

# PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2022

*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 2022. I hope that all of you are safe in these interesting and trying times. Despite the continuing COVID problems we worked on several projects this past year.

We have a new turtle t-shirt design; check out the web page at [www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org) to see the design and order one for yourself.

We continued to work at Augustine Beach, mulching and caring for the trees we planted several years ago. And a new historic marker was installed by the State. We also purchased two new picnic tables; look for them to be installed this spring by Fish and Wildlife.

The Waterman statue carved from wood, that we had rebuilt several years ago continues to deteriorate. We are looking at replacement options made from a more durable material.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Fall Fling Members' Event, as we celebrated our 40th anniversary at the Cleaver House. Jake Miller from Parks provided tours of the house and some historical perspective.

The Port Penn Interpretive Center is due for an update. Several of our board members are working with Parks on plans for a refresh.

And we continue to maintain Stewart Cemetery, with a new brochure talking about the Stewart family.

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](mailto:info@portpenn.org) if you are interested.

Regards, Wes Jones, President

## 2022 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 3rd**
- **June 2nd**
- **December 1st**

Open to the public  
**PLEASE JOIN US**

Visit:

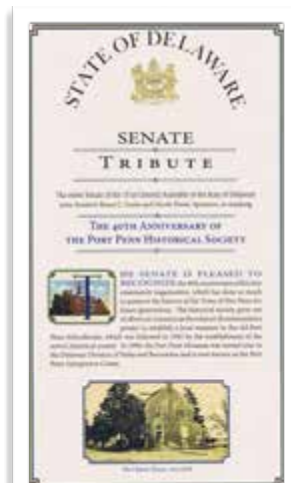
[www.portpenn.org](http://www.portpenn.org)  
for upcoming events and more information

E-mail:

[info@portpenn.org](mailto:info@portpenn.org)



Historic Marker at Augustine Beach



Member's Event "Fall Fling" at the Cleaver House



# AUGUSTINE BEACH RACEWAY- AT "THE MECCA OF PLEASURE SEEKERS"

By: Laura Lee

Augustine Beach has a colorful and storied history. A favorite public bathing spot for decades, its colorful history includes a variety of owners, ideas for development, and bathing resort iterations since the erection of the 'Brick Hotel of 1814". In 1933 the Baker Amusement Company advertised for concessionaires at the site. Their advertisement referred to it being "commonly known as the Mecca of Pleasure Seekers" proudly stated, "The Policy of the Baker Amusement Company is to continue their construction schedule until Augustine Beach and Pier has been builded [sic] into a veritable Coney Island." [1]

The Depression closed it down, but in 1949 newspapers talked of a resurgence. "The park is enjoying one of its brightest seasons since Tommy Taxis, the present owner, took over the management in 1946." The article went on to state "At that time there was little left of its former reputation except the name and the public beach. Today, boasting one of the largest picnic groves in the area, the park has rides for the kiddies, dances, and entertainment for young and old." That year, babies' beauty pageants were held, and the following year they planned on a "full-scale beauty pageant, with the selection of Miss Delaware as the final goal." [2]



News Journal, 09.01.1951

Jersey and Maryland will be on hand, including Wilmington's Perry Cooper, Howard Eaton and Hap Oliver. Other veteran gasoline jockeys slated to appear are Charlie Downs, Ray Cummins, and Erv Streets. All are well known to stock car addicts." The article went on to say, "John Carpenter, president of the track, disclosed last night that plans are underway for a cup race to be staged at the close of the summer season as the climax event of the Augustine plant's first meeting."

In September that year it was clear that Erv Streets was the man to beat. The headline was "Streets Sweeps Augustine Races" as

he added more points to his total with two victories over the Labor Day weekend. Streets won the 20 lap main event both Saturday and Sunday, and other placers included Doug Carter (Baltimore), and Tommy Johnson (Middletown). Erv went on to win the season trophy by garnering the highest number of points at the speedway. Perry Cooper held the 1-lap speed record at 27 seconds. He did so in a "hopped up stock car built by Tony Domino and Mac Mahaga." [4]

But the WOMAN to beat was Josephine Charles of Wilmington! Indeed they held a special 10-lap women's event in 1951 which she captured. Mildred Goff of Wilmington was runner up followed by Florence Sutton (New Castle). Perhaps Louise Brett was the hero however, as she "crashed into the guard rail during the race and received hospital treatment but returned to the track." [5]



1951 Ad

In 1951, the new Augustine Beach Speedway was the hot ticket in Port Penn. Cited as "One of the newest stock-car racing tracks in Delaware" [3], it was described as a half-mile clay oval, recently resurfaced. Earlier newspaper articles from 1910 to the 1930's mention the numerous Farmers Day celebrations and pleasure outings to Augustine which also sometimes included track and field meets. It is probable that this track was reinvented as the raceway which was behind the hotel.

