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WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue Southport, North Carolina 28461

Volume XXIII, No. 1 January 1999

Pot Luck & Program

Friday 6:30 January 22

Colonial Economics and Naval Stores

presented by Charles Williams, National Park Ranger at Moore's Creek Battlefield

President's Notes

by Chris Suiter

Southport, like most places, has always been plagued by an organizational parochialism in which all the various clubs, societies, etc. have competed for attention, assets, and people. One of the worst examples of this occurred several years ago when four different organizations simultaneously submitted requests to the State government to share in a windfall grant of substantial size. No one in Raleigh was willing to prioritize our requests, so Southport got nothing. We have to take an ecumenical approach to this sort of thing and try to set Southport's priorities in Southport! In line with this, I think we all agree that the rebuilding of the Community Building is important to the entire community; consequently the SHS Board of Directors has voted to donate \$2,500 to this project, payable in \$500 increments over five years.

Recently the SHS has participated in several joint projects and will continue to do so. Our closest collaborators are the Maritime Museum and Southport 2000. We have several connections with the Museum people, who have sold our books for years (and, this year, coverlets), provided meeting space, and much other assistance-they have a building, a shop, and an office; we have people, money, and a newsletter. (In line with this, we are enclosing a recruiting appeal for their Friends.) Many of you already know that SHS organized and staffed the Southport Visitor Center for Sunday coverage in conjunction with Southport 2000. Let's all play on the same team!

Another joint project has been the erection of monuments in the old cemetery to Generals Howe and Smith. SHS provided some seed money, and a Maritime Museum Committee led by Bob Thorsen grabbed the ball and ran with it! Donations received as of December 18 were \$1915 (in addition to the SHS contribution of \$800). All work to date has been paid for, and there is a balance on hand of \$1,445 to begin completion. Of course, additional donations will be needed, but it certainly is an impressive start. Go by and see the work in progress adjacent to the Lost Pilots' Monument.

All of us were saddened by the recent and unexpected death of SHS member Jim Ruark. Jim's legacy to the Society is an awesome genealogical data base of thousands of names which he constructed over the past several years. This invaluable resource did not exist until Jim lovingly created it.

Susan Carson, Editor



The Final Voyage of the Mary K. Sprunt

By Jim McNeil

or most Southerners, the years following the Civil War were filled with hardships. There was little money even for basic necessities. Few of the Cape Fear pilots and their families escaped the poverty that afflicted the land. But life goes on and the pilotage continued to attract young men seeking the challenge of bringing ships across the bar.

Wartime or not, pilots always face the perils endured by those who choose to brave the ocean in small boats. When a pilot boat fails to return as expected, especially with storm winds whipping the waters of Cape Fear, families wait anxiously. Sometimes, they wait in vain.

On December 13, 1872, the families of five Cape Fear pilots awaited word of their men who had been missing at sea for two days. Two of the pilots had been blockade runners: Joseph Bensel, of the *City of Petersburg*, and Thomas Brinkman of the *Condor*. The other three, too young to have run the blockade, were John D. Trott (24), James R. Sellers (21) and Robert St. George (22). Two days before their boat had been caught in a storm. Searches by the Revenue cutter *Seward* and the tug *Alpha* of the area where it had last been seen proved fruitless.

Days passed with no trace of the missing men. Hopes faded, replaced by grim acceptance that the pilots had perished. Christmas came. A few days later word reached Smithville that the wreckage of a boat which could have been the sea dory of the Cape Fear pilots had washed ashore at Tubs Inlet, near Little River. The following February, two months after the accident, near Battery Island was found the body of Thomas Brinkman. No one ever found the remains of the other men.

In a single accident, five Cape Fear pilots had lost their lives. Over the following years the tragedy remained on the minds of many who lived at Cape Fear, a graphic reminder of the perils of a storm-swept sea. In August of 1875 residents of Bald Head Island told stories of ghosts who appeared at midday in the halls of houses, mysterious writing on floors and unexplained moving of furniture. Some said the drowned pilots were responsible.

