

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2021

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 2021. I hope that all of you are safe in these interesting and trying times. In spite of COVID we managed to work on a few projects this year.

The trees at Augustine Beach have been mulched and some new ones planted. Watch for a historic marker unveiling sometime this spring.

You have seen them around town: 60 historic house plaques have been installed. Thanks to Carleen Czajkowski, Jennifer Naylor, Linda Beck and Julie Harrington for their assistance, to all the Port Penn residents, and the Delaware Preservation Fund for a grant.

The headstones at the Stewart Cemetery received some TLC courtesy of Materials Conservation. We also cleaned up the landscaping and refurbished the driveway. "Funding has been provided from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Delaware Humanities as part of the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020."

We welcome two new board members, Nancy Cornish and Jeff Reed. They are both long-time members and volunteers.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued support. 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.

Throughout the year there are opportunities to volunteer. Please contact 302-836-5880 or email: info@portpenn.org if you are interested, or check out our website at www.portpenn.org.

Regards,
Wes Jones President

2021 Dates To Remember:

Annual Member's Event to be held in the fall!

Date TBD

More information to come!

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

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

- March 4th •
- June 3rd •
- December 2nd •

Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US

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

E-mail:
portpenn@gmail.com

Port Penn Historic House Plaque Project

Partially funded by a grant from the Preservation Delaware Fund.



Stewart Cemetery Grave Marker Conservation



Partially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Delaware Humanities as part of the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020.

BAY VIEW BEACH

By: Linda Beck

Bay View Beach, Delaware, a private community, is located on Reedy Island Neck about four miles south of Port Penn east of Route 9. In the 1868 *D. G. Beers Atlas*, [1] we see this neck is situated with the St. Augustine Creek to the north, Silver Run to the south and the Delaware River to the east. The Atlas shows J. B. Alrich (note: variations in spelling: Alrich, Aldrich, Alricks) as owning land in the area that was to become Bay View Beach. *A History of Bay View Beach* written by Doris Duncan notes "James A. B. Aldrich, of St. Georges Hundred was assigned this land by Orphans Court on July 23, 1854, with Jacob Erb, of Warwick Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; or his estate holding the mortgage of three thousand dollars." [2]

According to Doris Duncan, "on November 7, 1878, the will of James A. B. Aldrich was probated and his widow, Rachel B. Aldrich, became the sole owner until her will was probated on August 4, 1887". The land went through various owners and then was deeded to Sarah R. Burbridge on September 20, 1901 for a cost of three thousand dollars. "The original farm consisted of eighty acres and thirty perches (one perch equals 30 ¼ square yards) with all the buildings and improvements thereon. Together with the wild marsh adjoining the River Delawarecontaining over twenty acres additional, be the same more or less." [2]

The original farmhouse and barns were set back from the river next to the lane now leading into Bay View Beach. The house was rented to a succession of farmers who cultivated the adjacent fields growing produce, corn and hay. The farmhouse was replaced, probably by Michael O'Rourke, Sarah Burbridge's second husband whom she married sometime after 1903, and continued to be rented.

On June 18, 1903, Sarah R. Burbridge sold roughly five acres from the original parcel to the United States Government for \$1,350. Located at southern end of South New Road, this parcel was to be used for the Liston Range Front Light to replace the lighthouse ¼ mile north on Route 9. In 1904 changes were made in the shipping channels of the Delaware Bay and River and an extensive jetty was completed in the River with the necessary range lights adjusted.[3] Note: The History of the Liston Range Front Lighthouse can be found at www.portpenn.org, in the winter 2000 Port Pennings newsletter.

The layout of Bay View Beach is essentially a T shape - one road in from Route 9 towards the Delaware River and then it splits with North New Road to the left and South New Road to the right. South New Road was developed first. Cottages line the shore on both roads.

In 1910 severe storms necessitated the replacement of the overturned sea wall next to the lighthouse with a studier concrete seawall. The M. McManus Construction Company was able to complete the job in March 1911 at a cost of \$3,193.27. In 1913 five jetties were built to collect sand and support the wall from continual storms. [2] Thus began one of the ongoing challenges that have plagued Bay View Beach for years: protecting the community from an unruly and destructive Delaware River.

