

The
Portage Area Historical Society
Newsletter



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

February 2007

For the year 2007, a trio of collections highlight the Station Museum's first floor displays. Items on loan from Mr. Robert "Bing" James, Mr. Stanley Oravec, and Steve Gavlak, offer a wide variety of items for visitors to enjoy. Bing's sports memorabilia varies from a 1944 Steelers program to Portage Area sporting events dating back to the 60s. Many programs and newspaper articles have been set out for visitors to look through and reminisce. Tiffany style lamps, large stained glass pieces, and paintings show off Stanley's artistic gift. His eye for detail and his love of colors come through in his creations. Steve opened his home for us to choose from his vast collection of memorabilia. His own mini-museum contains personal treasures and many items that showcase our town. Stop by and check out the new displays.

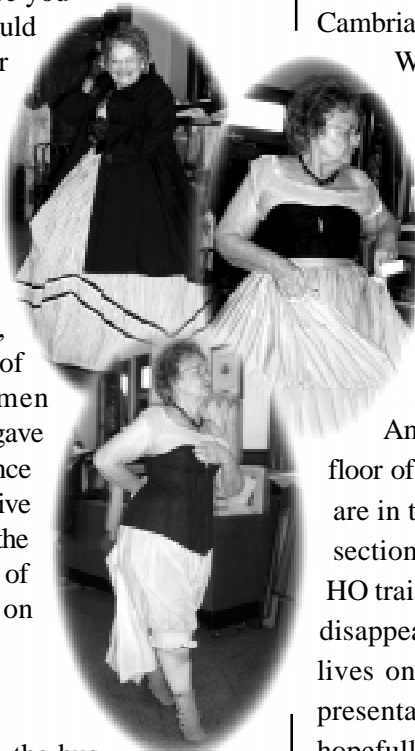


Ladies' Tea

On April 29th the PAHS plans to host a new event, a Ladies' Tea. The 36 tickets for the tea are being offered to you first, the members of the PAHS. Reservations may be made by calling the museum, 814-736-9223, the cost is \$15. If anyone has a special cookie or sandwich recipe you would like to make for the event, we would love to show off and share your creations.

Fashion Show

On November 5th, ladies from the Blair County Historical Society amazed the audience with their "Bosom Buddies to Bustles" fashions from the past. During their performance, ladies modeled the layers and layers of clothing worn by 19th century women and explained how the undergarments gave shape to the female form. The performance made every lady in the audience appreciative of today's styles! On November 4, 2007, the BCHS will present the last in their series of four fashion shows. Mark that date on your calendar!



Light Tour

Each year more and more people ride the bus and join in museum festivities for PAHS's annual Christmas

Light Tour, and this year was no exception. On December 16th, over 450 people toured the town to see the beautiful Christmas lights of Portage. One hundred-fifty children received gift packs from Santa. The Portage Community Band played Christmas carols and free pizza and cookies were passed out after each tour. Many, many thanks to the dozens of area businesses for the donations and for helping us make this annual event such a big success.



Library Additions

Two books recently sent to the museum by Mr. Walt Wood, a native of South Fork now living in retirement in southern California, have been added to our library. Mr. Wood, a marketing food technologist for Kraft and a college professor, created the original Weight Watcher frozen dinners in 1967 and developed over 30 items for Kraft Foods. His family has lived in the Bedford-Cambria-Clearfield area from the early 1700s to today. "Lucky Walter – A story of a quiet mountain boy who lived life to the fullest" is an autobiography about Walt Wood, who grew up in South Fork and went on to lead an interesting and adventurous life. "Thanks Mom and Dad – A Family History" can prove to be a model for anyone who is writing their own family history. Both of these books can be purchased via the Internet. Go to BuyBooksOnTheWeb.com.

New Display

An exciting project is presently materializing on the second floor of the museum. Charles Edwards and Frank Serbian are in the process of constructing a large train layout, with sections fashioned to look like the mainline. The vintage HO trains, on permanent loan from Charles's collection, will disappear under the table when not in use. Charles, who lives only a block from the Station Museum, plans to do presentations to the public upon request. When completed, hopefully sometime late this summer, the layout will become a permanent second floor display.



School Programs

We continue to expand our local history awareness programs into the elementary school, having something in place in almost every grade. Students recently gathered in the elementary auditorium to listen as fellow third graders shared their newly learned information about the history of their town. The four essay winners were presented with a collectible of the Mountain House and mural coloring contest winners received certificates and gifts from local businesses. The top mural winner, Michaela Pesta, is shown holding her colored mural. What did they learn? **Brett Michaels:** Portage 100 years ago was different than today. **Steven Panick:** Portage was popular long time ago because there were lots of mines and lots of jobs. **Tesa Mathieson:** I learned that there was a flu virus and when it spread all over, the Mountain House became a hospital.

Sebastian Hochrein: It took a man 20 minutes to paint a 14 foot cheerleader on the wall of the Mountain House.

Samantha Fedorko: The Keystone Hotel used to be where the Portage Bank is now.



Memorial Plaque

What better way to remember a loved one than with a gold plaque displayed at the Station Museum. Plaques can be purchased for \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1000.

Portage Area Historical Society Board

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Visit our Website @

www.portagestationmuseum.org

New winter hours:

11 am - 4 pm

Wednesday-Saturday

Construction of Lee Street Arch - Photo submitted by Ruth Richardson



Thanks to Mr. Robert Sease for providing the pictures and information for the following article.

