



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

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MAY 1995

REGULAR MEETING

The May meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, May 25, 1995 at the Southport Maritime Museum on Howe Street in downtown Southport. Refreshments will be served.

In conjunction with the release of the fourth printing of Cap'n Charlie and the Lights of the Lower Cape Fear by the Society, we will present a program featuring the life and times of Captain Charles N. Swan, as keeper of the Cape Fear Light on Bald Head Island. Cap'n Charlie's son, Augustus (Gus) Swan will lead a panel discussion about life on Bald Head. We hope that other Swan family members will also participate.

We had hoped that the author, Mrs. Ethel Herring, could attend so that we could recognize her gift to the Society of the profits of the sales of the new edition of the book. Unfortunately, her health will not permit her to travel from Winston-Salem to Southport.

ALL-DAY OLD-TIMEY EXCURSION TRIP ON HENRIETTA II

The Wilmington/Southport round trip on board the Henrietta II is set for Saturday, October 21, and sails from Wilmington at 8:00 a.m. We do not have a firm price but we do know that the total will not exceed \$35 per person, including breakfast and lunch. Tickets will go on sale Labor Day, September 4. We'll keep you informed as more information becomes available.

"Looking Back" - The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MAY 1995



For this issue, we are grateful to have two articles from local people. Our thanks go to Mrs. Gwendolyn Dixon and Harold Watson, both natives of Old Southport.

I REMEMBER - by Gwendolyn St. George Dixon

I remember when I was a small child going over to Fort Caswell for weekends, with my family, John Newton St. George, my grandfather, and his brother, Charles St. George, and his family.

We fished and cooked outdoors and stayed in two of the houses over there, one for all the women and one for all the men.

I also remember that Glen Northrop taught a business course in Southport in the old Army-Navy Club building, now the Masonic Building.

I remember when the Cruiser USS "Raleigh" came to Southport in 1930 and 1931. Everyone in town really gave these men the royal treatment. The girls my age (15 and 16) had a real field day!

When I worked for the WPA during the Roosevelt administration I worked in the employment office. Warren Hood was my boss. I made \$15.50 per week, and that was good money. The office was in a small building on the lot where Leggett's Store now stands.

I started school in the building where the Franklin Square Art Gallery is located. This was before the High School was built. The new high school was located where the Post Office is today.

I lived on the third block of Lord Street. We used to walk down to the river to swim at the foot of Lord Street. The house next door to us on Lord Street was said to be haunted because a man (Percy Canaday) lived there alone and the house had a high fence around it. We kids would run by there at night or went all around the block to keep from passing it.

I remember Jim Lewis who worked for the Post Office many years when it was located across the street from Leggett's Store.

There was always a 4th of July celebration when I was growing up. We had races, picnics, ball games etc.

I remember when the river pilots went to the tower to watch for ships before they had radios. I remember when the telephone office was upstairs in a building where Kirby's Prescription Center is located (now the Consignment Shop). The switchboard was like you've seen in stores. You put plugs in and rang by hand. Miss Edna Dozier was the operator and I worked Saturdays and holidays. Downstairs was a restaurant known as Jimmy the Greek's.

The first radio I ever saw belonged to Jim Weathers. It was a crystal set. You had to use headphones.

We had a telephone very early, among the first, because my uncle Harold St. George was a pilot. Our number was 36.

The train left Southport at 5:00 A. M. and returned around 6:00 P. M.

I remember the Swamp Gardens, Little Coney, and that Dr. Doshier did operations (tonsils etc.) at the Quarantine Office at the foot of Atlantic Avenue. I remember Miss Kate Stuart and her famous rescue of a little girl. I remember Mr. Willie McKenzie's ice cream parlor - he made the ice cream himself - and the Brown Dogs made by Ruby Howe and Dollie Evans.

So many wonderful times and people in Old Southport.

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ANOTHER STORY FROM THE CEDAR BENCH - Harold B. Watson

From the mid to late-20s, the school was all in what is now the Franklin Square Gallery and the bell in the belfry in that building was rung by Mr. Charlie Lee at 8:15 A. M. - first call. At 8:45 school started. At 12:10 and 12:55 he rang the bell for the lunch periods. To us that was "dinner". The late meal of the day was always "supper". Anyway, the bell ringing rope came down through an escape hatch into the second floor where Mr. Charlie could ring the bell without having to climb the ladder that was always there.

Once for a New Year's celebration, some of the older boys went next door to the Army-Navy Club building, now the Masonic Hall, and stole the halyards from the flagpole there, broke into the school house and climbed the ladder to the bell, tied the halyards together and threw one end out of the belfry. They then went down and stretched the halyards to the oak trees near the fire station, which was then the city hall up stairs, police headquarters and all. (Today Southport 2000 is in that location). Then the others helped a couple of boys to climb one of the oak trees and just before midnight they started ringing the school bell. Chief of Police Cecil Lewis got some men to help him (he was the entire police force). As the bell continued to toll, the boys could hear Cecil sneaking toward the school house, telling his men to be quiet as they surrounded the building, then broke in, and flashlights shining and Cecil yelling, "Come on down, you're under arrest", and the bell kept on ringing. By the time Cecil climbed the ladder to make the arrest, the boys up the tree decided they'd had enough, got down out of the oak tree and ran for home. There were lots of suspects, but no arrests. The City had to hire Warren Doshier, a local electrician, to put on his pole-climbing spurs and climb that flagpole to replace the halyards so Old Glory could fly again.

Many stories such as the above have been told over and over around the Cedar Bench, or Whittlers Bench. If you know another one, please send it in for this column. Our readers far and near seem to enjoy hearing about our Old Southport Escapades! If you send them in, I'll print them!