Starting in 1911, Sarah and Michael began selling lots from the original parcel deeded to Sarah in 1901. Early on, the cottages being built were for summer use. One of these cottages was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Chadwick who lived in Wilmington. Mr. Chadwick owned and operated the Pullman Hotel at Eleventh and Claymont Streets. On discovering Bay View Beach prior to 1907, the Chadwicks maneuvered a houseboat to shore at low tide and pulled it back to an orchard where it was used as a cottage. In 1912, they purchased land and built a permanent cottage. Building materials were brought in by boat. The cottage had no electricity or indoor plumbing. [2]

In 1924, the land, farmhouse and three cottages owned by the late Sarah R. Burbridge O'Rourke, were auctioned by the Orphans Court of Delaware. The land was sold to the Bay View Improvement Company for \$15,100. The company was incorporated, and directors voted upon. The land was paid for by the sale of stock, assessments and rents. [2]

Problems continued in the 1920's with maintaining the seawall. Many times, the Company was very low on funds and residents were asked to make the repairs themselves. In August 1933, a storm washed away ten houses on the north end and many others were beyond repair. A special directors meeting was held to decide which owners wanted to rebuild, and to inform the renters that the community was not financially able to repair or rebuild. Another storm in 1936 caused more damage. The Company at various times borrowed money from banks to make repairs. [2]

Cash flow for the Bay View Improvement Company continued to be a problem. Besides borrowing money from banks, the officers made personal loans to the Company to make necessary improvements and pay overdue bills. The depression compounded the problem making it difficult to collect rents for the cottages and the farmhouse. The directors lowered the rents in an effort to get through this difficult time. [2]

In 1931 a Community Hall was built across from the farmhouse. It was used for covered dish suppers, meetings, bingo, Sunday school, and recreational activities. The building was torn down in 1964 because it was run down, and the cost of liability insurance was high. [2]

The Triple Link Club was located south of the lighthouse. The members of the Triple Link Club were part of the Delaware Lodge of Odd Fellows. They rented the land from the Bay View Improvement Company. "In 1942 a separate battalion, the 261st Coast Artillery Battalion (Harbor Defense), a Delaware



D. G. Beers Atlas 1868 [1]



Photo courtesy Col. William Smith

BAY VIEW BEACH

National Guard unit from Sussex County used this clubhouse as a headquarters and mess hall. The troops lived in tents in the area including the lighthouse grounds. There were 90 mm harbor defense gun emplacements and a magazine, a storage shed for ammunition, on the lighthouse grounds. This unit provided security against possible German intrusion. On several occasions in 1943, groups from the Red Cross Motor Corps were driven by bus to Bay View to entertain the troops.” [2]

In 1954, the United States Government sold the lighthouse and grounds to Kathleen Skelton but maintained a right-a-way easement and easement for a modern Liston Range Front Light. [2]

Duncan reports that the community had been very close knit. Families and friends all knew each other and enjoyed activities together such as potluck dinners, an annual community picnic and crab feasts. Colette Croze, a longtime resident, remembers spending the summers catching minnows in Minnow Run on the north end and waiting for high tide to cover the mud to allow her to stay in the water 8 to 9 hours at a crack with only bathroom and food breaks – it sounds idyllic.

Colette’s grandparents Mary and Leo Dugan built the brick house she lives in now. Her grandmother was Secretary-Treasurer of the Oberly Brick Company. After Mary and Leo died, Colette’s parents Mary and Lorenzo Vincent Croze took over the property in the late 1970’s. Colette and her sister, Marianne, bought the cottage from their parents and owned it from 1988 to 1992. Colette and her late husband, Jim Bixler, became sole owners in 1992. [2] Colette has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Bay View Improvement Company since 1996 and serves as Vice President. [4]

During the 1950’s, 60’s, 70’s and 80’s, the Bay View Improvement Company continued to fund constant sea wall repairs. In the 1980’s money was borrowed to make repairs, and lots were sold for \$15,000 to help defray the expenses. Colette Croze reports that the board started selling lots in 1987. [4]

The water system came under the Public Service Commission regulations in 1959 and a new well was drilled in 1964. Artesian Water Company purchased the well, pump, water lines and the water rights of the community in 1995. The community dump at the south end was closed in 1971 and residents became responsible to hire private trash removal services. [2]

In the mid 1970’s the Salem Nuclear Plant on Artificial Island was constructed and forever changed the view for Bay View residents. It looms on the horizon during the day. Residents say its bright lights remind them of “Coney Island” or “Atlantic City”. [2] A friend used to tell me he could position his porch rocking chairs in such a way to obliterate the view behind various bushes growing in his yard in front of the river.

