

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2020

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 2020. 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.

The house plaque project is almost complete; the signs are being crafted now. Thanks to Carleen Czajowski, Jennifer Naylor, Linda Beck & Julie Harrington for their assistance, to all the Port Penn residents, and the Delaware Preservation Fund for a grant to help fund this project.

The Waterman statue is home back on his base after almost one year; it was reinstalled on February 5th. Thanks to John Ringer for his restoration craftsmanship, The Cutting Edge for moving and reinstallation, numerous donations from you our supporters, Delaware City Refining Co. and a grant from Delaware Division of the Arts.

We continue to maintain the Stewart cemetery. We designed a brochure to tell about the cemetery and the Stewart family; you can find this at the cemetery site. We also made a new friend, William Stewart, descendant of David Stewart, the founder of Port Penn. He supplied much history about the Stewart family.

The Fort Delaware Park superintendent, Michael Hitch, is moving on. We have enjoyed working with him and we welcome the new park superintendent Mika Drake.

We are working with the Division of Parks and Recreation on a project to replace the skinning shack that was lost to arson. They are taking the lead on this and we aren't sure yet if they will rebuild or find an existing shack as a replacement.

And now for something completely different – we are hoping to hold this year's Spring Fling members' event at the Augustine Inn Seafood & Chop House. Look for details on our website.

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 contact 302-836-5880 or email portpenn@gmail.com if you are interested, or check out our website at www.portpenn.org

Regards, Wes Jones (President)

The Waterman Returns

The Waterman statue is repaired and back home on its base! Thanks to all of our supporters - Delaware Division of Arts, Delaware City Refining Co., John Ringer, The Cutting Edge and numerous donations!



Historic Marker for the Village of Port Penn, installed outside of the Interpretive Center, July 2019



Port Penn Historic House Plaque Project

After much research our historic house plaques are being fabricated and will soon be ready for delivery and placement. We received a grant from the Preservation Delaware Fund to help with this project.

THOMPSON EATON HOUSE
IS LISTED IN THE
NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES
BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
c. MID-19th CENTURY



2020 Dates To Remember:

Annual Member's Event

"Spring Fling",

Sunday, April 19th

1:00-3:00 p.m.

at the

Augustine Inn Seafood
& Chop House

More information to come

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

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

• June 4th •

• September 3rd •

• December 3rd •

Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US

Visit:

www.portpenn.org

for upcoming events and more information

E-mail:

portpenn@gmail.com

PORT PENN & THE STEWART FAMILY CEMETERY

By: Wes Jones

Wandering around Port Penn you see Stewart Street, the historic Stewart House, and the Stewart Cemetery. What's the deal with Stewart? Who was this Stewart anyway? And whose family has their own cemetery?

In this article I discuss the Stewart family and their relation to Port Penn. There are two things to keep in mind. First, since there are many people with the same name I have noted them with Roman numerals to distinguish them. And second, in the early days the population of this area was not very large so you see multiple



Figure 1 The Stewart Cemetery today.

marriages among families (Van Dyke, Kennedy, Johns).

David Stewart I was the founder of Port Penn, and four generations of his family are buried in their cemetery. Five David Stewarts are buried in the cemetery: David Stewart II (son of David I); David Stewart III (son of David II); David Stewart IV (son of David III); and David Stewart V (son of David IV). In addition there is another David Stewart who died as a child, and was the nephew of David IV.

The story of the Stewarts in Delaware begins with John Stewart, who left Scotland in 1698, came to Delaware in 1703, settled in Appoquinimink near St. Georges, and operated a fulling mill. He had seven children; the eldest was David Stewart I, who inherited his land.

David Stewart I (1707–1776)

David Stewart I was a physician (whatever that meant back in the 1700s) and entrepreneur. He married Anne Adams. When he traded his land in St Georges for land along the Delaware River around 1750 he moved his wife and eight children to an estate dominated by a large brick house. This house, known as the Stewart House, still stands in Port Penn. Probably built circa 1730–1740 [9] this house is two-story with a five-bay (5 openings, windows or doors) front, interior gable chimneys, and decorative glazed header Flemish bond brickwork. Such a grand house implies a large estate with outbuildings and more modest houses for workers, but it was still just a farm. Port Penn didn't exist yet, except in Stewart's dreams.

