

The
Portage Area Historical Society
Newsletter



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P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

February 2012

On page 3 of *Portrait of a Town* is an article about a “Rock” not only important to the history of Portage but to the history of our country. We know about the Indians who once lived in this area because of it. From the book:

In the early 1930s, a rock was found in Portage which bears ancient carvings. Known as the Achannessink Rock, it provides a link with our Indian past. It is thought that the carvings on this rock indicate that Portage had been the headquarters of the Turtle Clan, a division of the Delaware Indian Tribe.

Don Troxel of Portage researched this for us and came up with the following details.

Philip and wife Gertrude Hopfer Stoltz lived on the corner of Lee Street and Hopfer Avenue. In the early 1930s Philip was digging pine stumps for his winter wood supply when he came upon a stump that straddled a rock.



The heavy Achannessink Rock measures approximately 18”x12”x8”. The carvings are outlined so the shapes can be seen.

Digging out the rock, he found it was lying on a 20-inch pile of wood ashes divided into layers. He first noticed the imprint of an arrowhead on the rock and then saw other carvings; three large turtles, a wolf, a turkey and crossed peace pipes.

Don thought the stone would have been found in the area behind the house. He remembers visiting there and sitting on the back porch when he was a youngster.

The Rev. Modestus Wirtner, a well-known northern Cambria County priest who was an expert in Indian lore, pointed out in a published article that the rock itself is shaped like a turtle’s head. He said that the drawings on the rock signify that the place in Portage where the stone was found was a center where the Turtle, Wolf and Turkey tribes of the Delaware Indians met in council, dance and play. To Rev. Wirtner this indicated that Portage had been headquarters for the Turtle Tribe.

Mr. Stoltz gave the rock to the Cambria County Historical Society who displayed it for years on the south side of the courthouse lawn in Ebensburg. The rock was shifted from place to place and then stored away in the Cambria County Historical Society Museum. Kathy Jones, CCHS’s Curator, has taken the rock out of storage for us and it is now on display on the second floor of the museum at 615 North Center Street, Ebensburg. The museum opens for the year on March 1st.

We are all saddened by the recent passing of Regis Huschak, our historical society president and treasurer. Regis was a blessing to the organization as he stepped in and helped save our program. He was a visionary and was so very proud of the museum and all that the board had been able to accomplish. Regis was delighted that during his tenure so many educational programs were added to our docket and that the second floor of the museum became a fabulous display of our mine and railroad history. He ran meetings very efficiently and in a fun manner, always keeping things in perspective and he truly enjoyed the teamwork of the board. Regis’ passing is a great loss to our organization.



left: Regis instructs a group of 5th graders.
bottom: 2002 Regis & Charles Edwards discuss plans for a new train layout.



The September book sale exceeded our expectations as we sold over 2500 books, CDs and DVDs. The organization has put boxes in Stagers so people can drop off books for next year’s sale. The community support for our fundraisers continues to be absolutely amazing!

Visitors:

“Thank you so much for the tour of the Station Museum. The gentlemen from Laurel View Village were very impressed with the model train layout and the excellent job that was done to make it so realistic. They also enjoyed the many artifacts and had fun reminiscing about those items. Thanks again.”

**Jenny Cruickshank, Residential Services Coordinator
Laurel View Village, Davidsville, PA**

As Vera Whitley from Achmelvich, Scotland walked through the doors of the Portage Station Museum she exclaimed, “I had to visit the place responsible for getting me together with my family in the United States!” The date was October 7th and Vera was accompanied by sister-in-law Constance Woolford from Leeds, England. Here’s Vera’s story:

“Shortly after my mother passed in 2006, my husband John and I were going through her photographs and found a card dated July 3, 1940 signed by Uncle Ted and Aunt Etta, Portage

Be sure and keep this address.
Mr George E Jones Sr
R 7 D 2 Box 193, Portage
Cambria County
Pennsylvania Pa
U. S. America.

The terrors of WWII can be sensed through this letter, still readable after all these years. "While reading it you may understand why we were so interested in following through as we did."

July 3 - 1940
Dear Harry Woodall.
If you have to
send your children out of England
how about sending them to us
We would like to have news of
your mother and the rest of the
family We can't realize thing over
there but they sound desperate to us
we will take care of them
With Love and best wishes
From Uncle Ted, & Aunt, Etta

Pennsylvania U. S. America. The author offered to bring children to the United States for the duration of the war. Not understanding who these Jones's were, I went to Google Earth and found the location of the address. I noticed the Portage Station Museum sign displayed on my screen. I talked with my husband for some time before I emailed a question to the museum asking if the Jones still lived at the cards address."

