

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2016

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.

Dear Friends,

As we head into 2016 I think of a quote from George Orwell: "*The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.*" Our inheritance is the photos, memories, stories and artifacts from the early days of Port Penn. Our new history is what we can do to improve our community and draw us together.

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 will remember 2015 as a busy year in Port Penn:

- Our long-time Executive Director, Linda Beck, retired, Julie Harrington has accepted the position.
- The Board chose to honor two of our long time members, Helen Reader and Linda Orr, who passed away in 2014. Helen supported the children at the Middletown Treatment Center and each year through her own fund raising efforts she purchased a Christmas gift for each child at the center. Her husband, Arthur Nost, has continued this tradition and the Board of Directors voted to make a cash donation in her name towards this project. Linda Orr was very interested in the Delaware City Library and especially the children's section. Her husband, David Orr, has honored Linda by helping to create a special room in the library for children and the Board donated to that cause.
- We worked with Girl Scout Troop 167 to enhance the tree plantings at Augustine Beach. We replanted several trees, and spread mulch (donated by The Cutting Edge of Delaware).
- We continued to preserve and maintain the Stewart Cemetery with ongoing maintenance and mulching.
- We designed and purchased new winter street banners for Port Penn. The banners will feature a winter scene of the Port Penn School from a painting Marion Streicher did many years ago. This painting is on display at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. Thanks to all the individuals, organizations and businesses who sponsored the banners.
- The Society continues to support the New Castle County and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources comprehensive plan to address the flooding impacts in Port Penn. In August work was completed to repair a breach in the dike in Port Penn.

As we move into the new year we will be busy in Port Penn:

- The Society is an active member of the Bayshore Byway Committee, an initiative that will protect the Route 9 Coastal Heritage Byway. As part of this initiative a new observation deck was recently installed at the Ashton Tract property overlooking the Thousand Acre Marsh. This property, located on Thorntown Road just north of Port Penn, is administered by the Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife and provides a wonderful recreational opportunity for the public to do bird watching, photography or just to enjoy the grand vista of the marsh.
- In 2016 the Society is exploring the possibility of collaborating with graduate students from the University of Delaware to continue our oral history project.
- Member's Event – our annual Spring Fling is coming up. Look for details on our web site.

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.

Wes Jones, President



2016 Dates To Remember:

**Annual Member's Event
"Spring Fling",
Sunday, April 10th
1:00-3:00 PM
at the**

**Bellevue Hall Mansion,
located in Bellevue State Park**

**More information to come
about our Fall Festival
at Grass Dale
September 10, 2016**

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

• **September 1st** •

• **December 1st** •

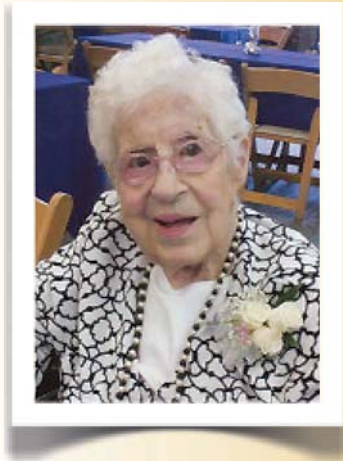
Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.

Visit:

www.portpenn.org
for upcoming events and
more information
302.834.7525

Lost Founding Member

Julie L. Sidwell in 2015



Julia L. Sidwell, age 106, of Port Penn, DE, passed away on December 5, 2015 at the Broadmeadow Nursing Home. Among the many organizations she supported in Delaware, Port Penn was very fortunate when she agreed to become a founding member of both the Port Penn Civic Association and the Port Penn Historical Society. By this time, Julie had retired after 35 years of service from a career as executive secretary with the DuPont Company.

Julie brought a life time's worth of administrative skills to the organizations she was involved with. This coupled with her immense charm and wit made her a force to be reckoned with and even the most reluctant individuals would end up getting on board with whatever endeavor she was proposing.

In the early years, she organized many Bi-Centennial events in the village, helped found the Port Penn Museum, and contributed to the success of the Folk Festivals and Marshland Dinners.

She will be remembered for her civic pride, her interest in history and her "can do" attitude. In 2008, the Port Penn Historical Society honored Julie for her lifelong contributions to the Society at our Annual Members Event. She will be missed by all.

A stroll up North Congress Street which straddles the river is a popular walking area for both Port Penn residents and visitors checking out the town. One of the conversation pieces on this street is the Hubbs House, which sits on the northwest side of the street. Delaware State Parks had the foresight to purchase this charmer as part of three parcels in 1995, preserving it for generations to come. Some historical sleuthing on the part of Parks determined that the house is a circa 1915 mail-order catalog house, and as a Parks employee I am fortunate enough to call it my home. As a summer employee I admired it from afar, and was thrilled to get a chance to live in it.

