

THE WHITTLES BENCH

is a publication of the Southport Historical Society a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization P. O. Box 10014 Southport, NC 28461 E-mail: shs@ec.rr.com Website: southporthisitoricalsociety.com Telephone contact: 910-457-0579 or 910-454-0437

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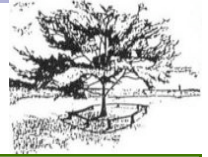
The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us a better understanding of our state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of 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

The Whittler's Bench



The Society gives Maritime Museum \$10,000! . . .

There was a saying that was used in my family from time to time, over many years. It was "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit and don't make a fool of yourself." As I think all of you are aware, the society tried and tried and tried, again and again to help preserve the Garrison House at Ft. Johnston as an historic site, by making it look like a fort, and also to create a Learning



Center for Children and adults to learn about Southport's history. Despite a long struggle with the city, we failed. Sometimes, though, things just fall into place, and that is what happened in this case. At a time when we gave up on the way we wanted to promote history, the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport was struggling with their building project at Ft. Johnston. It was stopped dead in the water for lack of funds. It didn't take your board of directors more than a couple of minutes to decide that the best use of the money we had for our plans was to give it to the museum to help insure that they would have the cash to move their project far enough along, that they could begin getting their artifacts moved into their new facility. The smiles on the faces of three key people in the museum's efforts: Friends of the Museum chair, Walt Madsen; Mary Strickland, who heads the staff, and her husband, Wayne, a driving force in their project, were worth the money. The donation made sense. The Historical Society and the Maritime Museum, while different in many ways, have the same mission: pursuing, preserving and providing access to and information about our history. You could say the two organizations are in the same business. It all fell into place. It was, you might say, an historic example of good timing.

Annual Meeting Thur. January 27 at 6:30

A Pot Luck Dinner will begin at 6:30 at the Community Center. Bring your favorite dishes, a friend or two, and we will celebrate the Societies' 35th anniversary. The meeting will celebrate not only this years accomplishments, but our history during three and a half decades!

History Classes in the Works :

The historical society's history classes will resume this spring in a new location. Instead of the Garrison, where we've met the past three years, the new home for the history class series will be the new NC Maritime Museum facility.

Exact dates are not yet known, since the museum's move is underway and will be for the next couple of months. But when the boxes are all unpacked, we'll take the wraps off this year's offerings.

At the request of a fairly large number of people, we are breaking the series into shorter units, rather than have them run for seven or eight continuous weeks. Instead, there will be two weeks or so on a particular time period and then two classes on another topic several weeks later. One thing that will not change is that Capt. Bert Felton will lead off the series with a class on early history of the area, up to the md-1700s, followed a week later with a field trip to Brunswick



Bert Felton teaching his Colonial history session

(Continued on page 2)

*Many thanks to the many supporters of our
"Christmas Tour of Homes"*



The hours of labor involved in making the Tour of Homes happen are immense, but year after year many great folks step to the bat and help us out. First we thank all those on the Home Tour committee. They will begin planning next year's tour yet this month after only a little more than a month off. Secondly we owe a huge thank you those of you who opened your Homes. This is our largest money raiser and without the gracious gift of your open homes, nothing happens. Then there are about 60 volunteers who act as Hosts or Hostesses and make everything run smoothly and keep the day a fun event. We opened and decorated both the Garrison and the Old Jail, manned with knowledgeable docents, for our tour. We also thank our newspapers and TV stations for their coverage, the Wilmington Trolley for transportation, Cape Fear Printing, and Ricky Evans Gallery. We were sorrowed by the death of Betty Johnson whose home was to be on the tour. Betty was a life member and her late husband Don had been president of SHS. The weather was not our friend this year and the revenue was a little less than normal, but we heard nothing but glowing reports about our collection of beautiful homes this Christmas.



Don't forget about the "Burying Grounds"

Remember what a mess we had? Many of you took on part of the cemetery as your contribution to keeping it up. If you didn't, I'm sure Musette Steck will be glad to assign you an area to keep picked up. The City does their part, but they still need help. Our thanks to all who have and continue to honor our past by making this cemetery a beautiful place to visit. This is no longer the Historical Societies project, but we all still need to keep our eyes on it and do our part.

