



# THE WHITTLERS BENCH

## Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue  
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XXI, NUMBER TWO, MARCH 1997

### REGULAR MEETING

The March meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, March 27, 1997, at the Southport Maritime Museum on Howe Street. (Please note that the time is later than usual, since this will not be a dinner meeting. Refreshments will be served after the program.) Local historian (and native Southporter) Bob ("Twit") Thorsen will give a program on the effects on the Southport waterfront of the hurricane of October 31, 1899, and the evidence of that event uncovered by the two 1996 hurricanes in the area in front of Fort Johnston. (Also you'll get a chance to ask "Twit" how he got his name!)

### "OUR STATE" MAGAZINE

We have made arrangements with this fine old magazine to have them pay the Southport Historical Society \$5.00 from each new subscription we can recruit. They sent us 150 free copies of the March issue of the magazine, featuring an article on Bald Head Island and Reese Swan, and prepared copies of a form letter to go with them, explaining the program. Come to the meeting and get your free copy of the magazine; the letter (complete with mistake--aren't spelling verifiers wonderful?) is included on the back of this page.

### NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members:

James and Aileen Boyer, California  
Robert Ernest, Long Beach  
Richard and Sue Mosley, St. James Plantation  
Betty Jane Williams, Florida  
Joseph and Yvonne Williams, Connecticut

(How does Susie Carson find all these out-of-towners?)



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Dear Southport Members & Perspective Members,

March 1997

As you know, some things are worth preserving. Since 1933, *Our State - Down Home In North Carolina* has been the only magazine devoted to travel, history, and folklore of the Tar Heel state. In fact, it is the oldest regional magazine in America. Please enjoy your complimentary copy. Don't miss the Bald Head Island story which features local legend Reece Swan.

*Our State* would like to offer you an opportunity to discover the colorful publication that covers everything from art to agriculture. In addition, the publisher wants to contribute a donation to the Historical Society.

For \$19.75 you can receive a 12 month subscription to *Our State*. With each new subscription, they will contribute \$5 to the Southport Historical Society.

Simply fill out the following subscription form and mail to *Our State* in the return address envelope. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

*Christopher A. Suiter*

Chris Suiter

-----cut here & return-----  
Yes, I want to subscribe!

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Southport Historical Society

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Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your subscription to begin. Thank you for your order.  
Offer expires May 31, 1997. (offer 44)

# "Looking Back" - The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MARCH 1997



The Editor is delighted to continue with the Foxy Howard "sagas" about Old Southport.

"The Sawdust Trail (where the Sawdust Trail branch of UCB is now located) has close ties with Jabber Town, and it's name also developed from references by the citizens of that community to the conditions in the area. About half of the Jabber Town males, those who didn't work on the menhaden fleet, worked at one of the nearby sawmills. The trail branching off to the right toward Jabbertown from the ruts leading on toward present-day Supply was boggy at best, and was more likely than not to be just an elongated mud puddle for days following a rain.

As at all sawmills of the time, large mounds of sawdust had formed at the various sawmill sites and all of the workers began filling their empty lunch pails, some even filled their pockets, at quitting time with sawdust to dump on the boggy areas to soak up the water. Sometimes mule-drawn wagons delivering lumber to Southport carpenters would carry tow sacks filled with sawdust to dump in the worst spots. After several years of this practice, the mud puddles were wiped out and the whole trail was a foot deep in sawdust - hence 'The Sawdust Trail'.

I know how Pete's Camp (where is this, Foxy?), and the area over at Yaupon known as the Horsepen. But now I'm a-wondering how the area past the Little League Park came to be known as The Cottages. There used to be a pretty good swimming hole over there, maybe there still is, but as far as I know there were no cottages there. And how about Bowery Hill? And Bowensville out near the ferry landing at Price's Creek? How did those names develop, and what connection to local lore do they bear? There may be other stories in the making, especially about Bowensville. Who were the Bowens? Was Bowensville a one-family town or was there a real settlement with streets and houses? Actually I have seen the old foundations of several small houses or cabins out there, but they lay in haphazard fashion with no evidence of streets. Bowensville is identified on large-scale maps of Southport that show that area; but just when did Bowensville exist, and when did it die? I think I'll find out."

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Foxy, we hope you will find the answers to your questions and will write about them. Maybe I can help just a little:

(1) In Vol. II of the Southport Chronology we find this under date of 1891: "Cottage Place, a new subdivision in the northwest section of Southport was advertised by W. B. Stevens." Sometime in my various research projects I have seen a copy of the map of "Cottage Place. Our own member, Mrs. Margaret Harper is a member of the Stevens family that laid out the subdivision. Maybe she will share with us the story behind it. How about it, Margaret?

(2) A long time ago - when I was a child - I remember going to Bowensville with my Daddy who had a sawmill in the area and some of his workers lived there. As I remember, it consisted of several houses on a bluff overlooking the Cape Fear and the area was often referred to as The Cliffs. The cliffs seemed so high to me that I often dreamed of falling off into the river - and I never even went close to the edge! Let's see if we can find anyone who remembers more than this about Bowensville.

## LOOKING BACK, CONTINUED

In view of the fact that we will soon be able to purchase Volume III of Bill Reaves' Southport Chronology, Bill has prepared for us a story about Volume I of the Chronology - our very first publishing effort. You will find it on another sheet.

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We do not have a lot to report for ROOTS, TWIGS AND BRANCHES this time, but I think we will by our next issue! Several of us amateur genealogists have been having some "secret meetings" and making some plans that we will soon reveal to you. We are delighted to report that Doreen Holtz, finding out that she just can't live without us, has moved back to the area and is active again. As soon as she gets her computer set up we will have three computer genealogists ready to go. You'll be hearing more about this.

