

OUR MUSEUM HISTORY

Southport Maritime Museum

In 1988, Pam Cumbee served on the Southport Economic Development Commission. She approached the members with the Idea of a Nautical Museum to help draw tourists to the downtown area. They charged her with gathering Information for their perusal. She reported it, and it was agreed that a separate Board of Directors should be formed to make plans for a museum. Members of the community were asked to serve, and the first meetings were held in the Southport City Hall and the Southport Fire Department building. Pam was the first Chairman of the Board.

*** First Donation ***

In the next months, the Board was completed. A name was selected, THE SOUTHPORT MARITIME MUSEUM. A P.O. Box and telephone number was established, the Articles of Incorporation were filed, the Tax Exempt Status was received, and the By-laws accepted. A serious hunt was on for a museum site, either an established building or a piece of property to be considered for a building site. There were disappointments galore, but the hunt went on. An original donation of \$5000. from the Newton Baker family of Oak Island was a great morale boost to all. The City of Southport Aldermen and the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners each allocated \$10,000 in their Fiscal Budgets for 1990-91 for the Museum.

Spreading The Word

In the Spring of 1990 "Encore Magazine" of Wilmington, N.C. interviewed Pam Cumbee, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Southport Maritime Museum. She unfolded the story of the beginning stages of the museum, as well as the director's plans for progress. In their August 9, 1990 edition, "Encore" updated that report meeting with Mike Bradley, Executive Director of the Marine Crescent, and Wayne Strickland, Assistant Director of the Board. They noted that the director was seeking to create a museum that would help create a balance of tourism, education and historical preservation, which would serve to revitalize the small coastal town of Southport. In this article, Mike Bradley stated that Southport needs a Visitor-related activity to attract the thousands of tourists passing through, that will encourage them to stay awhile, get a bite to eat, and maybe spend the night. He also stated that Southport was an ideal place to have a maritime museum because of its mid-point location between Maine and Florida, in addition to its proximity to the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Meanwhile, Pam, as Chairman, served as a guest speaker for many local organizations, including the Rotary, Lions and Women's Clubs, continuing to update everyone on the search for funds and building location.

*** Logo Context ***

On January 16, 1991, The State Port Pilot congratulated Southport artist Ray Cullis for his

winning entry in the Southport Maritime Museum's Logo Contest, depicting a ship visible in the mouth of the Cape Fear River between Bald Head Lighthouse and Oak Island Lighthouse..

*** Taste of Southport ***

On February 13, 1991, The American Institute of Architects Urban Design Team was honored at a reception at the Southport Community Building, aptly titled "A Taste of Southport". Mary and Wayne Strickland and Pam Cumbee set up a booth of American Indian artifacts, shipwreck artifacts and a "working" net maker, with books and printed materials to represent the Southport Maritime Museum. Interest from the citizens and the Design Team was evident, and it was there that Paul Genovese of Atlantic Carving stated his Interest In designing and carving an outdoor sign for the museum. At the completion of the architect's study, the museum was included in the plans for the City of Southport as set forth in the UDAC Book.

*** Museum Building Leased ***

In March, 1991, the Board of Directors signed a lease with Tommy and Julie Harrelson for the rental of the building known as Harrelson's Appliance Store at 116 North Howe Street in downtown Southport. The lease included the use of the adjacent building known as the telephone building, one of equal size, and usable for storage and preservation.

*** More Coverage ***

On May 10th., John Parker and Wayne Strickland met with Reed Page of the Bald Head Island Gazette, and a feature article about the Museum was the result.

*** New Officers ***

New Officers were elected in June, 1991, with John Parker serving as Chairman. Pam asked to step down in order to have more time to Chair a Fund -Raising Committee. Wayne Strickland was elected Vice Chairman, Mary Strickland, Secretary, Joan Chesnutt Treasurer, Yvonne Adams, Assistant Sec. and Bubba Smith, Assistant Treasurer.



