

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



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

September 2009

**T**his year the Portage Area Historical Society celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1989 a group of individuals interested in preserving the history of Portage began an organization called the Historical Society of the Portage Mainline. During the 1990 centennial, the group set up a temporary display at the old home economics building on Caldwell Avenue. In 1992, thanks to the generosity of the Stager



family and a great deal of hard work from many dedicated people, the old railroad station on Lee Street opened as the "Portage Station Museum" and the organization became the Portage Area Historical Society. Two charter members, Ruth Richardson and Betty Cann, remain on the board.

On September 5, St. Joseph's Church presented the historical society with the Ubi Caritas Service Award in honor of the Worker. The recipient is selected "for exceptional service in the form of time, talent, and treasure in such a fashion that it has had a long-lasting effect on the parish community and the local community." When Father Moll presented the award, he gave this introduction:

*The Portage Area Historical Society was formed in 1992 as a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation. The society is dedicated to the preservation, education and exploration of the rich history of Portage, and the surrounding local area.*

*The Historical Society manages the Portage Station Museum located in the 1926 original (restored) railroad depot building in Portage. The museum contains extraordinary displays of area history and culture formed through the influences of coal mining, railroads, steel, forests, water, and recreation. Dedicated volunteers staff, manage, and operate the museum, its programs and activities. A recent addition to the museum is a miniature train display that reflects the rich railroad history of the Mainline Area.*

*The Historical Society educates the public through visible reminders of the rich history of the area; through its interactions with area schools; dependable participation in community functions; and through the very popular programs which attract visitors from all around the area.*

*The Historical Society is managed by a board of directors, made*

**Congratulations to Historical Society student member Renee Irwin who was named Portage Area High School Homecoming Queen.**

*up of people from the Portage Area and membership is open to the public.*



To celebrate the anniversary, author Jean Crichton will present her book, "Digging for Treasure: Two Pioneer Coal Developers in Portage, Pennsylvania." Jean's father, one of the men profiled in the book, purchased coal property "up the crick" on Trout Run and founded what became the Johnstown Coal & Coke Company, which employed many Portage residents. The event will be held at the museum at 2 p.m. on Sunday, November 1st. The society continues to be thankful to the Stager family for use of its building and to the generosity of the community for its continued support. Congratulations PAHS!

### Fashion Show

If you missed the "Wedding Belles" Fashion Show in May, you missed a wonderful afternoon. The event, held at the Portage Elementary School, featured 15 wedding gowns dating back to the 1770s. Made by ladies from the Blair County Historical Society, each dress was created true to the time period. Peggy Fields, a national expert on period clothing, narrated the program and modeled several of the gowns. One of the outfits, a beautiful full blue silk gown, required 75 hours to assemble. Another was designed using a description from a 1828 letter housed at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware. For the event, PAHS ladies collected and displayed dozens of old photos, ten wedding gowns, and many other pieces of wedding memorabilia, all dating 50 years or older, all from local residents. Many thanks to Rose Pfeilstucker for coordinating the event.

**"High waist, round neck vandyking edged with lace, ..., and three ostrich feathers in her hair" (as described in the 1928 letter).**

**(below) Mary Kowalczyk & daughter Ruth Ann Long stand next to the gown that both ladies wore at their weddings.**



### Yard Sale

With a record 107 registered yard sale sites, the Great Portage Community Yard Sale was again a great success. Shoppers came from as far as VA and SC.

This year two sites were added to the map, places where vendors could set up tables, one on Main Street at the fire hall, the other on Mountain Avenue by the Winterfest committee. Historical Society members heard great comments from many participants about the large number of people who visited their sites. Many thanks to those who participated, to the local sponsors who donated for ads, and to all of the people in town who donated items for our sale at the museum.

**This appeared in a 1936 Ripley's "Believe It or Not" newspaper column: Having five Roman Catholic churches, one Russian Orthodox church, and nine of the Protestant faith, Portage, Penna. has per capita, more churches than any other town or city in the nation.**

The museum's furnace needs repaired before the hard winter temperatures set in. If each of our members would send an extra \$1 when renewing the 2010 membership, we could purchase the part needed for the furnace.

### New Workers

We welcome Helen Kompardo and Judy Smith as our two new museum workers. Helen is a native of Portage, very knowledgeable

about the community, the trains and the mines. She is the sister of two former fire chiefs, Tony and the late Joe Kompardo who for decades ran the weekly fire company bingos. Her father was a coal miner and a Portage policeman. Judy comes to us from Lilly. She is one of ten children and lives in her family homestead. Judy can relate to the items in the 1920s kitchen as she had many of these same items in her home. Judy's father was also a coal miner.

