



2018

LIFE

on the Family

Preserving North Carolina's Coastal Heritage Through Oral Histories



A PUBLICATION OF
BEAUFORT COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



LIFE *on the Family*

Preserving North Carolina's Coastal Heritage Through Oral Histories



CULTURAL STUDIES

Humanities 120

SUZANNE STOTESBURY

Editor

JAMES E. CASEY

Designer

2018

EDITOR'S WELCOME

Why We Create

The arts are an expression of the creative talents and culture of a specific area. In Washington, the arts are held in high esteem. This is obvious when one walks downtown and sees the various art galleries scattered up and down the main drive. On that walk, one might hear traditional blue grass and other styles of music streaming from the Turnage Theater and one of the many annual festivals and events.

Whether we realize it or not, the arts have an impact on us all. When we listen to the radio while we drive our cars, we are absorbing the artistic expression of another person. When we watch a child's school play, we know that we are going to be entertained by someone else's work – both those of the writer and of the performance ensemble. But, when we wrap up in the quilt grandma sewed by hand, we are using art for more practical means than entertainment. It doesn't matter where we are and what we are doing; there is art all around us to enjoy.

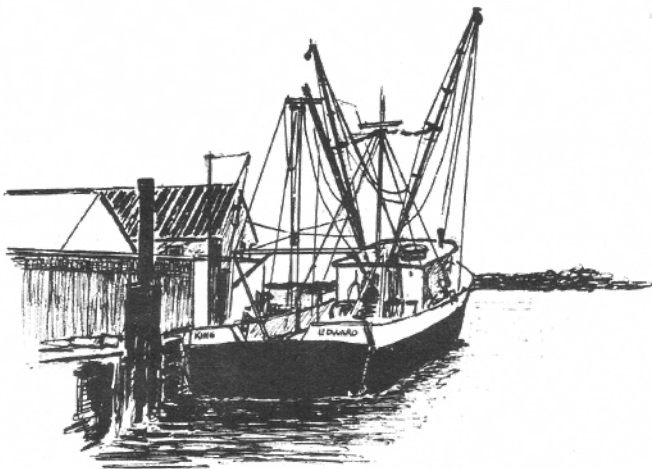
I once fancied myself as a future artist. I enjoyed art classes as a child, but my skills never developed beyond the basic concepts taught in class. While I enjoy creative activities, I've never quite developed into an

“artist”.

But, what is an artist, anyway? My grandmother Suzanne (for who I'm named) attended East Carolina University and obtained a bachelor's degree in art. She was predominately a housewife which provided her the flexibility in time to work on her craft. My grandmother had an array of talents. I do not remember her so much as an artist, however, because she died when I was only 9 years old. But, her legacy remains, and she lives on through her artwork.

My mother keeps pen and ink drawings created by my grandmother. Most are prints from drawings she made of churches in Washington County. Each has perfect detail and proportion in such a way that it hardly seems real that these images were produced by hand. However, my favorite pen and ink drawings of hers are the boats. Grandma inked a variety of small pictures of boats, with boats displaying the name of a family member. I have always loved this little personal touch, but I've also regretted that I was not yet born when she created these boat portraits. I've always wanted one with my name on it. There likely is a boat print out there with the name “Suzanne”, but we haven't located it yet. We do have prints of boats named for my great-grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, and my uncle.

However, my Grandma Suzanne is the only talent for inspiration in my family. On my father's side, my grandmother is about as creative as they come. She creates her own yard decorations for holidays, but for me, it's her sewing I find so remarkable. When I was a teenager, I'd take my prom dresses to her to be hemmed. When I graduated from college, she gave me some old quilts she'd made. I still use those quilts some 10 years

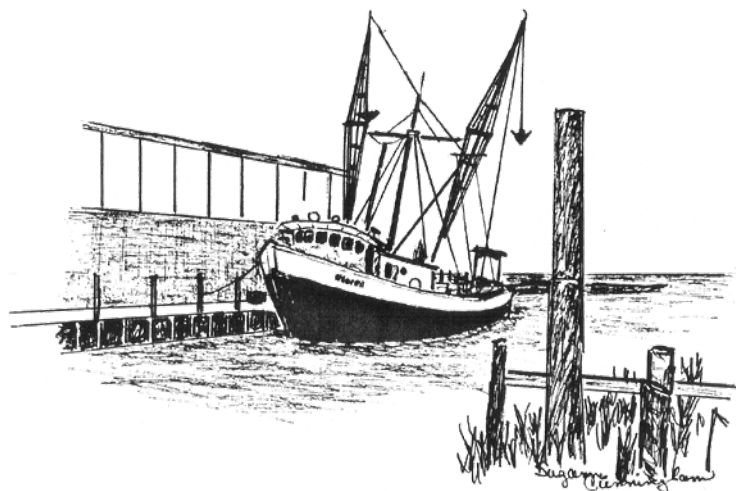


later. There's always a touch of nostalgia every time I use her quilts, a warm place where I feel protected. As these old quilts get used, they tear and need repair. Even now, my favorite quilt is waiting for me to take it to her for a seam repair. Every time she repairs it, the new patches add to the history and the personal connection I have to the quilt and my grandmother.

