



# THE WHITTLED BENCH

## Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue  
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XX, NUMBER THREE      MAY 1996

### REGULAR MEETING

The May meeting will be a Potluck Dinner, to be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 23, 1996, in the Parish Hall of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church located at the junction of NC 211 and NC 133. Everyone should bring a covered dish and all of the family--guests are always welcome! The program will be given by SHS Archivist/Historian Wolf Furstenau on his recently published book on the history of Long Beach. Hope to see you all there!

### NEW MEMBERS

Our recruiters have been busy! We would like to welcome the following new members who have joined the Southport Historical Society since January 1, 1996:

Louis K. Newton  
David Pearsall  
Mr. and Mrs. Russ Thompson  
Mrs. Mark Connaughton  
Mr. and Mrs. John Kluttz  
Mr. and Mrs. William Crowe  
Mrs. Claudette Holliday  
Mr. Thomas Pinner  
Mr. and Mrs. Tommy St. George  
Mr. and Mrs. John Watkins  
Mr. and Mrs. Glen R. Weaner  
Mr. and Mrs. John Floyd  
Afton W. Smith

# "Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MAY 1996



For this issue of Whittlers Bench we are delighted to have an article by Mrs. Minnie Kotowski, member of the Southport Historical Society, and former resident of Southport. Minnie now lives in Wyandotte, MI. Thank you so much for sharing with us, Minnie. Sorry it took so long to get it into print!

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Like most people, I don't remember being born. So the first part of my life is hearsay. I'm told that I was the first baby born on Fort Caswell and that I made my appearance in one of those winter storms that come on with high winds and waves. Our little cottage was near the stable which is still there. I'm told that the waves came over the seawall and washed out a hole in front of our steps large enough to put a horse in.

The daughter of the post commander liked to go horseback riding. When she came down to have her horse saddled, she would come over to our cottage. This was usually about the time my mother was bathing me. Of course, my mother would apologize for the disorder that usually occurs with the first baby, but Gretchen (the young lady's name) would say: "I came to see the baby, not the house."

Since I was sort of a curiosity, whenever my mother took me out for a stroll in my buggy, the officers' wives would come up to admire and fuss over me. (Too bad I can't remember that)

So life went on, but not without misgivings on my grandfather's part. He kept saying another big storm would come along and destroy our cottage, so before I could really remember living at Fort Caswell, I was moved to Southport. In those days there was no bridge, so you had to get across the river by boat. I forgot to mention that I was born in November 1907. So, unless you were born around that time, you would not know this.

I really do not recall much of anything until I was about four years old. That had to do with singing. I guess I was singing as soon as I could talk. I cannot remember a time when I did not sing. There were dances and programs on special occasions, usually in the old gymnasium in Southport. Since my mother had three younger sisters who like to attend these activities who could best chaperone them? My Dad was a bugler, a member of the marching band and orchestra. So back to my first memory at age four. We attended a Christmas program. I don't know how it came about, but I was lifted onto the stage to sing a Christmas song - "Now go to sleep, dear dolly, Old Santa will soon be here." I guess I must have done O. K. because Santa presented me with a lovely doll. I also remember sitting on my Dad's knee while the orchestra played for dances.

My Dad had a small boat in which he took us riding. Also, we went up the creeks catching crabs. My Mother was very fond of Scuppernong grape preserves. The grapes grew in abundance at the "Pig Pens". I guess pigs were kept on the island to help feed the soldiers or to clean up the leftovers and

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garbage. My Dad would take us over to Fort Caswell to pick the grapes, and it also made a good outing. However, it was abruptly ended the time my Mother reached up to pick a fine bunch of grapes and found herself face to face with a large snake. No more picking grapes for preserves! After that we just bought them.

I remember going to the old school house (now Franklin Square Gallery). That was the only school building. I remember having programs at the end of the school year. I wonder if anyone else remembers dancing around the Maypole. I don't think they do that any more. When I was in the 8th grade we went to school in what we called The Army and Navy Club. It was the Pythagoras Masonic Lodge Building (still standing on the corner of Nash and Dry Streets).