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 \$1,000.

We are collecting used books, DVDs, tapes & CDs for a Dec. sale.

### Visitors

This summer James Lentini from Akron Ohio visited his home- stead in Portage and stopped by the Portage Station Museum. The day was a special day for James as it was his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. He told us this bit of history, "It was about 1922 when my father,



Another "Mom & Pop" store

James Lentini, came from South Fork with his 17 year-old bride, Minnie, one year-old son, Joseph, and his parents. He bought the house on 408 Main Street (across from Sheetz) and the house on the right for his parents. I was told that this house was at one time a post office that was later raised up one floor. My father opened a grocery store in 1923 in the right side of the building; the left housed a barber shop. My sister, Mary, was born 4 years later. I was born in

1929 and by some mistake my name was misspelled on my birth certificate. That same year my father lost all his money when the Great Depression closed the banks. We had no money but as we had the store, we always had something to eat. Customers didn't pay cash, everything was on credit and put on the books until they could pay, which was mostly late or not at all. I remember my family getting electricity and me using the switch to turn on our first light bulb. When I was about eight, my job was to stack the shelves with goods. Every day I would carry items from the store, brooms, buckets of fruit, vegetables, etc., and put them in front of the store ready for passengers exiting the trains. When the last train left, I carried everything back into the store. My family was active in the Italian club, and we belonged to St Joseph's Church. When Grandpa and Grandma celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, all our relatives came to Portage and a picture was taken in our back yard. In those days we didn't sleep in hotels, we all slept in the house at 408 Main Street. We kept the store until 1943 when we sold the two buildings and moved to Ohio." James also visited St. Joseph Church where he was baptized.

Adaulphine Post Harrison Plummer from **Allen Jensen-Denmark** Gallitzin told us, "I was the first baby born at the Portage Hospital on Caldwell Avenue. Delivered by Dr. Replogle on April 27, 1962, he made sure my mother got the beer and pizza she requested after giving birth."



During the first week of September, we welcomed some international visitors to our museum. Keith Monument from Norwich,

England was visiting with family in the area and asked for a special tour over the Labor Day weekend. Allen Jensen from Denmark took a month off work to learn about the history of the U.S. He chose to tour PA for the month as he felt it was the state with the most industrial history. He noted the lack of bicycles on our roads, as Denmark has many. He had already walked around Portage, was off to see the Sonman Mine, then on his way to Altoona. He seemed impressed with our little museum.

Two pages in the museum's guest book show visitors for the last month came from Lovettsville, VA, Cleveland, OH, Mabank, TX, Slatehill, N.Y., Northridge, CA, Northwest FL, and many other out-of state places.



### Sent to us by email

These photos of the Nelson Ice Cream Co. building, circa 1915, were sent to us by Barry Shaffer, White House, TN. "My grandfather, James G. Shaffer, worked for Johnstown Sanitary Dairy for 10 years before moving to Portage with his family (about 1913) to manage the ice cream business for Mr. Nelson. They lived on 817 Railroad Avenue where my Uncle Leo was born (1915). My father, George, was born in 1921 at 514 Orchard Street. The family left Portage in 1923 and moved to Saint Marys where my grandfather started his own business, Shaffer Ice Cream Co.

The Nelson building was located near the alley behind the present location of Stager's Chevrolet Buick on the 500 block of town. The loading dock is located at the left rear of the building, behind the 'flivver' (automobile). The loading dock photo shows metal barrels in which the ice cream was shipped. They are marked Nelson Ice Cream, The Queen of Creams, Portage. The guy on the far right is eating ice cream.

(from Portrait of a Town) "Nelsons were the makers of one of the finest

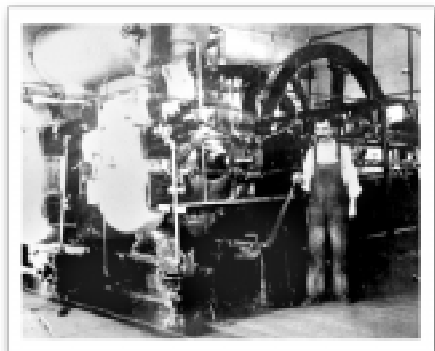


The loading dock. My grandfather, James G. Shaffer, is the second from the left, standing with hat, elbow on barrel. (bottom) He's the man on the left in the white shop coat.



ice creams found in Pennsylvania. Their slogan was the 'Queen of Creams.' Their chocolate and vanilla ice cream, and sometimes walnut, cherry, or strawberry, was delivered to dealers by horse drawn wagons in five-gallon metal containers. Ice was brought in wooden buckets, dumped around the cans, then rock salt was sprinkled over the ice. This process kept the ice cream cold. Nelsons also shipped via railroad express to towns along the Mainline including Johnstown, Altoona, Greensburg and Harrisburg. Ice cream was sold inside the building by the pint, quart or cone. When Mr. Nelson sold his business to a cooperative of area farmers, it became the Peerless Dairy.