Another house he probably found when he moved in is known today as the Margaret Stewart Darrach house (Margaret Stewart was his granddaughter, and she married John Darrach) [1]. This was originally a one-story one-room sawn-plank house with a gambrel roof. A fireback dates the house to 1725. A painting of this house by Marion Streicher is in the Port Penn Interpretive Center. The house was sold by the Presbyterian Church and moved to a site in Maryland around 1970.

Stewart had a grand idea for the land: a prominent port that rivaled Philadelphia. Grain harvest from local farms were typically loaded on boats at high tide, then sailed out to the Delaware River and upstream 60 miles to Philadelphia. Stewart envisioned a port that was closer to the ocean than Philadelphia, and closer to the Chesapeake via overland routes. He laid out a town plan that was square to the river, in a grid system, with street names of Liberty, Congress, Stewart, Market, Merchant, Beaumaris, and Delaware. The last two streets were laid out in marshland close to the river; Stewart was ambitious about draining and filling in the marsh.

On March 8, 1764 Stewart ran an advertisement in Philadelphia's *Pennsylvania Gazette* promoting "a Town on the River Delaware" to be known as Port Penn.

It took only six months to go from announcing the new town to having a store and an inn.

David Stewart I died in 1776 just as the nation was founded. He is buried at St Georges with "his wife, a brother, three sons and a grandson" [4].

David Stewart II (1733–1793)

David Stewart II was a physician and an Elder in the Presbyterian Church. He married Mary Van Dyke, from the family of one of the original Dutch settlers of the area. David II saw many of the struggles of a young nation. At the time of the Revolution an alarm post was established at Port Penn since the residents were subject to sporadic harassment, including abduction, by British naval landing parties. Actual battles also occurred; the winter of 1777-78 saw an encounter between the Pennsylvania Navy and some British warships off of Reedy Island. "Port Penn was bombarded in the course of the engagement which generated more noise than damage." [5]

Port Penn continued to grow. In 1790 the Port Wardens of Philadelphia had authorized the construction of docking facilities at Port Penn, and a customs house was built in 1792. David II continued his father's promotion and development of Port Penn. In 1792 he produced an amended plan for the proposed town. The plan's most striking element is the imposition of a geometric grid over an irregular topography of river, marsh, woodland, and field. There was also a market square adjoining the Stewart house and a private cemetery for the family.

David Stewart II died in 1793 and is the first Stewart in our cemetery; he is buried alongside his wife Mary.

David Stewart III (1777–1827)

David Stewart III, son of David II, was also a physician and an elder in the St. Georges Church. His first wife was Mary Kennedy; His second was Susannah Johns, daughter of Kensey Johns and Ann Van Dyke.

Port Penn continued to grow (to 270 people by 1800). While the Stewarts still lived in their big brick house, the other residents had more modest homes. A typical house was the one owned by John Eakins at 103 South Congress Street. Underneath today's yellow siding is a two-story pit-sawn log cabin dating to around 1800 with a later addition on the southern side. Inventories suggest a small retail store (likely on the ground floor of the addition), 3 tables and 13 chairs on the ground floor of the two-story section, and a large number of beds upstairs. This suggests a tavern with upstairs accommodations for guests as well as the family. Apparently the ships arriving at the dock required overnight stays for their sailors. Scharf, in his *History of Delaware*, notes that "[I]n 1822 the village was a grain market, and also a port of entry. In consequence of this, it was generally thronged with sailors and was very immoral." He also noted that there were five hotels in Port Penn at that time, one in the building where Dr Stewart lived. [6]

By the 1820s the vision that the Stewarts had for Port Penn to become a metropolis to rival Philadelphia (with a population of 135,000) had failed. While Delaware City was growing thanks to the C & D Canal, Port Penn was destined to remain just a small shipping town. In response to this the Stewarts sold their market square property to the Presbyterians. [7]

David III is buried in our cemetery between his two wives Mary Kennedy Stewart and Susannah Johns Stewart.