We have received a generous gift from the Lewis Hardee family in memory of the late Lewis Hardee, Sr. We appreciate this so much.

Also, two couples who have joined our Society since the last newsletter, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Williams, and Mr. and Mrs. James S. Boyer; and Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Butters, longtime members, have made contributions to the Cemetery Fund. We certainly do appreciate these gifts. Perhaps before long we will be able to report that work has started.

Bob Thorsen, Chairman of the Cemetery Committee, has some plans that he will tell us about later. We are now compiling a mailing list of people we know who have ancestors buried in Old Smithville Cemetery and we hope to enlist their help in this effort to preserve the cemetery.

John R. Woodard, of Wake Forest University, in a chapter written for Helen F. M. Leary's book, NORTH CAROLINA RESEARCH GENEALOGY AND LOCAL HISTORY, states that church records are excellent sources of information for genealogists, and that the following are available in North Carolina:

- Baptist: North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Room 207, Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 27109
- Catholic: Roman Catholic N.C. Archives, 300 Cardinal Gibbons Drive, Raleigh, NC 27603
- Christian Church: Historical Society of the Southern Convention of Congregational Christian Churches, Elon College, NC 27244
- Episcopal: Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, 201 St. Albans Drive, Raleigh, NC 27619
- Lutherans: Archives of the N.C. Synod of the Lutheran Church of America, N.C. Synod Church House. P.O. Box 2049, Salisbury, NC 28144
- Methodist: Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, 39 Lake Shore Drive, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745
- Presbyterian: Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Montreat Assembly, Montreat, NC 28757
- Quakers: The Quaker Collection Library, Guilford College, 5800 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410

With a very small treasury and a lot of perseverance, the Southport Historical Society published its first book in 1978 entitled SOUTHPORT (SMITHVILLE) - A CHRONOLOGY - VOLUME I (1520-1887). With very little knowledge of the how-to and the work involved, the Society jumped in because of their enthusiasm and their thoughts of the importance of the preservation of the community's very long and important history. Just imagine, a book about the formative years of the town of Smithville! The work began with the author, Bill Reaves, ex-employee of the Brunswick Town State Historic Site, who had collected a large amount of research materials on "The City By The Sea." Arrangements were made with the Postal Instant Press (P.I.P.), owned by Nelda and Charlie Illick, in Wilmington, to copy the pages typed by the author, along with designing a nice cover picturing the honorable Benjamin Smith, the town's namesake, and a few photos and maps for inside the book. After a short time, a large number of boxes were hauled from Wilmington to the board room of the then Southport Public Library, and a call went out to the "troops" to assemble for an old-fashioned game of "Follow the Leader." Without any problems and lots of energy, a group assembled which were to work for two or three days in the assembly of the book. Among the volunteers there were Eleanor Smith, the Society's first president; Elizabeth Watkins, Dot Schmidt and her husband, H.A. (Smitty), Bob and Llena Thorsen, Miss Kathryn Carson, Susie Sellers Carson, Pauline and John Swain, and the humble author, Bill. Others dropped in from time to time. You can well imagine a small room, with a long wooden meeting table stacked high with piles of printed pages in numerical order, and with a lot of laughs and a lot of circles around the table, the books were slowly assembled. At the end of the table was big Bill with the largest stapler he could find. Believe me it took muscle to press that stapler with those long staples through about 150 pages. His left arm, after the project was completed, had a bicep Charles Atlas would have been proud of. This did not end the job though. We had to cover the staples on the edge of the book with a strip of plastic tape in a lovely shade of blue to give the product of all our hard work with a finished touch. Just about every store in the Southport area and in Wilmington suddenly ran out of their supply of blue plastic tape. What was going on?

(over)

Memories of those many circles around that long table remain among many of our present-day members. There are still chuckles when they think about getting mixed up in line because the one in front was getting tired and going too slow. Passing was forbidden! It did occur a couple of times and it took a while to straighten out the mixed-up pages. Another break-down in the system occurred during coffee-breaks or having to go to the restroom. Everything came to a halt! Some brave souls tried assembling two or three pages at the same time. In this day and times robots have been invented for this same kind of work, but what a memory we can enjoy today.

With a great deal of pride, the book went on sale on July 2, 1978 during Southport's annual Fourth of July celebration. The book was dedicated to Miss Annie May Woodside, "Southport's Lady of Quality," and she was given the honor of cutting the ribbon opening the book sales booth next to the "Curiosity Shop" on Howe Street.

Well, Volume II was printed without any of the fun and excitement as was accompanied with the first book. Now, we are having Volume III printed, and the author has also completed Volume IV to be offered in the future. Who would have ever thought that Southport (Smithville) had such a long history to relate? Don't be surprised to see one more, a Volume V. in a year or two. This will contain everything that was missed or researched since the first four volumes were published. What other town in North Carolina of Southport's size can boast of such an undertaking, beginning in 1978, and continuing yet today.

(Note: Volumes I and II have been reprinted due to their popularity, and they are available from the Southport Historical Society.)

WMR

## 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. \$10.00.

*The History of Brunswick County*, by Enoch Lawrence Lee. Published by Brunswick County, NC, 1980, reprinted 1996, 279 pp., hard-cover. \$11.00.

*A History of Fort Johnston*, by Wilson Angley. 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*, 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.

*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., 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., soft-cover. \$20.00.

*Southport (Smithville), A Chronology, Volume III, 1920-1940*, by Bill Reaves. Published by Southport Historical Society, Southport, North Carolina, 1996, 248 pp., soft-cover. Available early 1997.

Note: Membership entitles you to purchase these books from the Society at a 10% discount.