David Kyle Monroe writes, "All my people were born and/or raised in Portage. My grandfather was John L Monroe. My dad, Adie Kyle Sipe Monroe, and my mother, Alice Estelle Froggatt, attended Portage high school. My dad was apparently quite a good football player. While tracing our family tree we discovered that my Grandad worked at a fully self-sustained steam station right outside of Portage. My dad told me there was a pond for their water supply, a mine complete with a mule, a cart of some kind that ran



1903 - inside of Power Plant

on tracks, and night shift workers would mine the coal to supply the fuel for the steam engines."

\*Dave's grandfather worked at the Electric Power House located on North Railroad Avenue (site of the ambulance building). It supplied power to Jamestown, Cassandra and Portage.

### History

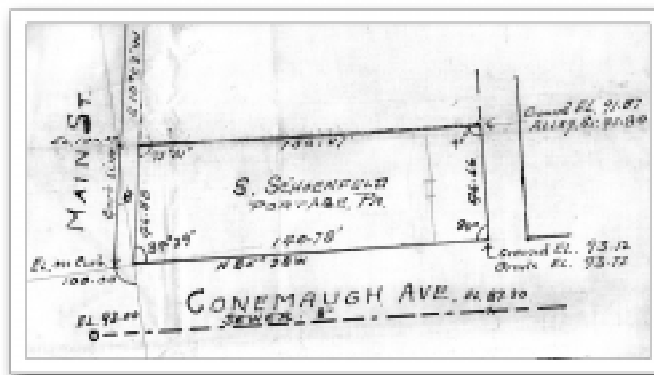
In the last year Portage has lost several of its old buildings; Harpos and Wasko's, both on Main Street, were lost to fire and Hi-Jo's on Springhill was torn down. The remaining half of the old silk factory was gutted by fire and its future remains uncertain. But one

old building on Main Street has a bright future. For several years now, Bob and Bonnie Fox have been renovating the old Schoenfeld building which stands at the corner of Main Street and Conemaugh Avenue. This location was originally the site of the town's first jail, bordering the alley in back of the building. At the Main Street corner was a blacksmith shop which Sigmund Schoenfeld later used as a warehouse. In 1920 Schoenfeld contracted E. Overdorff Contractors and Builders to build a new structure at the cost of \$26,494. Plumbing and heating were an additional \$4188.66. The original plans called for a balcony in the front, but was left off to save \$200. The first Mercantile license came through Cambria County and was issued in 1922 at a tax rate of one mill, which was \$36. The store opened as a clothing and



Schoenfeld Department Store as it looked in the 20s.

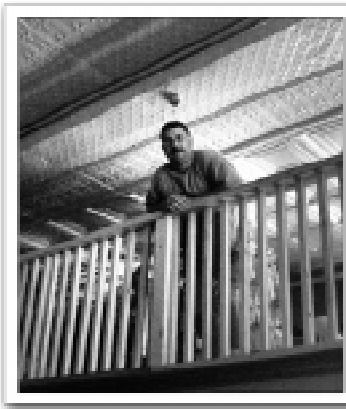
the intentions of building a wall along his property. The wood from this addition was used for the railing on the mezzanine (balcony). A garage in the back was also demolished. For years now the



Blueprints show the front of the building angled to Main Street

dry goods store and the family lived on the second floor.

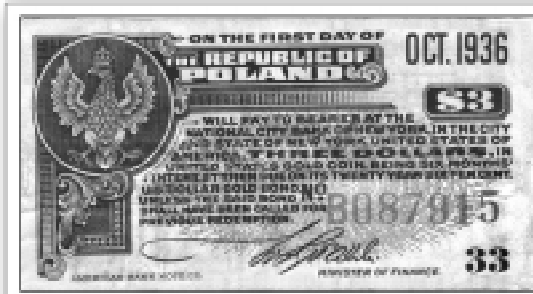
Using the original building blueprints, Bob & Bonnie have worked diligently to restore the building and property to its original look. The upstairs living quarters, where Bob and Bonnie now live, has been rebuilt to about 95-percent of the original layout. The high kitchen cabinets, the fireplace, a bookcase that separates two rooms, and the beautiful wide wooden trim look much like it did when the Schoenfelds lived there. The downstairs has been restored to its original design but with intentions of opening it as a coffee shop. The original coal furnace is still being used to heat the downstairs. Many of the items to be used or displayed in the coffee shop were found in the building or acquired from the people and businesses of Portage.



