

The **Portage Area Historical Society**
Newsletter



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

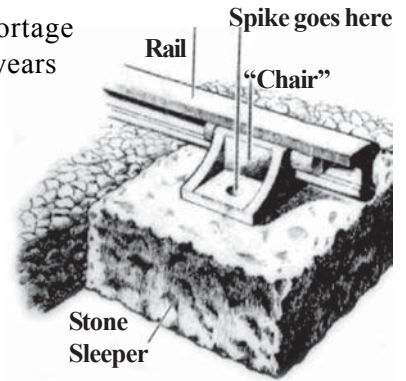
www.portagepa.us

October 2013

Sitting in front of the Station Museum are two large stones that often go unnoticed by visitors and passers-by. These stones are only two of nearly 200,000 that were once used as the foundation for the rails of the Allegheny Portage Railroad. Each stone measured approximately 2 feet square on top and 18" thick. Each took about 24 hours to create. Can you imagine making a 500 pound sleeper with just a hammer and chisel? (picture at right)

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setup and president of the Portage Historical Society for many years thereafter. She tells her story about the painting like this, "I needed this painting to be accurate, but I had never seen the Washington House Hotel, it was way before my time. However, my friend Jeanne Vasbinder's grandmother remembered it well. She had spent a great deal of time there as a young person. So Jeanne's grandmother told me what she remembered and I began to research. We compared notes until we came up with the large painting you see hanging on the wall at the museum today. The



Why "sleepers"? The name came from England, probably called so because the stones "lay on the ground".

Portage can boast that it had one of the first railroads in the country. Railroads were in their infancy when the Allegheny Portage Railroad was designed. Engineers brought the idea from England for stone sleepers to support the rails on the level portions of the railroad.

On the first floor of the Portage Station Museum hangs a large painting of the Washington House Hotel (picture on page 2). This hotel was a stop on Plane No.2. Painted by local artist Barbara Yetsko, we are so fortunate to have this unique historical representation. Barbara was on the board when the museum was



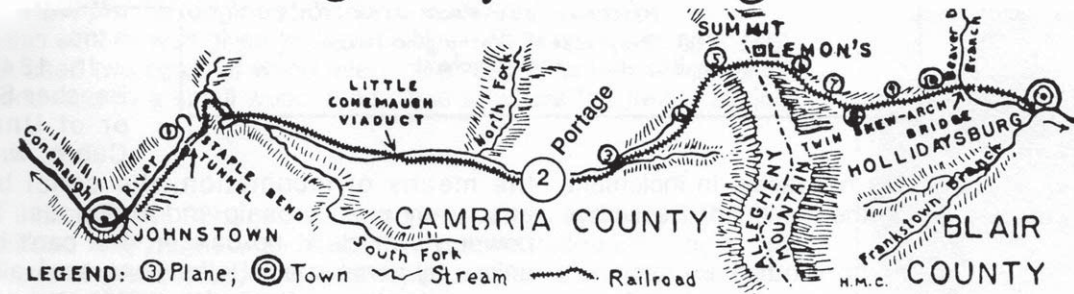
Frank Yurchik kneels on a large sleeper located in Rose Sral's back yard in Jamestown. Seven foot long sleepers were used on occasion to secure the tracks on some of the curves. They are quite rare.

horses are in the painting because the first year horses, not locomotives pulled the canal boats across the planes." (history of the hotel can be found in *Portrait of a Town* page 7)

No pictures have ever surfaced from the Allegheny Portage Railroad era. Some sketches done by George Storm in the 1890s show what each plane might have looked like, but there are no photos of the actual ten inclines or the people who used them. So Barbara's painting of the Washington House Hotel is indeed a treasure.

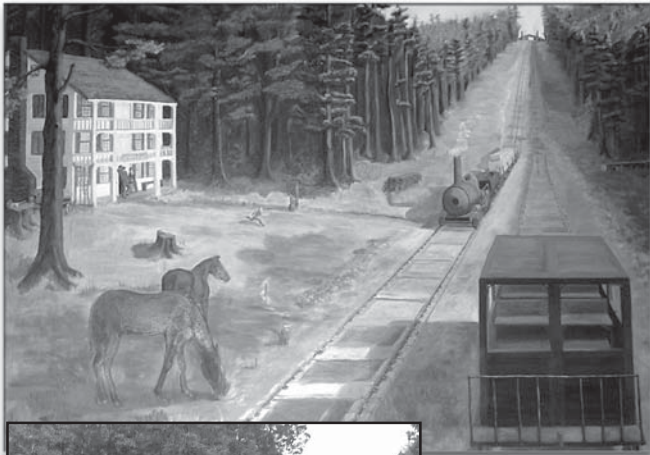
Many famous people- Davy Crockett, Ulysses S. Grant, Charles Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe (Uncle Tom's Cabin), and Mexican General Santa Anna once traveled the route that today we call Portage Street. William Henry Harrison, our 9th president, and

