

PORT PENNINGS

Spring 2026

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.

A Message from the Board President

As we close out 2025, I want to extend sincere thanks to our members, donors, volunteers, and partners for your continued support of the Port Penn Area Historical Society. This year brought steady progress and a shared commitment to preserving and telling Port Penn's stories.

One of our most significant accomplishments in 2025 was the progress made on the Waterman statue project. With the support of individual donors, a Community Reinvestment Fund grant, and careful financial planning, the statue was installed on December 29, 2025. We look forward to celebrating this important addition to Port Penn's landscape with a public dedication in the spring. Please watch for details in the coming months.

Beyond the statue, the Society has remained active throughout 2025: maintaining the Stewart Cemetery, continuing our flag-flying and banner project, caring for the Augustine Beach trees, and supporting the DE Division of Parks during a major restoration project at the Port Penn Interpretive Center. These efforts reflect the dedication of a small but deeply committed group of volunteers and board members.

As we look ahead to 2026, we are excited about the reopening and refresh of the Port Penn Interpretive Center, the Waterman statue dedication, and opportunities to welcome members and visitors to new programs and events. We are also always eager to welcome new board members and volunteers who share our passion for Port Penn's history.

Thank you for being part of this work. Your support makes it possible to preserve the past while building a bright future for Port Penn.

Warm regards, Wes Jones, President Port Penn Area Historical Society

2026 Dates To Remember:

Waterman Statue Dedication:

May 17, 2026

More information to come!

Historical Society Quarterly Meetings

Port Penn Interpretive Center@
6:00 p.m.

- March 5th •
- June 4th •
- September 3rd •
- December 3rd •

Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US

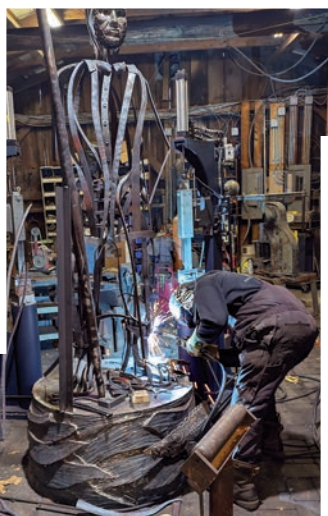
Visit:

www.portpenn.org

for upcoming events and more
information

E-mail:

info@portpenn.org



Various photographs courtesy of Tracy Beck, Bob Meadows, and Julie Harrington



THE WATERMAN STATUE ARRIVES IN PORT PENN

By: Tracy Beck

We are pleased to announce the installation of the new Waterman statue at the Port Penn Interpretive Center.

This sculpture marks an important new chapter in how PPAHS tells the story of Port Penn and its deep connection to the community. After the deterioration of two earlier wooden Waterman statues, the Society undertook a careful and deliberate search for an artist who could honor the legacy of the waterman while offering a fresh and lasting interpretation. Visits to several artists and studios ultimately led the Society to commission metal sculptor Matthew Harris.

Rather than creating a strictly literal figure, Harris was asked to design an open-concept sculpture, one that conveys meaning through both form and suggestion. The finished piece blends abstract and realistic elements, inviting viewers to engage with the work from multiple angles and to reflect on what is implied as much as what is shown. The intent is not only to represent the waterman, but to suggest the enduring relationship between people, place, and the surrounding waterways.

As the artist explains:

“In sculptural work, I often try to convey the spirit and essence of a subject or form through a duality of abstract and realistic forms. In doing so, I lay out a visual invitation for the viewer to engage with the work and solve the missing puzzle pieces. I hope to provoke further thought about what may



*Matthew Harris posing with his sculpture at the Port Penn Interpretive Center.
Photo Courtesy Linda Butler*

also be missing in the past and future. Public art is meant to provoke, preserve, and honor themes of culture.”

The statue is designed to develop a natural rusted patina over time. This is an intentional part of the finished look. The process may take up to three years, allowing the surface to change gradually in response to the environment. Once the sculpture reaches its intended

appearance, a clear protective coating (Permalac) will be applied to preserve the patina and protect the metal going forward.

