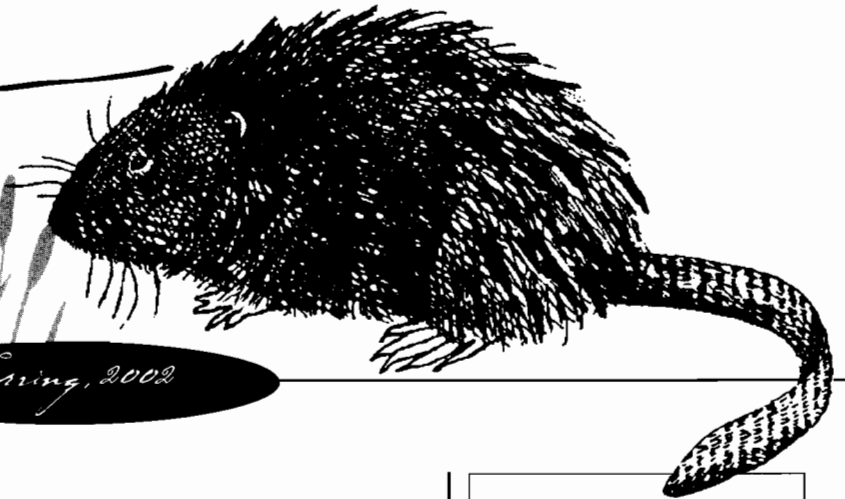


PORT PENN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Port
Pennings

Spring, 2002



From the President

by Bill Balascio

I want to use this opportunity to tell you about the events and programs that the Society is planning for the coming year.

Our first project for 2002 will be to acquire American flags and all the hardware needed to display them throughout the village. They will be hung during national holidays, when display of the flag is appropriate. We hope to work cooperatively with the Port Penn Civic Association on this ongoing effort.

The next project that we will be taking on is the planting of wildflowers along the interpretive trail. We have been in touch with the Division of Parks & Recreation, and will purchase the types of wildflowers that they suggest as being indigenous to our area. After the initial planting, these wildflowers should continue to come back every year.

In another effort to beautify the village, we are assessing the condition of the wooden street signs and historic area signs, and are planning on restoring them to their original condition.

Our final project for the coming year is already well under way. As I mentioned in a previous letter to all members this year, the restoration of the Stewart Cemetery has been made possible by the acquisition of the Harvey Moore farm by a cooperative effort of Delaware Wild Lands and The Delaware Open Space Council. Our Cemetery Committee chairman, Bill Marshall, has been working tirelessly on this project. The cemetery is now in much better condition, and will continue improve thanks to the efforts of Bill, as well as Rusty Harvey of Delaware Wild Lands and Cathy Harvey, both Historical Society members.



Photograph by William Marshall

David Shetzler cleaning out underbrush in Stewart Cemetery

Port Penn Area Dates to Remember

Area Historical Society Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, April 3, 2002

Mike Miller

"Delaware Folk Art"

Light refreshments will be served.

7:00 pm

Port Penn

Presbyterian Church

Annual Marshland Dinner

Saturday, May 4, 2002

Port Penn Fire Hall

Seatings, 5:00 pm & 7:00 pm

Call (302)834-7525 for information

Interpretive Center Opening

Division of Parks & Recreation

May 24-September 2

Friday-Sunday

11:00 am-3:00 pm

(302) 836-2533 or (302) 834-7941

Visit the old one-room schoolhouse,
now a folk museum in Port Penn.

Future Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

Wednesday, July 3, 2002

Wednesday, October 2, 2002

7:00 pm

Port Penn

Presbyterian Church

Open to the public.

PLEASE JOIN US.



The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal

by Mike Dixon

After running the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal for nearly a century, the stockholders of the Company handed it over to the United States Government in 1919, opening a new era for the manmade waterway. It had been back in 1829 that laborers finished carving the route between the Delaware River and a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. After that, barges and vessels plied the passageway, conveying goods and doing business at Delaware City, St. Georges, and Chesapeake City. Adding to the economy of the area, farmers brought produce for shipment to city markets to these places and stores provided merchandise.

The manmade waterway, an engineering marvel across the top of the Peninsula, opened up this section for commerce and eased passage between two important regions of the nation. In the early 19th century, long before anyone dreamed of an interstate highway system or knew anything about cars jamming up I-95 in the morning rush to Wilmington, conveying goods across Delmarva could be difficult. So imagine how pleased townspeople, villagers, and farmers in the area must have been to have a canal opened right here, making transportation much easier.

