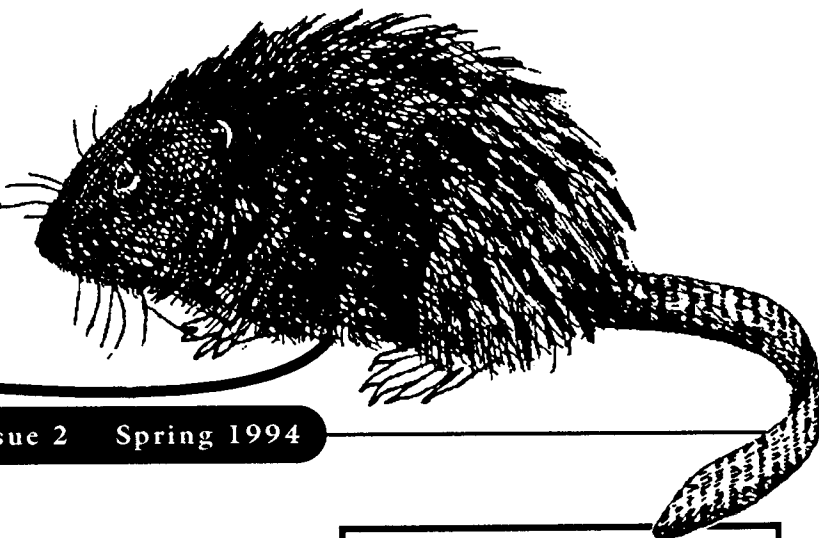


Port Pennings



Volume 1 Issue 2 Spring 1994

The William Walker House South Congress Street Village of Port Penn, Delaware

The 1792 town map of Port Penn indicates that the entire east side of Congress Street was rented to William Walker. These rentals included lot number thirty-five, now occupied by an ivory-colored frame dwelling, with an attached shop, across Market Street from the Cleaver Family house, Linden Hall. The house has undergone a number of changes since its construction, and has been owned at various times, by both the Stewart and the Cleaver families. In recent years, the commercial portion of the building was used as a furniture store.

Building materials and construction methods suggest that the house was built at the end of the 18th century; during William Walker's tenancy on the property. The dwelling began as one room deep, two stories high, and three bays wide. The foundation is composed of stone rubble and brick and includes a fireplace relieving arch. The frame house is constructed with pine weatherboards attached to oak posts and studs. The use of hand-wrought nails in various parts of the structure support the 18th-century construction date.

The original house possessed a single brick chimney with a fireplace in

the entry parlor. The largest of threesleeping chambers upstairs also contained a fireplace. Early additions to the house included a rear parlor, large sleeping chamber, and a lean-to kitchen.

William Walker was born in 1741, and served in the 6th Pennsylvania light infantry during the Revolution. William married Elizabeth Hodge before 1790 and relocated to Saint Georges Hundred where they had three children; William Jr, Margaret and Elizabeth.

When Walker died in February of 1803, his probate inventory was taken by two neighbors including John Aiken. (For an account of the Aiken House see Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1.)

William's probate inventory listed ownership of two slaves, Thomas and a young girl named Lid. Walker, a blacksmith, left a well furnished house. The downstairs "Parlour" contained an eight day clock, desk and bookcase, walnut dining table, couch, and corner cupboard. Additional walnut items, including a table, tea chest, and chest of drawers, were located elsewhere in the house. Walker's comparatively high standard of living also found expression in his monogrammed silver teaspoons and sugar tongs and five feather beds.

Port Penn Area Dates to Remember

April 30, 1994

Port Penn Area Historical Society
Marshland Shad Dinner
Port Penn Fire Hall
PLEASE JOIN US!

May 28, 1994

Port Penn Area Historical Museum
Opening
Open to the public—
PLEASE JOIN US!

September 9, 1994

Port Penn Wetlands Festival
Open to the public—
PLEASE JOIN US!

*New memberships are accepted at
any time during the year!*

Although Walker's personal possessions included shoemaker's tools, spinning wheels, and farm produce ranging from 400 pounds of smoked meat to 21 bushels of wheat, his estate listed nothing associated with blacksmith's work. Despite his obvious wealth, Walker was not always prompt in paying his debts. Twice townfounder, David Stewart, had William Walker arrested for nonpayment of rent on his Congress Street properties.

