

Franklin Square Showcases Area Artists' Work

BY TERRY POPE

Pat Simpson was one of the original Associated Artists of Southport, a non-profit group that formed 14 years ago with a goal of promoting local arts.

They opened the Franklin Square Gallery in the heart of Southport in 1980, turning an old school building dating to 1904 into a classroom and arts showroom for local talent.

"It's something that we've brought to Southport that we're very proud of," said Ms. Simpson.

Other original members were residents Betty Ledgett, Tony Oliver and Jim Brown. Membership has grown to around 120 today, with annual dues of \$15 for individuals and \$20 for families.

The first juried art show was held in the building while it was still in need of painting and repairs. Dark, brown molding along the walls blended in with the art frames.

"I'll never forget it as long as I live," said Ms. Simpson. "Since then, we've had some good visiting artists here. The pottery classes have been a backbone to the program."

The City of Southport owns the building and allows Associated Artists to use it with just one stipulation, that it be used as a learning center and as a showcase for local arts.

The building, which isn't heated, closes each January and February, which also allows time for renovations and repairs. This year, the ex-

hibit committee and 32 volunteers painted the interior walls and giant stairwell. They covered the brown and dingy paint with a lighter and fresher coat.

"We truly changed the face of this building," said Joyce Martz, exhibit committee chairperson. "It's kind of snowballing."

Dubbed "Operation Fresh Face," the renovation was celebrated with a covered dish supper.

"People just volunteered and spent lots and lots of time to get it done," said Donna Monday, publicity chairperson.

The group is fortunate to have use of the building, she said.

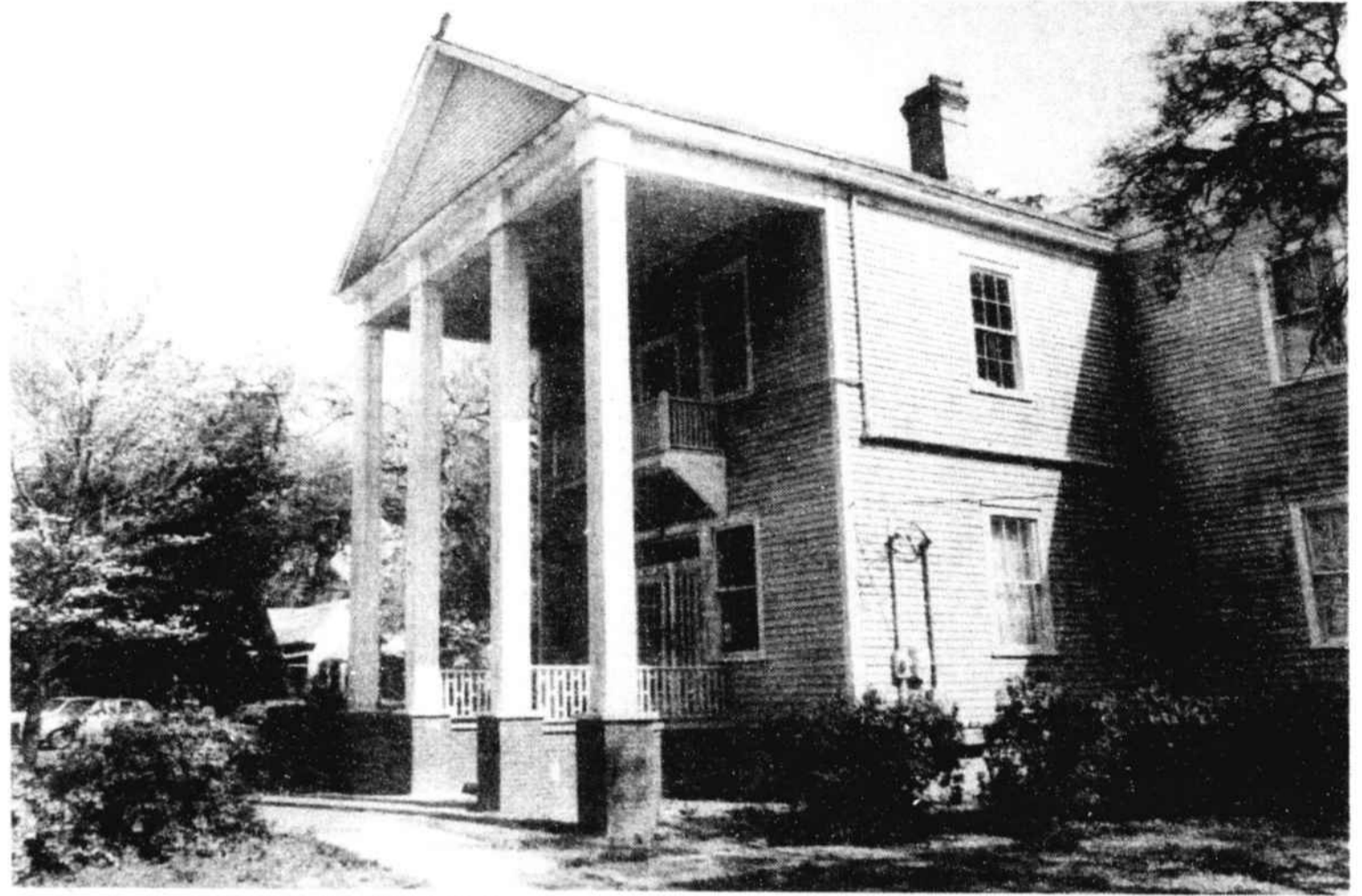
"This is really an unusual and special thing," said Ms. Monday. "This area has so many wonderfully talented artists."

Although the gallery sells and displays works by its members, the real purpose of the organization is to share talent with the community, she said. Some members own summer homes in Brunswick County and are not full-time residents.

The theme of May's art show is "Southport Scenes", featuring views of the historic town on the Cape Fear River. For June, the theme is "Carolina Waters", depicting scenes from area rivers, lakes, beaches or streams.

The annual Art in the Park celebration is Saturday, May 30, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

It will include a vault sale of unclaimed items that have been stored



FRANKLIN SQUARE Gallery is housed in a former school house that dates to 1904.

at the gallery, a bake sale, pottery demonstration and mural painting for children. Also, theater and musical performances will be held in Franklin Square Park just outside the gallery. Each year, the park event serves as the group's major fund-raiser.

A youth gallery upstairs features

art work from local school children. Art teachers submit work from students in elementary grades to high school to help give them public exposure.

But one is never too old to begin painting, said Ms. Martz.

"There is no such thing as a child protegee in art," she said. "Art takes

maturity."

Anyone can learn to reproduce, but art takes form through interpretation and through a display of mood, she said. So art becomes especially popular among Brunswick County's retirement population.

Other 1992 scheduled events at the gallery include:

■July: The 12th annual July 4th exhibition is open to the public July 1 to Aug. 1 with Don Andrews, watercolorist from Alabama, as judge. Art work will be received June 20-22, with judging June 27.

■August: A member show featuring works by Helga Beacham and Marilyn Harness will be displayed. (See ARTISTS', Page 41)

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