Costly to build and to keep up, financial problems and changing times determined the long-term future of the route. In the last decades of the 19th century, loss of trade to railroads resulted in declining traffic. At the same time, national interests began a campaign to build a new channel, a larger and deeper one, capable of passing through bigger vessels.

Engineers surveyed seven other routes on Delmarva to accommodate this type of traffic. As various pathways were considered, they were dropped because of costs, dangers of navigation, or defense considerations. One possibility was to deepen and widen the existing C & D Canal, which was the option finally recommended by the Angus Commission. Of course, that required the government's acquisition of a private corporation.

Stockholders probably understood that enlarging the passageway was beyond the capability of the Company, so negotiations for the sale started.

Once terms were reached, the historic waterway became the property of the United States Government. The date of the transaction was August 13, 1919. After that, plans for conversion of the route to a sea level waterway were pushed forward. As these plans evolved, many aspects of life in towns and villages along the waterway were changed forever. Right away, the Army Corps of Engineers established its canal office in a two-story, white frame building in Chesapeake City.

Construction got underway in 1921. At Reedy Point, two miles south of the old entrance at Delaware City, a new and straighter entrance was cut. With the ship canal being dug through open land south of the old town, it was through this route that the big ships would eventually move. Delaware City would have to content itself with being just on a branch course.

In addition to straightening the entrance, deepening and widening work was part of the conversion to a sea level channel. The total amount of material excavated was 16 million cubic yards. As with the original canal, major problems were again encountered in excavating the Deep Cut. Constructing five vertical lift bridges (one railroad and four highway) were an important part of the works, too.

Upon completion of deepening and dredging to a depth of 12' at low tide, the locks at St. Georges and Chesapeake City were removed. At Chesapeake City, the shrill cry of the steam whistle on the pump that had filled the canal rang out one last time, as the usefulness of the great water wheel ended. T. N. Loraine, the engineer who had operated the pump for 48 years, shut it off one last time on a Saturday in 1927. The ancient waterway was finally free of tolls and locks, though most people understood this was a first step in improvements, the limited dimensions still not fulfilling the requirements of a ship channel.

Leading up to this had been the closing of another chapter in the history of the enterprise, that of the working life of many employees of the company. In March 1926, the *Every Evening* reported, "The three canal towns, Delaware City,



The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal at Chesapeake City, MD

Photograph by Bob Hill

Chesapeake City, and St. Georges were surprised yesterday when official word was received advising of the lay off on April 1, of practically all the canal employees stationed in these towns." As completion of the construction came to a close, the Army Corps of Engineers would need few of the 30 lock tenders, steam pump operators, inspectors, and other workers.

With the locks gone, the pumping station at Chesapeake City just a memory, and five massive vertical lift bridges spanning the reconstructed waterway, hundreds of people gathered to take part in the formal opening program that included participation by President Calvin Coolidge, Wilmington newspapers reported. It was a Saturday in May 1927, and as the minutes ticked by, President Coolidge sat in Washington, DC waiting to press a button that would set wheels in motion that would raise the vertical lift bridge at Reedy Point. Precisely at the appointed time, 11:30 a.m., the president put his hand on the button, telephone wires between the nation's capitol and Reedy Point pulsed, and a buzz of machinery at the new bridge caused gears to start moving. The span groaned and slowly moved upward. As it steadily rose to open the waterway, it unfurled a large flag, letting hundreds of printed greetings from the President flutter down to the assembled crowd.

Once the bridge reached its raised position, the route to Chesapeake City was open. A long line of gaily decorated craft, including the Wilson Lines, City of Chester, passed under the bridge. The fleet was greeted with cheers and flags at many points as spectators dotted the along the route. At the mouth of Back Creek, the fleet rounded about, retracing its course back to the Delaware.

The well-worn towpath where mules once clomped along pulling cargo boats east and west had given way to a wider and deeper waterway in the march of progress. The old ditch was now nothing but a fading memory. Such antiquated methods were no longer of interest in the era of the modern, government canal.

A historian and newspaper columnist, Mike Dixon has been chronicling and disseminating historical information on the Delmarva Peninsula for over two decades. He works to promote historic preservation and conservation of cultural resources, as well as to encourage others to understand, record, and study the past. His work in this area has given him the opportunity to provide leadership in the preservation of historic sites on Delmarva.

