



PORT PENNINGS

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.

Winter•2010

Letter From Our President

Dear Friend,

Sometimes when I ask someone about becoming a member of the historical society their response is "I'm not very much interested in history" or "I don't know what I could contribute." I have to admit, I spent a few formative years thinking the same. Over time, though, I learned about the rich history surrounding the small fishing village along the Delaware River. I've come to realize and appreciate how much is in my own community, and have since developed a keen interest in helping to preserve the past. I know that you, as a supporter of the Port Penn Area Historical Society, also share this enthusiasm. It would be impossible to carry on without your generous support. We have several new projects slated for 2010 but, as you can see, 2009 was a productive year for the Society:

- The Historical Society wishes to thank everyone who contributed to the success of our major fundraiser, the Marshland-A-Fare. 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.
- We continued to collaborate with the Division of Parks and Recreation in their effort to provide enriching programs at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. For 2010, look for some exciting....and fun educational programming.
- We were thrilled to obtain a grant through the Delaware Preservation fund that funded, in part, the restoration of several shutters on the Interpretive Center.
- The Society spearheaded a successful effort that led to much needed dike repairs along the Delaware River at the Augustine Wildlife Refuge.
- Working with lifetime resident, Billy Marshall, we were able to scan and preserve his great collection of photos.
- We continue to maintain the website and welcome any photos, information, or stories about the Port Penn area. Check it out at www.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.

Regards,
Tracy Beck
President

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www.portpenn.org

2010 Dates To Remember:

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

The Port Penn Interpretive Center

**Sunday, April 18
1-3 PM**

More information will be forthcoming.

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

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

**July 7
October 6**

Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.



Located off the beaten path, the First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn is facing a critical juncture in its history. Suffering from declining attendance, dwindling finances, and a congregation that is aging, members must soon decide if the church doors can remain open or must be closed.

While the Port Penn Historical Society disclaims support of any religion, we are strongly advocating for the continuance of this historical church as a viable and important part of our community. We therefore ask you to consider making a tax-deductible donation to the church.

The pastor and five elders feel once the church can get past its current financial crisis, its members can begin a campaign to attract new members with more programming and become a center for thriving community ministry and outreach.

If you are interested in helping, checks made payable to: The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn, can be sent to P.O. Box 171, Port Penn, DE 19731. For more information, please call The Rev. Beth Thomas at 302-379-0590 (bethomas2@comcast.net) or contact Mary Lou Reynolds, clerk of session, at 302-834-2272 (loureynolds@verizon.net).

First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn Organized July 16, 1837

The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn, built in 1856, overlooks Market Street and is built on land that is adjacent to the Dr. David Stewart house, the oldest surviving house in the village. Stewart built his house about twenty-five years prior to founding the town in 1763. Dr. Bernard Herman in *"Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic"* tells us Stewart's dream was to develop an urban grid similar to Philadelphia's by extending the town westward at least a quarter of a mile to include other Stewart properties and eastward by reclaiming considerably tidal marshes to include wharves and canals, and other landscape features to enable townspeople to transport goods to and from river vessels.

The Stewarts' urban dream failed and on a lot originally set aside for a market square, the original considerably smaller church was built in 1834. Dr. Herman says "a proposed market square – the secular hub of a commercial community – had been replaced with a church – the new congregational focus for the village. The true commercial center ... had shifted closer to the river."

The following is from a copy of the paper which was placed in the corner stone of the present Church building.

"The formation of this Church arose from the circumstances of there being a number of persons attached to the churches of St. Georges and Drawyers but who now lived in the neighborhood of Port Penn wished to have a Church in their own neighborhood for the purposes of convenience and usefulness; therefore to carry into effect the wishes above stated - Mrs. Margaret Darrah (a descendent of Dr. David Stewart) made a grant of a lot at the Corner of Market and Stewart Streets for the purpose of building a *Presbyterian House of Worship* thereon."

"Accordingly, early in 1834 a frame house 24' x 36' was erected thereon, (this rough church building was later replaced by the present structure) as a branch of Drawyers Church and continued as such until July 16, 1837, when it was organized into a distinct and separate church by the name of the *First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn*. by a committee of Wilmington Presbytery, Rev. James C. How and Rev. Charles Brown. The following persons united with the Church at the time of its organization:"

FROM ST. GEORGES:

Mrs. Mary Cox, Mrs. Honora Matthews, Mrs. Eliza F. Dilworth, Mrs. Maria Hessey, Mrs. Rachel Webb,
Mrs. Margaret Darrah, Miss Margaret Kernahan, Miss Hester E. Dilworth.

FROM DRAWYERS:

Mr. William Cleaver, Jr., Mrs. Mary C. Cleaver, Mr. John Price, Mrs. Susan Price, Miss Ann Price, Mrs. Martha Jane Price,
Mrs. Priscilla Cleaver, Mrs. Mary Alrich, Mr. Samuel Jefferson, Mrs. Ann Jefferson.

"The Rev. Warren A. Jones was first Pastor and Samuel Jefferson and William Cleaver, Jr. were first Elders. Rev. Charles Brown, Rev. George Foot, Rev. Isaac W. K. Handy, Rev. T. Ralston Smith, Rev. David McClure and Rev. H. J. Gaylord were successively Pastors of the Church."

