

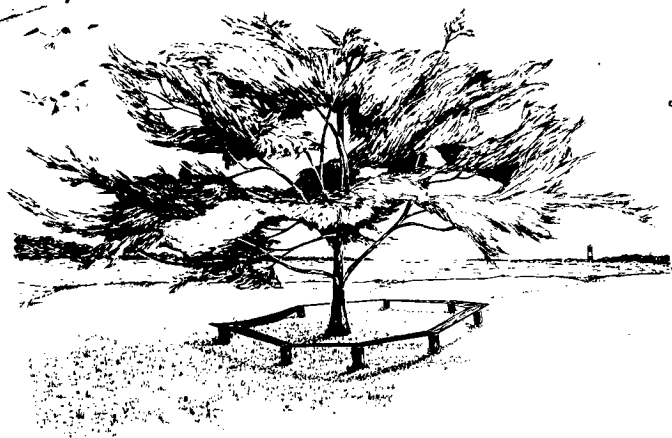
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# THE WHITTLERS BENCH

## Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue  
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER FOUR, SEPT. 1995



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**REGULAR MEETING:** The September meeting will be held at the Southport Maritime Museum on Thursday, September 28, at 7:30 PM. The program will feature video tapes of Mr. and Mrs. James M. Harper and memories of Old Southport. Mrs. Harper is a lifelong resident of Southport and Mr. Harper came about 1935 and took over the publication of the State Port Pilot. Their experiences cover the time when many changes were taking place in our town. Come to the meeting and enjoy these tapes. Refreshments will be served.

**INTERIM EDITOR:** Our regular editor, Chris Suiter, and his wife Debbie are still off "in the wilds of Alaska" where they have been working at one of our National Parks. Chris and Debbie should be back by the first of October. In the meantime, the editor of the "Looking Back" page is filling in.

**SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:** The Southport Historical Society was organized in January 1976 with 42 charter members and an almost non-existent amount of money. Eleanor Smith was our first president. Since that time we have had lots of ups and downs, but we have continued to grow. January 1996 marks our 20th Anniversary. Don't you think we should celebrate? Think about what you would like to see us do and pass your ideas on to the Executive Board.

**GENEALOGY NEWS:** One of our newest members, Nancy Lehto of Long Beach, has requested that we tell you in this newsletter that recently the Brunswick County Genealogy Group was organized. They are having interesting meetings and guest speakers. New members and guests are always welcome. Mrs. Lehto says, "All levels of experience are expected and wanted." If you are interested, please call Nancy Lehto at 278-7428. Their schedule through November is: Sept. 26, a field trip to the N. C. Room of the New Hanover County Public Library, beginning at 9:30 A. M.; October 27, field trip to LDS Genealogy Archives in Wilmington, beginning at 9:00 A. M.; and November 14, a visit to the Old Smithville Burying Ground with Mrs. Dorcas Schmidt, author of our publication The Cemeteries of Southport and Surrounding Area. There will not be a meeting in December. However, a trip to State Archives in Raleigh is being planned for early in the New Year.

**A "NEWSY" NOTE:** In cleaning out some files recently, it was discovered that we have a limited number of back issues of Whittlers Bench on hand. These will be taken to the September meeting and you are encouraged to pick up any issue you need to complete your set. Also, new members will probably enjoy reading about some of the projects the Society was engaged in during "the good old days". There will also be available a stack of old copies of Historic Preservation magazine which were donated to us by Mrs. Elizabeth Trenton. Pick up any of these which you may desire.

**NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE BOARD:** The tickets for the River Cruise are sold out.

To the Southport Historical Society:

As you may know, the Society graciously consented to act as publisher for my history, *Three Southern Families*. It has recently arrived from the printer, Broadfoot Publishing Company of Wilmington. I'd like to share with you a few comments received from readers.

"Please count me among many who are very grateful that the Southport Historical Society published this book." Ruth Hawkins, Denver, Colorado.

"Hot off the press: Lewis Hardee's book, *Three Southern Families*. It reads like a novel." Gerry Ruth, *The Scribe*, New York, June 1995.

"Thank you for publishing this book! It's wonderful! Jean Lindquist, Chantilly, Virginia.

