

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2023

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, Welcome to 2023!

I hope that all of you are safe in these interesting and trying times. Despite the lingering effects of COVID we worked on several projects this past year.

Port Penn Historical Society T-shirts are available now; we have Snapping Turtle, Sturgeon, and Great Blue Heron designs. Check out the web page at www.portpenn.org to see the design and order one for yourself.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Fall Fling Members' Event at Fort DuPont despite the 20 knot winds and sideways rain. We plan on better weather this year.

The Port Penn Interpretive Center is getting updated and should be open for visitation in the spring. Several of our board members are working with Parks on plans for the refresh. We have purchased a bike repair station which will be installed soon. We continue to maintain the Stewart Cemetery and have brochures for visitors onsite about the Stewart family.

Our stewardship of trees that we planted several years ago at Augustine Beach continues with annual weeding and mulching. We purchased two new picnic tables, constructed of recycled plastic, which have been installed by Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The base of the Waterman statue continues to deteriorate and we are working on a replacement. We have donated The Waterman to the Upper Bay Museum in North East, MD. They will display it inside their building and acknowledge our gift.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support.

We are beginning a new membership year and I invite you to attend a quarterly meeting or contact us so that we can hear your ideas for projects and events. As always, your dues help support our annual budget; it would be impossible to carry on without your help. Throughout the year there are opportunities to volunteer. Please contact 302-836-5880 or email: info@portpenn.org if you are interested.

Regards, Wes Jones, President

2023 Dates To Remember:

Annual Members' Event to be held in the fall!

Date TBD

More information to come!

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

Port Penn Interpretive Center @ 6:30 p.m.

• **March 2nd** •

• **June 1st** •

• **December 7th** •

Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US

Visit:

www.portpenn.org
for upcoming events and more information

E-mail:

info@portpenn.org



2022 Members' Event, Rain or Shine "Hurricane Party" - it was a rainy and windy day, but good times had by all!



It is with great sadness that the PPAHS is parting with The Waterman. The wooden sculpture, carved by Jacquin Smolens in 2007, has been displayed at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. Although the Society undertook repairs several years ago, its condition precludes it from remaining outside. After trying to locate a new home for The Waterman in Delaware to no avail, it will be moving to the Upper Bay Museum in North East, MD. The Society's future goal will be to commission a new Waterman in a more durable material.

REMEMBERING PORT PENN SCHOOL

By: Linda Streicher Beck

with former students Patricia (Patsy) Eaton Schaffer and William (Billy) Marshall

The Port Penn School House was erected in 1886 on land purchased in 1885 by Francis Dunlap, William Beck, and William Polk from the estate of Joseph Prewer for the purpose of building a school. The school is located at the corner of West Market Street and Delaware Route 9. Because of segregation, Port Penn's African-American children were educated in a separate school on Port Penn Road.

Known as School District No. 63, Port Penn School opened in 1886 with 52 students enrolled in ten grades. The school was outfitted with a coal stove, outdoor privy and a well. The coal shed and privy can be seen to the right of the school on a post card dated 1912 (Figure 1). From 1920 to 1961 various sources say the school operated with six grade levels in a single open room with two teachers, one acting as the principal and the other the assistant. Other sources say that students attended eight grades in two rooms. All could be true at one time or the other.

The one-story rectangle building was constructed with wooden siding, a cedar shake roof, and a copula with a bell. The bell rope hung down through a hole in the ceiling directly beneath the copula. There were two large rooms, one in the front and another in the back. Upon entering the front door, there was a small room to the right which eventually was removed. During our time at the school, all the classes were held in the front room with one teacher. Patsy's first teacher was Elsie Yearsley, and then came Evelyn Burriss who also taught Billy and Linda. We attended either the first four or five grades, and then continued our education at Commodore Macdonough School in St. Georges.

Patsy started first grade in 1942, Billy in 1944 and Linda in 1946. The school picture (Figure 2) is circa 1946. Bill remembers hauling coal in from the coal shed in the morning to heat the school. The stove had to be fed hourly to keep it going. By the time Linda started in 1946, the coal stove had been replaced by an oil stove. The heater was located in the front of the room to the left. It provided uneven heat during cold winter days especially if you were seated in the back of the room. It also provided the means to heat up tomato soup for lunch in winter, a wonderful treat.