Classes continued

Town/Fort Anderson Historical Site for a short class and a tour. Pat Kirkman will be doing a two or three week series on the period from the Revolutionary War (The Redcoats came here before they went to New England!) through the War Between the States. Other mini-series may include the Blockade Runners, Reconstruction Period, the explosive growth in what's now Southport, in the 1880s and 90s, the secret activities of locals prior to the Spanish American War, and the very rapid growth of commercial fishing and what happened to it. Later, in response to many who took classes in recent years, Larry Maisel will do an expanded treatment of several topics, including World War I, The Great Depression hits Southport, and World War II at Our Doorstep. We are trying to work out videotaping of these classes for those members who live far distant from Southport and those in our area who are unable to attend for health reasons. If there is a topic you think is worthy of a class, let us know by emailing us at shs@ec.rr.com

Members tell the tales of local historical citizens in living history lessons



Joe Loughlin



Charen Fink



Stuart Callari

Pat Pittenger



Candice Bland

Scholarship recipient in third honor society



Many times we award a local student a scholarship, wish them well and then may not hear much from them again. But we have heard how one of them is doing, and the answer to how she is doing is “great.” DeShondra Alexander, who received one of our annual scholarships a few years back, has just been inducted into her third honor society at North Carolina Central University. In early December she was inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa, the National Leadership Honor Society. Her mother, Southport City Clerk, Regina Alexander, says her daughter is now thinking over her next step. Law school is on her short list of options for graduate study. Whatever her choice, we wish her well!



Whittlers Bench Christmas Lights

Did you all notice the Christmas tree at Waterfront Park? The City Beautification Committee organized the effort to put it up and as our part we paid for half of the lights. Nice to see people come together for their community!

Fighting in the Shallows

We weren't there in 1864 when the fights between Union blockaders and Confederate blockade runners came into the shallows and sometimes too close and onto sandbars. We didn't hear the naval guns and the shore batteries, nor the sound of the sharpshooters trying to keep the Yankees from getting aboard stranded blockade runners. Neither was Mike Price, who spoke to us a few months ago, but you'd think he was, from the detail he has uncovered in recent years. The fighting was so close that, if we had been here, we would have heard it. It was deadly chaos.

Was the 1839 Bethel Baptist Church Destroyed in Skirmishing at Lockwoods Folly in January 1864?

By Michael L. Price, 2010

On the morning of January 3, 1864 the blockade runner Bendigo, trying to reach Wilmington with supplies for the Confederate Army, ran aground in the shallow Lockwood's Folly Inlet, in an effort to avoid the wreck of the Elizabeth. The captain and pilot mistook Elizabeth for a Yankee blockading gunboat. Bendigo became embedded in a shoal on the western margin of the inlet and was quickly discovered by the USS Fahkee, Acting Rear-Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee's flagship. Bendigo became a potential prize for the Yankees, even though she was set afire by her crew that hastily abandoned her, smoke billowing from her deck. Three Yankee boats, protected by the guns of Flagship Fahkee, were dispatched by Lee to try to refloat Bendigo. Rebel batteries and sharpshooters fired on the Yankee sailors as they attempted to board the steamer. The flagship was exposed to “musket and shell” and Lee retreated but ordered the USS Fort Jackson, Iron Age, Montgomery and Daylight to set sail for the western shoal to complete the destruction of Bendigo.

USS Fort Jackson involved in skirmishes surrounding the Bendigo [courtesy of Wikipedia.com]

The next day, January 4, on-again off-again skirmishing commenced when Rebel sharpshooters and batteries fired on Yankee ships that were trying to get to Bendigo. Was it during this affair when the Rebel battery at Dutchman's Creek was dismantled or leveled and the original 1839 Bethel Baptist Church was burned down? (I grew up hearing about this “Yankee outrage” from my Brunswick County relatives.) Was it around this time, too, when William Gause's two-story brick-and-wood plantation house was destroyed by Yankee gunboats (an enduring story handed down in the Gause family)? The Yankee blockaders would patrol the coastline all around Cape Fear and, spotting smoke or burning fire would at times open their guns on it, suspecting that it might be the site of a Confederate salt work or sentinel patrol. USS Montgomery briefly grounded on a shoal trying to tow the Bendigo [courtesy of Wikipedia.com]



