



SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

• SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA 28461

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First 1983 Meeting: Set for 7:30 Thursday, January 27~~th~~ at the Southport-Brunswick County Library where the program will be on the proposed pictorial history of Southport. William Faulk, Milton Prevost and James

Harper, with James Harper as editor, have been working together on the project for over a year and will present the program; it should be a most interesting one with lots of old Southport pictures and comments. Light refreshments, public welcome. Please come.

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY HONORED

Last November 6th our Society received the Gertrude S. Carraway Award of Merit from the Historical Preservation Society of N. C. at an Awards Dinner at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Raleigh. President Elizabeth Watkins accepted the award given in recognition of the Society's organizing and publishing of The Architecture of Southport by Carl Lounsbury. This work led to the official designation of the Southport Historical District on the National Register. Several slides of buildings included in the book were shown at the dinner.

NATIONAL REGISTER CERTIFICATES: A reminder to those whose buildings are included in the Historical District, they can obtain such certificates by writing the N. C. Dept of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C. 27611, Attn: Mr. David Foard Hood.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE...annual dues are due again?

They are... and the application form is below. Won't you please complete it and send in your tax deductible check today to our Secretary/Treasurer, Mrs. Pauline Swain, 110 N. Frink Drive, Southport, 28461....or maybe bring it with you to the meeting Jan 27~~th~~.

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SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY -MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME _____	Membership Dues (please mark one and enclose payment in the amount shown.)
ADDRESS _____	_____ Individual \$ 5.00
_____	_____ Student (thru high school) 2.00
PHONE _____	_____ Business, institutional, professional 15.00
	_____ Sustaining 25.00
	_____ Life 100.00

As has already been announced, Dot Schmidt and Susan Carson are in the process of preparing for publication a book on the cemeteries of the immediate Southport area. In the meantime, we felt it might be interesting to our readers to run an article or two in Whittler's Bench about some of the persons buried in those cemeteries. With this issue we begin the series with information on one who has often been referred to as the Heroine of Smithville - Miss Kate Stuart:

MISS KATE STUART, HEROINE OF SMITHVILLE
by Susan S. Carson

Her obituary in the Wilmington Star-News for Sunday, April 14, 1929, the day after her death, began: "The City of Southport today wears a mantle of mourning, for Miss Kate Stuart is no more. Throughout all of eastern North Carolina there is a pang of deep regret at her passing, and in far away corners of the earth, friends of this grand old lady feel a mist creeping into the eyes as they learn the sad intelligence." The funeral was held at Trinity Methodist Church in Southport where she had been a member for many years. Six lawyers from Wilmington were her honorary pallbearers. A further honor was given her as many of her black friends in the community asked special permission to sing some of her favorite hymns. Interment was in the old Smithville Cemetery, less than two blocks from the church.

"Miss Kate", as she was known far and wide, was a little over 85 years old at her death, having been born in Smithville on August 17, 1844. Her mother was Mary Elizabeth Garland Bensell, a native of Tennessee. The widow of Joseph Bensell, Sr., she had been left with five small children to rear. In her efforts to provide a home and a living for herself and the children, in 1830 Mrs. Bensell established the boarding house at Smithville, close to the water's edge, that came to be known as the Stuart House in 1842 after her marriage to Dr. Charles Henry Stuart, a doctor at Fort Johnston. Kate was the only child born of that marriage.

As a lovely young lady in her late teens or early twenties during the Civil War, Kate was very popular with the soldiers stationed at the fort. Tradition has it that the poet Sidney Lanier while a signalman stationed in the area met Kate and they became special friends. He gave her a copy of his poem, "The Marshes of Glynn", which was published in 1878, and she treasured it throughout her life.

Kate was a young woman of courage and determination. In the summer of 1869 she had in her charge the young daughter of Captain Alex Hunt, of the Clyde Lines steamer, "Fairbanks". When the ship was sighted on its return to Smithville, Mary Hunt ran out on the Stuart House wharf to wave to her father. Excited as only a child can be, Mary toppled off the dock in eighteen feet of water where the tide was strong. Viewing the accident from the wide piazza of the Stuart House, Kate ran out and jumped into the water fully clothed, grabbed the child and swam to the dock pilings where she held on until help came. The captain saw the whole thing from the ship's deck. He later gave Kate a gold watch inscribed with these words: "From Alex Hunt to Miss Kate

Stuart of Smithville for her bravery in saving the life of his daughter, Mary, July 1st, 1879." As long as the Clyde steamers passed the Stuart House they blew their whistles three times in grateful salute to Kate. This was the second time she had rescued someone from the waters of the Cape Fear, and during the Civil War she had given unstintingly of herself in caring for the sick during the smallpox and yellow fever epidemics in the town. In newspapers over the State she was now referred to as the "Heroine of Smithville".

Both Kate Stuart and her mother were intellectuals vitally interested in their times, their country and their fellowmen. Because of her concern for the education of young people following the Civil War, at a time when the public education system in Brunswick County was non existent, Miss Kate and her friend, Miss Anne Drew, opened a school in a private home. By 1872 the school's enrollment had grown to more than eighty pupils and Miss Kate was conducting it alone in the Masonic Building on Nash Street.

Gifted with executive ability as well as a fine intellect, Kate was active in local affairs to the extent that she was considered by many to be an authority on important questions, a woman well ahead of her time. In the operation of the Stuart House, because of her fine hospitality and wise counsel, she became the friend of lawyers and judges from many areas of the State as they came to Smithville for the court sessions. She was an avid supporter of anything which she felt might benefit her fellow townsmen. In November 1911, when the railroad finally came, Miss Kate, then 67 years old, and the only female member of the Southport Chamber of Commerce, rode triumphantly into town to the scene of the "glorious celebration" on a flat car. As a part of her contribution to that occasion she wrote an amusing poem, "The Railroad's Come to Town!".

After 85 years of the zestful living of a life that made her corner of the world a better place, the Amazing Miss Kate laid down her mantle.

The writer is gratefully indebted to the gracious permission of Mrs. Barbara Marcroft of Wilmington for much of the information used in this article.