Red Man's Grove

Today we know it as the Portage Football Stadium parking lot, but years ago it was a popular gathering place called Red Man's Grove. Red Men were members of a Major Benevolent and Fraternal Order. Whether the property was owned or leased by the order is not known. Perhaps since there were so many parcels of unused land, they took it upon themselves to clean the area for the use of their organization as well as the community as a whole. They erected a huge enclosed pavilion for dancing. Several smaller buildings were put up for a kitchen, for dining, and for vendors of refreshments, novelties, and souvenirs.

The stadium site was an open field where the Portage Independent baseball and football teams played their home games. Portage being the largest town in Cambria County, with the exception of Johnstown, and situated on the Main Line of the



Pennsylvania Railroad, made it a thriving community. People from the smaller towns flocked to Portage by train to participate and enjoy the many activities available here. Three or four big circuses appeared each summer and set up at the grove. Each circus had a parade that traversed the streets of town before their performances under the big top. They had cages of animals on wheels, drawn by teams of well-groomed horses, clowns, acrobats and painted ladies riding horse back. The parade was sometimes led by two bands, one white, one black, and a steam calliope always brought up the rear. Many carnivals came to the grove in summer months, but the Red Men always reserved the Fourth of July as their day. Families with picnic baskets started arriving early. There were baseball games in the morning and races for children and adults. The Red Men staged a western type sham battle in the afternoon. Some of the

members wore authentic Indian costumes; shoulder length black wigs, beaded shirts, and headbands with feathers. Their chief wore a luxurious feathered headdress. Other members were outfitted in cowboy garb; buck skins with fringes on the sleeves and pants. They all carried bows and arrows or rifles and they all rode horseback. Many members owned horses, some had to borrow or rent from one of the four livery stables in town. The Indians rode bare back or with a blanket thrown on the back of their horse, cowboys used

saddles. For the event they used the playing field. They pursued each other up and down the field, firing their weapons, naturally blanks were used. But men would fall from the horses apparently after having been shot. I think the cowboys

always defeated the Red Skins, just as in the make believe days of the silent movies.

The Red Men sponsored a junior baseball program and supplied uniforms and equipment for four teams, the Lions, Tigers, Wild Cats, and the Cubs. This group also endorsed the football teams. The first football team was called the Portage Independents, but sometime after WWI, it was reorganized and became the Portage Quakers. About this time the Portage Bulldogs was organized by younger men of the community. It boasted one of the best won and lost records in the state. The Bulldog organization existed

longer than any independent team in the state. The Olympics was another Independent Football team. The schedule for games at the grove was so crowded, the Olympics had to use a field in Jamestown, Portage Twp. The Quakers and Bulldogs alternated their games on Sunday afternoons. The local high school team also played here on Sunday afternoons during the summer.



The last big celebration at the grove took place on Labor Day 1915. All organizations, churches and various groups took part. The Portage Lodge Loyal Order of Moose, one of the towns more progressive organizations, was the chief

sponsor for the outing. It began with a parade through town. The Moose had upwards of 100 members in a line of march. They wore white linen suits, Panama hats, and white shirts with red knitted ties. The Moose emblem was worn on lapels and each carried a natural wood cane. Also in the parade, headed by the old Portage Concert Band, were the Italian Society, Scouts, and church groups. Picnics, races, and other contests, with dancing into the wee hours, were the order of the day. Lesser events were held at the Grove until our involvement in WWI. Athletes continued to play their games there until the Moose Field came into existence on Route 53 in the early 20s at the present site of the shopping center and parking lot.



Mr. William Callahan's memories of Red Man's Grove: As youngsters my brother and I visited Red Man's Grove to see the horses and animals the horse traders had to trade. I recall one trader by the name of Lightener Wilt. He lived in an old bakery wagon. It was faded but you could still see

the slogan "Baked in Sight by Men in White." A most likeable fellow, he would trade most everything. He sold me a dog for ten cents. There had to be a spring or water supply in the area, because in the winter someone would dam it up and it was a great place to ice skate and to race your auto – put on the brakes and slide in a circle.

Mrs. Grace Crichton remembers it being used for festivities and she also remembers that many people used it to graze their cows in later years when it was not so busy. She said a lot of people who settled here after immigrating from other countries held on to the tradition of keeping a cow or two



on hand that they kept in a shed on their property, but they took them down to the grove to graze during the day. One of the older men would watch over the animals while the others went to work in the local mines.

Mr. Robert Sease remembers the grove being full of crab apple trees. Lightener Wilt would let young Robert and his buddies ride his horses through the grove. The prickly trees would often scratch the boys and occasionally even knock them to the ground.

Anonymous submitted: Me and my buddies kept a ladder hidden in a tree and would use it to go over the fence to see the football and baseball games. I also remember that at night the grove was used as a lover's lane.



Share your memories, photos, and memorabilia with us and we'll share them with the community.

2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Your membership is important to us, so if you have not already done so, renew your membership for 2007

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Amount Enclosed: _____

Mark the category you prefer.

() Annual Member \$5.00 () Life Member \$50.00 () Student Member \$2.00

() Life Sponsor \$100.00 () Life Benefactor \$250.00

Make all checks payable to: **Portage Area Historical Society**

400 Lee Street Portage, PA 15946

