

The
Portage Area Historical Society
Newsletter



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P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

October 2006

This year a record-breaking number of people visited the Portage Station Museum. Local residents, individuals from all over the country, and many senior and church groups viewed the displays, watched the videos, and came for the performances. By keeping the museum open five days a week, Frances Berzinsky has made the museum accessible to so many more people. Frances not only welcomes visitors but keeps the museum clean and well organized. Continued funding from the Senior Community Service Employment Program will keep Frances with us until June 2007, and hopefully for many years to come.



Community Yard Sale

Though four other community yard sales fell on the same day as the 10th Annual Portage Community Yard Sale, the June 10th sale was our most profitable to date. Ninety participants registered – thank you all. Many thanks too, to area residents for donating items for our own sale at the museum. It too, was our biggest and best ever.

Antique Appraisal Fair

From glassware to furniture, jewelry to toys, the July 15th Antique Appraisal Fair at the Portage Moose Hall brought in some truly unique items. The flow of people was continuous from the time the doors opened until closing. The expertise of the two appraisers, Ken Mirilovich and Barry

Gallagher of Johnstown, overwhelmed participants and board members alike.

Tables set up by local artists and crafters included: paper cuttings and tumbled gem pieces by Barbara and John Havrilla, paintings by Barbara Yetsko and Sally Stewart, stained glass and stepping stones

by Theresa Walters, and crocheted pieces by Pam Moyer. Many thanks to the Portage Moose personnel for free use of their hall and to Ken and Barry for donating their services for the event.

Ken & Barry



PHC Grant

Thanks to a grant from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, the Station Museum opened its doors on October 8th to “*Songs and Stories of Pennsylvania’s Working Class People*” performed by Gregory Zaborowski. A full house enjoyed Greg’s musical antics and the stories he told through the songs he composed and sang.

Song topics included the Sonman Mine Explosion, Portage Baseball, the Portage Railroad, and much more. As usual, the performance was free and refreshments were available, with time to socialize after the performance. Gregory’s music can be purchased on cassette at the museum.



Sonman Mine Explosion Exhibit

Starting with Summerfest weekend and continuing through the end of September, photos of the Sonman Mine Explosion were exhibited on the first floor of the Station Museum. Mr. Robert Sease did an outstanding job displaying pictures, maps, and newspaper articles of the devastating event. The original coroner’s inquest, a collection of newspaper articles, letters written by the deceased, and other items from the museums archives were also on display. Dozens of visitors took the time to watch the video “63 Men Down.”



Mr. Robert Sease & Mr. Wm. Callahan, Cedar Falls, Iowa, examine photos from the Sonman Mine Explosion exhibit.

During a recent visit Cathy Page Fetsko was kind enough to offer these words, “Born and raised in Sonman, I was drawn to the museum to see the Sonman Mine Explosion Exhibit. The display and film

of the explosion were both excellent. We also took some time to look at the museum exhibits and were most impressed. Our appreciation goes to all involved with this museum.”

Thank You Portage Rotary

Last spring the PAHS board received a grant to bring 5th graders from Portage Area Elementary School to the museum to learn the history of the Station Museum, their town, and the Allegheny Portage Railroad. The field trip was such a success that teachers asked if it could be repeated with future classes. Thanks to the generosity of the Portage Rotary who have offered to finance the venture, future 5th grade students will be able to visit the museum.



Items donated / on loan to the museum:

Many thanks to all for sharing your treasures.

***A table and two chairs** made by James H. McConnell [1850-1933] for his wife, Rosalia (Cramer) McConnell. They lived in a small cabin on Dr Burkett’s land [Summerhill Twp., across the road from where Adams’ Cycle Shop is now on Frankstown Road]. The legs had to be cut off because Rosalia was a very short woman. The green is the original paint - on



loan from Carol (Yanek) Crichton, Portage, great-granddaughter of James H. McConnell

***Framed picture of the Pittsburgher Train** over 80 years old - ~18”X24”. Original owner was Dr. John Logan of Portage. The picture was originally displayed in Dr.

Loepod’s office in the Pearce Building – donated by Jean Logan Evans, NY, NY, Dr. Logan’s daughter

***Display case** once used in the Casale Shoe Repair Shop (site of Mark Serenko’s new addition) – at least 70 years old. This display case is a wonderful addition to the museum

railroad office as it fits the time period just perfect – donated by Mark and Patty Serenko, Portage

***Framed document Portage Light and Heat Company** - Commonwealth of PA ~16”X20” – Jeffrey Arpino, Altoona



*Early 1900 **scale from Hons Drug Store** – donated by Harold Schmidt, Portage

*Vintage 17” tall **metal bottle capper**, J Sherman Moyer, Portage

***Sonman Mine Explosion newspaper articles and Portage photos** – donated by Mary Frances Bryja, Rockville, MD, daughter of Joseph Bryja

