

Federal Point Historic Preservation Society

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

Newsletter

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Darlene Bright, editor

February Meeting

The Federal Point Historic Preservation Society will meet Monday, February 20, 2006, 7:30 PM, at the Federal Point History Center, 1121-A North Lake Park Blvd., adjacent to Carolina Beach Town Hall.

We are delighted and privileged to have Mildred Deaton Burnett Jones, (Susie), as our guest speaker. Susie is the author of "When The Moon Stood Still", a wonderful look back at NC's small town beach life before and during World War II. Susie and her husband live in Raleigh, but enjoy the family cottage at Carolina Beach.

We look forward to an evening with Susie while she shares her memories with us. She will also be available for a book signing.

Members and the general public are invited to attend. Refreshments will be served following the meeting.

Last Month

Stan Clardy presented an amazing musical performance at the History Center last month to over 55 members and guests. Stan sang and played original and period music and told the stories behind the songs. The audience was delighted with the excellent presentation and sang along with Stan and his wife, Cathy.

Our Society and the Fort Fisher Chapter of the UDC sponsored Stan's performance at the Fort Fisher 141st Anniversary re-enacted on Saturday, January 14th, and Monday at the Carolina Beach School, as well as the History Center on Monday night.

Many thanks to Pat Bolander for her generosity and hospitality in providing lodging for the Clardys.

Message From Your President

By Judy Rhudy Thompson

Happy Valentine to everyone! Once again, I understand I missed a really good meeting in January. We had a blockbuster audience and I am sure you enjoyed listening to his stories and songs. We all thank Stan and his wife, Cathy, for entertaining us with their pieces of history.

When I came by the Fort Fisher Museum on Saturday, the 14th, and all the volunteers were leaving, I knew the sausage dogs and BBQ sandwich sales were a hit at the re-enactment. A big **THANK YOU** to all that helped because it was quite a cold, blustery day to be outside.

Will our Committee Chairs get their information together and plan to talk to us this month as to what is being planned in their areas? I will call on you at the February meeting.

There are several of our members that could use our thoughts and prayers because of illness or deaths in the family. Please keep Ron & Frances Griffin, Jo Wainright, and Mary Jo McKittrick's family in your thoughts.

See ya at the meeting!

Capt. John and the Ferry, *John Knox*

By Leslie S. Bright

At the age of 48, Captain John H. Bowen had spent most of his life as a Cape Fear River pilot and navigating sea tugs, coasting the waters between Wilmington, NC, and Baltimore, Maryland. Born July 15, 1872, and raised along the Cape Fear, Capt. John Bowen, son of a Cape Fear River pilot, was widely known for his abilities and his dependability during the peak period in marine shipping and water transportation in our history. Tough and versatile, he experienced the transition period from sail to steam and then oil and gas propulsion for marine vessels and adjusted to the technology.

In June, 1920, John Bowen, known widely as “Capt. John,” was chosen to captain a brand new ferry boat across the Cape Fear River between Wilmington and Brunswick County, through a 2.10 mile causeway across Eagles Island. The modern ferry boat, named *John Knox* in honor of the Chairman of the Brunswick Board of County Commissioners, was equipped as a “double ender” with propellers on either end. The 79.8’ long vessel was powered by a 100 horsepower gasoline engine and could operate without turning around from a pilot house on either end. The new ferry was capable of transporting 10 automobiles and 50 passengers from shore to shore in approximately 15 minutes. Previously (since 1906), “flats carrying three to four vehicles were steered to the opposite shore by launches locked along the flats side.” Crossing time was slow and even slower during inclement weather.

When Brunswick and New Hanover Counties acquired the old ferry company in October 1919, they left the management of the new ferry service to O. A. Durant, who had managed the old service for 19 years. Durant managed the business, setting the schedule and rates for the service. Charges were “automobile and driver, 25 cents, and 5 cents for each additional occupant; one-ton trucks, 35 cents; over one-ton, 50 cents; horse & cart, 20 cents, driver included; horse & buggy, 25 cents; 2-horse wagon, 35 cents.”

Capt. John continued to operate the ferry boat, *John Knox*, without speakable incident, except for routine maintenance layovers, until February 6, 1935. During these 15 years, Capt. John saw traffic crossing the Cape Fear River ever increasing. In March, 1924, the New Hanover-Brunswick Ferry Commission bought a second ferry, the steamer *Menantie*, capable of carrying 18 vehicles. Eventually, ferry service across the river was extended to 24 hours to accommodate the increased need.

