



# PORT PENNINGS

*Serving the Port Penn Area Community since 1981. It's 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.*

Winter•2009

## Letter From Our President

Dear Friend,

We are beginning a new membership year for the PPAHS, and I want to request your continued support. As we all nervously watch for signs of light at the end of a dark economic tunnel, the daily news sounds gloomy. Particularly hard hit will be small charitable organizations that rely on donations and fund-raising. Your membership dues are integral in helping to sustain our annual budget used for Port Penn area projects and events; it would be impossible to carry on without your generous support.

2008 was a very busy year for the Society:

- The Historical Society wishes to thank everyone who contributed to the success of our major fundraiser, the Marshland-A-Fare. The A-Fare was a "new twist" to the Marshland Dinner. We offered a lunchtime menu that included turtle soup and crab cakes. In addition, a silent auction and live music were added features that made the day fun and successful. Flyers will be mailed announcing the date of this fall event.
- The Division of Parks ongoing restoration of the Cleaver House continues to be a priority for the Society. Environmental remediation took longer and was more expensive than expected but was completed in the summer. In January a PPAHS sub-committee met with Parks representatives to tour the house and to discuss the next phase of this restoration project.
- You may have noticed the "new" Waterman Statue in front of the Interpretative Center. The carving, by Jacquin Smolens, replaces his earlier carving that rotted beyond repair. In 2008 plantings for the Center were purchased and planted by the society.
- The society continues to maintain the grounds of the Stewart Family Cemetery.
- Look for an invitation to the upcoming members' event that will be held on Sunday, April, 19, 2009.
- We continue to maintain the website. We welcome any photos, information, or stories about the Port Penn area. Check it out at [www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org) or e-mail: [info@portpenn.org](mailto:info@portpenn.org)

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support. I would like to invite you to become a hands-on member. Throughout the year there are opportunities to volunteer. Please call 834-7525 if you are interested.

Sincerely,

Tracy Beck  
President

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Linda Beck.302.834.7525  
[www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org)

## 2009 Dates To Remember:

**Historical Society Annual Members Event "Spring Fling", to be held at**

*The Hale-Byrnes House*

**Sunday, April 19  
1-3 PM**

More information will be forthcoming.

## Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

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

**June 3  
September 2  
December 2**

Open to the public.  
PLEASE JOIN US.



# HISTORIC PORT PENN SCHOOLS

*A forgotten past: A history of Black Education in Port Penn*  
by Linda L. Beck

In his book *Adolescent Negro Education in Delaware – A Study of the Negro Secondary School and Community (Exclusive of Wilmington)*, George R. Miller, Jr. writes that early on there were no public schools in Delaware. He says that schools were either private or church schools or more likely under church supervision. “With the coming of William Penn in 1682 the English rose to greater prominence than they had ever before attained in the province, and Penn’s Frame of Government contained provisions that looked toward universal education. This law required all parents and guardians of those orphans who had sufficient estates and ability to do so, to make certain that their children were able to read and write by the time they reached twelve years. Failure to comply with the requirements of this law carried a fine [or] imprisonment.” Miller says “nothing was done.”

Miller continues saying “even the meager education available for white children during the earlier years were denied the Negroes. Free Negroes sometimes bore the cost of their education and at other times accepted the patronage of philanthropic whites while slaves were sometimes permitted to study with the masters’ children. A school for Negroes with 34 pupils was in existence in Wilmington as early as 1814.”

Miller says the free school law of 1829 in Delaware “proposed a system under which the State matched up to \$300 the amount to be raised by the local community whether there was a school or not. It gave districts the authority to raise money by taxation locally in such amounts of the required supplement to the school fund as a majority of the voters of the district might consider proper.” Bradley Skelcher reports in his book *African American Education in Delaware, A History through Photographs, 1856-1930* that this legislation “allowed school districts to support public education through property and poll taxes. Most Negroes owned no property. Many were tenant farmers renting both land and houses from Euro-Americans.” He says “to attend school Negroes had to pay 10 cents per week for each child.” They raised funds through fund raising activities.

Miller says “as late as 1866 there were only seven schools for Negroes in the State, three of them in Wilmington. The Delaware Association for Moral Improvement and Education of Colored People was inaugurated in 1866. At the

end of the first half of 1867 there were seven elementary schools in New Castle County, four in Kent and four in Sussex.”

In 1875 the Legislature passed “An Act to Tax Colored People for the support of their Own Schools”. Miller reports that the funds collected were turned over to the Delaware Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of Colored People. By 1875 there were 28 Negro schools supported by this organization.

