



# LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc. BULLETIN

Volume XL, Number 3

Wilmington, North Carolina

June 1996

## RAMBLING THROUGH THE HOWARD LOUGHLIN COLLECTION

by Susan Taylor Block

"Would you like to keep these for a while and read through them?" Howard Loughlin asked me in 1995, pointing to a large yellowed pile of his parents' turn-of-the-century love letters and a shoe box chock full of old postcards. Would I like it?! Would a cat like to lift the latch on a cage full of canaries?

I spent the next several months pouring over the material and eventually experienced something common to all the Historical Society archivists. I began to know a lot about some residents of the Lower Cape Fear who I had not actually known at all. It was like eavesdropping through a time machine as I read the protracted conversation of two young people who longed to have no space whatsoever between them but were separated by a thousand miles.

J. A. Loughlin, a civil engineer, had already fallen in love with Annie Manson when he got a terse telegram. "If you want a six month job come at once," wrote the owners of a vast tract of undeveloped land in Tampico, Mexico. The pay was too good to refuse, so he bid his fiancée goodbye and went by train and horseback to Mexico. If everything went right, soon he would have enough money to get married and buy a house in Southport for his "Dearie." There they could live surrounded by liveoaks and camellias. They could see Fort Caswell in the distance, two light houses on Bald Head Island, the Coast Guard Station on Oak Island, and the glorious Cape Fear brimming over as if to spill onto Bay Street.<sup>1</sup>

Even without the scenery, young Annie Manson could not imagine living anywhere but Southport. Her mother was a Potter and that was enough to give her roots in that little town as deep as the Whittlers' Bench oak. The Potter family had been in Southport, or Smithville as it was then known, at least since the early 1800's. They were descendants of Wilmington co-founder, Joshua Grainger, and James Claypoole, a distinguished Philadelphian who married the daughter of Oliver Cromwell. The

Smithville Potters occasionally wed Wilmingtonians and merged their lines with surnames like London, Platt, and Wright. In fact, in 1864, when Sarah Fottoral Potter married Dr. Adam Empie Wright, son of Dr. Thomas Henry Wright, she actually married her cousin as they both were direct descendants of Joshua Grainger. To further confuse their descendants' DNA, Adam Empie Wright's first cousin, Florence deRosset Wright, who was the daughter of William Augustus Wright and Eliza Ann Hill, married William Fottoral Potter, who was Sarah Fottoral Potter's brother.<sup>2</sup>

One landmark of Wilmington's Historic District bears the name of a Smithville Potter: the Ballard-Potter-Bellamy House at 121 South Second Street, sometimes referred to as the little deRosset House. Samuel R. Potter bought the house in 1851 for \$8,000. Potter died in 1856, but his widow resided in the house for many years.<sup>3</sup>

The Historical Society archives yielded many Potter family facts as well as two unrelated gems. The first was that when little David Sprunt Potter died 8 March 1879, a newspaper ran the following obituary: "Died of pneumonia...David Sprunt, youngest son of Captain W. J. and Sallie Potter, aged 2 years and five months. Little David was a delicate child but had a sprightly intellect. His cunning little pranks endeared him to all, and made him doubly dear to his parents, brothers and sisters. But God saw fit to take him from them and plant him in a more congenial clime."<sup>4</sup>

The second preserves the sort of little nugget that makes research a delight. In 1937, Ida Potter Watson of Southport wrote of a familial memory. "I have a very faint recollection of cousin Buck Drew. Her husband used to tell me when I was very small that he would grease me and swallow me whole, and I believed him, and was very much afraid of him."<sup>5</sup>

Annie Manson's family tree also included Captain John Harper who ran the steamer *Wilmington* for over twenty five years, her brother, Captain Chapman Manson who succeeded him, and her uncle, Captain L. D. Potter who piloted the *Wilmington* and the *City of Southport*.