"I sat down to read and didn't stop until I had read every fascinating word. You've made our wonderful heritage come alive for me, and how grateful I am to you for making this treasure available to the generations to become. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." Suzanne Davis Hardee, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

"At last the book arrived and we are thrilled with it. It is absolutely beautifully prepared and written." Annie Partin Burns, Fernandina Beach, Florida.

"Thank you for a wonderful history of my family." Howard H. Davis, former editor and publisher, *The Southeastern Georgian*, Kingsland, Georgia.

*Three Southern Families* traces from Colonial days to the present the Pitt County, N.C./Georgia line of Hardees and connecting Carteret County, N.C. Jones and Davis families. I worked for many years on this book, and tried hard to make it readable for the general audience by placing it within context of historical events in North Carolina, Georgia, and elsewhere.

There is much coverage of the Civil War era, particularly regarding Gen. William J. Hardee, C.S.A., who commanded a Corps during the Battle of Atlanta. His young teenage son, Willie, was killed at the Battle of Bentonville in central North Carolina, only moments after the General had reluctantly sworn him into the Army. I spent years researching and documenting the book. It is 400 pages long, in 20 chapters, indexed, with a bibliography. There are 118 photographs and illustrations. I am delighted with Broadfoot's edition, which is hardbound, with high quality binding, printed on acid free paper.

*Three Southern Families* is available at the Southport Maritime Museum, The Old Curiosity Shop, and Leggett's in Southport, or by writing The Southport Historical Society.

May I add my thanks to the Southport Historical Society for its cooperation and help.

Most sincerely,



Lewis J. Hardee, Jr.



TO SUSIE CARSON FROM BILL REAVES

TO BE INCLUDED IN THE WHITTAKER'S BENCH NEWSLETTER.

THE DEATH OF FIVE SMITHVILLE PILOTS  
1872

Over 122 years ago the citizens of Smithville were overcome with the horrors of losing five of their citizens who had gone to sea, never to come home again. Only one body was recovered and that was two months after the tragedy. Today, there is a prominent monument in the corner of the old Smithville Cemetery as a reminder of that sad event in the long history of Southport.

The following accounts of the event were carried in the WILMINGTON WEEKLY STAR newspapers of December, 1872, and February, 1873.

The first announcement appeared in the WEEKLY STAR of December 20th, 1872,

and read as follows: "By an arrival from Smithville yesterday evening we have intelligence of a probable sad calamity to a number of citizens of that place. Our informant states that Joseph Bensele, Thomas W. Brinkman, Jno. Trout, Robert St. George and James Sellars, pilots of that place, left Smithville yesterday morning to board two or three vessels which they had sighted through a spy glass from Bald Head Lighthouse a short time before. A gale of wind was blowing at the time, and as the vessels were some distance outside some of the friends of the parties, who felt some anxiety as to their safety, watched their progress until they got well out at sea, and only the sail of their boat could be discerned, when it suddenly disappeared. As the boat and crew have not since been seen or heard of, up to yesterday afternoon, the general supposition is that the boat was swamped and the five men were drowned. The steam-tug ALPHA cruised in the vicinity of the point where they were last seen yesterday afternoon, but could discover no trace of them. Two of the vessels which they started to board arrived last night, and upon inquiry it was ascertained that those on board had seen nothing of the missing boat. There was one other vessel in the offing at the time, and there is a bare possibility that the men may be on her, but it is not considered at all probable. Messrs. Bensele and Brinkman are men of families, while the other three are young men and unmarried. We sincerely hope that later intelligence may at least give us some hope of their safety."

"No Tidings of the Missing Pilots" was the heading on a news item in the WEEKLY STAR dated December 20th, 1872. It continued, "Much interest was manifested among our (Wilmington) citizens yesterday in reference to the five unfortunate pilots who braved the dangers of the deep on Wednesday morning for the purpose of boarding the three vessels off the bar, an account of which we published in yesterday's STAR. We regret to have to state that their fate is still shrouded in mystery, and there is now scarcely a doubt that their frail craft was swamped and every soul perished. The weather being bitter cold, and a heavy sea prevailing at the time, of course there was no possibility of righting the boat if she once went over, or of freeing her of the water if she filled, as the men could not have sustained life scarcely a single minute under such a trying ordeal. That the boat was swamped or capsized by the heavy gale seems now to be considered almost certain, in which case the five daring men who have so often braved the perils of the sea in the pursuit of their hazardous profession were no doubt hurried into eternity in almost an instant. Capt. Carson and officers of the Revenue Cutter SEWARD have been indefatigable in their efforts to discover some trace of the missing boat and crew, but without success. Leaving Smithville at daylight yesterday morning she cruised all day, going to the vicinity of the light-ship off Frying Pan Shoals, thence around by Shallotte and in other directions in which it was possible that they might discover some trace of the unfortunate men, returning to this city (Wilmington) late last evening with the sad tidings that their search had been all in vain. Terrible indeed must be the suspense and torture experienced by the families and friends of the missing men, who have seen boat after boat return with no tidings of their fate; and hard must be the heart that is not filled with sympathy for them, as well as for the poor fellows who are now so confidently believed to have perished in the cold waters of "Old Ocean." "