Depending where you lived in Port Penn, you might go home for lunch or eat a packed lunch, (mostly peanut butter and jelly) at your desk. Patsy remembers Georgie Dorman and Eileen Bendler walked to school the first day and then went home for lunch. When Georgie dropped Eileen off at her house along the way, he told her not to wait for him because he "wasn't going to return to school". He was done with school!



Figure 1: Post card postmarked October 10, 1912, Port Penn, Delaware
To the right can be seen the privy and coal shed.

When we started at the school, there were two outdoor privies, one for the girls and one for boys to the left of the school in the back. They proved to be enticing to the boys who knocked them over yearly at Halloween. Thankfully, they were replaced with indoor toilets. Early on, when there were water issues at the school, Linda remembers walking down the street to Mary and Belle Carpenter's house with a bucket to fetch water. Back at school in the little room next to the front door, the water was poured into a large crock and we drank from a metal dipper.

In the school room, the black boards were located along the front wall. Desks for the higher grades were placed to left facing the front and desks for the lower grades to the right along with a reading circle of small chairs. Linda remembers some of desks had deeply carved lettering, the devious handiwork of some mischievous students, plus inkwells which we didn't even use at that time. We all commented about how distracting it was trying concentrate and you'd end up listening to what was being taught to students in other grades seated next to you. Somehow we learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. We agreed that when we moved on to Commodore Macdonough School, there was some catching up to do. Linda remembers the lack of books at Port Penn and some that were old and musty. A highlight at home for Linda was when her parents purchased the World Book Encyclopedia from a door-to-door salesman. She was able to pour over the books for hours - all in color, so many pictures, and so much to learn.

Christmas and Halloween are remembered with all the students making green and red or black and orange paper chains glued together with flour and water paste to decorate the room, a Christmas tree, and possibly an appearance by Santa Clause (Figure 3).



Figure 2: Port Penn School - circa 1946
Photo courtesy Patricia Schaffer

Top row: William Spencer, Edsel Blankenship, William Hill
Middle row: Phyllis Essex, Eileen Bendler, Dawn Ferries, Mary Rhodes, Barbara Bennett, Linda Streicher, Doris David, Janet Pfister, Patsy Eaton, Lydia Rhodes, Joann Davis
Bottom row: Robert Nickles, George Dorman, Robert Carpenter, Jackie Morris, Robert Hill, Richard Thorp, Robert Thorp, Jim Rhodes, Larry Bowman, William Marshall

REMEMBERING PORT PENN SCHOOL - CONTINUED

Port Penn School was one of the last one-room schools in Delaware. Although the PTA tried to keep the school up, in 1958 the fire marshal and the county building inspector visited the building just before Christmas, branded it a "fire trap beyond repair", and ordered it closed. Once again the PTA rushed to the rescue and while the children were enjoying the holidays, their parents rewired, plastered, and improved the building. The school was permitted to reopen after the holidays.

In June, 1957, the old Port Penn School District disappeared in a triple merger with Delaware City and Commodore Macdonough to form the new Gunning Bedford School District. In July, 1960, the Gunning Bedford School Board announced plans to close the school, which had dwindled to two grades, and send the pupils to the Commodore Macdonough consolidated school.

Residents protested and a compromise was made. Those insisting on leaving their children at Port Penn were allowed to do so but at the end of the 1960-61 school years, when there were only 12 students left, the school board ordered the school closed for good.



Figure 3: Christmas 1943 at the Port Penn School
Photo courtesy Patricia Schaffer

The school was sold at an auction in 1962 for \$3,650 and turned into a bait and tackle shop for several years. It was then sold to the Port Penn Civic Association in 1975 whose goal was to create a museum as a symbol of the community's history and way of life to celebrate the 1976 United States Bicentennial. In time, owning the museum didn't fit within the mission of the Port Penn Civic Association. The Port Penn Area Historical Society was created and became owner of the museum. After operating for fifteen years, the Port Penn Area Historical Society transferred the ownership of the schoolhouse museum to the Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation in 1991.

