

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2024

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,

I trust this letter finds you well as we embark on the journey of the new year, 2024. I am pleased to share with you the projects undertaken by the Port Penn Area Historical Society over the past year.

Our steadfast commitment to environmental conservation and historical preservation is evident in our ongoing work at Augustine Beach. The dedicated care of the trees planted several years ago stands as a testament to our collective efforts to maintain the beauty and significance of this historic location.

Our Fall Fling Members' Event, held at the historic Augustine Inn, was a memorable occasion. While it saddens me to share that the Inn has since closed its doors, we remain optimistic about its potential reopening in the future. I extend heartfelt thanks to all who joined us for this enjoyable event.

Regrettably, the iconic Waterman statue, carved from wood and rebuilt several years ago, has experienced deterioration. Our team is actively exploring replacement options crafted from more durable materials to ensure the enduring legacy of this vital piece of our community's history.

I must inform you that the Port Penn Interpretive Center is currently closed until further notice due to safety concerns. However, the Division of Parks is diligently working on repairs, and in the interim, they continue to host programs outside of the Center. Stay updated on upcoming events and intriguing stories about Port Penn by checking out their Facebook page.

As we embark on a new membership year, I extend a warm invitation for you to join us at one of our quarterly meetings or to share your ideas for future projects and events. Your ongoing support through membership dues is crucial to sustaining our annual budget, and we genuinely appreciate your steadfast commitment to our shared mission.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support. The Port Penn Area Historical Society thrives because of individuals like you who are dedicated to preserving our rich history. Consider volunteering throughout the year, and if interested, please reach out to us at 302-836-5880 or via email at info@portpenn.org.

Thank you once again for being an integral part of our historical preservation journey. Here's to a year filled with shared history, community spirit, and continued growth.

Warm regards, Wes Jones

President, Port Penn Area Historical Society



Mulching at Augustine Beach



Members' Event at the Augustine Inn

2024 Dates To Remember:

**Annual Members' Event
to be held at
Fort Delaware on
September 22, 2024**
More information to come!

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

Fort Delaware State Park
Office, 2540 Colter Road,
Delaware City, DE

@ 6:00 p.m.

- June 6th •
- December 5th •

Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US

Visit:

www.portpenn.org
for upcoming events and
more information

E-mail:

info@portpenn.org

PORT PENN TAVERNS: AN ELEMENT OF DISORDER

By: Laura Lee

A poem written by former Civil War correspondent George Alfred Townsend was a centerpiece of an Old Drawyers Church anniversary celebration and was featured in a 1902 newspaper article on the festivities. Townsend, a Washington resident who wrote under the pen name of "Gath", wrote for the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1861, then the prestigious New York Herald. Reportedly the youngest war correspondent ever at age 21, in 1865 he covered Lincoln's assassination and its aftermath for the New York World. Townsend, one of the most frequently quoted writers, grew up in Georgetown but spent time as a youth in the Odessa area. His poem, while too long (and frankly a little boring) to print in entirety, stated:

"and Drawyers Creek
took name, as I opine,
From one whose
tavern drew. Ale and
Wine
Which might account
for many a mishap
Which gave
MacDonough's Inn the
name of Trap
Whisper it soft! Our
sailor Dutch were fond
Of liquor, as a bull-frog of his pond
They brewed Newcastle sleepy. As a dunce,
And even Port Penn five taverns had at once...."

Taverns, you say? I sought out information using old newspapers to shed some light on the mystery. Surely a booming port town had need of housing for the many travelers, and 'cold barley soup' was a sailor's passion. But uncovering specific details on the supposed five taverns was not so simple. A 1700-1800 search of Newspapers.com produced no information specifically on Port Penn taverns, but the 19th and early 20th century papers were rife with applications for tavern licenses. Perhaps a law was established thus the start of a paper trail in the newspapers. It's unclear if these applications were an annual thing, or if all these applicants even actually opened businesses. Who knows if there were ever five taverns at one time- perhaps over the years there were five? Or perhaps the word 'five' worked better in his poem! Researching history is a lot like doing a puzzle only to find that my dog ate seventeen of the pieces. But one thing is probably a given- most likely you could always find a beer in this town somewhere.