My step-grandmother is also talented. In her mid-90s now, she can't hold a paintbrush steady as she once could, but some 20 years ago, Grandma Alice painted nature scenes. She won a few local awards for her efforts. She will not sell her paintings, only prints, because it is important to her that each of her family members have a little something that connects us together. As such, we all have several paintings of hers that are ours "exclusively", just a little gift from Grandma that will bind the family for generations to come.

While I've never excelled to the talents of my lovely grandmothers, in this day and age, the home crafting craze has once again booming, and I am a patron and creator of those areas. I like to support crafters and artists by purchasing their work. I often do this via visits to craft fairs, art galleries, and online communities like Etsy. It is important to maintain the arts, as they are a representation of culture and history, much like the focus of HUM 120 – Cultural Studies, the course students take to be a part of the *Life on the Pamlico* project.

I may not be artistic, but I am a bit "crafty." As such, I was able to share with the students how and why we create local folk arts like the state's official folk art – the whirligig. Crochet is my best creative talent, so as a part of this year's course, students not only studied artistic expressions of culture and heritage, they also had an opportunity to learn a little about creative fiber arts. Each student in the class tried crocheting chains and small squares. For some, it was frustrating. For others, they liked it so much they bought their own crochet materials to keep practicing at home. Regardless, they noted the practicality of folk art and how unique it is to be able to create your own personal items like clothing.



Folk arts like these are practical, making them less entertainment than art, but the skill and care that goes into crafting folk arts – quilts, baskets and all the handmade and utilitarian “crafts” – make these works just as important as artistic works meant for entertainment. After all, just because something is useful doesn't mean it isn't beautiful.

This is a lesson that my students learned, as they diversified their thinking about what art is and how and why we create it. This led each to a specific project they embarked upon for this publication. Each student chose a specific craft to focus on. In these pages, you will find a history of drama in the community by way of the Turnage Theatre. You will learn how the town of Bath inspired the novel, musical, and film, “Showboat”. Students also visited dance floors and painting studios and reported back on what they saw and learned. Overall, this edition of *Life on the Pamlico* is a time capsule that will preserve a snapshot of the arts that represent our culture in this time person.

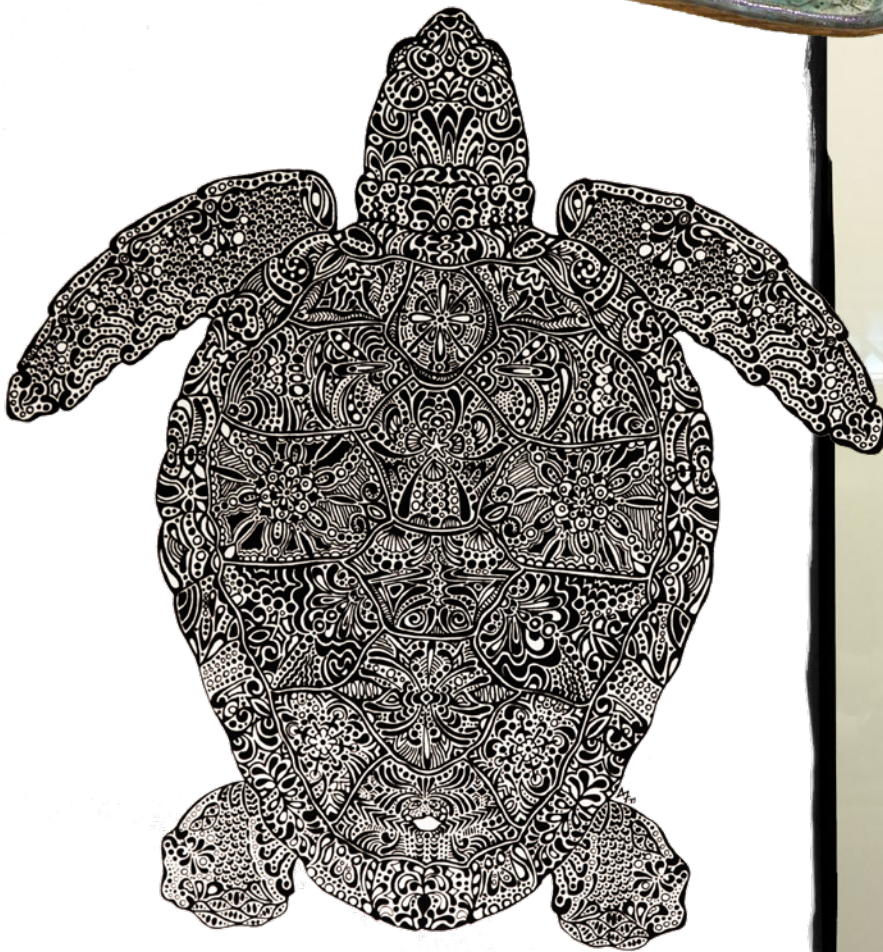
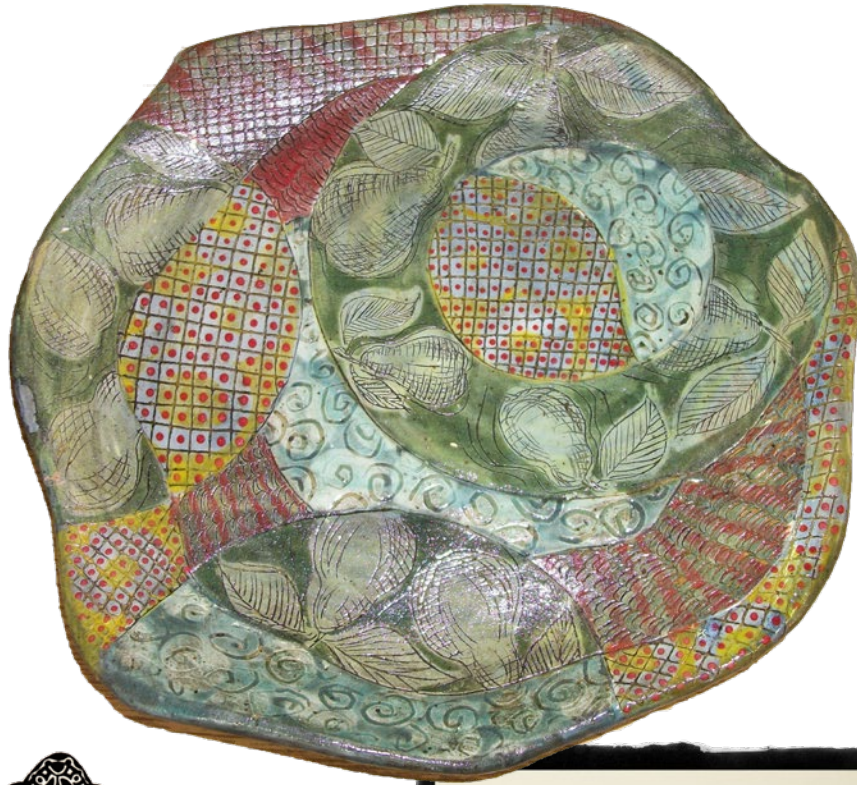
As such, I hope you enjoy the student's adventure into learning more about the arts that define northeastern North Carolina, and the folks that live “life on the Pamlico”.

