

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

YEAR 2025

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Southport Historical Society

Mission Statement

Southport Historical Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization registered under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code dedicated to bringing together persons interested in local area history.

SHS endeavors to do so by providing opportunities for learning through programs and special events; published articles and books; educational classes; and community projects that will both enhance and preserve the unique history and heritage of Southport and the surrounding area.

2025 Board of Directors

President Liz Fuller
Ex Officio President Bob Surridge
Vice President Donnie Joyner
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Ted Brockman (part year)
Greg Gorddard
Carolyn Lucas
Donna Rowntree
Rich Sullivan
Kris Wright (part year)
Renée Yost

Mailing Address:
Southport Historical Society
P.O. Box 10014
Southport, NC 28461

Phone#: 910-477-3461
Email: info@southporthistoricalsociety.org
Website: www.southporthistoricalsociety.org

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Howe St. banner from the Women's History Banner project, co-sponsored by Southport Historical Society and the City of Southport.

Photo credit: Lawrence N Ashley

Cover image: Dunbar Davis, Keeper of the Oak Island Life Saving station 1892 - 1915, Davis was known for his many heroic rescues including the Sea Islands Hurricane of 1893. Photo taken 1893. SCRR Archives

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

This past year has been a really good one for the Southport Historical Society. We grew our reach and strengthened our connections, thanks to the many people in our community who care about Southport and its history.

Working with local businesses, fellow nonprofits, historical groups, and the City of Southport reminded me how much stronger we are when we work together. These partnerships helped us reach new audiences and uncover new ways to share Southport's stories, and I'm truly grateful for the spirit of collaboration behind them.

For me, the goal has always been to make Southport's history feel accessible and relevant to the people who live here. That thinking showed up in a lot of what we did this year, working with partners, sharing resources, and finding new ways to help people feel connected to the place we call home.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you to our volunteers, members, and supporters. Your time, enthusiasm, ideas, and generosity are what make this organization thrive. I'm so appreciative of your commitment and proud to be part of this community.

As we look ahead, we're also beginning to think about a meaningful milestone: our 50th anniversary. It's a chance to honor the people who started this organization, thank those who have sustained it, and celebrate the many ways Southport's history continues to matter. I hope you'll join us in marking this anniversary together and help shape how we celebrate this moment.

Liz

LIZ FULLER
PRESIDENT

SOUTHPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WOMEN WHO MADE SOUTHPORT

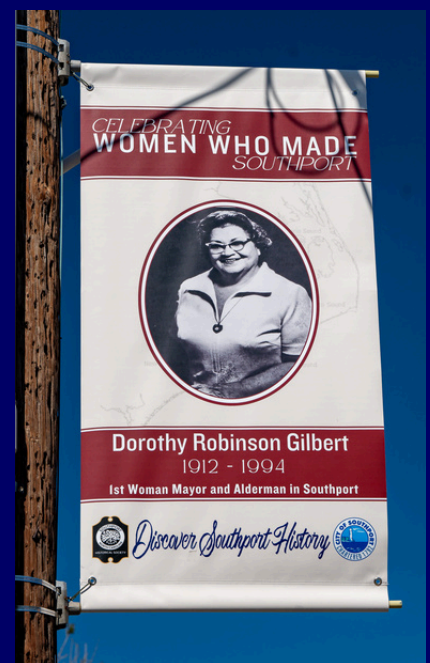
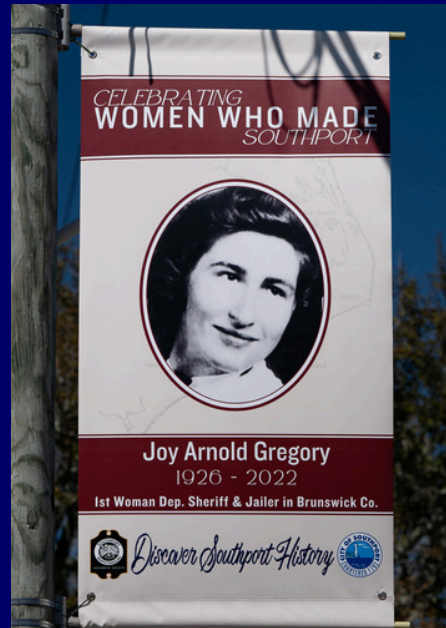
One of our most memorable events this year was a unique collaboration with the City of Southport to create a public history display on Howe St. commemorating fourteen women who made significant contributions to Southport's history.