On April 14, 1877, Smithville families were again anxiously awaiting word of pilots missing at sea. Two pilot boats carrying a total of ten pilots had failed to return to port after a fearful storm ravaged Cape Fear. Among the distressed parents who waited on shore were Charles Gause Dosher and his wife Susan. Their son Charles Jr. was among the missing, along with the husbands of two of their

daughters.

Two days before in clear weather, four Cape Fear pilot boats put to sea—the Henry Westerman, the J. H. Neff, the Uriah Timmons and the Mary K. Sprunt. The - Westerman and the Neff returned that evening.

The next day, Friday the thirteenth, "a terrible storm of wind and rain raged all day long." At six o'clock in the morning the winds picked up from the east. Before the day ended more than three inches of rain had drenched the sandy streets of Smithville. Winds gusting to seventy miles per hour knocked down telegraph lines. The Frying Pan lightship broke her anchor line. Vessels were driven ashore, along with two pilot boats. But the *Timmons* and the *Sprunt* were not among them.

The *Timmons* sailed under the command of one of the most experienced of the Cape Fear blockade runners, Captain C. C. (Kit) Morse. With him were Joseph T. Thompson, another blockade runner, along with Julius Weeks, C. Grissom and Joe Arnold. The five pilots were accompanied by two black sailors. The *Timmons* had been built in 1873 for Kit Morse and Julius Dosher at the Cassidey shipyard in Wilmington and was known as a fast sailer, having opposed Charleston pilot boats in Fourth of July races.

The Mary K. Sprunt, named in honor of a daughter of Alexander Sprunt, had been launched in Smithville in February of 1876. Built by William R. Dosher, Charles' cousin, she measured fifty-five feet overall, forty-three feet at the waterline, with a sixteen-foot beam and seven-foot depth of hold. She belonged to Charles Dosher, Jr. and his two brothers-in-law, Robert S. Walker and Christopher C. Pinner.

Captain Dosher and his brothers-in-law had been accompanied by three other pilots. On Thursday afternoon, eighteen to twenty miles north of Frying Pan Shoals, the *Sprunt* had pulled alongside the British brigantine *Baltic* for Jim Williams to board her to bring her into the harbor. The most experienced of the five pilots remaining on the *Sprunt* was Thomas B. Grissom, age thirty-nine, who had brought the *Lilian* through the blockade. The youngest at twenty-three was Lawrence Gillespie. A steward completed the crew.

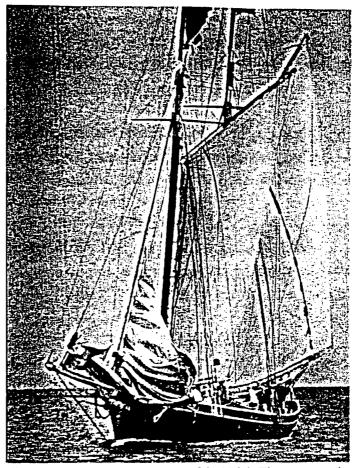
When the storm struck Cape Fear, both pilot boats stood well offshore. Neither could return to port.

In the days which followed, news of the missing vessels came slowly. On Saturday, townspeople standing on shore could see the pilot boat *Swift* lying on oyster rocks in the bay with her keel sprung and the pilot boat *Nellie Neff* lying in the marsh. But they heard nothing of the *Timmons* and the *Sprunt*.

On Sunday the fifteenth, the steamer Lucille arrived from Baltimore. Her master, Captain Bennett, reported that he encountered the gale south of Hatteras and

had to scud his steamer to within thirty miles of Frying Pan Shoals before he could haul her to a stop. At eleven o'clock on Saturday morning he passed the Frying Pan lightship twenty miles southeast of her station. At the same time he passed a pilot boat. Judging by her rigging and her color, he made her to be the Timmins. According to Captain Bennett, the boat seemed "to lying very comfortably."