Suzanne Stotesbury

EDITOR

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THE TURNAGE THEATRE

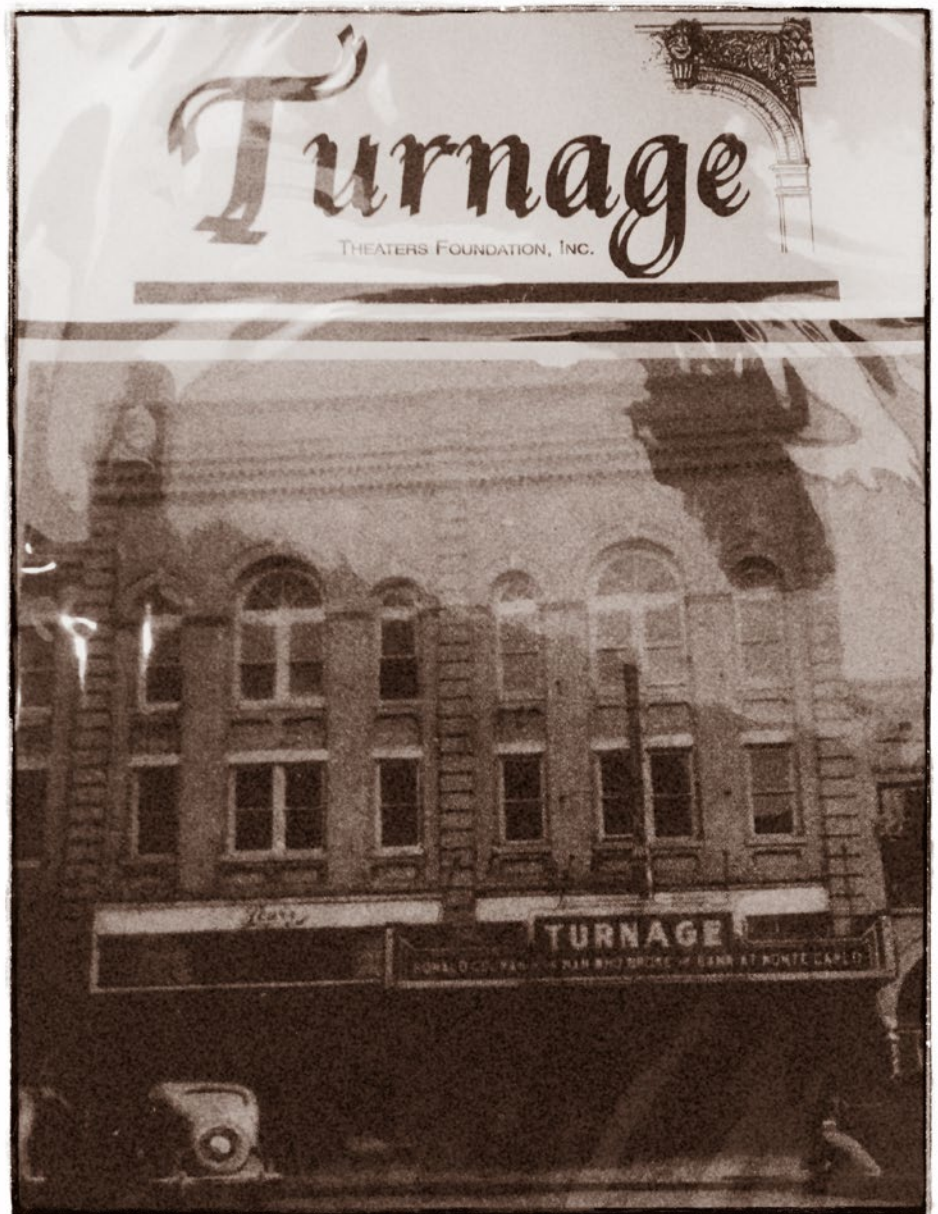
A Revival of Local History

MEGAN GRADY

Walking down Main Street the sight of the warm, glowing lights of the dancing neon sign welcomes visitors to the lively atmosphere that is housed behind the historic doors of the Turnage Theatre. The Turnage has been the heart of downtown Washington for many years, where its vibrant past has illuminated an interesting path for its future.

The history of the Turnage begins with vaudeville. Vaudeville shows were that most popular form of entertainment in the United States and Canada in the 1800s to the early 1930s. These shows consisted of a variety of unrelated acts performed together on the same stage. The acts ranged anywhere from singers, acrobats, comedians, magicians, to movies. It was this that caused C.A. Turnage to open the theatre in 1913.

Many vaudeville performers came to the Turnage not just for the stage itself, but because it was easily accessible by railroad and boat which



were the main forms of transportation for performers at the time. One of the most memorable vaudeville shows to have crossed the Washington stage was performed by the actor Roy Rogers.

Into the 1920s, the Turnage began to play silent movies and in 1927, it began playing “talkies” (movies with sound). One night during a “talkie” production, a crowded theatre had a hard time listening to the movie because of the bustling sounds coming from the street. This caused C.A. Turnage to open a second theatre behind the Vaudeville theatre. The new theatre opened in 1928, and that section of the theatre is the part still used today.

Like most, the theatre’s life has been through its series of obstacles. The first time the Turnage closed its doors was in 1978 when a new movie

“It has housed many memories for residents and visitors to Beaufort County—including first dates and kisses!”

theatre came to Washington. After being neglected for twenty years, some people from the community worked to reopen and restore the Turnage. Sadly, the efforts made by the Turnage Foundation weren’t enough, and the theatre was once again closed in 2011. However, when it was put up for auction in 2012, the Turnage was purchased by the Beaufort County Arts Council, now known as the Arts of the Pamlico. It was determined at that time that the historic Turnage Theatre would be revived.

The Turnage Foundation did