Top: Kate Stuart (1844- 1929) 1st Woman in Southport's Chamber of Commerce; Jessie Stevens Taylor (1879-1961) : 55 Years National Weather Service Volunteer; Anna Alene Clemmons Worked for Voting Rights for All Citizens.
Bottom: Descendants of Melissa Jackson (1848-1944) gather to celebrate her banner as a businesswoman, midwife, landowner, and philanthropist. Photo Credit: Top Row Lawrence N. Ashley. Bottom: Donnie Joyner.

WOMEN WHO MADE SOUTHPORT

The banners were designed by Jessie Labell, Assistant Director of the Southport Community Relations Department and installed by the Southport Public Works Department.



Left: Mary Eliza Williams Wortham (1885- 1966) 50 Years as a Brunswick County Midwife with descendants. Photo courtesy of the Wortham family; Top Right: Joy Arnold Gregory (1926-2022) 1st Woman Deputy Sheriff and Jailer in Brunswick County. Bottom Right: Dorothy Robinson Gilbert (1912 - 1994) 1st Woman Mayor and Alderman in Southport. Photos credit: Lawrence N. Ashley.

WOMEN WHO MADE SOUTHPORT

The banners hung during the month of March to celebrate Women's History Month. Where possible, actual photos were used. If no photos could be found, silhouettes were substituted.



Top Row: Anna Miller Davis, first woman in Brunswick County to register to vote, Ludelphia Bellamy Rogers, founding member of Southport NAACP.

Above: Annie May Woodside, 1st Woman Supt. of Brunswick County Schools

Left: Dollie Spaulding Evans: Businesswoman, Worked for Educational Equality.

Photo Credit: Lawrence N. Ashley

WOMEN WHO MADE SOUTHPORT

The women who were honored were selected by the Southport Historical Society.
Nominations for additional honorees in future years will be contributed by the community.



Left: Miriam Gore Lane: Jeanes Supervisor Brunswick County Schools

Above: Sarah McKenzie Moore, 45 Years as a Brunswick County Teacher

Right: Margaret Taylor Harper, 1st NC Woman to run for NC Statewide Public Office.

Photo Credit: Lawrence N. Ashley



ORIGINAL PLAY

We were proud to have premiered a new play on Southport history at the 13th Annual Brunswick County Black History Symposium, sponsored by the Southport Historical Society, the Brunswick Arts Council, the NC Arts Council, and the City of Southport.

“Celia Galloway: US Colored Troops Widow” written and directed by Liz Fuller, told the true story of one Southport woman’s fight to obtain a widow’s pension for her husband’s military service.

The three-day event included a day of educational programs and culminated with a Sunday afternoon gospelfest.



Tyanna Parker-West portrayed Celia Galloway. James White, Sr. portrayed Abram Galloway. Not shown: Taraus Deas on keyboard at the 13th Annual Black History Symposium.

Photo Credit: Lawrence N. Ashley



Above: Pvt. Abram Galloway, USCT, Co. 137th Regiment



Left: Celia Galloway

Photos contributed by family.



North Carolina Arts Council
Fifty years of leadership



BRUNSWICK ARTS COUNCIL
Celebrate. Cultivate. Community Outreach

This project was supported by the Brunswick Arts Council Grassroots Program, a Designated County Partner of the North Carolina Arts Council, which is a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

HISTORICAL PLAQUE PROGRAM



Shannon Huback, Florence Lee Smith House, circa 1907
Photo Credit Robert Palmeter

The Southport Historical Society's plaque program identifies Southport homes that are more than 75 years old. Since the inception of this program, SHS has authorized more than 150 plaques.