Annie wrote to her sweetheart about the Harpers and the Mansons, the Ruarks and the Potters and launch



---

## LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

---

Volume XL, Number 3

Wilmington, NC

June 1996

---

### OFFICERS

President .....	Robert W. Martenis
Vice-President .....	Catherine R. Stribling
Secretary .....	Merle Chamberlain
Treasurer .....	Larry Mass
.....	Rebecca T. Rhine
Archivist .....	Diane C. Cashman
Executive Director .....	Catherine Myerow
Counsels .....	William J. Boney, Jr.
Coordinator .....	Shirley Ballou

### ARCHIVES STAFF

Diane C. Cashman	Merle Chamberlain	James R. Beeler
Susan T. Block	Dorothy H. Newton	

### DIRECTORS

1994-97	1995-1998	1996-99
John H. Debnam	Russell Clark	Kathryn Black
Sharon Futch	Ray Collins, Jr.	Amy DeLoach
Pat Gasson	Constance Knox	Jean Poole
Shelagh Hubbard	Jean Anne Sutton	Wade Williams
Jeanie Lessing	Wade Wilson	Blonnie Wyche

### BULLETIN STAFF

Editor .....	Susan Block
Editorial Committee .....	Beverly Tetterton
.....	Diane C. Cashman
.....	Merle J. Chamberlain
.....	Gibbs Willard

*Manuscripts may be submitted to the committee for review.*

---

parties at Bald Head and picnics at Caswell and all the other events taking place in Southport at the time. Sometimes she probably wished she hadn't. "I hope the bazaar is a success tonight, but Annie if you take part in that kissing for Charity at so much as a kiss, I will never go with you again," he wrote on November 22, 1907.

Albert, as she called him, wrote of his life in Mexico. "I have a pretty nice camp of my own now, a Chinese cook and anything I want to eat. Everything is just right. I have two horses to ride and a man to wait on me. There are some girls out here and when they want to go visiting, they get a horse and start out and don't resist a ride of 20 or 25 miles."<sup>6</sup>

Annie did not like to hear about the girls in Mexico and Albert did not like to hear about the young men who went to the Tuesday Night Dances in Southport, but somehow they made it through a courtship that stretched out into several years. Albert eventually uprooted Annie and they moved to Wilmington where he worked as the City Engineer. Sixty years after they wrote that first batch of love letters, Albert was buried at Oakdale Cemetery. Within the same year, 1967, Annie took her place at his side.

After having transcribed many of the letters, I decided to concentrate on the postcards. Most of them were written between 1906 and 1908 but remain in good condition. Several of them have already served as the basis

of historic local scenes for Wilmington artist, Sam Bissette. I showed a portion of the collection to Beverly Tetterton, veteran Special Collections Librarian at the New Hanover County Public Library. She assured me that the rarest cards were the ones of Southport and Fort Caswell.

Then Howard Loughlin popped up with a couple of pictures loaned to him by Glenn Avery of the steamer *Wilmington* and the *City of Southport* and the suggestion for a field trip to Cape Fear Towing to see the whistle from the steamer *Wilmington*. So, over the river and along the causeway we went to see the gleaming brass whistle of the old boat. 82-year old Ed Orrell, the owner of Cape Fear Towing, and Howard Loughlin reminisced in Mr. Orrell's office and then Howard explained why the whistle was out in the hall. "When they sold the boat, Ed bought it. He had a tugboat called *The Battler* and the whistle had not been installed correctly. Every time the whistle blew, the engine turned off. So, when he got ready to sell the steamer *Wilmington*, he kept the whistle and put it on *The Battler*. When *The Battler* met its demise, he saved the whistle."<sup>7</sup>

Built in 1880 and named for the city of Wilmington, Delaware, the steamer was not brought to North Carolina until 1892 when Captain John Harper steamed it up the Cape Fear River. It could carry 500 passengers and reach the speed of 16 miles per hour. When it was sold in 1923, it was altered and became a ferry boat in Petersburg, Florida. Later, it became a fishing boat in Tampa and then a passenger boat in Brazil.<sup>8</sup>

Both Howard Loughlin and Ed Orrell remembered when Captain Manson commanded the *Wilmington*. "He was the first person in town every Spring to put on a straw hat. He always had a flower in his lapel. He was a real ladies' man. Didn't settle down and get married until he was 56 years old," said his nephew, Howard Loughlin. "He carried a raincoat over his arm, regardless of weather... and under the raincoat he had a bottle of liquor for the guests."