The editor of the WILMINGTON WEEKLY STAR was compelled to write the following entitled "THE FIVE BRAVE PILOTS"  
 "The information we publish this morning leaves little room to doubt that the five brave pilots who ventured out from Smithville Wednesday morning in a high sea and fierce wind to the assistance of two vessels in the offing, perished in their hazardous attempt. Two of them have families who will be bowed by the stroke. Three of them are young unmarried men. The five- Bensen, Brinkman, Trout, St. George and Sellars - will be remembered long as heroic men whose sense of duty was higher than the sense of fear. The heroism of the deed gilds the mournful gloom of the catastrophe with a halo, and we are reverent with admiration for the self-sacrificing men who fell in the jaws of the storm in the venturesome pursuit of a venturesome vocation. Their families, relatives and friends have our deepest sympathies."

Over two months later the body of one of the lost pilots was recovered.

The WILMINGTON WEEKLY STAR reported: "Yesterday morning, about 10 o'clock, the body of Thomas Brinkman, one of the five unfortunate pilots who was drowned off the Bar on the morning of the 11th of December last, was found on or near Battery Island, opposite Smithville. (continued....)

continued...

" . . . The body was, of course, badly decomposed, part of the head and face being entirely gone, and would not have been identified but for the fact that a pilot order with his name attached and his regular pilot branch or license were found in the pockets of the deceased. The remains were properly cared for and interred at Smithville yesterday afternoon. The pilots were drowned some six or eight miles out to sea, and it is a little remarkable that over two months after the disaster, the body of one should be recovered inside the Bar and so near the friends and relatives who were mourning his untimely end. "

(From the files of Bill Reaves, Wilmington, N.C., 1995)

COL. FRED OLDS, DIRECTOR THE STATE HALL OF HISTORY,  
IN RALIGH, N.C., VISITS SOUTHPORT, 1918.

The journey from Wilmington to Southport was on the Wilmington, Brunswick & Southern Railway instead of by boat, for on the river memories would have been so sad of his well beloved dead friend, Capt. John W. Harper, who for more than a quarter of a century commanded the steamer WILMINGTON.

At Southport Miss Kate Stuart yet remains, a dear, delightful landmark of the quaint old town, in her little hotel in the snug shelter of the bluff and by the waterside. In fact, the house was originally known by the odd name of "Water-Skirt"; in other words, a one-story warehouse on the waterside. Miss Kate, known to thousands of North Carolinians, is a delightful link between the old days before the civil war and this present time. What a memory she has, and what sunshine there is in her smile! She can remember when the soldiers who had gone off to war from North Carolina returned home again, in 1848, and again in the civil war in 1865 as though the events had happened only yesterday. She recalled the great days in Southport, the only place in all the Confederacy, or the United States for that matter, where gold money circulated during those four years, and when the pilots got five thousand dollars in gold for making a run from Nassau, in the British West Indies. They were the princes of their time.

Nothing could be more delightful than to sit in the charming old parlor at Miss Kate's after tea and after a hard day's work and hear her tell stories. One of them was about a big whale which made its way into the river from the ocean, passing right by Fort Caswell at the harbor mouth and getting aground in the river. Captain Harper used to tell a story about this very whale. He said it swam right up to Miss Kate Stuart's wharf, looked over the embankment, opened its mouth and seemed to be about to speak to her, and just then two preachers, one carrying a satchel, stepped right out of the whale and wanted to know if she had any room for guests.

