



PORT PENNING

Spring 2015

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.

Greetings from the Executive Director

Our Society has been going strong for almost 35 years and over the years we've accomplished so much. I think the longevity of our Society is a commendable feat considering how small our village is but as luck would have it, we've always had a small core of dedicated individuals who participated and gave freely of their time to make our organization a success.

We look forward to 2015 and a new membership year and I invite you to become an active participant of our Society. As always, your dues help support our annual budget used for projects and events, and it would be impossible to carry on without your help.

Looking back over the years, our projects have been innumerable and diverse. Our Annual Marshland Dinners, held every spring, were awaited by many who wanted to enjoy the indigenous foods of the area – snapping turtle soup, baked boneless shad and country ham. What a feast that was!

Below is a snapshot of some of the projects we've accomplished. These could not have been completed without partnering with friends and other organizations.

- Delaware's first Greenways Trail was established in Port Penn.
- Village of Port Penn put on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Joint exhibitions at the Philadelphia Maritime Museum.
- Tree planting projects in the village and Augustine Beach.
- Commissioned *The Waterman* sculpture located at the Interpretive Center.
- Restoration and continued maintenance of the Dr. David Stewart cemetery.
- Installation of banners along Market Street.
- Streetscape project: installation of brick sidewalks and 18th century streetlights.
- Streetsigns and new village entrance signs for Port Penn and Augustine Beach.
- Painting and exterior restoration of the Interpretive Center.
- Unsuccessfully tried to save the historic circa 1760 Kux/Alrich house south of Port Penn. The house, owned by Delaware Wild Lands, was demolished.

In 2015 the Society is funding the window restoration at the Port Penn Interpretive Center, with help from the Delaware City Refining Company, Marmot Foundation and the Delaware Preservation Fund. We continue work on an oral history project; designing and installing new street banners with a winter theme; working with the Bayshore Byway Committee developing ideas to enhance visitors enjoyment as they travel Delaware's Route 9; and helping with issues regarding the repair of area dikes and sluice gates.

In closing, after many years serving as the Executive Director of the Society, I've decided it's time to pass the torch. I will be stepping down as Executive Director as of April 12 when the members vote on a new Board officer slate at the Annual Members Event. The Officers and Board members elect are listed on the back page of the newsletter. We welcome Julie Harrington as our new Executive Director. She has served many years as Treasurer and will be an excellent and capable Executive Director.

We were very saddened in 2014 by the loss of Linda Orr, our Vice President, and Helen Reader who served on the board for many years. The Society was fortunate that both these women dedicated so much of their time to our organization. Two new members are joining the board: Sandy Johnston, a long time resident of Port Penn, and Laura Lee, a new Port Penn resident but one who has been involved with the Society through her work at the Division of Parks and Recreation.

On behalf the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support, and especially thank those who, throughout our 35 year history, have given so generously of their time, their enthusiasm and have supported us in so many ways. We have many volunteer opportunities where you can lend a hand, so please call 302•834•7525 or check our website at www.portpenn.org

With warm regards,
Linda L. Beck
Executive Director

2015 Dates To Remember:

Annual Member's Event
"Spring Fling",

Sunday, April 12th

1:00-3:00 PM

at the American Birding
Association Headquarters,
Central Hotel, 93 Clinton St.,
Delaware City

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

Port Penn Interpretive
Center @ 7:00 p.m.

- August 13th •
- November 5th •

Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.

Visit:

www.portpenn.org
for upcoming events and
more information

Now displayed in Cabelas
at Christina Mall



Bob Beck & Carl Morris
holding a sturgeon from the Society's
collection of old photographs.

Our oral history
project continues...



Clyde Roberts

Retired from the US Postal Service. He is
a historian, fisherman extraordinaire,
bookseller and former handball
champion.

Handmade Easter Eggs

The members of the First
Presbyterian Church of Port Penn
are again selling Easter eggs as a
fund raiser. In the past few years
we have been able to raise enough
money to keep the church open.

The church is located at
8 E. Market Street in Port Penn.
We will be selling homemade
**1/4 lb eggs for \$5.00, Butter Cream,
Coconut and Peanut Butter.**
If you would like to place an order
call Mary Lou Reynolds at
(302) 834-2272 or
e-mail Pat Schaffer at
sally4712@verizon.net.
You will be called to pick up the
eggs when they are ready, around
March 18th or later.

REEDY ISLAND AND PORT PENN

The next time you're crossing the Reedy Point
Bridge, or looking out onto the Delaware River, you
will see the 50 or so acres of Reedy Island. Deserted
now, at one time it was on the front line of the public
health system.

