

The *Portage Area Historical Society*
Newsletter



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

October 2010

Ladies Tea

Scones and jellies, sandwiches and pastries, accompanied the assortments of teas served at the fourth annual Ladies Spring Tea. Laughter and camaraderie filled the museum as 40 ladies, most wearing hats, enjoyed being served and pampered.

Sarah Hochrein, a senior at Portage Area High School and an accomplished musician, entertained the group with pleasant melodies from her oboe. Several high school students collected community service hours assisting with the event. All of the hard work and preparation made for a wonderful day enjoyed by all.



August Speaker

Local mine expert Walter Prozialeck spoke at the Portage Station Museum during this year's Summerfest weekend. Walter began his presentation with a video he made telling about mining in the early 1900s. He said he visited a mining museum where several mining artifacts had been mislabeled and thought the need to document and share all of the things he had learned and researched during his lifetime. Walter has a collection of mining tools that is second to none. His collection of books, including a "company store" book dating back to 1897, covers everything about mining from the laws to the accidents. Calling himself a "dying breed," he told his audience about the hardships of working in the mines and of life in general during the early 1900s. He learned first hand about mining. "I worked in the mines when house coal was 90 cents a ton, delivered. My first mining buddy was born in 1878," he said.



The late Carl Richardson, a long-time Portage Area Historical Society member, was recipient of this year's Joe Vargo Award. Carl's wife Ruth, who is vice president of the historical society, accepted the award. Congratulations to the Richardson family.

"The Depression wasn't as bad as they say, it was worse." Our thanks to Walter for sharing his mining

experiences with our community. Hopefully he will return to Portage to again show his video and to do a tour of the wonderful artifacts in our second floor mining display.

Engineers Charlie Edwards and Austin Rodgers kept the "Miniature Mainline" trains running during Summerfest weekend. The museum was busy all three days with visitors who came to look at the displays, listen to Walter or watch the HO trains.

Community Yard Sale/ Rummage Sale

With 113 registered sites for this year's community

yard sale, Portage hosted one of the largest events of its kind in the region. We are most appreciative to the site participants and the many business sponsors who advertised on our map handouts. Distributing more than 3,000 maps throughout town certainly helped shoppers move around. The event is our most important fundraiser and provides for a wonderful community activity that brings so many people into our town.

This year we again teamed with people from the Church of God to do a follow-up rummage sale. The event gave yard sale participants a place locally to drop off unsold items and provided us with another fundraiser. The week-long event took a tremendous amount of team effort but what a fun and worthwhile activity for all who participated and shopped.



Board Member Charles Edwards an Author

Board member Charles Edwards recently wrote a book entitled *The Little Book: The Ungodly Liberal Agenda*. Charlie's book was featured in the Tribune-Democrat and the Portage Dispatch and on WJAC-TV. Published by AuthorHouse, the

A metal chair with a red seat stored at the museum is rumored to be from an old train. No documentation can be found for this chair. Can anyone provide us with some information?

paperback book can be found locally or purchased online at Amazon, BiggerBooks and Borders. It is also available for the Kindle. Congratulations to Charles, we wish you success on the sale of your book.

Visitors

This summer a gentleman from India visited the Station Musuem. He was taking a train across the state and got off at Altoona to see local sites. While camping at Glendale he visited Blue Knob State Park, Horseshoe Curve and sections of the Allegheny Portage Railroad. Another visitor, a bus driver from England, was taking the train across the country. An avid train fan, he also was stopping at places along the way.

Liesa Helfer from Bloomfield Hills, MI stopped by the museum for a visit and to



donate her copy of Dr. Buzzard's book to our library. Liesa sent us the wonderful information about the Waldorf Hotel for the last newsletter.

The guest book has many new names signed by people from as far away as Vancouver, Texas, Daniel Island, SC, and Charlotte, NC.

Recipient of two grants:

We are pleased to be one of the recipients of the 2010 Portage Endowment Grants. Our grant money will be used to pave the sidewalks in front of the museum. Jim and Terry, museum workers, have already done some curb work and we are now waiting for the borough to do the paving. The deterioration of the sidewalks has gotten so bad over the last few years that in a few places they are unsafe for visitors to walk. The new paving will greatly improve the overall look of the building.

Another grant came from Walmart. This money will be used to purchase an HO train car with a camera. The car will travel around our train display attached to one of our engines. The device will enable (pg 3)

Congratulations to basket winners Treva Lucas (bath/beauty items), Ann Krutch (afghan/home-made items) & Brandi George (beach basket).