In 2025, a plaque was presented to the Florence Lee Smith house, circa 1907. Florence's grandmother was the first Black woman in Southport to own a lot (Lot 93) within the Southport city limits. Members of the family owned the land from 1868 to 1975. Florence Lee Smith was given a portion of the lot in 1907 following her marriage to William Smith. There, they built their family home which was later inherited by their daughter Mabel Smith Berry who lived there the rest of her life.

A plaque was also presented to the Frances and Dunbar Davis House, circa 1880. Frances Price Davis purchased the land from family members in 1878 for \$375. She and her husband Dunbar Davis built their family home there. The home remained in the family until 1960.

Dunbar was Keeper of the Cape Fear Life Saving Station and then the OKI Life Saving Station and was credited with saving many lives.



Frances Davis and four generations of offspring. L to R. Danny Harrelson, Frances Davis, Fanny Davis Brinkman, Norma Brinkman Loughlin and Elizabeth Loughlin Harrelson. Dunbar Davis is on the front cover. Photos contributed by family.



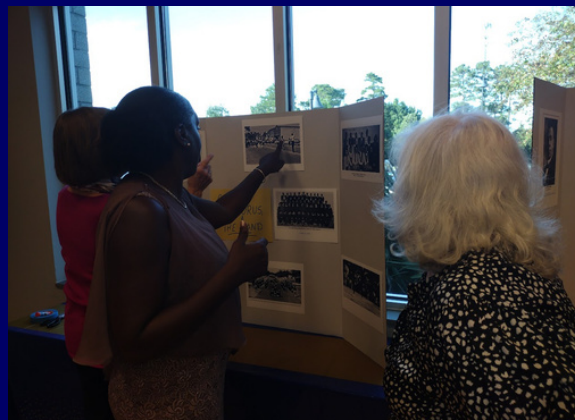
Bob and Alice Gardiner, Frances and Dunbar Davis House
Photo credit: Zeb Starnes

BRUNSWICK COUNTY TRAINING SCHOOL CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

SHS was pleased to support Brunswick County Training School's Centennial Celebration by providing a memorabilia room and by conducting oral history interviews.



Judy Gordon, Chair of John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc.



Judge Pauline Hankins shows Mary Ellen Poole a photo of her mother the Head Drum-mette in the Brunswick County Training School Marching Band.
Photo credit: Liz Fuller



Cozette and William Davis, President of the Brunswick County Training School Reunion Committee



Col. (Ret.) Willie Gore, Harry Jeffreys Jr., Lois Gore Thompson, Joyce Galloway Jeffreys

Photo Credits: Mary Ellen Poole

SUSAN SELLERS CARSON SCHOLARSHIP



Douglas Schulte-Hock, recipient of
2025 Susan Sellers Carson Scholarship
Photo courtesy of the Schulte-Hock family.

In 2025, the Southport Historical Society was pleased to award the Susan Sellers Carson Scholarship to Douglas Schulte-Hock of Bolivia, North Carolina. This annual scholarship recognizes a graduating Brunswick County senior whose original essay reflects both strong research and a meaningful engagement with history.

We are grateful to our Scholarship Committee: Greg Gorddard (chair), Ellie DeYoung, Liz Fuller, Carolee Morris, and Judy Rubin for their thoughtful work in reviewing submissions and supporting this important program.

Established in 2003, the Susan Sellers Carson Scholarship honors Miss Susie Carson, co-founder of the Southport Historical Society. For nearly fifty years, Society members have worked to collect, preserve, and share Southport's history. This scholarship reflects that ongoing commitment and our belief that an understanding of the past helps shape the future. Since the scholarship's founding, the Society has awarded more than \$30,000 in scholarships.



Susan Sellers Carson
co-founder of Southport Historical Society

4TH OF JULY CELEBRATION



In 2025, Downtown Southport Inc. (DSI) invited Southport Historical Society to join them on their parade float. It was a good time for young and not-so-young!

Kameron McKenzie-Mitchell (great granddaughter) and Marlowe Mitchell (granddaughter), and Brad Mitchell (son) of SHS volunteer, Rick Mitchell rode on the float with "Frenchie" on temporary parole from the Old Brunswick County Jail.

