

The *Portage Area Historical Society*  
**Newsletter**



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

May 2007

“Very Elegant”, “A Martha Stewart Event” and “Worthy of Bon Appetit Magazine” were comments heard from ladies who attended the first annual Ladies Spring Tea. The High Tea began with fruited scones served with blueberry butter, lemon curd, and gooseberry and rhubarb jellies. Poppysed radish, cucumber, and tropical ham salad sandwiches along with tortilla ham and black bean and pepper jelly rollups followed. Seventeen different desserts tickled the fancy of all.

Background music provided by high school students Barbara Kulik, Meagan Lamar and Sarah Hochrein under the direction of Ms. Jen Shuty entertained the ladies throughout the meal.

Prizes from Perfect Images and Nails by Heather were

drawn for ladies who wore

hats, but everyone

received a gift. The success of this first tea confirms plans for future teas, hats encouraged, of course.

### Trains

The train setup on the second floor progresses nicely. A project that started with two gentlemen, Charles Edwards and Frank Serbian, now entertains four men who work daily on their Mainline design. The trains are up and running and several group presentations have already been done. Next project phase is landscaping and scenery. Mr. Al Moore, who enjoys the hobby of constructing miniature buildings, is creating structures related to the Mainline. We thank Mr. Robert “Bing”

James for funding the entire train project. Bing gave us permission to sell most of the sports programs he donated to the museum with the condition that the money be used for the new train setup. Because of Bing’s generosity, the layout, scenery, and landscaping have extended far beyond original plans.



### PASD Donation

In April, the Portage Area Historical Society received a check for \$203 from the Portage Area School District. Our organization thanks the

Portage teachers for donating the money from their “Dress Down Day” to the museum.

### Community Yard Sale

Museum board members busy themselves working on forms, advertising, and a map as the June 16<sup>th</sup> Portage Community Yard Sale rapidly approaches. Last year almost 100 participants set up for the big day. This is our one big fundraiser and we do host a sale at the museum, so if you have items to donate, call 736-9223



### Summerfest

During Summerfest weekend, August 10, 11, and 12, the Portage Railroad Museum will proudly display paintings and stained glass pieces by Mr. Stanley Oravec. This octogenarian, a most talented artist, graciously offered to share his creations with the community. We presently have six pieces on display in 2 large showcases on the first floor of the museum. For Summerfest, Stanley’s works should fill the entire first floor. Museum hours for the three days are tentatively set for Friday, Saturday and Sunday, noon to four.





**Brady Huschak and Maddy Single, student photographers, point to one of the pictures they took for their Walmart sponsored project.**



**6th Graders at the Lemon House**

**5th Graders at the museum**



## Educational Programs

The Historical Society and the Portage Elementary School put a bit of local history into the second grade, thanks to a grant from Walmart. Each year second graders do a walking tour through Portage. This year before the tour, students were presented with “Then and Now” posters of what they would see on their tour and of what was there many years ago. The posters show buildings like Caddy’s and a 75 year old picture of the Trout Run Supply Company – SUV vs horse and buggy, the Rivoli Theatre that was torn down to make room for the Portage National Bank parking lot, the Centre Towne Plaza once the Portage Joint School, and others. Irene Huschak wrote the grant for the Historical Society and Becky Single, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, coordinated the project. Many thanks to Mr. Robert Sease for sharing his photos for reproduction.

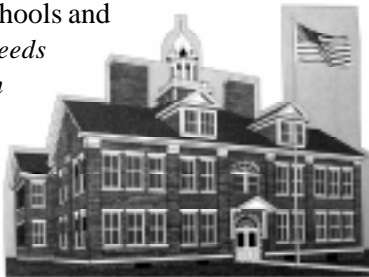
Fifth graders learned some local history during their field trip to the museum where National Park Education Specialist, Gregory Zaborowski taught them about the history of Portage and the Allegheny Portage Railroad. The PAHS also helped organize a trip for the 6<sup>th</sup> graders to the Lemon House as a follow-up to last year’s trip to the museum. Many thanks to the Rotary for financing both of these wonderful educational experiences.

## Memorial Plaque

Two new names have been added to the Memorial Plaque Board, Robert G. Weber and Anna Kostan. 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.

## New Collectible

The 2007 collectible, soon to be on sale, focuses on one of the many schools from our area’s past. The 1909 Caldwell Avenue School, a magnificent educational facility, burned to the ground in 1931. The following gives some insight into the history of our schools and the 1909 building. *(The PAHS needs help finding a good photograph of the football stadium for next year’s collectible. If you have or know of anyone who has a picture of the stadium, please share your photo with us.)*



(Information and photos from “Portrait of a Town Portage, PA 1890-1990”)

Unless you have read “Portrait of a Town Portage, PA 1890-1990,” chances are you are unaware that 34 schools once graced the Portage area. Each little community needed a place to educate their youngsters, a place close enough for kids to walk to school. So, as the population grew and the area expanded, new schools continually popped up throughout the Main-line area. The first, the Itel School on Munster Road, was

established in 1829 by local farmers. Classes were 10-15 minutes long as all eight grades occupied one room.

