

# Southport Historical Society

Summer 2006

## *From the President's Pen . . .*

Along with the sweltering summer days, Fourth of July fireworks, sunburned bodies and sizzling hot dogs on the grill, there are some pretty "hot" issues around our fair city these days. Namely, the forthcoming International Port, the Marina situation, condos on the riverfront and most currently, the "Save Fort Johnston" effort. It is to this last issue I would like to speak.

A couple of years ago the US Army issued a statement that it no longer wanted the expense and responsibility of maintaining Ft. Johnston as the residence for the commandant of Sunny Point (MOTSU). In fact, the building has been vacant for some time now and plans are moving forward for ownership to be transferred to whom knows who! And that is the crux of the matter right now—who will be the new owner?

Federal law mandates that surplus property first be offered to any federal agency that meets the criteria for taking over the property. Therefore, under the umbrella of HUD, a homeless ministry in Georgia has applied for use of the property as a shelter. What we don't know at this point is the status of that application and the ability of the applicant to "jump through all the hoops" necessary to acquire and maintain the property. When they read the fine print, it may be too large an undertaking for them—let's hope so and maybe they will fade quietly into the background.

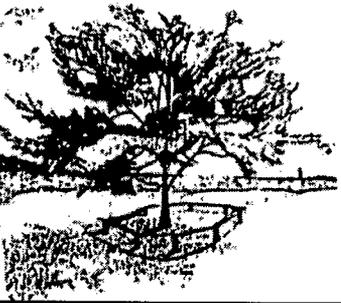
Logically, next in line if all federal agencies opt out, would be the state of North Carolina. However, from all we've heard, it seems the state is not interested in attaining the property for any use including development a State Historic Site such as Ft. Fisher or Brunswick Town. So the state is out of the picture.

Moving on down the line, we come to city or municipal applicants. The City of Southport has applied for ownership under the Federal Lands to Parks program. Does that move the city up to first-line position under that federal agency umbrella? What "hoop-jumping" would that require? If it falls into the city's hands via Federal Lands to Parks what stipulations go along with it and how much freedom will the city have to mandate the use of the property (offices, etc.)? Seems like a lot a questions still to be answered.

An organization has been formed to petition opposition to HUD's application and move the question of ownership back into the local arena. Your officers and directors were asked by the leader of that organization if the society would take a public stand on the issue. After deliberation, your board has decided not to make a formal statement of position for the entire society due to the fact that we represent about 350 members and we cannot presume to speak for all of you on all points of this issue.

The one thing we believe all members of the society could agree on is that we are definitely in favor of preserving the historical integrity of Ft. Johnston. As to what agency or entity we would like to see as owners, there would probably be many opinions. Therefore, we encourage each of you to become involved as you see fit and support whatever ownership you deem trustworthy. Above all, we should all let it be known that we want Ft. Johnston to remain as a fine example of our coastal history - preserved and available to the public for enjoyment and education.

*Pat Kirkman*



The Whittler's Bench

Celebrating our 30th Anniversary 1976-2006

**THE WHITTLER'S BENCH**

is a quarterly publication of the Southport Historical Society a 501 3-c non-profit organization  
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**OFFICERS:**

President: Pat Kirkman  
 Vice President: Musette Steck  
 Secretary: Ginny Cannon  
 Treasurer: Phil Fravel  
 Archivist: Larry Maisel  
 Ex-officio: Peter Wyckoff

**DIRECTORS:**

Cathy Fravel  
 Karen Knighton  
 Don Parker

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us a better understanding of our state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of our American heritage.

We further cooperate with the city of Southport to preserve the town's records and archives, and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers.

We endeavor to provide programs of historical interest at regular meetings, publish articles and books for the purpose of education and encourage community participation in the preservation of our heritage.