(At the museum, Vera's call was routed to board member Mary Lou George. Mary Lou, who keeps records for the Prospect



Marshall Jones, Connie and Vera look at the train display. Vera could not believe a town the size of Portage had such an amazing little museum!

Cemetery, was then working with Cathy Jones on some family genealogy. Mary Lou referred Vera to Cathy.)

"Some twenty minutes later I received a reply that members of the Jones family still lived on that same street. The email included a

Jones family phone number. Intrigued, John and I dialed the number and got in touch with Cathy and Marshall Jones. They were unable to explain the card, but did know of Ted and Etta.

After a lot of work, final proof of the family relationship arrived by post from Cathy. She sent two pictures found in an old family photo collection. One showed a very young Duke of York in army uniform and the other a very easily recognized photo of Vera's dad, also in uniform, posing with his rifle in the First World War. We were then able to email Cathy to say the Prince was no relation, but the armed soldier certainly was!

This pursuit helped me find 28 relatives. My brother, who sadly passed away just recently, was my only surviving relative in Great Britain. So you can imagine my delight at finding the wonderful people I have now gotten to know over these last five years.

Winterfest proved to be quite the event for both the community and for the museum. The trains ran all Saturday afternoon and the flow of traffic through our building never stopped. Our engineer, Charles Edwards, said at times the visitors were two deep around our Miniature Mainline display.

John and I have traveled many times to the United States and have loved our times in America very much. And I have to say, Portage is our home away from home after finding such wonderful relatives."

Vera and Connie stayed with Marshall and Cathy Jones during their two week visit in October. The Jones residence on Springhill is just 200 yards from the original address that Vera was searching for!

Cathy Jones added this: "After the initial phone call from Scotland in 2006, we conducted genealogy searches on both sides of the 'pond.' The Jones name was too common to make the search easy, but the Hodgkinson name was the key to locating ship passenger lists proving our suspicions. Vera found relatives in the Hodgkinson and Rosman families of Portage, Jones family of East Freedom, Reese families of Virginia and New Castle, PA, and Joneses in Texas and New York.

"Vera and husband John first visited Portage in 2008, then Marshall and I visited Scotland in 2010. During this last visit in October, we celebrated Thanksgiving early so Vera and Connie could enjoy a totally American holiday. We also visited many places, ate at many restaurants (Chatterbox included) and did lots of shopping (Stagers, too) with loads of fun and laughter all along the way. jfwhitley@btinternet.com

Acquisitions

The Historical Society takes great pride in displaying items donated to the Portage Station Museum. Our 1950s kitchen holds numerous antiques and collectibles that came from throughout our community. From big pieces like the table and stove to small ones like the feed bags and boot remover, the kitchen remains a favorite place for older visitors to reminisce and youngsters to learn about a time gone by. A recent acquisition to our kitchen, a gas iron for pressing clothing, came from Dot and Don Murray of Portage. Gas irons were fueled by gasoline, kerosene, alcohol, natural gas, and carbide-acetylene and sold by Sears, Coleman and Montgomery Wards until after WWII. The Amish still use them. But this one is new to our kitchen and we are extremely pleased to add it to our display!



Another first floor display has items from the once grand Mountain House Hotel: an original table set with plates and utensils from the hotel restaurant, curtains, photos and more. A large framed copy of the Mountain House has always hung on our wall, but a recent donation from Glenda Cornelius has given us an older version of the building with a stone wall around it. Glenda's mother, Phyllis



Kertes, who grew up on Branch Street, loved her large framed painting done by St. Michael artist N. Hudimac. When Mom passed, Glenda donated the painting to our museum for the entire community to enjoy.

Walter Kiel once played on the famous football team called the Portage Bulldogs. Walter collected all of his Bulldog programs, photos and memorabilia. He researched newspaper articles to add to the collection. He then put it all together so the history of that famous football team could be preserved. The next newsletter will feature our famous Bulldogs. If you have a story to share with us, please email or call the museum. This football team was the talk of the area for many years and we would love to share your stories.

Small World

An item sold for a museum fundraiser recently went to Stanley Knepper, Alliance, OH. Stanley then sent an email telling us his grandfather was on the posse sent to apprehend the robbers after the 1904 Portage Bank heist. (*Portrait of a Town* - page 12). "Joe Hopfer handed out guns from his hardware store to miners forming posses. Bloodhounds were procured to trail the robbers. Joseph A. Wright, a native of Wilmore, was one of the first

of 3,000 men that were involved in the manhunt." Another of Stanley's grandfathers, William Knepper owned and ran the Portage General Store. Stanley, an avid genealogist sent pages of information and numerous newspaper clippings about his family's history. Those documents have been placed in our museum library.



Joseph A. Wright, Who Was One of the First Men on the Scene
This picture was drawn the day Pat Campbell and Charley Haws were shot. They were robbed on the way to the mines with the payroll.