- 1829 Itel School
- 1854 Burgoon School
- 1859 First Cramer School
- 1870 Jamestown#1
- 1895 Plane (Jamestown#2)
- 1906 Jamestown#3
- 1877 Lower Benscreek
- 1890 Davis
- 1891 Diehl (Upper Benscreek)
- 1896 First Puritan
- 1910 Benscreek#3
- 1916 Benscreek#4
- ? Sonman
- 1893 Second Cramer
- 1898 Salt Block
- ? Redbird
- 1901 Second Puritan
- 1903 Fiddler’s Green (Trout Run?)
- 1905 Miller Shaft
- 1905 Mountain or Guiguetown
- ? Prospect
- 1868 Portage Boro
- 1890 Portage Boro
- 1904 Springhill
- 1909 Portage Boro
- 1915 Portage Boro High School
- 1915 St. Joseph (elementary & high school)
- 1924 Sacred Heart School & Kindergarten
- 1927 Portage Township High School
- 1932 Portage Boro High School
- 1947 Bethany Kindergarten
- 1959 Portage Area High School
- 1974 Portage Area Elementary Middle School
- 1975 Wesleyan Holiness Academy



**The Diehl School**



**Benscreek Third Building**



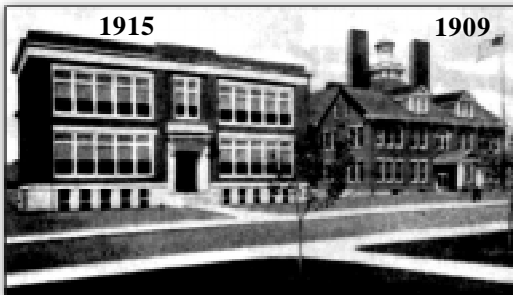
**Stella Bem**

## Caldwell Avenue Schools

In the 1880s the Portage School District erected a two-room school building on Caldwell Avenue. One male and one female teacher earned \$50 and \$40, respectively. School ran six months a year. In 1900, the school expanded to



four rooms, two upstairs, two downstairs, with two classes in each. Portage's rapidly growing population demanded more classroom space, so in 1909 a new 12 room building, able to accommodate seven to eight hundred students, opened to the right of the old school. The red brick two and a half story building stood close to the road, hosted two dormers, and an elaborate bell tower that rose above two huge chimneys.



In 1915 a new brick building replaced the 1900 school with eight classrooms, an auditorium, and a gymnasium. When school

was not in session, townspeople used the school for church services, entertainment, and other community activities.

About the same time the district purchased a house in front of the school from Irvan M. Oldham. It was used as a residence by several principals and later as the school's Home Economics Department.

(\*text and photos of the fire submitted by Gary Yusko\*)

\*On December 29, 1931 a devastating fire burned the 1909 grade school building to the ground and damaged the new gymnasium located behind the school. The fire of unknown origin broke out at 5:10 pm and when the fire companies arrived the flames were already shooting through the doors. A

delay caused by the inability to get water from fire



**On December 29, 1931 a devastating fire burned the 1909 grade school building**

hydrants and later low water pressure made it impossible to save the school. The firemen concentrated their efforts on saving the high school building located a few feet away and the gymnasium located behind the 1909 school. The firemen sprayed water on the high school building from the rooftop of the gymnasium and were able to save the high school building and the gymnasium with very limited damage.

The school district put in place an emergency plan for all students to attend part time sessions in the high school building. Grades seven to twelve attended school from 7:25 to 12:45 and grades one to six attended school from 1:00 to 5:30. The students finished the school year with this schedule and also had to continue the same schedule during the 1932-33 school year until the new school building was completed.

The Portage school board decided to convert the 1915 high school building into the grade



school and to build a new 12-room high school at the eastern end of the gymnasium. The new high school opened on September 5, 1933 for the start of the new school year. The school district's insurance covered \$40,913 of the loss. The new school was built and finished for approximately \$42,500. This high school building and gymnasium are still in use today by local businesses.\*

The board bought a plot of ground west of the school property which contained an opera house named Pringle Hall. The front, the old part of the building, was moved behind the school and after

### Class Song of 1916

Thru the three short years we've spent in Portage High,  
Midst the scenes our hearts will ever hold so dear,  
It will drive away all care and sadness,  
When we turn our memories to Portage High.

We must bid farewell to pleasant years now past,  
Not farewell to friendship that we'll still hold fast.  
Though the coming tears may soon our paths divide,  
Yet "Maroon and Gold" will always be our pride.

### Chorus:

This the Class of Sixteen; noble girls and boys;  
We have worked together, shared each other's joys.  
Never be discouraged if you are falsely blamed,  
"Always build for character and not for fame."

some renovations used for classes, band practice and as a gymnasium. In 1954 the building was moved to Faren Street and is now the Senior Citizens Center.

The high school remained on Caldwell Avenue until 1959, the elementary until 1974. Now most Portage students find themselves atop the hill with the most awesome view of their town and the Mainline area.

### Portage Area Historical Society Board

Regis Huschak - President

Ruth Richardson - Vice President

Rosemary Pavelko - Treasurer

Mary Kostan - Recording Secretary

Irene Huschak - Corresponding Secretary

Mary Lou George, John Havrilla, Barbara Havrilla, Betty

Cann, Ginny McDonnell, and Linda Miko



We recently received this wonderful old photo of a Portage fire truck from the Victorian Vandergrift Museum, Vandergrift, PA. An attached note stated: "We received this photo with a large donation of fire department memorabilia and thought it would have a more appropriate home with your society. There was no information available as to date of the photograph, although it was with a number of other photographs of Seagrave Fire Trucks."

Mary Lou George researched the Internet and found that the Portage Fire Company purchased the 1948 fire truck for \$23,000. For more information check out the Portage Fire Department's web site at [www.portagefire.net/PastApparatus.html](http://www.portagefire.net/PastApparatus.html).

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

Museum hours: 12 pm to 4 pm - Tuesday through Saturday - Visit our Website @ [www.portagestationmuseum.org](http://www.portagestationmuseum.org)

## 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**

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