Photo credit: Kimberly Yates Carrillo

Below: Wes Collins portrays Dr. D.I. Watson and Sue Crippen portrays Susan Loughlin as they ride on the parade float, with Randy Jones, president of Downtown Southport Inc. and Alexis Gore, John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation Inc. Boardmember.



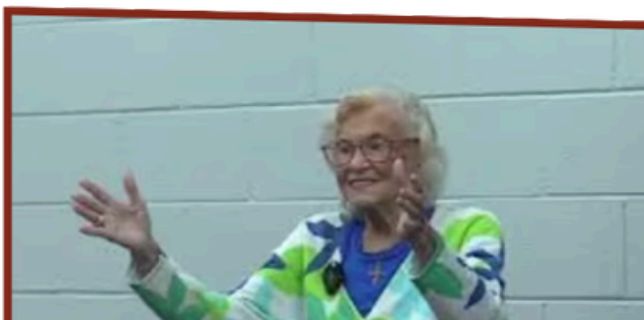


Photo Credits: Lisa Anderson and Donnie Joyner (video stills) from the October, August, July and April Second Tuesday Talks.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

We held our monthly “2nd Tuesday” talks at the Harper Library which have become a tradition over the past eight years. We offered multiple evening talks at Southport Suzie’s. And we held an outdoor program in our Heritage Garden at the Old Jail Museum.

In addition, SHS members were invited to speak at local organizations including Brunswick Civil War Roundtable Ladies Forum, Brunswick County Historical Society, Vintage Ladies, Daughters of the American Revolution, St. Peter Lutheran Church Women of Faith, and the Southport Woman's Club.



MUSEUMS

The Southport Historical Society maintains two free museums to share Southport's unique history with visitors and residents.

Fort Johnston - Southport Museum & Visitor Center receives as many as 30,000 visitors per year. Exhibits commemorate Southport's more than 230 year history from its founding through its roles as the county seat, a quarantine station, a military town, a shrimping capital, and more recently a movie and television filming location.

The Southport Historical Society opened the Brunswick County Old Jail Museum in June, 2005. The popular museum received nearly 4000 visitors in 2025.

It is open two to three afternoons per week, from April through October, as well as on the day of the Holiday Home Tour when the Grinch is held in one of the cells for trying to steal Christmas.

The museum is available for private tours upon request.

FORT JOHNSTON SOUTHPORT MUSEUM

NEW ROTATING EXHIBIT

Picturing Southport's Past



This new exhibit conceived by Bob Surridge and managed by Henry Livingston presents a different artwork each month portraying iconic landmarks and significant events in Southport history.

Above: "Indian Trail Tree" textile art by Debby Dickson Masten, and "The Roland" watercolor by Art Newton.

Right: The Old Fire Station and Fire Truck by Ricky Evans. Photos: Henry Livingston



BRUNSWICK COUNTY OLD JAIL MUSEUM 20TH ANNIVERSARY



Old Jail Museum Photo Credit: Lawrence N. Ashley

SHS welcomes nearly 4000 visitors annually to learn about the history of the Old Brunswick County Jail. A team of 37 volunteer docents provide guided group or private tours of the jail. They share the history of the building which served Brunswick County for more than 70 years, from 1904 to 1978, first as a jail and then as Sheriff offices. Their knowledge and enthusiasm make the tours a fun and educational experience for the whole family.

The Old Jail Museum Advisory Board manages the running of the museum. Members of the Advisory Board are Rich Sullivan (Chair), Rick Mitchell, Candace Bland, Dottie Capriotti, Sue Crippen, Mark Deans, Shirley Johnston, Bob Surridge, and Catherine Smith.

