



THE WHITTLES' BENCH

Southport Historical Society

Volume XXVI, Number 4

September, 2002

In this Issue

- Looking Back
- Share Your Memories
- Exciting Growth
- Volunteers Needed
- September Meeting
- Board Meeting Highlights
- Sister Society
- Heritage Walk

SHS Officers & Directors

President
Peter Wyckoff 457-5599

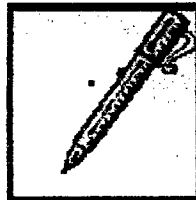
Vice-President
Pat Kirkman 457-0579

Secretary
Karen Knighton 457-8018

Treasurer
Wolf Furstenau 278-4050

Historian/Archivist
Marilyn Lessen 457-0004

Directors
Ann Brown 457-6710
Shirley Wilson 278-7430
Dick Hughes 253-9877



PRESIDENT'S PARAGRAPH

Impossible to believe – the summer is behind us.
Where did it go?

I don't know about all of you good folks, but your SHS Executive Board has been hard at work. Yes, we continue to meet all through the summer and stay connected between meetings by phone and e-mail.

We have many irons in the fire, the most prominent of which is the restoration of the Old Jail. A new survey of the property has been provided to us by the City and the fencing is continuing along the clarified property lines. The new front doors have been crafted and installed, and many hours have been devoted to planning the next steps to be taken; steel fabrication, new electric service, and heating and cooling, for example. It is a daunting task but the results will be outstanding and something of which we can all be proud.

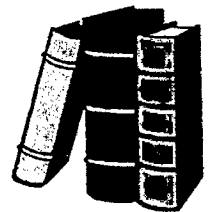
Some other irons are participating with the Robert Ruark Foundation in developing the best medium for remembering and honoring the world famous author; planning the 2nd annual Heritage Days festival, and, of course planning for the annual Christmas Tour of Homes.

Volunteers are ALWAYS welcome and needed. If you can give a few hours at a time, doing whatever best fits your skills, please call Karen Knighton, secretary, at 454 8018.

Peter Wyckoff

SHS PRESS

The Southport Historical Society is actively engaged in publishing books dealing with the history of the lower Cape Fear. Works are available for sale at Society meetings and at book stores in the area or by calling Wolf Furstenau at 278-4050.



"The Whittler's Bench" prepared by Becky & Bert Felton, Ann Brown
Design and Layout by CM Target Marketing - Oak Island, NC 910-278-4650



LOOKING BACK - THE HISTORY PAGE

Susan Carson, Editor

For this issue of "Whittler's Bench", I am delighted to have two special items for our readers. The first is about net making, written by a member of the Potter family, Mrs. Cathy Potter Melton, who is also a Society member. The other is by Augustus Norton Swan who grew up in Southport and on Bald Head Island. Gus' article about Bald Head and old Southport days was dictated to our good friend, Margaret Leverett and we appreciate her help. As this is being written, Gus (as we call him) is in New Hanover Regional Hospital, seriously ill. I think it would be great if all of us write Gus a note of appreciation, but send it to his home address: 7935 River Road, S.E., Southport. You can find my friend (and relative, I've learned) Cathy Melton at the Shrimp House or 712 Summit Road, Boiling Spring Lakes. Let them know how much we appreciate their contributions.

Tools of the Trade

Like the fishing industry itself, the art of net making is dying out. Just like commercial fishing, nets and the materials they are made of have advanced. Nets of long ago were made from one of three products: cotton, linen and flax. These nets, after the day's use, had to be hung out on a spreader to dry. Of the three materials, cotton was the best and Sea Island cotton from South Carolina was the twine of choice.

As a family of generations of commercial fishermen, the Potters have for many years tended and mended their own nets. Through the years, the art of net making has been handed down from one generation of Potters to the next. Today, "Tookie" Potter carries on the tradition. He learned to hang a gill net at about four or five years of age while watching his grandfather, father and uncles, all tirelessly sewing the new nets to the cork and lead lines.

At about age nine, "Tookie" and his father were out fishing. While waiting for the school of mullets to show up, Daddy figured it was about time that "Tookie" learned how to mend a net. Out of his pocket came his old Barlow. With it he made a large rip in the webbing. With needle in hand, he began the seam, while "Tookie" watched. Before long, "Tookie" was mending nets with the best of them. Soon he was making nets. There were flat nets, balloon nets, two-seam nets and mongoose nets.

From time to time, Louis Hardee, a local commercial fisherman, would hold night classes at the old Marine Biology Building, teaching net making. By this time, though, "Tookie" was already good at his craft. When the World's Fair was held in Memphis, Tennessee, a good many years ago, "Tookie" was invited to attend and demonstrate the art of making and mending nets.