most of the restoration before the theatre was purchased at auction, and that kept the theatre historical integrity intact. The left balcony side of the stage only received some minor cosmetic repairs, but it is mostly original to the theatre. An intricate part of the restoration was that the other side of the theatre required more work and was modeled after the original. On the ceiling in front of the stage are beautiful flower like structures called sound cones that paired with the acoustic paneling create a crisp euphonious sound. While these time period features remain, the restoration was finished by the Arts of the Pamlico by adding a new updated sound and light system making the Turnage ready to embrace new generations.

Now under the watchful eye of Executive Director Debra Torrence, the Turnage is thriving and bringing vital life to downtown Washington. During an interview with Torrence, she said that the theatre provides not only a physical form of history because “It is one of a few buildings in the nation to house two theatres.”

But, there is also an emotional history. “It has housed many memories for residents and visitors to Beaufort County – including first dates and



Small work lamps cast a glow on the stage of the 1930s-era Turnage Theater on Main Street in Washington as it stands today. Renovations in the 1950s covered many of the interesting facets of the building. The theater has been vacant since the mid 1970s, but is awaiting renovations that could start

kisses!” Lining the front walkway of the theatre are bricks engraved that started as a fundraiser by the Turnage Theatre Foundation to raise money for the restoration. Each brick has a short-engraved message, one of which is a brick memorializing a local couple’s first date and kiss.

Since the Turnage’s revival, there have been some additions such as a catering kitchen, exhibition gallery, and the Lane gift shop, named after the late Louis Lane who founded the local arts council in 1972. When walking into the theatre you can feel the warmth of passion of artists filling the atmosphere with music. There are pictures of the local community hung on the walls leading to the doors of the

theatre. The Turnage houses the work of many local artists and welcomes visitors and residents come together and enjoy.

Torrence explains, “The Turnage Theatre is a community art space, supported by the community for the community--we strive to make the theatre a home to our community’s artists, groups and patrons.”

The Turnage offers a variety of events such as Broadway Kids Camp, music showcases of all genres, and improv comedy. Events can be found on their website or you can stop by their office located on 150 W Main St in downtown Washington. To learn more, visit www.artsofthepamlico.org or call (252) 946-2504.