A study of the architectural resources of Port Penn completed in 1996 by the University of Delaware (Warner, Herman, Siders, Darsie, Melson) provides history on Port Penn but inadvertently incorrectly identifies the structure as 'mid-19th century'. Delaware Parks and Recreation archaeologist Cara Blume discovered information leading to the conclusion that it is in fact a 1915 mail-order catalog house, possibly purchased from Sears & Roebuck. A 1915 receipt indicating that the kit should be picked up at a railroad station lists "S. Collins" as the receiver, and also bears a Chicago, Illinois return address (likely a rail yard) but no company name. I am still researching details of the house, the occupants, and "kit" houses, and have learned some fascinating info about these unique homes. Ever the fact-checker, I continue to look for a way to prove or disprove it's a Sears home.

Kit houses were popular from about 1906 to just after World War II. By 1900, 75% of the population lived in apartments or rented flats. In just 15 years, the average income of this group doubled, making it possible for them to own a piece of the American dream. Popularity in these home kits declined in the post-World War II housing boom when government regulation of the housing industry combined with mass tract housing construction impacted the industry. In the kit buyers received: construction materials and blueprints, while some kits came all inclusive with doors, lumber, nails, shingles and an instruction book. Others were less inclusive and some even came with uncut lumber. One-story bungalows predominated the industry though second-floor homes were also available. Materials were shipped by rail, boat, and later using motorized vehicles. Parks research indicates that mine came by rail, then boat (across the canal), and then by wagon to its current home.

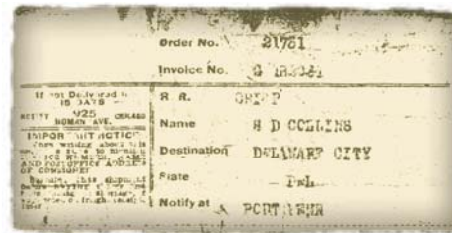
The cost of the kits was often half of the total cost to build, as the lot, foundation and construction labor significantly increased the tab. The construction industry was not particularly thrilled with the mail-order homes, and indeed trade unions sometimes took out full-page ads claiming the homes were inferior and took jobs away. But the popularity of them was much stronger than the protest against them and these homes can be seen in just about every older community. Port Penn boasts several others and nearby Delaware City has quite a few as well.

The Hubbs House is a quaint Victorian two-story home with a full wrap-around porch and turned spindle wooden columns. Two unique features make it stand out from the rest of Port Penn. The second level has a beautiful alternating geometric pattern of ornamental siding/shingling in triangles, concave and convex circles and straight lines. Interestingly, part of the south side second story is cantilevered out from the wall with no support beneath. I've been told this is often referred to as a "Dutch porch". This section that juts out is immediately outside my 'front' door (which is on the south side of the house), indicating that it may have had a utilitarian purpose- on a rainy day I stay dry when fumbling for my keys!

I learned that "Sears house" has become sort of a generic moniker for these kit homes, but actually eight large companies including Montgomery Ward produced them along with a host of smaller companies. Montgomery Ward and Sears both had a Chicago presence matching my receipt (unless the location where the wood was cut and shipped was not the same as the main office.....).

I was gleefully excited to find www.searsarchives.com which provides info and photos of some of the styles. Soon I found several Sears styles that looked very similar to my home, but were not identical. It turns out that many companies copied popular designs from their competitors, and the same similar designs existed in other company offerings. To make the sleuthing even harder I discovered that the owner-builders often made style changes so that the final product often didn't exactly match the plans. Thus my search for a design that exactly matches the final product was set aside as I followed other leads.

I found out that Sears kit wooden studs were stamped with a number near the end of each one, and it contained a letter plus a number to aid the builder in organized



assembly. Montgomery Ward numbered their studs too, but they were numbered towards the center of each piece. Racing to my attic to look for markings, I was disappointed to find the studs were all stained a dark brown. Then I learned that Sears' 'Honor-Bilt' line of homes reportedly always placed studs and roofing joints 14 3/8 inches apart. I was thrilled to find my wall studs to be an exact match, however the roofing studs were 24 inches apart. But... could it be that the entire roof (joists and all) was replaced, and thus the distance could have originally been 14 3/8"? I decided to shift my research to learn more about who built the house and lived in it.

