

The

Coastal Dispatch

FREE

NO. 6 AUGUST 24, 1979

FINAL ISSUE

A recent history in black and white

The Hammocks is high, fertile land in the shape of a peninsula southwest of Swansboro. It is bordered along the Atlantic Ocean by Bear Island, now called Hammocks Beach State Park.

Early in this century, the appearance of a white Northerner—world renowned surgeon Dr. William Sharpe—dramatically altered life on The Hammocks as well as in black communities across the state. Dr. Sharpe became close friends with a black family on The Hammocks, and he left the estate to them and to the black teachers of North Carolina. Then, the '60s, integration, and an active state park system furthered The Hammocks' transformation.

The following history of The Hammocks is a living history, because it is intertwined with the story of John and Gertrude Hurst and their

family. Their ancestry is slave labor; their lives have been farming, fishing, cooking, sewing, and a pride in new generations of Hurst children.

Here are bits and pieces of a story which merits many more hours of conversation and research in order to be told well.

John Lewis Hurst and Dr. William Sharpe are dead now. John Hurst's wife, Gertrude, is 79. She still lives in the Hurst home on The Hammocks, several hundred yards from the big house that Dr. Sharpe, his family, and his colleagues came to for 40 years.

In the preface of the autobiography Dr. Sharpe wrote in 1952, called Brain Surgeon, he gave special thanks to "Gertrude of The Hammocks," a grandmother and a daughter of a slave who invested her savings, earned by picking cotton, in a typewriter, and learned to type by herself. The chapter on The Hammocks owes much to her proficiency."

On The Hammocks:



The big house on The Hammocks was once Dr. William Sharpe's retreat.

Dr. Sharpe was a pioneer in brain surgery. He grew up in the slums of Pittsburgh, Chicago, and South Philadelphia. His father was a clergyman of Scotch Presbyterian denomination who gravitated to the places where he felt his ministry was most needed; that meant he

took unfortunate people into his home for food and rest, as well as for religion. From teenage years on, William Sharpe knew he wanted to practice medicine. He worked hard in school. Ironically, when he won a scholarship to Harvard University, it was because their crew scouts spotted his rowing

ability.

Once at Harvard, he made a small fortune tutoring other students. From then on, income was not a problem for William Sharpe. As his interest and reputation as a medical student grew, he studied and practiced—in Berlin, Vienna,

(Continued on page 2)

News Patch

HARBOR OF REFUGE

With chances of 80 percent state funding looking extremely good, a Harbor of Refuge project in Swansboro is currently in the hands of an engineering firm, says Mayor Linwood Williams. The engineers will determine the costs and planning details of the project.

A feasibility study was compiled by the Office of Civil Works in Morehead City after the Town of Swansboro and the state directed that office to do so in December 1978. The study describes a harbor, channel, diking and contingencies costing an estimated \$80,000.

The primary purpose of the Harbor of Refuge will be protection from storms for the 36 commercial fishing vessels in the area, and for many recreational vessels, local boats as well as those passing by on the Intracoastal Waterway.

Hawkins Creek was chosen by the Town as the proposed site for the harbor. It is located southwest of the business district, and within the city limits. The creek has never been dredged, and is currently home for four or five small fishing boats.

The feasibility study proposes that Hawkins Creek be dredged to a depth of eight feet at mean low water. A 600' x

150' harbor is proposed, with a 400' x 40' interior channel. According to the study, the Town of Swansboro anticipates adding a pier or dock at the end of Chestnut Street at a later date.

The study states that spoil areas of about three acres, which do not include marshland or tidal lands, have been donated by J. Raymond Freshwater for the dredging of Hawkins Creek.

STITCHERY SHOP

Mary and John Wood of Swansboro plan to set up a new shop in the building currently housing Elizabeth's, a dress shop on Front Street. The Wood's shop will be called "The Village Stitchery," and will feature materials and sewing goods, crewel, crochet and knitting supplies. Also, says Mrs. Wood, they plan to hold evening classes in stitchery crafts, and may feature crafts-artists at the shop.

Elizabeth's will move to the new mini-mall at the corner of Front and Church Streets.

BOGUE INLET

A preliminary report on future needs of North Carolina's 26 inlets recommends that Bogue Inlet, off Swansboro, be deepened to match the Intracoastal Waterway, a depth of 12 feet,

says Leo Maness.

Mr. Masess is a member of the Inlet Study Committee appointed by Secretary Howard Lee of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development. The final report on inlets will be submitted to Secretary Lee.

