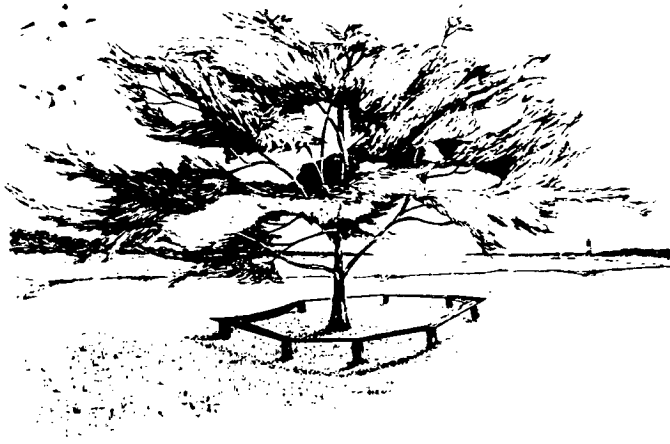


THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461
Vol. XVII No. 2 March 25, 1993



MEETING

The Southport Historical Society will hold its meeting Thursday March 25, 1992 at 7:30 PM. The meeting will be held at the Presbyterian Church. The speaker will be Mr. Thomas Puckett, better known as "The Clock Man".

IN THE NICK-OR-TIME

Reminder that 1993 dues are due. This issue of the Wittlers Bench may be your last, should you forget to send your payment ot 501 North Atlantic Ave. Southport, NC 28461.

TIME TO REMEMBER

We are trying to identify the Northwood Cemetery grave site (s) of the survivors of the oil tanker John D. Gill torpedoed off our coast in March 1942. Letters have been sent to the Coast Guard and to Congressman Rose for additional information and benefits available for WWII merchant mariners.

A LONG TIME, NO SEE!

We will need volunteers to hold the Old Jail open over the July 4th holiday. More specifically, we need one person to prepare and implement a sign-up sheet; and someone to clean up and expand our Law Enforcement display.

"If you realize too acutely now heavenly baluable time is, you are too paralyzed to do anything." ... K. B. Hathaway

TIME'S -A- WASTIN'

Get your copy of JOSHUA'S DREAM by Susan S. Carson. Go to the CP&L Visitor Center or mail your request (\$15 + \$3 for shipping) to Carolina Power and LightCo. P. O. Box 10488, Southport, NC 28461.

The Whittler's Bench Con't

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

We have sent a grant request to the N. C. State Arts Council seeking funds to continue our Living History Video Program. If anyone has any recorded family discussions, please send us a copy.

"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MARCH 1993



A TRAGIC STORY FROM "TORPEDO JUNCTION"

by Mary J. Shannon

On the night of March 12, 1942, the giant tanker JOHN D. GILL, laden with a cargo of Texas crude oil vital for the country's defense effort, was struck by a torpedo from a German submarine twenty miles off Cape Fear. A geyser of crude oil rocketed skyward to cover the area for hundreds of yards around the ship. In response to the cry of "man overboard", a life preserver was shot from the stern. The self-ignitable flare from the life preserver ignited and a sudden flash was seen on the water. A flash of blinding flame came rolling toward the ship. A blast of heat and noise ran over the decks as the tanks in the hold of the vessel caught fire. Escaping oil ignited with a blast and instantly the sea was aflame.

The sound of the initial explosion had reached shore and the flames were visible for miles around. Rescue craft were on the way. Hours later survivors and the bodies of the forty-nine man crew began arriving in Southport. The survivors were taken to Doshier Memorial Hospital for treatment. Many of the men were unrecognizable under their coat of crude oil and burns.

Southport citizens met the first challenge they had faced since the war began. Hours before the first survivors arrived Miss Elizabeth Murray, hospital superintendent, and J. J. Loughlin, business manager, and other members of the staff, had everything in readiness at Doshier. On hand and ready to serve were the newly graduated women of the Red Cross Class for Nurses' Aides taught by Mrs. L. C. Fergus, wife of one of the town's two physicians. Both volunteer and regular staff pitched in for the job to be done. Soon the survivors were cleaned up and given medical attention according to their needs.

