

# Federal Point Historic Preservation Society

P.O. Box 623, Carolina Beach, North Carolina 28428

## Newsletter

Volume 11 No. 12

December, 2004

Darlene Bright, editor

### December Meeting Merry Christmas!

The Federal Point Historic Preservation Society will hold its annual Community Christmas Party, Monday, December 20, 2004, **6:30 pm**, at the Federal Point History Center, 1121-A North Lake Park Blvd., adjacent to the Carolina Beach Town Hall.

Celebrity and Historian, John Golden, along with Jim Clare, will return by popular demand to perform and lead in a Christmas carol or two.

Members and the public are cordially invited to sit down and enjoy a good old-fashioned dinner of ham, turkey, and the trimmings. If you wish, you may bring a favorite covered dish or dessert.

### Last Month

Nathan Henry, Underwater Archaeologist with the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, brought a new look at old days on the Cape Fear River. Nathan described the business of Cape Fear River navigation and piloting which has persisted with little change, except for the equipment used, since regulation began during the colonial period. He related, to an audience of approximately 31 members and guests, work he and the Underwater Archaeology team at Fort Fisher have made to research what may be the remains of the last sailing pilot boat, *Frances Elizabeth*, which burned and sank in the lower Cape Fear River.

The Society is grateful to Nathan and the Underwater Archaeology Branch for sharing with us a part of our important history many of us may have overlooked.

### Message From Your President Patricia Gray Bolander

Seasons Greetings to all! As we near the end of our year, take a pause to reflect on all our blessings, such as the hurricane season that was mild to us compared to other parts of the country. Is there a serviceman's family whom you might remember? Perhaps there is an ill friend or neighbor you could assist? Let us make this a season of helping someone else enjoy the holiday and put our "Good Neighbor Policy" at the top of our lists.

My THANKS once again to all the members, especially those who have unselfishly volunteered their time – your help makes my job so much easier, and that helps promote our Society.

A Blessed Christmas Holiday and a Happy, Healthy New Year to you all!

### Mullets And Sweet Taters By Leslie Bright

I can think of no other naturally occurring and widely distributed food commodities, that have contributed to settlers' nourishment and survival along the coastal areas of North Carolina, as mullets and sweet potatoes. Known as Jumping Mullet, Popeye Mullet, and Sucking Mullet, this fish can be found plentiful in most parts of the world as they are at home in fresh, brackish, or salt water. Considered by some as trash fish, they have been commercially harvested for oil and fertilizer. To a few folks with unique taste buds, they are considered a delicacy, but to many more, this fish was something to eat when nothing else was available and could be

transformed into an exotic dish when eaten with sweet potatoes. Less fortunate folks in eastern North Carolina often survived during these periods by eating a lot of mullet and sweet potatoes.

Mullets were caught in gill nets, haul seine nets, or snagged with trebble fishing hooks. One method which sometimes worked was to wait for a school to swim by, frighten them, and pick them up when they jumped out of the water and landed on the shore, the marsh, or your boat. Plentiful as mullets were in the old days, one could usually venture to the nearest boat landing and buy all one wanted for pennies. Before electricity was provided in coastal areas, mullets were preserved for food by salting them. I, myself, recall helping to salt mullets as a youngster in the late 40s and 50s. This we did by first cleaning the fish and then rubbing them with salt and tightly packing them in a large open-ended wooden barrel. We added brine water, which we made by adding salt to water until a hen egg floated, level with the top of the fish. Salt was then poured over until it reached a thickness of approximately two inches. A muslin cloth was draped over the open barrel to keep insects from falling in. As the salt brine permeated the fish, the salt layer would become rigid to form a seal. A few fish, from time to time, could be removed through a plug hole cut out of the salt cap and put back to restore the seal. Fish removed from the brine were soaked in warm water to delute and remove salt before cooking, especially with sweet potatoes.

