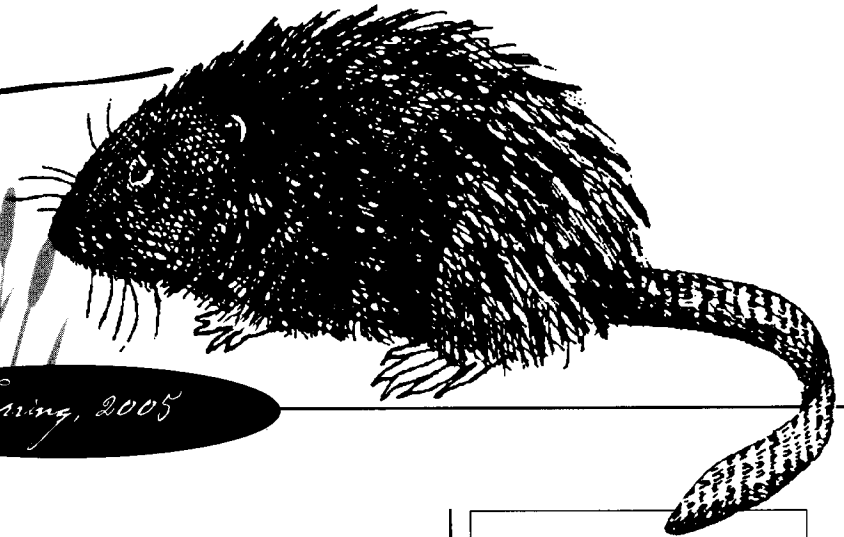


Port
Pennings

Spring, 2005



From the President

by Bill Balascio

I wanted to use this opportunity to remind you to mark your calendars for our society events.

Our 2005 events include:

Annual meeting and membership gathering "March Merriment" at the Interpretive Center on Sunday, March 6. This is our first quarterly meeting of the year, and it is an important one. We will review revisions to our bylaws and elect officers and board members during this meeting. Besides the Society business aspects, we are planning on refreshments and entertainment. We have had good turnout at these events over the past few years and hope to maintain the tradition.

Annual Marshland Dinner on Saturday, May 7. More details to follow for you dedicated turtle-pickers, soup-makers, and other generous volunteers. Call Linda Beck to volunteer your services at 302-834-7525.

Quarterly meetings at the Port Penn Interpretive Center will be June 14, September 13 and December 6. We are bound to discuss some of the coming projects for the village, so coming to these meetings is a great way to keep informed and involved.

Those upcoming projects include the restoration/renovation of the Cleaver house, discussions on Parks and Recreation's plans for the Dr. Jason Campbell property across from the Interpretive Center and the Department of Transportation village streetscape project.

I hope to see many of you often throughout the coming year.

Calling all kids! Hands on Heritage Camp Scholarships Available

Each year, as part of an ongoing initiative, the PPAHS provides full scholarships so that two local youngsters can have the opportunity to attend Heritage Camp. The camp is run by the Delaware Heritage Commission, whose mission is to celebrate the history and heritage of Delaware. The Hands On Heritage Camp explores a variety of museums, historic sites, interpretive centers and state parks throughout Delaware. This week-long summer camp for ages 11 to 13 is full of adventure and educational hands-on activities. There are three week-long sessions for New Castle County residents and a one-week session for Kent and Sussex County residents. Bus transportation, snacks, and tee shirts are provided.

If you are a high school student you may be interested in Advanced Camp. This is limited to ten campers and will be held for two weeks this summer. Campers are provided period clothing and will be fully immersed in the time period being interpreted.

If you are interested in receiving a brochure please call the Heritage Commission at 302-577-5044. If you are from the Port Penn area and would like to be considered for a scholarship please contact Tracy Beck at 302-325-2080.

Port Penn Area Dates to Remember

March Merriment

Featuring Wine, Punch,
Hor d'oeuvres and Music
&

**Historical Society
Semi-annual Update**

Sunday, March 6, 2005
Port Penn Interpretive Center
1:00-3:30 pm
Call (302) 834-7525 for information

Annual Marshland Dinner

Saturday, May 7, 2005
Port Penn Fire Hall
Seatings, 5:00 pm & 7:00 pm
Call (302)834-7525 for information

**Historical Society
Quarterly Meetings**

Tuesday, June 14, 2005
Tuesday, September 13, 2005
Tuesday, December 6, 2005
Port Penn Interpretive Center
7:00 pm

Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.



