



The HO scale model train layout on the second floor of the Portage Station Museum has boosted attendance significantly since the trains began running several months ago. People viewing the layout for the first time are surprised by its size and the attention given to detail. Charles Edwards and his assistants spent hundreds of hours trying to make the display one of the best in the area. Personal touches include a miniature Portage Railroad Station (Museum), the Horseshoe Curve, area road and building signs, rock structures with coal seams, and hundreds of trees on the mountains. Visitors seem to spend as much time studying the scenery as they do watching the trains move around the tracks. Ken Billings of Billings Lumber Co. recently built two platforms so youngsters can get a bird's eye view of the entire layout.

Recently local train buffs have been bringing their own model trains to the museum to run them on the new tracks. A special contributor David Mills, a truck driver and train enthusiast from Washington D.C., carries his own trains in his truck cab. He stopped by after a delivery to Gamesa and took his trains into the museum where he and Charles spent the afternoon running them. Mills said he had a great time and was most impressed with the display.

With the success of the new train display we now need volunteers to help Charles keep the trains running. Anyone interested in learning to run the trains at the museum, call 736-9223. With the model train display about 95-percent complete, Charles, along with volunteers Frank Serbian, and Al Moore, plan to work through the winter to complete the project. A grand opening with a weekend of festivities is planned for next spring.

## New Display Area

For many years the Historical Society used the Freight Station for storage. A car crashed into the building some years ago destroying some of the items inside and a leaking roof caused damage to other items. Fortunately the new owner of the building repaired the roof and permitted the society to continue storing items inside. Now through



an agreement with Bob and Bonnie Fox, who plan to open a tearoom in the former Schoenfeld's building, the treasures collecting dust in storage will be displayed. This exciting arrangement benefits both the society and the Foxes, but especially the community where diners will be able to enjoy the historic items on display.

## Yard Sale

The 11th annual Community Yard Sale attracted hundreds of bargain hunters to the streets of Portage this past June 16th. The wonderful weather pleased shoppers, participants, and local businesses alike. The Bakery McDonalds, and Subway all reported a boost in sales. The volunteer fire company sold 700 subs by lunchtime, a sizable increase in its usual monthly sales. Each year for the last 11 years participation in the community yard sale has been increasing. This year for the first time the number of registered sites went over 100. Many thanks to everyone who helped make this historical society fundraiser a tremendous success.



David Mills smiles for the camera as he runs his trains at the museum.



It is with a sad heart that the Portage Area Historical Society notes the passing of Robert "Bing" James. He was one of our most generous supporters, having funded the entire train layout. He will be sadly missed.

## Fashion Show

Mark this on your calendar: On November 4th, ladies from the Blair County Historical Society will model clothing from the time period 1898 to 1908 in a program called the "The Edwardian Lady." This is the last in a series of four fashion shows. If you attended any of the others, you know these shows amuse and educate, bring giggles and gasps, and cause eyes to open wide. Come enjoy an afternoon of fashion, bring a friend.

## Christmas Light Tour

Last year's warm December weather brought over 400 people to the museum for our annual Christmas Light Tour. To prevent the long lines as people waited for the bus, we plan to go back to the reservation system once used. This year the bus, treats, and other festivities will still be free, but reservations will be required. So don't forget to call the museum for the December 15th Light Tour.

## Membership Increase

Increasing utility prices and operating expenses over the last few years have compelled the society to seek additional funding from its supporters. When you fill out your membership form for next year, you will notice a dollar increase, the membership going from \$5 to \$6.

## Great Loss

We are saddened by the recent passing of two of our Lifetime Members, Marge Slanoc and Mahlon Hoover. For many years Marge was active with the Historic Society's Summerfest Ball. Both will be sadly missed.

## 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.

Do you recognize the name J. C. Martin? If you know the history of Portage then you probably do. A large picture of John Calvin Martin hangs in the museum, the last large cement "M" for Martin remains on the former bank building across the street from Stagers Chevrolet, and everyone has driven through Martindale. Instrumental in the development of the timber and coal mining industries in the area, J. C. Martin's influence in the history of our town defines him among the founders of Portage.



J.C. Martin



In this newsletter, we are fortunate to publish part of a history written by Jean Crichton of Summit, NJ. Jean's father Andrew B. Crichton worked for and later bought out J. C. Martin. While researching information about her father much of it in her father's personal documents, Jean found a tremendous amount of information about J. C. Martin. Here is part of what she wrote:

John Calvin Martin grew up wealthy. The son of a successful, self-made Pennsylvania Dutch merchant, John was born November 13, 1845, in an affluent home in Millersville, near Lancaster in eastern Pennsylvania. John was the second of two sons of Barton B. and Catherine C. Martin. He had seven younger sisters. John had seen the rough side of life when he enlisted as a teenager in the Union forces during the Civil War. But he won quick promotion and, before the war was over, rose to the rank of captain. After discharge from the army he prepared to go into business with his father.

When John arrived in the area in the late 1860s, the Portage area was still covered with old-growth forests. In these years after the Civil War, white pine, hemlock and valuable hardwoods like cherry and ash carpeted the ridges and valleys of Cambria County much as they had in pre-colonial America.

At the time, Portage was a settlement of about 100 with five hotels and a dozen saw mills, some steam-powered. Little distinguished it from other mountain lumber camps of the period, except for its premier position as a stop on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which had been completed in 1854, only a dozen years earlier.

In the late 1850s, Barton Martin had bought large tracts of white pine forests in Clinton and Centre counties in central Pennsylvania. There he developed a highly integrated timbering business, modern for its time, controlling every phase of

the process from tree cutting to establishing an urban lumberyard.