Miss Kate Stuart said she didn't recall this part of it, but knew that a Southport man, who helped kill the whale, which had gotten aground, cut off its head and chartered, for \$25 a little vessel to haul the head up to Wilmington, intending to get a fortune by charging so much a look. Fate was against him, for the vessel got aground near Big Island, half way to Wilmington and stuck there two days. It was a warm spell and that whale got so lound Wilmington knew it was coming before it arrived, and the port officer and the board of health made a formal visit and informed the crest-fallen owner that unless he moved it away in a hurry he would get a dose of jail. So down the river he went and back to Southport and there the board of health fined him \$25 and informed him that unless he buried that head it would cost him that much every day. It is needless to remark that he never monkeyed any more with whales.

Miss Kate Stuart tells ghost stories and true ones, too. In her grandmother's day a ghost sensation of the first class developed in the shape of the "shaking bed," in a well known home in the place. The local constable and a force of the bravest men finally went to the house, with the rest of the people, wide-eyed, standing afar off. The bravest of the brave in that posse wanted to be in the middle of the group, so as to have folks about him. As they stood at the door of the room, the bed went up and down and such running had never been seen before. Finally a brave woman, carrying in one hand a broom and in the other a rolling pin, went in and "uncovered the ghost." The old fashioned feather bed had been put out to air and get the benefit of the sunshine and a hen of large dimensions and an inquiring mind had gotten on the inside of it through a tear in the cloth, so when the bed was brought in she was brought with it, and in her frantic efforts to escape for two or three days she kept that feather bed on the move and scared all of Southport nigh unto death.

(continued...)

The live oak trees at Southport are worth going to see, and glorious camellia japonicas were in all their beauty of bloom and the place was like a picture, with Fort Caswell in a distance; the two light houses on Bald Head, or Smith's Island, and the busy river, the Cape Fear, and a coast guard station nearby on Oak Island. What a treat!

THE MORNING STAR, Wilmington, N.C., March 24, 1918.

(NOTE FROM SUSIE: Miss Kate died in 1929)

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We extend our deep appreciation to Bill for these articles. He has had many health problems in the past year or so, but has been faithful in sending items for Whittlers Bench. He has also made an extra donation of money to the newsletter to be sure we always have enough money to pay publication costs. Thanks, Bill. Just recently Bill has had surgery and is in the recovery period. We extend our best wishes and hopes that things will soon be much better for him.

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NEW MEMBERS: To all of you who have joined our Society this year, we say a hearty Welcome! We hope you will attend the meetings, enjoy our activities, and invite others to join you.

**North Carolina Confederate Burial Locator Project, Inc.**  
2139 Buffalo Shoals Rd. , Catawba NC 28609

**NEWS  
RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jeff H. Stepp

Phone: (704)241-4483 \* Office (704)328-6405

FAX: (704)327-3643

**STATEWIDE EFFORT UNDERWAY TO IDENTIFY BURIAL LOCATIONS OF CONFEDERATE  
SOLDIERS AND VETERANS IN NORTH CAROLINA**

Hickory, NC, July 28 -- 1995

Instituted in 1993, the most comprehensive effort, to date, to catalog the burial locations of Confederate soldiers and veterans within NC needs your help! A computerized database has been developed for the project which currently holds records locating burial sites in NC for over 9,000 CS soldiers and veterans, including verification of their military service in most cases. More are added daily, and with the future publication of the data collected - the project will prove to be an invaluable aid to genealogical and historical researchers. If you have knowledge of the burial places of Confederate soldiers or veterans, we warmly solicit your submission of that information. We also welcome additions to our statewide staff of volunteer cemetery surveyors.

Submissions for the database should include as much of the following as is available: Full name of soldier or veteran, dates of birth and death, name of cemetery or burial location, nearest road or municipality to burial site, NC county in which burial is located, type of gravestone, i.e. upright, flat, government supplied marker etc..., company and regimental designation for individual, if known.

Programs conducted by our staff relating to the project and your area's military organizations during the War Between the States are available to historical and genealogical organizations. Parties interested in programs and providing burial submissions should contact the project Editor Jeff H. Stepp at: 2139 Buffalo Shoals Rd. Catawba NC 28609.

Help us remember the tens of thousands of young men who faithfully served their native states and beloved Southland, along with the brave old survivors of that conflict, who repose in quiet churchyards and cemeteries all across North Carolina - many whose ultimate fates remained unknown to their families at home.