The story of Reedy Island starts at the end of the 19th
century. It was a time of increased immigration to
the US, and growing cities and people living close
together and epidemics. Modern medicine's arsenal
of antibiotics and vaccines were not available then,
but doctors did know of the relation between germs
and disease, they knew about contagion and they
knew the value of quarantine and disinfection. The
first quarantine station on the Delaware was built in
1798 in Essington, south of Philadelphia, and
operated by the state of Pennsylvania. Quarantine
inspection comprised examination of the crew and
passengers, water supply, toilets, and "general
sanitary condition" of the ship. Any vessel infected
with cholera, yellow fever, tuberculosis, plague or
small pox would be disinfected. [1] Steam was used
to sterilize clothing and sulfur dioxide gas was piped
into ships. If any one person on board was sick, all
of the crew and passengers were quarantined until
they were no longer contagious.

The US government established its own quarantine
station at Cape Henlopen in 1884. This station
handled thousands of immigrants headed to
Philadelphia from Europe and Cuba. [2]. While at first
only ships from infected ports were inspected, in
1892 an outbreak of cholera was feared and all
ships were required to stop at the inspection
port. US government officials realized another
inspection site was needed, closer to Philadelphia,
and Reedy Island, already owned by the US
government and site of a lighthouse [3], was chosen.

Money from the federal epidemic fund was
allocated in March, 1893; construction began at
once, and the station was opened on July 1, 1893.
A large pier, 200 feet by 40 feet, extended out into
the channel from the east side of the island. The
depth at low tide was 30 feet which allowed ships to
tie up directly to the pier during disinfection. A large
shed on the pier housed the disinfecting equipment:
a boiler for generating steam, two steam chambers
for disinfecting clothing, a sulfur generator and
hoses for carrying the sulfur dioxide fumes to the
ships, and several large water tanks (Fig. 1). An
observatory was built at the end of the pier, and



Figure 2: Reedy Island buildings [5].

connected to the mainland via a telegraph cable
running through Port Penn.

Buildings on the island itself comprised a cottage
hospital, attendants' quarters, and surgeon's
quarters. All the buildings were constructed on
pilings to be above high water, and connected by
gangways (Fig 2). The total cost of the quarantine
station was about \$67,000 (\$1.7 million in 2014
dollars).

Even after their passengers were quarantined at
Cape Henlopen, all the ships coming up the
Delaware were obliged to stop at Reedy Island. On
July 7, 1901, for example, T. F. Richardson,
Assistant

Surgeon, reported the arrival and inspection of 5
vessels carrying fruit, molasses and ore from
Cuba and the West Indies [6]. The installation was
improved several times over the years, with
\$150,000 being spent in 1919 alone for additional
buildings and quarters [7].

By the end of World War II the quarantine station
was closed and the US government wanted to sell
the island and facilities. John Mitchell was
appointed caretaker of the island in 1948 and lived
there with his wife, two children and his dog. In
1949 Shelby Collins of Port Penn offered the
government \$7,500 for the buildings, equipment,
and coal in the bins. Collins was then 78 years old,
and had helped build the original installation in
1893 [8]. The government turned his offer down as
being too low. Collins got his way eventually, as
after the quarantine station was decommissioned in
1955 he moved several houses to Port Penn on
barges.



*Figure 1: Disinfecting Pier on Reedy Island
with the tide indicator in front. [4]*



*Figure 3: Commodore's House from
Reedy Island in 1978. This is the
original front entrance which now
faces the Cleaver House. [9].*



Figure 4: The Reedy Island Barracks House, located at 111 S. Congress St in 1978. [9]

In 1978, Port Penn was nominated for and received recognition from the National Park Service as a Historic District. Part of the nominating process involved an extensive study of all the houses in Port Penn [9]. In 1996 a team led by Bernie Herman also studied the houses [10]. Between these two studies we have a detailed description of most of the houses in Port Penn.

According to Herman, "Port Penn's landscape was improved with a third phase of house construction. Most notable among the new houses are the buildings moved by Shelby Collins from Reedy Island into the village after the federal installation on that island was decommissioned in 1955. Chief among these buildings are the Commodore's House on the northern extension of Congress Street and two pyramidal-roofed dwellings on south Congress Street below Merchant." [10]



Figure 6: A house being moved from Reedy Island in 1955. The chimneys have been removed from the two extensions at the rear of the house. [11]

The Commodore's House (Fig. 3) was moved to 4 North Congress St. "While on the island, it served as the primary residence for the commanding medical officer running the quarantine station located there. Another bungalow built around 1930, this central-hall plan house features two front rooms for entertaining guests, another aspect of the government official's responsibilities." [10] In Port Penn the house was positioned so that the original front porch is turned to the side, facing the Cleaver House. "Built in the colonial revival style, the Commodore's House is a two-story, three-bay, center-hall-plan dwelling of weather-boarded frame construction with a gable roof. The interior retains much of its original trim including colonial revival mantels, doors and woodwork." [9]