Bob leans on the newly replaced balcony railing, the metal ceilings show a fresh coat of paint.

From childhood Bonnie remembers the wonderful window displays and wanted to recreate her memories in such a way that others could also enjoy sharing with their families. She plans to continue doing the displays that add so much charm to the building and to Main Street Portage.

On the outside the Foxes have uncovered the windows, (replacing where needed), and removed an addition from the back, not original to the building. While Bob was removing this addition, he came upon a stone foundation that he believes to be from the old jail. He carefully dug up those stones and stacked them in his parking lot with



Sigmund Schoenfeld saved a variety of paper money that his customers used. The paper money and other historic documents discovered during renovations will eventually be put on display at the coffee shop.

Foxes have worked toward creating a nostalgic dining atmosphere.

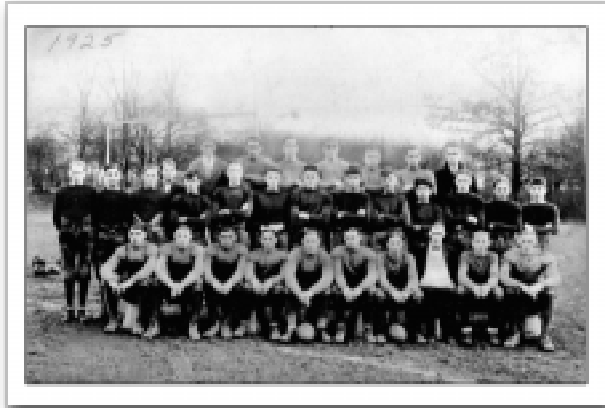
**New Store Item**

Thanks to the generosity of some local sports enthusiasts, a new T-shirt honoring the undefeated 1925 Portage High School football team is now on sale in the museum shop. This team outscored its opponents 390-0 during the nine-game season. Coach Ray W. Gray, considered one of the greatest coaches in the school's history, coached the team for 12 years and built such a reputation for his team that during this period other schools of the same size refused to play against Portage. The shirts are a bright gold with a picture of the team on the front and their names under the picture. On the back are the games

Portage High School Football	
Season 1925	
Portage 26	South Fork 0
Portage 63	Spangler 0
Portage 20	Hellamysburg 0
Portage 24	Beverlydale 0
Portage 52	Carrolltown 0
Portage 34	Cresson 0
Portage 193	Danmabore 0
Portage 24	Danmabore 0
Portage 44	Bellwood 0
<b>Total 390</b>	<b>Total 0</b>

**Back of Shirt**

points, player's names and year they graduated. Ironically, just before the T-shirts were put on sale, Dave Monroe of Whitehall, PA, sent a box of photos to the museum. Though many of the photos were of his family, the Froggatts and Monroes, and the Portage area during the early 1900s, among



**Kyle Monroe's 1925 photo of his undefeated team**

**We need a rotating color wheel to light our silver Christmas tree. Would anyone have one to lend us for the holidays?**

**A bathroom sink was donated to the museum and needs to be installed. It is very small and would require little work, so let us know if you have the skills to install it for us.**

**Please donate a lottery ticket or 2 for our Winterfest basket.**

the pictures was a collection of his father's old football photos. And Dave's father, Kyle Monroe, played on that famous football team! The pictures are on display at the museum.

**Acquisitions**

The museum has many new acquisitions, stop by to see them.

**2009 Schedule of Events**

- October 18 - Ed McDade - Singin' on the Rails
- November 1 - Author Jean Crichton
- December 12 - Winterfest

**Portage Area Historical Society Board**

- Regis Huschak - *President*, Ruth Richardson - *Vice President*, John Havrilla - *Treasurer*, Mary Koston - *Recording Secretary*, Irene Huschak - *Corresponding Secretary*, Mary Lou George, Barbara Havrilla, Betty Cann, Ginny McDonnell, Charles Edwards & Rose Pfeilstucker

**Newsletter by Irene Huschak**

*Your membership helps keep our doors open*

**2010 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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

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

( ) Annual Member \$6.00 ( ) Life Member \$50.00 ( ) Student Member \$2.00

Make all checks payable to: **Portage Area Historical Society, 400 Lee Street, Portage, PA 15946**

**Museum hours: 12 pm to 5 pm - Tuesday through Saturday**

**U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
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