

**THE WHITTLES BENCH**

is a publication of  
the Southport Historical Society  
a 501 3-c non-profit organiza-  
tion

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Secretary: Charles Christianson  
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**DIRECTORS:**

Cathy Fravel  
Tom Izod  
Joe Loughlin

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this society shall be to bring together persons interested in the history of Southport and surrounding areas. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us a better understanding of our state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of our American heritage.

We further cooperate with the city of Southport to preserve the town's records and archives, and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers.

We endeavor to provide programs of historical interest at regular meetings, publish articles and books for the purpose of education and encourage community participation in the preservation of our heritage.

**Southport Historical Society**

was established  
January, 1976  
and maintains the  
**Old Jail Museum**  
located at  
318 E. Nash Street  
Southport, NC

# The Whittler's Bench



*This is a first for SHS . . . An electronic newsletter!*

The *Whittler's Bench* gets its name from our founders back in 1976 who were following the 19th century Southport tradition when folks in town sat under a cedar tree at the foot of Howe Street to discuss the latest happenings. First editions were typed on a manual typewriter, mimeographed and handed out or mailed to members. As word processors and computers came along, the typing, graphics and printing got easier but it was still distributed by mail. Now we have captured the essence of the 21st century by issuing our first electronic edition! This method will save us over \$300 in printing and mailing expense.

Most of our members now have e-mail and will receive this edition via the internet but we haven't forgotten our "paper readers". Printed copies will be mailed to those who have not given us e-mail addresses. The electronic edition is sent in a PDF format and you may easily print out any or all pages if you want a paper copy. You may also copy the newsletter to a file in your computer for quick future reference. We know that Eleanor and Susie (our co-founders) would be amazed, but proud that SHS has progressed to this point (and that we are saving money!).

If you would still prefer to have a copy mailed to you, we can certainly do that, just e-mail the society at [shs@ec.rr.com](mailto:shs@ec.rr.com) and we will put one in the mail for you.

*While we're on the subject . . . "Webmaster" needed!*

The society's website ([www.southporthistoricalsociety.com](http://www.southporthistoricalsociety.com)) is a bit "tired" and needs some perking up. Surely there is one among us who would like to take on this much needed renovation and maintenance. If this sounds like something you would like to discuss with us, please call Pat Kirkman at 457-0579. You could be a vital "link" in keeping the society's information current and attractive (and you can work from home with no committee meetings!) We do have folks visiting our website and would like to upgrade it as soon as possible. Please consider this if you have experience in this area. It would much appreciated!

*Just thinking . . . and thanking !*

As I begin my fourth year as your president, I look back over the ten years I have been an SHS officer (secretary, vice president, president) and realize how much my association with the society defines my involvement with the Southport community. What a privilege it is to represent SHS as I speak to folks all over the county about who we are and what we do. Having always been a history buff, the opportunity to live in this uniquely historic place and to learn, teach and write about it is truly fulfilling. When I say that Southport is "my heart's hometown", I really mean it! Greensboro holds only a small portion of my allegiance, it's sweet Southport that captures my heart as I hold dear the past, present and future of this special little corner of the world. I'm thankful to be here!

*Pat Kirkman*

## *Welcome to many NEW members . . .*

These have joined the society since our last newsletter in the Fall. We are delighted to have all these new members and look forward to their involvement in the society. Thanks for your support!

<b>Jerry Chappell</b>	<b>Harley &amp; Gerry Lemons</b>	<b>Bill &amp; Rita Wissinger</b>	<b>Connie Parrish-Deitrick</b>
<b>Mary Mulling</b>	<b>Larry &amp; Carolyn Sherwin</b>	<b>Christopher &amp; Joy Brann</b>	<b>Bill &amp; Marge Leuschner</b>
<b>Todd Greer</b>	<b>Mary Ellen Poole</b>	<b>Ellie DeYoung</b>	<b>Joe Siudara</b>
<b>Judy Lechner</b>	<b>Walle &amp; Phyllis Johanson</b>	<b>Bob &amp; Diane Schwartz</b>	<b>Paul &amp; Jackie Gawron</b>
<b>Sue Dail</b>	<b>Diane Calhoun</b>	<b>Debra Poczik</b>	<b>Pam Donohue</b>
<b>Kathy Moody</b>	<b>Mary Walker</b>	<b>Wally Rueckel</b>	<b>Richard Slease</b>
<b>Jill Webb</b>			

## *Our newest LIFE members . . .*

**Liz Albee      James Miller      Jim & Nancy Crum      Eric & Sherol Lappala      J. Ryan Taylor**

Thank you for the investment you have made in the society. Your support is especially appreciated.

## *In Remembrance . . .*

We are deeply saddened by the deaths of these special friends and members of the society since our last newsletter. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to their families.