As the words of the captain were repeated in the town, the families and friends of Kit Morse and the other pilots aboard the *Timmons* could afford to ease their vigil. But the fate of the *Sprunt*



There are no surviving pictures of the Uriah Timmons or the Mary K. Sprunt. A granddaughter of Charles Gause Dosher. Esther Dosher Eriksen. clipped this picture from a newspaper and kept it always because she said it looked just like the Sprunt. The Timmons probably resembled this vessel also.

remained uncertain. . . . (the conclusion to "Final Voyage" in the next newsletter)

Southport Historical Society membership

individual	\$ 10	student \$2	business / org	anization	\$15	
couple lifetime	15 150	(up to age 18) lifetime couple 2	sustaining 00	25		
please print	nai	me				
	ade	dress				
	city, state, zip					
	tele	ephone				

mail to: 501 North Atlantic Avenue, Southport, NC 28461

Southport Maritime Museum

Southport Maritime Museum, Inc. is a nonprofit organization, devoted to the maritime history of the Lower Cape Fear. In 1978 the Brunswick County Courthouse, located in Southport since 1808, was moved to a more centralized location at Bolivia, and the downtown area of Southport soon suffered economically. The museum was originally conceived as a method to bolster the city's economy through tourism, and its Board of Directors successfully opened the doors in June of 1992 at 116 N. Howe Street. It continues to be funded by allocations provided by the City of Southport, Brunswick County, private donations, grants, "Friends of the Museum", sales, and a nominal admission charge for adults. The site is leased on a yearly basis, with (1) exhibits on the first floor of the building once known as "Harrelson's Appliance Store", with (2) exhibits, research library, and lecture room in the physically connected "Telephone Building" on I Am Alley, and with (3) storage in the old Caroon Crab Company on Bay Street. With careful use of its advertising dollars, and with positive publicity nationwide in news articles and travel magazines, the Southport Maritime Museum is now acknowledged as an important "must stop" by visitors to Southeastern North Carolina. It is one of seven sites on the River Circle Tour, which includes the Battleship N.C., CP&L Visitors Center, Brunswick Town, Fort Fisher Civil War Museum, N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher and Orton Plantation Gardens. It is also a member of the State of N.C.'s Maritime Heritage Trail, showing traveling exhibits such as the "QAR" (thought to be Blackbeard's Flagship "Queen Anne's Revenge").

The Southport Maritime Museum houses a collection of memorabilia pertaining to the vast nautical history of our area, while telling the story of the Cape Fear region's people and their relationship to the water--a tale of tides, wind, and ocean. It is a story of exploration, piracy, and commerce; of pilotage, salvage, and fishing. The museum staff provides a large variety of educational and entertaining programs about the past, present and future, both in-house and outreach, for school classes, organizations and tour groups. The staff also uses the on-site research library to satisfy requests for information on maritime subjects, the civil war, and local family genealogy. It has an excellent working relationship with the Southport Historical Society as an outlet for the Society's book and coverlet sales, and provides meeting room space at no cost.

The museum has satisfied its original purpose, that of helping correct the faltering economy of Southport. And, while accomplishing this, it has contributed to the intellectual growth of our youngsters, instilling a new awareness and respect for the strengths of their own forefathers. It is with the generous financial support of the City of Southport and the County of Brunswick that we are able to operate and grow yearly, but the support of our devoted "Friends" is essential to the continuance of the services the museum provides to the people of this community. Membership dues have always remained the same, but a change in scheduling of renewals will begin this new year of 1999, coinciding with the museum's fiscal calendar July 1-June 30. Anyone joining now will have their year's membership extended to June 30, 2000, as will all <u>current</u> members. We look forward to having you in our family.

Family Membership	\$30.	All Memberships include free admission,
Individual Membership	\$15.	10% sales discount, and occasional
Student Membership	\$ 5.	announcements and newsletters.
Business Membership	\$50.	Thank you - Mary E. Strickland, Ex. Director

Introducing the Southport Coverlet

This beautiful coverlet was commissioned by the Southport Historical Society and created by We Love Country. It is 100% cotton, two-layer, Jacquard woven in the U.S.A., preshrunk, colorfast and machine-washable. It is handsome and practical, measuring approximately 48 x 68 inches, and fringed on all four sides.