Sketch of USS Aries as she appeared after the Civil War

Shallows continued

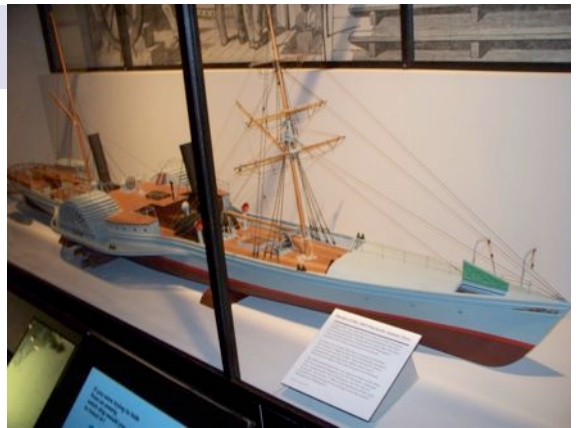
Shortly after daybreak on January 7 the blockade runner Dare was chased by the USS Aries and USS Montgomery, "Shut in thick with rain," Dare eventually was run aground off the coast of South Carolina but not before she had landed Confederate Naval officers in a dense fog that had sheltered her near Lockwood's Folly. When the fog lifted, Aries and Montgomery closed in and the hot pursuit continued. Dare was beached in rough seas in the North Inlet, near Georgetown. Aries "came to anchor" in the high surf to avoid being grounded herself, and when two of her small cutters were dispatched to board the Dare, one capsized and the Rebels captured two Yankee officers and seven of her crew. A boat from nearby USS Montgomery also capsized and two officers and fourteen crewmen were taken prisoner.

On January 8th and 9th various attempts by the Yankees were made to tow Bendigo off the sandy western shoal but ultimately these efforts failed, with the Yankees taking "shot and shell" from the Rebels while contending with heavy seas and shoal water. On January 10th the Union blockader USS Iron Age was lost in the Lockwood's Folly Inlet. She had run aground about 9:00 o'clock in the morning trying to tow Bendigo off the western shoal and was unable to free herself. The Rebels took notice and began to bombard Iron Age from land. The ship was eventually destroyed by the Yankees when they purposely set her afire on January 11 around 4:00 o'clock in the morning in order to prevent the Rebels from taking her. The fire caused her forward magazine to explode. She blew up at about 5:40 in the morning. At daylight on January 11th the blockade runner Ranger, pursued by the USS Minnesota, Governor Buckingham and Daylight, was purposely beached and set afire by her crew, about a mile west of the stranded Bendigo. From land, Rebel sharpshooters completely commanded her decks, keeping the Yankees at bay. There was heavy firing by eight Yankee steamers throughout the day at the inlet, including firing on the Ranger, finally destroying her. All that was saved of the Ranger were two flags – the Stars & Bars and the Union Jack – and "an excellent compass." On shore were at least two Companies of Rebel soldiers firing on the Yankee steamers. Two cutters carried a Yankee sergeant and ten marines ashore (or near shore; the records are unclear) but they were fired on by the Rebels. Another blockade runner, mistaken for the Ceres, was grounded off Shallotte Inlet before the day ended.

All along Lockwood's Folly and the Cape Fear coast the Yankee blockade was tighter than ever. The small congregation at Bethel, as if to show no fear and despite being in an unsafe time, quickly rebuilt their little church. My 2nd great grandfather, Henry Arthur Wescott, a veteran of the Civil War, served as deacon at Bethel for ten years in the 1870s.

After the major salt work at Little River, South Carolina was destroyed, a small salt work was set-up along the Elizabeth River, not too distant from the Confederate battery at Dutchman's Creek and the first Bethel Church. The 1864 "Map of the County Adjacent to Smithville," drawn by Jeremy Francis Gilmer, shows the location of the 2nd Bethel Church near the Price and Wescott plantations, indicating that the 1st church building had been de-

The people of the Burying Ground told their tales while Pirates invaded Southport! Musette Steck & Martha Johnson haunt the cemetery



Blockade Runner Dare; Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington



News from the Old Jail . . .

The Old Jail continues to be a historical asset to Southport and the Society. We should take pride in our restoration of this historic building. Many thanks to all the docents who faithfully man it during the year and special thanks to Nancy & Charles Christanson and Dick Slease. Nancy does a great job keeping our Jail manned and open, Charles maintains the building and especially the garden, and Dick is our curator.



Christmas Tour of Homes revisited



2011 Dues are due (your support is appreciated)

You may pay them by mailing the form below or at the annual meeting. Consider a life membership and forget about future payments!

Membership Application . . . Invite a Friend to Join

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Name(s) _____
 Address _____
 Telephone _____ E-Mail _____
 New _____ or Renewal _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Mail this form with your check to: P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461

Annual Dues: Individual \$15 Couple \$25 Business/Organization \$25
 Life Memberships: Individual \$150 - Couple/Business \$200