



THE WHITTLERS BENCH

Southport Historical Society

501 North Atlantic Avenue
Southport, North Carolina 28461

VOLUME XXI, NUMBER THREE, MAY 1997

REGULAR MEETING

Our May meeting is a very special event, in conjunction with the City of Southport, to inaugurate Hurricane Awareness Week. The meeting will be held upstairs in Southport City Hall at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, May 22. (Please note that this will not be a dinner meeting.) The program will be given by Jay Barnes, the Director of the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores, on the history of hurricanes on the North Carolina coast. Jay, a native of Southport, is the author of North Carolina's Hurricane History. He will be available after the program to sign your copy of his book. If you don't already have one, copies are available at the Southport Maritime Museum. (FYI, the Pine Knoll Shores Aquarium is a sister institution to our local Fort Fisher Aquarium; the third "sister" is on Roanoke Island.)

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new (and returned) members:

Mr. & Mrs. John W. Byrne, Fuquay-Varina, N.C.

Thomas S. Bowmer, Southport

Betty Geers, Long Beach

Mr. & Mrs. Ennis B. Hardin, Southport

Joanne D. Jackson, Long Beach

James McKee, Southport

Mrs. Arthur L. Young, Oklahoma

Mr. & Mrs. James W. Evans, Southport

Mr. & Mr. Dan Harrelson, Southport

Mr. & Mrs. Walter J. Harrelson, Southport

Mr. & Mrs. Walter Madsen, Southport

Mr. & Mrs. John R. Samuel, Southport

BILL REAVES DAY - JUNE 1, 1997

The SHS invites all members to a reception in honor of Bill Reaves and his major contributions of three books on the history of Southport! The reception will be held in the lounge of the apartment building where he lives - Solomon Towers in Wilmington, at the corner of Front and Castle Streets. The date is Sunday, June 1, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. We are celebrating the completion of Volume III of the Southport Chronology series and his birthday, which is really June 3. RSVP (if planning to attend) to Marilyn Lessin (457-0004) or to Mary Shannon (686-7839) by May 20, 1997. We hope those of you who already know Bill and new members who have not yet had a chance to meet him will attend.

Of course, no issue of WHITTILERS BENCH would be quite complete without one or more of the articles that Bill Reaves continues to send in. We appreciate and enjoy these articles.

Source: THE WILMINGTON MESSENGER, 1-19-¹⁸⁹⁸~~1988~~

FATHER MACKIN REMEMBERS

After forty years, Rev. Father James F. Mackin, of Washington, D.C., returned to Southport, then Smithville, to visit friends and see what changes had taken place in the lower Cape Fear area after so many years.

About 1858, Father Mackin was wrecked off Smithville, and was rescued by Captain Joe Thompson and Captain Doshier, well known Cape Fear pilots, and he was cared for by Sergeants James Reilly and Jake Malarky, then in charge of Fort Caswell for the United States government. Sergeant Reilly was afterwards the gallant Major Reilly, of the Confederate States army, and one of the heroes of Fort Fisher.

Father Mackin belonged in Baltimore, Maryland, and came from the West Indies, working his way home as a sailor lad. He remained in the Smithville and Wilmington area for a couple of years and during that time of residence he served on the Frying Pan Shoals lightship with Captain John Wesley Galloway, father of Dr. W. C. Galloway and Capt. John W. Galloway. He spoke interestingly of the people who lived in the area in the 1850s.

On the evening of January 18, 1898 he was entertained at the hospitable home of Major D. O'Connor, of Wilmington, whose wife was the daughter of Major Reilly. During the visit it was learned that Major Reilly was the first to place a prayer book in the hands of the young sailor lad who afterwards became a convert and Catholic priest.

The next day with Colonel F.W. Kerchner, formerly of Baltimore, and a friend of the famous Bishop, later Cardinal Gibbons, they took a tour of the lower Cape Fear, stopping over at Fort Caswell and Southport. During the trip it was learned that he and Rev. Father M.S. Gross, so well known for serving at St. Thomas' Catholic Church in Wilmington, were ordained to the priesthood at the same time, and Father Gross, at the time of his death, was his assistant at Washington.

After his very satisfying visit to Southport and Wilmington, he departed for Fayetteville where he was to conduct services on the following Sunday.