"Wilmington historian Delmas Haskett later concurred. I have never seen a more immaculately dressed man than Captain Manson."<sup>9</sup>

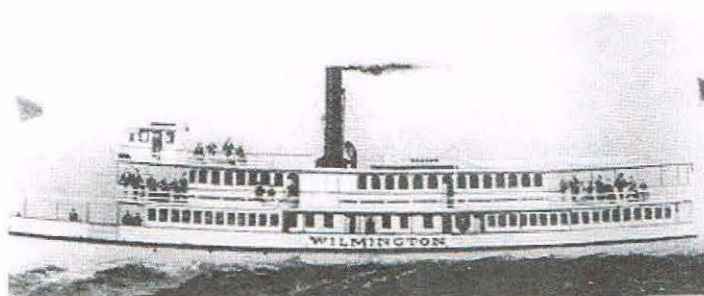
When Captain Manson died, Captain Letta D. Potter, Manson's uncle, took over the steamer *Wilmington*. Captain Potter was the great-grandfather of Wilmingtonian Glenn Avery and the great uncle of Howard Loughlin. He earned the nickname "Courtesy" for obvious reasons and entertained his guests on the *Wilmington* and its successor, the *City of Southport*, by telling them facts about river landmarks like the Dram Tree, Orton, Kendal, Gander Hall and St. Philip's Church.<sup>10</sup>

In the late teens and early 1920's, one young man who enjoyed the steamer *Wilmington* was Wilmington native, Dr. E. Lawrence Lee, Jr. "The Steamer *Wilmington* was the greatest boat that ever was built. It was such an exciting trip for a youngster. My mother and I made many trips down the river on it. They served meals on the lower

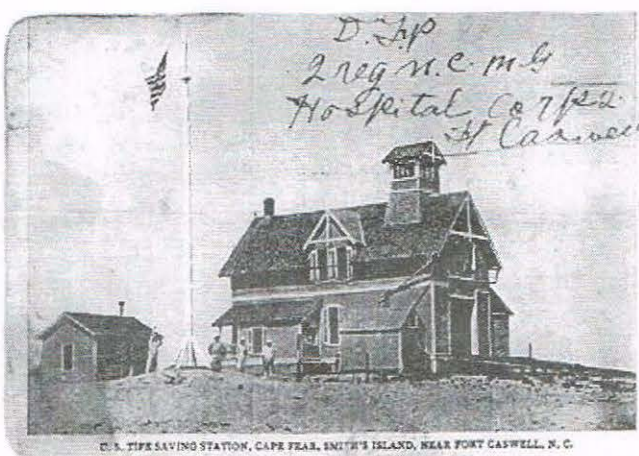




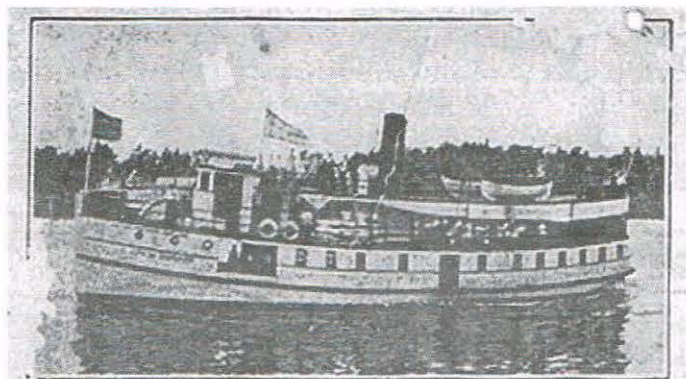
*The foot of Howe Street,  
Southport, 1906.*