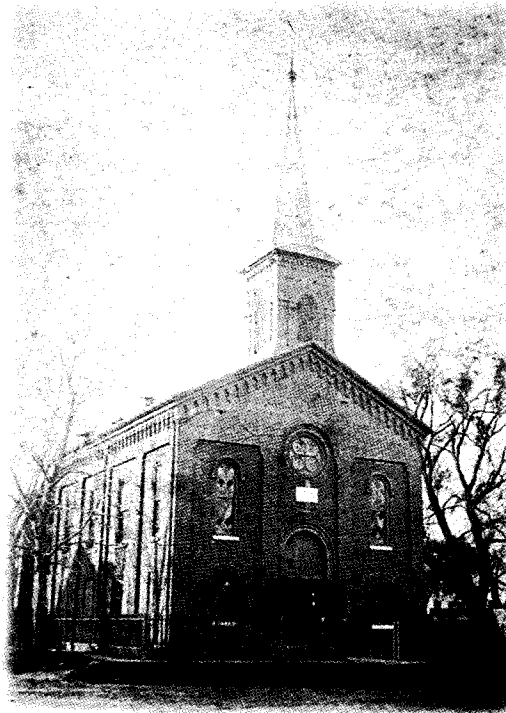
“In consequence of the increase in the congregation and the uncomfortable condition of the old house, it was deemed indispensably necessary to erect a new house of Worship, and the old lot being too small, Mrs. Darrah in her enlarged liberality and benevolence, again supplied the wants of the congregation by making another grant of land, including the old lot, sufficient for the present building, as well as for horses and carriages. The effort has been made, and so far successful as this day to lay the stone, in which this paper is deposited in the wall of the new house, so that in after ages it may be known by whom the foregoing enterprises were begun and carried on when even their names have been forgotten.”

“The present building was erected by Thomas Price, builder, and the first record of a service held within these walls was “Sabbath Afternoon, May 17th, 1857.”

The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn has been located in the heart of the community since 1856 offering residents a place to worship. The church structure remains almost entirely as it was erected in the mid 1800's when this town was a thriving port. The church has not been altered significantly over the years. Dr. Herman describes the architectural details as follows: “Built of brick laid in stretcher bond, the two-story church building consists of a ground-level community hall and Sunday school and an upstairs sanctuary. The gable front, with its round and segmental arch gable-end windows and door, quatrefoil rose window, and sawnwork brackets, represents a free borrowing of popular Italianate and Romanesque Revival detailing. With its brick construction and use of nationally popular mid-nineteenth-century architectural elements, the Port Penn Presbyterian Church is the most visible and pretentious public building in the village.”

An interesting historical note about Rev. Isaac W. K. Handy, one of the early pastors of Port Penn and Drawyers churches, was his arrest in 1863 and imprisonment at Fort Delaware for 15 months during the Civil War. He had

subsequently become pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Portsmouth, Virginia and made a trip back to Delaware with his wife who was in ill health to visit her family at Forest Hall, the residence of her mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Dilworth. His wife and her mother, also not in good health, had not seen each other for five years and he felt the probability that one or both them might not long survive. He intended on returning to Portsmouth several weeks later leaving his wife and five of the nine children with friends but was arrested presumably for being a Southern sympathizer. Rev. Handy gives a full account of the day to day prison life at Fort Delaware in “*United States Bonds; Duress by Federal Authority*”, a journal written in 1874.



Undated photo of The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn.

In recent years it was recognized that the church required major restoration. In 1987 the roof was replaced and the structure and steeple reinforced. In 1995 a renovation committee made up of church and community members began meeting to discuss the historic preservation of this church building. Restoration work amounting to \$58,543 for the sanctuary and \$78,015 for the downstairs community hall, Sunday school, kitchen and exterior was completed by contractor Tim O'Connell between 1997

and 2000. With the renovations completed the members of the First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn have preserved the church historically for future generations.

We wish to thank the following people who contributed to this article. Mary Lou Reynolds, a lifelong resident of Port Penn, attended Sunday School and Bible School at the First Presbyterian Church as a child and joined the church when she was twelve. She served on the church restoration committee and currently is an elder of the church. She and husband Roy have a daughter, Terri, and a granddaughter, Juda. Mary Lou is a senior financial analyst for an insurance company. 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. Linda Beck, also a lifelong resident of Port Penn, is a founding member of the Port Penn Historical Society and currently Executive Director.

Some events at The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn complete list @: www.delawarecityportpennpresbyterian.com

Saturday, March 27 – Easter Egg Hunt for children on the church lawn at 1:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 28 – Worship Service 9:45 a.m. Palm Sunday

Easter Egg Sale – Selling ¼ pound candy eggs Butter Cream, Peanut Butter and Coconut.

Orders will be taken in March for pick up the week of March 22. For information and to place orders, call Mary Lou Reynolds 302.834.2272.

Sunday, April 4 – Worship Service 9:45 a.m. Easter

Future April Event.- Dine and Donate dinner at Applebee's in Middletown. Bring Church flyer and 10% of your dinner order is donated to the church.

For more information about the Event & Flyers call: 302-379-0590

Tentative Port Penn Interpretive Center 2010 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.

For more information, please contact: Laura Lee, Interpretive Program Manager, 302.834.7941

Program Offerings:

Family Marshland Hike:

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

Sunday, June 6th, Saturday, July 17th,
Saturday, August 28th @ 11am

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.

Saturday, June 19th @ 1pm

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!

Saturday, August 7th @ 1pm

Speaker Programs:

Saturday, July 24th evening-time TBD

Delaware's Best 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.

Sunday, June 27th @ 2pm

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.

2010 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