Board of Directors, left to right
Yvonne Adams, Zeb Rhodes, Mary Strickland, Don Johnson, John Parker, Chris Suiter, Wayne Strickland, Bubba Smith, Jim Marlowe, Jean Rhodes.
Not pictured are Roy Daniel, Eugene Gore

*Museum Sign *

Paul Genovese agreed to donate his labor to the museum to carve a masterpiece sign for the building facade. It would feature carved portraits of the Bald Head Island and Oak Island lights, a stylized star, and the name of the museum in applied gold leaf. This professional addition would be ready before July 4th, 1991. Thomas Puckett of Long Beach built a beautiful Victorian replica wall clock, and donated it to the museum.

*Displays *

In June, John Parker made arrangement with a defunct Wilmington Jewelry Store to purchase ten lighted jewelry display cabinets for \$200 apiece. Also in June, Wayne and Mary Strickland built and equipped two lighted window displays in the front of the museum area to be ready for tourists during the Southport Fourth of July Festival,

* 1991 - Consultant Hired *

At the July 10th. meeting, the Board of Directors voted to hire Museum Educator Simon Spaulding for an eight week time period as a Consultant. He would work on grant applications, museum storyline, Acquisition Policies and priorities.

* Visit From Washington, D.C. *

It was on August 14, 1991 that 14 Delegates of Representative Charlie Rose's office in Washington, D.C. visited the Southport Maritima Museum. A Continental Breakfast was served, the visitors were seated and informed as to progress and hopes for continued success by Key Speakers from the Museum Board of Directors and the City of Southport. A brief walking tour of the museum and downtown Southport was followed by a formal luncheon at a local waterfront restaurant. Many residents joined the Museum Board to greet the visitors, sharing their thoughts and interests. The Board received thoughtful tokens of appreciation from Congressman Rose's office several weeks later.

*Committees Formed *

A Fund Raising Committee and an Acquisition Committee were formed In September, and started to work in earnest.

* Marine Expo Exhibit *

During Wilmington's October Riverfest, the Southport Maritime Museum took part in Wilmington Marine Expo at the Educational Convention Center. Wayne and Mary Strickland set up a display using the Logo sign as a backdrop. A display case of artifacts was a highnote of the convention, and Board Members and Volunteers handed out verbal and printed Information for 3 days.

* End of 1991 *

In the last months of 1991, Rev. P.D. Midgett of Southport began a video taped history of the Museum, three new members were elected to the Board of Directors, and the "Friends of the Museum" Program was announced.. David Kelly of Carolina Power and Light Company called Pam to offer display cases and partitions, all very useable in the Museum Storyline.

* Renovations*

Tim Stiller Construction Co. was hired to begin building renovations, moving forward at a rapid pace. As of the first week in March 1991, all walls and insulation had been replaced, the office moved, and the handicapped ramp and restrooms built. Firewalls had been built to house the furnace room, and fireproof ceilings installed. Work would be completed by the end of March.

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1991-92, the Fund Raising Committee was hard at work, and the 1991-92 funds allocated for the Museum by the City of Southport and Brunswick County (\$10,000) each). An Educational Grant from John Wesley and Anne Hodgins Hanes Foundation in the amount of \$1,000 and an Educational Program Grant from Janirve Foundation in the amount of \$3,530, received In January.

* Allocations *

Don Johnson, Mary and Wayne Strickland prepared the forms needed for Allocations, Gifts, and Loans for the Museum Exhibits. The State Port Pilot reviewed the Museum's progress in it's January edition, stressing the desire for exhibit articles. Weekly ads requesting exhibits began in March in area newspapers. A work detail committee prepared the Annex Building for storage use.

* Grand Opening *

A Grand Opening is scheduled in conjunction with the 1992 Fourth of July Festival celebration.

* OUR EDUCATION PROGRAM *

The Southport Maritime Museum offered special 45 minute School Programs on local maritime history in March, April and May, free of charge to each student. Thanks to grants from the John Wesley and Anne Hodgkin Hanes Foundation, and the Janirve Foundation, these educational programs were designed and presented by historian-educator Simon Spaulding. He had a diverse background of study, travel and performance at museums, schools, historical sites and festivals throughout North America and Europe. Mr. Spaulding had previously taught courses in early seafaring in New York, California, Colorado and Texas. His presentations included "Life At Sea With Verrazano and Columbus", "Navigation In the Age of Exploration", "North Carolina In the 18th. Century---A Sailor's Eye View"; "Blockading and Blockade-Running The Cape Fear River"; and "The Fishing Industry".

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