Sweet potatoes were easily grown in small and large garden plots in practically any type of soil. Their abundance also made them available cheaply. In rural neighborhoods, one could usually get a "mess" from a neighbor if one ran out. Called spuds, yams, or sweet taters by coastal folks, preservation of this food was simple, "don't let them freeze." They would become "cold-hurt" and make you sick. Preservation was accomplished by preparing a "potato bank." In a depression on the sunny side of a hill, prepare a straw bed, place the sweet potatoes on the bed, leaving air spaces before placing straw over them, and then cover with soil deeper than the frost line. To get them out, make a small hole, take out a few, and replace straw and soil.

I suspect that if you don't know what mullet and taters taste like prepared on an old wooden stove, you are not familiar with the the outhouse privy.

## **Meet A Member**

### **By Jeannie Gordon**

*(Appearing periodically in our newsletter, the purpose of this new feature is to personalize the faces and names of members you have met over the years. )*

To those who know what she does, the name Darlene Bright is synonymous with our Society. We simply could not function without her! Darlene is a founding member of the Federal Point Historic Preservation Society and she has been at the heart of our group for over ten years. She served as our Secretary and our Treasurer until last year, when she relinquished the duties of Treasurer. She remains our Secretary, taking minutes at all the meetings, preparing reports, serving as archivist of the Society, and handling the majority of the correspondence.

In addition, Darlene serves as Director of the History Center, making note of maintenance issues, choreographing volunteer docents, collecting and researching items for our library (named in her and Leslie's honor), and even performing the manual chores necessary to keep our center clean. If we have a fundraiser, community service project, or a social, Darlene is there. As if all of this effort is not enough, do you realize that Darlene is singularly responsible for each and every issue of this newsletter! She writes or edits the articles, processes the text, duplicates the pages, staples, folds, labels and slaps on the stamp. Every month!!

Originally from Blacksburg, South Carolina, Darlene has two brothers and a sister. She has called Carolina Beach her home since 1968 and has a history of commitment and involvement in her church and community. While raising her "young-uns," she was especially active in basketball, coaching the First Baptist Church girl's basketball team for the town's church league for eight years. Married to Leslie for 23 years, she has four daughters, three of whom live in the Wilmington area, a stepson and a stepdaughter, and six grandchildren. Darlene and Leslie are close with their family and are frequently involved in family activities and projects.

Darlene worked at the County Register of Deeds for many years; and she even ran for office as the County Registrar (she lost). Building on her real estate skills, she next worked as a legal assistant, with real estate law emphasis, from 1978 until retirement in 1995. Asked to un-retire by her former employer, she continues to work part time. Using her real estate background and Leslie's construction skills, Darlene and Leslie enjoy buying and renovating older buildings. At one time, they owned the Ocean Plaza (and ran it for a summer) and the old drugstore building now housing Laney Real Estate.

When asked for something we might not know about her, Darlene talks about how much she enjoyed playing basketball and softball on various community leagues and that she played on a women's basketball team with her two older daughters, as the oldest woman on the team. She retired from the game only after breaking her arm.

Having lived in Carolina Beach for close to forty years, Darlene cares about the town and preserving the area's history. She is a walking encyclopedia of people, places and events--and she tends to know who to contact for just about anything. She ran for Town Council in the late 1980s; and, while she has mixed feelings, she generally likes what she sees going on in the town.

Darlene's ethic of active involvement is exemplified in her family life, her professional life, her service to the community and, especially, her dedication to the Federal Point Historic Preservation Society. We all owe her a huge thank you for her contributions toward the continued growth of our organization.

### Society Notes

- **Membership Information:** Renewal notices are being sent on the anniversary of your joining the Society. If you have been receiving a Newsletter, and we have not heard from you within 90 days of the billing date, your name will be placed in the inactive file and no Newsletter will be sent. Thanks to all who have responded promptly! Our renewals are up! Your support of our local preservation efforts with your membership is very important as it is the lifeblood of our organization.