Looking at Duncan’s *History of Bay View Beach*, from the 1920’s on, the cottages changed hands many times. Up until the 1970’s, the cottages were mostly summer residences. [2] As time went on, owners made improvements and winterized their houses and today there are 44 residences including the farmhouse. One new house is planned for the north end of the beach. There are four

houses not owner-occupied: one is rented and three are undergoing major renovations. [4]

According to a News Journal article in March 2014, State emergency planners were hoping to use some of the Hurricane Sandy relief package to help owners of nine high-risk properties on North New Road elevate their houses about 11 feet to meet county requirements. According to Bill Anthony, President of the Bay View Improvement Company, FEMA would fund 75%, and a non-federal share of 25% would be funded by the state and homeowners. A combination of high bids and the short three year FEMA timeframe to complete the job exhausted this possibility. In 2004, the Federal Emergency Management Agency flood insurance maps estimated the water height in the river just off Bay View Beach at 13 feet above normal during a 1-in-100-year storm. [5] Colette reports two existing houses have been elevated at owner’s expense and all new houses recently built are elevated to meet county code.

Colette has lived through many storms and some come without warning. In a recent December storm, she could see the Delaware River rising and then heard water rushing under her house. She has storm shutters, but most people do not. Cars have to be moved to higher ground. The village experiences flooding caused by extremely high tides, winds and storms. Water not only spills over the sea wall but can come in on the opposite side from the adjacent marsh, flooding the only road in the village.

Today the Triple Link Club is gone with only remnants of its stone foundations seen on the shoreline. The Bay View Improvement Company no longer leases land for farming. The piers that used to extend out in the water in front of some of the cottages are all gone due to storm damage. There isn’t much of a beach at high tide but at low tide, there is 10 to 14 feet.

Bill Anthony and Colette Croze say the primary focus of the Bay View Improvement Company is the continued and costly maintenance of the sea wall, maintaining the road and cutting the grass. As far as new initiatives go, the Board is focusing on developing a sustainable plan for financing seawall repairs since each year brings greater demands for protecting the community from property damage. All of this takes a great deal of money and is funded by yearly assessments charged to the homeowners.

Nevertheless, Colette says living here is “a little bit of paradise”. She enjoys the serenity of this quiet community, swimming, crabbing, bird watching and just looking at the water. What could be better than that?

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Colette Croze and Bill Anthony, Vice President and President respectively of the Bay View Improvement Company. Colette shared her many memories, and Bill a tour of the community. They both provided their knowledgeable insights on the future of the community.

References:

1. D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware*, Published by Pomeroy & Beers, 1868
2. Doris Duncan, *A History of Bay View Beach*, Self published, 1998.
3. National Register of Historic Places, Liston Range Front Lighthouse, National Register Information Systems ID 03001386, Date listed January 14, 2004, Report prepared by Robin Boda and William H. Duncan
4. Colette Croze, interview conducted by Linda Beck, December 2020
5. Jeff Montgomery and Molly Murray, “*State seeks federal money to elevate homes*”, The News Journal, March 25, 2014



Division of Parks & Recreation Port Penn Programming 2021 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.

The Center's opening day is Saturday May 29, 2021 through Monday September 6, 2021

The center will be open for the special events listed below!

Historic Town Tour

Saturdays:

February 6, 11:00 a.m. • February 27, 3:00 p.m.

March 13, May 8, June 19, September 18 and November 13, 10:00 a.m.

Port Penn has a very unique and interesting history. In this program, we will talk about the development of the town from the 1760s through the present. Along the way, we will see a number of the historic buildings that showcase the town's story. All tours start at the Interpretive Center. They are free, but participants must register in advance through our website.

Treasures of the Delaware Public Archives

Saturday, March 20, 10:30 a.m.

The Delaware Public Archives is an incredible repository of some of the photographs, maps, documents, and other objects that highlight the incredible history of Delaware. For this program, Corey Marshall-Steele from the Delaware Public Archives will present some of these treasures to the public. This program will meet at the Interpretive Center. It is free, but participants must register in advance through our website.

Wetland Trail Walk

Saturdays:

April 10, May 15, and October 2, 10:00 a.m.

Many residents of Port Penn supplemented their income throughout the year with hunting, trapping, and fishing, all of which made use of the proximity of the wetland. For this program we will enjoy the wetland trail, talk about the wetland and its importance to Port Penn, and keep an eye out for the incredible wildlife that makes Delaware so special. All tours start at the Interpretive Center. They are free, but participants must register in advance through our website.

Port Penn Christmas Open House

Friday, December 10, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Come enjoy some holiday cheer at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. We will have the museum decorated in holiday style. Come check out the decorations, participate in a holiday activity, and enjoy some refreshments. This program is free. Come and go as you like!

Disclaimer: We don't know what the situation with Covid-19 is going to be at any point during the year.

DNREC will run as many programs as allowed, but all of this is obviously subject to change.

Check the destateparks.com website for the latest information.

2021 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