During World War I the Army-Navy Club building was used as a social center (or community center) for the servicemen and townspeople. There were lots of programs given and always my sister Christina and I had to sing. We knew all the songs from that era. Parties were given in private homes and we were always there singing for the boys. My Mother's cousin was a music teacher and she was always happy to accompany us. We would sing whatever the boys requested.

So time marched on and I was in high school. My family attended the Baptist Church (on corner of Howe and Nash) and I was kept busy there with youth activities, singing in the church choir, and sometimes playing for services when the regular organist was ill or on vacation.

High School was a busy time. Besides keeping up with church activities there were school plays, operettas and programs. I think I was in them all. I loved the High School building and felt very badly when it burned. Even more so when I wanted to get a Social Security number and my school records were all burned. Since I was born at Fort Caswell, the hospital doctor there neglected to record my birth. Its a funny feeling to find that officially you were never born. However, after much maneuvering, I finally got the records straight.

My Dad was born in Iowa and migrated with his family to Nebraska where his father started a cattle ranch. In his own words, after living 17 years with horses, cattle and dogs, he ran away and joined the Army. He was sent to Fort Caswell where he became fascinated with all the water. He ended up in the mine-planting company and was assigned as engineer to the Old Number 14 that planted mines off Caswell. When they had target practice, the Number 14 would pull the target for the gunners to shoot at. When that was on schedule, Southport residents were warned to take down pictures from the walls, or if they had plates standing upright on shelves to put them down flat. Otherwise, there might be some breakage. When those big guns "boomed", everything shook. Sometimes windows cracked. The "sonic boom" we hear today could not compare to the boom of those cannons.

Have you ever felt a shaking of the ground? I believe it usually happens in the fall. Even then the windows rattle. I remember that someone wrote The State Port Pilot and asked what it was. Scientifically they have not found any explanation, so I've read, but it goes back to the native Indians of the region who had a name for it, which I cannot recall. So it is an old

phenomenon going back as far as the old Indian Trail Tree in the little park near the Public Library.

After graduation I worked a year at Watson's Pharmacy. Dr. Watson and Dr. Moody Mintz were great bosses. I met so many interesting people who stopped in while their boats were being refueled on their way up or down the coast. The most famous of these, for me, was Gene Austin whose song "My Blue Heaven" was high in popularity. I remember Dr. Doshier bringing him in for a coke and saying, "See, we have our own Clara Bow". I was very embarrassed, but Gene Austin was very gracious and even gave a concert from the deck of his yacht so the people of Southport could see and hear him in person.

By then my father was out of the Army and working with the Engineer Department. They were dismantling Fort Caswell and my Dad was commissioned to take the old "Tippin" to the Government Engineering Headquarters in Detroit. He remained in Detroit from then on and we moved to Detroit.

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AN APOLOGY FROM THE HISTORY EDITOR

Oops! The History Page editor has to apologize. You remember the item about the Southport crow which we ran in the March issue? Well, the item which follows should have preceded that article. Please forgive me - and I hope Bill Reaves will, too. He's the one who sent both items, and we deeply appreciate his efforts in keeping us supplied with history articles.

WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 9-29-1887

CROWS AS PETS - A rage has sprung up this summer at some of the country places for crows as pets, and those who have adopted the fashion are much amused in studying the habits and peculiarities of this much maligned bird. The crow has proved himself easily domesticated.

Once his wings are clipped and he is well fed he will not go very far away. Though at first he may exhibit signs of timidity, in time these leave him altogether and he exhibits one of his chief characteristics-- his love of company.

Wherever people are there he will prefer to be, and in this way it is not unusual for him to become a nuisance. He is, moreover, an incorrigible thief, and will carry away everything he can lift with his big beak, preferring those things which are bright and shiny to duller objects.

He is a glutton, too, and a piece of meat held at a tantalizing distance from the bird will invariably provoke a loud and demanding "Caw."

(Excerpt from PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN)