



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

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G R E E T I N G S

The Southport Historic Society welcomes all visitors and hopes they will tour the Old Brunswick County Jail and sign our official prisoner register.

Society members will be available to answer questions about the jail, Southport and Genealogy. Have a wonderful time.

SELF GUIDED, WALKING TOUR

A NEW walking tour map and description of some of Southport's buildings ~~is~~ FREE. If you have any problems with, or questions about the brochure please let us know.

HISTORICAL POST CARDS -- Scenes of Southport

We have a new set of four post cards. The cards were made from pen and ink drawings and include a short description of the following:

1. The Whittlers Bench (our logo)
2. The Brunswick County Jail 1904-1971 (our headquarters)
3. The Obelisk Marker honoring lost Pilots in the Old Smithville Cemetery.
4. Fort Johnston Officers' Quarters as it looked at the beginning of the Civil War (1861).

The post cards will be on sale for 25¢ or five for \$1.00. Out of town persons can obtain a set of cards by sending one dollar and a large, stamped, self-addressed envelope. Or as a special introductory offer, seven sets for a five dollar donation and we will supply the envelope and postage.

In addition, for the same price, we still have sets of four post cards that show prisoner ART and GRAFFITI. The cards have been slightly censored;

OVER

however, they were copied from graphics on the jail walls.

If you find postage getting too high, send more cards and help support the Historical Society at the same time.

NO ANTIQUE SHOW

Due to the very limited dealer response and the lack of adequate space to hold an antique show and sale, we were not able to sponsor one during this July 4th celebration.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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|----------------------|------------------------|
| Quilters | Typists |
| Writers | Proof Readers |
| Researchers | Tour Guides |
| Video Camera persons | Cemetery Ghost Busters |

You name it! Do come join us, and we will pass it on to the Do Nothing Committee.

1791: TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The Internal Revenue Law was passed by Congress which placed an excise tax on domestic whiskey. This tax was not very popular and most of the revenue was needed to collect the money. The result was the Whiskey Rebellion. This "insurrection" in Pennsylvanis was suppressed by the National Government and established its right to collect taxes. In addition, it showed that State Milita could be counted on the suppress domestic ensurrections.

Vermont became the 14th State from territory claimed by New Hampshire.

George Washington was ending his first term as President of the United States.

It is into this National Period that the establishment of Southport ws being conceived. Next year, 1992, will be our bicentennial celebration. We encourage and solicit information and articles that explain politics, land, people, and everything that happened two hundred years ago. We would like to include your input to our historical heritage reports.

HOORAY

The Southport Historical Society has received its tax-exempt status from the IRS. We are now an officially tax-exempt organization.

"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor



HISTORY OF THE OLD JAIL - Susan S. Carson

Following the move of the county seat of Brunswick County from Lockwood's Folly to Smithville in 1808, a courthouse was built on some of the lots reserved in the original Town Plan for the use of the town. The courthouse was built with money raised by public subscription by citizens of Smithville and thus the building belonged to the town rather than the county. It was leased to the county by the town. Many years later the building then standing on the lots was to revert to the city.

Smithville, in 1808, already had a jail of sorts, a wooden two-story structure, located approximately where the present day fire station stands in the edge of Franklin Square or the "Grove", as it was known locally.

The two-story wooden structure continued to be used as a jail, but evidently was not satisfactory. The "Cape Fear Recorder", a Wilmington newspaper, under date of August 10, 1818, carried a notice that "Proposals will be received by the undersigned until the 15th day of September next for the building of a jail, stocks and pillory, in Smithville, Brunswick County, of the following description, viz." There followed a detailed description of the building. It was signed by John C. Baker, John Brown, Jr. and Robert Potter, as the Committee of Public Buildings. So far as can be learned a jail was not built at that time. However, the fate of the first jail was decided in 1849 when a prisoner set fire to his cell on the second floor, causing considerable damage.

On October 10, 1850, there was another request for bids on the construction of a jail at Smithville. This time the Building Committee was Dr. S. B. Everitt, S. N. Galloway, Captain John Brown, Elijah Owen and Robert McRackan, leading citizens of Smithville and Brunswick County. Again there is no evidence that the jail called for in these bids was built. In 1879 a newspaper account complained that eleven prisoners were crowded into a "one-room jail" at Smithville awaiting trial, thus leading to the belief that some sort of temporary structure was being used. In 1890 another newspaper item reported that the Smithville jail was "old and dilapidated".

Evidently the Town of Smithville was unable to raise money for a new jail. Thirteen years later, on October 23, 1903, the following item appeared in "The Dispatch", a Wilmington newspaper: "The Board of Commissioners of Brunswick County awarded the contract for the construction of the new county jail to A. J. Robbins of Southport. He will do the work complete for \$6,738, the lowest bid."

Land for the jail was purchased by the County from Miss Kate Stuart, known as "The Heroine of Smithville". The location was the corner of Nash and Rhett Streets in Smithville and the building was the one we now call "The Old Jail". It housed prisoners until 1971 when it was replaced by a one-story structure immediately behind it, facing on Rhett Street. The older building then became the headquarters for the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department until 1978 when the County Seat was moved to Bolivia.

Architecturally, the Old Jail was built according to the specifications called for in the bids. It is a two-story brick building laid in 1:6 bond and has a six-course belt dividing the two stories. The windows have segmental openings. The iron bars on the windows and the cells upstairs are apparently the original ones. Some changes were made to the interior while it was used by the Sheriff's Department.

"Old Jail", continued

During the filming of the movie "Crimes of the Heart" in the summer of 1986, several of the movie scenes were shot in and around the Old Jail, the movie company having leased it for a short period from the City of Southport.

Today the building is Headquarters of the Southport Historical Society under a lease from the City of Southport. One of the original rooms has been turned into a genealogical library by the Society, housing a large number of books and many files of family history.

(NOTE: Information for this article was supplied by Bill Reaves, Wilmington author and historian; Mrs. Ragnhild Bairnsfather of Winchester, MA, a descendant of the Robert Potter mentioned as a member of the first "Committee of Public Buildings"; Carl Lounsbury, architectural historian at Williamsburg, Va; and from the files of the Editor. Thanks Bill, Randy and Carl).

OLD SOUTHPORT CEMETERIES

Perhaps you noticed the lack of repairs in the Old Southport Burial Grounds. Most of you know about our Cemetery Endowment Fund! However, there's not yet enough money in the fund yet to generate substantive interest earnings (With an endowment, only earnings are spent. The capital remains to generate more interest earnings). There is now some money in interest earnings -- about \$100 to \$150.

Within their budget, Southport city provides some general maintenance, such as cleaning out the undergrowth and mowing. Maybe you noticed that this generally is done in time to make a nice appearance for this Historical Site in time for the Fourth of July Visitors? Did you ever wonder why it is done that way? Did you ever wonder why we established a Cemetery Endowment Fund, and why we push to build the endowment?

Care for the Old Smithville Burying Ground, and care for the other cemeteries in the city, is assigned to Building and Grounds Department, and in turn to its Recreation Component. No extra monies have been allocated to them since they assumed the mowing of the cemeteries. Cemetery care comes at the bottom of the priorities list. We cannot argue that point. Recreation sites such as baseball diamonds, football fields, Franklin Park, and other places used by the living general public come before the cemeteries.

The Cemetery Endowment Fund was established to build for a broader future care. However, perhaps it is time to consider some small activity with our little bit of interest. We might pay to repair one marker. We might help lay out a guided walkway through the cemetery. I think the city would help us with something like this. We might think of some special tree trimming such as was done in the Wilmington's Oakdale Cemetery with some of their old, overgrown trees. Maybe we should use our money to hire expert nurseryman advice.