*The Steamer Wilmington.  
Glenn Avery Collection*

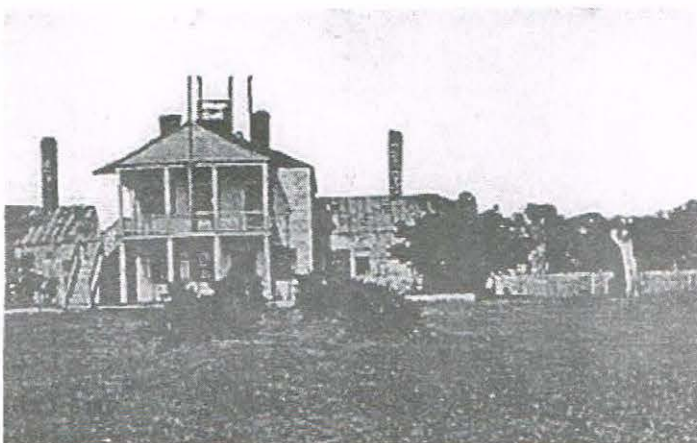


*U. S. Life Saving Stations,  
Smith's Island, 1907.*

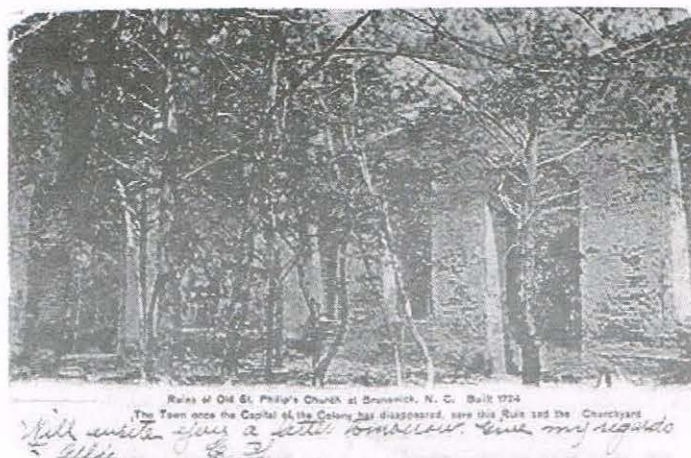


Steamer "CITY OF SOUTHPORT" leaves Wilmington daily 10:00 A. M. Returning, leaves Southport 1:00 P. M. Round trip, adults, \$1.00, children under 12 years, 50 cents. Keep ticket as souvenir. Void when punched