Roger C. Mowrey writes in *Delaware School District Organization and Boundaries* that on March 22, 1881, the Delaware General Assembly enacted a law proposing an annual appropriation for support of colored schools and authorized \$2,400 for the first year. Miller writes “the law provided the amount should be divided equally among the three counties but to participate, a school must have been open at least three months and have an average

attendance of 20 pupils.”

Miller says by 1887 there were 69 schools with an enrollment of 3,563 students. \$7,166.69 was the sum divided among the three counties and the average school term was 4.3 to 5.5 months. Negroes still had few schoolhouses using homes, churches and society halls.

Miller continues saying “The Act of 1887 brought about a greater number of schools, free textbooks and the management of schools was put in the hands of county superintendents. There was a rapid decline in illiteracy among Negroes from 1880 to 1920.” Segregated black schools, which had relied solely on meager real estate taxes of African-American residents to support their own schools, saw very little relief. A ledger of accounts for Port Penn Colored School #122 for the period of 1899 to 1919 confirms this. It shows for the year of 1899 total expenses were \$238.91. The

income was a “state dividend” of \$201.81 and taxes collected of \$50.00. The teacher was paid \$198 per year, rent \$21, fuel \$12.63, stove pipe \$2.48, etc. They even had \$12.90 to carry forward to the next year.

Miller reports that 1921 school law required the Board of Education “to maintain separate schools for Negroes which should be uniform and equally as effective as those for the white.” Under this program \$2,622,751 was spent building 87



Photograph Number: 490ap. Port Penn Colored School, Old Building.  
Undated

Photograph printed with permission of Delaware Public Archives



Photograph Number: 490bp. Port Penn Colored School.  
Date: December 13, 1920

Photograph printed with permission of Delaware Public Archives

schools. The greater part of this was funded by Pierre duPont who offered to build as a personal contribution to the education of the State, schoolhouses for Negroes over the entire state." Laura M. Lee, Division of Parks Interpretive Program Manager, says Mr. duPont took it upon himself to personally improve the educational situation for blacks in Delaware by spending over \$1 million of his own money on new schools. He chose Port Penn as one of the communities in which to construct a new school. Said Time Magazine of Mr. duPont, "While other (wealthy) men choose to make money, instead Mr. duPont chooses to make citizens".

Ruth Ann Jones and William Marshall of Port Penn report that a "colored school" existed on Port Penn Road about 7/10 of a mile west of the Port Penn Interpretive Center. This information has been confirmed and Colored School #122 is shown on the north side of the Port Penn Road at that location in "The Clyde of America" Embracing the State of Delaware ... map of 1921. It may have been located in the vicinity of where a woods exists today. William Marshall said that another colored school existed at one time in Congotown, an African-American community, once located west of Port Penn on Port Penn Road in the vicinity of where Mt. Zion Cemetery is today. Research confirms that Colored School #123 did exist there on the north side of Port Penn Road on the 1921 map. The D. G. Beers Atlas published in 1868 also shows a schoolhouse at this site. Mr. Marshall thought a third school existed on the north side of Route 9 in Port Penn opposite the Port Penn Interpretive Center. The D. G. Beers atlas confirms this although it doesn't indicate whether the school is "colored" or "white".

The undated Photograph Number 490ap of the Port Penn Colored School has "old building" written on the back of the photograph indicating this school probably existed prior to being replaced with the Port Penn Colored School in Photographs Number #490bp and Number #490cp. Construction of this larger one room building began on September 20, 1920 and was completed December 13, 1920 at a cost of \$13,041.93.

To give an idea of class size, in the Educational Directory of the State of Delaware for school year 1915-1916, the teacher Ellen Jones taught grades one through five consisting of 37 boys and 28 girls for a school year of 137 days. She earned a salary of \$30 (probably per month) and her education level was that of a normal school graduate.

There are Educational Directories of the State of Delaware which were published yearly by the State Department of Public Instruction at the Delaware Public Archives. The earliest directory is dated 1914. There are two other booklets, not directories, dated 1908 and 1913. These publications include the teacher's name and trustees or commissioners for both Port Penn Colored School #122 and Congotown Colored School #123. The earliest information about the Port Penn Colored School is a handwritten ledger of accounts for the period of 1899 to 1919. The actual date that the original Port Penn School was

built or when students may have gathered elsewhere (i.e. church, homes, etc.) to receive formal instruction couldn't be determined. On April 20, 1945 the Port Penn Colored School #122 closed and became part of Delaware City Colored School #118.