With Oakdale Cemetery in mind, I looked at our cemetery the other day. There are many trees and bushes that would be suitable for that type of "tidy-up" trimming. Pairs of little evergreens, planted 50 years ago, are now unsightly trees. Little hedges of azaleas, planted many years ago, are now big, weedy and ugly. Our city would not undertake anything "artistic" on their own, but perhaps we could give them guidance. Maybe one or both of the city garden clubs would help us if we lead. The city crew could help, if we coordinate such an effort this fall.

We need to remember our Cemetery Endowment Fund, with donations to go into the fund capital. Donations are recognized and recorded in a Book of Remembrance for amounts in increments of \$25, \$50, \$100, and even \$500. This book is on display in the Old Jail during the Fourth of July Celebrations. Anonymous Donations can be kept anonymous. This helps with businesses who would like to make a donation, but don't want other worthy causes to expect the same. We can accept donations "In Honor of someone", and "Remembering Someone" This is a good way to gift a person who has everything, and a remembrance that will not fade like flowers. We have cards to send to the recipients of such gifts.

We need to remind the city aldermen that a moratorium was placed on new burials in the Old Smithville Burying Ground several years ago. Yet burials continue there. We probably have a "layered" burial ground with many older remains known only to God. Families of these recent burials either don't know about our Fund, or don't want to donate to it.

The Cemetery Endowment Fund is managed by the Historical Society Elected Officers who serve as a Board of Management. The Historical Society supports the fund and has paid expenses which have occurred, such as postage and printing for letters requesting donations.

Each donation given to the Cemetery Endowment Fund goes into that fund's capital. All donations large and small are welcome. Make your donations, and remember to tell your friends and other organizations about the fund. We have several members who make yearly donations. Maybe you could do that?

Abbie Bitney, Cemetery Chairman

HISTORY NEWS

HERITAGE QUILT: Construction of the Southport Bicentennial Quilt got underway on Thursday, June 13, as members of the Southport Historical Society's "Quilting Team", under the direction of Mrs. Susan Kaufman, met in the Fellowship Hall of the Southport Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Mary L. Russ, Home Extension Agent with the Cooperative Extension Service, Bolivia, was present and gave the group detailed instructions and suggestions for a quality production. The team members present began making practice squares as the various techniques were demonstrated by Mrs. Russ, who had prepared practice kits for each person.

The designs for the quilt, depicting scenes of well-known landmarks of Southport had been ably prepared by our Society President, Don Johnson. All who have seen the designs agree that Don has done a superb job for us. We look forward to a beautiful finished quilt that we will be proud of for many years to come.

Those in attendance at the first Quilt Team meeting were Mrs. Betty Gavin, Mrs. Thelma Dunn, Mrs. Joan Lawrence, Mrs. Donna Michaux, Mrs. Valma Rabon, Mrs. Laverne Rehder, Mrs. Eleanor Smith, Mrs. Russ, Mrs. Kaufman, and Mrs. Susan Carson who will serve as Project Historian, Photographer and Recorder (but not a quilter!) Four members of the team were out of town for the initial meeting but will be back in time for the second meeting.

Incidentally, there are thirty designs in the quilt. Some of the designs show the Old Jail, the Kate Stuart House, "Crimes of the Heart House", the Fort Johnston Officers Quarters, the Bald Head Lighthouse, Price's Creek Lighthouse, and the Old Smithville Burying Ground.

NEW LIFETIME MEMBER: For those who were not at the last meeting, we are happy to report that Roy Pollitt of Disputanta, Virginia, was made a lifetime member of the Society as a way of expressing to him our thanks for the valuable and numerous books he has given to the Society for its Genealogical Collection.

Others who have become members recently are Mr. and Mrs. William L. McGowan, Jr., Mrs. Eileen McGowan Reed, and Captain and Mrs. C. R. Calhoun. We extend a hearty welcome to our new members.

As the Fourth of July Festival rapidly approaches, the History Page Editor felt the readers would probably be interested in a history of the Old Jail. During the Festival much attention is focused on the Old Jail and many questions are asked about it. The Society is making extra copies of this issue of Whittlers Bench available for distribution at the Old Jail, so our "Looking Back" this time will feature the Jail's history.