Two months after William's death, Elizabeth Walker married John

Aiken. Elizabeth died in October of 1803, leaving her small estate to Aiken.

In 1888, the property was purchased by Henry Cleaver who owned it until his death in 1909. Henry's heirs offered the property for sale by auction where it was purchased by Norwegian ship captain, Didrick Ossstinsen for \$600.05—a winning bid by five cents. Ossstinsen's daughter, Helene Dicarolis Poore, currently lives on Congress Street just a few doors down from the frame house at lot thirty-five where she grew up.

The shop was added in 1919. Helene Poore spent a great deal of time in the store helping various family members with the business of the day. The store initially carried a variety of dry goods as well as freshly slaughtered pork. The store failed in the Great Depression, and remained vacant until 1935 when the building became a branch of the New Castle County Free Library system. The librarian was Helene's aunt. The library remained open twenty-four hours a day. Those who desired to borrow a book simply pulled a bell cord near the door for service. The house and the library were connected by a doorway through the coal storage area so Helen's aunt could answer her borrower with dispatch. The library continued in use into the 1940s. After that time, the family used the old library and shop for storage.

Helene inherited the house in the early 1950s and lived there until she sold it and the adjoining vacant lot to her daughter. The property was purchased most recently by the John Dipersio family.

Lee Jennings
Port Penn Interpretive Center

The Shad Are On Their Way!

One of the rich traditions of past years in Port Penn was the annual shad run. This begins sometime in March, depending on the kind of winter we have had and ends sometime in May.

To be part of this traditional fishery since the shad has come back in plentiful supply, has been my happy lot. This took place in the mid-1970s.

But I also remember the sad decline and scarcity that took place in the late 1930s. I remember as a young lad going out to help Mr. Ed, as we called him, to set his shad nets.

He owned one of the last of the old-time "one Lunger" shad skiffs. I can still remember the anticipated joy and enthusiasm on his face as we started out. The last day that I fished with him produced no fish. I can still see the sad and disappointed look on his face.

I only wish that he, along with the many others of the old-time shad fishermen could be here today to see the recovery of this magnificent fish and the plentiful harvest that we now reap.

I can still remember the excitement this produced in my good friend and fellow fisherman, Bob Beck. No child on a Christmas morning was more excited than Bob on the day when we came into port with over 400 pounds of this big, beautiful fish.

But it is not only the fishermen who are glad to see the return of the shad in such plentiful supply. There was the shad loving population who were happy to grace their tables with this rich delicacy once again.

So somewhere out there in the vast depths of the Atlantic Ocean, there is a large and healthy supply of the American white shad. About one million of these magnificent creatures will soon start their annual migration up the Delaware Estuary.

Many of these will get no further than off the waters of Port Penn. From here they will find their way to the fish markets and eventually to the tables of many whose delicate palates are patiently waiting the sumptuous feast which they will provide.

It is interesting when one considers the scientific name of this fish, "Alosa Sapidissima." It comes from the Latin and means, "small fish, good tasting."

So to those who are yet strangers to this rich gourmet dish, I say, try it and see if those who named this fish knew what they were talking about.

Clyde Roberts
Vice-President
Port Penn Area Historical Society

More About Shad

Edward Eggleston wrote in *Century Magazine* in 1885, "Shad were too plentiful; incredible stories are told of three thousand taken at a haul; they sold from one to two cents apiece, and were held so cheap that the salmon were sometimes picked out of a net and the shad rejected." In spite of the commonness of shad, it was the excuse for a number of parties in Washington—in the early days of the republic, senators and representatives sailed down the Potomac nearly every Saturday on parties organized for the sole purpose of eating shad and having a few drinks. George Washington had several fishing stations on the Potomac where shad were caught, and Baked Shad was one of Washington's favorite dishes.

Shad was known as elft, the eleven fish, to the Dutch Settlers in New York. It was on the eleventh of March each year that the first shad were caught and cooked on a plank—a method learned from the Indians.



Clyde Roberts fishing for shad on the Delaware.
Photo by Eric Crossan, May 1987.