BENNETT CARPENTER

The Sound of the South

JASON JEFFERSON

*T*he banjo is an instrument people likely think of when they imagine southern music. All the different and unique sounds, the atmosphere envisioned, the mood the banjo creates. All this and more likely comes to mind when you think of the banjo. Its usage in southern style folk music and even in newer folk music is well known.

Most people associate banjo players with older men, sitting on their porch. However, modern banjo music is not as full of old men as you may have once thought. In fact I thought this way too, until I met Bennett Carpenter of Washington North Carolina.

"I decided to learn the banjo two years ago, to quit smoking," Bennett said, "It gave my hands something to do. It gave me something to focus on and distract me from the urge to smoke."

While Bennett may have decided to learn the banjo on a whim, but





it didn't stay as just a method to give up smoking for long. He explained, "It became part of my daily routine. Every day I practice somehow, if it's only for ten minutes or two hours." In many ways the banjo was more than just a hobby for Bennett it became a way for him to express himself, and even connect to his roots.

Growing up in a family of international folk dancers, Bennett has been folk music and dance for most of his life. "I didn't really know an instrument well until I started learning the banjo," Bennett said. "I learned some flute in school, and some guitar, plus I used to sing, but the banjo was the first instrument I really learned."

Learning how to play the banjo,

"I didn't really know an instrument well until I started learning the banjo."

however, wasn't easy. There are multiple different styles, and many different tunings that contribute to the difficulty in learning to play it, despite this, Bennett said, "It was fun to learn the banjo. It was a challenge, but it brought me so much joy."

Bennett does he normally perform publically. However, if you ever were to see him sitting on his porch downtown, he would likely play a tune, just like those banjo greats from

the past. Maybe if you're lucky you'll see him downtown, playing with some members of the Beaufort County Traditional Music Association.

AMI FLOWERS STAPLES

Painting the Natural World

CALEB TOPPEN

On a spring afternoon, gray light streams from the tall windows behind Ami Flowers Staples in her home studio, as she bends over her current project. She meticulously adds small blue and green brushstrokes before sitting down her brush and admiring her progress.

Staples is a biologist full-time, but her “other job” is to illustrate the creatures that she works with on a daily basis. Because she is a biologist and an avid fisherman, Staples finds inspiration for her illustrations, both at work and in her free time while fishing. Staples work is focused on wildlife species that are found in eastern North Carolina. Her goal as a scientific illustrator is to show others the many beautiful creatures found in and around the Pamlico River. Staples also enjoys going to Lake Mattamaskeet and other state parks to find inspiration for her work.

Staples’ interest in art and illustration started as a young child simply



coloring in coloring books. She eventually taught herself how to draw the things she saw around her. Both her parents saw that she had a wonderful talent at a young age and encouraged her to pursue illustration even further by sending her to various art classes. By the time she was in the eleventh grade, Staples made the transition to illustrating different animals and was spending most of her free time work-

ing on her art. Staples has a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from the University of Georgia’s Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

While Staples was attending the University of Georgia, she was awarded the Logan Award of Excellence for her piece called “Cucumber Magnolia.” This scientific illustration had



Because she is a biologist and an avid fisherman, Staples finds inspiration for her illustrations, both at work and in her free time while fishing.

such immense detail in it that while Staples was working on it in the aborium, the lady that was in charge actually thought she had brought an outside plant indoors and was very upset until she realized that it was actually a piece of art! Staples said, "It was at that point that I realized I made it as a scientific illustrator!"



Soon after she graduated from college, she met her husband and made the move from Georgia to North Carolina. Currently, Staples is employed as a biologist at the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, and she works on her art part time. Her goal is to spend a minimum of three to four hours a week working on her illustrations.

Staples' scientific illustrations have immense detail throughout each piece. It is almost like you are actually looking at the actual species of fish or animal rather than looking at a piece of art. Staples also incorporates the fine details of native grasses or plants into the background of some of her pieces. She does most of her drawing with pen and ink, colored pencils, and watercolor, depending on the type of illustration she is working on at the time. While speaking with Staples, she explained how art is important to her as a scientific illustrator because it is a descriptive art. The illustrations help show people different aspects of species that they might not see with just their naked eye, or not have had the chance to see the different species in their natural habitat.

Staples said, "One of my goals is to help educate children about North Carolina's natural resources, fishing populations, and even fishing related subjects." She also was commissioned by Georgia's Department of Natural Resources to illustrate a coloring book for third grade children. This particular project theme is the tour of Georgia, from the mountains to the coast, featuring all the plants and animals found in that ecosystem. Not only is she educating the children about these cool animals and plants, her work is also inspiring children to get outside, go fishing, and explore the many beautiful places that we have available here in eastern North Carolina.

For anyone interested in going to see or purchase any of Ami Flowers Staples art, it is displayed at the River Walk Gallery in Washington, North Carolina, or online at [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com).



DR. GREG BARMER

Music Shows the Way

REBECCA BANTA

The congregation quiets down their Sunday morning conversations, as a tall gentleman walks onto the stage and sits in front of a piano. He welcomes them to Sunday morning service and invites them to stand and sing with the worship team. He plays a variety of Christian songs, as the congregation follows in verse. At the end of the song, he prays for the congregation seated below him. The man behind these actions is the talented Dr. Greg Barmer of First Baptist Church of Washington.