At 57 years old, in 1929, Capt. John witnessed the completion of two toll bridges across the Cape Fear and North East Cape Fear Rivers and its impact on the ferry service. From the first opening of the bridges, December 10, 1930, ferry receipts were cut in half, alleviating the need for the *Menantie*, which was sold shortly after. Capt. John continued to operate the *John Knox* until February 5, 1935, when bridge tolls were lifted by the State. Capt. John and the *John Knox* both were out of work and retired from the ferry service the next day. *John Knox* was purchased by Stone Towing Co. of Wilmington and towed to Stone’s boat yard across the river from Wilmington where in June 1937 “was caught on a piling and sank.”

At 63, Capt. John Bowen went about his business living to be one of the oldest river pilots on the Cape Fear River. No public ferry operated on the Cape Fear River at or below Wilmington until 1965. When the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry was dedicated, Capt. John was present and shared stories with the new ferry captain.

Capt. John Bowen lived to the ripe old age of 101. His family still recalls and takes pride in the life and legacy of this one old, tough river captain. He was great grandfather to one of our Society members, Captain Mike Coleman.

(Note: References for this article provided by Mike Coleman, Wilmington Star News, and Underwater Archaeology Branch).

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.

Welcome New Members! Jack and Tamsie Lynch of Carolina Beach.

Support our Business Members!

A & G Barbeque and Chicken
Austin & Son Garage, Inc.
BB&T
Bank of America
Britt's Donut Shop
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 Bros. Realty Company

● **“Be A Tourist in Your Own Hometown” Appreciation Day** will be held on Sunday, March 5, 2006. The History Center will be participating between the hours of 10:00 am and 4:00 pm, and we need volunteers to keep the doors open and greet our visitors. Sign up at our February meeting, or give me a call at 458-8684.

● **History Center News!** The History Center is open every Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm, or other times by appointment. In addition to approximately 50 members and guests who were here for our January meeting, we had 32 visitors to our Center this past month. Thanks to our volunteers: Jeannie Gordon-10 hours; Darlene Bright-20 hours; Leslie Bright-10 hours. And also, our faithful workers: DK Dempster, Cindy Clark, and Pat Bolander. Helping hands are always needed to work in doing inventory and indexing files, photos, and other materials. If you can spare an hour or two, please let us know.

● **The Fort Fisher Re-enactment**, held Saturday, January 14, 2006, was a fun and successful time for all, even though the weather was not cooperating! The event was well attended and we sold out of sausage dogs and BBQ sandwiches by mid-day, making \$459.00. Thanks to our volunteers: Leslie & Darlene Bright, Danny Thompson, Cheri McNeill, Jim Dugan, John Gordon, Paul & Kitty Slebodnik, Luana McGurren, Jo Wainright, Fred Grady, and John Nelms.

● **The FPHPS Board of Directors** met on January 23rd at 7:00 pm. A number of ongoing activities were discussed and several new ideas presented. Primary responsibilities of the Board are to set policy and approve budget matters. However, with many Board members involved with committee functions, many topics of a general business nature were discussed. Updates on Fort Fisher's 141st Anniversary fundraiser, History Center operation, and the Society budget were presented. A discussion on various committees, their progress, and ways to improve production resulted in John Gordon to contact Lynn Benson regarding her fundraising idea of flying

flags around the Carolina Beach Lake on July 4th honoring veterans; Jeannie Gordon to look into finding members to work on Oral History collection; Darlene and Cheri to explore the idea of an outdoor history guided tour sponsored by the Society, possibly in May; Jay Hockenbury to look into legal and regulatory responsibilities of Society functions; Leslie Bright and others to get on with the Church exhibit and repair the shingles on the cupola at the Center; Ray Flowers asked for a mirror in the men's room, and he and Leslie are to continue on the Curtiss-Lamb project. Jeannie Gordon asked and received permission from the Board for transfer of additional funds for updating and printing Society brochures and pamphlets. John Gordon led a discussion on the possibility of placing markers or plaques on historic sites in the area. John, Jay, and Mike Blasko will look into the possibility of forming a committee for this purpose. Generally, it was agreed that we must work harder and get more members involved in order to improve our Society.

Officers

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

Lynn Benson
James Dugan
Ron Griffin

Directors

Mike Blasko
Ray Flowers
Jay Hockenbury

Leslie Bright
John Gordon
Cheri McNeill

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