



**Here is Where it All Started
“Independence” That is.....
1795-2020**

The history of Southport's Fourth of July Festival celebration was first recorded in a newspaper in 1795. When ships lying at anchor in the harbor would discharge salutes from their cannons at daybreak and throughout the day, with the ships officers and town officials sharing companionship toasting the young nations independence. During this time it was known as the "Festival of Free Men."

In the 1950's, the existing festival was known as the "Live Oak Festival" and celebrated with parades, balls and queens.

The 60's proved to be a time of early foundation for today's festival, In 1962 the newly organized Southport Jaycees, in their search of a ways and means project held the first boat raffle on the evening of July 4th at what was known locally at that time as the "Cedar Bench". Today that landmark on the waterfront, now known as the "Whittler's Bench" still carries on this tradition. Another newly organized civic club, the Junior Woman's Club started the tradition of the "Arts Festival" in 1963. With the enthusiasm and excitement of Southport residents and tourists, the true patriotic spirit came alive with the celebration of the now recognized Fourth of July parade in 1964.

In 1972, the festival was incorporated by the Secretary of State as the "North Carolina Fourth of July Festival, Inc." a non-profit organization. Along with its Board of Directors, the professional staff at the Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce and many volunteer workers it has continued to grow into what it is today. This three to four day festival has no counterpart anywhere. Hosted by this little seacoast town of happy and hospitable people, the festival annually brings joy and an intense feeling of patriotism to the residents and visitors from every state in the union.

Since 1996, a Naturalization Ceremony has been incorporated into the N.C. Fourth of July Festival and administered by what is now the United States Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services(USCIS). In 2011, 152 individuals from 52 countries and every continent in the world took their Oath of Citizenship and became United States citizens. Since 2007, more than 723 new citizens have been welcomed by the Festival, including 533 during the July ceremonies and another 190 during special Mid-Winter Naturalization Ceremonies in January.

Holding true to its mission of promoting patriotism, the festival also holds a Veterans Recognition Ceremony, Flag Retirement Ceremony and Flag Raising Ceremony.

The festival doesn't lose sight that it is a celebration. The Waterfront Stage entertainment has festival attendees dancing in the street while Franklin Square Park offers a shady respite from

the July heat as over 100 handmade arts and craft vendors setup their wares for sale in the park.

Children are a focal point with activities including old fashion sack races, watermelon eating contests at the Children's Games, Volleyball and skateboarding competitions at Beach Day and face painting and children crafts at Children's Entertainment.

Of course, our NC 4th of July Festival would not be complete without a fantastic parade through downtown Southport on the 4th, featuring floats, marching bands, military units, antique automobiles, clowns and Shriners from around the area, and Fire Department representatives from throughout Brunswick County. To cap it all off at 9:00 PM on July 4th a giant fireworks display is presented over the beautiful Cape Fear River witnessed by thousands along Southport's waterfront, nearby boats, and from Oak Island.

We invite you to join us June 26-July 4, 2020, celebrating our 225th year.
www.nc4thofjuly.com

Contact: Karen Sphar, Administrator @ 910/457-5578 or 800/457-6964.
(Some of this information was obtained from the archives of the Southport Library)