Stanley also sent pictures of the coins taken during the robbery, like this 1882 Eagle \$10 gold piece.

Mom & Pop Store #12 Portage General Store

In the early 1900s William Woodward Knepper ran the WW Knepper General Store in Sidman then later moved his business to Portage. His Portage General Store was located on Gillespie Avenue next to the old Moose building (now Lodge Run) on what is now the Rite Aid parking lot. An alley would have separated the two buildings. In the late 1930s one could find a soda fountain type display called the Rainbow in the store. George Askew later had a funeral home in the building and two school rooms "with heat" were rented on the third floor. The two upper floors housed apartments, one occupied by teacher Ruth Seaman. The Patterson



Stanley's grandfather owned the Portage General Store

family continued to own the building until the 90s when it was demolished to build Rite Aid.



During a trip out west last fall, our bus driver told us his father was from Portage! Jack Whitos from Utah said, "My father, Paul Whitos, was born and raised in Portage. He was an avid sports fan and watched many Bulldog games. His brother Felix tried out for the team but never made it. Dad told me that the Bulldogs was such a tough team and won so many games that they got to be too sure of themselves. So when they took on the Steelers, they were beaten badly. Dad worked in the mines and helped bring out the bodies after the Sonman mine explosion. It was something that stayed with him until his death. Dad had moved

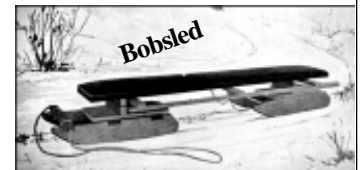
to Michigan in the late 40s when the auto industry was more lucrative than the mines. He had two brothers: Felix and Albert (killed in WWII) and two sisters Ann and Mary.

Letters and Emails

Edna Mae Adamsik Cook, South Fork: In 1943, when I was just twelve years old, my family moved from Bobtown, PA to Jamestown. Back then I thought the train trip was forever, but it was very exciting for me, especially looking out of the window at all of the scenery. Upon arriving in Portage at the train station, we walked the Sonman Road to our new home in Jamestown.

The first time I attended the Ladies Spring Tea event at the Portage Station Museum, I experienced much nostalgia. I vividly remembered back to that day, my first train ride and the first time I saw Portage. I still remember the train's plush seats with footrests and the Portage train station with its ticket office and steps leading to the underpass. Returning to the station after so many years, it was like a magical place for me. I enjoyed all of the displays, especially the "Miniature Mainline."

Ross S. Mickey, Hawaii: In the 1920s skiing was not a popular sport in the USA. Some of the first generation farmers from Austria and Eastern Germany who lived up Blue Knob way used skis to go cross country in the snow. However, most used snow-shoes. Bobsleds were made locally and most were very professional looking. Our run started at Blue Knob (where the Game Lands Road meets Route 164) and many times ended up in front of my home on Main Street. However, they were usually stopped short of the town boundary by the local police. Unfortunately, every year there would be a serious accident since the bobsled 'runway' was the icy local road. And there were a few fatalities over the years. The 'sissy' ski resort came many years later. (Reference to Blue Knob)



Sam Timura, Portage, said he once

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Our museum store has a new item, a 62"x50" green and white throw that shows pictures of places important to our town and its history. Price - \$40.

2012 Scheduled Events:

- April 29 – Ladies Spring Tea
- June 9 – Community Yard Sale
- September – Annual Book Sale



drifted his car over this route. Though the car slowed considerably through Fiddler's Green, he made it the entire way to town without starting up the engine.

Rosella Howieson, Austin, TX: The airport article has some misinformation in it. Dale did not have MS but developed arthritis which he was able to control with medication. Dale had spent five years in the service, received several medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, and never lost his love of flying. After retiring from Ford Motor Co. in OH, Dale built and flew several small planes and was almost finished building an open cockpit 2-seater when he died in 1999. Dale's mother, Sara Howieson, was also a mail carrier. She had some harrowing experiences during cold and snowy days, but was always proud that she did the job.

**** Name under center picture on pg 3 is Haws - Portrait of a Town has Hayes not Haws.**



PAHS Board - Irene Huschak-*President/Education Coordinator*, Ruth Richardson-*Vice President*, John Havrilla-*Treasurer*, Mary Kostan-*Recording Secretary*, Barbara Havrilla-*Corresponding Secretary*, Mary Lou George-*Communications & Advertising*, Betty Cann (HM), Charles Edwards, Frances Berzinsky, Pat Fedorko and Judy Smith
 *** Newsletter by Irene Huschak ***

2012 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Only members receive newsletters

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 4 pm - Tuesday through Saturday

Your memberships help keep our doors open