David Stewart IV (1813–1899)

David Stewart IV was a physician and an elder in the Presbyterian Church. According to family records he attended school in New Castle after his father died, and then school in Philadelphia. By 1840 he owned two pharmacies in Baltimore, and was studying medicine. He taught at St. John's College in Annapolis until it was closed due to the Civil War, and he returned to Port Penn in 1862. [8]

STEWART FAMILY CEMETERY CONT'D

His first wife was Henrietta M. C. Earle, and his second wife was Emeline Perkins Littlefield.

As the 1830s rolled around the focus of the town shifted from the market square to the waterfront. In a small village economy there was room for only one entrepreneurial family- the Stewarts were out and the Cleavers were in. [9] Maybe this is why David IV left to seek his fortune elsewhere. The Cleaver house (circa 1835) was built to overlook where the village wharf met the street. The southwest corner of the house was dedicated to business use, and the family entertained at the other end. William Cleaver could sit in his office and monitor all cargo entering or leaving Port Penn.

Two churches were formed in Port Penn during David IV's lifetime. In 1834 the first Presbyterian Church was built next to the Stewart House on the site of the former market square. The original building was wooden; it was replaced by the current brick structure in 1856. The original building was moved out Port Penn Road to Congotown, a free African American community located at the site of the present-day Mt. Zion Cemetery, for the use of the Zion AME Church. In 1843 St. Daniels' Methodist Church was built, formed by a portion of the congregation of Asbury Chapel [6].

The first peaches were planted in Delaware in Delaware City in 1832 and within a few years they had spread down the state with the introduction of large railroads in 1850s. Local peaches meant money to local growers (David IV was reported that at one time he had an orchard of 12,000 peach trees [8]) and inspired the name of the local baseball team, but the rails ran west of Port Penn however and brought no prosperity.

Although the railroad and canal had bypassed Port Penn all was not lost. The town continued as a local landing for crops, and the fishery began to grow as the harvest from river and marsh was packed and shipped upriver. Port Penn and Augustine Beach became popular for day-trip excursions on steamers from Wilmington and Philadelphia, and some residents profited from the military presence by supplying provisions to Reedy Island and Fort Delaware.

David IV died in 1899 and is buried in our cemetery alongside his second wife Emeline and his sister Mary Eliza Kennedy Stewart.



Figure 2 Grave marker for David Stewart III.

David Stewart V (1845–1915)

David V was a physician and an elder in the Presbyterian Church of New Castle. He married Esther J. Longland.

The beginning of the 20th century brought peach blight to Delaware. A viral disease spread by aphids called the Peach Yellows began hitting northern Delaware peach orchards and quickly killed most of them. Other crops took their place, especially tomatoes. The Zacheis Cannery (which was located across the street from the Interpretive Center) was founded at the turn of the century by a well-established Port Penn family. Like other independent canneries recorded throughout the state, the Zacheis operation purchased local produce which they then processed and shipped. Photographs indicate that much of the cannery work was performed by women who lived in town.

In addition to the cannery, the rise of the marshland economy followed a seasonal cycle of fishing and trapping. The marshland fishery represents the village's most extensive economic activity through the first half of the twentieth century. [3] The roads replaced the water highway, however, and in the early 20th century wharves fell into disrepair.

David and his wife are buried together in our cemetery.

That brings us to the end of the Stewarts buried in our cemetery. But the Stewart line continued well into the 20th century with David Stewart VI (1881-1965) and David Stewart VII (1909-1989).

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to William Stewart for sharing his family history and for many insights into the Stewart family. He is a grandson of David Stewart V.