References:

- R. Scott Wilson, *Port Penn School To Be Bait Shop*, News Journal, 1962
- Old Port Penn School Will Be a Bait Shop*, News Journal, 1962
- Philip M. Boffey, *Fight for 'One-Roomer' Lost*, News Journal, March 26, 1962
- Pamela Warner, Bernard L. Herman, Rebecca J. Siders, Julie Darsie, Dawn E. Melson, *The Architectural Resources of Port Penn, Delaware*, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering, University of Delaware, January 1996.
- Delaware State Parks Interpretive Sign, *Port Penn Schoolhouse, Symbol of the Community*.



Banner used at tent on Delaware City Day, October 8 to represent four local non-profits: Port Penn Area Historical Society, Fort Delaware Society, Delaware City Heritage Association and Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery.



A scholarly talk by David Orr on duck decoys used in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey at Port Penn Interpretive Center on February 11, 2023. Program presented by Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation.

WELCOMING A NEW CONGREGATION TO PORT PENN!



Iglesia De Dios Pentecostal MI El Shaddai

Iglesia De Dios Pentecostal MI El Shaddai Church is beyond excited and joyful to call 8 E. Market Street in Port Penn, DE our new house of worship. We initiated our Hispanic congregation in 2013 in Middletown, DE where the Lord blessed us with a community of beautiful people that serve the Lord. Our beliefs are in the Father God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We would love to extend an invitation to the Port Penn community to join us in fellowship. Everyone is welcome! Our days and times of service are as follows:

- Tuesday & Thursday @ 7:00 P.M.
- Sunday @ 10:00 A.M.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. – Romans 15:13.

Submitted by: Rev. Juan Lozada



Kate & Juan Lozada

Division of Parks & Recreation Port Penn Programming 2023 Season

Port Penn Interpretive Center Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302.834.7941

For more information: Call (302) 834.7941 • www.destateparks.com • e-mail: jacob.miller@delaware.gov

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

**The Port Penn Interpretive Center will be open from
May 27 to September 4 on Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays.**

Stop in any time between 10 am and 4 pm to see the exhibits and talk to our staff about the history of Port Penn.

The program schedule listed here may change due to inclement weather or other issues.

Check the Port Penn Interpretive Center page on the destateparks.com website for the latest information.

All programs are offered free of charge & meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center, unless otherwise noted.

Historic Town Tour

Saturdays: 10:00 a.m.

February 25, March 25, May 6, July 1, August 26, September 9 and November 11, December 16

Port Penn has a very unique and interesting history.

In this program, we will talk about the development of the town from the 1760s through the present. Along the way, we will see a number of the historic buildings that showcase the town's story. They are free, but participants are encouraged to register in advance by calling our office at 302-834-7941.

Wetland Trail Walks

Saturdays: 10:00 a.m.

June 3, and September 23

Many residents of Port Penn supplemented their income throughout the year with hunting, trapping, and fishing, all of which made use of the proximity of the wetland. For this program we will enjoy the wetland trail, talk about the wetland and its importance to Port Penn, and keep an eye out for the incredible wildlife that makes Delaware so special. We will also talk about the elements of the seasonal economy that was so important to the residents of Port Penn throughout much of its history.. They are free, but participants are encouraged to register in advance by emailing Jake at jacob.miller@delaware.gov or by calling our office at 302-834-7941.

Kids' Craft: Net-Making

Thursday, June 15, 3:00 p.m.

Port Penn fishermen relied on their nets! Many fishermen wove their own nets, and fixed them on their own, too. In this program, we will learn how to make a simple net, while also talking about the local Port Penn fishermen. This program is free, but please register in advance by emailing Jake at jacob.miller@delaware.gov or by calling 302-834-7941.

Kids' Craft: Flower Pot Crab

Thursday, August 10, 3:00 p.m.

Crabbing has long been an important part of Port Penn's economy, and many locals still spend time on the river catching crabs! In this program, we will learn how to make a crab out of a flower pot, while also talking about how crabbers work in Port Penn. This program is free, but please register in advance by emailing Jake at jacob.miller@delaware.gov or by calling 302-834-7941.

Port Penn Christmas Open House

Friday, December 15, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Come enjoy some holiday cheer at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. We will have the museum decorated in holiday style. Come check out the decorations, participate in a holiday activity, and enjoy some refreshments. We will also have some crafts for kids, as well as a small gift for each child that comes. This program is free. Come and go as you like!

PPAHS Membership Application (annual membership)

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