Southport Historical Society  
 was established  
 January, 1976  
 and maintains the  
**Old Jail Museum**  
 located at  
 318 E. Nash Street  
 Southport, NC

*Meeting Dates :*

Please note your calendars for the following supper meetings remaining in 2006:  
**SEPTEMBER 21 NOVEMBER 16 SOUTHPORT COMMUNITY BUILDING**  
 We begin around 6:00 with fellowship time and set up, the covered dish supper starts at 6:30 and we try to start the program around 7:00. If you haven't been to a meeting in a l-o-o-o-ong while, why not plan to come to the next one. We'll be delighted to see you again! Be sure to bring something good to eat!

*E-Mail Addresses:*

As events and information of interest come to our attention we send out periodic e-mails to those of you who have given us your e-mail address. If you are not receiving e-mails and would like to be included, please e-mail the society at [shs@ec.rr.com](mailto:shs@ec.rr.com). We do not share our addresses with other organizations or solicitors, so you can be assured that we will protect your e-mail address.

*In Remembrance:*

With saddened hearts we remember these members who have recently passed away: **Shirley Wolff, Coy Hewett, Jr., Ray Bitney, Jane Felber, Charles Hogan and Elizabeth Watkins**(charter member). Our sympathy goes out to their families and friends. The society greatly appreciates their support and contributions through the years to the growth of our organization.

*Book News:*

A concentrated effort is underway to sell our publication, *A History of Fort Johnston on the Lower Cape Fear* by Wilson Angley at a reduced price of \$5.00 a copy. A successful combination house tour and book sale was held at the Garrison on the Ft. Johnston site during Heritage Days in May. Many thanks to **Don Parker** for coordinating the event with Sunny Point. The books are still available to individuals and vendors at the new price until we whittle down our inventory of over 1000 books.

The society presented a copy of the book as a memento of the event to each of the new American citizens at the July 3 Naturalization Ceremony that took place at Ft. Johnston. Pictured here (left to right) are **Musette Steck** (society vice president); new citizens, Rachel Girma (Ethiopia); Marie Feliciano (Haiti); and **Pat Kirkman** (society president) at the ceremony.



Also selling well are the combination sets of the four volumes of Southport chronologies edited by Bill Reaves for \$25. They are available at the Southport Visitors Center and the Old Jail or by calling members of the book committee, **Chris Suiter** at 457-6922 or **Ken & Carolee Morris** at 454-4133.

A new shipment of *Classic Southport Cooking* authored by society member, **Lewis Hardee, Jr.** arrived in May. Over 2000 were sold in less than one year and sales continue to be steady. Keep it in mind for gift giving and remember your member's discount if you buy directly from the society (\$18.50 rather than \$22 retail).

*Noteworthy . . .*

## At the Old Jail . . .

The 1904 Family Life Room has turned out beautifully. A job well done by the committee. The donations are greatly appreciated, especially the stove, it's a work of art! If you haven't been down to visit the Old Jail Museum, don't delay! We have had many, many visitors over Heritage Days, Fourth of July and during our regular Wednesday and Saturday "open" days. The hours are 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.



## More Jail News . . .

- On May 18, 2006 we had a very interesting day with Hilary Perez who works with NCECHO in Raleigh. She made a site visit to the Old Jail and met with **Pat Kirkman** and **Beverly Wyckoff**. "Exploring Cultural Heritage Online is the World Wide Webb's doorway to the special collections of North Carolina's libraries, archives, museums, historic sites and other cultural institutions." NCECHO will be able to provide SHS with many learning tools, as we move along. To see the Old Jail photos on line go to [www.ncecho.org](http://www.ncecho.org) and follow the links to SHS Old Jail.
- Docents needed! We have 20 or so very faithful docents, but we need many more. We will do another training when more people sign up. Please call or email **Marilyn Lessin** at 457-0004 or [dlessin@ec.rr.com](mailto:dlessin@ec.rr.com). to get involved with this fun experience.
- The 1904 Family Life Room looks great, but we would still like a small kitchen table, a small pie safe, children's clothing, toys and books of the 1904 era. If you have items that you would like to loan or donate to this exhibit, please call or email 457-0579 or [shs@ec.rr.com](mailto:shs@ec.rr.com)
- **Larry Maisel**, SHS Archivist, is working on all of the old files and "paper" that belong to SHS and are now in one room at the Old Jail. If you like to organize and do research, please call or email Larry at 457-6222 or [olmize@aol.com](mailto:olmize@aol.com).
- Southport Chief of Police, Jerry Dove, recently donated several items to be added to our upstairs Law Enforcement Exhibit Room. If you have experience or interest in Law Enforcement and would enjoy helping with the set up this exhibit call or email **Bert Felton** at 457-5302 or [felton@ec.rr.com](mailto:felton@ec.rr.com).

**SPECIAL NOTE:** We are very sorry to accept **Beverly Wyckoff's** resignation as curator of the Old Jail Museum due to Peter's recently diagnosed illness. Beverly did a magnificent job of bringing the museum to its present status and organizing the training of the docents. We will certainly miss her leadership and extend to both she and **Peter** our very best wishes as they deal with these new developments in their lives.

## New Members . . .

We welcome these new members who have joined since the last newsletter was mailed. We are delighted to have each of you and look forward to your involvement in our organization!

Louise Broadwell  
Earl & Audrey Daigler  
Arthur & Barbara Dichl

Ron & Susan Fisher  
Charles & Victoria Hogan  
Muriel Lawrence

Muriel Moore  
Georgianna Morris

**LIFE MEMBERS:**  
Paul & Karen Fisher  
Annelle Royal  
Dr. Angela Wadsworth



## Looking Back with Susie Carson . . .

As we continue celebrating our 30-year anniversary, we look back on comments from Susie at a presentation of a plaque of appreciation to founder, Eleanor Smith. The society dedicated and added a memorial stone to the Waterfront Park Heritage Walk this past May as a part of Southport Heritage Days in honor of Eleanor and the important part she played in establishing our society. Here's how it all began - in Susie's words from that presentation on May 28, 1998:

*Back in 1975, when there was a lot of discussion going on all over the United States about the nation's Bicentennial which was coming up in 1976, my friend Eleanor Smith had a "brainstorm".*

*At that time I was working downtown in Mr. E.J. Prevatte's law office across the street from Eleanor's "Curiosity Shop". One day Eleanor called me to come over and talk to her a few minutes about something interesting that she wanted to suggest. Of course, I went over.*

*Her suggestion was that Southport should have a historical society and that she wanted me to help her get one started; that the bicentennial year would be the perfect time to do it while everyone was interested in history. Naturally, I heartily agreed. My only regret was that I had not come up with such a great idea on my own!*

*Eleanor started talking the idea up among people she knew that were interested in history and I did the same. So on January 15, 1976, Eleanor called a meeting in the public library's conference room and nineteen people came. All agreed that we should organize ourselves into the Southport Historical Society and that Eleanor should be our first president. I was chosen as vice president and Pauline Swain was chosen as secretary-treasurer. We agreed to hold the charter membership open until April 1st. By that time we had 42 paying members. Dues were \$5.00 a year, so we had a large treasury of \$210.00!*

*Eleanor appointed Bob Thorsen, Frances Burdette and me to write a constitution and by-laws and to present same at the April meeting. Kathryn Carson was asked to edit a newsletter for the group because it was felt that it was important that we have one from the very beginning. Very soon Volume I, Number 1 of the Whittler's Bench was prepared and copies mimeographed - yes, mimeographed - does anyone remember that process? - and mailed out to the members.*

*The AASLH gave us a sample of a constitution and by-laws for organizations such as ours and patterned after those, we soon adopted our own. We were now off and running!*

*The past 21 years have been interesting ones. We have grown tremendously in membership and income. We have successfully undertaken many projects such as the preservation of the Old Jail, the establishment of the Benjamin Smith Heritage Garden at the Old Jail, for which we were awarded a plaque by the North Carolina Bicentennial Committee; the Old House plaque project, The Family Certificate program with its receipts designated for cemetery preservation.*