Today's nets are made of nylon and are dipped to preserve them. In the old days, hot tar was used; today we use paint. The multi-colored, shaggy-looking stuff you see on nets is called "chafing gear" and is used to protect the bag. The bag is the bottom portion of the net and is where the fish and shrimp are funneled into.

"Tookie" has expanded his craft and now makes a variety of items with the webbing, including hammocks, deck railing, plant hangers, and a multitude of other things. Examples of his handiwork can be seen at The Shrimp House Restaurant on the Old Yacht Basin in Southport.

Gus Remembers

When I was a child, growing up in Southport was quite different from what it is today. Southport was a thriving little town, with all kinds of stores. You could buy anything you needed here. There was no electricity, central heat or air, or telephones. There were very few cars. All of those things came later. Howe Street was very narrow and had oyster shells for pavement.

I was born in 1915 on W. West Street. My mother died when I was four months old. My father was Captain Charlie Swan, keeper of the Cape Fear Lighthouse on Bald Head Island. Later, he remarried.

As I grew older my job at home was to keep the lamps trimmed and filled with oil, saw and cut the wood for our three stoves, and I also had to get up early to build the fires before going to school. In the winter time my hands got so cold I would have to hold them over the flames to warm them. Since I was the oldest boy still at home, I guess I was considered the man of the house as my father had to stay most of the time on Bald Head Island. Another little job I had was cleaning the Amuzu Theater and keeping Mrs. Lillie Furpless' wood box at her home filled. For this I got free tickets to the movies.

In spite of all this I still had time to do a few things I enjoyed. I played baseball, went sail boating, clamming, fishing, and dancing. We danced in a building next to the Amuzu Theater. Every Saturday night there was a dance at the Miller Hotel, too. The hotel was located at the corner of Bay Street and Howe Street. The building that is now known as Northrop Mall also had a dance floor. I was one of the best dancers in Southport, if I do say so myself.

LOOKING BACK - Continued



We went to school eight months a year. As soon as school was out for the year, my father came from Bald Head to pick up the family and we all headed to Bald Head so we could be together for the summer. The most interesting thing to me on Bald Head was the turtles. They weigh between three and four hundred pounds. At the first full moon in May they start coming ashore to lay their eggs. They would dig a hole in the sand about a foot and a half deep with their back fins. There they would lay about 100 to 120 eggs which would take about an hour. Then they would cover the nest with sand and head back to the ocean. The turtles continued coming back to shore until the middle of August. Turtles lay eggs three times a year. After the baby turtles hatch, they always head for the ocean. This was a sight to see!

Back in those days, turtle eggs were plentiful because there were so many turtles. I would gather a nest of their eggs in a burlap bag and walk two miles to the Coast Guard Station and ride the boat to Southport. I had regular customers who bought the eggs for ten cents a dozen. This money went into a jar at home to buy my school clothes. While I was selling my eggs I usually had a grocery list to leave at Ruark's Store on East Moore Street. They put the groceries on the Coast Guard boat and when we got back to Bald Head, I carried them in the burlap bag two miles back home.

For four months out of the year the Atlantic Ocean was our swimming pool and the island our playground. That is, when we weren't busy with our daily chores.

My, how things have changed, but then, time marches on!



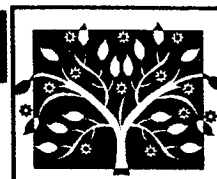
I WONDER...

As I sit down to write this, I've just come in from working in the yard for about an hour, doing some heavy pruning. I was drenched in sweat and would have been eaten alive if not for heavy duty bug spray. And I was not in the sun, in the heat of the day, or working particularly hard. Oh, the chill dry air in the house felt good as did the refreshing shower.

That led me to wonder how our ancestors managed before the days of a/c. How did they work in the fields all day under the blazing sun? How did they work in the house all day with steaming wash tubs and hot stoves. How did the little ones sit in school?

I'm sure that some of you, like Gus, have first hand experience. I invite you to jot down your memories and experiences and get them to me or Susie in any way that you like. Your memories would make fascinating reading in future issues of *The Whittler's Bench*.

EXCITING GROWTH!



The SHS continues to add new members to do the work of the Society and to enjoy each other's company. We would like to welcome:

- Judge Bill Gore, Whiteville, NC
- Betty Williams, Neptune Beach, FL
- Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kitchin, Southport
- Mr. and Mrs. Robert Martin, Oak Island
- Jane Miller, Southport
- R. E. Northrop, Miami, FL
- Michael Perdue, Wentworth, NC
- Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Prendeville, Vienna, VA
- Sandra Shuford, Ocean Isle Beach

Be sure to look for these newcomers and welcome them to our family.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Volunteers are needed in many areas. If you can help, please contact Karen Knighton (454-8018) or Pat Kirkman (457-0579).