*The Steamer  
City of Southport, 1907.  
Glenn Avery Collection*



*The Garrison, Southport, 1906.*

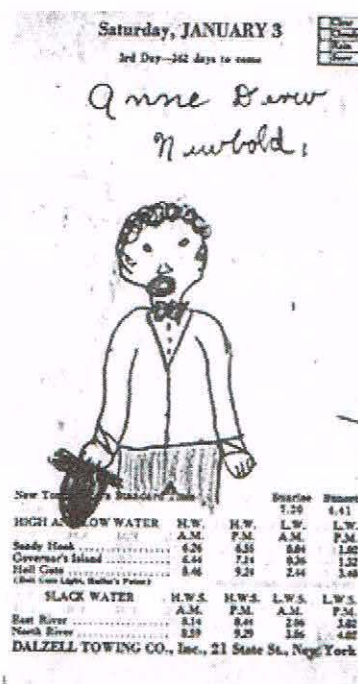


*St. Philip's Church, Brunswick, 1906.*



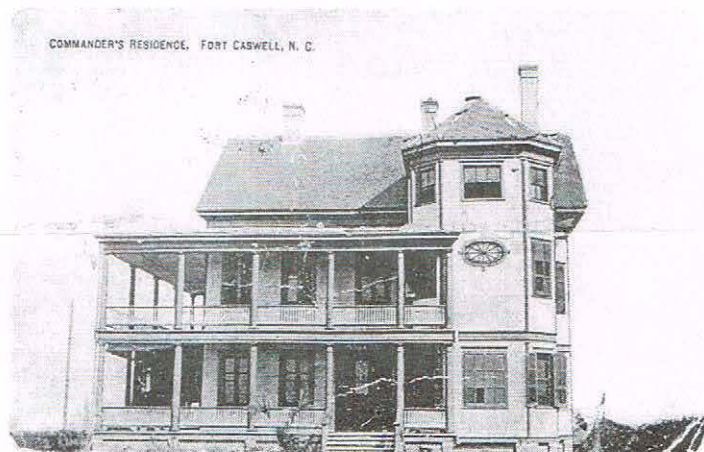


*The ship's whistle  
from the  
Wilmington.*



*Early art by  
Ann Newbold Perkins  
in the ship's  
log, 1931.*

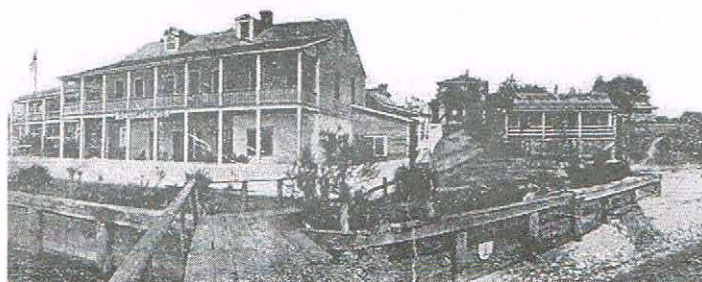
*Glenn Avery  
Collection*



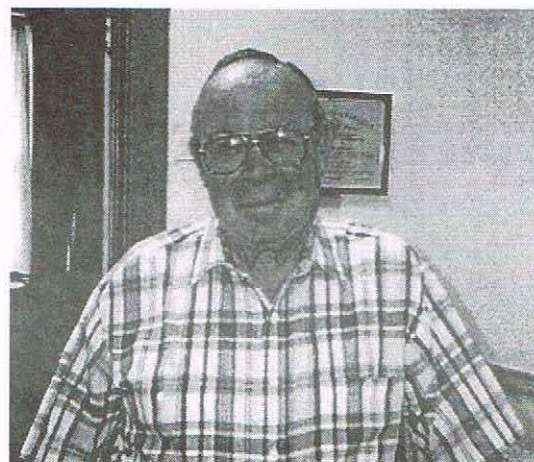
*Commander's Residence Fort Caswell, 1907.*



*"Prior to prior. This is the 16 mile road  
between Southport and Supply," said  
historian Delmas Haskett.*



*Miss Stuart's Hotel, Southport, 1906.*



*Howard Loughlin*



deck. Children would be about the bow and grownups would flutter all around them. I guess they thought one of them would fall in. I never knew of anybody going overboard, though.

"The steamer *Wilmington* made excursions from Wilmington to Southport and not always, but sometimes they would stop at a pier at the site of the church at Brunswick Town and let everyone who wanted go look at the church. I was very fascinated by the fact that the people were there and then they were gone... Yes, it was sort of like, 'Here's the church/ Here's the steeple.' ... After that, I always wanted to find that old town and then I did."

Lawrence Lee grew up to become a C.P.A., one of the most elegant writers Wilmington has ever produced, a respected historian who published *The Lower Cape Fear in Colonial Days* and the *History of Brunswick County*, a professor of history at the Citadel and an archeologist who did indeed research and excavate Brunswick Town. Using pages of facts gleaned in months of reading through old deeds at the courthouse and studying Sautier's maps, Dr. Lee painstakingly located foundations of the homes at Brunswick.

At 84 years of age, the memory of his favorite project is still fresh to Lawrence Lee. "Using the church as a starting point, I began locating houses. Then we laid out the streets. Actually, I found some of the foundations long before that. I went out there with a long iron pipe and stuck it in the ground over and over until I located some of the building sites.