2025 Jail Docents: Shannon Bennett, Tanya Bennett, Candace Bland, Kim Brown, Susan Brown, Stephen Burns, Tina Butler, Dottie Capriotti, Sean Cockrell, Mary Ellen Cox, Jim Crabtree, Nancy Drew, Mary Ann Duffy, Linda Fitzgerald, Anne Grady, Patricia Grady, Mary Green, Joan Hargrove, Barbara Herring, Gail Herring, Carolyn Hines, Patricia Hinson, Mary Holden, Joan Johnson, Fran Kaylor, Martha Koury, Linda Loughlin, Cathy McCarthy, Karen McDougald, Pat McKeithan, Linda Mintz, Nancy Moore, Betty Newton, Patricia O'Connor, Mary Ellen Smith, Janet St. Clair, and Mary Swain.

BRUNSWICK COUNTY OLD JAIL MUSEUM

20TH ANNIVERSARY (Continued)



Above: Musette Steck paints a window casing during restoration (2002).

Right: 4th of July Rededication Ceremony and Centennial Ceremony (2004). (L-R) Bob Lucas, Peter Wyckoff, Susie Carson, Mayor Norman Holden and Sheriff Ron Hewett.

Photos courtesy SHS Archives.

The Southport Historical Society began leasing the Old Jail building from the City of Southport in 1984, using it as its headquarters. Although the lease payment is only \$1 per year, SHS is responsible for all preservation, maintenance, security, and utilities.

In 1998, the Society undertook a major renovation, cleaning the structure, removing rust, and making it safe and presentable for public use. Since that time, SHS has invested more than \$140,000 and innumerable volunteer hours in the ongoing care and upkeep of the Old Jail and its grounds.

On July 4, 2004, a Rededication Ceremony and Centennial Celebration was held.

The Old Jail Museum opened to the public in June 2005.





Colleen Webster greets guests at her home on the 34th Annual Holiday Tour of Homes. Photo credit: Renée Yost.

FUNDRAISING PROGRAMS

Southport Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) that relies on the goodwill of the Southport community to support our mission to research, preserve, and share Southport's unique history.

The Southport Historical Society holds several fundraising projects throughout the year.

As with all of our programs, we make it a point to incorporate education and entertainment into our fundraising activities:

- Commemorative Brick Program
- Living Voices of the Past
- Southport Holiday Tour of Homes

COMMEMORATIVE BRICK PROGRAM



Photo (top row): Members of the Southport Beautification Committee worked hard to install the new commemorative bricks in the walkway in front of Fort Johnston.

Photo (bottom left): SHS Ex Officio President portraying Mayor Leonard T. Yaskell.

Photo (bottom right): Commemorative Brick Walkway in front of Fort Johnston.

Southport Historical Society is once again grateful to the members of the Southport Beautification Committee, for their hard work in laying the Commemorative Bricks in the walkway at Fort Johnston Southport Museum and Visitors' Center.

Southport Beautification Committee Chair Lynne Geiman was an excellent coordinator in setting up and keeping SHS informed of the plans. Her masonry specialists rose to the occasion to make sure that the bricks were superbly and expertly placed.

LIVING VOICES OF THE PAST

One of our most engaging fundraisers is our annual Living Voices of the Past program in which a dozen or so historical characters from Southport's past come to life in the Old Smithville Burying Ground.

It's a fun day for performers and guests alike.



Rick Mitchell portrayed Deputy John Baker Fountain who lived with his family at the jail and was on duty when murderer C. J. Walker escaped from the jail.



Claire McNaught portraying Mrs. Sarah Twining Curtis, 2nd wife of Dr. Walter Curtis, former mayor, hotelier, and quarantine station doctor for 30 years.



Wes Collins portraying Dr. D.I. Watson, owner of Watson's Pharmacy who shepherded Southport through the flu pandemic of 1918.

LIVING VOICES OF THE PAST (CONT.)



Carol Jutte portrayed Adeline Russ, widow of Revolutionary War Veteran, Sempronius Russ.



Barbara Lemos portrayed Rebecca Long, widow of North Carolina's first lighthouse keeper, Henry Long. She was a woman whom Thomas Jefferson said neither he nor the country was ready for.



Debbie Scavuzzo portrayed Susan Tate King, Southport librarian and WWII war correspondent, rivaling Tokyo Rose.

LIVING VOICES OF THE PAST (CONT.)