*There have been other projects, some successful and others not. However, our biggest and most successful project has been the publication of books related to Southport's colorful past. Our very first publishing effort was that of a survey of the cemeteries done by Dot Schmidt, then quickly followed by the first volume of our chronologies and The Architecture of Southport by Carl Lounsbury. Many others have followed and some are now in the works. We are proud of all of these.*

*But we are especially proud of Eleanor, our first president, because she got us started on the right path! Thanks, Eleanor.*

Here are some other interesting facts about the life of Eleanor Joan Pancoast Potter Smith. These comments come from a biographical sketch by her daughter, Sandy Potter Spencer.

She was born in Carbondale, Pennsylvania in 1922. During World War II she came to North Carolina to visit a Coast Guardsman stationed at Fort Caswell, and it was during that visit that she met two of the loves of her life: Bryant Potter and Southport. She and Bryant were married in 1944 and began their family life in Southport in 1946. She became the mother of three daughters, Sandy, Anne and Madeline. She served as Postmistress during the early 1960's and operated a seafood market on the Yacht Basin for a number of years. Her widowed father, Edward Pancoast moved to Southport and he and Eleanor opened The Curiosity Shop where they bought, sold and refinished antiques.

Along with being the founder of SHS, Eleanor was one of the earliest members of Sacred Heart Catholic Church, a founding member of ANCHOR, the Southport business development group, a founding member of the Sea Notes Choral Society, a long-time member of the Southport Garden Club and a member of Southport Woman's Club. She was an active participant in the Brunswick Little Theater Group and received the Brunswick County Small Business Owner Award in the late 1990's. She was certainly a valuable asset to the community and her contributions to Southport will long be remembered. Eleanor passed away at age 82 on September 4, 2004.

## *Historically Speaking with the Archivist . . .*

### 307 E. Moore Street J.B. Ruark House - 1890

A Series Featuring Southport Homes  
by Larry Maisel

This house, at 307 E. Moore Street, was built by merchant J. B. Ruark on the site of his earlier house, which was moved to the southwest corner of Moore and Atlantic.

Ruark was one of Southport's leading merchants and had a grocery and dry goods store for many years just across Dry Street from St. Philip's Episcopal Church (now the Chapel of the Cross.) This house was one of dozens built in during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

At the time the house was built, Ruark was a member of the Board of Aldermen. Active in several businesses, he was one of the owners of Brunswick Transportation Co., formed in 1906 to operate the steamer Atlantic, which carried passengers and freight between Southport and Wilmington, and in 1911 was one of the incorporators of the Bank of Brunswick. He died in 1934.



## *From the Chronicles . . .*

In the good ol' summertime . . .

The society has published a set of four chronologies edited by Bill Reaves that cover happenings in Smithville/Southport from 1520 to 1970. Fascinating reading! A limited number of these sets are now on sale for \$25. They will be available at the Old Jail or the Visitors Center.

**July 4, 1810:** A discharge of 13 cannon at Fort Johnston announced the dawn of the Fourth of July celebration. The officers of the garrison, plus residents and visitors joined together at the hotel of Samuel Potter. There they drank toasts, each accompanied by a discharge of cannon and many cheers. One toast was to "The Town of Smithville—may it increase in its population and prosperity."

**July 30, 1885:** Messrs. J.N. Maffitt and J.A. Corbett, while fishing, discovered a large shark which they shot and killed. It was found to be a tiger shark, native to the coast of South America, 10 feet long and 5 feet in circumference and weighed 400 pounds. It took five men to get him in the boat. The shark was skinned and the hid tanned as a souvenir.

**August 20, 1915:** The electric power plant of the Southport Electric Light and Power Company was being rebuilt completely. Improvements amounting to \$5,000 were underway. Only 20 percent of the houses of Southport were wired for electricity and a house wiring campaign was inaugurated. The work could be paid for on easy terms by the tenants, and not the owners.