The Congotown Colored School #123 may have been a smaller school. There is no picture of this school at the Archives. In the 1915-1916 school year, Marie M. Dennis taught grades one through five consisting of 12 boys and 16 girls. It appears the Congotown School finished operation on July 1, 1920 and also become part of Delaware City Colored School #118.



Photograph Number: 490cp. Port Penn Colored School.

Date: December 13, 1920

Photograph printed with permission of Delaware Public Archives

The following references were used:

Beers, D. G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. Philadelphia, Pomeroy and Beers, 1868.

Miller, Jr, George R. Adolescent Negro Education in Delaware – A Study of the Negro Secondary School and Community (Exclusive of Wilmington). Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

degree of Doctor of Education in the school of Education of New York University, 1943?

Mowrey, Roger C. Delaware School District Organizations and Boundaries. Dover, Delaware: Delaware State Department of Public Instruction, 1974.

Mueller, A.H. Map of the Delaware River "The Clyde of America" Embracing the State of Delaware and part of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland. Compiled, published and copyrighted by A. H. Mueller, Philadelphia. Published and sold by James H. Semple, Wilmington, 1921.

Skelcher, Bradley. African American Education in Delaware A History through Photographs, 1856-1930. Delaware Heritage Press, 1999.

Educational Directories of the State of Delaware published yearly by the State Department of Public Instruction beginning in 1914.

*We wish to thank the following people who contributed to this article. William T. Marshall, a lifelong resident of Port Penn, has a great interest in the history of the village. Mr. Marshall is a retired carpenter, millwright and dock builder. Ruth Ann Jones attended the Port Penn Colored School #122 very briefly. She and her late husband, James, have resided in Port Penn for many years. Laura M. Lee is currently the Interpretive Program Manager and Park Historian for Fort Delaware State Park. Her responsibilities include Fort DuPont and the Port Penn Interpretive Center, where she once worked as a seasonal employee in the 1990's. Laura formerly was employed as Museum Director at the Iron Hill Museum, where she did extensive research on Pierre duPont's educational philanthropy project. Linda Beck, a lifelong resident of Port Penn, is a founding member of the Port Penn Historical Society and currently Executive Director. Finally, a thanks to the personnel at the Delaware Public Archives in Dover for their help.*

# Tentative Port Penn Interpretive Center 2009 Programming

## Public Hours:

Open Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day Weekend • Saturdays and Sundays 10am - 4pm  
Open 7 days a week to groups of 10 or more by reservation.

### Program Offerings:

#### Town Tour:

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

**Sunday, June 28<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup> @ 3pm**

#### Family Wetlands Hike:

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

**Saturday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, and Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> @ 2pm**

#### Nature Crafts!

Grab a glue gun and some items from nature and we'll build some artsy creations using pine-cones, driftwood, seed pods, pebbles, and much more. Fun and relaxing for ages 3 to 103!

**Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup> @ 1pm**

### Speaker Programs:

**June 20<sup>th</sup> @ 2pm**

Delaware Ghost Stories  
Speaker: Ed Okonowicz

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.

**July 25<sup>th</sup> @ 2pm**

History of the C & D Canal  
Speaker: Cecil County Historian,  
Mike Dixon

**August 15<sup>th</sup> @ 2pm**

Delmarva Foodlore –  
Scrapple, Muskrat, and More!  
Speaker: Ed Okonowicz

What we consume reflects who we are, where we came from, and where we live and work.

Hear Ed Okonowicz discuss America's regional foods and in particular, the cuisine most identified with the Delmarva region. This program is for ages 10 and above.

**August 23<sup>th</sup> @ 2pm**

Black and White: The One Room  
Schoolhouses of Port Penn  
Speaker: Laura Lee, Park Historian

During the days of segregation, Port Penn was home to both white and black one-room schoolhouses. Hear the story of the two schools and the people who attended them. Alumni of both schools are encouraged to attend and share their memories. Primary research materials, such as photos and documents, will be on hand for examination.

### Scout Programs in April, May, September, and October:

The following badge or pin programs are available to scouts by reservation:

**Brownie Try-Its:** Listening to the Past, Outdoor Fun

**Cub Scouts:** The Past is Exciting and Important

**Webelos:** Naturalist, Forester

Fee is \$3 per child

Minimum of 10 participants or \$30

No charge for leaders, parents, and/or chaperones

## 2009 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](mailto:info@portpenn.org)