Mr. Maness further explained that Bogue Inlet has traditionally been maintained at a 6-foot depth by the Army Corps of Engineers. Federal funding determines which inlets are dredged and the depth. The inlet study report will stand as a recommendation for the future, which state and, ultimately, federal officials will or will not act upon.

YOUTHS RECOGNIZED

On August 12 at the St. Thomas AME Zion Church, Miss Swansboro Wendy Wood appeared in her crown and a long dress to officially recognize four youths from the Church's congregation, reports Junior Director Mrs. Charles Shepard.

At the ceremony, Christina Lynn Williams, age 3, was crowned "Little Miss St. Thomas." Denise Christine Shepard was crowned "Miss St. Thomas." She is 15.

Willie Anderson Jr., age 3, is "Little Mr. St. Thomas." He was awarded a small trophy. A

larger trophy went to Charles Shepard Jr., age 19, who is

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Point Petition presented

A delegation of citizens seeking public parking at Bogue Inlet Point went before the Emerald Isle Mayor and Commissioners on Saturday morning, August 18.

At the town meeting, proponents of public parking at the Point appeared from communities in east Onslow County, west Carteret County, and from Emerald Isle. One resident of the Point voiced his concern about problems caused by public parking there in the past.

Frances Corbett of Swansboro presented Mayor Ronnie Watson with 1227 signatures on a petition from "people wanting to open the Point back up," she said.

She read a statement on behalf of Swansboro-area people and vacationers who have traditionally gone to Bogue Inlet Point for recreation and surf-fishing.

"It is time now for beach communities, specifically Emerald Isle, to realize that they have an obligation to protect the public right of beach access.... The Point area

has been used for generations by people throughout eastern North Carolina for recreational purposes....

"Swansboro is known as the 'Friendly little Town by the Sea.' She has always opened her doors to the residents of Emerald Isle as well as vacationers to the island in times of hurricanes and ice storms. Why then does Emerald Isle slam her door in our face when all we ask is to be able to use a beach we have used for hundreds of years?"

"In closing," she read, "how can commissioners who own paid public parking lots vote on the question of free public parking?"

Then Mrs. Corbett introduced Ted Miller from west Carteret County. Mr. Miller commended Mrs. Corbett for her efforts in Swansboro, and said that people in Carteret County, of which Emerald Isle is a part, are equally concerned about parking at the Point.

Mr. Miller said, "I hope Emerald Isle will get acquainted with Carteret

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Correction

In the August 10 issue of CD, in a story titled "Launching," the owner of the commercial fishing vessel Miss Sandy was mistakenly identified as Keith New. Apologies to Captain Kenneth New. Keith is Capt. New's grandson.

on The Hammocks

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Baltimore, New York City, Boston. He received an appointment to the Harvard Medical School in Shanghai, China. He met Hitler and Stalin, as well as top surgeons in the world's medical meccas. One of his good friends was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1914 he journeyed south with colleagues to the Onslow Rod and Gun Club. Hunting duck and geese was not his talent, but he was assigned to a small boat manned by John Hurst who knew a great deal about the outdoors. Thus began a close friendship between Dr. Sharpe and the young black man.

In his autobiography Dr. Sharpe wrote, "Looking back over the thirty-eight years (with John Hurst), I realize I have gained from him more off-the-beaten track, common-sense, useful bits of knowledge than from any other man, not only because he is a master at farming, stock-raising, and outdoor life, but because he is a philosopher. To him, the good luck to have been born in itself compensates for the many tragedies of life."

Dr. Sharpe asked John Hurst to find him land in the area, "a retreat which would be beautiful, isolated, and have an abundance of fish and game." After a three-year search, Mr. Hurst located The Hammocks. Dr. Sharpe purchased the land and buildings from the heirs of George Smith. In his autobiography, he describes "a peninsular wonderland...consisting of forty-six hundred acres of open fields and woodlands of short- and long-leaved pine trees on the mainland and a four-mile stretch of Atlantic beach..."

He wrote, "Shortly after we occupied it, with John as manager, various white men of the area came to see me during my monthly visits to apply for John's position. Their argument was that 'No Negro can order and handle other Negro tenants and workers; a white man must be boss here in the South.' That did not make sense to me, as I saw repeatedly how well John and the tenants were working together. I refused to make the change. It was not long before I received unsigned letters threatening damage unless a white man became the manager. In rebuttal, I inserted a notice in the local paper, offering a reward of five thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone damaging The Hammocks or injuring its personnel, and there was no further trouble."