Going to the census records I discovered the only "S. Collins" in town was Shelby Collins. The University of Delaware study divided the Port Penn history into three time periods, and had labeled the third period as "The Collins Years". The authors stated that 1900 to 1950 was a period in which the town's role as a river landing was further diminishing, with more of a focus on the seasonal marshland economy and other economic pursuits. Shelby Collins was quite the entrepreneur who owned his own pile driving and dock building business, and following the close of the Reedy Island federal quarantine station he filled vacant Port Penn lots with buildings he floated over from the island. It made sense that he might have built homes on other lots as well. (Shelby lived on Merchant Street, in a home that only recently found a new owner after years of decay).

Turning to the 1920 census, I found that the Quillen family lived in my house at 7 North Congress Street. John Raymond and Lillian Quillen, ages 26 and 23, lived there with their children Thelma (3 1/2), and Raymond A. (2 months). They are listed as renting the home in 1920, but by 1930 the census indicated that they owned it and they then had a third child, Roland. John Quillen was a mechanic and had a garage on-site, and at one time also drove a school bus.

The numerous auto and truck parts that my daughter has unearthed in the brush behind our house attest to that as do random patches of asphalt in the grass. Sons Raymond and Roland both served in World War II - Raymond in a military railroad battalion, and Roland as a warrant officer with mechanical talent. Both went on to marry with sister Thelma marrying at least twice, once to a Nickle and the second time to a Hubbs. The house remained in the Quillen family however, as in 1995 the state purchased it from Thelma Q. Hubbs. Unfortunately the interior of the house is completely refurbished but the exterior remains largely as it looked in 1915.



I feel grateful to be able to live in this very unique house, and continue to research the history of both the house and the people who lived there. As my daughter says, we're the only house around 'with a museum sign out front'. Stop by sometime and read the sign to learn more about the house!



Hubbs House 2016

photos courtesy Guy Harrington

Author: Laura Lee Resident & Park Superintendent-Auburn Heights Preserve

Spring Fling 2015...



The Society expresses thanks to The American Birding Association for allowing us to hold our event at their headquarters in Delaware City.

Handmade Easter Eggs

Start Placing Your Orders the week of February 22nd!

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. Eggs will be ready for pick-up from March 18th-March 25th



NEW PARKS SUPERINTENDENT



Rachael Phillos

Rachael Phillos, a Delaware native, has felt a connection with nature since she was a young child and her family's yearly camping trips cemented it. This connection is what set her on her life's path. She was hired as Park Superintendent at Fort Delaware State Park in the fall of 2015. Rachael has been working with Delaware State Parks since June 2006. She started at White Clay Creek & Lums Pond, moved to Trap Pond, and prior to the new position at Fort Delaware she worked as the Trainer/Educator for Killens Pond State Park. She also worked for the Delaware Nature Society at Abbotts Mill. Rachael has a BS in Wildlife Conservation and Ecology from University of Delaware and holds a number of certifications including First Aid/CPR/AED instructor, Small Craft Safety Canoe and Kayak Instructor, Basic Water Rescue Instructor, and National Association of Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guide.

Originally from Georgetown, she now resides in Frederica. In her spare time she likes to walk her 85lb dog, a Rottweiler mix named Ranger at the local State Park. He sometimes walks her instead. She is an avid reader, and occasionally binges on Netflix DVD marathons.

Port Penn Programming 2016 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 Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day.

The Center's opening day is Saturday May 28, 2016

Historic Town Tours

January 23, February 14, April 2, May 21, June 11, August 20,
November 5, December 3, 9am.

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!

Wetland Walks

March 19, July 30, September 17, November 19, 9am

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!

Port Penn Family Photowalk

April 9, 9am

Join professional photographer Larry Wilder and enjoy snapping some pictures of the beautiful spring environment at Port Penn! Fun for all ages and skill-levels. Bring your own camera!

"Delmarva's Best Ghost Stories," with Ed Okonowicz

July 22, 7pm

Hear ghost stories and legends from Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore, including tales of Fort Delaware, Phantoms at the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, and many more! Hosted by professional story-teller Ed Okonowicz.

"Miss Jackie Sings (For Adults Only)"

August 5, 7pm

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.

Fall Fest

October 16, 2pm-5pm

Come learn about what life was once like in this riverside community! Activities for kids teach about various economic necessities such as fishing, trapping, and canning. Kids may fill out a scavenger hunt sheet featuring facts gathered from around the town to win a prize! The museum will be open for perusal as well.

Christmas Open House

December 16, 6:30pm-8:30pm

It's the most wonderful time of the year at the Port Penn Interpretive Center! Come celebrate the holidays with us!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Wes Jones — President
Dr. David Orr — Vice President
Tracy L. Beck — Secretary
Mary Lou Reynolds — Treasurer
Julie Harrington — Executive Director

Linda L. Beck
Jeff Beliveau
Carleen Czajkowski
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Terence Dinneen
Dr. Bernard Herman
Rebecca Herman

2016 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