The Allegheny Portage Railroad



The Allegheny Portage Railroad, also known as the Old Portage Railroad, was a most remarkable engineering feat. Its purpose was to link the eastern and western divisions of Pennsylvania's Mainline Canal System. From 1834-1854 this 36 mile railroad "portaged" 80-foot sectional canal boats over the Allegheny Mountains. At the center of the line, Plane No. 2 (that's us) served as the railroad headquarters.

Zachary Taylor, our 12th president, both died while in office. Their bodies were transported over this route. Between 1834 and 1854 anyone traveling from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh would have used the rail system that once ran through our town. Portage is located where it is and named what it is because of the Allegheny Portage Railroad. Foot of Ten is the only incline community that kept its name, but our area was once called the Foot of Two.



This picture (left) shows the same view as Barbara Yetsko's printing (top). The vehicle coming down Plane Road from Jamestown onto Portage Street (Route 53) is following the same route as did the Allegheny Portage Railroad.

From Our Readers

Jack Williams, local Indian artifacts collector tells us, "I recently stopped along Twin Lakes Road in Jamestown where the new water lines are being installed. I found one spear and three arrowheads to add to my collection."

In the July newsletter two stories "From Our Readers" came from **Janet Folajtar** and **Marie Diehl** Cole. After receiving her newsletter, Marie wrote this: I read the article written by Janet Folajtar in the latest newsletter. She mentioned her grandmother was the daughter of William Moudy and Orlena Diehl. Since my maiden name is Diehl, I, of course, was interested. My daughter does a lot of research with Ancestry.com and I asked her to do some detective work on Orlena Diehl. Sure enough, Orlena's great grandfather, Daniel Diehl (1782-1851) is also my great-great grandfather. Small world!

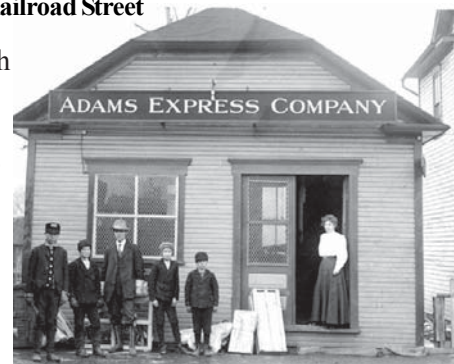
On pages 12-13 in *Portrait of a Town* is an incredible story about a 1904 mine payroll holdup outside of Portage. **Carol Patrick** sent us five articles she received from Ray Washlaski, Editor of "The Old Miner." The articles add so many details to our documented account. (articles were shortened to eliminate repetition)

Youngstown Vindicator," Youngstown, OH - July 30, 1904 PAYMASTER MURDERED BY ASSASSINS - Portage, Pa.

Charles Hayes, a driver employed by the Puritan Coal Company is dead and Patrick Campbell, the company's paymaster, lies fatally wounded at the Altoona Hospital as the result of a hold-up and murder which occurred on the township road leading from this place to Puritan about 10:15 o'clock today. The two in a buggy, were taking a satchel containing \$3000 with which to pay the coal company's employees at Puritan from the Adams Express company office here to the coal town, when, at a point about three-quarters of a mile out of Portage they were suddenly fired upon by a party of three men armed with shotguns. Hays fell to the bottom of the buggy, pierced by thirty-seven buckshot wounds in his neck and breast and died about half an hour later. Campbell was dangerously wounded with 15 bullet wounds to his face, one in his mouth, two in his forehead, and two shots piercing his right lung. He was taken to Altoona on the Day Express. The populace, terribly excited over the outrage, threatened to lynch the perpetrators if they are captured.



Before delivering the payroll, Hayes and Campbell stepped into the Portage House for breakfast. The building still stands on North Railroad Street



After finishing their meal, the men walked across the road to Adams Express and picked up the \$3,000 in gold and bills.

Campbell said he thought their assailants were Italians. Officers arrived from Johnstown, Altoona and other points, and it is scarcely thought the men can make good their escape, though they had not been taken up to 2 p.m. The Puritan Mines are operated by a company headed by J. C. Martin of New York.