"Looking Back" — The History Page

Susan Carson, Editor

MAY 1997



As Jimmy Harper once said in his "Waterfront" column of THE STATE
PORT PILOT: "And ever since that day Hurricane Hazel is the yardstick by
which we have measured all other storms."

Since our Historical Society meeting this month will be centered on the
subject of hurricanes, I thought this might be a good time to look back at
some headlines in the newspapers immediately following that fateful day
of October 15, 1954:

WILMINGTON MORNING STAR, Saturday, October 16, 1954:

"ROARING HURRICANE TOLL 3 LIVES, 3 MISSING,
MILLIONS LOST IN SENC's GREATEST DISASTER"

Brunswick County Counts 3 Fatalities In
Wake of Hazel

Other SENC Regions Feel Fury of Storm

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER (Raleigh), Saturday, October 16, 1954:

Hurricane Brings Death and Destruction

Death Toll Up to 11; Damage Into Millions

THE SUNDAY STAR-NEWS (Wilmington), Sunday, October 17, 1954:

Hurricane Hazel Leaves 107 Dead Raging from
Carolinas Into Canada

Red Cross To Give Relief Aid To Hurricane Losers

Ten Die As High Tide Beats Brunswick Area
To Rubble

THE STATE PORT PILOT, Wednesday, October 20, 1954:

BRUNSWICK HIT BY HURRICANE
Nine Persons Killed, Millions in Property Damage In Worst
Disaster in County History

Heavy Equipment Left Undamaged at Sunny Point

EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION TO SUNNY POINT CONTRACTORS

As Mayor, Board of Aldermen and Citizens of Southport, we feel that our thanks and the thanks of all the citizens of Southport are due to the Sunny Point Contractors and their employees for their great work in aiding in restoration following the storm.

DIAMOND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY:

For two large cranes and crews and the work they did in getting boats back into the water, removing trees and other heavy wreckage from the streets.

T. F. SCHOLLES, INC.:

For furnishing motor carriers to bring in heavy equipment and trucks and men.

HERTFORD-CECIL COMPANIES:

For furnishing cranes and workmen to remove trees, wreckage and heavy objects from the streets of Southport.

The efforts of the above contractors on the Sunny Point installation, all of whom were working there at the time, came voluntarily and without charge. Inspired by what they were doing, our own citizens rapidly awoke from the daze in which the storm had left them. In short, a morale was quickly built up and the City of Southport came right back to normalcy.

And the only comment made by the contractors was: "We want to help the people of Southport,"

Thanks to the Sunny Point contractors and other aid, business at Southport is now very little below normal.

WE THANK YOU

THE CITY OF SOUTHPORT

J. A. Gilbert, Mayor

Davis Herring, W. P. Jorgensen, E. G. Hubbard, F. W. Spencer, Harold Aldridge, Wm. McDowell

Members of the Board of Aldermen

THE SOUTHPORT FISHING INDUSTRY

Dallas Pigott

Lewis J. Hardee

Merrit Moore

And Other Waterfront Property Owners

Couple rode out storm

State Port Pilot
Oct. 1982

Hazel was memorable for Chamber director

By JOHN SANDERS
UNC Sea Grant College
Program

Connie and Jerry Helms awoke about 7 a.m. as their cottage on Long Beach trembled and shuddered under the force of the wind. They tried to start the family car and jeep but the ocean had crashed through the dunes and flooded the engines of both vehicles. They began to walk down the deserted road leading to the mainland and high ground, but within minutes the water climbed above their waists. The Helms broke into a two-story house adjacent to Davis Creek and went to the second floor, hoping they could ride out the sudden storm. Hours later they learned that the storm had been Hurricane Hazel.

Hazel had originated as a weak tropical wave that was first detected on October 3, 1954, near the Lesser Antilles. In the days which followed, the ocean supplied energy to the atmosphere through the processes of evaporation and condensation. The weather system strengthened and became the hurricane that would rewrite meteorological history in North Carolina.

For days the storm traveled west over the Caribbean Sea, until October 8 when the hurricane began to slow in its forward speed. Like a master strategist in a game of chess, Hurricane Hazel kept secret its next move. Then on the 10th, the slow-moving storm changed its westward movement and began to curve—first to the north, then to the northeast. Now aimed toward Haiti, the hurricane maintained a steady course and on the morning of October 12, Hazel steamrolled over the island.