In neighboring Swansboro during Dr. Sharpe's occupation of The Hammocks, public opinion continued to be mixed. There was Ku Klux Klan activity, but also there were people who visited the brain surgeon: "Some called him 'Old Doc,'" says Mrs. Hurst. The local doctor, James Corbett, often visited Dr. Sharpe to discuss his patients' cases. And Mrs. A. E. (Mary) Smith of Swansboro says she remembers when the Sharpe's car was sent around to pick her up, taking her to The Hammocks to play with Dr. Sharpe's

children, Bill and Gail. (Today Bill, a psychiatrist, still periodically visits the Hursts on The Hammock. "He's like one of the family," says Mrs. Hurst.)

II

Gertrude Pearson married John Hurst when she was 26, in 1926, and moved into his home on The Hammocks. Mr. Hurst spent most of his time farming on The Hammocks. Gertrude Hurst had taught school for 10 years, for \$25 and \$35 a month and in one-room schoolhouses, and when Dr. Sharpe asked her to cook for him and his family, she accepted.

"I made more money cooking than I could teaching," she says. "He'd come down whenever he got time off, and his wife came once in a while." Dr. Sharpe also brought fellow doctors and surgeons to fish offshore in his boat called The Hammocks. Some of Dr. Sharpe's friends built a bungalow on the Bogue Inlet end of Bear Island. Mrs. Hurst remembers it vividly, because she often rode the boat to the beach to cook for the guests during that time.

She says, "They had a log cabin over there, made out of white pine. I worked over there about five years. I'd cook Dr. Sharpe breakfast over here, and then catch the boat over. My husband would ride that plane, but I wouldn't." The small plane belonged to Dr. Sharpe's friends; it landed on the beach. On the mainland side it landed in a cleared field.

She never liked going over to the beach to cook. "You see, I'd have to go some mornings, and it would be late coming back. I had three children, and I had to get someone to stay with the children, and if anything would have happened to them, I couldn't have got back, because they had the boat on the outside, fishing. I'd be alone at the house. When a storm came up, I'd turn the stove off and go into the middle room, the littlest, darkest room." Mrs. Hurst was frightened by the thunderstorms which often racked Bear Island.

Dr. Sharpe was an easy man to get along with, she now recalls. He ate simple foods: "Fish, vegetables of all kinds. Chicken. He'd eat any kind of fish, but he didn't care much about anything fried. Steamed crabs, deviled crabs." He was helpful to her, at times, doctoring her children: "Yes, he always had lots of medicines over there," and she says that he liked to cut firewood for her house as well as for his own.

III

In his book, Dr. Sharpe noted his surprise that John Hurst ate no meat, only seafood, eggs and vegetables. "He considered the wild game of the fields and air as his friends. He had grown up with them, so how could he kill or eat them? As for the chickens, cattle, and hogs, he had seen them born and raised them, and they too were his friends. For the first time I realized why he always waited for me to kill the steer and the hog for household use."

The surgeon wrote many other stories praising his friend John Hurst. One of the most understated passages about the black man's gifts is also the most amazing. In 1940, Dr. Sharpe's older brother, Norman, who was in his mid-sixties, developed a chronic lower back and thigh pain which could not be diagnosed. Norman Sharpe visited numerous doctors and endured

many tests, to no avail. During a month of basking in the sun at The Hammocks, Norman was casually advised by John Hurst to have "all his bad teeth yanked out," that perhaps then the pain would go away. The next day Norman Sharpe did indeed have his teeth removed, and the pain receded, but then returned. By the end of the year Norman Sharpe died of the unknown illness. An autopsy revealed an advanced case of arteriosclerosis, caused by toxins in all the organs of his body. Finally, the source of the toxins was determined to have been a chronic infection from both upper and lower teeth. Norman Sharpe did have his teeth "yanked out," but John Hurst's good advice had come too late.

IV

In 1950 Dr. William Sharpe deeded much of The Hammocks to the North Carolina Black Teachers' Association, for recreational and educational purposes. Mrs. Hurst recalls, "Dr. Sharpe offered the estate to me and my husband, and we'd have been glad to take it, but then he made another suggestion, because we wouldn't have been able to do anything with it. He put the question before me, 'How about turning it over to the teachers?' knowing that there was an organization that would stick together, I guess. So, it just went like that." The Hurst family retained their home portion of the land plus the farming rights for decades to come.

