

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



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P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

February 2011

In August, Portage Borough workers paved the sidewalks in front of the Station Museum. They removed the broken macadam that covered the old cement sidewalks and put down a new coat of macadam, covering everything from the underpass to the end of the storage building that hosts our Mountain House mural. Funded partially by an Endowment Grant, the borough and township covered the remaining expenses. How wonderful to live in an area where such community involvement and collaboration exists. Many thanks to the borough and township for their financial support and to the borough workers for an outstanding job. The new sidewalks have made it safer for



visitors and have greatly improved the appearance of our museum.

**Portage Station Sign Returns Home**

From 1926 to 1954, people traveling by train bought their tickets at the Portage Railroad Station, walked through the underpass, up the cement steps that once went through the middle of the underpass, and waited at the platform for their train. A large sign hung over that waiting area marked "PRR Portage , PA, PRR." That sign has been returned to the museum! A local couple found the sign in an antique shop and purchased it for the museum. They had it professionally cleaned and it will soon be hanging at the museum in memory of John Bilchak.

How exciting that the Portage Station Museum was chosen as the location for the filming of WPSU's *Our Town: Portage*. After months of planning by some dedicated people under the supervision of board member John Havrilla, interviews began at eight am on October 16th. Twenty-five Portage residents talked about a wide variety of topics from our town's history to activities to organizations and attractions. Representatives from several



Jessica Peters and Whitney Chirdon pose in front of the museum during interviews.

local businesses told their stories. Naturally, the story of Crichton-McCormick Park was told, as it is a focal point of many activities in Portage. Organizations such as the Rotary, Summerfest Committee, and the Women's Club

talked about their history and accomplishments. St Michael's Orthodox, Sts. Peter and Paul, and the Lutheran Churches had representatives to tell their stories. Jeff Trimbath talked about the Drive In,

unique in that there are not many left in the country. The Sonman Mine Explosion was explained by Richard Bem, Mr. Bernazolli talked about the history and accomplishments of the school district, and Regis Huschak talked about the Station Museum and the Historical Society. The WPSU staff was very pleased by how well those interviewed had organized their materials and the quality of the interviews.

The *Our Town: Portage* video previewed on December 9th. Eleven people from Portage traveled to State College to the WPSU TV station to answer phones for a fundraiser. The event was such a tremendous success that scheduled 15 minute breaks from the program were extended to 35 minutes so all the phone calls could be answered. The station set a goal of 200 pledges, but to the delight of the entire WPSU staff, 272 pledges were made, the best ever collected by an *Our Town* project!

WPSU has given us permission to show the *Our Town* video at the museum. So watch the *Dispatch* for its showing. Admission will be free.



Placemats around town advertised the program.

## New Board Members

Portage native Patricia Mihalko Fedorko is a graduate of Portage Joint High School and Mercy Hospital School of Nursing, Johnstown. Pat worked as a staff nurse at Lee Hospital then as head nurse of ICU & CCU. She and husband Larry moved to Everett where she worked at the Bedford County Memorial Hospital as their nursing supervisor. After Larry's death, Pat moved back to Portage. Pat says, "I look forward to being a member of the Historical Society Board."

Judy Smith was born in Wilmore and moved to Portage 40 years ago when she married her husband, Reagan. The mother of three children, Ryan, Justin, and Lindsay, Judy is grandmother to four granddaughters and one grandson. She recently retired and is now working at Admiral Peary Pre K Counts as a teacher's aid and loving it. She has been a member of the Women's Club for the last 30 years and the St. Joseph Choir. Judy tells us, "Now that both Reagan and I are retired, we're looking forward to spending our summers camping."

## Pennsylvania's Paranormal

With a Steeler game on TV and local football games at the stadium, the large turnout for the October 17<sup>th</sup> "Pennsylvania's Paranormal" program was a pleasant surprise. Authors and paranormal researchers Patty Wilson and Scott Crowover told many eerie stories of local haunts. Though we hear of few Bigfoot stories in Pennsylvania, Patty's revelations of the creatures was quite shocking. Her "ghost" pictures and voice clips gave everyone the chills. Halfway through the program one young fellow sitting near the front climbed onto his father's lap. The Historical Society thanks the Portage Area School District for the use of their facilities. Not having to cram so many people into our small museum and having use of the school's technology was wonderful.