"We had to hack our way through - make our way with bush axes. It was a pure wilderness.

"There were mosquitos and it was hot. There was no breeze. There were animals there, too. Someone saw a bear, but I never saw it. I saw wildcats and deer. I carried a 22 rifle all the time, but now I look back and wonder why it wasn't a 12 gauge shotgun. What was I going to hit in that excitement?

"We found wells which proved to be gold mines. In 1748, the Spanish attack occurred. As the residents were leaving, they threw everything, it seemed, into the well. We even found silver pieces they tossed... It all started on the steamer *Wilmington*."11

Tabitha Hutaff McEachern also traveled on the steamer. "I remember going on the *Wilmington* with my father, George Henry Hutaff, to Fort Caswell during World War I. He was grateful for having done well with Coca Cola and wanted to do something for the soldiers, so he did a lot of Red Cross work. I remember I was in the fifth grade and they let me eat with the men. When I got home, my mother asked me what I ate and I said, 'Beans and scrambled eggs.'

"We had a summer house at Carolina Beach. Often I would see the steamer *Wilmington* letting the passengers off at the dock. They would get on a little train called the *Shoefly* and ride to the Pavilion. Although I

rode on the boat to Southport and Fort Caswell, my family would always drive to Carolina Beach. It was a real adventure because the only road down there at the time was a straw one with two ruts, one for coming and one for going."12

Wilmington aeronautic pioneer J. C. "Skinny" Pennington remembered when he went on the steamer with other members of First Christian Church. "It was a big boat with two decks. There was a dance floor. I saw it more than I rode on it. When I was a boy, we lived in the Purnell-Empie house at 319 South Front Street. Hannah Block owns it now. At that time, it was safe for a child to walk anywhere and often I would wander down to the riverfront and watch the boats."13

When the *City of Southport* replaced the steamer *Wilmington*, automobiles had diminished the passenger traffic on the river. However, memories of the smaller boat abound. Martin Stevenson Willard recalled the thrill of steering the ship's wheel as a boy, with his father and Captain Potter just over his shoulder. Bruce Barclay Cameron, Jr. rode the steamer with his father and remembers stopping at the Orton dock on their way to spend the night at Miss Kate Stewart's little hotel in Southport; a picturesque waterfront house where a boy in the 1920's could listen in the parlor to the famous hostess relate personal recollections of life not only before the Civil War, but as early as 1848, when she saw the North Carolina soldiers returning from the Mexican War.

Miss Kate's stories of the Cape Fear were legion and authentic. One of her guests recorded the following story just as Kate Stewart related it. "The Southport man who helped kill the whale, which had gotten aground, cut off its head and chartered, for \$25, a little vessel to haul the head up to Wilmington, intending to get a small fortune by charging so much a look. Fate was against him, for the vessel got aground near Big Island, half way to Wilmington, and stuck there two days. It was a warm spell and that whale was so loud Wilmington knew that it was coming before it arrived, and the port officer and the board of health made a formal visit and informed the crest-fallen owner that unless he moved it away in a hurry he would get a dose of jail. So down the river he went and back to Southport and there the board of health fined him \$25 and informed him that unless he buried that head it would cost him that much money every day. It is needless to remark that he never monkeyed anymore with whales."14

Howard Loughlin, a 70 something Wilmington surveyor who can still spot the faintest path through the woods, has a more grisly memory of the *City of Southport*. "I was fiddling with a folding chair on the boat and managed to cut off the end of my finger. Dr. Houston Moore sewed it back on."15

The wonderful, inimitable Jessie Harper Newbold took her children on the *City of Southport*. Indeed, with houses on Church Street in Wilmington and one on the



deck. Children would be about the bow and grownups would flutter all around them. I guess they thought one of them would fall in. I never knew of anybody going overboard, though.