High tides and strong winds caused severe damage in the major cities. Heavy rainfall loosened the soil on

—Closeup—

Haiti's steep mountain slopes and one entire village was buried under several feet of mud. An estimated 600 to 1,000 people were killed. Hurricane Hazel had begun to earn a notorious reputation.

As Hazel left Haiti the storm again changed course. Curving back toward the northwest, the eye of the hurricane passed by the Bahama Islands on the 14th. While the center of Hurricane Hazel was in the vicinity of the Bahamas, clouds developed in the easterly wind flow that prevailed over the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. Rain began to fall intermittently in North Carolina that afternoon.

At 5 p.m. on October 14 a hurricane watch, which means that a hurricane may threaten in 24 to 36 hours, was issued for the Carolina coast. As the hurricane approached the Carolinas, two remarkable events were taking place: storm intensity was increasing and the hurricane was beginning to accelerate in its forward motion. Instead of traveling at a forward speed of ten to 15 miles per hour, an average speed for most hurricanes that approach North Carolina, Hazel bore down on the coast at 25 to 30 miles per hour.

The time available for preparedness efforts and evacuation was sliced in half. The hurricane warning, which normally signals that

the eye of the storm will strike land within 12 to 24 hours, went out at 2 a.m. on the morning of October 15. Yet, Hurricane Hazel was accelerating so quickly that the core of the storm would be over the barrier islands near Little River Inlet within six hours.

In Wrightsville Beach, volunteers joined with the two-man police force, going door-to-door and telling people to evacuate. Warnings went out over the radio. But in some cottages on the smaller and less populated islands, people like the Helms slept soundly.

After taking refuge in the two-story house, Connie and Jerry Helms watched as the island went under water and beach cottages were lifted from their foundations or pounded into pieces by the storm surge and the large waves.

Every building within sight had been destroyed and still the water continued to rise. Downstairs furniture, small appliances and dishes crashed against the walls. The Helms knew that it was only a matter of time before their shelter would collapse under the stress of waves and wind.

Tying themselves together with a flannel blanket, the Helms pushed a mattress through the second-story window into the water that swirled just inches below the second-story window frame. Connie Helms, who

could not swim, climbed onto the mattress and Jerry Helms dropped into the water.

Connie recalled that moment.

"We'd hoped to float to this sand dune that stood between the house and Davis Creek. But we didn't count on the winds shifting (and)...instead we were pushed across Davis Creek into the tops of some small scrub oaks that stood 30 feet off the ground." There the Helms rode out the final hours of the storm.

When the storm conditions subsided and the sea receded, Connie and Jerry Helms and thousands of other North Carolinians were greeted with scenes of devastation and destruction. Sand dunes which had been as high as 15 to 20 feet, coastal roads and hundreds of cottages and buildings had disappeared. More than 16,000 buildings and scores of fishing boats had been badly damaged.



Connie Ledgett of Southport was one of the lucky ones. She survived Hurricane Hazel. As a new bride, she and her husband clung to a mattress and rode out the storm on the raging waters that engulfed Long Beach.

Bruno was keeper of the inn

Hazel was 'unbelievable'

By Jim Harper
Staff Writer

Ken Bruno's earliest memories of Oak Island start with looking for a home, finding one, of settling into a community which fell just short of frontier conditions.

This was Long Beach, 1946.

"I bought a lot, but that was 'way down the beach (11th Place West) back then, and I couldn't raise a daughter down there," she recalls. "I lived in a trailer first, and then Charlie Trott found the inn that had been run by Mrs. Moore, and I bought it and moved in there."

She recalls meeting Charles Gause, who worked in real estate sales with Trott, and of course E. F. Middleton, whose development Long Beach was.

"Mr. Middleton was from the old school, a fine Southern gentleman," she said recently. "A real sweetheart."

The rooming house she bought and christened Long Beach Inn was two-story, with individual rooms upstairs and long sitting porches on both levels. That was on the north side of what is now called Beach Drive -- what then for obvious reasons was known merely as "the road."

Mrs. Bruno arrived on Long Beach at about the same time the Brice Helms family moved in from Monroe to open a fish market; at the time Dan Harrelson ran a summertime store and then Dan and Inez Shannon became year-round storekeepers.

Ed Baucom ran a restaurant near the inn, "and that is where I became a crack shot with a .22 rifle," Ken Bruno remembers.