Two other houses in Port Penn proper also were brought from Reedy Island. "Situated side-by-side, both houses are squared, double-pile structures [2-rooms deep] capped with pyramidal roofs sheathed with raised seam tooled sheet metal and terminated by small-windowed monitors at the peak. Both

houses also have flat, flared, hip roof porches and rear one-story lean-to additions." [9] The first, at 111 South Congress St, is known as the Reedy Island Barracks House (Fig. 4). It is a "two-story, five bay [5 window] frame house probably served as a barracks type resident for single employees on Reedy Island. The central door is located beneath the broad hipped porch roof supported by two squared wooden posts." [10] This house looks much as it did when surveyed in 1978 except that the metal roof has been replaced with shingles. The second house is right next door at 113 South Congress Street (Fig. 5). Known as the Reedy Island Officer's House, here "we see a more modest scale than the Commodore's, suitable for lower level government officials. The hipped roof with a glazed monitor on top is a common feature used to survey approaching ships from a protected space. Here, small paired windows are hung directly beneath the wide eaves and the white weatherboard is laid in a vertical pattern with a saw-tooth pattern at the bottom of the slats." [10] The last house known to have been moved from Reedy Island is shown in Fig.6. This house is currently located at Augustine Beach, south of the Augustine Inn and has recently been remodeled (Fig. 7).



Figure 5: The Reedy Island Officer's House, located at 113 S. Congress St in 2014. [11]



Figure 7: The Reedy Island house today at Augustine Beach. The chimneys have been rebuilt at the rear of the two extensions. [11]

References in this article, identified with bracketed numbers are listed on our website: www.portpenn.org

Article by Wes Jones. He has a great interest in the Port Penn area and has been involved with the Society for several years. He enjoys researching and uncovering interesting historical facts that may have been long forgotten.

Some recent projects...

2015 Restoration of windows at the Port Penn Interpretative Center



John Ringer
Master Carpenter



Mitch Wessell
Assistant Carpenter



Students from the University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture & Design, documenting the Kux/Alrich house prior to demolition in 2014, under the direction of Rebecca J. Sheppard, Ph.D.

Port Penn Programming 2015 Season

Port Penn Interpretive Center Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302.836.2533

Program Information 302.834.7941 • Programs are free to the public.

e-mail: DNREC_FortDelawarePrograms@state.de.us

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

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

The Center's opening day is Friday May 22, 2015



Jake Miller

Our new Trainer/Educator 1 at Fort Delaware/Fort DuPont State Park and the Port Penn Interpretive Center. He has an extensive history and management background.

Scavenger Photo Hunt and Town Tour

April 11, 9 a.m.

Come join photographer Larry Wilder for a walk through the marshlands. Snap pictures of the natural beauty and wildlife of Port Penn. Open to photo enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels.

Historic Town Tours

April 18, June 20, July 11, and August 22 – 2 p.m.

Join us for a walk through historic Port Penn! Learn about the buildings and their historical significance, and how they helped shape the community. A kids scavenger hunt makes it fun for the whole family!

“Miss Jackie Sings for Adults Only”

June 12, 7 p.m.

Children's librarian Jackie McCabe takes an evening break from kids' songs to bring you some of her favorite folk tunes! It's a one hour musical performance featuring humorous, slightly bawdy folk and tavern songs!

Family Wetlands Walks

Sundays, June 14, July 26, August 16 – 2 p.m.

Join us for a walk through the wetlands of Port Penn! Participate in an animal scavenger hunt for furry and feathered friends, insects, and more!

“Delaware's Best Ghost Stories” with Ed Okonowicz

July 24, 7 p.m.

This program includes ghost stories and legends from Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore, including Bigg Lizz, Patty Cannon, Woodburn (Delaware's haunted governor's mansion), Fiddler's Bridge, Fort Delaware, Phantoms at the Cape May-Lewes Ferry...and many more.

Sunset Photo Walk

August 2, 8 p.m.

The sunset over the waters near Port Penn makes an excellent backdrop for photos of the area. Come with us as we take advantage of this opportunity! Fun for photo enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels.

“Birds in Flight” with Phung Luu

August 28, 2 p.m.

This incredible program features native and exotic birds, interacting with the audience while flying almost close enough to touch. Come learn about conservation programs and how we can protect our avian friends in a constantly changing world.

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2015 Membership Application

Please return this form and check to:

Port Penn Area Historical Society • P.O. BOX 120 • PORT PENN, DE 19731-0120

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.

The Port Penn Historical Society is interested in your comments and ideas.

Please contact us at the above address or send us an e-mail: info@portpenn.org

