



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XX, NUMBER TWO MARCH 1996

REGULAR MEETING

The March meeting will be a Potluck Dinner, to be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 28, 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 author (and Southport native) Brooks Newton Preik on the subject of her award-winning book Haunted Wilmington and the Cape Fear Coast. Hope to see you all there!

IN MEMORIAM: NONIE - MY FRIEND

(Spoken at the funeral of Mrs. Elnora Rogers (Nonie) on February 24, 1996, by her close friend, Susan Carson)

Nonie was my true friend. We started to school together in 1926 and we graduated together in 1937. We were close friends all the way and remained so until the end. We shared our faith, our love for our families, our love for our hometown, Southport, and its history, and especially we shared our love for the Class of '37, as we came to be known. Thanks to her, the class members were always doing things together. She was our motivating force.

She believed in me and encouraged me in whatever I attempted. She always went the extra mile, not only for me but for others. I shall miss her every day I live.

SPECIAL THANKS

. . . to SHS Charter Member Bill Reaves for his generous contribution of \$500 as seed money for a Southport Historical Museum. We have set up a special bank account for this purpose. Bill once again demonstrates that historians look to the future as well as the past!

PUBLISHING NEWS

Our publications expert Paul Sweeney has obtained permission from NC Archives and History for the SHS to copyright and publish the History of Fort Johnston written several years ago by Wilson Angley. The State also provided a publication-ready package, complete with pictures and index. The SHS Board of Directors has voted to print 2,000 copies as soon as possible, and we hope to have them by the May meeting.

ANNUAL DUES

Once again, we wish to remind everyone that 1996 Annual Dues are needed by May 1; here is another form:

1996 DUES

NAME _____	\$10	INDIVIDUAL
ADDRESS _____	\$15	HUSBAND/WIFE
_____	\$15	BUSINESS, INSTITUTIONAL, CLUB OR PROFESSIONAL
AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____	\$25	SUSTAINING
	\$150/200	LIFE
MAIL TO: Southport Historical Society 501 N. Atlantic Avenue Southport, NC 28461	\$ _____	DONATION

"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MARCH 1996



Sometime ago your Editor of the History Page asked Brooks Newton Preik, a native of Southport, now of Wilmington, for permission to use an article that appeared in "Wilmington Coast" magazine, in the autumn of 1994. Permission was graciously granted, but the article was not used at the time. However, since Mrs. Preik will be our guest speaker for the March meeting, this seems to be the most appropriate time to use the article.

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY - Brooks Newton Preik

In the realm of life's simple pleasures, high on my list is the weekly arrival of my hometown newspaper, The State Port Pilot. Though the paper still chronicles the activities of the citizens of Southport, with the passage of time there has been less and less news of people I knew and loved from growing up there. Most of the older generation have died, and many of my contemporaries moved away years ago, as I did.

Nevertheless, I continue to pour through each issue anxiously, knowing that somewhere within there will be a name, a story, or perhaps a picture that will trigger a treasured memory. Mostly recently, it was an article about a Tom Sawyer-Becky Thatcher Crab Derby that was held in the old YachtBasin. A photograph of children crabbing accompanied the story.

In the forties, long past the time when the fictional characters of Mark Twain were stirring up trouble along a river bank in Missouri, the youngsters of Southport, North Carolina, were still enjoying a Huck Finn-type existence. Saturdays in summertime were synonymous with crabbing. It was as much a part of the summer scene as bare feet and watermelon. There was nothing I loved more than the ritual that began with a wake-up call from my dad almost before the light of dawn.

My brothers and I would gather together the crab lines, an extra ball of heavy fishing twine for repairs, and our one old sink net. This contraption was a large molded piece of iron that encircled a net containing a sinker in the center with a strong cord for tying on a large chunk of smelly bait to attract the crabs. The design of this net made it possible to catch several crabs at once. We had a long-handled dip net as well—a necessity for scooping up the elusive crabs.

By the time we were ready my mother, Southport's undisputed culinary champion, had filled the house with the aroma of fried chicken. She lovingly packed it for our lunch. Creamy potato salad and deviled eggs, as well as homemade pimento cheese sandwiches were also part of the fare. To top it off, there would be large chunks of moist yellow cake with thick chocolate icing—this was before the days of "orders to go" or drive-through fast food restaurants. A large gallon of sweet lemonade or iced tea completed our provisions. We placed the lunch on top of our crabbing gear in a tall bushel basket.

Taking turns swinging the heavy basket between us, we started our merry trek to the dock.

We always crabbed at the Standard Oil dock. No longer used by that company, it was, during the forties, a mooring place for the local menhaden fleet. The old dock was the perfect place to crab. Fodale's Shrimp House (in later years, ironically, the site of a thriving crab factory) adjoined the dock property. Discarded shrimp heads and other wastes created a rich feeding ground that attracted an abundance of the beautiful blue crabs. Because of the remote location near the Jens Berg house, the northernmost residence on the river at that time, the dock was often deserted during the day. We were thus fortunate not to have to share our bounty with other crabbers.

This location was a good thirty minute walk from our home on the opposite side of town. The long walk was an added part of the fun. We played word games like "Stinky-Pinky" as we hiked through the curving dirt streets with their covering of crushed oyster shells. A shady canopy of ancient live oaks sheltered us from the heat.

Our first stop along the way was at a local grocery store. The butcher always managed to find some meaty bones-just beginning to spoil-to give us for bait. There was no thought of charging for crab bait in those days. The butcher often had the bait wrapped and ready for us, seeming to relish his opportunity to share vicariously in our wonderful adventure.