Applying for a tavern license included posting your application in a newspaper. The applicant had to list "freeholders", presumably

local citizens supporting their application. Some applications listed the actual tavern name while most did not. The Port Penn House and Port Penn Hotel by far received the most mentions and several different proprietors applied for a license under these names. Samuel Yearsley asked to open the Webb House in the late 1800's. That was advertised in the *Daily Gazette* on April 9, 1877, ironically next to an article stating that Captain Eaton was found dead on the floor in his bedroom also in Port Penn. In 1893 Simeon Lord applied for the Pier House near Port Penn.

From 1877 to 1915 I found tavern license applications from William C. Elison, Samuel



Port Penn Hotel, corner of Market and Congress Streets. Owned by: Robert Chadwick

Yearsley, Albert Bendler, Calvin P. Stidham, Elam Page, Robert Chadwick, Thomas Beard, James H. Dilworth, Joseph Beale, and Simeon Lord. Yearsley and Bendler had the most applications from my sample. Only in the 1870s did I see more than one tavern application from Port Penn in the same newspaper printing,

possibly lending credit to the theory that there were five establishments over time.

Who were the freeholders whose names appeared in print in support of the taverns? It didn't seem like they favored one over another- many appeared on multiple applications. Neighbors that supported the opening of the William Elison establishment in 1877 included William H. Miller, Wm D. Lockerman, J.B. Stevens, Conrad Zachies, Thomas S. Eaton, S. C. Eaton, John D. Bendler, Samuel Bendler, E. S. Zachies, R. H. McCleary, and Simeon Lord (later to apply to open his own tavern).

In 1881 Albert Bendler had quite a cadre of supporters of his Port Penn House. The list included Simeon Lord, Conrad Zachies, Samuel C. Eaton, John H. Yearsley, H. C. Carpenter, Wm. Castelow, Thomas Kirk, Thomas Castelow, John M. Evans, W. R. Fleming, Zends P. Longland, Samuel C. Carpenter, Samuel Yearsley, O.H. Webb, John Zachies, Thompson S. Eaton, James R. Conrad, and Charles H. Rose.

When Calvin P. Stidham applied in 1906, the qualifications seem to have tightened up. He had to verify that he was "a person of full age, and a man of sobriety and good moral character; that an inn or tavern is necessary at the point

PORT PENN TAVERNS ~ CONTINUED

designated to accommodate the public; that he is the tenant and occupant of the said house.". It went on to say that "the true rental value thereof is three hundred dollars- that there are at least in said house, two suitable rooms and four comfortable beds for the exclusive use of travelers and guests and stabling and provender for at least four horses." Stidham also had tavern applications in Odessa, did work in a foundry, and had a son who visited from Colorado City on occasion (possible gold speculator).

Did these applications all get approved? It seems not- that perhaps Port Penn had a wee reputation as a trouble spot. Elam Page's 1891 application reveals some exasperation on the part of a Mr. Prickett who was advocating for him. The *Delaware Gazette* and *State Journal* reported in a court report column:

"The next application considered was that of Elam Page of Port Penn. Mr. Prickett said that this license has been refused so often that he did not think it worth while to summon any witnesses. He contended that while it was licensed (... implying a time when it was not?...), liquor was sold contrary to law, and that it was an element of disorder."

H. C. Turner, Esquire then appeared for the applicant and produced several witnesses to show that the place had been conducted in a quiet and orderly manner during the time it had a license, and also that a hotel was needed, as there was not another place within four miles of Port Penn.

In 1881 an article about a drowning illustrated, well, the helpful nature of Port Penners who might have had a liquid lunch. Seems Coroner Weldin was called to Port Penn shortly after 2 pm for an inquest into a drowning. Unlucky for Port Penn's reputation, the newspaper reporter came with Dr. Ogle to town. There he reported "The place was found in a state of considerable excitement over the case, and many were of the opinion that the dead man had been

fouly dealt with. The body lay in the water and was tied to the wharf. The face presented a ghastly appearance, looking much bruised and was bloody about the nose and forehead, as if a terrible blow had been struck there." When the body was recovered however, Dr. Ogle found no wounds - and between statements of several people and his expertise determined that the appearance was caused by the sun. People who saw the body earlier in the day said it had a perfectly natural appearance.



