

# southport historical society

## The Whittler's Bench

Post Office Box 10014, Southport, NC 28461

<http://www.southporthistoricalsociety.org/>  
[info@southporthistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@southporthistoricalsociety.org)



Publication of the Southport Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

#### OFFICERS:

President: Musette Steck  
Vice President: Don Parker  
Secretary: Tom Izod  
Treasurer: Phil Fravel  
Archivist: Larry Maisel  
Past President: Larry Maisel

#### DIRECTORS:

Charles Christianson  
Nancy Heilhecker  
Martha Johnson  
Trudy Young

#### 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

## Musings from Musette, President SHS

Since becoming president of the Southport Historical Society (SHS), I have attended historical society meetings in Burgaw, Southern Pines, and Wilmington when they advertised programs that I thought we might enjoy. No society served a meal, but some offered a box lunch for \$5 - \$8. Those groups meeting during the day had fewer in attendance than those at night. All of the more established societies have seen a decrease in active membership because there is more competition for our time and avenues for our interests than was available twenty or forty years ago.

The SHS has lost three long-time members this year. The most recent was Mary Furstenu, wife of Wolf who was our treasurer for many years as well as project manager for several books we published. He is also the author of "The History of Long Beach". Don Lessin, the husband of Marilyn who was in charge of our potluck dinners, also died. Dr. Walter Harrelson, a native son of Southport, world-renowned biblical scholar and lifetime member of SHS also passed away. Dr. Harrelson was the first person to purchase a memorial brick that was the fundraising project we had to install heat and air in the Old Jail.

Recently, the memory of Daniel Walker was honored with contributions to SHS from Mrs. Jim Fallon as well as Paul and David Walker. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to all these families and friends.

Our newest life members are Greg and Debbie James. We thank all 68-life members for their investment in the Southport Historical Society.

Continuing to fulfill our mission statement, we have given a check to the librarian of the Southport Elementary School as we try "to increase knowledge of the history of Southport". She intends to buy appropriate books and a large local area map. We have shared some of our book inventory with the libraries of two feeder middle schools for South Brunswick High School - Cedar Grove and South Brunswick. As has been our custom for several years, we have provided the DAR with a local history book to be given to each new US citizen in the July naturalization ceremony. Our website continues to attract book orders from Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wyoming, South Carolina as well as from North Carolina.

We had over one hundred people attend both the March and May meetings this year. Our November meeting was held on a cold and rainy night but about forty hardy souls showed up to hear an interesting program on the history of Bald Head. The annual business meeting will be on January 23, 2013. On March 28, 2013 the popular historian, Dr. Chris Fonvielle of UNCW, will present our program. His subject will be "The Battle of Moore's Creek".

We hope to see you many times in the coming year.

## The Transfer of Historic Fort Johnston to the City of Southport

*By Don Parker*

Many people wonder how the City of Southport obtained historic Fort Johnston from the federal government. This property extending over a full city block on the banks of the Cape Fear River has certainly become the City's center of gravity with the Community Building, the North Carolina Maritime Museum and, now, the City's Visitor Center and Museum all located on the grounds of the old fort.

The Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point (MOTSU) relinquished possession of Fort Johnston on September 8, 2006, after the federal government formally conveyed the property to its new owner. Fort Johnston, formerly the oldest and smallest active duty fort in the United States, originally began construction in 1748 by the British to protect the Cape Fear region from Spanish marauders. Since the late 1950's, it had served as Army Family Housing for soldiers and their families assigned to MOTSU. The MOTSU Commander's quarters had been the Garrison House, now the City's Visitor Center and Museum and one of the oldest buildings in historic Southport. The Garrison House was built in 1810 to serve as officers' quarters but was significantly modified beginning in 1955 to accommodate a single family.

The history of Fort Johnston is integral to the history of Southport and the entire Cape Fear region. Cape Fear militia ousted the Royal Governor of North Carolina in 1775 who had fled from the colonial capital of New Bern as unrest in the Colonies evolved into the Revolutionary War. Weeks before the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861, North Carolina militia demanded Fort Johnston from federal caretakers and then themselves abandoned the fort upon the fall of Fort Fisher and the Union push to Wilmington in January 1865. Fort Johnston was garrisoned until 1880 when several federal entities, in succession, occupied the property leading up to use by the U.S. Army as the initial MOTSU headquarters and then, subsequently, as family housing.