The Waterman statue is located outside the Interpretive Center, where visitors are encouraged to spend a few moments with the piece.

A public dedication is planned for May 17, 2026, when weather allows for a proper community celebration. PPAHS looks forward to welcoming the public to that event and to continuing the conversation about Port Penn’s history, culture, and maritime traditions.

This project would not have been possible without the continued support of Society members, donors, volunteers, and community partners. Your commitment to preserving Port Penn’s history, and to supporting thoughtful, lasting public interpretation, makes projects like this possible. We look forward to celebrating together at the spring dedication and to continuing this work with you in the years ahead.

THE LIGHTHOUSES OF PORT PENN

By: Wes Jones

When we think of lighthouses, what immediately comes to mind is a lonely tower along the coast, warning ships of dangerous rocks or shallow seas. But there is another type of light that is used for navigation.

Range lights or leading lights are a pair of lights, a front light and a rear light, used to indicate a safe route through a channel. The lights are a distance apart and at different elevations, with the front light lower than the rear light. When they are aligned they indicate the bearing the ship should follow.

Over the years there have been several ranges near Port Penn helping ships navigate the channels of the Delaware

Bay. Some are gone and some remain. Some were substantial buildings of which nothing is left, while in two cases the lights were moved and became a part of a new range.

There was the Old Reedy Island Range: the front range light was on Reedy Island, and the rear range light was located in Port Penn on Congress Street. There was the Port Penn Range: the front range light was just off Route 9 south of Augustine Beach (look for the historic marker!) and the rear range light was located out Port Penn Road. Still existing is the Baker Range: the front range light was located in the marsh just north of Port Penn while the rear range light tower remains just east of the sluiceway north of Port Penn.

One range remains in use today and is probably familiar to the residents of Port Penn. This is the Liston Range. These lights are perhaps the most interesting and relevant today since both the front and rear lights still exist and are visible. The Liston Range was put into operation in October 1904, to replace the nearby Port Penn Range. This range is the first that mariners see when heading up the Delaware River. The front range light is located at Bayview Beach and the rear range light is located on Port Penn Road near the intersection with Rt 13.

Front Range Light

In 1903 the government purchased five acres of land for the Liston Range Front Light. The first light was just a post holding a galvanized-iron headlight lantern. The permanent lighthouse structure was completed in 1908; it was a two-story, framed dwelling with a hipped roof, topped by a watchroom and lantern room. The bathroom was attached to the oil house and required an outdoor excursion.

The first keeper of the Liston Front Range Lighthouse was George W. Duncan who had been the last keeper at Port Penn Front Range Lighthouse. His grandson, the late Dr William Duncan, eventually bought this lighthouse in 1998. This is the same year that he had discovered the remnants of the Port Penn Front Range lighthouse in the marsh along Route 9 (see above). Dr Duncan hosted two Annual Members' Events of the Port Penn Area Historical Society in the lighthouse.

Liston Range Rear Light

The Liston Rear Range Lighthouse is the tallest in Delaware and the one farthest from the water, standing three miles inland. This is also the longest range on the Delaware, and the original Fresnel lens is still in use because of its power.



Figure 1 (above) Port Penn Range Front Light, located in Bayview Beach [1]



Figure 2 (above) The Liston Range Rear Light in its original location on Port Penn Road. It was then known as the Port Penn Rear Range Light. [2]

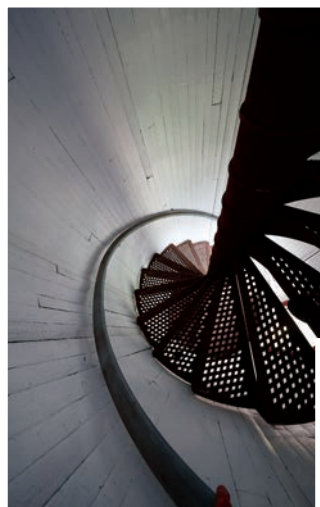


Figure 4 (above) The stairs inside the Liston Range Rear Light. [4]



Figure 3 (above) The Liston Range Rear Light from the ground [3]



Figure 5 (above) The light and lens of the Liston Range Rear Light [5]



Figure 6 View of the Hickory Grove cemetery from the top of the Liston Range Rear Light [6]

In 1904 temporary lights were established on the Liston Range. The first light here was a 100-foot-tall post bearing a daymark and topped with a lantern.