**Boyce Spencer    Chris Suiter    Marjorie Wheat**  
**Sam Newton      Jane Kerr      Dorothy Hardee**

## *Special "Thanks" . . .*

"Behind-the-scenes" volunteers and workers often times don't get much recognition for their faithfulness in carrying out their responsibilities year after year. We want to especially thank **Marilyn Lessin** who has coordinated the set-up for all our pot luck suppers for a long, long time. She has kept tabs on the inventory to be sure there were plates, napkins, forks, etc., etc. and has arrived at least an hour earlier to get everything all set for us. Thank you so much, Marilyn. It has been wonderful to have you "always there". Marilyn is now going to take a well-deserved break and we are delighted that **Audrey Carathansis** will be stepping into her shoes. Audrey has been a good helper in the past along with several others, **Beverly Wyckoff, Shirley Wilson, Becky Lucas, Cathy Fravel, Irv Green, Debby Jacoby** (and probably others whose names escape us right now) whom we appreciate so much! Keep up the good work - you are vital to a successful supper! Thanks also to those of you who help us with clean-up afterwards. You, too are appreciated!



Our "booksellers", **Ken and Carolee Morris**, faithfully bring our publications to each meeting and set up the book table. Our book sales are very important to the financial stability of the society and we appreciate so much their willingness to do this task as well as keeping the inventory of our books. **Dinah Snead** also helps with this important responsibility and we appreciate her as well. Be sure to stop by and buy a book or get to know Ken and Carolee!

## *Next Supper Meeting is March 26 . . .*



### *The Gullah-Geechee Influence along the Cape Fear*

**Eulis Willis**, our program speaker, is Vice Chairman of the four-state, 25-member commission for the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Mr. Willis, who has deep roots in Brunswick County, is also mayor of Navassa. He looks forward to sharing with us the plans for the Heritage Corridor and traditions of the Gullah.

This fascinating coastal culture was established by enslaved Africans from several West African countries who were brought to the Carolinas as early as the 1600's to plant rice which was a native crop for them. Although Gullah-Geechee traditions are still evident today, their lands are rapidly being developed. In an effort to preserve this unique culture, the federal government has funded and designated the Gullah-Geechee Heritage Corridor which extends from Jacksonville, Florida to Wilmington. That includes our own county where there were a few rice-growing plantations along the Cape Fear, most especially Orton.

Known as Gullah in the Carolinas and Geechee in Georgia and Florida, the culture remained rather intact because it was isolated on barrier islands and rural counties. If you have visited Charleston and Savannah you have surely been exposed to the Gullah-Geechee in the marketplaces as they weave their sweet grass baskets and sell other cultural crafts and artwork. Books, movies and websites give us further insight into this lifestyle. Give it a "google" and see what you come up with to enhance your understanding at our next meeting.

**Pot luck supper begins at 6:30 and the program at about 7:15**

**Southport Community Building**

**Bring a dish to share and invite your friends and neighbors**

## *Old Smithville Burying Grounds Update . . . by Musette Steck*

The society sponsored its first clean-up day in the Old Burying Grounds the weekend of October 14/15, 2006. Hopefully, we will have accomplished most of our goals by October, 2009. Although we have had four or five advertised workdays a year, there have been 26 individuals who have adopted plots and worked every month. Then there are these dedicated members, **Charles Christianson, Susan Davis, Nancy Heilhecker and Debby Jacoby** who seem to be there weekly because when they see a need, they take care of it wherever it might be.

The executive board voted to budget \$14,000 on needed restoration of grave markers, walls, tombs and fencing. The brick mason has completed his work; work on the cast-iron fencing will begin this month (March). The most noticeable improvement will be the repairing of broken stones and cleaning them. Eric Kozen, Superintendent of Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, will repair the designated stones, but we need volunteers to help clean the stones. As always we are working with permission and in cooperation with the city of Southport.



*Come help us clean up for Easter.*

*We'll be there April 4 from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.*

*Bring your own rake or broom.*

*We'll have brushes for cleaning and bags for leaves.*

*Any amount of time you can work will be appreciated.*

## *Historically speaking . . . by our Archivist - Larry Maisel*

### ***Getting to (or out of) Our Town Was Tough***

Next time you're sitting in traffic in Shallotte, or Highway 211, or Long Beach Road, think about when there were no roads worthy of the name. Oh, there was the one called "The King's Highway," but it fell far short of bring fit for a king, or anyone else for that matter. Water was how you got anywhere. It was faster. It was well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century before you could go west or north from Southport without getting bogged down in the mud.

Very early, whether at Eagle's Island or Calabash, Brunswick County entrepreneurs were ferrying people and goods for a fee. By 1803 a sloop called *Friendship* was hauling passengers and freight between Wilmington and Smithville (now Southport) on a somewhat regular basis, joined later, by the schooner *Rising Sun*. But it was a "maybe yes, maybe no" proposition, depending on the tides, wind, and how bad the shoaling in the river had become.