The decline in the number of soldiers assigned to MOTSU, coupled with the availability of abundant housing in adjacent residential communities, resulted in Fort Johnston becoming excess to MOTSU's needs. The decision was made to excess Fort Johnston in the fall of 2003 and the Department of the Army approved the action the following year. Over the next year, MOTSU worked in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, to prepare the necessary documentation to turn the property over to the General Services Administration (GSA) for final disposition. Thorough research and development of specific covenant language conveyed with the deed to protect the historical integrity of the property.

The GSA obtained the property in the fall of 2005 and advertised it through several "screenings" to determine potential public interest. The City of Southport submitted an application to the National Park Service to obtain the property through its Federal Lands to Parks program. The National Park Service responded to the GSA during a public entity screen that they had an approved application from the City of Southport and desired to convey the property to the city for use under parks and recreation. After other applicants were evaluated and eventually disapproved, the GSA finally conveyed the property to Southport through the National Park Service.

As Fort Johnston's newest steward, the vision that was initially outlined in the original application for the property is finally coming to fruition. With the move of the Visitors Center and the on-going development of the City museum in the Garrison House, a significant milestone has been achieved. The Garrison House is open to the public and now serves as the perfect complement to the North Carolina Maritime Museum that successfully moved into renovated and remodeled former duplexes along Davis and Moore Streets.

After completing its 250-year mission as an active duty fort, it is a pleasure to see its legacy protected and enhanced through the successful transformation to public use by the City of Southport.

## Museum at Ft. Johnston *By Larry Maisel*

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*"Museum at Ft. Johnston getting good response from visitors."*

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The long-awaited museum at Ft. Johnston has been a hit with both tourists and quite a few long-time locals. The initial exhibits in our portion of the Garrison House included a display of antique tools. Some of our visitors had a great time debating about what a particular tool was. A device for sharpening the teeth on a crosscut saw blade brought the most discussion. One day I counted 11 men exchanging views on it. A variety of antique tools will be on display frequently.

The photo exhibits about World War II included one about the German submarines, or U-boats. Few people, not from here, realize that Southport had a ringside seat to the U-boat war. In 1942, seeing burning ships from the waterfront was common. U-158, which sank the tanker John D. Gill off our coast in 1942 was the best known. There were numerous ships sunk by torpedoes, but the Gill was the closest to Southport. It's the one about which the monument on the waterfront (donated by the Historical Society a few years ago) was erected. The story of that submarine's skipper is particularly interesting.

But we have two WW-II exhibits. The other deals with two Coast Guard Cutters sinking a U-boat in the mid-Atlantic. That was not common - Navy destroyers did most of that -but a Southport man, Chief Mechanist Mate, Worth Ward, was on the cutter *Duane*, which, along with the *Spencer* sank U-175.

An exhibit of carved animals boarding Noah's Ark has been popular, as has a collection of teacups and saucers, traditionally given to pilots who guide ships through the Panama Canal.

Most exhibits will rotate every six months or so, except for a highly unusual one - still a surprise—which will be coming soon. Did you ever help churn butter? I know it's an odd question, but the up-coming exhibit of butter churns, donated by Darrell Posey, of Oak Island, contains some very odd churns and some very clever designs.

We really need some volunteers a few hours a month to greet visitors and answer questions. I will give you information about things that might be asked, but the captions on the exhibits cover nearly everything. You will meet some fascinating people from all over the country, and some from other nations. If you would like to help us out, please call me at 477-0296.



Cannon Thor and Cannon Crew on the Garrison Grounds

## Cannon Thor *By Phil Fravel*

Nicknamed “*THOR*”, after the mythical god of thunder, the society’s full-scale replica of an 1841 bronze six-pound cannon is a lively addition to many events in the area. Cannon Ltd. Of Coolville, Ohio constructed the cannon in May 1991 for Robert C. DeHaven. In June 2001, Mr. DeHaven donated the cannon to the Southport Historical Society to be used to promote the city of Southport by firings at appropriate historical, nautical, civic and other special events. “Thor” made its film debut in Ted Turner’s epic film “Gods and Generals”.

