



Molly's "Beaufort Town"

*A ten-chapter story in celebration of the
300th Anniversary of Beaufort, NC*

Chapter Two- "The Quilting Party"

Molly and her mother waited on the corner, where they were to meet Lydia and Aunt Susan. This morning there was to be a quilting party. The neighbors' daughter Susannah was engaged to be married and the ladies of the church were making a wedding quilt. It was going to be beautiful – redbirds centered in white squares, with ivy leaves all around the border. Molly had seen the quilt last week, when Mother made her go and watch the ladies work.

"All proper young ladies should learn to make quilts," Mother had said. Molly hated to admit, but it was amazing to watch the women's hands at work. How could they make such tiny little stitches? And how could they do it so quickly? But she couldn't watch them for long - she couldn't stand still long enough!

Molly had tried to sew once – just once. When she stuck her finger with the needle, she had tried so hard to be brave. But it hurt, and she couldn't help but cry a little. Mother had told Molly that maybe she just wasn't ready yet. Next time, she might learn to sew a square or two. But for now, she should just watch and learn.

Aunt Susan was making Lydia go to the quilting party, too. The grown-ups seemed to look forward to the event - but not the girls. They could think of better things to do. Molly watched for her aunt and cousin from the shade of a spreading cottonwood tree. "There they are!" she announced as she spotted them popping around the corner.

The two mother-daughter pairs paraded down the street for their morning of quilting and fellowship. Molly studied the neighbor's houses as they passed.

There was the Nelson House. She thought *her* family's porch was great, but it was nothing like *this* one. The Nelsons' porch, like many others in Beaufort, was really two, with one stacked on top of the other, spanning the whole width of the house. And on the rooftop was another small porch with railings - just a square, uncovered box that opened up from below. What was it called again? Oh, yes... a widow's walk. Sometimes she would see Mrs. Nelson standing there, holding onto the rails and looking out towards the harbor, waiting for her husband's ship to return home.

Captain Nelson sailed a merchant ship that traveled all over the world. When the ship left Beaufort Harbor, it would be filled with goods to trade for items that were needed here. When the ship returned, cloth, tea and other items would be unloaded and either taken to the general store on the waterfront or shipped by smaller boats to inland towns. It was exciting to see the new products in the store window and wonder where they had come from.

Molly didn't see Mrs. Nelson on the widow's walk... yet. But she knew she would be there later. Her husband's ship had been out to sea for three months now. He should be returning soon.

And here was the Thomson House. It was similar to their but the window shutters were closed tight. Mother said that the Thomsons had gone to New Bern. "Maybe they will see the building of Tryon Palace while they are there!" Molly thought. She knew that if they did, William, the Thomsons' son, would tell her all about it. William could be a little know-it-all sometimes, but he had lots of stories to

tell about his family's travels.

Molly had never been around the world. She had never even been to New Bern, for that matter. She wondered what it would be like to travel to any place she wanted to go. She wondered about faraway England, across the Atlantic Ocean. That's where her family had come from when she was just a little girl, but she was too young to remember it. She'd sure like to see it again one day. Maybe she could visit her grandparents...

Her thoughts were interrupted as Molly's group turned up the path to the Gible house. There they were greeted at the door by Susannah, the bride-to-be. In all there were three children in the family, Fredrick, Dedrick and Susannah. Molly always thought it was odd that the two brothers had rhyming names. Susannah took the ladies' hats and hung them on the rack near the stairs, then led them into the living room.

There in the middle of the room was *the quilt*. It was stretched out tight on a huge rack, and chairs were placed all around. A lot of work had been done on the quilt since Molly had seen it last. She reached out to touch one of the finely-stitched squares when she heard a loud "Ahem," sound. She jerked back her hand and looked up to see Mrs. Ramsey, one of the older women who attended her church, staring at her as if she had committed a terrible crime.

"Dirty fingers make dirty quilts," Mrs. Ramsey said sternly. Molly gulped. Lydia was fidgeting beside her.

Mother jumped to Molly's rescue. "I made sure the girls washed up before we left," Mother explained. Molly gratefully looked up at her mother, who gently pushed her to stand beside a chair near the quilting frame. Mother sat down in the chair and picked up her needle and thread as the other ladies arrived.

Soon there was lively conversation, with several discussions going on at once. Molly and Lydia watched for a while as the women chatted and sewed. At no time was it silent - or still. Lips and hands seemed to work together in a rhythm all their own.

Soon, however, Molly became bored. She stared at the ceiling and shuffled around on restless feet. And, with all the women here in one room, it sure was hot. All she could think about was the cool creek water waiting for her just a short distance away. She imagined her bare toes squeezing into the murky mud at the water's edge.

Suddenly, all the ladies stopped talking and sewing and looked toward the front windows. Molly was puzzled but glad for the change of pace as excited voices and the shuffling of feet were heard just outside. Like a small herd of sheep, the women moved toward the windows to find out what was happening in the street.

"What a way to end a party," thought Molly.

Next - Chapter Three - "The Storm!"

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Newspaper Activity:

Using your local newspaper, identify individuals in the news who demonstrate independence and challenge stereotypes about what women and men should do.

Learn more about historic Beaufort!

Two porches, one house

Many of the homes in historic Beaufort were built by sea captains, boat builders and merchants trading with seagoing vessels. These men traveled a great deal and brought back design ideas and materials from other areas. The design for steep rooflines covering front and back porches, for example, came from the Bahamas. Ideas for long, narrow rooms extending from front to back, allowing sea breezes to help cool the home, came from tropical climates as well. The "double porches" on many of Beaufort's historic homes also helped keep residents cool in warmer weather. Two levels of outdoor living allowed residents to catch the incoming breezes from both the upstairs and downstairs areas of the home.



Beaufort's "Hammock House" is one of the oldest homes in the area. (Photo courtesy of the Carteret County News-Times.)