**FPHPS Members:** Beginning this Christmas Season through Thursday, January 6, 2005, we are giving a ten percent (10%) discount to all FPHPS members on any item in our gift shop. You are welcome to come in and look around. Not only will you find a nice gift, but your purchase will help in promoting our preservation efforts.

- **History Center News!** The History Center is opened every Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm, or other times by appointment. If you wish to volunteer, please sign-up at the Monday meeting, or call me at 458-8684. We really need your help. Thanks to our volunteers: Pat Bolander - 16 hours; Jeannie Gordon - 20 hours; John Gordon - 3 hours; Sylvia Snook - 4 hours; Ron Griffin - 3 hours; Frances Griffin - 3 hours; Leslie Bright - 7 hours; and Darlene Bright -25 hours, who greeted 21 visitors to our Center. Thanks to Lynn Benson and Lois Walton for decorating the History Center for Christmas.

- **Fort Fisher News!**

**October, 2004 - September, 2005** - Captain Thomas J. Purdie's Uniform, a special exhibit featuring an artillery uniform worn by Confederate Col. Thomas J. Purdie, stationed at Fort Fisher early in the war. Purdie Battery, thought to be named in his honor, was the location of the famous Armstrong Cannon. The uniform, along with his saber, valise and canteen will be on loan from the Averasboro Battlefield Commission. This is an opportunity to see a very rare item!

**January 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005 - 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Capture of Fort Fisher.** This will be a large living history program featuring special tours and demonstrations. A battle recreation followed by tours and cannon demonstrations highlight Saturday's event. Our Society will be serving those dee-licious country sausage dogs on Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> - proceeds will go toward supporting the Armstrong Exhibit Fund.

**Fort Fisher takes Aim at Brunswick Town** - A belated but much appreciated sincere thanks to Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site: One Saturday, last July, my parents in company of their next door neighbors, visited Brunswick Town where they enjoyed a delightful experience. They were given the "royal treatment", feis and feted, at the hands of Ms. Brenda Marshburn and Mr. Nick Briggs. Father and

Mother just raved about BT's newly renovated facility and we all agreed that their exhibit hall is as professionally and tastefully done as any we've seen, truly museum quality. Especial thanks to Mr. Briggs for the golf cart without which my Mom would never have been able to traverse their expansive beautiful grounds. All in all it was a red letter day. Site Manager Jimmy Bartley has much to be proud of in his staff and volunteers. These fine folks (including Ms. Millie Hart and Mr. Kent Snyder) are a first class act.

But we already knew that, seeing as how we lured Ms. Tammie Bangert (2003 recipient of "The Spirit of the Southeast" award) away from them about six years ago. Of course they got even last year, when they kidnapped Mr. Chris Jackson (a most excellent employee) from us.

P. S. The lovely and talented Ms. Marshburn recently graced television screens across southeastern NC, starring in a segment of *The Down East Gardener*, where she ably hosted her site – Great Job Brenda! And don't forget her autograph is available for a nominal fee.

Thanks again B.T., keep up the good work! **Sincerely, Ray Flowers**

For the latest info about programs at Fort Fisher call (910) 458-5538, or email at [fisher@ncmail.net](mailto:fisher@ncmail.net).

● **Attraction NEW 2005 Carolina Coast Dining & Value Guide** is now available! Treat yourself and your friends! Be among the first to get your money saving coupon book. This is one of our easiest and best fundraising projects - the books sell themselves. Everyone, please take a few books to sell and make this a successful fundraising experience.

#### **Officers**

President - Pat Bolander  
Vice-President - John Gordon  
Secretary - Darlene Bright  
Treasurer - Jeannie Gordon

James Bartley  
Leslie Bright  
Barbara Hoppe

#### **Directors**

Lynn Benson  
James Dugan  
Beth Keane

Mike Blasko  
John Gordon  
A. E. "Punky" Kure

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