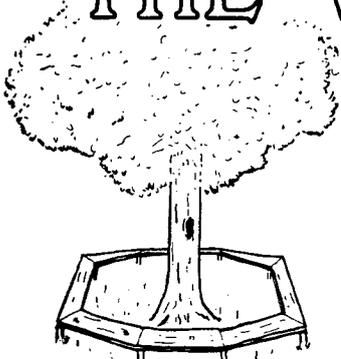


THE WHITTLERS BENCH



SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

501 N. Atlantic Ave. • SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA 28461

APRIL 1987

BILL MARTIN TO SPEAK AT APRIL MEETING: Your Editor and your president owe Mr. Martin and the Society an apology for being so late in getting out this issue of Whittlers Bench. Maybe income tax time, Easter guests and things like that can be blamed somewhat - but maybe the biggest reason is we forgot to look at our calendars! Please forgive us; we promise to do better!

Our Program Chairman, Mrs. Eleanor Smith, has arranged a program for us to be held on Thursday, April 23rd at 7:30 P. M. at the Library. Our guest speaker is Mr. Bill Martin, Educational Coordinator at the N. C. Marine Resource Center at Fort Fisher. Please plan to attend. Bring a friend with you. All our meetings and programs are open to the public.

TWO MEMBERS OF SOCIETY NAMED TO COUNTY COMMITTEE FOR CELEBRATION OF THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE U. S. CONSTITUTION: Mrs. Abbie Bitney and Mrs. Susan Carson have been appointed members of the Brunswick County Committee for the Celebration of the Bicentennial of the U. S. Constitution. The committee will serve for several years, but one of the main observances will be in September of this year. Details on this will come later.

HEIRLOOM GARDEN: Barbara Rhodes is chairing the committee working on the planting of traditional native flowers around the Old Jail and on other public land, including the triangle between Moore Street and River Road. This project is also eligible for recognition on a national level as a part of the Constitution Bicentennial project known as "Living Legacy" and the application for such is being prepared by Barbara and her committee.

TRIP TO TRYON'S PALACE: You probably heard by way of telephone that your Society and the local chapter of AARP are participating in a bus trip to New Bern as a "History Tour" to visit the Tryon Palace complex and other sites of interest in the Historic New Bern area. It is hoped that the Society members who take the tour will go with the group who will be visiting the Old Cemetery for ideas that will help up with our restoration and preservation project of the Old Smithville Burying Ground.

The tour bus will leave from behind the Southport City Hall at 8:00 A. M. on Thursday, May 7th, and return by 5:30 in the afternoon. The bus has 46 seats and all are taken, unless we have cancellations. The bus fare is \$10.00. Each person is responsible for his own admission fees and lunch. Should you wish get on the alternate list, please contact Jack Fairley at 457-5512.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE TIME: It is time for us to secure a Nominating Committee. The committee will make its report at the Oct. meeting and we will elect a slate at that time to take office in January 1988. Be thinking of someone to serve on the committee and also of suggestions to make to that committee. All members should feel free to make suggestions.

Mr. Huske was the first mover of a town near the Fort, and I myself was to become the operator. I stepped off the ground from the old Fort southward to the first small creek. The distance was shorter than what was wished. I accordingly wrote Mr. Huske; notwithstanding I was prevailed on to form a petition to be circulated through Brunswick County, setting forth the prayer of the inhabitants that an act of the Assembly might be passed for the establishment of such a town.

The said petition accompanies the report, No. 2, (not found with the monograph) J. Potts having written said petition was applied to for it by Charles Gause, Esq., a leading inhabitant of Brunswick County, who undertook the exhibition of it in order to obtain subscribers names. This was performed and introduced to the General Assembly which in that year sat at Fayetteville.

The whole intention was unexpectedly opposed by Gen. Smith who was then a member of and for Brunswick County. It was said he supported his negative role on account of two or three pilots who had built their houses, by public permission promiscuously on said land-as it was, however, he had influence to stop the proceeding in the Assembly, and thus ended the prospects of a town at that time.

