



PORT PENNING

Serving the Port Penn Area Community since 1981. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, care for, maintain, instruct and encourage public interest in all matters, facts and things of any nature relating to history.

Spring 2012

Dear Friend,

As I sit on my porch thinking about what to write, I vaguely recall a Pearl S. Buck quote... which I had to look up, "if you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday." This is so true, especially after listening to Jeanne Swan's remembrances of a wonderfully rich life in Port Penn. An excerpt of that interview is included in this issue. As a Society our mission is to keep the past in the forefront so that, tomorrow, there is no doubt where our footprint has been. There are so many dedicated historical societies up and down the state with similar missions. I'm so proud to be a part of a very productive and committed organization dedicated to preserving Port Penn's past. We are beginning a new membership year and I want to invite you to attend a membership meeting or contact us so that we can hear your ideas for projects and events. As always, your dues help support our annual budget used for our projects and events; it would be impossible to carry on without your help.

We have several projects slated for 2012 but 2011 was a productive year:

- We continued to collaborate with the Division of Parks & Recreation in their effort to provide enriching programs at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. We are especially grateful to all members who made a donation in response to our appeal letter for the painting and exterior restoration of the Interpretive Center. The Society was asked by the Division of Parks & Recreation to provide assistance by cost-sharing 50% or \$6,000. That goal was met! In addition to private donations, we also would like to thank the Delaware City Refining Company for \$1,000 and the Delaware Preservation Fund, Inc. for \$1,000.

- We are thrilled to have launched an oral history project, interviewing folks who can help document Port Penn's past. A big thanks to Jeanne Swan who was the first to be interviewed. This will be an ongoing project and transcripts will be available on our website.

- Soon, when you drive through town, you will notice three new entrance signs. Thanks to the Port Penn Volunteer Fire Company for their \$500 donation towards the project and Julie Harrington for the design work. Sign-Crafters have been commissioned to do the work.

- A new October Glory Red Maple was donated by the PPAHS to the Division of Parks & Recreation, and was planted at the Interpretive Center.

- Mark your calendars!! The vintage Diamond State Base Ball Club will play a game October 7 with a rain date of October 21. The club is based upon one of the first known amateur baseball teams in Delaware who played in Wilmington from 1865 until the mid-1870's. The team wears uniforms replicating those worn by the original ball club and play according to the baseball rules and customs of the mid-1860's.

- Port Penn Yesterday and Today, a DVD, was produced in cooperation with the Corbit-Calloway Memorial Library and is available for purchase for \$10.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support, and invite you to become a hands-on member. Throughout the year there are opportunities to volunteer. Please call 302-834-7525 if you are interested or check out our website at www.portpenn.org

Regards,
Tracy Beck
President

2012 Dates To Remember:

Historical Society Annual Members Event "Spring Fling", to be held on Sunday, May 20th 1:00-3:00 PM
More information will be forthcoming.

2012 Annual Historical Society "Fundraiser" Sunday, October 7th
Vintage Diamond State Base Ball Game
•no entrance fee•
RAIN DATE-October 21st

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings
Port Penn Interpretive Center
@ 7:00 p.m.

• June 7 •
• September 6 •
• December 6 •

Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.



Many Thanks

The Society would like to thank the following members who answered our 2011 Appeal Letter with contributions to help pay for the restoration and painting of the exterior of the Port Penn Interpretive Center.

The Center is the home of an extensive collection of artifacts highlighting the area's long relationship with the river and the marshes. Additionally, the Division of Parks & Recreation hosts interpretive programs as well as being open for visitors on the week-ends throughout the summer.

We'd like to thank the Delaware City Refining Company and Delaware Preservation Fund, Inc. for their donations of \$1,000 each. The Society also contributed \$2,000 from past fund raisers towards the project. Work on the Interpretive Center is scheduled to begin soon.

Linda Beck, Tracy Beck, Bob Beggerow, Marion Beggerow, Kim Burdick, Nancy Cooch, Elizabeth Muffett Craven, Dr. Wales Craven, Patricia Crichton, Colette Croze, Dr. William Duncan, Helen Eliason, Louise Fortner, Louis Gallo, Clara Gray, Vance Gray, William Gumprecht, Wes Jones, Midge McGraw, Frank McKelvey, Leona McKelvey, William Morrow, Jacqueline Orth, Dr. David Orr, Linda Orr, David Rittenhouse, Mary Rittenhouse, William Roemer, Bob Rosenberg, Margaret Rosenberg, St. Daniel's United Methodist Church, Charles Salkin, Susan Salkin, Catherine Scott, Dr. Thomas Scott, Jeanne Swan, Nancy Carol Willis, Bob Willoughby, Dorothy Willoughby

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ORAL HISTORY



Jeanne Swan

"I'm a 4th generation Delaware girl, and proud of it!"

