, Hebe, Kate, Let Her Be (Chicora), Let Her Rip (Wando), Helen, Index, Lillian (Lilian), Little Hattie, Lynx, Margaret and Jessie, Mary Celeste, North Heath, Old Dominion, Orion (Fannie), Owl, Pet, R. E. Lee (Giraffe), Siren, Susan Bierne, Talisman, Thistle II, Venus.

If you have information that we are looking for, please contact:

Mary or Wayne Strickland
The Southport Maritime Museum
P.O. Box 11101
116 N. Howe Street
Southport, NC 28461
910-457-0003 (phone and fax)



"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor



DR. W.G. CURTIS, SOUTHPORT HISTORIAN, WRITES
OF PAST SOCIAL LIFE IN "YE OLDEN TIMES."
1897.

(From the files of Bill Reaves, Wilmington, N.C., March, 1997.)

Southport is an ancient town in the sense that anything in America over a century old is ancient.

Yet, at the date of this present, there is no single specimen of antiquity remaining.

The march of progress has obliterated every specimen of the world of the original settlers. With the old block-house and the old house built of cypress boards and fastened with wrought nails -with the one-story, dormer-windowed houses with the broad verandas and shed rooms at the back, have gone, the old people and the old memories. It is not in good form, except with a few who have ancestry, and take a pride in the fact, to say much about the olden times, which are little esteemed by the new men and women.

"Who was Benjamin Blaney?" is inquired some times in a letter from New Jersey or California, and nobody knows, but somebody (there is always a village antiquary, or "Old Mortality," in every place) goes down to the old cemetery and finds a broken and neglected tombstone lying in the brambles and finds this inscription

"Here lie the remains of
Benjamin Blaney,
a native of Roxbury,
State of Massachusetts,
who departed this life
on the 14th of Nov., 1816,
aged 50 years."

Another distant inquirer asks: "Who was Benjamin Smith?" Nobody knows, but after diligent inquiry it is learned that he was once a governor of North Carolina, that he gave away all of his magnificent estate and died in poverty and neglect, and is buried - where? Nobody in Southport knows, but there is a tradition that somebody's bones had been dug up and buried for his bones -somewhere. However this may be, it is a fact that letters of inquiry have been lately received to find out whether it was as reported, that the hair on the late lamented skull of this somebody who was dug up had actually grown and turned red after burial. All of which leads to the sad reflection: That where the march of progress actually begins, we are of little consequence, and that the money spent on inscriptions on our tombstones might better have been spent in providing tracts in the Booriboolan language on original sin for the natives of Booriboolah Gha. (continued...)

Southport was laid out about a century ago in a spirit of liberality which took no note of the probable fact that land would be worth \$100 a front foot when the railroad should get there.

Its streets are 99 feet wide, and are named after the men of mark who lived in this days, and whom the writer loved to honor - such as Dry, Moore, Nash, Howe, Rhett, Potts and others. It was named Smithville, in honor of its founder, His Excellency Benjamin Smith, governor of North Carolina, a man given to hospitality, generosity and a patron of learning in the state. From the earliest times, Southport has been a resort for purposes of pleasure and comfort and health. But there are resorts and resorts, pleasure seekers and pleasure seekers, various in their purposes and in their tastes. Of the old sort (blessed be their memories), and peace to their ashes! their purpose was ease, not without dignity, but certainly with genuine friendship, and a genial hospitality. They came to Southport about June 1st, which was as late as it was deemed safe to stay at their winter homes, for mosquitoes and malaria arrived in those days by the almanac. On the 10th of October frost was due, and as they did not rise very early they took it on trust that frost had come as is duty bound on that day. So they folded their tents and departed, leaving the Smithvillians in tears, for the residents of Smithville were very fond of these summer guests, whose business it was to sit in the shade, where the summer breezes from the Atlantic, blowing over summer seas, could permeate through them with a delicious coolness. At 11 o'clock by the watch it was in order to take a toddy and bless the Lord for his goodness. This was before the days when the devil was discovered at the bottom of the cup; at any rate, they took their toddy, and lived long and happily thereafter.