Dr. Greg Barmer, the pastor of First Baptist Church Washington, originally came to Washington as a music minister in 1995 from Aulander, North Carolina. "I chose Washington because it was where God directed me to go, and I have loved being here," he said. He brought with him his wife Lisa, daughter Sara, and son Andrew, who have participated in some of his choirs and have shared some of his musical interest.



As a senior in high school, Dr. Barmer decided that he would pursue a career in music. He was encouraged by two of his teachers, Fonda Sanderlin and Martha Smithwick. "They encouraged me, helped me grow my passion, and poured their lives in me," he said. After leaving high school, Dr. Barmer was set on his path to pursue a career in music. Dr. Barmer graduat-

ed with degrees from the Institute of Worship Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and East Carolina University. When the Dr. Barmer brought his family to Washington, he had accepted the job as minister of music. He stayed in that position for 23 years, but a few years ago, he felt a calling from God to take his ministry to a new level. In Febru-

"I think that music plays a huge part in the church services. There is power in the music."

ary, Dr. Barmer was promoted to the pastoral position at First Baptist.

Dr. Barmer enjoys playing the piano, and it is his "go to" instrument when he plays music in front of the church. However, until his junior year in high school, he was set to play the trumpet for life. He switched from the trumpet because, "I learned where my talents lie," he said. He instead decided to work hard learning to play the piano to the best of his ability. "The piano for sure is my favorite," he said. But, he played a variety of instruments throughout his career in music school. "The percussion was probably my favorite out of any of those, and my least favorite of those was probably the oboe because it was the hardest one," Dr. Barmer explained.

Also, while he was in high school, Dr. Barmer started to bring his music career inside of the church, and that is where his focus has stayed until recently. He did this by playing music in the church services. He continued to play in the church throughout college and seminary. He took a short two-year break to teach music at a school in Tarboro but came back to the church full time after that.

"Obviously, I think that music plays a huge part in the church services. There is power in the music," Dr. Barmer said. He added he has nev-

er been nervous before worship unless it is a complicated piece. But, Dr. Barmer feels the closest to the Lord when he is sitting at the piano, so he has the Lord's strength in every piece he plays in front of the congregation.

As minister of music at First Baptist, he led several groups such as: children's choir, youth choir, sanctuary choir, a children's hand bell team, and an adult hand bell team. The children's choir performs for the church a couple of times a year, and they perform a musical at the end of the school year. The youth choir sings for the church, travels to other churches, and attends Segue every year. Segue is a

weekend that multiple youth choirs from Eastern North Carolina gather to learn and perform music for the Bible Belt community that Washington, North Carolina is a part of. The sanctuary choir performs almost every Sunday, and the hand bell teams perform once a year at the church's Christmas cantata. All the choirs sing together and individually as well during the Christmas Cantata.

"I got to have more fun and goofiness with the children, but I enjoyed my challenge to have to teach the kids while being goofy," Dr. Barmer said. "The teenagers were similar, except I had to have it casual enough to where they enjoyed it, but serious enough to where they felt they were accomplishing something. The adult choir was more serious, but they enjoyed having the sense of accomplishment."

While Dr. Barmer will not be playing in the front of the church anymore, he plans to make the most of his piano playing as a hobby. There is a possibility he will include some hymns on Sunday nights during adult Bible study, he said. The music that Dr. Barmer plays will be on his own time as a hobby in the times of needing a break. In the meantime, leading his flock is his primary concern.



DEBRA SILVERTHORNE PAUL

Dancing the Night Away

JAMES FREEH

Even as they get older, people can still feel young by “busting a move” in Eastern North Carolina. Washington, for example, offers a plethora of dance opportunities, open to all ages. One of these dancers is Debra Silverthorne Paul.

“I learned to dance by watching T.V.,” Paul says. “There used to be a dance show on T.V., and we would watch that, then get in front of the mirror and dance.” Although it wasn’t a formal way of being taught, Paul still knew she loved to dance from a young age.

Later, Paul was formally taught her first square dance when she was 12 during a dance class at school. “I love music so much,” she said, “and dancing goes with music,” adding that her favorite dance at the time was the bop.

Dancing remained a big part of Debra’s life, and although she is having problems with her knees, she still tries to actively go dancing every Sat-





"Do your best to dance as much as your body will let you. It's the best exercise a person can get."

urday night at single's dances at the Tar Heel Variety Theater as part of the Single's Club.

"There are several types of dances, but I usually stick to the Single's dances." She explained that there were dances held at either the Red Man's Lodge, or the Tar Heel Variety Theater. She said that there were dances held every Friday not far from Washington in Bear Grass, but she "liked to stick to the singles dances around here (Washington) on Saturdays." She also said that once a month the Civic Center of Washington holds a dance.

The Single's Club is a club in the Washington area led by Kenneth Moore that organizes dances for single people here in Eastern North Carolina and allows different people to meet. If you wish to apply, contact

Kenneth Moore for an application, and soon you too could be swinging with the Single's Club.

In fact, the area hosts many types of dances for adults. The Eastern North Carolina Shag Club is one of these hosts, holding dances every Thursday night at Ribeyes Steakhouse in Washington. They provide their own DJs, and the events are open for anyone to attend. Quite a few members are active and attend, dancing their hearts out to the music playing throughout the restaurant. Most of the people seemed to know each other and got along well, as many were engaged in conversation during and between dances.

Paul says she has met a "ton of people" through dancing. "A lot of people come from different towns and all around," she explained. Dancing

brings people together; for example, she explained a dance called the "Paul Jones" in which all of the males get in a circle in the middle, and all of the females dance around them. When the music stops, they must dance with the person in front of them. "Usually, the people introduce each other and get to know each other," she said. This musical chair-like dance helps new people meet.

Overall, Paul has had a lot of fun dancing all throughout her life. "Just have fun, and do your best to dance as much as your body will let you," she recommends, adding "it's the best exercise a person can get."

CAROLYN SLEEPER

Throwing Clay in Washington

ANNA EAGLESTON

In the heart of Washington are many talented artists of all different types. One woman by the name of Carolyn Sleeper lights up the little town with her passion for pottery. She is the owner of Slatestone Studio just down the road from Washington High School, where she shares her artistic passion with her community.

Carolyn Sleeper majored in art at Morehead State University in Kentucky to be an art teacher. During this time of her life she focused mainly on drawing and painting. She didn't discover her true passion until she got her first job teaching art at Norfolk Collegiate School. When they were showing her the art area, her eyes laid to rest on a large kiln in the corner of the room. A kiln is a large oven used for baking and drying pottery. But in this certain class, they were only teaching with air drying techniques. They did not with the kiln that they had. She knew at that moment that she wanted to learn how to create pottery, so she



could later teach the subject to her students in more depth and detail.

She picked up the craft in taking a course at Tidewater Community College. That is where she learned the basics including skills like “throw-

ing” which is where you create pieces on the spinning wheel. After finishing up her formal education in pottery, she continued to grow her knowledge and learn as much as she could from different places. She attended many

workshops and began teaching herself with each new idea she came upon.

For Sleeper, this is more than a hobby; “this is my life,” she says. Sleeper loves the art so much because she says “you can create anything and everything from a piece of clay.”

Some time ago, she moved from Virginia she sold her house to move to little Washington to look after her mother. She continues to share her craft here.

Sleeper now teaches small classes at her studio. She has run a summer camp from younger children in the past, but she recently converted it to an adults-only workshop. She loves her classes and students because they can be a large source of inspiration. “I can take their ideas and grow them into amazing things,” she says.

Sleeper has participated in many art shows and store set ups. Her work has appeared at the Riverwalk Art Gallery in Washington, Elizabeth City Arts Museum, Albemarle Bank of the Arts, Seadragon art Gallery in Duck, and Manteo Arts Council in Dare County. She also has attended the East Carolina Arts Festival.



Some of her favorite things to make are what she calls “houses” or clay or pottery sculptures with a twist. She adds drawers and doors to these works that make them unique. She also she likes to make what she calls “dots” because “they make me laugh when im making them.” “Dots” are tiny balls of clay with even tiner little clay ball eyes on top of them.

However, her favorite pottery piece can be seen in the Martin County Arts Council building. This piece resembles a head and represents the anguish felt before her sons double lung transplant. For her this is very meaningful. Sleeper says “I might think awful things, but God is good and always takes care of us.”

“I can take their ideas and grow them into amazing things.”

If you’d like to learn some pottery and throw around some clay, you can contact Carolyn Sleeper at (252)-945-3541. She teaches a morning and night class on both Monday and Tuesday. The classes teach all techniques and styles of the craft.

KATHY GARREN

A Different Spin on Art

KELSEY ALLIGOOD

When people think of pottery, they think clay, spinning bowls and mud everywhere, but there are other unique ways to create pottery.

In downtown Washington, Kathy Garren of Chocowinity is a part-time teaching artist at The Lemonade Art Gallery. However, she works on her pottery making primarily from her home where she has shown that there are more ways to doing pottery than just using clay.

She has primarily created baskets over the past thirty years, using local materials such as reeds and pine needles. However, as Kathy was contemplating how to get rid of some pine straw one day, she was inspired to mix mediums and include the pine needles with pottery.

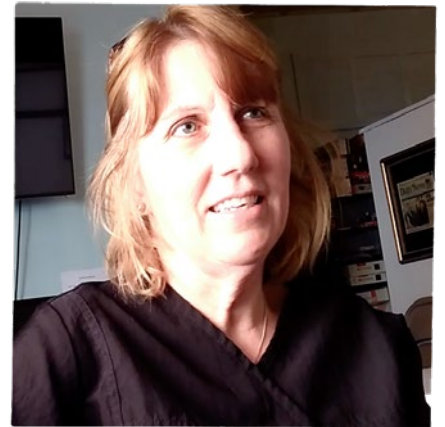
She says she likes creating new art because it gives her something to do with her hands to keep busy and create something unique. Her major inspiration for creating art is her

faith, and this is reflected in certain pieces she makes by the imagery and words she includes on those pieces. She uses her faith and love for adventure to create the designs on the pots she makes, including things like light houses, horses, and calming words like “Peace”.