Jeanne O'Neal Swan, a longtime member of the Port Penn Historical Society, grew up in Port Penn. After graduating from Delaware City School in 1943, she attended Beacom College and worked at the Atlas Powder Company prior to marrying Robert (Bob) Swan in 1944. Her husband served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific during WWII from 1942 to 1945. After the war, they purchased the family grocery store in Port Penn. When the store was sold in 1968, the Swans built a home in north St. Georges. Jeanne then worked at the Wilmington Trust Company Bank in Delaware City until she retired.

The following is an excerpt of an oral history conducted on December 7, 2011.

Jeanne O'Neal Swan was born in the middle of a snowstorm on February 23, 1925 in the old Delaware Hospital in Wilmington. Her father, Captain Leroy O'Neal, was a yacht captain who spent the summers in New England and winters in Florida and her mother, Hilda, was part of a long line of grocery store owners in Port Penn. Her grandparents, Albert and Mary Kumble, were in the grocery business for 30 years. They had a store in the front of their house on Congress Street in a building owned by her great-grandfather, James Robinson Conard. This building was located between what is now the Port Penn Post Office and a tavern that had been on the corner of Congress and Market Streets and was demolished years later when the owners of Kelly's Tavern expanded their parking lot.

Her grandparents later moved next door and expanded the building on the north side around 1900 to create a new grocery store. Much later after the Swans sold the building, the portion that had been the grocery store eventually became the Port Penn Post Office.

Her Uncle Albert and Aunt Marion Vineyard Kumble continued the grocery store for 31 years living in the house and store that had belonged to her grandfather. Then Jeanne and her husband, Bob Swan, took over for another 21 years buying the store from Uncle Albert and Aunt Marion in 1949. Jeanne, Bob and their daughters, Judy and Connie, lived over the store. They sold the store in 1968.

Her grandfather had a butcher wagon and he'd "load it with meat, and go out to the farmers, and he had a regular route. He went clear to Mt. Pleasant." "The butcher wagon had a meat block in the back of it" and the meat was hung from hooks as he traveled the countryside. He would remove the meat from the hooks, carve off the desired cut on the meat block for the customer and then "hang it back up on the hook." She believes her grandfather went to "Baltimore for most of his wholesale things but then, later Philadelphia, and when we had the store, to Armour's for meat in Wilmington."

When asked what was sold at the store, she said, "everything. We had a soda fountain, Atlantic gas pumps, we had an ice house, and we filled kerosene, and in the back we had chick feed, a meat block" to butcher meat, "and show cases, and penny candy."

"As you came into the store, there was the soda fountain, and it was put in when I was seven years old. I remember that distinctly because I was so thrilled I tried everything that they had. My uncle had the store when I was little, and I was just in and out of the store and I was a spoiled child. I was the only grandchild and the only niece of two uncles - my mother had two brothers and so, they thought that I could do no wrong so I, uh, was spoiled."

Jeanne's parents lived in the house next door to the store on the south side. This house was also owned by her grandfather as well as two farms in the Bayview Beach area. Her mother worked quite a bit at the store with her Uncle Albert because her father was away a lot working on yachts. She tells the story of her mother making a crème d'menthe cake "which all the women in Port Penn made and the mixer was going and she went over to the store, right next door, to get more sugar and the store was so busy that she stayed to work and forgot about the cake. When she came back, the cake was still mixing." When asked if all the ladies in Port Penn made crème d'menthe cake, Jeanne said "I was married in the church in Port Penn and in 1944 my mother belonged to the church Everfaithful Class. There were 18 members and at my reception ... it was an ice cream and cake reception, there were 18 crème d'menthe cakes."

Jeanne said they later learned to make the Shrewsbury cake and "we always called those Port Penn cakes. It's Swedish, I think. And it came from the Presbyterian Church in Newark. I've made a hundred of them, and I bet my mother made more than that. It's in a tube pan, and the sugar goes to the top. It's 3 cups of sugar, 3 cups of flour, 3 eggs, half a pound of butter, and a cup of milk, and 1 tablespoon of vanilla and 1 teaspoon of baking powder. That's all that's in it, so you can imagine all that sugar coming to the crust at the top."

She said "everybody" had gardens when she was growing up. "That's what you ate out of. People grew food that they could eat because there was no money." During the crash of 1929 her dad couldn't get work on yachts. "He was home for that stretch and he took any kind of work that he could get." She said an oyster shell road was being built south of Port Penn and "he pushed a wheelbarrow to get money just to fill in the time until he could get back on a yacht". "During that time, people ... would run an account at the store and then when they would get enough money, they would either pay on it or all of it. But that's how you lived."