According to several sources, Dr. Sharpe had stipulated that Bear Island should be developed to an extent that would make it easily accessible to visitors. The Black Teachers' Association raised \$100,000 by 1961, but the development of access to the island was beyond their means. They gave the island to the state for a park because the state promised to provide facilities and access to the island, for the use of all people. Somehow, in the course of this transaction, a misunderstanding occurred: the teachers thought the state promised a bridge; the state instead provided two ferries, a bathhouse and other public facilities on the beach.

Park ranger Claude Crews says today, "I think a bridge would have ruined the island myself, but they couldn't see it that way at the time." The bridge-versus-ferry debate caused angry feelings which have lingered through the years.

The Hammocks is known in black communities throughout North Carolina, especially among the older people, because, until recent times, there were few places where black people could go for recreation. For years, all of the state's black teachers contributed \$25 a year to what was set up as The Hammocks Corporation, to maintain and improve their land. They built dormitory buildings, and a hall which was named for Gertrude Pearson Hurst. Black children from all over the state constructed a 4-H camp and Future Farmers of America camp.

When integration occurred in the 1960's, and North Carolina's black and white teachers' associations were urged to merge, one thing that held up that merger was the black teachers' dilemma about the Hammocks Corporation. Would black teachers continue to contribute their dues to the Corporation once they were scattered through mostly white school systems with white



Mrs. John L. (Gertrude) Hurst with one of her quilts.

principals? Few black men or women became principals of schools following integration, and previously, it had been those black principals who urged unity in the responsibility of maintaining The Hammocks.

Now only 80 or 90 black teachers continue to pay their dues to the Hammocks Corporation, and monetary troubles have developed, as was feared.

But the valuable land still is theirs for future use. And Bear Island (Hammocks Beach State Park) is now North Carolina's most protected natural barrier island, one of the least spoiled beaches on the East Coast.

V

Gertrude Hurst has the prominent cheekbones of the Indians who inhabited the area hundreds of years ago. She has some Indian blood, she says, as well as the strong features of her father. Both her parents gaze out of faded framed photograph-portraits in her living room. On the mantel are pictures of her children, children-in-law and grandchildren.

"My father was 103 when he died. He was in the Civil War," she said. After a long pause, I asked if he had been a slave.

She answered sharply. "Yes, he was a slave. When he was a grown man. He hauled provisions for the soldiers." Then in a softer, gentler voice, she asked me, "Do you crochet? I'm standing here looking at your handbag."

The handbag, with its extensive needlepoint work, had been a gift from my mother, I told Mrs. Hurst. She replied, "I do all kinds of handwork. No one taught me to do it; I just picked it up." She showed me her shellwork, "all kinds of designs, they come to me that way." All along the back of her sofa stand the colorful pillows that she made, with hand-sewn pictures and designs. She showed me her quilts made from no machine, made from an abundance of scraps accumulated during the years that she took in sewing for extra income. From a closet she withdrew a stack of crocheted counterpanes, some of which are the work of her daughter, Mrs. Johnell Respass (named for her father, John L. Hurst), who is a teacher in Swansboro. Mrs. Hurst said, "Sometimes the children worry

Johnell so bad that she comes home and sits right down there after giving all those lessons, and she goes to crocheting to get them off her mind."

John and Gertrude Hurst's children went to Oxford, North Carolina, for high school, "because all the schools were segregated at that time. There was no school here; there was a high school in Jacksonville, but it didn't have much equipment then," Mrs. Hurst said. "In Oxford, they had better equipment and better teaching." The Hurst children went to colleges in North Carolina before returning to The Hammocks.

They remain a close family. Gertrude Hurst has a particular fondness for granddaughter Harriet: "She is my sugar," she says.

VI

Harriet is a tall, pretty girl, almost 15, who will be a sophomore at Swansboro High School this fall. This summer she works two days a week at Onslow Memorial Hospital in a program called The Explorers. Members of The Explorers range in age from 13 to 21, have above-average grades in school, and are interested in careers in medicine. At the hospital, they receive valuable first-hand experience.

Why is Harriet Hurst interested in medicine? "In my family, all the women were teachers and all the men were in science fields," she said. Her father, Harold, was a biological technician who died of cancer when Harriet was six.

Dr. Sharpe had already died when Harriet was born, but she says, "I heard a lot about him from people in the family. I imagine he influenced some of them to be interested in medicine."