**Patty sold & signed books after the performance.**

## Visitors Feedback & Emails

*From Dave D'Agostino - Scotch Plains, NJ*

I had the distinct pleasure of touring the museum on December 31st while visiting family in Portage. I was VERY IMPRESSED with the museum and delighted by the friendly and helpful volunteers who were there that day. We only spent about an hour but I can see that we will be back to visit the museum the next time we are in Portage. I'm sure I could spend an entire day just with the albums!!!! I especially enjoyed the HO railroad exhibit upstairs and this is actually the reason for this message. I am a model railroad enthusiast and have quite a collection (much to my wife's chagrin) that I

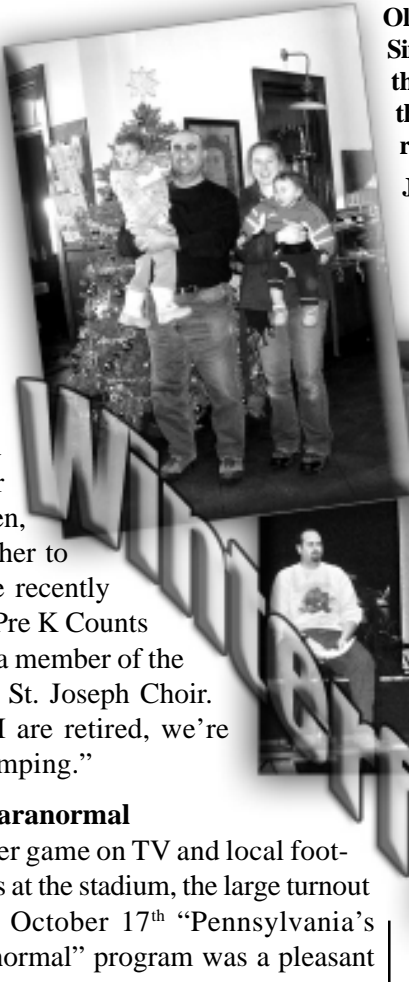
Carol Paterick  
Web master Visit our Website @  
[www.portagepa.us](http://www.portagepa.us)

**Olivia, John, Wendy, & Simon Girard stopped by the museum to check out the model trains that ran all weekend.**

**Jason Thornton talked to his audience about angels in the SPLAT presentation called "Ghosts of Christmas."**

Winterfest weekend brought many visitors to the museum. Some had watched the Our Town-Portage program the night before and stopped by to look around, others came to see the trains or watch our mining video.

**Gail Selapack, Damian, Denise & Chelsea Moschgat enjoyed their visit to the museum. The video 63 Men Down plays in the background.**



take great pride and pleasure in. I am constantly acquiring new items but they are not always exactly what I collect. I am a Lionel O27 gauge collector but have a number of HO gauge items. If you feel that there would be some use for these items (engines, cars, buildings, track, parts, etc), it would be my pleasure to pack them all up and mail them to you as a donation to the museum, no charge, free to a good home.

In closing, again my compliments on a really enjoyable visit and presentation.

*From Sylvia P. Onusic, Kent St. Portage*  
My maternal grandfather, Stanley Pisarski, came to Portage from Gdow, Poland (near Crakow) via Nanticoke, Pennsylvania (the hard coal district). He was born in 1887 and died in 1957. He arrived at Staten Island in 1913 and married Mary Czupal here in 1920. She was born in a village a few miles from Gdow, near the famous salt mine of Wielizcka, but the two never knew each other. Mary came to Portage to visit her brother, Frank, and met my grandfather. Brides were at a premium and many men proposed on the

**The Ladies Spring Tea** is scheduled for April 17<sup>th</sup>. If anyone is interested in attending or would like to make cookies or sandwiches for the event, call 736-9223.



**Coming home from Beachley No. 6 Mine where he worked.**

spot. They were married August 1, 1921, she was 20 and he, age 33. The couple lived on Springhill all their lives and raised 10 living children.

My mother said that he walked to work by going “up over the hill” behind his house. In those days the mines worked two or three days a week and the women took in boarders to make ends meet. The photo was taken by my mother, Jennie Pisarski Notich, sometime in the early '40s. She also said that he didn't usually allow his photo to be taken; but in this case, we are very glad that he did.

**Stanley & Mary pose near the Kosciuszko Hall.**



The Fruhlinger brothers opened their meat market in April of 1911. It was located on Main Street in the area where the Amvets is today. In the early 1900s, people who came here from Poland to work in the coal mines wanted to build a Roman Catholic Church in which Polish was the main language. Unable to attain land, Ignac Fruhlinger stepped forward and bought a parcel of land from William Moudy at the site where Sacred Heart Church now stands. Fruhlinger then sold that property to the Polish Society so they could build their church.

**Fruhlinger's Meat Market- Mom & Pop Store #9**



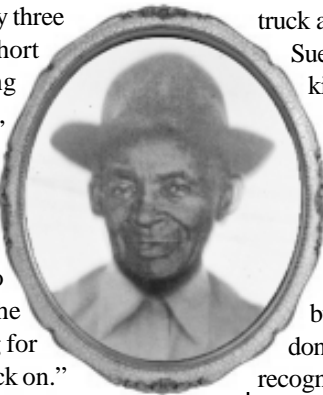
*submitted by Bob Sease*

**D**uring the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only three black men lived in Portage, two for a short period of time, one became a life-long resident. Bill Carpenter was a kindly gentleman, quiet, honest, sincere, and loved by all. In the days when the KKK marched in the local parades and cross burnings were common, Bill was accepted as a friend, neighbor and respected member of our community. This type of camaraderie was so unusual years ago. Jean Crichton tells us that she once heard a relative say, “If a black man looking for work got off the train in Portage, he quickly got back on.”

