

Mission Accomplishments

Have you noticed a shield-shaped plaque with a date and name on some houses and public buildings in Southport? Have you visited the Old Jail Museum across from the Old Smithville Burying Ground? An answer in the affirmative means the efforts of the Southport Historical Society (SHS) have been successful as we have tried to “encourage the preservation of historic buildings” which we interpret as being both private and public structures.

The historic plaque program, which features historic structures, was begun by the Anchor Club and adopted by the SHS in 2002. The first six years have proved to be the most successful when a total of twenty-six historic plaques were added within Southport’s designated historic district. The slow-down might have been due to a misconception that the SHS arbitrarily selected the places, which displayed a plaque. Our requirements are much simpler and defined. First, the structure must have been built by 1930. Second, the documentation of its age must be deeds from the office of the Registrar of Deeds in Bolivia. Third, send a check for \$100 to SHS with the application and documentation.

The 1930 date alone qualifies most churches in Southport as well as many houses and business establishments as being historic. The date and the deeds also determine the first name to be on the house’s plaque because it is always the surname of the first family who resided in that house. Our archivist, Larry Maisel, will help determine the names and dates if there are any questions. You may obtain an application from our website www.southporthistoricalsociety.org or call Musette Steck at 454-0437.

One of Southport’s few preserved buildings, which is open for public viewing is the Old Brunswick County Jail. The Old Jail was built in 1904 for \$6,738 and served as the jail for the county until the county seat was moved to Bolivia in 1978. About ten years ago when Peter Wyckoff was president of the SHS, the Old Jail became headquarters for the society. A major renovation was undertaken including installation of HAVC, painting and other restorations at a cost of nearly \$50,000 from society fundraisers with Karen Knighton serving as project manager. Many volunteers worked diligently to create the museum as a showcase for a part of Southport’s history.

The first floor has a “1904 Family Life Room”, the actual county logs of the 1950’s and 1960’s jail bookings, displays and book sales area. The second floor still has the original cells and a room filled with police memorabilia and insignias from all over North Carolina and other states.

The Old Jail Museum has been open for free tours on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, April through October, on a regular basis since 2005. We also open at other times upon special requests. 2,966 visitors signed the register in 2011 and donated \$1,095.78. In order to maintain these numbers and continue to fulfill our mission “to encourage community participation in the preservation of our heritage”, we need more people to help interpret our history. As a volunteer docent, you will select a time to lead a tour and become comfortable with the knowledge given in the training program. Call Nancy Christianson at 457-7412.

Have you heard Thor roar? One may sound rather tongue-tied if “Thor” is pronounced correctly because the “h” is silent, but our Thor is anything but silent. Thor is the SHS’s full-scaled M-1841 replica bronze 6-pounder cannon which is used to celebrate weddings, anniversaries, town festivals, artillery demonstrations and several events for Southport’s July Fourth historical celebration.

Before Thor came to Southport and the SHS, Sandy Toth and Norm Carathanasis were among the hundreds who lined the waterfront as the tall ship, Endeavor entered the Cape Fear. As they tell it, “The

Endeavor fired and we waved.” By chance, Toth had a friend in Virginia who had bought a cannon in 1991. In 2000 the Virginian donated the cannon to the SHS. The Smithville Guard was organized immediately and certified by the National Civil War Association after extensive training. By sponsoring Thor and the Guard, the SHS accomplishes another part of its mission, “to promote a better appreciation of our American Heritage”.

Although our Guard was relatively new, they and Thor were asked to participate in the Hundley Celebration in Charleston. Fifty cannon represented the fifty states and Thor was one of those firing a salute to the raised Civil War submarine. The Smithville Guard is open for new and “younger-blooded” recruits of age 16 and over. Requirements for recruits: be willing to be trained on the job and stand for certification every two years; supply your own uniform; join the SHS. For more information call Toth at 454-0760 or Carathanasis at 454-5700 or get a brochure at the Visitor’s Center.

The SHS has been giving life to its original 1976 mission for thirty-six years. With continued support and participation from the community and aldermen, we intend to include more people in the history of Southport. Even those who do not “make” the history books do make history . . . for themselves and for the possibilities it gives others.