Just outside of Portage, off the Pump Station Road, are the remnants of the world's longest water pan system. With only a large slab of concrete remaining to mark the location, the four tracks of the Wilmore pans once extended 2,685 feet and used more than a million gallons of water a day.

Early trains pulled by steam engines needed to stop frequently for water. They needed the water to make the steam that ran the engines. Time and fuel were lost each time a train slowed to a stop under a tower or hydrant to fill up with water and then get back up to speed. In 1859 a water trough system was developed that could be installed between the tracks.

A device called a scoop was installed under the tender

(the car after the engine) that could be lowered into the trough. The forward motion of the locomotive moving at a speed of 29 and 30 mph, forced the water up into the tender. This process ended the need to stop the trains.

Coal was needed to fuel the steam engines and it was abundant in our area, but water was not. To supply water to our local pans, the Pennsylvania Railroad built the Wilmore Dam for the sole purpose of keeping the pans filled. In 1929, the pans were using 1.5 million gallons of water a day, as the Wilmore pans served both heavy freight and fast passenger trains on four different tracks. At times,



This 1943 picture of a passenger train going west bound at Wilmore, shows the train taking on water from the water pans. When the tender tank was full, it overflowed, as shown in the picture. A fireman then raised the scoop and the train kept going. submitted by Mark Blaisdell

small fish from the reservoir found their way into the pans, sometimes jamming the water level floats and causing the pans to overflow. The pans had to be cleaned periodically to remove dead fish, coal, and other debris. To protect the track beds from erosion by water splashed during scooping, thousands of *Belgian blocks were laid beside the tracks and a series of drains installed.

Winter presented many problems. Steam was injected into the water supply line to keep the pans from freezing. The ice created by splashing also was a major hazard. The Wilmore track pans were manned 24 hours a day from November 1 to April 1 and intermittently for the rest of the year. The pans continued in operation until the spring of 1953, the boilers and pumps were removed in 1955.

Our local railroad system helped keep people and commerce moving safely across the Allegheny Mountains. We were and still are an important link to connecting the east and west train traffic moving across the nation.

The following information was sent to us by Charles Potchak of Sidman. My father, Frank Potchak, worked on the railroad his entire life. Most of those years were spent at the water pans, just about a half-mile walking distance from our

*Granite cobblestones featuring an amazing color range from molted purple to grey.



Fred Connacher's Painting of the Wilmore Water Pans submitted by Mark Blaisdell

homestead in Wilmore. Dad's eight children, including myself, seldom concerned themselves with Dad's work. But on one occasion, and I remember it clearly until this day, the entire family gathered around the kitchen table to listen as Dad told us about a terrible accident on the rails. I was just 11 years old. One of Dad's coworkers was killed that day – cut in half by a train! Dad said there was a terrible storm, wind blowing snow so hard that the man who blew the whistle to warn the others about oncoming trains, misjudged what line the train was coming down. He could not get off the track fast enough to move out of the way of that oncoming train and was cut in half. Two of Dad's friends carried



Mark has a piece of one of the original water pans along with a unique collection of pictures showing the water pan site.

the remains from the tracks. Local historian Mark Blaisdell, a longtime Wilmore resident who lives near the pan site, tells us, "The five water pans used by the PRR were not unique, as pans were also used by the New York Central and in Great Britain. Wilmore Dam and Beavertown Dam both fed the Wilmore pans and were hydrologically connected (an engineering feat at the time) to a reservoir located on the hill west of the present site of the Wilmore Sportsman's Club. Today, the only remaining evidence of the water pan facility is the overgrown cement groundwork of the pump station. An interesting story was told to me by the late Charles Eggie, PRR plumber and Wilmore resident. 'One winter, a hobo boarded a train somewhere west of Wilmore. Not being familiar with the pan operation, he climbed on the coupler between the coal tender and the first car. When the train stopped at Cresson, he was found covered in ice and frozen to death.' "

Dave Wright who lives on Pump Station Road across from the original water pan station, built a full-sized model of a section of the pans in his front yard. Dave has always had an interest in the water pans as many family members worked at jobs associated with them – grandfather in the boiler, uncles breaking ice and maintaining the tracks. About 10 years ago Dave purchased a 7-and-a-half-foot piece of a metal pan. For the next seven years he collected the tracks, ties, spikes, and the train sign that he needed to complete his project. Dave already had the Belgian blocks. He said that in the '50s when the railroad disassembled the pans, they piled the Belgian blocks on stacks for anyone to take. So his father took many of them to landscape his property. Three years ago Dave completed his display and he now welcomes people to stop by and take a look at a remarkable piece of history. If Dave is not working, he might take you on a tour of the original site and share his vast knowledge of the pan system with you.