Historical Society Autumn Picnic Brunch at Lighthouse

In September, Society members enjoyed a wonderful picnic brunch on the front lawn of the Liston Range Front Lighthouse at Bayview Beach. Dr. William Duncan, owner of this historic lighthouse on the Delaware River, graciously provided his home for the event. The lively strains of "Crabmeat" Thompson's music, a combination of improvisational story telling set to guitar music, was savored by the crowd along with a brunch prepared by Helen Reader. Members enjoyed wandering through the Victorian foursquare home with chestnut wood interior wood-work up to the 4th story "light room" cupola that once held the navigational light that guided ships up the Delaware River. For those willing to brave the crisp, windy September air and the heights of the widow's walk, they were rewarded with a magnificent view of the river and surrounding countryside on all four sides. The Rear Range Light can be seen in the distance to the west on a black tower. The Liston Range, greater than 17 miles, is the longest navigational range in the United States.



Photograph by William Duncan

Sampling the Picnic Brunch



Photograph by William Duncan

Crabmeat Thompson entertains from the Lighthouse Porch

Membership Application

Port Penn Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 120
Port Penn, Delaware 19731

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Membership Categories Individual \$10.00 Joint (Husband and Wife) \$15.00 Family \$20.00 Life \$200.00

I/We would like to volunteer help with Port Penn Activities.

The Port Penn Area Historical Society Newsletter is interested in your comments and ideas. Please write or call.
 Please return this form with your remittance to the above address. For information call: (302) 762-6472.



Parks in Port Penn for 2002

by Mike Miller

Folklife Manager, Division of Parks & Recreation

The Division of Parks and Recreation's recent activities in Port Penn include completing some goals identified in the Master Plan of 1999. One of the most important goals of the plan was town beautification. The Division has undertaken two such projects to help fulfill this goal. In addition, the Historical Society's successful tree planting project will improve the village's appearance for many years.

One specific Division project involved the parcel at the corner of Stewart and Market Streets. This land was owned by New Castle County and used by St. Daniel's and First Presbyterian Churches, as well as the community at large, as a casual parking area. The County transferred the property to the Division in January, 2001. The Division then retained Eric Sturm, a professional landscape architect, to work with the Division staff and representatives from community groups to develop a suitable design. Sturm discovered that developing the parcel as a paved parking area was probably not feasible due to cost and the County's Unified Development Code. In the interest of improving the town's appearance and maintaining the parking use, however, the Division is developing its own, simple design to provide some landscaping and improved sidewalks. Senator James Vaughn will help provide the money for the sidewalks through Community Transportation Funds. Community groups involved in the design phase included St. Daniel's A.M.E. Church, the First Presbyterian Church, the Port Penn Area Historical Society, and the Port Penn Civic Association.

A second project focused on town beautification has just begun. The Division was awarded a small grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to develop a streetscape plan for its properties along Market Street. We retained Matt Spong of Landscape Architectural Services, Inc. to complete this streetscape plan. The goal of this project is to create some visual consistency, through landscaping and other amenities such as lighting, signage, and traffic control, along the village's main thoroughfare. The product of this work will be a concept plan detailing recommendations for these improvements. Such a plan will be helpful in acquiring funding in the future. The four community groups mentioned above will also be involved to review preliminary plans and make suggestions to be integrated into the final plan.

Volunteer Opportunities

Annual Marshland Dinner on Saturday, May 4 at Port Penn Fire Company

If you would like to be a volunteer helper for this year's dinner, call Linda Beck at (302) 834-7525. Helpers are needed for a wide variety of tasks: to gather and arrange flowers for tables; display photographs on the walls; set up tables and chairs; bus tables and serve; serve as hostesses and hosts; cook the snapping turtle soup; carve the hams; and the ever popular snapper pickin' evening on April 22 at 6:30 pm.

Planting Wildflowers on Interpretive Trail in late June

If you are interested in helping, call Guy Harrington at (302) 836-5880.

Installation of hardware for American flags in Port Penn in April

If you are interested in helping, call Carleen Lewandowski at (302) 834-3669.

Port Penn Area Quilt Harvest Quilters S.O.S.-Save Our Stories

Information will be forthcoming about this event. For more information on the Quilters S.O.S.-Save Our Stories project visit www.quiltcenter.org. Click on the Quilters S.O.S. icon.



Photograph by Bernard Herman

Heather Gibson interviewing Nancy Ziegler of Newark, DE for Quilters S.O.S.-Save Our Stories

Port Penn Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 120
Port Penn, Delaware 19731

Address Correction Requested