### *With A “BLAST FROM THE PAST”*

The cannon is available for hire for public and private firings for a tax-deductible contribution to the Southport Historical Society. The society’s gun crew will bring “Thor” to your special event. It has been fired for Weddings, Nautical Events, Parties, Birthdays, Anniversaries and several times during our July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival. Recently Thor was part of a three cannon, 13 Gun salute at the Sunny Point Change of Command ceremony at Ft Johnston

### *The Gun Crew*

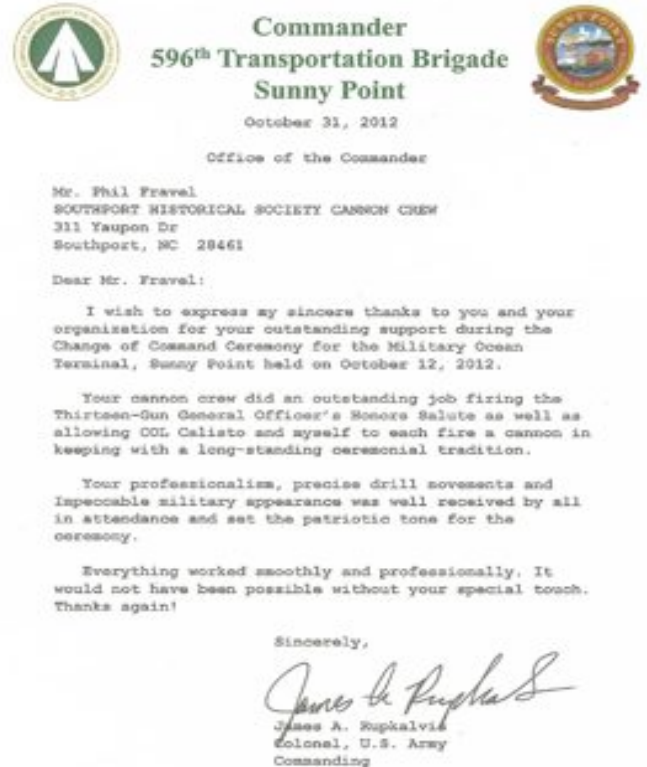
Our gun crew consists of thirteen individuals, all of whom have been trained and certified by the National Civil War Artillery Association. A minimum crew of five will safely fire THOR using the same cannon drill developed during the Civil War period. Not only do you get a “big bang” when the cannon is fired, you also get a show during the drill prior to and after the firing. **Although Thor will be in hibernation until Spring, if you have an interest in becoming a crew member please contact Sandy or Norm, or any current crew member.**

For a brochure, donation schedule and more information call:

Sandy Toth: 910-457-0760 or Norm  
Carathanasis: 910-845-5700

or

Visit the Southport Visitor Center for information



Charles setting up grids  
for finding gravesites.  
Story following

## Old Smithville Burying Grounds

*By Charles Christianson*

As most of you know, the Southport Historical Society developed an over-view of the Smithville Old Burying Grounds in 2005. The sight of the Burying Grounds being covered by over growth and not being able to find grave markers because of poor maintenance was not a positive view of the Southport City. Upon the Historical Society's request, Southport Aldermen had convicts come in and clean up much of the overgrowth. One could then see across the Grounds for the first time in several years. It was a great improvement, however, there were still items that needed fixing, such as broken grave markers, wrought iron fences that had been crushed by falling trees, falling wrought iron fences, broken cast iron fences and so on. Musette Steck, of the Society, organized community Burying Grounds cleanup days so that the newer Brunswick County residents could be actively involved to create a cleaner cemetery for Southport.

In 2007-2008, we had Southport native Bobby Jones's support in working on some falling apart brick walls, certain table graves, and grave markers that needed mending. In the same time frame, the Historical Society appropriated \$14,000 to fix specified very broken items. One of those was the cast iron fence grave lot in the center of the Burying Grounds that was badly rusting and broken. It has been there since about the early 1800s. That fence was rebuilt, the graves inside were fixed with new bricks, and the table stones were cleaned with a special stone cleaner. The Historical Society also bought certain products made specifically for the repair of gravestones.

In the same time frame, the Society had a seminar given by Eric Kozan, curator of Wilmington's Oakdale Cemetery, to show interested people how to straighten stone foundations, cement the stone grave marker onto its foundation stone, and to glue (epoxy) broken grave markers together. This class helped us learn what was necessary to support the maintenance of the smaller grave markers. In the years since the class, some changes to certain designed lots have been done. Some

fences have been painted Charleston green, stones have been straightened, some pipe boundaries have been straightened. Of course, we have had county residents come out, rake the debris off of the lots, pick up the fallen branches, and in general, clean up the Grounds.