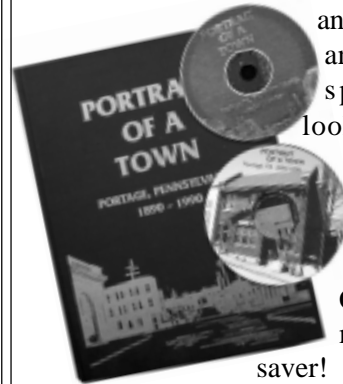
Austin Rodgers is presently working on a display of the water pans that will be placed in a case on the second floor of the museum. Austin has collected pictures and is making a replica of a section of a real water pan. His display will include the history of the pans, a model showing how the water got into the pans and how they operated.



us to project images on a screen showing visitors what the train ride around Horse-shoe Curve, through the Gallitzin Tunnels and past the Portage Railroad Station might look like if looking out a real train car window.

CD Now on Sale

The CD, *Portrait of a Town, Portage Pennsylvania 1890-1990* is now on sale at the Station Museum. Digitized by Thomas Burgan, a senior at Portage Area High School under the supervision of Mr. Jay Shuck, the CD contains a file readable on



any computer. For anyone who has spent time looking for information in our 326-page book, the searchable feature of this CD is a tremendous time saver! The cost of the

CD is \$10, tax included. To have the CD shipped, add an additional \$1.00 and send your check to the museum made payable to the Portage Area Historical Society.

Mom & Pop Store (#8) - Timura's Store 1504 S. Main St. (now Springhill Rd.)

Andy Timura built his store and adjoining home in the mid 30s. He and wife Sue then ran the store until 1971. They sold groceries, threads, school supplies, work socks, and other small items. Andy delivered his groceries, too. Many customers put their orders on the "book" and paid later. Neighborhood children, not understanding this method of payment, thought they could shop there without money and often stopped by for candy. When the store closed, daughter Rita converted the store into a beauty shop. Rita still runs the shop and, along with her two children, still lives in the house.



Visit our Website at www.portagepa.us

Carol Paterick
Web Master

Sadly Missed

The PAHS mourns the recent passing of Joseph Sherman "Sonny" Moyer. Sherm, the brother of Ruth Richardson, was a life member of



the historical society and donated generously to the organization over the years. Through donations in his passing, his name will be added to the memorial plaque. Sherm's family donated several items to the museum including an 8X10 framed 1942 PHS football photo.

New Worker

The end of summer means the changing of workers. Judy Smith is no longer with us and Helen Kompardo and Jim Wozniak will be leaving soon. Our new worker, Terry Gomulko has already learned to run the trains, handle store items, and has helped setup and worked the book sale. Terry is originally from Richland, but moved to NH after the '77 flood. In 1972 he moved back to Davidsville where he started and then ran a drilling business until 2005. He now resides in Wilmore.

*** Newsletter by Irene Huschak ***

Upcoming Events

Oct 17-Portage Area HS Auditorium-2:00-donation \$5 Authors and paranormal experts Patty Wilson and Scott Crownover will give you chills and make the hair on the back of your neck stand high. Their presentation will cover everything eerie, unexplained, and unusual that's been heard, seen, or reported in Pennsylvania including local stories of UFO's, Bigfoot, ghosts and other cryptozoological creatures. You will see their photographs of ghosts and listen to the voices of the dead. Folks will be shocked by what's in Penns Woods!

Dec 12-Portage Area HS Auditorium-2:00-donation \$5 Brought back by popular demand, the Southwestern Pennsylvania League of Apparition Technologists A.K.A. SPLAT will be back with a presentation entitled "Ghosts of Christmas: A closer look at angels, demons, and the Holiday Season"

**Due to the mature subject themes, both presentations will have age restrictions.*

PAHS Board - Regis Huschak - *President/Treasurer*, Ruth Richardson - *Vice President*, Mary Kostan - *Recording Secretary*, Irene Huschak - *Education Coordinator*, Mary Lou George - *Communications & Advertising*, Barbara & John Havrilla, Betty Cann (HM), Charles Edwards, Rose Pfeilstucker, Frances Berzinsky and Matthew Decort

Interested in volunteering, please check off and send this with your membership:

Yard Sale

Rummage Sale

Book Sale

Ladies Tea

2011 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

*Your memberships help
keep our doors open*

**U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 2
NON-PROFIT ORG.
Standard Mail
Portage, PA**