The halls of the hospital echoed with stories of these men who went through nine hours of terror and misery such as few ever experience. They told of swimming in a sea ablaze while others clung to a life raft, submitting their bodies to cruel punishment when they alternated in making human oar-locks so others could pull the heavy oars necessary to get away from the blaze. When the men were picked up by the Coast Guard cutter, one was quoted as saying, "We surely lived our lifetimes out there". These were the fortunate ones.

Several of the men who could not be identified, along with Catalino Tingzon, a young Filipino seaman, were buried in Northwood Cemetery. The residents of Southport saw to it that these sailors who died in the line of duty far from home were laid to rest with as much tenderness and solicitude as if they had died in their own homes, surrounded by their kindred. Particularly impressive was the beauty and profusion of the floral tribute paid these men.

Fifty-one years later the Southport Historical Society is seeking funds to erect a monument upon the unmarked graves of these brave men. Not only will this monument be in honor of those who gave their lives, but also a tribute to the people of Southport who gave of themselves for the sake of those in need.

As Editor of this page and avid believer that we should proceed to honor the men of the JOHN D. GILL, my thanks go to Mary for this fine article and the intensive reasearch she did for the history file on the subject. Our thanks also go

"Looking Back", Page 2

Edgar Keal, one of our Society members who served in the Merchant Marine and who shared with us some of his own material on the subject.

Some of you have already made contributions to the fund for the marker: Mr. and Mrs. Chuck Paty, Mr. and Mrs. William S. Dunn, Ms. Sally Ann McNeil, Dr. and Mrs. Jim Rabon, Ms. Joanne Wesson, Ms. Laverne Rehder, Dr. and Mrs. Carroll Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Bill McGowan, and Mrs. Mary Shannon. The fund total now stands at \$160.00. If others of you care to contribute, please send your check made payable to the Southport Historical Society, seamen memorial, 501 North Atlantic Avenue, Southport, N. C. 28461.

Your History Page Editor had planned to use several more articles that have been contributed for the column recently, but just before the Storm of the Century hit Southport the Editor was hit by Type B flu bug, and has not yet recovered fully. Therefore, the typewriter was silenced by both the absence of electricity and Type B! I promise that the next issue will do better. To those who have sent in articles, don't give up. You will get into print soon!

Genealogy Can Be Fun

March 1993

Several weeks ago, Mrs. Doreen Holtz, a Society member from California who has deep Southport roots, asked that we run a list in Whittlers Bench of those who are researching Old Southport names. "Susie", as she is known, was here for Founders Day and was intrigued by the number of families represented. While space and time will not allow us to include all names and addresses, we are instead setting out a list of all the family surnames being researched, as far as we have been informed. If you find a name you want to know more about, I will be happy to supply you with the names and addresses of those researching in that area. However, when you make a request, be sure to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope to speed your answer to you.

ADAMS	DAVIS	LOCKWOOD
ANDERS	DEVAUN	MARLOWE
ARNOLD	DOBBS	MASON
BAKER	DOSHER	MILLIKEN
BELL	DREW	MINTZ
BELLAMY	EVANS	MURRAY
BENNETT	FOUNTAIN	MORSE
BENSELL	FRINK	MCKEITHAN
BETTS	FULLWOOD	MCRACKAN
BLANEY	GALLOWAY	PLATT
BOWERS	GARCIA	POTTER
BRINKMAN	GAUSE	POTTS
BROWN	GREER (GRIER)	PRICE
BURRISS	GUTHRIE	ROBBINS
COOKE	HEWETT (HEWITT)	ROGERS
COPEs	HICKMAN	ST. GEORGE
CORBETT	HOOPER	SELLERS
CROCKER	HOWE	SPENCER
CUMBEE	JORGENSEN	SWAIN
CURTIS	KEAL	THOMPSON
DANIEL	LEHUE (LEHEW)	WADE
	LEONARD	WESCOTT

WARD

WOODSIDE

You realize, of course, that our files are not complete on any of the names listed. Very few people have applied for our Family Certificates, but for several years now I have kept names and addresses of those I know to be researching certain names. Some people will not share the results of their research, but many will, so it is worth a try if you just want to touch base with someone who shares a common ancestor. None of these will do your research for you, but may provide you with valuable clues.

Susie Carson, Chairman
Genealogy Committee