

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2017

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 2017 I think of a quote from Robert Kennedy: *“There are people in every time and every land who want to stop history in its tracks. They fear the future, mistrust the present, and invoke the security of a comfortable past which, in fact, never existed.”*

Our mission at the Historical Society is to reveal and preserve our history, not to glamorize or romanticize it. By understanding where we came from we can better appreciate who we are and what our traditions mean to us.

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 used for our projects and events; it would be impossible to carry on without your help.

During the past year:

- The Historic Society requested and received support from legislators Bruce Ennis and Kevin Hensley during the Bond Bill Meeting April 2016 to support funding that would be used for the Port Penn Dike repair.
- We held our 2016 Members' Event at Bellevue Mansion - great weather, a tour of the historic building, and music by Deb Shane & Mike Fisher - "Makin' Whoopie".
- Last fall we held our 1st Wetland Festival at Grass Dale Center. It was very successful, with twelve tradition bearers who described their crafts. Thank you to all of our participants, demonstrators, volunteers and to our sponsors, the Delaware City Refining Company, Sidney Craven and the Thousand Acre Farm. The program was partially funded by a grant from the Delaware Humanities Forum, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Delaware Humanities Forum.
- We continued our tree-planting efforts at Augustine Beach with 16 trees planted. This project was partially funded by the Port Penn Historical Society and by the Delaware Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program - Grant #TP 2016-13. Our thanks to the Cutting Edge for donating and spreading mulch around the trees!
- Installed new winter street banners around town. These were all sponsored by local businesses or residents. They will alternate with our summer banners.
- Look for more information about our 2017 Annual Member's Event "Spring Fling" to be held at the Thousand Acre Farm on April 2, 2017.

As we move into 2017 we will be busy in Port Penn:

- We will be working on the Stewart cemetery this spring, removing a dead tree, cleaning up the grounds, and improving the parking and driveway.
- Members' Event – our annual Spring Fling is coming up on April 2. This year we will be at the Thousand Acre Farm just north of Port Penn. Look for details on our website.
- We will be completing our tree planting project at Augustine Beach, with the planting of 15 trees in fall of 2017.
- We are planning our 2nd Wetland Festival in the spring of 2018.

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. Please call 302-836-5880 if you are interested, or check out our website at www.portpenn.org.

Regards,
Wes Jones, President

2017 Dates To Remember:

Annual Member's Event
"Spring Fling",
Sunday, April 2nd
1:00-3:00 PM
at the

Thousand Acre Farm,
located on
Thousand Acre Marsh

More information to come

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

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

- **September 7th**
- **December 7th**

Open to the public.
PLEASE JOIN US.

Visit:
www.portpenn.org
for upcoming events and
more information
302.836.5880



By: Laura Lee

A great place to peruse interesting everyday American history is a website called *Chronicling America* (ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov/). This Library of Congress project digitized thousands of American newspapers, and the (FREE!) searchable database enables you to search by town. Below is one of the stories found in the Daily Gazette (Wilmington, DE) of August 2, 1882. The story is almost too incredible to believe but it's bigger than the best fish story I've heard at Kelly's Tavern! Several words were illegible due to the computer scanning process so in lieu of knowing those words I've added xxx to each sentence.

AUGUST 2, 1882, THE DAILY GAZETTE (WILMINGTON DE)
CATCHING A SHARK
A SURPRISE TO PORT PENN FISHERMEN
MAN-EATER 16 FEET LONG IN A STURGEON NET- AN AQUATIC MONSTER TAKEN AFTER A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE

Two sturgeon fishermen off Port Penn were on Monday treated to the greatest surprise of their lives, when an enormous man-eating shark got into their net and fought savagely for liberty. The fishermen, John Williams and James Johnson, had been fishing all forenoon, and had been the unhappy victims of bad luck. The day was a sweltering one on the river, and when the net was drawn in time and time again without having anything in it, the fishermen's hopes fell. High water came about xxx o'clock and the two disappointed fishermen began to have hopes that their luck might change. Their hopes were realized. Their luck soon changed. Just as they commenced to close in the net in order to make a haul, the net having been xxx on the east side, they saw a huge xxx cut the water and then an immense fish xxx half out of the river and dashed across to the other side of the seine, and thrashed about creating an aquatic disturbance such as the fishermen knew no sturgeon could make.