**August 19, 1936:** Tennis was more popular in Southport than ever before. Camp Sapona had a fine double court, and the town had an extra good double court which attracted many players and spectators during daylight hours and what might be termed crowds at night. The courts were equipped with flood lights for night playing and as many as 200 spectators frequently turned out to witness match games.

## *30th Anniversary Thoughts . . .*

Perhaps after reading about the beginnings of the society, you are interested in knowing who those 42 charter members were back in 1976: William R. Thorsen, Edward Pancoast, Esther Swan Davis, Margaret Swan Hood, Jerry Ennis, Frances Burdette, Mary Bellows, Eleanor Smith, Roberta Hon, Leila Pigott, John Swain, Pauline Swain, Doris O'Daniel, Jessie Swan, Susan Carson, Kathryn Carson, Dorcas Schmidt, Harold Aldridge, Victoria Aldridge, Reid Page, Mary Ann Page, Jack Fairley, Mark Connaughton, Margaret Connaughton, William Deitz, Afton Smith, Elnora Rogers, Louise Parker, Walter Reinheimer, Elizabeth Watkins, Grace Ruark, Elizabeth Harrelson, William Dunn, Thelma Dunn, Elizabeth St. Ana, Woodrow Spencer, Robert Nicholson, Annie May Woodside, Philip Dodd, Marty Dodd, Neil Lewis, William Reaves.

## *Student Scholarship . . .*

For the past three years, SHS has awarded a scholarship to an outstanding student at South Brunswick High School. The

scholarship honors the life and work of Miss Susie Carson.

Students must be active in their school and community, be good scholars, have the recommendations of those with whom they have worked and write a short historical essay on a topic about Brunswick County. Initially, the award was for \$1,000 but this year's award is \$2,000 and will be paid to the winner in each of the first two years of college.

Matt James (pictured here with Miss Susie) won the SHS Susan Sellers Carson Scholarship this year. He graduated at the top of his class at S. Brunswick High School, participated in music, scouts, student government and many other activities and community service projects. In the fall, he plans to attend UNC-Chapel Hill. His winning essay follows.



## **The Growth and Importance of Brunswick Town During the 18th Century** by Matt James

Right in our backyard, Brunswick Town today acts solely as an historic landmark. However, this has not always been the case. Throughout the years, it has led a rather tumultuous existence. In the 18th century, Brunswick Town endured a cycle from formation to prosperity, to destruction and abandon. Let me illustrate.

In 1725, Brunswick Town was founded by Maurice Moore. Maurice Moore was a Major in the colonial military and had first come across the lands of Brunswick County during a march in war with the Tuscarora Indians. He thought that the lands were ideal for settlement, but were rendered unusable due to pirate inhabitation. The pirates were driven away by 1718, as a result of the execution of the prominent pirates Blackbeard and Stede Bonet.

Brunswick Town was never without close neighboring settlements. In fact, to promote growth in the area, Maurice Moore's brother, Roger Moore, developed another settlement close by. Both Roger and Maurice Moore selected areas around the large port of Wilmington to promote their respective shipping industries. Roger Moore built the settlement at Orton, whose population consisted primarily of himself and hundreds of black slaves. Maurice Moore picked an area 15 miles below Wilmington on a bluff for his settlement. He named it Brunswick in honor of the reigning family.

The years immediately following Brunswick Town's settlement were economically booming. Its economy was structured with an emphasis on plantation farming and overseas exportation. "Brunswick has a great trade, a number of merchants and rich planters." This comment described the state of Brunswick Town in 1731, and was written in "Natural History of North Carolina" by Dr. Brickell. The variety of exports of the settlement prove its economic superiority. An even greater display of the context to which Brunswick Town was important was the far away locations they traded with. Distant locations such as the West Indies, London, Bristol, and other destinations prove this point.