Just before reaching our destination, we would stop again, this time where the railroad station had stood before it burned in the late thirties, across from the jail and parallel to the old cemetery on Rhett Street. Scattered railroad spikes, left there when the tracks were dismantled, could be found with diligent searching. They were just the sinkers we needed for our crab lines. Best of all, like the bait, they were free.

Soon the dock was in sight. The basket, no longer a burden due to our growing enthusiasm, bounced precariously as we ran through the soft dirt at the entrance to the dock..dodging sandspurs..impatient to assemble our lines. The moment came at last and we dropped our lines over the rail, watching their slow descent through the shallow water until they came to rest on the river bottom where the big crabs liked to feed. The excitement mounted as the first line was pulled up, ever so gingerly, just high enough to spot two giant claws busily pulling at the bait. Next, quick as lightning, the dip net, welded by Dad, slid deftly under the nibbling crab, and the catch was made.

It's been years since I tried my hand at crabbing. I used to take my own children when they were young, but somehow with "store-bought" crabbing gear, the noisy distractions of a commercial pier and the constant whining to go to McDonald's for a hamburger, the enterprise was not the same. There was a simplicity about those earlier days that I could never recapture. But the memory is still there, waiting to be recalled at will, as precious and vivid as if it had happened just yesterday. Childlike voices as raucous as a flock of feeding seagulls still echo in my mind, crying delightedly, "Daddy, quick - bring the net! We've got one! We've got one!"

A SOUTHPORT LAWN PARTY, 1887.

The event of the season, in social circles at Southport, was the lawn party given by the Misses Rhea and Julia Daggett, at "Magnolia Cottage," the summer residence of W.T. Daggett, Esq., on Thursday evening last.

It was a veritable scene of enchantment; the beautiful lawn was lighted up by many colored Japanese lanterns, dotted here and there by daintily-spread tables, from which were served from time to time the most delicious ices and other refreshments; but who can describe the matchless beauty and bewildering toilets of the ladies which greeted us at the "inner portals," where Miss Rhea Daggett, with charming grace, received her guests.

The music for the occasion was furnished by the Southport String Band, led by Captain Pete Moore, a musician of "ye olden time." The merry dance was opened by Mrs. Daggett and Mr. Thomas Thompson, Jr.

The following is a partial description of some of the most ravishing toilets.

Miss Rhea Daggett, satin foulard and velvet. Miss Julia Daggett, pink embroidered lawn. Miss Hattie Whitaker, of Wilmington, exquisite evening costume of lilac crepe and white lace, decollete. Miss Emma Thompson, pink silk, lace overdress and diamonds. Miss Birdie Munger, cream satin, garnet trimmings and roses. Miss Lettie Thompson, debutante costume of ice-blue satin. Miss Emma Davis, white mull, handsome sash, Miss Josie Pepper, white mull embroidered. Misses Nannie and Carrie Weeks, very small young ladies, were attired in white etamine. Miss Annie Thompson, striped silk and blue velvet. Miss Laura Weeks, white cashmere and lace.

I give the names of a few of the young gentlemen present: Mr. Bennie Mitchell, of Wilmington; Messrs. Phil. and Ward Lettig, of Baltimore; W.W. Daggett, Walter Daggett, Eddie Cranmer, Johnnie Cranmer, Robert Morse, Leta Potter, and Thomas Thompson, Jr., of Southport.

Among the lookers-on we observed Captain and Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Captain Munger, Lieutenant and Mrs. Reid, Mrs. Reid, Mrs. Philip Lettig, and Mr. and Mrs. Cranmer, of the revenue cutter COLFAX, Miss Kate Stuart, Dr. Frank and Dr. Curtis, of Southport.

The festivities of the evening were brought to a close by dancing an old Virginia reel, in which all engaged.

LOCAL SOUTHPORT NEWS - There is a marked improvement going on in Southport; nearly the entire length of Moore street has been laid in shell walks, and Potts street, from the hotel to the steamboat wharf, has been planked. The railroad boom is revived, and the prospect is bright and cheery.

WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 8-28-1887.

THE UNWELCOME CROW OF SOUTHPORT, 1887.

Southport can boast of a crow which is the delight of the two boys who own it, and the terror of all the housekeepers and little black children of the town. The writer took a walk through Southport the other day, the first house passed, a lady came running out with a broom in her hand and the crow flying before her - he had been in and helped himself to sugar and fresh beef. Five minutes later, hearing cries of rage and distress, we turned a corner and beheld the crow chasing a lot of little black girls, flying just above their heads, and swooping down occasionally and taking a lock of their hair in his beak, while they were screaming for dear life. The day before he had visited the signal office, and in the absence of the observer, had dropped the cork of the glue bottle into the anemometer, and spread the glue and ink all over the papers and table, when the office boy appeared, he was sitting on the telegraph instrument chuckling and saying aha! aha! Two hours after he met a very small girl with two silver quarter dollars, and stole one and flew away. He visited a house on Front street, and seeing the upper windows open for airing, went in, emptied a bottle of ink all over the bureau cover, ransacked the small drawers, and finally made off with some small brass screws and carried ~~the~~ screwdriver off to the shed. When he enters a room the first thing he does is to take all the matches out of the boxes and lay them out in rows on the bed - if there is a clock in the room he opens and stops it. In attempting to get a large vase off the mantel a few days ago he broke it, and when the owner rushed in alarmed by the crash, he flew through the window, taking with him as he went a spoon. All the mischief done in the town is laid to this crow and with good cause.

He visits all the stores and helps himself to fruits, and the butcher dares not hang his beef outside the store. He perches himself on some high place after he has done these tricks and chuckles in such a sly way, and then they shake a stick at him and call him a villain he shakes his head and says, "No, no!"

WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 11-26-1887.

(From the newspaper files of Bill Reaves, Wilmington, N.C., 1996)