The late William Callahan told us that for many years Bill Carpenter lived in the basement of a restaurant Callahan's father owned in the Martin Building. Bill took care of the furnace in exchange for a cot to sleep on and leftovers from the restaurant. When the Callahans moved to what is now the JayTar building, Bill Carpenter moved to a “two room shanty” on Springhill.

Paula Kordish Smith lived across the street from Bill. She said, “As a child I use to ride to Vinco with Bill in his old ‘Sanford and Son’ truck when he went to sell his scrap. I remember his tiny two-room shack with the coal stove he used for heating and just a few simple pieces of furniture. Bill's home was decorated with religious items.”

Cindy Mastaler George, who also grew up close to Bill, tells us: “Bill Carpenter was the pied piper of the neighborhood. Kids waited along the street to wave to Bill as he passed by in his junk



truck and often pestered him at his bungalow located on the Walter and Sue Barish property on Wesley Avenue. Bill had Biblical names for us kids. I remember not liking mine because it sounded like a boy's name. On one occasion, Bill took Betty Earnest Zaremba and me by bus to Johnstown to buy us each a school dress. Betty remembers that she and I sat together on the bus and that Bill sat elsewhere. I don't remember any kinds of prejudice towards Bill, but at that young age, I don't know if I would have recognized it as such.”

Robert Sease tells us, “The Halloween parade was once called the Bill Carpenter Parade, as Bill collected money to fund the event. I think he may have even started the first Halloween parade.”

Just before her passing, Anne Rzeszut, related some of the wonderful memories she had about her friend and neighbor. “I knew Bill Carpenter for over 40 years, he was a good friend of my family. Bill's parents were slaves. When he was 9, he ran away from home and got a job as a carpenter. He had one sister who worked



**Bill's home on Springhill**



**“Hand in hand, our friend Bill Carpenter took us to Johnstown on a bus and bought us these dresses. Why is it that it's only when I look at pictures that I remember**



**Portage Dispatch 5/21/59: HONORED: “Uncle Bill” Carpenter, one of Portage's best known residents, accepts a medal from Rotary Club member John Dunda at a dinner in his honor at Rimini's Hall. The club paid tribute to Bill for his “benevolent service” to the community. Nearing age 86, Bill has resided in the area since before the turn of the century. His friends, children and adults alike, number in the thousands.**

as a servant. We once took Bill to visit her, but he never talked about that visit as it seemed to hurt him that she was living such a hard life. He sometimes watched my young sons and brought food that I cooked and we shared together. We were all so poor back then. Once for Thanksgiving, Bill brought a 25-pound turkey that wouldn't fit into my oven. He loved the gravy and oyster stuffing but never ate the turkey meat.

As a young person I remember seeing the flames from the fires of the burning crosses started by the KKK. I remember how afraid I was. Apparently the group never bothered Bill.

Bill was good to everyone and gave all of his money away. He enjoyed visits from the local children and bought them candy and clothes. He never went hungry as people always shared their food with him.

Bill had an old box camera and loved to take pictures of kids. He stored those pictures in an old black suitcase. When he died, they buried Bill in the Protestant cemetery along with



**Every year since his death almost 50 years ago, Bill's friends have taken care of his grave site and put flowers around the stone.**

**Portage Dispatch, Thursday, October 31, 1963 - Page 1**

**BILL CARPENTER, PORTAGE PIONEER, EXPIRES TUESDAY**

William (Bill) Wesley Carpenter, 91, Wesley Avenue, Portage, died Tuesday, Oct. 29, 1963 at Ebensburg.

He was born January 3, 1872 in Jefferson, Maryland, the son of late Charles and Julia Carpenter. Surviving is a sister, Mrs. Pauline Brooks, Brunswick, Maryland. Mr. Carpenter had been a resident of Portage since 1891. Friends are being received at the Clifford M. Beck Funeral Home where service will be conducted at 2 p.m. Thursday by Reverend Alvin Cottle. Interment will be in Prospect Cemetery.

his suitcase filled with the hundreds of pictures he had taken over the years. Because he had no money when he died, the community raised the funds needed to buy his tombstone."

*Share your stories, photos, and memorabilia with us and we'll share them with our readers. We would love to hear from you!*

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. New memorial plaques are for **Joseph Sherman "Sonny" Moyer** and the **PAHS Class of '65**.

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, Charles Edwards, Frances Berzinsky, Pat Fedorko, and Judy Smith - Betty Cann (HM), Matthew Decort (HM) \*\*\* Newsletter by Irene Huschak \*\*\*

**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*

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