The ladies were the dispensers of a generous hospitality, and happy were they who could gather around the table of Mrs. John Walker, or Mrs. Cowan, or Mrs. Owen D. Holmes, and many others, and partake of the delicious viands they knew so well how to set forth and preside over. Truly, they were cooks in those days, taught by adepts in the art of tickling the palate, and not hampered by the rules of Mrs. Parloa, or any other professor of the culinary art. They just simply did it, and that was all there was about it. Then, after the feast, came the evening drive, and then the dancing. Duke Walker was the fiddler. This venerable colored gentleman enjoyed a high reputation, first, as the major domo of Major Walker, and, second, as the fiddler at all impromptu social gatherings. But, alas! for the degeneracy of human nature! Having spent a long and useful life as above enumerated, he finally accepted a position as "boss" of the First National Bank of Wilmington, and went out with that institution.

Thus Smithville remained until the tocsin of war sounded in 1861. An ideal resort, having its characteristics varied from time to time by its military aspect. For Smithville was never altogether Smithville. It was Fort Johnston from early Colonial times, and long
(continued...)

before Smithville was thought of. Indeed, it was seldom that any of the pleasure and health seekers spoke of Smithville at all. They were going to the "Fort" always. At the Fort were the troops of the United States army, with their gay young officers, always popular at the South. And the South, in like manner was ever popular with the gay young officers. At no military post were they received with more courtesy, or with a more open handed hospitality. At no military post did they find more beautiful women. At none were they more easily compelled to surrender to the overwhelming power of Cupid's darts. In fact, the bond of friendship and affection between many of the officers and our people did become so firmly bound that, after four years of a bloody war, they were not forgotten. One hesitates to ring down the curtain and hide forever the peaceful life of these people at the favorite and only resort in the Cape Fear section. For, be it remembered, this was in the days of slavery, which assumed in these days and in this place a rather patriarchal character. None of the evils of slavery, so much talked of and written about in the northern and anti-slavery points were known to exist; and it seems now that about the only obstacle to entire freedom was the patrollers, who were a terror to wandering negroes away from home after 9 o'clock at night. But even this did not amount to much deprivation of liberty, because any of them could get a pass merely by asking for it. Many of the families residing in the town for the summer kept from ten to fifteen servants, whose principal occupation must have been to get out of each other's way.

Not many who prosper in these days know the routine of daily life at that time. Every member of the family and every guest had his own special servant. The misfortune attending this arrangement was that your special servant was apt to be out to hear the band play, or see the procession pass by, just when he was wanted, but if everything went on with due regularity he waked you in the morning at the proper time, not too early, brushed your clothes and arranged them neatly on a chair at your bed side, took your shoes away to be polished, and, after a brief absence, returned with the water for your bath. After you had finished your toilet, he offered you a mint julep sent up by your host, which puts you in a happy mood for enjoying your breakfast.

After this meal is over, you repair to the shady veranda, where pipes are served already filled, and ready to be lighted from a blazing coal from the kitchen fire. But in a town where most of the pilots of the Cape Fear river had their homes, it was not to be expected that absolute quiet would long prevail, and even the summer residents and members in good standing of the Lazy Club, could not resist the excitement which naturally pertains to the business of piloting. A white spot about the size of a man's hand will appear in the offing, discernible only to the practiced eye of a pilot. The cry of "a ship off the bar" would arouse the town to life, energy and activity. IN less time than you could think, from (continued...)

two to a half dozen boats would put off from the shore, the steersman always in his place, the oarsmen pulling off their coats, others clearing away to set the mainsail and jib, and before they had got 100 rods from the shore all would be settled in their places for the chase, which might be five to ten miles long. Then the excitement of the race would pervade all classes of people, even women and children alike. And so it was all the time, for commerce was then entirely coastwise, and transacted by sailing vessels. It was not uncommon for ten or twenty vessels to appear off the bar in a single day, and often twenty or thirty would hoist their white sails and go to sea on a single tide. So it is always and everywhere. An intense interest and excitement attached to all transactions upon the mighty ocean. Wherever in pursuit of their avocations pilots race over smooth waters or stormy seas, there is daring and danger, which requires a fierce activity and constant watchfulness, attracting the attention and sympathy of all observers.