***Wooden kitchen clothes dryer** - Helen Phillips, Lilly

*Collection of vintage **WorkBook magazines** dating back to the 50s – donated by Emil & Shirley Branas, Portage

Trip Down Memory Lane

This summer Portage lost another old building at 527 Main Street. The Martin Building had to be torn down as a result of a fire that occurred on January 18, 2005, rendering it a total loss. A former resident, Mr. William Callahan, shared some interesting history about the building. He remembers that the Martin Realty Company owned and rented the building before 1924. That year Charles and Grace Callahan (Wm’s parents) opened the Callaway Tea Room, where they boasted of home cooking the Callahan Way. The second floor of the building had two apartments with a community bath between them. For a period of time the American Legion stored WWI uniforms in one of the apartments and gave them to the poor. The basement of the building was used to store records – all kinds of records – from banking to mining to financial records.



Portage Arch started in 1890 completed 1896 (on Main Street at the stop light near Sheetz)



Anderson House 1890 (on Railroad Street across the tracks from the freight station)

Photos courtesy of Steve Gavlak, Portage

As a boy Mr. Callahan collected stamps and would root through the papers for stamps, of course he always got in trouble for doing so. Bill Carpenter, the only black man in town, slept in the basement on a pallet (cot) next to the furnace and kept the fire going. Bill received leftovers from the restaurant in return for keeping the fire going. In 1930 the Callahans moved to the site of what is now Jaytar (Computer) Services Inc. on Caldwell Avenue.

After the Callahans moved, Elvin "Sox" Berkheimer operated a beer garden in this building until 1945. Then John and Rhea Mae Powers opened Powers Restaurant. Their restaurant had a private dining room and Rhea played the piano during dining hours. May's Restaurant came next, occupying the building until 1949, then Russ Brown's Restaurant, and finally The Holiday Restaurant. (Can you provide any more historical information about this building?)

Mr. Robert Sease added that the street in front of the Martin Building was originally called Emily Street, named after J.C. Martin's wife. It ran from S. Railroad Street to Caldwell Avenue. Mr. Martin also built the Emily Martin Hall to the right of the Martin Building (site of the former Mulhollen Service Station)

*Notice the large M on the Martin Building. J.C. Martin, considered by some to be the founder of Portage, put this mark elsewhere in town. Do you know where? (More about J. C. Martin in the next newsletter)

PAHS Honors One of Its Own

The Portage Area Historical Society honored board member Ruth Richardson on her 80th birthday. A surprise party with cake and ice cream was given by the members at the end of the regular monthly meeting.

In addition, Ruth was awarded a special plaque and presented a gift certificate for Sassy Sisters to commemorate her 14 years of dedication to the Historical Society.



Photos courtesy of Robert Sease

New Board Member - Linda Miko

Lifelong resident of Portage, loves it and the people in it! Graduated from PAHS 1965, Cambria County Community College, magna cum laude, 2003 with an associate degree in Human Services. Retired as Director of Mental Retardation Services from Cambria Residential Services after 29 years, July of 2006. Wife of John Miko for 37 years! Mother of Johnny, Amy, Jude & Adrienne, and Grandma to Lucas, Mitchell & Andrew Miko, Jillianne Donner, Taylor & Sophia Rabatin. Interests include golf and has served as president of Maple Crest ladies league for a number of years, cemetery researching with Mary Lou George and some craft projects.

Welcome Linda, we are very pleased to have you on the board.

New Treasurer

In October Rose Mary Pavelko took over as PAHS treasurer. Rose replaced John Havrilla who has done an outstanding job at the position since January 2003.

Vandalism

Once again vandals caused damage at the museum. On two separate occasions rocks thrown at the second floor windows broke two window panels. Though these destructive incidents may seem minor, the \$500 deductible insurance we carry has been very costly to our small museum. Petryshak Construction Co. is presently replacing the broken glass. If you know anything about this, please call

the local or state police.

New winter hours: **Christmas Light Tour**
11 am - 4 pm December 16th
Wednesday-Saturday 7:00 pm

Visit our Website @ www.portagestationmuseum.org

Portage Area Historical Society Board

- Regis Huschak - President
- Ruth Richardson - Vice President
- Rose Mary Pavelko - Treasurer
- Mary Kostan - Recording Secretary
- Irene Huschak - Corresponding Secretary
- Mary Lou George, John Havrilla, Barbara Havrilla, Betty Cann, Ginny McDonnell, and Linda Miko

2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Amount Enclosed: _____

Mark the category you prefer.

Annual Member \$5.00 Life Member \$50.00 Student Member \$2.00

Life Sponsor \$100.00 Life Benefactor \$250.00

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