When asked if she went to Port Penn School (now the Port Penn Interpretive Center), she said "yes, we all did, so did my mother and my grandmother." "I went to the fifth grade, but in my grandmother and my mother's time there were eight grades, and there were two rooms." When asked what happened after the 8th grade, she said "that was the end of school unless they wanted to go to Delaware City to high school." The Delaware City School had twelve grades and is the building that is today the Delaware City Town Hall. Jeanne said that her Uncle Albert rode in a horse and buggy to Delaware City taking Myrtle Collins Shorts from Port Penn and Lucy Chadwick Cordrey from Augustine Beach with him to school. "He would let the girls out at the school and then he would ... take the horse and buggy all the way down where there was a stable, and if he took care of the horse himself, the man would let him leave it there for free or for

something. Then he would walk back up town to the" school. They graduated from high school in 1911.

Jeanne said her mother "only went to the 8th grade." She didn't want to go on to school and so she helped in the store. Her mother met her father when "he came up to the store from the yacht for supplies when he was captain."

Jeanne talked about the tomato factory which was located across from the Port Penn School. She said her grandmother also worked at the factory, "she was always doing things to make extra money because money was scarce, you know, then." The cannery was owned by the Zacheis'. The farmers would bring the tomatoes to the cannery by horse and wagon. The wagon would be weighed, on "a big scale on the side of the cannery. They must have known what the wagon weighed empty, and that's how they did that." There would be "like 30 baskets of tomatoes" on the wagon, and "I mean they were stacked so it didn't matter if they squashed them because they were going to skin them anyway."

She remembered a photograph of her grandmother with two (*African American women*) "with their little white bonnets on" and their cans with slits in the top to hold the tokens collected for each bucket of tomatoes they skinned. The tokens would later be turned in for money. She remembered another (*African American woman*), "Vi Hackett, and she had this little girl, and she never moved. She would stay right at her station and the little girl would run and get her the tomatoes, and she was the champion skinner because Teensy would bring her the bucket of tomatoes." After work when they were walking home, "I could see a whole row them coming down the back street and they would drop off when they got to their house but their aprons would be splattered with tomatoes."

"And the town smelled like, ... not like rotten tomatoes, but tomatoes, you know." "And they worked; it was a big deal in the summer, that's how the women got their money for Christmas." Jeanne said "later I think Jack Zacheis wasn't well, and it was closed for a while, and Jason Campbell bought it. He was a doctor in New Castle, and his wife actually ran the cannery."



The Port Penn Historical Society has undertaken an Oral History Project to gather the remembrances of people in our community. Jeanne Swan's oral history was conducted by Linda Orr, Laura Lee and Linda Beck. Tracy Beck and Wes Jones completed the transcription from the digital recorder. This article was compiled by Linda Beck.

Port Penn Interpretive Center 2012 Programming

Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302•836•2533

The Port Penn Interpretive Center tells the story of the historic wetland communities along the shores of the Delaware.

Programs are free to the public.

The Center is open from 10am to 4pm Fridays through Sundays and holidays, from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.

For more information, please contact: Laura Lee, Interpretive Program Manager, 302.834.7941

e-mail: DNREC_FortDelawarePrograms@state.de.us

Program Offerings:

Town Tour:

Sunday, June 3rd and August 19th @ 1pm

Join us in a walk through town to learn about the buildings that shaped Port Penn, with a few ghost stories thrown in. A kid's scavenger hunt makes it fun for all ages.

Family Wetlands Hike:

Sunday, August 26th @ 2pm

Join our park naturalist on a wetlands scavenger hunt for furry and feathered creatures, insects, and much more!

Birds in Flight:

Saturday, July 7th @ 2pm

Bring your family for an amazing immersion experience where birds take flight around you, and even provide some up close encounters. Learn about conservation practices, and how to make our earth a better home for the birds.

Delaware Ghost Stories with Ed Okonowicz

Friday, July 20th @ 7pm

From Fort Delaware to the Cape May-Lewes Ferry Terminal, Delaware's history is filled with mysterious legends and ghost stories. Join Ed Okonowicz and hear the state's ten best haunted and historic tales.

Come along on a Photo Walk! Larry Wilder, Port

Penn resident and photographer, welcomes photo bugs to bring their cameras and capture the local scenes. The leisurely-paced walks are open to photo enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels. Its a great way to gain experience and share technique with others who have the same passion. Larry will be doing a photo walk in conjunction with the Town Tour and Wetlands Hike days, and will also be on hand for the bird program.

2012 Membership Application

Please return this form and check to: PPAHS • P.O. BOX 120 • PORT PENN, DE 19731

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-Mail _____

Membership Categories: Individual \$15.00 _____ Joint \$20.00 _____

Family \$25.00 _____ Life Membership \$200.00 _____

_____ I/We would like to volunteer to help with PPAHS events.

E-Mail: info@portpenn.org

