



PUBLIC INFORMATION

ITEM NO. 3.

DATE OF MEETING: June 4, 2012

REQUESTED BY: Mike Taylor, Library Director

SHORT TITLE: Update on Special Programs Sponsored by Pender Organizations Partnering to Bring the Smithsonian Institute's Journey Stories Exhibit to Pender County Public Library June 23-August 4

BACKGROUND: On February 2 I announced to you that Pender County had been awarded the privilege to serve as the June 23 launch of the NC tour of Smithsonian Institute's traveling exhibit Journey Stories. The exhibit tells the story how we and our ancestors came to America and once here how journeys continue to play an interesting role in our national and personal heritage.

Other partnering organizations joining us are the Friends of Pender County Library in Burgaw, the Burgaw Depot Historic Preservation Foundation, the Pender County Historical Society, and the fortunate recent addition of the Pender County Arts Council bringing a significant contribution of nearly \$5,000 for a total budget of \$9,200. The library is providing oversight through planning and administrative services and the NC Humanities Council is providing a \$2,000 grant to assist us in this role. The Town of Burgaw is also collaborating by waiving the rental fee for the historic train depot for several programs after the exhibit is set up in the library meeting room. Some events will be held outdoors. A complete schedule of events has been provided to all attending the meeting today.

We launched the series with a well attended program on the Underground Railroad and the development of quilt patterns used for secret signaling. Two workshops about how to research the journey of your own family history were also conducted. This past Saturday, June 2, the popular program by Nita Brown was presented about the age of steam boats on the Black River. June 9 brings two authors who have each documented a separate chapter in the fascinating history of settlements at Van Eden between Burgaw and Watha, a Hugh MacRae colony, and how the now vanished community of small farms first welcomed Dutch settlers and later during World War II served to shelter a group of German Jews who narrowly escaped the Nazi Holocaust.

On June 21 representatives from the other exhibit sites from across the state will come here for workshops and learn how to set up the exhibit by actually doing it for us. Then the weekend of

June 23-24 brings the grand opening with a highland bagpipe and drum band providing the backdrop, followed by a reception hosted by our partners and a musical program called Memory, Music, and Migration by a storyteller-musician at the train depot. On Sunday, June 24, a New York Times reviewed author, who is also a national award winning historian, presents the amazing story of his remarkable quest to discover the real man behind the legend of John Henry, the steel driving railroad man, remembered musical lore. June closes out with an outdoor lawn concert by a mariachi band under the oaks at the library.

Three more programs follow in July, first on the 7th with an antique car display on Cowan St. by the library. July 23 is a big day with a morning program at the depot about the story of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad which ran through the heart of Pender County and was the longest railroad in the world when completed in 1840. Hear about the adventures during the Civil War when the Union sought to subdue what General Lee called the "Lifeline of the Confederacy." Then the night of July 21 come and journey through our history through a readers theater performance of a play written by Samm-Art Williams as a gift to all of us who share a rich history of life in southeastern NC. For the sake of any who do not know, Williams is a native son of Pender and resident,, a TV producer, actor, and playwright who was nominated for the 1980 Tony Award for 'Best Play' for "Home" which is still performed around the country today. He was inducted in the NC Literary Hall of Fame a few years ago. The exhibit closes on August 4.

The Commissioners and everyone here present are invited to visit the exhibit and take in these special events. Bringing Journey Stories to Pender County has been a remarkable grassroots effort of cooperation and support and we urge you all to not let this pass by without some participation.

WINTER/SPRING
2012

NORTH CAROLINA CONVERSATIONS



A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Pender County Journeys

Michael Y. Taylor, Director,
Pender County Public Libraries,
Burgaw

People have long journeyed to, through, and from the land we now call North Carolina. While many stayed for generations, others only passed through, but most were affected in some way by the experience of the journey. New York and other great urban areas may be most identified as the "melting pot" of America. But wherever paths lead and cross, journeys have played some role in shaping who we may be culturally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

Burgaw is a small town of only a few thousand souls located in rural Pender County in the southeastern corner of the coastal plains. Explorers sailing up the Northeast Cape Fear River in 1663 wrote the first detailed travel journal of their experiences and left geographic names — Stag Park and Rocky Point — that we still use today. Hearing of their account, others followed from the British Isles and France seeking land and opportunity, while bringing captives from West Africa against their will.

Burgaw is not particularly an old town, having been designed and laid out as a new county seat in 1878 on deforested land beside a pioneering railroad from the 1830s. So it's all the more surprising that the town possesses what the North Carolina Department of Archives and History called in 1985 the oldest train depot in the state.

The beginnings of the three hundred-foot long wooden structure go back to 1850 after the 161.5 mile railroad between Wilmington and Weldon was built and



Italian immigrant women and children of St. Helena in Pender County are gathered in front of one of two community canneries in 1908. Photo Courtesy of Pender County Public Library; Hugh MacRae II Collection.

hailed as the "longest railroad in the world." Before Burgaw was a community, several hundred acres of forest were purchased on the rail line twenty-three miles north of Wilmington at the headwaters of Burgaw Creek to serve as a wood and water fuel stop for the steam-powered trains.