They at once hurried to close in the net, and xxx reduced its compass. The disturbance ceased and the men began to think the monster fish escaped through the net. Xxx the surprise he had given them until xxx place it is probable they would have been better pleased had such been the place. Gradually the net closed and when the circle was only 30 feet in diameter there was a dash and a splash and water xxx in all directions. "I never saw anything like it in my life" said Williams. "It seemed to me like all the water inside the net had burst into a whirlpool. Foam xxx in all directions and we had a hard time, I tell you to hold on to that net. I thought the whole thing was going to xxx. In the midst of all this the shark jumped out of the water fully four feet. We could see through the flying water that he was an enormous one, but did not know xxx what it was. He struck the water with xxx and the next minute run under the boat lifting it

out of the water. In doing so the shark became entangled xxx, and he suddenly turned and almost xxx our boat. Then such struggling you never saw! In less than no time the boat was half full of water, and I thought we would surely sink.

"How did you capture him?"
"D---d if I'll ever tell you. It's one of the strangest things I ever knew of. I can't remember much about it, only that we held xxx grim death. We thought he would swim away with boat, seine, and all. Sure xxx he had gotten wrapped up in the seine and soon tired himself out, and finally the beast ceased to struggle. Then Johnson got the gaff and stuck a hook in him as he lay close to the xxx, and the circus commenced again. Xxx we had a picnic! The dad gusted fish thrashed around, nearly pulling Johnson overboard, and the hook pulled out. He was more enraged than ever and the water xxx and the boat foamed and seethed worse than before. Finally he got quieted again and we finally pulled him into the boat, and he nearly broke it into pieces with his flopping and pitching. He was dragged up onto the steamboat landing and soon commenced to gasp and finally died. "By actual measurement he was 16 feet long and he presented a picture of strength such as is not often seen in a fish." All Monday afternoon the shark was a curiosity at Port Penn. He was shipped to Philadelphia on the Steamer Delaware.

Author's note: I had to find out how plausible this story was, so reached out to Rich Wong, Fisheries Biologist from Delaware Fish & Wildlife. As former historian at Fort Delaware I had also read Confederate prisoner diaries in which they feared escape via swimming due to sharks in the river. I used to laugh that off - but no longer! Rich's take on things: *Yes, there could have been a shark caught as far north as Port Penn! Our most common sharks in Delaware Bay are: the smooth hound, spiny hound, sandbar, and sand tiger. Since it was referred to as an 'man-eating shark', I assume it was a 'toothy' shark, one with characteristic sharp, triangular teeth. Sharp teeth and the sheer size (16') would rule out the smooth and spiny hounds. The sand tiger is about the most gruesome, toothiest shark you'll ever see. Both the sand tiger and sandbar shark, however, prefer middle to higher salinities. The fact that it was August though, supports the authenticity of the story. If it was a particularly dry summer, July droughts are pretty common, the salinity would have risen fairly high, especially with the incoming tide. The sandbar and sand tiger could have expanded their range into the Port Penn area. Lastly, regardless of any possible drought or higher than normal salinity, bull sharks can readily venture into low salinities, even freshwater. They're not commonly seen in Delaware Bay or Delaware River, but given their ability to live in freshwater for extended periods, it's in my top three most plausible suspects. A sixteen foot shark is an amazing and rare specimen. I'd say, "Believe it!"*

Coming next issue: Big government munitions plant planned for Port Penn in 1918!

Meet Andrew Roy ~ New Seasonal Parks Assistant Manager



Andrew Roy has recently joined the Fort Delaware/Fort DuPont State Park team as the new seasonal Assistant Manager.

Andrew holds a B.S. degree in Parks and Recreation/Resources Management from Slippery Rock Univ. and has over 30 years of experience with Delaware State Parks. He most recently served 16 years as the Park Superintendent at the Wilmington State Parks and retired from full-time service at the end of 2015. Although a native Delawarean, Andrew currently lives in Cecil County MD with his wife Kelli. At his retirement party, Andrew joked that he wanted to move to an exotic island! This new assignment will help him fulfill that dream!

By: David G. Orr

Despite excessive heat and confusion related to the closure of the Fifth Street Bridge the Port Penn Historical Society's 2016 Wetland Festival at the Grass Dale Center in Delaware City, was an experience many will never forget. It brought together for one afternoon only the artifacts and small watercraft that once were ubiquitous in the Delaware River, streams, and estuary. The Upper Bay Museum in Northeast Maryland, a new partner of the Port Penn Historical Society, brought a punt gun skiff and demonstrated it with enthusiasm! They also brought some baskets made by the Day Basket Company in Northeast which illustrated another venerable local tradition. Bob Meadows set up his impressive collection of fishing gear, much of which concentrated on the ancient inhabitant of the Delaware; the Atlantic Sturgeon. Bob also quoted his numerous informants on their encounters with this bottom loving fish, the source of so much folklore and industry. Turtle propping and muskrat trapping were also present as well as a score of related crafts and artworks. Waterman's World documentaries were shown inside the Grass Dale facility.

From its home in Bivalve, N.J., came the "Port Penner" a meticulously handbuilt Sturgeon Skiff built constructed in Philadelphia under the sponsorship of our society during the Bicentennial. Migratory Waterfowl and their hunting nuances were also discussed with a large collection of decoys

exhibited by the author. The Upper Bay Museum's Punt Gun Skiff contributed to these tales of hunting, some before the passage of migratory bird legislation. By understanding these artifacts one can appreciate the strong conservation and wetland preservation programs supported so aggressively by our society over the years. For it is the landscape which is our most precious resource. Upon these watery stretches sailed our small boats and skiffs of all kinds. The presence of a hunting railbird skiff and a Sneak Box worked well with the other artifacts in capturing a "faraway time and place".

For me personally the real power of what we were attempting was manifested by Clyde Roberts, a true waterman and local tradition bearer, who confronted the various material displayed and interpreted it from a participant's point of view. The sight of him sitting on one of the lower rungs of the Loft Ladder found nearby and dating to roughly 1710-20 formed for me a visual synthesis of all the ways we capture the past. Certainly the human resource is critical and Clyde's comments are mandatory for all of us who see profound lessons in the activities and dreams of our forebearers.

The lessons learned from this ambitious undertaking will certainly lead to other similar adventures in local history!

Crabmeat Thomson provided the music and there was plenty to drink and eat.

"Spring Fling" 2016...



The Society expresses thanks to The Friends of Bellevue State Park for allowing us to hold our event at the Bellevue Mansion.

Handmade Easter Eggs

Orders will be taken

March 20th-March 31st

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.

Call Mary Lou Reynolds (302) 834-2272 to arrange pick up!



Many thanks to Larry Wilder and David Orr for the pictures. A big thanks to all participants!

Port Penn Programming 2017 Season

Port Penn Interpretive Center Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302.836.2533

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

Call (302) 834.7941 for more information or e-mail: Jacob.miller@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 27, 2017

Historic Town Tours

Saturdays - February 11, March 11 & May 20 - 10:00 AM

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!

Lantern Tours of Port Penn (NEW PROGRAM!)

Saturdays - August 26, September 2 & September 30 - 8:00 PM

For the first time since the invention of electricity, visit Port Penn by the light of lanterns. Enjoy the stories of how the town developed and the important figures that decided its course.

Wetland Walks

Saturday - May 6 - 10:00 AM

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!

Evening Wetland Walk (NEW PROGRAM!)

Saturday - September 9 - 7:00 PM

Come enjoy the beautiful wetland trail in Port Penn in the calm of the evening. Learn about why wetlands are important to Delaware's health and economy and participate in an animal scavenger hunt to see how many species we can locate!

Port Penn Family Photowalk

Saturday - June 3 - 10:00 AM & Saturday - September 23 - 6:00 PM

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

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

Friday - August 4 - 7:00 PM

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.

Marsh Dipnetting for Kids (NEW PROGRAM!)

Saturday - October 7 - 10:00 AM

Wetlands are full of loads of plants and animals, including lots of bugs! Discover these crawly swimming critters in this new program! Be sure to wear shoes that you don't mind getting a little muddy.

Hérons and History (NEW PROGRAM!)

Saturday - August 19 - 7:00 PM

Port Penn's wetland is home to incredibly diverse plant and animal life, which has been crucial to the town's economic development over its history. In addition to enjoying the natural beauty of the wetland, we will talk about how the wetland has contributed to Port Penn's development. Join us!

Christmas Open House

Friday - December 15 - 6:30 PM-8:30 PM

It's the most wonderful time of the year at the Port Penn Interpretive Center! Come celebrate the holidays with us for our 3rd annual Christmas Open House! Light refreshments and merriment will be provided.

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2017 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

