

Be a Tourist

The Naturalization Ceremony that Southport hosts every July always evokes memories and provokes thoughts within me. New Americans often seem more proud of their new citizenship than those of us who have it as a birthright. This train of thought leads to my thinking that visitors not only seek out our history here in Southport, but embrace it.

Many out-of-towners find the Southport Historical Society's *Southport Trail: A Self-guided Walking Tour* brochure at the Visitors Center, where it has been available to the public for over ten years. The trail, which can be followed also by car or bicycle, highlights twenty-three historic sites and is a little over one mile long. It covers the area on Bay Street from Captain Thomas Mann Thompson's house to Kingsley Park and from Caswell and West streets to Brown and Atlantic streets. The SHS is in the process of updating that brochure due to needed corrections, but mainly because the Society now has doubled the number of colorful historical markers shown on *Southport Trail* and has perceived the need for a separate brochure of historical markers.

From 2000-2008, under the leadership of Karen Knighton with the Southport Historical Society and Carolyn Pryor with Coastal Water Watch, three grants were received from the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation under the North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources. The first marker to be erected is the largest and has a place of honor on the corner of Bay and Howe streets at Waterfront Park. The marker is a timeline which begins in 1524 when Indians of the Waccamaw tribe greeted the first European explore, Verrazzano; it continues through the early 1860's when Confederate blockade runners on the Cape Fear were the only provider of supplies for Lee's soldiers. The timeline ends in 1932 when the Intracoastal Waterway was extended to Lockwood Folly.

The other historical markers are referred to as table markers because they are the height of a table but the top surface is slanted as a convenience for reading the script. Among these markers erected by SHS are descriptions and pictures of seven historic churches from Lord Street to Franklin Square Park, World War II U-boat activity, the shrimp and fishing industries, wildlife of the salt marshes, the Quarantine Station, the two Masonic lodges and other points of interest not specifically listed on the *Southport Trail* brochure.

Visitors to the Old Jail Museum will notice the Bicentennial Heritage Garden plaque and the Southport Heritage Walk. The colorful flower garden under the care of Charles Christianson is filled with shrubs and flowers that are indigenous to this area and were popular when the jail was built in 1904. The Heritage Walk consists of a stone walkway commemorating people who helped shape the history of Southport and are now deceased. The first stones were in honor of the "founding fathers" of Smithville (now Southport) in 1792: Charles Gause, Robert Howe, Jr., William Espey Lord, Jr., Joshua Potts and Benjamin Smith. Other stones commemorate Rev. Alexander Betts, a circuit rider; Eleanor Potter Smith, a co-founder of SHS in 1976; Donald K. Johnson, a president of SHS, author of *Southport Trail* and the driving force behind the Southport quilt; A.C. Caviness, principal of Brunswick County Training School from 1923 to integration; Jesse Stevens Taylor, founder of the Southport Woman's Club and a volunteer weather observer from 1901-1961; Susie Sellers Carson, co-founder of SHS, author and teacher. Susie's stone was dedicated on what would have been her 89th birthday, May 25, 2009. In a light-hearted moment, the Society decided to commemorate Hurricane Hazel, born October 15, 1954, with a stone because the face and history of Southport was forever changed by her 200 mph winds.

Whether you have lived here all of your life, for a decade or two, or just a short while, I invite you to see Southport through the eyes of a tourist. Act like a tourist and visit the Maritime Museum, the Old Jail Museum or the new Visitors Center and City Museum and deepen your appreciation of where you live.