"The steamer *Wilmington* made excursions from Wilmington to Southport and not always, but sometimes they would stop at a pier at the site of the church at Brunswick Town and let everyone who wanted go look at the church. I was very fascinated by the fact that the people were there and then they were gone... Yes, it was sort of like, 'Here's the church/ Here's the steeple.' ... After that, I always wanted to find that old town and then I did."

Lawrence Lee grew up to become a C.P.A., one of the most elegant writers Wilmington has ever produced, a respected historian who published *The Lower Cape Fear in Colonial Days* and the *History of Brunswick County*, a professor of history at the Citadel and an archeologist who did indeed research and excavate Brunswick Town. Using pages of facts gleaned in months of reading through old deeds at the courthouse and studying Sautier's maps, Dr. Lee painstakingly located foundations of the homes at Brunswick.

At 84 years of age, the memory of his favorite project is still fresh to Lawrence Lee. "Using the church as a starting point, I began locating houses. Then we laid out the streets. Actually, I found some of the foundations long before that. I went out there with a long iron pipe and stuck it in the ground over and over until I located some of the building sites.

"We had to hack our way through - make our way with bush axes. It was a pure wilderness.

"There were mosquitos and it was hot. There was no breeze. There were animals there, too. Someone saw a bear, but I never saw it. I saw wildcats and deer. I carried a 22 rifle all the time, but now I look back and wonder why it wasn't a 12 gauge shotgun. What was I going to hit in that excitement?

"We found wells which proved to be gold mines. In 1748, the Spanish attack occurred. As the residents were leaving, they threw everything, it seemed, into the well. We even found silver pieces they tossed... It all started on the steamer *Wilmington*." <sup>11</sup>

Tabitha Hutaff McEachern also traveled on the steamer. "I remember going on the *Wilmington* with my father, George Henry Hutaff, to Fort Caswell during World War I. He was grateful for having done well with Coca Cola and wanted to do something for the soldiers, so he did a lot of Red Cross work. I remember I was in the fifth grade and they let me eat with the men. When I got home, my mother asked me what I ate and I said, 'Beans and scrambled eggs.'

"We had a summer house at Carolina Beach. Often I would see the steamer *Wilmington* letting the passengers off at the dock. They would get on a little train called the *Shoefly* and ride to the Pavilion. Although I

rode on the boat to Southport and Fort Caswell, my family would always drive to Carolina Beach. It was a real adventure because the only road down there at the time was a straw one with two ruts, one for coming and one for going." <sup>12</sup>

Wilmington aeronautic pioneer J. C. "Skinny" Pennington remembered when he went on the steamer with other members of First Christian Church. "It was a big boat with two decks. Their was a dance floor. I saw it more than I rode on it. When I was a boy, we lived in the Purnell-Empie house at 319 South Front Street. Hannah Block owns it now. At that time, it was safe for a child to walk anywhere and often I would wander down to the riverfront and watch the boats." <sup>13</sup>

When the *City of Southport* replaced the steamer *Wilmington*, automobiles had diminished the passenger traffic on the river. However, memories of the smaller boat abound. Martin Stevenson Willard recalled the thrill of steering the ship's wheel as a boy, with his father and Captain Potter just over his shoulder. Bruce Barclay Cameron, Jr. rode the steamer with his father and remembers stopping at the Orton dock on their way to spend the night at Miss Kate Stewart's little hotel in Southport; a picturesque waterfront house where a boy in the 1920's could listen in the parlor to the famous hostess relate personal recollections of life not only before the Civil War, but as early as 1848, when she saw the North Carolina soldiers returning from the Mexican War.