Norfolk and Charleston have always been easier to get in and out of than Wilmington. Between the 1830's and mid 1850's, steam vessels, such as the *Virginia*, on runs between those two, would *sometimes* stop in Smithville, to pick up wood, and take on any passengers and freight. But it was risky at low water, and the boats came only when they happened to be near Cape Fear at high tide. You can almost picture Brunswick residents hoping for bad weather which might force vessels to take shelter here, so they and their freight could leave.



Typical early steamer/ferry

In 1854, Wilmington and Charleston were finally linked by rail, but not Wilmington and Smithville. So, it was back to *sail* boats, operated by Captains Samuel Potter and Samuel Price, leaving Brunswick County at the mercy of the wind and tides. Again. The following year, just for the summer, Captain Price ran a steamboat, but that Fall, it burned and it was back to square one. Again.

Good roads and the Intracoastal Waterway were still 70 or 80 years away, so travel between Brunswick County towns---even from Smithville to Shallotte or Calabash---meant going "outside," meaning into the ocean. It wasn't a case of "you can't get there from here," but rather "it ain't gonna be easy!"

### ***Society Proposes Museum at Fort Johnston . . .***



On February 4 the society delivered a proposal to establish a museum and learning center in the Garrison House to the City Aldermen's Ft. Johnston committee for consideration. The committee in turn presented the proposal at the February 12 Aldermen's meeting. It is our understanding that the proposal with supporting documentation has been sent to the federal and state agencies that must approve the usage of the property under the covenants set forth when the property was deeded to the city through the US Lands to Parks agency.

We are hopeful that if approval is granted that the city will accept our proposal to set up historical exhibits and displays on the ground floor of the building and to develop relevant learning opportunities for the general public. We have also proposed to purchase four replica cannons to be placed along the front of the fort at a cost of up to \$16,000. This would more clearly define the property as a fort even though the building itself has undergone many transitions throughout the years since its origination in colonial days. We would also provide docents for the museum and pay some of the utility costs. Opening Ft. Johnston to the touring public as well as our citizens would be in line with the purpose for which the property was intended in the transfer of ownership from the US Army.

Ft. Johnston is under the direction of the Southport Parks and Recreation Department and it is our goal to be a friend to the city, cooperating together to use this long-standing historical property to its highest potential. We e-mailed a complete copy of the proposal to most of our membership and will be happy to mail a printed copy to anyone requesting it. Let's hope all goes well with the needed approvals and that the Aldermen will act favorably on our proposal.

## News from the Old Jail . . . 2009 Season Opens Soon



Painting by Bryan Varnam

Volunteers under the direction of the Old Jail Advisory Committee and **Nancy Christianson** are already busy getting the Old Jail Museum ready for the 2009 Season to begin in April. New storyboards have been installed. Cleaning, rearranging, taking inventory of the artifacts and finishing the Heritage Garden are all underway. We will be looking for all our docents to return and for new ones to sign up! If you are interested in helping us at the Old Jail, please be in touch with Nancy by telephone (457-7412) or by e-mail (christiansonn@juno.com). She will let you know about the training opportunities and work you into the schedule for the Wednesday and Saturday opening hours.

2008 numbers were very impressive as there were 1,757 visitors, \$728 collected in donations and books sold in the amount of \$572. Thanks to all of you who gave your time and energy to making our efforts at the Old Jail a success. We are looking forward to an even better year as we greet visitors to the museum. YOU make a difference!

## Christmas Tour of Homes . . . Successful "Sell-Out"

Our superb home tour committee has done it again! All 1200 tickets were sold and the net profit was over \$10,500. The homes were beautiful, the homeowners were wonderful, the publicity was outstanding, and all our hosts and hostesses did a great job!

Many hours of planning and work go into this annual fundraiser and there aren't enough thanks for our committee members, **Susan Toth, Randy Jones, Phil & Cathy Fravel, Celeste Plassman, Debbie Parker, Nancy Heilhecker, Audrey Carathansis, Shirley Wilson, Marty Loughlin and Amy Maisel**. **YOU ARE THE BEST!**



Phil displays the "sold out" sign

## Local History Classes . . . First Session a Hit

A six-week session of history classes was held January 19-February 23. **Bert Felton, Pat Kirkman and Larry Maisel** shared teaching responsibilities. A group of 36 filled all our space in the Garrison building that the city so graciously allowed us to use. Future classes will be held when schedules can be worked out. We'll keep you updated.

## Welcome - Joe Loughlin . . . New Director

We are happy to have **Joe Loughlin** join the board of officers and directors. He was elected to a three-year term at our January general membership meeting. Joe is from an old Southport family and we look forward to his participation on the board.

## Membership Application . . . Invite a Friend to Join

### SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_  
 New \_\_\_\_\_ or Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with your check to: P. O. Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461

Annual Dues: Individual \$10 Couple \$15 Student \$2 Business/Organization \$15 Sustaining \$25  
 Life Memberships: Individual \$150 - Couple/Business \$200