Sue Crippen portrayed Susan Loughlin, wife of jailer J. J. Loughlin, who lived with her family at the jail and was famous for her Topsy Cake.



Kris Wright and Bob Hagerman sold books.



Vice President Donnie Joyner was the videographer.



Mary Ellen Poole greeted visitors.

34TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY TOUR OF HOMES



Photo credits : Lawrence N. Ashley

Top Row: Myra and Robert Palmeter, Jack Rudnick, Amy Coggins and John Mann, Judd and Ellen Moul

Center Row: Leigh and Rhonda Armistead, Shannon Huback, Janet and Scott Fortney, Chris and Colleen Webster

Bottom Row: Rick and Linda Pukenas, Southport Baptist Church

Many thanks to the more than 150 volunteers who worked together to make this year's home tour a success.

Special thanks to the 2025 Holiday Tour of Homes Committee: Renée Yost (chair), Paul Fisher, Liz Fuller, Pat Gorton, Tish Hatem, Heidi Heifetz, Emily Humphreys, Randy Jones, Jessie Labell, Kim Lehner, Pam Lewis, Sharon Lightbourne, Dottie Nixa, Peggy Popelars, Linda Pukenas, Laura Ryan, Tammy Torino, and Joanne Wesson.

And most especially, thank you to the homeowners and Southport Baptist Church who opened their doors to visitors. Without your hospitality and generosity, we could not hold this beloved Southport tradition.

2025 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Thanks to the continued generosity of our donors and the success of our fundraising efforts, the Southport Historical Society maintained a balanced budget throughout 2025. This strong financial position allowed us to expand programming, invest in digital infrastructure, and adapt our operations for long-term sustainability.

Key Financial and Operational Updates:

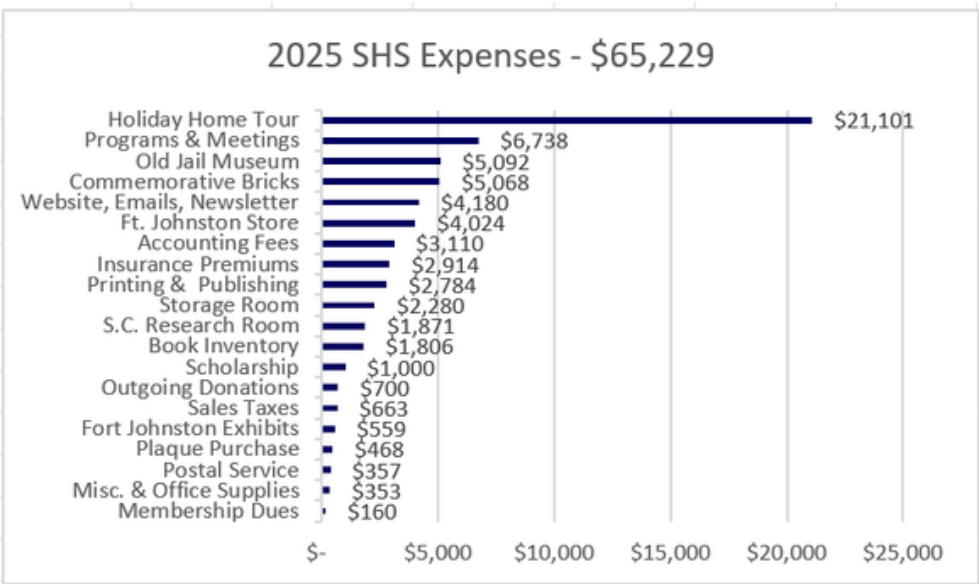
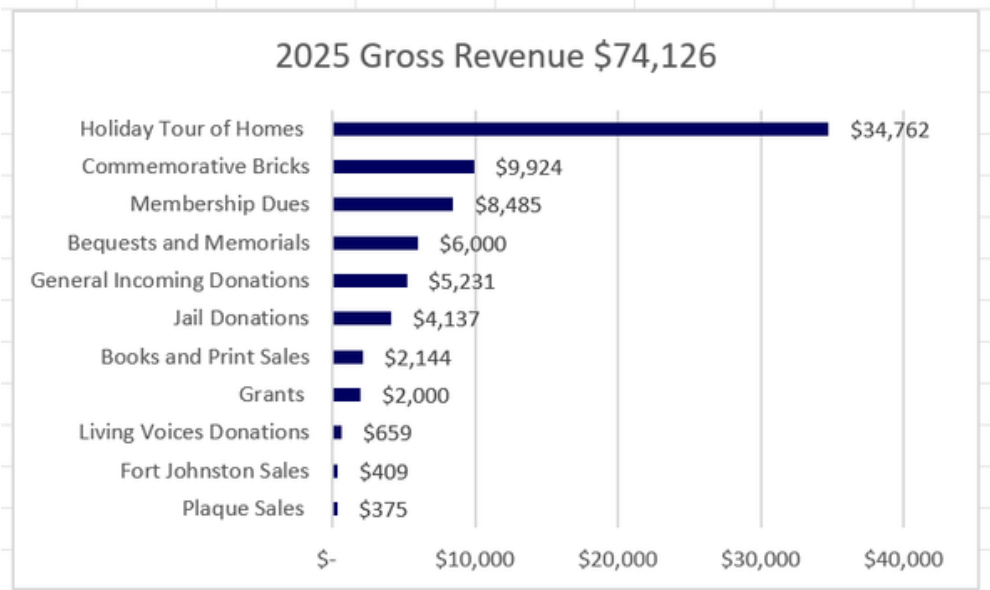
- Upgraded our website to improve public access to information, resources, and historical content.
- Implemented a new more robust online payment system for our memberships and ticketed events.
- Established a partnership with Downtown Southport Inc. to enhance and expand our fundraising capabilities.
- Transitioned management of the gift shop at the Fort Johnston Visitor Center to the City of Southport after eight years of operation. This strategic change allowed us to reallocate volunteer and financial resources toward educational programming and outreach.