"I'll be going into medicine. That's why I'm working so hard at it now. Maybe I'd practice somewhere else first and then come back here, or maybe I'd practice here for a while and then go somewhere else. I want to see more of the world, too," she says.

In his autobiography, the well-traveled surgeon, Dr. Sharpe, wrote that he thought it had been a blessing, knowing from the time he was a teenager that he wanted to work in medicine. Harriet Hurst agrees: "Knowing what you want to do, it takes a lot off your mind."

THE COASTAL DISPATCH

P. O. Box 1233,
Swansboro, N. C. 28584
STAFF: Jennifer Miller
SPECIAL THANKS TO: Jack
Dudley, David Barbour, John
Freshwater, Claude Crews.

Man in charge

(Continued from page 5)

About Hammocks Beach State Park: Secretary Lee stated that he had received no official request from the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Base regarding the park. He said, "I could not honor setting aside any part of the island for the exclusive use of any group, nor could I honor the sale or lease of any part of it." Also, he said Governor Jim Hunt agrees with him. "I would only assist them (the Marines) in making maximum use of the park facilities, just like everyone else," Mr. Lee said.

Secretary Lee went on to say that Hammocks Beach should be preserved as a natural area, with no development at all except to "maximize the use for the public." Thus, his Department plans to look closely at the size of the parking lot on the mainland, the number of ferries transporting people to the island, and the park's problems with its fresh water supply. "There is state park money to be spent," he said. "And some of that will come to Hammocks Beach."

When asked if a bridge to the island was a possibility, Mr. Lee said it would not be feasible: it is too expensive,

and it would allow uncontrolled passage to the island, thus harming its natural state.

About public access to other beaches on the N. C. coast: Secretary Lee says the state will not invest money where there is no public access. "We are only looking at beaches that are now providing public access; we will aid in ensuring continuation."

"When it comes to private and semi-private beaches, we take a dim view." About funding erosion control projects, he says, "We will look at each case individually."

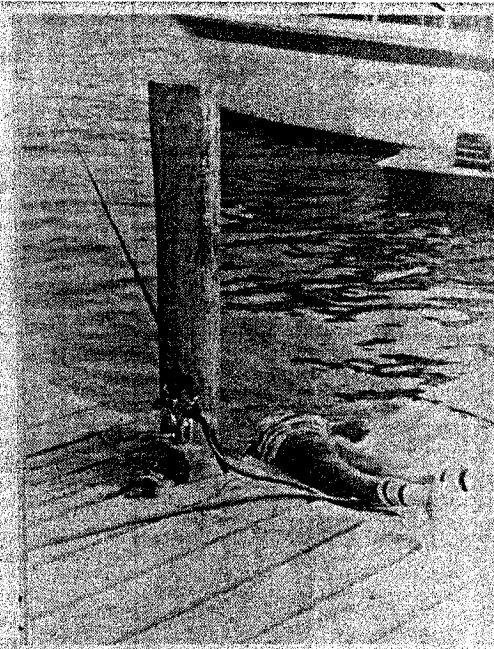
About future economic growth in coastal North Carolina: "The coast is the most fragile area in North Carolina," Secretary Lee said. "And the balance can be tipped too far so that we could not recover." He spoke about the increasing numbers of people who are moving to the coast, and about problems with polluted water and sewage. He mentioned the industries currently in force: Tourism, the fisheries, agriculture.

Then he said, "The state will assist in strengthening the economic base in eastern North Carolina."

Currently, two oil refineries and a nuclear waste transport operation are attempting to locate in the Morehead City and Wilmington areas.



FISHING FEVER



Photos by Jeff Keleher

Petition

(Continued from page 1)

County and not be a group to themselves. What you're really doing is ignoring the rights and feelings of the majority of people in the county. That's really the issue. It's not a legal issue but a human issue.

"There can be a reasonable

amount of parking there...on a first-come, first-serve basis."

Mr. Miller mentioned the "friendly feeling" of other beach towns, such as Wrightsville Beach, which do provide public parking and beach access.

Commissioner Tom Singleton stated that he too had spent a lot of time in Wrightsville Beach, and had noted that the town has two inlets: one open to

the public and the other completely closed to beachgoers, a private residential development.

"I say we have a similar situation in Emerald Isle," Mr. Singleton said. "We have Fort Macon, it has public parking and it has an inlet, and we have Emerald Isle, which has residences and it has no parking."



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