In her spare time, Kathy spends a lot of time outdoors, and she enjoys activities like fishing, kayaking, and biking. She also travels around teaching others to make baskets as well as finding ways to keep green through the ways of recycling. Her most used recycled material is the use of pine needles, and North Carolina has no shortage of pine trees. In this way, her artwork helps the environment, too.

Interestingly, clay is considered the North Carolina’s state art medium, so Kathy’s artwork is a reflection of this state in many ways, from the materials she uses to the designs she incorporates into her work.

While the pieces she creates may seem small, the number of hours she



spends on a project takes up a lot time. Many projects take up to 48 hours, but some that she’s done can take up to several months due to her full-time job – nursing.

All-in-all, Kathy Garren has helped the local community that there are other ways for making baskets and bowls then just using clay. Locally, she teaches classes at The Lemonade Art Gallery to share her craft with others in the community.

To learn more about Kathy’s artwork and the classes she teaches, visit The Lemonade Art Gallery in downtown Washington at 201 W. Main St. or on Facebook.

AVA GARDNER

NC's Own Hollywood Gal

AMBER MIDYETTE

Beautiful, stunning, vivacious: these words and many more could be used to describe the actress Ava Gardner. A native North Carolinian, Ava was born on December 24, 1922 in Grabtown NC, near Smithfield. Her parents were Mary Elizabeth Baker and Jonas Bailey Gardner, poor tenant farmers. Ava was the youngest of seven children, and in her youth, she developed a love for running barefoot and watching Clark Gable on the big screen with her mother.

Ava's father died when she was 15, after which the family moved to the town Rock Ridge, near Wilson, NC. She graduated high school in Rock Ridge, and then started taking secretarial classes at Atlantic Christian College, now Barton College, for a year.

When she was 18, Ava visited her sister and brother-in-law in New York, where he ran a photography studio. It was there that he took glamour photos of Ava and posted them in the



window to further advertise his work. An MGM representative saw the photos and asked Ava to do an interview. Because of her thick southern accent, not many people could understand her, but she was still given a contract

due to her beauty.

She had many small roles at the beginning of her career, with most of them being uncredited extras. But, her breakthrough role was when she starred in *The Killers*. In it, she played

the role of Kitty Collins, the deadly love interest of the film's protagonist. After this role, she started to draw more fame and play in bigger roles.

One of these roles was in the film adaptation of *Show Boat*. *Show Boat* was originally a story written by Edna Ferber and published in 1926. Ferber pulled inspiration from her stay in Bath, NC, and her time on board the James Adams Floating Theater. Ava played Julie La Verne, a mixed-race singer on board the show boat "The Cotton Blossom."

According to Lynell Seabold, director of the Ava Gardner Museum in Smithfield, "Ava really fit the role." In the story, Julie's life doesn't go as planned due to the "one drop rule." This was the rule where anyone with any trace of African ethnicity in them was considered African-American, and they were discriminated against. Ava fit the role of Julie because her life didn't go as planned all the time either, between three divorces and the usual Hollywood gossip that followed her.

But, Ava was not the only actress who sought the role of playing Julie La Verne. Leena Horn was also an option for the role, but due to the fact that she was an African American actress, she didn't make the cut. "If Leena Horn had been cast as Julie, the movie

wouldn't have been as popular," said Seabold. Because Leena Horn was an African American, people likely would have not wanted to watch the movie, since this time period was fraught with racial prejudices. However, as an African-American actress, she would have been more fitted for the role's original intent.

After appearing in *Show Boat*, Ava continued to play in movies, with some of her other famous roles being in *The Barefoot Contessa*, *Mogambo*, and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. She eventually moved to Spain as a way to get away from everyone in Hollywood. Ava went to multiple bull fights and became good friends with Ernest Hemingway, who was the author of "Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Killers", stories that inspired movies she had appeared in.

After some time in Spain, Ava moved to London, where she spent the rest of her life. She never had any children, but she lived happily with her housekeeper Carmen Vargas, and her corgi Morgan. Ava suffered two strokes in 1986, leaving her bedridden until her death in 1990 from pneumonia. She was taken back home to North Carolina for burial, and she was laid to rest next to her parents.

Today, her legacy still thrives on through her films and the Ava Gard-



ner Museum in Smithfield, NC. This museum offers a look into Ava's life both before and during her time as a Hollywood star. From pictures and letters to paintings and outfits, Ava's spirit still lives on through the efforts of the museum staff and visitors alike.

If you are interested in visiting the museum, you can visit www.ava-gardner.org/index.html or call them at 919-934-5830. By visiting the museum, you can see who Ava was and why she became one of Hollywood's greatest stars.

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LIFE ON THE PAMLICO
is produced
as the final project of
HUM 120 Cultural Studies
at Beaufort County Community College:

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or to offer comments or suggestions,
please contact Suzanne Stotesbury
at suzanne.stotesbury@beaufortccc.edu.

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