Miss Kate's stories of the Cape Fear were legion and authentic. One of her guests recorded the following story just as Kate Stewart related it. "The Southport man who helped kill the whale, which had gotten aground, cut off its head and chartered, for \$25, a little vessel to haul the head up to Wilmington, intending to get a small fortune by charging so much a look. Fate was against him, for the vessel got aground near Big Island, half way to Wilmington, and stuck there two days. It was a warm spell and that whale was so loud Wilmington knew that it was coming before it arrived, and the port officer and the board of health made a formal visit and informed the crest-fallen owner that unless he moved it away in a hurry he would get a dose of jail. So down the river he went and back to Southport and there the board of health fined him \$25 and informed him that unless he buried that head it would cost him that much money every day. It is needless to remark that he never monkeyed anymore with whales." <sup>14</sup>

Howard Loughlin, a 70 something Wilmington surveyor who can still spot the faintest path through the woods, has a more grisly memory of the *City of Southport*. "I was fiddling with a folding chair on the boat and managed to cut off the end of my finger. Dr. Houston Moore sewed it back on." <sup>15</sup>

The wonderful, inimitable Jessie Harper Newbold took her children on the *City of Southport*. Indeed, with houses on Church Street in Wilmington and one on the



river in Southport, it was as if the course was charted for her. When her daughter, Ann Newbold, was asked to sign the ship's log, she drew a picture which served as foreshadowing to her career as Ann Newbold Perkins, an accomplished and respected Richmond artist.<sup>16</sup>

Captain Potter, like Captain Manson, particularly enjoyed the company of the ladies on board, according to Mr. Loughlin. His opinion was reinforced by Bill Neal of Goldsboro who wrote in the 1931 ship's log, "Don't let many girls with devilish eyes come on your ship, Captain, for I fear for your wife."

Aileen Williams of Fayetteville inscribed, "Captain Potter, all I can say is that your ship wasn't one that passed in the night. I've enjoyed my trip down with you and your jokes. I'm going to look for one that will really put yours in the shade."

More reserved salutations were entered by Wilmingtonians, Mrs. Alexander Miller, Frances Sutherland (Lee), W.O.S. Sutherland, Jr. and a young lady named Sarah M. Taylor who would later become the wife of local historian, Dr. Robert M. Fales.

There is much more to the Howard Loughlin Collection and the memories his postcards have stirred up in some of his fellow Wilmingtonians, but to cover all that here would be to ramble too far afield. The Historical Society is grateful to him for the use of his materials and

for helping us turn back the clock with memories that brought dreamy smiles to a lot of Wilmington natives. Sometimes they looked as if they could almost feel the river breeze blowing in their face.

---

<sup>1</sup> U. S. Vonplenl to J. A. Loughlin, Howard Loughlin Collection, hereafter cited as HLC. J. A. Loughlin to Annie Manson, 24 March 1908. HLC.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene C. Hicks, *Hicks, Ward, Wright, Yonge, and 7,812 Descendants*, Wilmington, 1982, pp. 401, 560, 565, 554.

<sup>3</sup> Tony P. Wrenn, *Wilmington, North Carolina: An Architectural and Historic Portrait*, Charlottesville, 1984 65,66.

<sup>4</sup> N.n., n. d., Southport-Brunswick County Files, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Ida Potter Watson to R. P. Wheatley, 14 March 1937. Southport - Brunswick County files. Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Loughlin to Annie Manson, 22 May 1910. HLC.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Sam Bissette and Beverly Tetterton.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Cobb Cashman, *Cape Fear Adventure*, Woodland Hills, California, 1982. James Sprunt, *Tales and Traditions of the Lower Cape Fear*, 1896.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Delmas Haskett, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Ticket owned by Glenn Avery

<sup>11</sup> Series of Interviews with E. Lawrence Lee, Jr., 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Tabitha McEachern, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Skinny Pennington, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with Martin Stevenson Willard and Bruce Barclay Cameron, Jr., 1996. "Stories of Southport as Told by Col. Olds," unidentified newspaper clipping, March 1917. Lower Cape Fear Historical Society Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Howard Loughlin, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> 1931 Tide Tables and Daily Log of Captain L. D. Potter. Courtesy of Glenn Avery.

---

LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 813

WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA 28402

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Permit No. 306

Wilmington, N.C.