- Design a brochure explaining the Heritage Walk at Waterfront Park and those it honors.
- Jail Restoration tasks:
 - Help erect fencing and paint it with water protection
 - Dismantle existing bathroom and prepare it for remodeling
 - Clean cell bars and steps
 - Research the 1904 period to determine appropriate décor
- Join a committee. The following committees need members:
 - Social Committee, Cemetery Committee, and Public Relations Committee...



SEPTEMBER MEETING

With the new fall season, we will be re-starting our always enjoyable and informative meetings. It is the mandate of the SHS to preserve history and educate others about it, and one of Southport's oldest bits of history is the legacy of its old oak trees. Our speakers will be Joey Hill of the Southport Forestry Commission and David Nash of the County Extension Service, addressing the legacy and what we all can do to preserve it.

We invite everyone to come early (6:00 pm) on September 26, 2002 to Trinity Methodist Church Fellowship Hall (on N. Atlantic) to help set up and socialize. The "groaning board" will open at 6:30 after the Blessing, followed by a short business meeting and our featured speaker. Please plan to have your specialty covered dish feed a minimum of 10 people.

SHS BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

- Approved \$200 donation to support the Waterfront Heritage Walk
- Approved a \$250 scholarship for a graduating senior at SBHS
- Agreed to reprint Southport Secrets with revisions
- Paid \$150 honorarium to David Cecelski for his May presentation
- Agreed that the board will serve as project manager for the jail restoration
- Appointed Pat Kirkman to chair the Christmas Tour of Homes, with Ginny Noble as co-chair
- Approved \$2,550 bid from A. Fadeley to construct and install exterior doors for the jail
- Toured jail and established a tentative work schedule for restoration
- Gave permission to the Southport Lions Club to use copyrighted material from Southport Trails in its Christmas Ornament project
- Approved changes to the Constitution and By-Laws to be considered by the membership in September.
- Approved a request to seek bids for Heat/AC and welding work for the jail
- Appointed Marilyn Lessin nomination committee chair
- Approved the purchase of a permanent chain/rope to be used around the Indian Oak tree



SISTER SOCIETY



The Brunswick County Historical Society meets on a quarterly basis at the BEMC, Hwy 17, Supply. Their meetings are always very informative, and the *NEWSLETTER* is more than worth the annual dues of only \$10.00. We can't think of a better way of learning more about this wonderful county. The BCHS recently purchased the 1930 North Carolina Census Records on microfilm and have placed them in the Brunswick Community College Library. With this purchase, the BCHS has provided the entire collection of census records (1790 - 1930) to the library. Other available records on microfilm are court records, newspaper files, and some miscellaneous items. These records are not dry and dusty. They provide a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the people who made this wonderful county what it is today.

With the indulgence of the BCHS, we'll borrow a piece from their August 2002 issue:

THE SOUTHPORT LEADER
OCTOBER 23, 1890
LOCKWOOD FOLLY NEWS

Dear Leader - - I am a reader of your paper and as I seldom see anything from the whereabouts of Lockwoods Folly, it may be the case that people don't think of writing, so I will begin by saying that Lockwoods Folly is not entirely lost.

Business here is on a boom. We have a mill here, owned by Dr. D. B. McNeill, one of the best doctors that has ever been about Lockwoods Folly. The mill contains a saw and grist, a cotton gin and a shingle machine, the machine has just commenced making shingles and has manufactured about fifteen to twenty thousands. Mr. J. J. Pigott is the general superintendent.

Farmers are very busy gathering their crops. Corn is pretty badly damaged by the wet weather. Mr. Samuel Mints, of Waccamaw, has lost 300 bushels. When we get our crops gathered, the railroad through Brunswick County will soon clear them all out.

We have four stores and one turpentine still, and not far away, another cotton gin owned by Elisha Sellers, Jr. and a grist owned by F. M. Galloway. Then we have a blacksmith shop at the Folly and another close by, also two good fisheries there are on a boom.

The democratic candidates have all been nominated as you have probably published before you receive this letter.

There are a dozen other things I might mention, but I will close by saying, Democrats, stick together till the hair slips.



HERITAGE WALK

Have you been along the Southport waterfront just east of the parking lot at the foot of Howe Street since the end of June? If not, be sure to take a leisurely stroll down there, enjoy the "salubrious breezes" and see the new Heritage Walk to which the SHS contributed. The Heritage Days Festival Committee deeply appreciates the contribution of the SHS and those others who have made possible the honoring of the five original founders of the city. Thanks is also due to the City for their cooperation and parks staff, and to the inmates at BC jail who labored in the heat to carefully install the monuments.

In each succeeding year, a new stone will be acquired and installed to honor a deceased individual who has contributed significantly to the city. A committee needs to be formed to make this very important selection. Would you like to help?