Some people in Wilmington and others in Brunswick County, being disappointed in their expectations of a town were said to have imputed the opposition of Gen. S. to the cause, not of pilots, but that he had not been previously consulted in and about the business.

Now, so it was that the old Fort Johnston as well as the surrounding lands was the the property of the State of North Carolina, and that power alone the petitioners had relied on for the grant alluded to.

Capt. John Brown and Joshua Potts determined, however, not to abandon the place, and fearless of any molestation proceeded to occupy as a temporary residence for Summer and Autumn, each a few square feet near the shore, and accordingly proceeded to have each a cabin formed and framed in Wilmington and procured a sufficiency of boards and shingles to complete these; employed a pettiauger and put on board the frames and other materials of both houses, engaged carpenters with their tools and both families of said John and Joshua, with plenty of provisions, etc., all together went on board the lighter at Wilmington, arrived at Fort Johnston and there landed the whole.

In a few days afterwards we had erected each a summer house, in a temporary manner, near the water, between where is now Mrs. Wade's and the beach. The said two houses, or camps, had not chimneys of any kind, and only rough shutters to the windows (no glass), the whole of the sawmill roughness, as a plane had not been used about them. Our two families were thus coarsely encamped; and instead of a kitchen our cooking fires were made among thick bushes near hand, which screened the inconvenience of the wind, but rain would sometimes moisten our cooking and depredating hogs would run off with our hot cakes in their mouths.

In this way our families enjoyed health, cool breezes and a coarse way of living several Summers. In the meantime Capt. B. and myself became expert fishermen.

During these rugged scenes there was no town laid off, and only a few neighbors, pilots and their families.

The first twelve months had nearly expired after the failure of the bill at Fayetteville and the General Assembly were next to sit at Newbern. Who should come in my cabin at the Fort but the same old Mr. Charles Gause whose business it was to get me to write and renew the petition for the establishment of said town. I remember re-

minding Mr. Gause that any such attempt must be of no use as no doubt Gen. Smith would oppose it as before. Mr. Gause replied in a positive voice that if I would copy off the petition he would advocate it as before and that Gen. S. should not be sent to the Assembly unless he would use his endeavors to have a suitable act passed for the intended purpose. (The election was then pending).

Conformably to the request of Gause I then wrote off a new petition, much after the tenor of the first.

The venerable old man made his word good. Gen. S. was elected, went to Newbern and assisted to get the act passed and which is herewith enclosed. See No. 3 - passed at Newbern, November session, 1792.

The writer hereof remembers hearing Gen. S. say, when he returned from the Assembly, that on his making a motion and offering the bill for the act Mr. Macon or some other respectable member made an observation that many applications had been acted upon for different towns in the State, but that few, if any of them, had succeeded; that the said worthy member said as Gen. S. has applied in behalf of this petty town, it should be called Smithville, as if by way of derision to the applicant, should the town (like many others) not succeed.

The next desirable object was to secure my attention and services in laying off and beginning the necessary operation to form the town; see a letter from Gen. Smith dated Belvidere, January 29th, 1792, No. 4.

By reading over the first act of the Assembly, No. 3, it will be seen that the town was to consist of one hundred lots, with streets and squares; that each subscriber should pay forty shillings or four dollars, to the State, for each and every lot of half an acre he might determine, but no one person might subscribe to more than six lots, that many might have a chance.

The plan of the town was at length sketched off by Gen. Smith and J. Potts, and the lots numbered thereon, from No. 1 to No. 100. Meanwhile all the lots were subscribed for -

(Here the manuscript ended. All of the documents referred to by number have evidently been lost as they were not in the Southern Historical Collection. Since the last issue (January 1987) of Whittlers Bench, I have learned that the original town book, called a "waste book" because it was written on waste paper, to be transferred to the permanent town book, is in possession of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. A copy of the waste book has been made available to us and we are now in the process of having it "transcribed" so it can be carried in Whittlers Bench at a later date, if such proves feasible. We have not been able to locate the permanent town book for those very early days.)