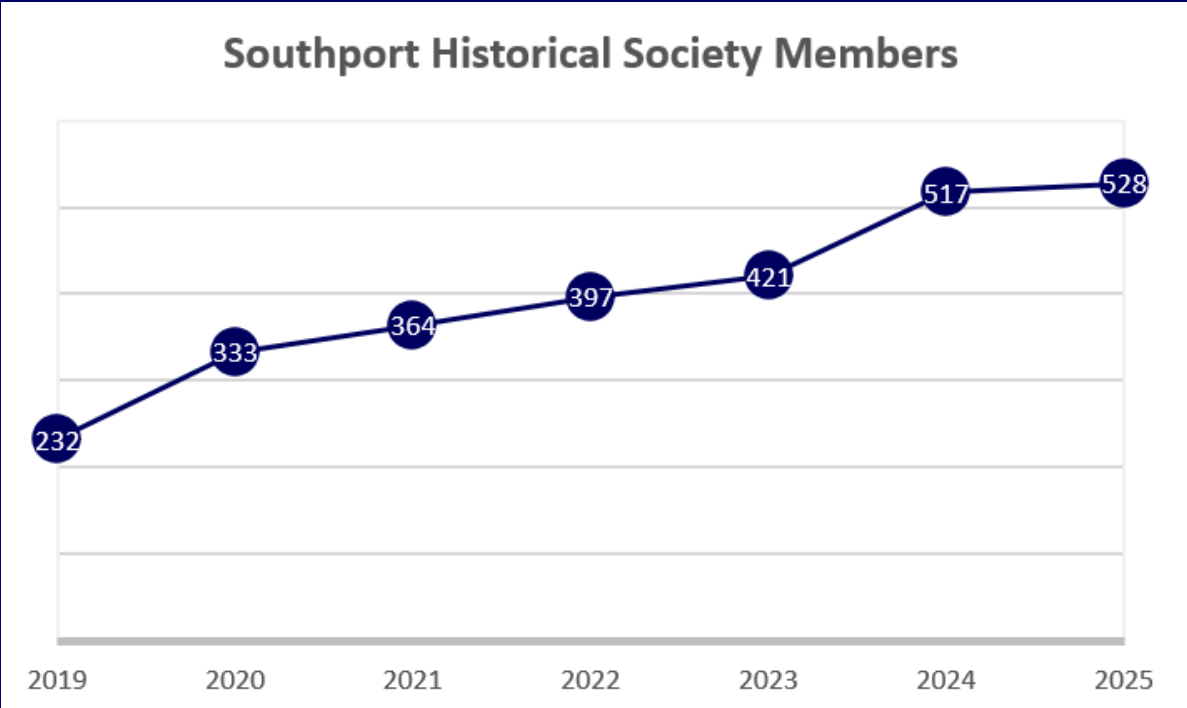
These changes reflect our ongoing commitment to using financial resources efficiently while expanding our reach and impact. SHS is entirely run by volunteers and, since its inception in 1976, has sustained its work through membership dues, fundraising, and private donations, with only limited grant support.