References:

1. Register Report of John Stewart, family document, courtesy of William Stewart
2. Stutz, Bruce, *Natural Lives, Modern Times: People and Places of the Delaware River*, Crown Publishing, 1992
3. Warner, Pamela, Herman, Bernard, et. al. "The Architectural Resources of Port Penn", Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering, College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, January 1996
4. Findagrave (David I) <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/154800450/david-stewart>
5. National Historic Register - https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/78000903_text (retrieved 01/15/2019)
6. Scharf, J. Thomas "History of Delaware 1609-1888 Chapter L St. George's Hundred" <https://archive.org/details/historydelaware00unkngoog/mode/2up> (retrieved 02/01/2020).
7. Lanier, Gabrielle M. and Herman, Bernard L. *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1997.
8. Mary E. K. Stewart, "The Story of the Stewarts", family document, courtesy of William Stewart
9. Herman, Bernard L., *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware 1700-1900*, University of Tennessee Press, 1987

Church Closing After 186 Years ~ By: Mary Lou Reynolds, Clerk of Sessions

Dr. David Stewart acquired land which was to become the village of Port Penn. He proposed building a town, which was to include a Presbyterian Church. The formation of the church came about when Presbyterian parishioners attached to St. Georges and Old Drawyers at Odessa, who now lived in Port Penn, wished to have a church in their own neighborhood. Mrs. Margaret Darrach made a grant of a lot at the corner of Market and Stewart Streets for the purpose of building a "Presbyterian House of Worship". Early in 1834 a frame house was erected, (this rough church building was later replaced by the present structure) as a branch of Drawyers Church and continued until July 16, 1837, when it was organized into a separate church by the name of the "First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn".

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

The present building was erected by Thomas Price, builder, and the first record of a service held was on May 17, 1857. The First Presbyterian Church of Port Penn has been located in the heart of the community since 1834 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. This structure has not been altered significantly over the years.

In 1987 the roof was replaced and the structure and steeple reinforced. In August of 1997 renovations to the church were started and finally completed in 2000. The sanctuary was remodeled with new lights, carpeting, seat cushions and paint. The whole downstairs was painted, new flooring installed in the front hallway and the kitchen remodeled. The brick was repointed on the outside.

As the membership decreased over the years we have been yoked with other churches to help with the financial burden. In the last few years we have been on our own using a CRE (Commission Lay Pastor). Our biggest fund raiser starting in 2010, making and selling chocolate Easter eggs, helped us stay open.

It is with a sad heart that on Sunday November 17, 2019 the congregation in attendance voted to begin the closing process of the church. The doors of the church will close the last Sunday of April (April 26, 2020). This was not an easy decision but our expenses are greater than our income even though we keep the expenses to a minimum. So due to financial reasons, we have made the decision to close the church.

**There will be a special service held on
Sunday, April 19, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.
for the closing of the church.**

Port Penn Programming 2020 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@delaware.gov

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 23, 2020 • The center will be open for the special events listed below!

Intro to Port Penn

Tuesday, March 24, 6:00 p.m.

Founded 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 at the Brandywine Hundred Library.

Historic Town Tour

Saturdays, March 28 and May 9, 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, August 15, 5:00 p.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.

Explorers' Walk

Saturday, March 28, 2:00 p.m.

Kids, did you know adventure waits in your own backyard? Let's go exploring! Who knows what natural treasures we might find!

Wetland Walk

Saturday, April 18 and June 6, 10:00 a.m.

This program, in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, will take us through the wetland in Port Penn. We will discuss the ways that wetlands help us out, and what we can do to take care of our wetland resources.

Lantern Tours at Port Penn

Fridays, November 6 and 13, 6:30 p.m.

Visit Port Penn by lantern-light! Come hear the stories of the town and the people who built it and make it special. We will meet at the Port Penn Interpretive Center.

Port Penn Christmas Open House

Friday, December 11, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Celebrate the holidays at the Port Penn Interpretive Center! The museum will be open for visitors, and we will have light refreshments. The Center will be all decked out for the holidays. Small gifts will be available for kids 12 and under.

Be sure to check our Facebook page and seasonal program guides for more information on upcoming programs!

Private Town Tours

Can't make it to any of our scheduled town tours or wetland walks? Call our office to schedule a private tour for your family or group. See the picturesque village of Port Penn at a time that is convenient for you! Cost is \$2 per person. Maximum 15 people per tour.

Call (302) 834-7941 to schedule a time.

2020 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