"We'd line up bottles on the for-sale signs across the road and shoot



BRUNO

at them from Baucom's porch," she said. "All we had to do to entertain ourselves in wintertime was shoot."

But it was not a useless frontier skill, for once Ken Bruno had to shoot a snake that had invaded her clothes closet. (Perhaps she'd learned from an earlier encounter when she sought to protect her daughter, Kay, from a snake with a hoe and found herself being pursued.)

Ira Evans lived on Long Beach, Mrs. Bruno recalls, as a sort of caretaker for the development; and Buddy Brown -- sometimes a carpenter, sometimes a fisherman but always a character -- lived in a boat under the Oak Island bridge.

Other Oak Island residents included the Swain brothers, whose family had a permanent home north of Davis Creek.

"The woods there was filled with holly and yaupon and it was lovely," Mrs. Bruno said. "There were duck ponds -- we called them alligator ponds, because they were full of alligators."

Wildlife abounded -- gray foxes which were soon to inspire the annual Washington's Birthday hunt; deer, raccoons and skunks. Mrs. Bruno recalls helping raise a skunk litter under her porch, alongside a family of cats.

"I'd put out food for the cats and the mother skunk would let her babies come and eat too because she knew what I was doing."

The Capel "castle" had been built on the large wooded hill just west of the Big Hill by then, and development spread that way as the road was paved.

Mrs. Bruno was proprietor of the inn until October, 1954, and Hurricane Hazel, which marked both the end and beginning of Long Beach development.

"The Coast Guard came by and told us around midnight we'd have to get off the beach -- that the beach had to be cleared -- and I spent the night in Southport in the Camellia Inn," she said.

But not everyone got that word, or heeded it, and on Long Beach at least six people died and others

'(After Hazel) Kay shinned up to the second floor and found the dog, two cats and our goldfish still swimming about in their bowl'

came within inches -- or moments -- of their lives.

"Charlie Trott rode out on one end of a refrigerator, glaring across a snake that was riding out at the

other end," Mrs. Bruno said. "And Cleveland Swain saved his life by getting to some high dunes behind his house and burying himself in the sand so he wouldn't wash away."

When the fury of the storm subsided on the afternoon of October 15, 1954, those residents who had been driven off Oak Island, including Ken Bruno and her daughter, returned.

"I was devastated," Ken Bruno remembers. "It was unbelievable."

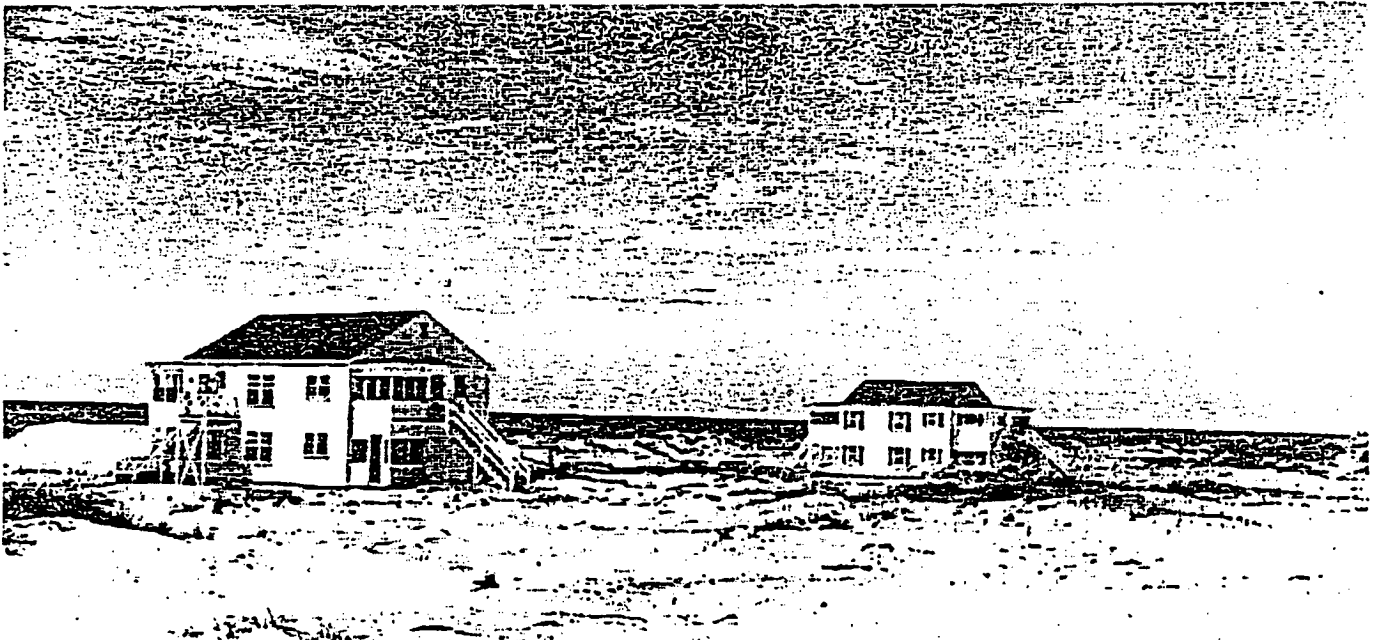
From where they could first look down Long Beach there was nothing they recognized.