2025 FINANCIAL DETAILS

The Southport Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that is funded by the support of private donations, membership dues, grants and book sales. We have no paid employees. All funds are spent in support of our mission to research, preserve, and share Southport’s unique history.

Note: 2025 net revenue (\$8,897) was higher than usual due to an increased amount of memorials and donations.





MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Southport Historical Society remained steady in 2025. Members have the satisfaction of knowing they are helping to keep Southport’s unique history alive. They also enjoy first access to highly sought-after events, such as the Holiday Tour of Homes.



Discover Southport History

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support this year.

Adventure Kayak Company
Blue Tulip
Brunswick Arts Council
Brunswick County Historical Society
Brunswick County Civil War Roundtable
Brunswick Town Chapter, NSDAR
Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson
Camouflage
Carriage House Inn
Cattail Cottage
City of Southport
Downtown Southport, Inc.
Federation of NC Historical Societies
Flow Acura of Wilmington
Friends of the Library - Southport and Oak Island
Haven/Slice of Haven
Historic Wilmington Foundation
Intracoastal Realty
James and Margaret Harper Jr. Library
John N. Smith Restoration and Preservation, Inc.
Las Olas
North Carolina Arts Council
North Carolina Digital Heritage Center
North Carolina Maritime Museum Southport
Port City Java
Randall Library, UNCW
Renee's Fine Jewelry
Ricky Evans Gallery
Robert Ruark Inn
Salty Olive
Sea Glass Realty
Southport 4th of July Festival
Southport Beautification Committee
Southport Department of Community Relations
Southport Magazine
Southport Public Works Department
Southport Shanty Crew
Southport Suzie's
Southport Wooden Boat Show
The Old Baldy Foundation, Inc.
The State Port Pilot
Uncorked by the Sea

Thank you for your support of the Southport Historical Society

The Southport Historical Society was organized in 1976 to research, preserve and share the unique history of Southport, North Carolina. We're a 100% volunteer organization. Some of the programs initiated and supported by the society are:

- Sponsoring the annual Holiday Tour of Homes on the second Saturday each December.
- Identifying and installing plaques on historic buildings and properties.
- Operating and maintaining the extensive Susie Carson Online Research Room <https://sites.google.com/site/researchsouthporthistory/>
- Providing historical memorabilia and displays for the Southport Museum and Visitors' Center at historic Ft. Johnston
- Assisting in genealogical research.
- Conducting local history classes.
- Conducting lectures and special tours for school groups, family groups and other organizations
- Providing visitor information and self-guided tours
- Presenting public lectures on historical topics.
- Recording history through oral interviews.
- Participating in NC State Regional Historic Site programs.
- Preserving and maintaining the "Old Jail" Museum and the Southport Museum at the Visitors' Center.
- Performing "Living Voices of the Past" at the Old Smithville Burying Ground.
- Publishing and selling books related to local history.
- Providing scholarships to deserving local college students.
- Placing historical markers throughout the City.
- Providing support to local organizations and projects working to preserve the history of Southport.
- Digitizing The State Port Pilot newspaper archives.
- Publishing our Newsletter, The Whittler's Bench.



910-477-3461 | info@southporthistoricalsociety.org

WWW.SOUTHPORTHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG