

Federal Point Historic Preservation Society

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

Newsletter

Volume 12 No. 8

August, 2005

Darlene Bright, editor

August Meeting

The Federal Point Historic Preservation Society will meet, Monday, August 15, 2005, 7:30 PM, at the Federal Point History Center, 1121-A North Lake Park Blvd., adjacent to Carolina Beach Town Hall.

Mr. Thomas Matheson, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the Wilmington National Weather Service, will speak on catastrophic weather and the National Weather Service's efforts to protect us through the years. Mr. Matheson's career began aboard the US Navy aircraft carrier, *USS America*, as weatherman from 1975 to 1979. He served as intern Meteorologist in Great Falls, Montana, 1982 to 1984, before working one year in Billings as Forest Fire Meteorologist. He was Supervisor and Agricultural Meteorologist in Yuma, Arizona, between 1985 and 1991. He was Doppler Radar Teacher for three years in Norman, Oklahoma, before coming to Wilmington in 1994. He was with us during the last rash of hurricanes to strike in the Cape Fear area.

Ben Franklin said "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." Come to our next meeting and find out how wrong old Ben might have been.

Members and the public are cordially invited. Refreshments will be served after the meeting

Last Month

Last month at the Federal Point History Center, historian and accomplished writer, Susan Taylor Block of Wilmington, presented a most enlightening and interesting preview of her latest book, "Tales of a Shirtmaker, a Jewish Upbringing in North Carolina." Her collection of family and area pictures helped to identify many of the characters and tell her story of her husband Fred Block's experience growing up, living, and working in the lower Cape Fear area.

We appreciate Mrs. Block taking time to address our Society and sharing her work with us. We look forward to her future endeavors to preserve our history in a most delightful way.

Message From Your President

Judy Rhudy Thompson

On my way back from Georgetown, SC, Sunday, I sat in stopped traffic waiting for a funeral procession of a fallen fireman to go by. I began to think of all my good friends everywhere, especially here on this Island. I wake up every morning and thank God for allowing me the opportunity to live and work here and learn new things. The history of this area is interesting to me and I look forward to finding out more and more. And, with all the good and bad changes that are happening, it is even more important that we do our part in preserving the history of this area.

Thank you all for everything you do and for all the information that you contribute on a monthly basis for all of us to enjoy.

Unfortunately, I will not be with you Monday night. Fortunately for me, my daughter, Keeley, is coming up from Florida for a short visit. We are heading up the road to my Mom and Dad's for a quick visit. At their age, they need to be with their beautiful granddaughter as often as possible, and it has been two years since their last visit. So, enjoy each other and the program that Leslie and Mike have lined up, and I will see you all in September.

W. G. Fountain's Royal Palm Hotel

Part 2

By Leslie S. Bright

In 1946, the need arose to expand the Royal Palm Hotel. A wing was built by Mr. W. G. Fountain on the east side of the Hotel which consisted of 50 more rooms, built over a full service cafeteria capable of seating 100 people. During the vacation season, breakfast, lunch, and dinner was served.

Between the years 1946 and 1961, the Hotel was managed by Elmo Fountain, the middle of W. G. Fountain's seven sons. Plina, Elmo's wife, managed the 75-room Fountain Apartments next door. The outgoing and personable Elmo boasted the coffee shop and cafeteria had the "best food at the beach at attractive prices." A Miss Watson took on the duties of dietitian of the Hotel. Many college students and local citizens were employed at the Hotel and cafeteria from time to time. Meadowlark Lemon (of Harlem Globetrotters fame) worked at the Hotel in the late 40's according to Griff Fountain, Elmo Fountain's son. Griff ran the elevator during his youth between the years of 1949 and 1961.

W. G. Fountain founded Fountain Oil Company, distributor and retailer of Atlantic Richfield petroleum products, and in 1953, he became the southeastern North Carolina distributor and retailer of Phillips 66 products. The Hotel was placed under the ownership of Fountain Oil Company listing W. G.'s seven sons as shareholders.

In 1954 Hurricane Hazel damaged the Royal Palm Hotel, built only one block from the ocean. Griff Fountain recalls, "I remember well the water mark left in the lobby. It was five feet deep in water. The kitchen area of the cafeteria was most damaged. All of the major ovens and food prep articles were destroyed. However, my grandfather had the foresight to have insurance coverage and repaired and re-opened the damaged Hotel and cafeteria. A lot of businesses back then had no insurance."

In 1955 W. G. Fountain died leaving his interest in the Royal Palm Hotel and Fountain Apartments to his sons. In 1959 the apartment buildings were sold and moved away to make more room for parking at the Royal Palm Hotel.

In 1961 the Fountains sold the Hotel for \$150,000.00. During the next 20 years, the Hotel experienced a decline in business. The Hotel remained pretty much the same, but several changes were made to the cafeteria with greater emphasis on entertainment and alcohol consumption. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, boxing matches were promoted in a part of the earlier cafeteria with the remainder a bar and night club.

In 1982 Vince and Dee Bolden, sewer contractors from Maryland, purchased the Royal Palm Hotel and altered it to combine 107 rooms to form 53 larger accommodations. At the completion of this work, the Boldens renamed it Astor Hotel. In spite of their efforts, business declined at the resort and the Hotel was sold again in 1994. As the hotel business declined, it fell into a state of disrepair and was sold numerous times since. The Hotel was closed and eventually condemned by the Town of Carolina Beach.

On the morning of June 27, 2005, the old Royal Palm Hotel was reported to be fully engulfed in flames, probably set by a vagrant. By the end of the day, W. G. Fountain's Royal Palm Hotel was no more.

(Information for this article provided by the Wilmington Star Newspaper, Bill Reaves files, and Griff Fountain)

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.

Support our Business Members!

A & G Barbeque and Chicken
Bank of America
Britt's Donut Shop
The Cottage Restaurant
Friends of Brunswick Town
Fort Fisher Restoration Committee
Got-Em-On-Live Bait Club
Hanover Iron Works, Inc.
Historical Society of Topsail Island
Laney Real Estate Company
Dr. Vincent Smith, DDS
Taylor's Heating & Air, Inc.
Tucker Brothers Realty Company
Underwater Archaeology Branch

● **Welcome New Members:** Sylvia Paylor and son, Austin, Lance Gurel, and Laney Real Estate Company.

● **Help!** If you can spare an hour or two, please consider joining one of our committees or volunteer at the History Center to work on the many projects that need our attention. Call the History Center, or sign-up at the next meeting.

● **History Center News!** Thanks to Mr. Griff Fountain for sharing his memories and copies of pictures of his grandfather, W. G. Fountain, builder and owner of the Royal Palm Hotel.

You may have noticed that volunteer hours are down a little. Beginning this fiscal year, July 1st, we contracted with DK Dempster, Pat Bolander, and Cindy Clark to work at the History Center, keeping it open on a regular basis when we are short on volunteers. DK is our "Girl Friday", and Pat and Cindy share the Saturdays. We have already seen a difference in the number of

visitors, and also, chores are getting done and these ladies are providing much needed assistance on several ongoing projects. We had 39 visitors to our Center this past month. Thanks to our volunteers: Leslie Bright – 9 hours; Darlene Bright – 27 hours; Jeannie Gordon – 12 hours; Lynn Benson – 5 hours; and Ron Griffin – 3 hours. The History Center is open every Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm, or other times by appointment. We still need volunteers on Fridays and Saturdays.

● **MARK YOUR CALENDAR:** On Saturday, September 17, at 4:30 p.m., the Society will be holding a Membership Drive Picnic and social at the waterfront home of Ryder Lewis, off St. Joseph Street. Bring a friend and potential member, a covered dish and prepare to have a good time! More details will be provided at the August meeting.

● **Flavor of the Past!** Saturday, August 27, 2005 @ 9:30 am until 4 pm, experience 100 years of tasty treats and southern culture, sponsored by the Historic Wilmington Foundation. Tickets \$35 through August - \$50 beginning August 15. Event ticket includes morning river cruise on the *Henrietta III*, admission to five historic sites, living history experience at each site, historic-inspired food samplings at each site, and trolley shuttle between sites. For more information, call 762-2511.

We welcome contributions to the Newsletter. If you have something you would like to share, please call me at 458-8684.

Officers

President – Judy Thompson
Vice-President - John Gordon
Secretary - Darlene Bright
Treasurer - Jeannie Gordon

Directors

Lynn Benson	Mike Blasko	Leslie Bright
James Dugan	Ray Flowers	John Gordon
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