For 2012, the Society asked for and received permission from the City to take old grave flower decorations off of the graves, finished mapping the Grounds into a grid (marked into quadrants with alphabetic/numeric locations in the quadrants (marked on the surrounding fence)) so that the different graves can be found quicker, placed the grid information on its web site, glued at least 10 grave markers together, and is very thankful that Susan Davis continues to rake and bag leaves. The brown bags are donated by Stewart's Hardware. Also appreciated is the increased work by the City as to mowing and trimming the Grounds. The mapping of the Grounds can be viewed by logging onto the Society's web site (updated for 2012); [southporthistoricalsociety.org](http://southporthistoricalsociety.org), picking the PROJECTS tab at the top of the screen. That will produce a menu that will display the word "Cemeteries". By picking "Cemeteries", one can see the grave stone names in an alphabetized list with a grid-defined location. It is now easier to find the Ground's grave markers. However, even with the grid, the location of the grave marker is within about a 20-foot radius of the given location.

As for lot clean up, this year we focused on the Price/Swain lot (quadrant BN, location G-6) to repair the downed grave markers. There are places for eight grave markers. Out of the eight, two were standing up. One was repaired in 2007, but the base had washed out, and it was at an angle. Five bases were leveled using pebbles, two bases were epoxied, and five stones were epoxied (one needed 2 separate breaks fixed). There have been other improvements in the Grounds, but the Price/Swain lot is the most significant for 2012.

There is an issue that has presented itself this year. There has been more vandalism than in years past. Several grave marker stones have been pushed over, one of the large corner cinder block cemetery marker stones was pushed into the fence, and the pickets on the surrounding fence have been pulled off. We have tried to keep the fence along Rhett and Moore streets neat with replacement pickets, but along Nash, we have somewhat given up. They disappear or are pulled off faster than we can do the maintenance. We do need people to call the police when they see people in the cemetery after dark. The City has an ordinance that states that there should be no people in the cemetery after dark.

Work on Sellers' Twins stones – Little Buddie - Mary Ceicel - Quadrant BN, Location I6 – Grave stones down flat on ground. Base of grave stones broken and left in main foundation. Little Buddie stone was broke into 3 sections. Leveled foundation stones. Clean up the slot where the gravestone fits in. Cleaned where stones were to be joined together Epoxied the stones back into foundation and into 1 piece. Cleaned the stone's faces.

Before



After



## The Old Jail

*By Nancy and Charles Christianson*

Greetings from the Old Jail. The Old Jail was opened on April 11 for this year and officially the season ended on October 31. There were two more openings: on November 30 and December 1 for the Southport Charles Dickens Christmas festival, and December 8 for the Southport SHS Christmas House tour. As planned one of the Old Jail mannequins, in period attire, was Mr. Fezziwig and another as Charles Dickens's father who spent some of his life in debtor's prison.

As always, the Old Jail is dependent upon the Docents who take time out of their days to help us keep the Old Jail open for visitors. Without Nancy Christianson asking for people to volunteer for Docents and the people responding, the Old Jail does not happen. If you find that life is a little boring, and you like to meet people and tell them a little history of Southport, then being an Old Jail docent is a great way to enrich your life. You meet people from different parts of the world, United States, and of North Carolina counties and cities. We request the visitors to sign the Old Jail Visitor sheet. Connie Hendrix, one of the Old Jail Docents, took the 2010 and 2011 sign in sheets, and found that we had visitors from 5 different countries in 2010 and 7 in 2011. In 2011, we had also had visitors from 38 different states and from 167 different North Carolina cities. As to the states, Ohio had the most cities (29) represented, followed by South Carolina (25) and Virginia (25). We are very thankful to Connie for doing the work and categorization.

We opened this year with an exhibit of the Wilmington, Brunswick, and Southern railroad (W. B. & S (willing, but slow)) that came into Southport in 1911 and was sold for scrap in 1943. There are photographs, maps, and assorted rail road items (including some items from the collection of the late Edward Clark). The exhibit has been popular and since the railroad went down Rhett Street next to the Old Jail, the exhibit shows the association with the Old Jail. There is a photo of the railroad freight depot

and in the distance you can see the back of the Old Jail complete without house.

We received a copy of the original sale of the Old Jail lot in 1904 to Brunswick County from Kate Stuart of Southport. The price for the lot was \$400. The copy was being kept in the Garrison among the Historical Society's artifacts until the time it was brought to the Old Jail and hung.

At the end of the 2012 season (April to October), the Old Jail had a total of 2,015 visitors, with total donations of \$1,014.11 and a donation/visitor ratio of \$.50. The Old Jail sold \$344 of books without having a new edition of a book as we did last year. Last year, in the same April-October time frame, we had 2,545 visitors, donations of \$1,065 with a donation/visitor ratio of \$.42. Last year we had a Fourth of July that was a 4-day weekend. July 2011 monthly visitor total was 1,106. This year, July had a total of 833 visitors. The 2011 July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend was a mad house. We had and needed 4 docents to support the Old Jail visitor flow.