Marshland Dinner

The annual Marshland Dinner will be held on Saturday, April 30 at the Port Penn Fire Hall. We will be serving our famous snapping turtle soup, boneless baked shad, home baked ham, vegetables, beverages and dessert. A cash bar is available. Reservations can be made for either 4:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. by sending a check for \$13.00 per person made payable to the Port Penn Area Historical Society to Marshland Shad Dinner, P.O. Box 120, Port Penn, DE 19731. Your tickets will be held at the door. For more information call 834-7346.

Progress Report

If you have gone past the Port Penn Interpretative Center recently, you will have noticed many changes. Piles of dirt around the building, elevated sidewalks, propped up roof overhangs over the doors, exposed flashing round the base of the building, etc. Don't be alarmed! The Division of Parks and Recreation has assured the Historical Society that the exterior of the building and the grounds will be returned to normal by spring.

Personnel from the Division of Parks and Recreation including the Director, Charles Salkins, met with the Historical Society on January 26 to present plans for the restoration/renovation of the building and to begin discussions regarding the exhibits. Afterwards, we toured the museum to see first hand the many changes that are occurring in the former two-room schoolhouse.

The front room is being restored to its original condition. Material has been removed to reveal the original wainscoting under the chair rail and hardwood floors. Paint chips have been examined to determine the original color and the woodwork will be painted accordingly.

The back room has undergone major renovations which include the installation of new heating and air conditioning systems, removal of one of the bathrooms and renovation of the other, a new office and pull down attic stairs and a central space for viewing slides, videos, etc. The floor is being elevated to match the level of the floor in the front room and interior six paneled doors will be added to match the exterior doors.

Outside, handicap access ramps have been installed to provide access to both the front and side doors and to the new parking lot at the rear of the Interpretative Center. Plans include grading up to the access ramps.

Much effort, time and thought has gone into this project and the progress so far is impressive. Working at the site everyday is supervisor, Eugene Iannotti, a member of the Port Penn Area Historical Society.

A museum committee has been formed consisting of three members of the Historical Society who will work closely with state personnel in planning the exhibits, determining the story lines that will be told, and the long term direction. These members are Clyde, Roberts, Bernard Herman and Linda Beck.

The Division of Parks and Recreation plans to reopen the Interpretative Center in May.

Linda Beck
Treasurer
Port Penn Area Historical Society

The Port Penn Area Historical Society was formed in 1981 by the following founding members:

- Linda L. Beck*
- Robert A. Beck*
- Gertrude Thelma Bendler*
- Alberta L. DiVirgilio*
- Carolyn S. Foraker*
- Margaret Foraker*
- Patricia A. Schaffer*
- Julia L. Sidwell*
- William S. Sidwell*
- Margaret T. Zacheis*

The current officers of the Society, whose terms will expire in 1994 are:

- Sidney Craven, Vice President*
- Clyde A Roberts, Vice President*
- Alberta L. DiVirgilio,*
Corresponding Secretary
- H. Virginia Spicer,*
Recording Secretary
- Linda L. Beck, Treasurer*

All the above officers serve on the Board of Directors which also include:

- Kim Burdick*
- Bernard L. Herman*
- David G. Orr*

The office of President left vacant by the death of *Robert A. Beck* on June 25, 1993, will not be filled until his term expires in 1994, as a mark of respect, gratitude, admiration and affection. His passing leaves officers and members of the Society with a deep sense of sadness.

Membership Application

Port Penn Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 120

Port Penn, Delaware 19731

Name _____

Telephone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership Category

- Individual \$5.00
- Family (Child under 18) \$10.00
- Joint (Husband and Wife) \$7.50
- Life \$100.00
- I/we would like to volunteer help with Port Penn activities.

The Port Penn Area Historical Society Newsletter is interested in your comments and ideas. Please write or call.

Please return this card with your remittance to the above address.
For information call: (302) 454-2100 or (302) 834-7346

THIS IS THE LAST ISSUE YOU'LL RECEIVE UNLESS YOU BECOME A MEMBER!



Address Correction Requested

Port Penn Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 120
Port Penn, Delaware 19731