"It looked like virgin beach," she said.

Later they got onto the beach, walked to where the Long Beach Inn had been turned sideways off its foundations. The first floor was destroyed, but on the second floor Red Heart Valentine, the family Chesapeake retriever, was ready for human company.

"Kay shinnied up to the second floor and found the dog, two cats, and our goldfish still swimming around in their bowl," Mrs. Bruno said.

That was the end of Long Beach I. Yaupon had been badly damaged and many houses swept away from Caswell too. The story of Long Beach II, and indeed most of Oak Island's modern history, started to unfold.



They were substantial, but early oceanfront cottages were few and far between



Roots, Twigs, Branches

THE GENEALOGY PAGE

MAY 1997

DOREEN (SUZY) HOLTZ, EDITOR

On May 1st the Genealogy Committee held a meeting at the Southport Public Library. We discussed using new forms for our Family Certificate Program, and also Ancestor Charts. So far, Jim Ruark has entered 5200 names in the computer data base. We really appreciate all the work he has done so far. Thank you, Jim.

Once again we need your help. We have attached to this newsletter another Ancestor Chart. If you have not turned in one to our committee, please do so as soon as possible. Your records are important to us and to your descendants.

If you are doing a family history of an old Southport family, please contact Jim Ruark on e-mail 102545,444@compuserve.com. or contact Susie Holtz by mail at 1071 Longleaf, Boiling Spring Lakes, Southport, N. C. 28461.

If you are interested in genealogy, you are welcome to join us at our next meeting. Contact Jim Ruark at 251-0545, or Susie Holtz at 845-3592 for date, time and place.

By the next issue of WHITTLERS BENCH, we hope to have a real masthead for our column. We're still open to suggestions.

Ancestor Chart

Name of Compiler _____

Address _____

City, State _____

Date _____

Person No. 1 on this chart is the same person as No. _____ on chart No. _____.

Chart No. _____

b. Date of Birth
p.b. Place of Birth
m. Date of Marriage
d. Date of Death
p.d. Place of Death

4 (Father of No. 2)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.

2 (Father of No. 1)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
5 (Mother of No. 2)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

1
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.

6 (Father of No. 3)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
3 (Mother of No. 1)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

7 (Mother of No. 3)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

8 (Father of No. 4)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
9 (Mother of No. 4)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

10 (Father of No. 5)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
11 (Mother of No. 5)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

12 (Father of No. 6)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
13 (Mother of No. 6)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

14 (Father of No. 7)
b.
p.b.
m.
d.
p.d.
15 (Mother of No. 7)
b.
p.b.
d.
p.d.

16 (Father of No. 8, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
17 (Mother of No. 8, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
18 (Father of No. 9, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
19 (Mother of No. 9, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
20 (Father of No. 10, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
21 (Mother of No. 10, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
22 (Father of No. 11, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
23 (Mother of No. 11, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
24 (Father of No. 12, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
25 (Mother of No. 12, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
26 (Father of No. 13, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
27 (Mother of No. 13, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
28 (Father of No. 14, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
29 (Mother of No. 14, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.
30 (Father of No. 15, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
m.
d.
31 (Mother of No. 15, Cont. on chart No. _____)
b.
d.

(Spouse of No. 1)

b. d.
p.b. p.d.

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.