The Southport Visitor Center was moved this year to the Garrison at Fort Johnston from its previous location on West Moore Street. The Historical Society has always supplied the information on City's Tour Guide Brochure and did share the costs with the City for publishing it. The Tour Guide Brochure was given out (free) to the visitors who appeared at the Visitor Center, and it gives them a city map with an indicated tour path that passed some of the historical parts/houses of the City. The original tour brochure was developed in 2006 by the Historical Society with small drawings done by the artist, Don Johnson, a Society past president. Since the Visitor Center was moved more toward the center of the City at the fort, the brochure cover drawing needed to change along with the suggested tour path.

Using the old brochure as a guide, we did not want to change the "tone" of the old brochure. So we left the "tone" of the new brochure the same. The new brochure has words changed and locations added and subtracted. Therefore, drawings were added and subtracted. The new brochure is currently being printed at a Southport printer at the Society's expense. The Society also made 2,500 copies of the old brochure at the same printer at its expense when the new Visitor's Center opened at the beginning of July. Those 2,500 copies have been given out and more were needed at the end of October. Currently, the Society is having 5,000 copies printed in hope that the City can have a correct guide brochure to give out for the start of the new year.

# Historic Southport

## A Self-Guided Tour



Fort Johnston Officers' Quarters

Smithville, North Carolina - 1861

Southport Historical Society  
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[www.southporthistoricalsociety.org](http://www.southporthistoricalsociety.org)



## Susan Sellers Carson Scholarship Procedures

*By Karen Knighton*

Each year the Southport Historical Society awards this scholarship in honor of Miss Susie Carson. It's a two-year award of \$1,000 each year. Students must maintain a B average to be eligible for the second years' award. The money is sent directly to the student's school and requires full-time enrollment. If a second candidate is worthy of an award, the SHS has periodically approved a small second award, usually \$500, for one year. The annual award can be divided between the academic terms at the school if that is the school's policy.

The application is updated and usually new questions based on local history are added each fall. By December the forms are distributed to SBHS counselor, Nikita James. Letters and copies of the applications are also sent to the high school principal, Greg Bland, history/social studies teacher and the senior English teacher. A flier listing the details of the scholarship is printed and distributed to the library, Visitor Center, City Hall and other area locations. Usually the date that applications must be received is during the first week in April. Applications are mailed to the SHS post office box (10014) and must be postmarked by the deadline. An announcement regarding the application is sent to the State Port Pilot as soon as applications are available and it is run in the paper frequently until the application deadline has past. Notifications to students are done by early May. The winner is asked to join the society at its May meeting and to read their essay.

Students and the high school counselor complete the application form, provide their current transcripts, letters of recommendations, information regarding their high school activities, and an essay based on one of the questions on the application form. Essay requirements are listed on the application forms

An award letter is mailed to the winner and it lists the requirements for receiving it the second



year. A separate award letter is sent to the secondary winner if that award is made. Letters go to all the students who applied but not awarded. Letters go to the high school counselor as well. The society makes an announcement in the newspaper. In mid-summer, letters are sent to the college financial aid offices along with the checks and instructions for disbursing the award.

SHS volunteers evaluate each of the application components - rating them on a scale such as 1-5. Once a winner is selected the scholarship coordinator notifies all the students of the results as well as SBHS.

## Requirements for Historic House Plaque



1. Structure built by 1930
2. Copies of deeds from courthouse from original to present if possible. Owner must locate the documents.

Copies of deeds from purchase back as far as possible to establish who owned the house originally, at least the earliest known owner. The staff at Register of Deeds at the courthouse in Bolivia is very helpful. Be aware we DO NOT accept date of construction from tax records.

3. \$100.00 check made out to Southport Historical Society
4. Download application from website and mail with required documentation to:

SHS/Archivist  
 PO Box 10411  
 Southport, NC 28461

**southport historical society**

### Membership Application

<http://www.southporthistoricalsociety.org/>

Yes, I (we) would like to support the Southport Historical Society.  
 Please accept this membership in the category checked below:

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual                                     | \$15.00 per year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couple   | \$25.00 per year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (Through High School)                  | \$2.00 per year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business, Institutional, Club, or Professional | \$15.00 per year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining                                     | \$25.00 per year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Individual)                              | \$150.00         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Business)                                | \$200.00         |

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Make Check Payable To:** Southport Historical Society  
 Post Office Box 10014  
 Southport, NC 28461