The Cape Fear River has been essential to the inhabitants of Brunswick County. Brunswick Town was no different, they took full advantage of their access to the ocean by creating an International Port. The Cape Fear is named because of the many dangerous shoals in its water. This was a detractor from mass trade and can be accredited as the reason that it did not grow even larger as a port.

By mid-century, the inhabitants of Brunswick County had developed loose class lines. This is certainly evidence of a well developed economy. The upper-class positions were that of slave owning planters surrounding Brunswick Town, large merchants, public officials, and those men with professional jobs. There were the

(Continued on page 7)

## Events: Past & Upcoming . . .

- Aug. 2 "Shipwrecks, Treasure & Pirates" with Mike McDaniel - Community Building at 7 p.m. sponsored by Maritime Museum - Free
- Aug. 7 Brunswick County Historical Society Meeting - 7:15. Brunswick Electric Conference Room - Hwy. 17 - Supply, NC.
- Aug. 15 North Carolina Lighthouses - 7 p.m. with Bruce & Cheryl Roberts. Call Maritime Museum for details (457-0003)
- Aug. 26 "Flavor of the Past" 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. - Wilmington. Sponsored by Lower Cape Fear Historical Society - Call 762-0492 for details.
- Sept. 8-9 "Secret Garden Tour" Call same number as Aug. 26 event for details.
- Sept. 12 Southport Movie Event/Fundraiser - Sponsored by St. James Service Club Watch newspapers and e-mails for further details.
- Sept. 28 SHS - General Membership Meeting - Community Building - 6:30 p.m.

### "Back to Class with Susie"

Calling all those who attended any of "Professor" Carson's classes to "answer the roll" for this meeting to recall all those history lessons and good times shared throughout the years. Watch your e-mail and the newspapers for more information. Mark your calendar today!

### "Southport Secrets Tours"

Plans are in the making to offer walking tours of Southport based on our book, *Southport Secrets* during October. Be on the lookout for more information in the fall.

Local Scouts, soloist, Wendy Jones, "Betsy Ross" (Kathy Holbrook) and Brenda Birmelin participated in our Flag Day activity on June 14 co-sponsored by Daughters of the American Revolution.



21st century sisters and society members, Stuart Callari and Pat Pittenger portrayed 19th century sisters Kate and Almira at our very successful "Kate Stuart Day" events on April 13. They are great-grandnieces of Kate Stuart.



### (Scholarship essay continued from page 6)

middle class men who helped with the trading industry and various apprentices and there were the lower class of slaves and indentured servants. Class structure helps show the level of sophistication the society was reaching.

The economy reached its successful cusp at the brink of the Revolutionary War. One way to measure the growth of a settlement is to see the variety of items that were imported. On October 18, 1773, a full rigged ship from Glasgow, Scotland came to port. This ship contained such luxuries as "furniture, leather, saddles, earthenware, shoes, linen, hats, gun powder, silks, glass, iron, lead, and "shott", also port wine, rugs, toys and household articles." This text taken directly from the trading logbook gives us an idea of the path Brunswick Town was blazing.

It was about this time that England began a series of new taxes and tariffs on the colonists. Most notably, the Stamp Act infuriated the entire population of the colonies against England. In order to combat the Stamp Act, the local colonists formed a rebel group named the "Sons of Liberty". On February 18, 1773, approximately, 1000 men march to Brunswick Town. They chose this town for two reasons. First of all, it was where the English sailing vessels were being held. Also, to confront the royal governor, William Tryon, whose headquarters where in Brunswick Town.

Several years, later, the Revolutionary War raged across the newly formed country. As in most areas of the country, Brunswick Town suffered heavy losses in population and in economy. After the Revolution, Brunswick Town was virtually destroyed and uninhabited. It was commented as being destitute by all who wrote of their travels there until the beginning of the 19th century and the Ante-Bellum period which would prove to pull the settlement from the rubble and to make it successful once more.