But is it impossible to elaborate these matters of social life, and the history of Smithville at greater length. It would require the imagination and the pen of a Dickens to describe the curious people, both men and women, who have spent their lives in old Smithville, and who have gone to their rest. Smithville is no more. When the trumpets of war sounded she yielded up the ghost and quietly departed out of this troublesome world. Old Smithville is a dream and a present impossibility. Her ways of doing things and her manner of life could no more be revived now than could the institutions of slavery. And never, on this continent or any other can there ever be such a place. The struggle for life and political liberty and money, and social position is fierce. There is strife and bickery and new social and political ambitions, which cannot be satisfied. The bottom sail has got on top, and don't know what to do with itself. None of these troubles existed in old Smithville, where everybody occupied the position intended for him, or her, from the foundation of the world, and were satisfied with it.

Farewell, ye happy valley!

The new Southport dates from the time when that highly respected and faithful public servant, Henry Bacon, under the direction of Colonel Craighill, cast in the last stone which finished the great engineering work of filling up New Inlet.

This made Southport a harbor of great excellence, with deep water inside the harbor, and sufficient, after a little dredging, on the bar. Then, Southport, with pardonable elation, concluded that if she was not a commercial city, she ought to be one, and immediately proceeded to publish her claims to the world. After some years of delay she succeeded in getting her new name of Southport printed upon the marine charts of the United States, and also in the post office register. This was a great point gained, and soon it became known throughout the civilized world that she had existence, and that Dr. Nansen, if he wished to do so, could communicate by letter with his Norwegian friends at Southport and send greeting to them from the Arctic circle.

Southport is a place that North Carolina should be proud of. It is the only finished and prominent harbor in the state. It is being fortified by the United States for defence, with the soldiers of the United States, and the brilliant uniforms will be seen upon our streets as in the olden time. Are the beautiful Cape Fear girls going to let these young officers suffer for want of their bright smiles and fascinating ways? We think not, but we will wait and see.

Undoubtedly there will be a new city at Southport some time in the future. The situation is too beautiful to be ignored. Its commercial position will command business. As a city, it will be a younger brother to Wilmington, and the relation between the two places ought always to be intimate and friendly.

THE WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 8-22-1897.

ROOTS, TWIGS AND BRANCHES

Our Editor is off on another trip to California. We just can't keep her in this part of the world. But she has promised not to stay TOO LONG! For this issue we have only one item, a query:

"I wish to exchange family data with descendants of Edgar and Susan Potter Williams. Children of record were: Catherine Duval Williams, Sara Fathalia Williams, Edgar Dickinson Williams, Jameson Hunter Williams, Elizabeth Lord Williams, and Alice London Williams. Catherine is thought to have married a Marlowe, Sarah a Windsor, and Alice a Bucher. Elizabeth married Marshall C. Guthrie. Edgar Williams was born in Charleston, S. C., son of Simpson and Catherine (Duval) Williams." Reply to Edgar Rives Taylor, Jr., 1070 Old Gate Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235-2741.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING - Before you know it you'll have to think about gifts and shopping. Let us suggest that for family members you consider applying to the Southport Historical Society for a Family Certificate. These certificates, when nicely framed, make excellent and welcome gifts for family members. The cost is \$10.00 for each certificate and the money goes into our Cemetery Endowment Fund. For more details call Susie Holtz (after 10/1/97) at 845-3592, or "the other Susie" at 457-6940.