The Cannery

by Mike Miller

The Port Penn Cannery closed in 1954, ending an era of the village's economy that began in the late nineteenth century. The last owner and operator of the site, Dr. Jason Campbell of New Castle, purchased the cannery following World War II. He and his wife ran the business until they decided the narrow profits were not worth the long working hours and cost of operating capital. With the acquisition of the site by the Division and Parks and Recreation, this part of Port Penn's story can now be preserved and interpreted for the public.

Campbell acquired the business in 1946. The Zacheis family had operated the cannery for years in the first part of the century, but the operation was not in use during World War II. Campbell stayed in business for about eight years before he decided to pursue a career in medicine.

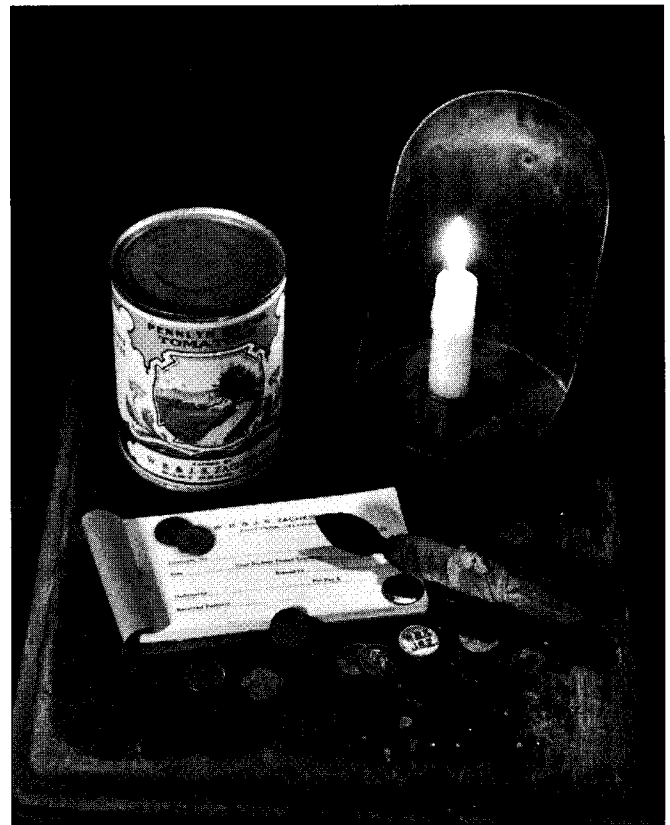
Canneries, like the one in Port Penn, once played an important role in local economies. Packing and distributing perishable goods allowed a crop to earn revenue far past its normal life span. These local business sites were commonplace throughout Delmarva and were part of the area's economic and social life. They also embody an important shift in technology and food production, one which we largely take for granted today.

The Port Penn Cannery was similar to many others in the region. Each cannery was a part of a network of producers, shippers, canners, and distributors that provided consumer markets with canned vegetables and fruit. The Port Penn Cannery packaged tomatoes exclusively.

Fresh tomatoes came to Port Penn by truck from New Jersey and as far south as the Eastern Shore of Virginia. After unloading, the tomatoes were placed in scalders to loosen the skin and then put in pans on a 'merry-go-round' that rotated a pan to each worker. The workers, called 'peelers,' would remove the skin and core of the tomato. Tomatoes were placed in gallon tins and a token, worth 55 cents, was given for each gallon tin a worker filled. Most peelers completed about one gallon per hour but fast peelers could often complete two gallons and earn a higher wage. The tomatoes were then put in kettles and heated by steam. After cooling for 24 hours the tomatoes could finally be canned.

There is little evidence of the building today with the exception of a concrete pad. While many think this is the foundation of the cannery, it is actually the foundation of an adjacent cinder block storage building. The building itself ran north to south along the east side of the lot.