Races were every Sunday during the season beginning at 2pm, with a 1pm warmup. Featured drivers raced in a series of five races each event day, earning points for a series champion at the end of the season. The August 4 1951 Morning News stated, "Top daredevils from Delaware, Pennsylvania, New



Aerial View 1954

The thrill of the Port Penn aces was short-lived as no mentions can be found in the newspaper record after 1952. Frequent articles appear touting the Georgetown (DE) Speedway so it looks like the races may have headed south. In the late 1950's the then Delaware Fish and Game Commission began purchasing land in the Augustine area to support continued boating and fishing activities. A recommendation was made for it to even become a State Park (1964) which never came to fruition. In 1964 the Board of Health closed the beach due to pollution. Complaints about the cessation of swimming led to increased pressure to clean up the Delaware River.



Miriam Sheldon, 18, racing at Augustine Beach News Journal, 08.31.1951

### References:

1. Morning News (Wilmington DE) Feb. 19, 1923
2. The News Journal (Wilmington DE) August 10, 1949
3. The News Journal May 15, 1952
4. News Journal May 17, 1952
5. News Journal Sep. 4, 1951

PPAHS t-shirts for sale!



A BIG thank you to the Scully family and friends for their support by posing in PPAHS's snapping turtle t-shirts!

Left to Right: Abby Darling, Michael Scully, Donna Scully, Jim Scully, Jr., Stephanie Scully, James Scully, III, Morgan Ludlam



ORDER your t-shirts today!

ALL t-shirts are \$22 each.

Additional sizes may take a bit longer to get in stock

Shipping: 1) = \$7.00, 2) = \$10.50, 3) = \$11.50 4) = \$12.00

Contact PPAHS for larger orders.



Local Pick up is available, contact PPAHS at: [info@portpenn.org](mailto:info@portpenn.org) or phone 302-584-8663

Please return this form and check to:

Port Penn Area Historical Society • P.O. BOX 120 • PORT PENN, DE 19731-0120

E-mail: [info@portpenn.org](mailto:info@portpenn.org)

Snapping Turtle:

M  L  XL  XXL  XXXL

Sturgeon:

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Great Blue Heron:

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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\$22.00 each + Shipping

Shipping (choose)

+ 1 shirt) = \$7.00

+ 2 shirts) = \$10.50

+ 3 shirts) = \$11.50

+ 4 shirts) = \$12.00

Shirts: \_\_\_\_\_

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TOTAL \$ Enclosed:

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# Division of Parks & Recreation Port Penn Programming 2022 Season

**Port Penn Interpretive Center Rt 9 and Rt 2 (Port Penn Road), Port Penn, Delaware 19731 • 302.834.7941**

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

For more information: Call (302) 834.7941 • [www.destateparks.com](http://www.destateparks.com) • e-mail: [jacob.miller@delaware.gov](mailto: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 will be open for the special events listed below!**

## **Historic Town Tour**

*Saturdays: 10:00 a.m.*

February 26, April 2, May 14, July 2, August 27, September 10 and November 19

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 are encouraged to register in advance by calling our office at 302-834-7941.

## **Wetland Trail Walks**

*Saturdays: 10:00 a.m.*

May 7, and June 18

The surrounding wetlands has been incredibly important to Port Penn's people for over a century. Come walk the wetland trail with us as we learn about the seasonal economy of Port Penn, and enjoy the beauty of the surrounding area! The program is free, but participants are encouraged to register in advance by calling our office at 302-834-7941.

## **Port Penn Christmas Open House**

Friday, December 16, 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. We will also have some crafts for kids, as well as a small gift for each child that comes. 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. We also anticipate running some other new programs this year, but they are contingent upon other factors that have not been set up yet. Check the [destateparks.com](http://destateparks.com) website for the latest information.

## **NEW: Kids Craft Club**

Port Penn has a fascinating history! This year we are putting together a new series for middle school kids. At each program, we will have a small craft related to some aspect of Port Penn's history. Come have a great time, and also learn about this history of this great community! These events are totally free, but advance registration is required so that we make sure we have enough materials for everyone. Participants can register by calling Jake at 302-834-7941. All children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

### **•Net-Making•**

*Thursday, June 23, 3:00 p.m.*

Port Penn fishermen relied on their nets! Many fishermen wove their own nets, and repaired them on their own, too. In this program, we will learn how to make a simple net, while also talking about the local Port Penn fishermen.

### **•Flower Pot Crab•**

*Thursday, July 14, 3:00 p.m.*

Crabbing has long been an important part of Port Penn's economy, and many locals still spend time on the river catching crabs! In this program, we will learn how to make a crab out of a flower pot, while also talking about how crabbers work in Port Penn.

### **•Thaumatrope•**

*Thursday, August 18, 3:00 p.m.*

For this program we go way back to the 1860s! Folks in the middle of the 1800s often entertained themselves by making "thaumatrope." Don't know what a thaumatrope is? Come find out!

### **•Making a Simple Duck Call•**

*Saturday, October 8, 1:00 p.m.*

Duck hunting was a major activity in Port Penn in the early 1900s, and is still a popular leisure activity today. In this program, we will learn how to make a simple duck call, while also talking about the art of duck hunting.

## ***2022 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](mailto:info@portpenn.org)