After the huge, old-growth trees were cut from Martin's lands, the logs were stripped of their bark, branded on the ends with Martin's initials and floated down nearby streams to a wholesale lumberyard Martin owned at Lock Haven, on the upper Susquehanna.

**PORTAGE**

Is NOT a  
"One-Man Town"

**19**

different coal interests operate in the PORTAGE district.

The Quality of their coal creates a PERMANENT demand for it.

At 2,000,000 tons a year (the present rate of output) Portage district coal will last over 200 years. PERMANENCY again!

Portage also has a Silk Mill, Refrigerator plant, Ice Cream factory, Planing Mill, Ice factory, Concrete Block factory, and other new industries are coming.

Many more men are needed at Portage NOW at good wages.

PORTAGE—16 Miles from Johnstown.

Write Portage Board of Trade or  
**MARTIN REALTY CO.**  
Portage, Pa.

\*\*1916 AD Johnstown DAILY TRIBUNE  
courtesy Jean Crichton



At Lock Haven, the logs were cut into planks at a sawmill, tied together and rafted down the Pennsylvania Canal, which paralleled the river to the port town of Columbia, just a few miles west of the city of Lancaster. In Lancaster, Barton Martin operated a retail lumberyard.

In the late 1860s, the Martins began looking for new sources of lumber and bought forest land along Fout Run in Portage Township, where they could ship their lumber by rail. Using the PRR's main line, which ran through the middle of town, boards made from locally cut trees could be on the loading dock in Lancaster within four hours.

In about 1868, Barton Martin and three other men, John Stoneback, Henry Hopple and Henry Cunningham, owned a steam sawmill on Portage's Main Street. When 23-year-old John Martin came to town, he took over his father's interest in the mill and soon bought out the other partners.

Within a few years, the Martin lumber business began booming. Loggers were hired to cut the trees, and the once thickly wooded hillsides were gradually denuded, except for a bristle of three- or four-foot high stumps. Mule teams hauled the logs along pitted, sometimes muddy dirt roads to the sawmills.

**Coal Discovered Under Martin's Lands**

About 1875, John Martin discovered an even more profitable resource beneath his land-rich veins of some of the most valuable bituminous coal in Pennsylvania. This coal was low in ash and high in carbon, making it burn very hot, just what was needed to produce steam for the industrial boom going on in America.

Martin soon opened a coal mine in the area. At first the coal was sold for local use, but within a few years, rail shipment began - eastward toward Lancaster, Philadelphia and New York and westward to Pittsburgh and Chicago.

In the late 1870s, Barton Martin, then in his late 50s, began transferring title of his properties to his son, John. As time went by the younger Martin purchased additional coal lands in the area. A few years later he opened Martin's Colliery #1 and later began sinking a shaft in Puritan.

**Early lumberman uses horses to "skid" logs out of the woods.**



**Saw Mill located near Leman Machine Shop and P.A.**



**Portage Saw Mill - location unknown**



**Early Portage Mine**

By 1880, thousands of tons of coal were being dug out of the Fout Run mines every year. Dozens of mules were needed for the dangerous and muddy work of hauling the coal to the Pennsylvania Railroad's depot in Portage. The volume of coal soon overwhelmed the mule transport system.

It seemed clear that a rail line to the mines was needed. John Martin petitioned the Pennsylvania Railroad to underwrite the building of a rail spur but officials in the Philadelphia headquarters refused, saying the investment wasn't justified. Using his own and his family's money Martin built the three-mile "Martin branch" himself.

In 1883, 16 coal cars were being shipped down the Martin line each day according to John Laxton, Martin's superintendent of mines, who was quoted in the March 22, 1883, edition of the Johnstown Tribune. The payroll of about 100 men was expected to increase, Laxton said. Once the rail line was in place, Martin began leasing sections of his

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**Newsletter by Irene Huschak**



Puritan Mines - one of 58 mines in the Portage area

coal to other companies. Under the leases, these coal operators paid him a royalty percentage of the sales price, for every ton of coal mined, and, of course, Martin charged them for shipping their coal down the Martin track. Lucrative as the shipping arrangement was, Martin kept trying to sell his busy little rail spur. On March 6, 1886, the Pennsylvania Railroad bought the Martin Branch for \$12,000, making it part of the PRR's vast network of track. Tremendous development followed, with half a dozen or more coal companies signing leases to work the coal seams Martin owned. By today's standards, these mines look rickety and dilapidated. But as the years went by, Martin made an estimated \$10 million from his coal properties, according to one of his obituaries.

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

*Mr. Wm. Callahan, Cedar Falls IA wrote about the last newsletter:* The latest newsletter was a trip down memory lane. I was one of the children who attended school from 7:25 am to 12:45 pm. Most of the class pictures were taken on the steps of the 1915 high school. It was a big occasion when they blasted down the smokestacks. I was somewhere in the crowd. No mention of the Pringle Hall being on Caldwell Avenue and used as the boy scouts meeting rooms. When it was behind the school I attended band practice there.

**Museum hours: 12 pm to 5 pm - Wednesday through Saturday Visit our Website @ [www.portagestationmuseum.org](http://www.portagestationmuseum.org)**

## 2008 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Our membership is important to us, so if you have not already done so, renew your membership for 2008

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mark the category you prefer**

- Annual Member \$6.00
- 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**

**Portage Area Historical Society  
PO Box 45  
400 Lee Street  
Portage, PA 15946**