The cannery's products were sent out into a regional distribution network and sometimes ended up as far away as Canada. Port Penn's cannery, much like the muskrat fur and sturgeon egg trade, tied the village into the regional, national, and sometimes international, economy. That economy also determined how profitable a given business could be, and many small canneries, like the Port Penn Cannery, were out of operation by the 1960s.



Photograph by Eric Crossan

Display at the Port Penn Interpretive Center shows tokens that were given to cannery workers for each bucket of tomatoes peeled, the payment book for the Pennlyn brand and a tool used by workers to remove the core from the tomato.



Kemp Packing Company built in Port Penn in 1890



Photograph by Eric Crossan

Can labels of the Port Penn and Pennlyn brands

Michael Miller has managed the Delaware Folklife Program of the Division of Parks and Recreation since 1996. The Folklife Program interprets Delaware's traditional culture throughout the state. In addition to Port Penn, the program is involved in a statewide folk art collection project and managing the Division's collection of historic artifacts. Miller served as an Arts Administration Fellow in 1995 at the National Endowment for the Arts and as the South Dakota Folk Arts/Folklife Coordinator from 1992-1994. He earned a Master of Arts in American Civilization from the George Washington University in 1991 and a Bachelor of Science in Management from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1985.

A Glance Back at Delaware Canning Factories

The following is from an article written by the late Robert A. Beck for *The Island Paper*, November 1988.

Dr. David Bryan of Dover, Delaware, made an extensive study of most of the canners and canneries in Delaware including the ones in our local area. After going through some of his research, it seemed to me that every town and crossroad had one or more canneries to serve their area.

Just to mention a few, there were canning factories at Taylors Bridge, Townsend, Middletown, Armstrong's Corner, Delaware City, and Port Penn. Most of these canneries specialized in putting up one product such as tomatoes or corn, but some canned a variety of products such as peas, fruits, and mincemeat.

These canneries helped boost the income of many families in these areas, not only as employees in the factories but the many farmers who contracted their crops with the packers.

According to Dr. Bryan, the first cannery in Port Penn was established in 1846 by Reed Gorden who canned peaches but his process was not very successful and it soon went under. The next cannery was built in 1878 by Thomas F. Dilworth and T.D. Stewart and canned tomatoes. I have not been able to establish the location of this site as of yet but it did employ about 100 persons and shipped 10,000 cases of tomatoes to Philadelphia and New York.

The following article titled "Port Penn to Lose Canning Landmark," written September 3, 1963 appeared in the *Evening Journal* and relates to the demise of the old cannery that was located across from the present day Port Penn Museum (now called the Port Penn Interpretive Center).

"Workman are razing the old cannery here, one of the oldest structures used in the packing industry. It is owned by Dr. & Mrs. Jason Campbell of New Castle.

"The Kemp Packing Company of Baltimore built the plant in 1880. It was operated under several ownerships until 1958. The building passed through the hands of Miss Kemp Thomas, the W.B. and J.S. Zacheis Company and Clyde Carroll, Aberdeen, Maryland until Mr. and Mrs. Jason Campbell purchased it in 1945.

"We employed 120 people up to the last year," said Mrs. Campbell. "But competition was too tough. The little guys were squeezed out and the California tomato market never had a crop failure."

After WW II the local farmers went into grain farming and the Campbells had to purchase their tomatoes from New Jersey. This forced them to close down the factory for good.



Port Penn cannery workers pause for photo at the Kemp Packing Company shortly after the turn of the twentieth-century. Myrtle Collins Shorts provides this identification: Front row, from left, Anna Gibason, Ruth Shelton, Lillian Quillen, Alice Saxton, Lizzie Shelton, Hattie Yearsley, Clifford Bendler and Fred Dyer. Middle row, Lottie Collins, William Dyer, Blanche Yearsley, Minnie Voshell, Sadie Conard, Anna McMunn, Earl Eaton, Warren Voshell and Ward Wright. Third row, Ella Johnson, Lizzie Johnson, Conard Dyer, Claude Voshell, Frank Moore, William Ellis and Samuel Kershaw. At rear, Harry Eaton and Calvin Stedham.



Membership Application

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Membership Categories: Individual \$10.00 Joint (Husband and Wife) \$15.00 Family \$20.00 Life \$200.00

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 form with your remittance to the above address. For information call: (302) 325-2080.