Involuntary journeys certainly include the 226 men of African heritage listed in the 1850 slave census owned by the railroad corporation. Some of these men were kept at Burgaw Depot to cut trees and to saw and split the wood to fit in the locomotive fireboxes. From these captive labor camps common to Southern railroads rose a rich legacy of stories and music, such as the story of John Henry, the "rail drivin' man."

At the turn of the 20th century, several hundred acres on the south side of Burgaw were marketed in Europe as a real estate farm development called St. Helena. "Own a Home in North Carolina" proclaimed a brochure with glowing language describing the economic opportunities and quality of life. Each ten-acre plot was to include a tidy cottage and outbuildings, all for \$240 financed over three years.

The first wave of Italian farmers arrived by train in 1907 but found the place not as pleasant as depicted. The fertile fields they anticipated were nonexistent, and the forest had to be cleared. Local prohibition laws drove the Italians away when they could not legally consume the wine from their vineyards. But they left a love of a new food embraced by the locals called spaghetti. Their departure opened the door for waves of Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Austrians, and Russians who stayed and planted a mosaic of cultures and traditions to blend in with the Anglo-Saxon and African American communities.

Through such journey experiences, the people of Burgaw and Pender County heard new languages, tried new foods, and formed lasting friendships and blood connections. Some journeyed northward for a generation or more and then came back home to the land. Others journeyed overseas to war, forever changed by that experience. Today the community absorbs new people with different influences from Mexico, Central and South America, along with Palestinian Muslim families.

The Pender County Libraries will feature much of this history when *Journey Stories* arrives in June.



Smithsonian
Institution

Journey Stories

Exhibit and Special Events in Burgaw



NORTH CAROLINA
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL
MAKING STRONGER, ONE PEOPLE

May 30, 10:30am

Discover Your Family's Journey Stories
Library-103 S. Cowan St.

Genealogy Research Workshop
June Swinson, library archivist & genealogist
Sponsor: Pender County Public Library

June 2, 10:30am

Steam Boat Journeys on the Black River
Library-103 S. Cowan St.

Talk illustrated with historic photographs
Nita Brown, popular chronicler of the steam boat age in this region
Sponsor: Friends of Pender County Library

June 9, 10:30am

Van Eeden: Dutch Dream, Holocaust Haven
Library-103 S. Cowan St.

Local 20th century Dutch & Jewish colonies
Charles Riesz, journalist & forthcoming author about the Dutch settlements
Susan Taylor Block, historian and author of Van Eeden
Sponsor: Friends of Pender County Public Library

June 23, 11:00am

EXHIBIT GRAND OPENING
Pender County Public Library -103 S. Cowan St.

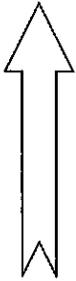
Participants: Representatives from the Smithsonian Institution,
The North Carolina Humanities Council, federal, state & local officials,
Pender Journey Stories Partners, volunteers, and you!
Featuring **Wilmington Police Bagpipe and Drum Band**
Sponsor: Pender Arts Council

12:30pm

Memory, Music, and Migration
Reception Historic Burgaw Train Depot -115 S. Dickerson St.

Performance by **Logie Meachum**, noted NC storyteller-musician
Sponsors: North Carolina Humanities Council, Pender Arts Council, Burgaw
Depot Historic Preservation Foundation, Friends of Pender County Library,
Pender County Historical Society

Events information continued on reverse



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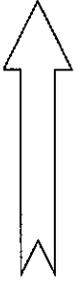
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June 24, 2:00pm

Steel Drivin' Man-John Henry, the Real Story

Presentation

Historic Burgaw Train Depot -115 S. Dickerson St.

Scott Reynolds Nelson, award-winning author, NY Times reviewed

Sponsor: Burgaw Depot Historic Preservation Foundation

June 30, 12:00pm

Mariachi Band

Outdoor performance (bring seating).

Library-103 S. Cowan St.

Los Viajeros - "The Travelers"- NC's famous traditional mariachi band

Sponsor: Pender Arts Council

July 7, 10:00am-2:00pm

Classic Antique Car Display

(Rain date: August 4)

Library-103 S. Cowan St.

Sponsor: Friends of Pender County Public Library

July 21, 10:30am

Journey through History on the Wilmington & Weldon RR

"Longest Railroad in the World" when built in 1840- Role in the Civil War

Burgaw Train Depot -115 S. Dickerson St.

James Burke-CFCC professor, historian & author.

Sponsor: North Carolina Humanities Council

July 21, 7:30pm

Pender Journey Stories Readers Theater

Original play

Historic Burgaw Train Depot-115 S. Dickerson St.

by **Samm-Art Williams**, Tony Award nominated playwright & TV producer

Sponsor: Pender Arts Council

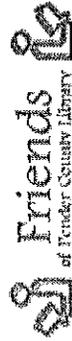
Ticketed event

QUESTIONS: Call the library at (910) 259-1234

Pender Journey Stories Partners



**Pender County
Public Library**



**Friends of
Pender County Library**

Pender Arts Council



**Burgaw Depot
Historic Preservation Foundation**



**Pender County Museum
and Historical Society**

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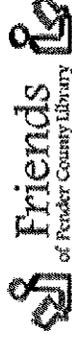
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