

MEMBER NEWS

Focus on a Federation Member: Swansboro Historical Association

By Anthony James, President, and Amelia Dees-Killette, Vice-President, Swansboro Historical Association

In late 2007, the Swansboro Historical Association (SHA) reorganized to continue the work of education and preservation started by its tireless founders in 1961. In 2008, following a period of dormancy from the mid-1980s, the SHA partnered with the town to celebrate Swansboro's 225th birthday. The celebration included placing new plaques on contributing structures in the National Historic District and on other historical properties in town.

Since then, we have tackled numerous projects. Our organization volunteered time and money to help the town refurbish the historic Tucker Littleton House as a Visitor's Center. We wrote and published, through Onslow County Tourism, a self-guided historic walking tour, now available at Welcome Centers throughout the state. In the spring of 2010, we sponsored our first Historic Homes Tour. Of late, we have started facilitating historic walking tours of the town. During the Homes Tour and various walking tours, visitors remark positively on how nice it is to see historic homes that speak to a simpler time and that reflect the lives and traditions of ordinary people.

Through our quarterly meetings, the SHA both highlights moments of historical importance, and seeks to instill in the community the critical need for historic preservation and collection. Our general programs have run the gamut, from an overview of education in Swansboro, to an enthusiastically received night of memories of the charter boat industry, with authentic replicas made by craftsman and member Bill Kay. Currently the SHA is working with congregants to recognize the sites of one of the state's oldest AME Zion churches, St. Thomas (1869), and the 1868 Freedmen's School.

One of our initial broader projects was to develop an oral history program for the town, with a goal to interview people in their 80s and 90s as a way to preserve the memories and history of our coastal community. In the spring of 2009 we sponsored several oral history training sessions with coastal historian and folk artist Connie Mason. To date, our members have interviewed and prepared transcriptions for ten townspeople. These stories include those of a former teacher and church music director who remembered

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being enthralled by the James Addams floating theater when it docked on the waterfront. Another interview is that of a 101-year-old woman who has lived in the same house on Front Street for almost her entire life. She talked of May Day excursions to Bogue Banks, long before bridges and beach cottages. A local descendant of Swansboro fishermen colorfully related how he cornered the market on shrimp heading, and how, much to the chagrin of his fellow students at ECU in the 1950s, he ate dried fish roe from home as a snack.

All of these stories and many more have been preserved thanks to the vision and work of our members. We are now partnering with Onslow County Library to have these memories digitized and placed online for easier public access.

Even though we have accomplished much, the SHA has been faced with the familiar challenges of how to encourage volunteerism and office holding. We also struggle, as do many coastal communities, with the tension between tourism, development, and historic preservation. One of our goals is to reach out to historical societies for support and education, and we welcome any suggestions. We dare consider the possibility of sponsoring a long-awaited local museum and encourage advice about organization and funding. We look forward to promoting Swansboro's history and being an active part of the Federation of N.C. Historical Societies in the years ahead.

Please feel free to check out our website (<http://swansborohistory.org>) or join us on Facebook. To contact the SHA, write us at Swansboro Historical Association, PO Box 1574, Swansboro, N.C. 28584 or send an e-mail to swansborohistory@yahoo.com.