The design captures the history and spirit of early Southport, as seen in old photographs taken many years ago. Depicted are the Brunswick County Courthouse, the Pilot obelisk at the old cemetery, the Ft. Johnston Garrison House, the Masonic Hall during World War I, the entrance (1912) of the Southport Public Library, the Old Jail, the early school (1904) which is now an art gallery, Dosher Memorial Hospital, St. Philip's, Trinity Methodist, the old Pilot tower, Prince's Creek light, Old Baldy on Bald Head Island, the Indian Trail Tree and the Historical Society logo. The perfect gift for family members and friends both near and far, it captures special memories and will become an instant keepsake.

This unique, custom woven coverlet is available in the following classic colors: Williamsburg Blue, Hunter Green and Cranberry Red, all with Natural as a second color. The price is only \$50.00. Member discount, 10%. Please enter the desired quantity of each color: Williamsburg Blue @ \$50.00 each Hunter Green @ \$50.00 each \$____ ___ Cranberry Red @ \$50.00 each Sales Tax @ 6% Total enclosed Checks should be made payable to The Southport Historical Society and mailed to 501 N. Atlantic Ave., Southport, NC 28461. Ordered by: City ______ State _____ ZIP _____

The Book Page

Southport Historical Society is actively engaged in publishing books dealing with the history of the lower Cape Fear. Works listed below are available for sale by the Society, and at book stores in the area.

Architecture of Southport, by Carl Lounsbury. Southport Historical Society, second printing 1966, 62 pp., soft-cover. \$15.00. The styles of old Southport homes are described and illustrated.

Cap'n Charlie and the Lights of the Lower Cape Fear, by Ethel Herring. Southport Historical Society, fourth printing 1995, 120 pp, ill., soft-cover. \$10.00.

The Cemeteries of Southport, compiled by Dorcas W. Schmidt. Southport Historical Society, 1983, 94 pp., soft-cover. \$8.00. A unique reference book listing names of those buried in the cemeteries of Southport and environs.

Fort Caswell in War and Peace, by Ethel Herring and Carolee Williams. Published by Broadfoot's Bookmark, Wendell, North Carolina, 1983. 138 pp., ill., hard-cover. Sold out. New edition expected in mid-1998.

A History of Brunswick County, by Lawrence Lee. Published by Brunswick County, Bolivia, North Carolina. 1980, 279 pp., ill., hard-cover, \$18.30

A History of Fort Johnston, by Wilson Angley. Includes index. Published by Southport Historical Society, in association with the Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1996, 150 pp., ill., soft-cover. \$10.00.

Joshua's Dream, a history of old Southport by Susan S. Carson. First printing published by Carolina Power & Light Company in 1992, second printing published by Southport Historical Society, 1994. 168 pp., ill., soft-cover. \$15.00.

Long Beach, A North Carolina Town: Its Origin and History, by Wolfgang Furstenau. Published by the author in Long Beach, NC. 1995, 2. printing 1997, 364 pp., ill., hard-cover, \$17.95

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology, Volume I, 1520-1887, by Bill Reaves. Published by Broadfoot Publishing Company: Wilmington, North Carolina, 1978. Second edition 1985, 129 pp., ill., soft-cover. \$15.00.

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology, Volume II, 1887-1920, by Bill Reaves. Published by Southport Historical Society, Southport, North Carolina, 1978. Second edition 1990, 324 pp., ill., soft-cover. \$20.00.

Southport-Brunswick County, North Carolina, Volume III, 1920-1940, A Chronology by Bill Reaves. Published by Southport Historical Society, Southport, North Carolina, 1996, 248 pp., 46-page index, ill., soft-cover. First edition. \$12.00.

Southport Secrets, compiled by Donald K. Johnson. Published by Southport Historical Society, Southport, NC. 1998, 88 pp., ill., soft-cover. \$12.95.

Note: Membership entitles you to purchase these books from the Society at a 10% discount. Please include \$2.00 per book for mail orders.