The permanent light was established a few years later. The 120-foot iron tower originally served as the Port Penn Range Rear Light, located out Port Penn Road near the split with Pole Bridge Road.

The Lighthouse Board recognized that it would be far less expensive to move the existing tower than to build a new one. By the middle of 1907, the tower, along with a new dwelling, barn, oil house, and privy, had been completed at the site. About 1913 a house for the assistant keeper had been erected. Sometime around 1930 the light was electrified and automated, and the keeper's dwellings sold to private individuals.

In 2013 the lighthouse itself was sold to a private individual, and again in 2020 to the current owner.

In the summer of 2025 several members of the Port Penn Area Historical Society were invited to visit the lighthouse. Climbing more than 150 steps, on a hot day, in the sun, inside a black iron tower, is not fun. The view from the top, however, is exhilarating.

Notes

1. Photo courtesy of Wes Jones
2. National Archives, photo 26-LG-21-26b, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/45693705>
3. Photo courtesy of Tracy Beck
4. Photo courtesy of Bob Meadows
5. Photo courtesy of Tracy Beck
6. Photo courtesy of Wes Jones
7. For additional information about the Liston Range Front light see <https://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=464>
8. For additional information about the Liston Range Rear light see <https://lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=463>

Division of Parks & Recreation Port Penn Programming 2026 Season

For more information: Call (302) 834.7941 • www.destateparks.com • e-mail: jacob.miller@delaware.gov

All programs meet in the parking lot for the Interpretive Center, unless otherwise indicated.

Historic Town Tours

Saturday, February 21 and October 17, 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, March 28, April 11, and December 12, 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, June 6 and July 11, 6:00 p.m.

Port Penn has a fascinating history going back to the 1760s! Join our park historian as we walk through town and explore how this town developed, plus many of the stories that highlight life in this historic community.

Wetland Trail Walks

Saturday, February 28, November 14 & December 12, 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, March 14, 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 16 and August 22, 6:00 p.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. We will also talk about the elements of the seasonal economy that was so important to the residents of Port Penn throughout much of its history.

Port Penn Museum Reopening

Sunday, May 17, 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

The Port Penn Interpretive Center has been closed for the last couple of years for some much needed maintenance. Join us as we reopen the museum at this special event. The event will feature an official unveiling of the new Waterman statue by the Port Penn Area Historical Society, the chance to tour the museum, and a Historic Town Tour with our Park Programs Manager.

Explorer's Walk

Saturday, November 14, 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!

Kids Craft Club

Kids! Come try your hand at a fun craft, and learn about the wetland that surrounds Port Penn. All programs are free, and meet at the Interpretive Center.

These are the crafts and dates:

Make a Cattail – Tuesday, June 16, 2:00 p.m.

Come make a cattail and find out why these plants are valuable to our wetlands.

Make a Flower Pot Crab – Tuesday, June 30, 2:00 p.m.

Paint a flower pot to look like a crab, and find out about crabbers in the Delaware River.

Water Filtration Challenge – Tuesday, July 21, 2:00 p.m.

See if you can filter water as well as a wetland!

Origami Jumping Frogs – Tuesday, August 18, 2:00 p.m.

Make a paper frog that actually jumps!

Port Penn Interpretive Center Refresh

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States this year, we are going to be working on a project of updating the exhibits at the Interpretive Center. We hope for as much community feedback and involvement in this process as possible! Like our Facebook page for updates as the project progresses!

PPAHS 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