Augustine Beach Hotel (Pier House) circa 1940
Photo courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

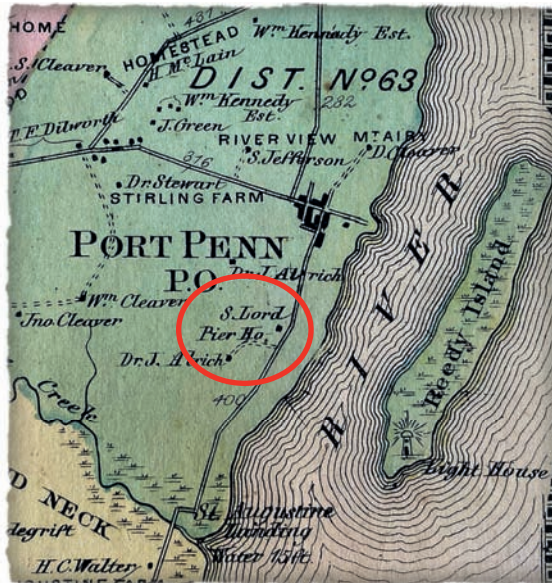
It seems poor "Chalkey" was found by two oystermen of the sloop William Pallock, near the Van Baker buoy who then brought it to Port Penn. Chalkey was recognized by another coworker Thomas Spencer of Camden, in Port Penn who had been on the oyster boat Mary L

Boosby. He told the coroner and doctor "on Friday last Chalkey went forward to work the anchor and fell overboard."

Cue the support from the local tavern-goers, ready to solve this mystery and make the best of all the excitement. Said the reporter, "The unpleasant experiences through which a coroner is compelled to go through at time was clearly shown at this inquest. When the party arrived at Port Penn two men who were loating (sic) around the tavern and were very drunk, accosted the coroner, and asked to be put on the Jury."

"We will have nine on this jury" said one Port Penner, and "you can make John. (his companion) foreman." The article went on to say, "they were overheard saying the juror fees are 25 cents, and nine times twenty-five is \$2.25 clear to us. Smiling at the little game the coroner picked a jury of seven from the best citizens of the town and when the scheming, Tavern loungers found out how they had been left in the lurch they proceeded to give all the trouble they could, swearing about the jury, threatening to have it out with the coroner and cursing the physicians and every one else. This they continued until the coroner threatened them with arrest."

In any event, it seems taverns in Port Penn were not only a staple but a source of entertainment and the seat of law!



Atlas of the State of Delaware, D.G. Beers, 1868

Division of Parks & Recreation Port Penn Programming 2024 Season

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

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

Note: The Port Penn Interpretive Center will be closed until further notice.

The Center will not be open for any of our programs

Historic Town Tour

Saturdays: March 16, May 25, June 8, August 17, September 21, November 2, and December 14, 10:00 a.m.

Port Penn is a fascinating town full of fascinating architecture! The town still retains much of its 18th and 19th century character. Join a park historian for this tour to learn about the interesting architectural features of the town, and the amazing people who make up its past. FREE

Intro to Port Penn

Tuesday, March 26, 6:30 p.m.

In the 1760s, Port Penn's founders hoped that it would become a seaport to rival Philadelphia. Though it never quite lived up to those aspirations, Port Penn is a remarkable community that managed to be both international and uniquely Delawarean. This program will be held via Microsoft Teams. It is free, but registration is required to get the sign-on link. Please register by emailing Jake at jacob.miller@delaware.gov or by calling 302-601-6382.

Sandpiper Stroll

Saturday, April 13, 9:00 a.m.

Migration is starting to pick up speed! Come out and join us on a guided bird walk to see what a perfect layover spot the Port Penn wetlands are for migrating sandpipers. Our target sandpipers include Dunlins, Least sandpipers, and Greater and Lesser yellowlegs. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. All ages and skill levels are welcome!

Wetland Walk

Saturday, April 20, 10:00 a.m.

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. In

celebration of Earth Day, we will also be talking about ways that you can help the wetlands. This program is free, but participants are encouraged to register in advance by calling our office at 302-834-7941.

Warbler Walkabout

Saturday, May 11, 9:00 a.m.

And so, the magic finally begins: the warblers are starting to arrive! The iconic bright-colored little songsters are popping up in Port Penn, so come join us as we search for Common Yellowthroats, Palm warblers, and Pine warblers. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. All ages and skill levels are welcome!

• Kids' Craft: Net-Making •

Thursday, June 20, and Thursday, August 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. This program will be held at the Fort Delaware State Park Office (2540 Colter Road, Delaware City, DE 19706).

Wetland Trail Walks

Saturday, September 7, 10:00 a.m.

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.

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