"New Oxford Item," New Oxford, PA, Aug. 5, 1904 BOLD HOLD-UP AND MURDER - Portage, Pa., Aug. 1

Charles Hayes, a driver employed by the Puritan Coal Company is dead and Patrick Campbell, the company's paymaster lies fatally wounded at the Altoona Hospital as the result of a hold-up which occurred on the township road. A charge of buckshot almost tore Campbell's face off and rendered him unconscious. Messengers were at once dispatched to telegraph offices and telephones.

Pursued by 800 determined men, the three murderers are hiding in Cedar Swamp, about seven miles from Portage, on the Bedford county line. One of the fugitives is injured, but not enough to affect his flight. In parties of about 20, the pursuing men are scattered out over the entire boundary of the Laurel thicket and swamp, which is 12 miles long and seven miles wide.

Visit our Website at
www.portagepa.us

Carol Paterick
Web Master

Previous newsletters are archived here. Only members get recent editions with a photo insert mailed to them.



Joe Hopfer handed out guns from his hardware store to miners forming posses. Hopfer's Hardware Store was located across from the S&T Bank parking lot on the corner of Jefferson & Main. Don Troxel tells us, "The story is true. Grandpap emptied his gun display case and gave out the shells."

**"Indiana Evening Gazette," Indiana, Pa, Jan. 24, 1908
CHASE ENDS IN ITALY - Messina, Sicily, Jan 24
Gang Accused of Portage Highway Robbery and
Murder Are Captured - Pursuit Lasted Four Years.**

A hold up at Portage, Pa. four years ago ended here last night in the arrest of three men who are declared to have been accomplices in the robbery and murder crime. The men's names are Carmela Carallim, Rosario Degrazio and Giuseppe Filloramo.

Search for these men had been going on for many months in spite of the fact that they went disguised and constantly changed their appearance. Last night all three gathered together in a house near here. The police then came down on them and the house was surrounded by carabinieri. After all precautions had been taken, six policemen forced their way into the room where the men were. There was a desperate fight, but the men were outnumbered and were quickly forced to surrender. There were no casualties.

Another accomplice in the hold-up named Francesco Imbezzi was arrested here several months ago.

Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 24, 1908

Campbell Took the Trail - Remembered Assailant's Face.

Campbell claimed that when he fell he had retained an indelible impression of the features of the man who had shot him and after his recovery set out on the trail of the man and has never abandoned it. His theory was that the men had been familiar with the movements of the paymaster and that as soon as they had secured the money they fled to foreign lands.

A man named Imbezzi, charged with the crime, has lain in an Italian jail for many months. It was known that he left the vicinity of Johnstown shortly after the hold-up. But it appeared that no crime could be made out until last summer, when a confession was extracted from a foreign boarding house keeper in South Fork, Pa. Imbezzi and another man whose name has not been disclosed were implicated, and Mr. Campbell, remembering his impression received the day he was shot down, resolved to go to Italy and continue the search for the bandits.

**"The New York Times," New York, NY, Oct. 10, 1913
SURRENDERS AFTER 9 YEARS**

One of the Portage Highwaymen, Gives Himself Up in Sicily Oct. 9.

Francesco Imbesi, who attacked and robbed Patrick Campbell at Portage, Penn. in 1904 surrendered himself to the authorities here yesterday. He was recently condemned in his absence to thirty years imprisonment for the crime and his complicity in the murder of Charles Hays on the same occasion. Two men beside Imbesi were charged before the Criminal Court of Messina last June with the robbery and murder but were acquitted.

**"The Pittsburg Press," Pittsburg, PA, June 25, 1915
ITALY FREES SUSPECTS OF AMERICAN MURDER**

District Attorney Charles C. Greer of Cambria County received word from the State Department in Washington yesterday that in an opinion handed down by the Court of Assize in Messinam, Italy, Francesco Imbesi and Giuseppe Filloramo were acquitted of the murder of Charles Hays and the attempted murder of Patrick Campbell.



Mom & Pop Store #14
Opened in the 1930, Bellvia's grocery store was located at 1021 Caldwell Avenue and run by Carmella Bellvia. Granddaughter Carmella Sedar remembers her grandmother selling items like penny candy, bananas in a bunch, lunch meats and pickles in a jar.

Visitors

Rich, Linda, Lewis and Kelci Sapko of Lower Burrell, PA love trains and train museums. They found our museum on their GPS and stopped by for a visit. The Sapkos were most impressed with our little museum and commented on our detail to local preservation. Linda also said, "Of all the train museums we have ever visited, the Portage Station Museum has more local train history than any other we have ever seen."



Lewis and Rich Sapko were shocked at how close they were to the trains while standing on our platform.

Share your memories, photos, and memorabilia with us and we'll share them with the community.

I Remember When

Bob Baudoux, Northroeville, PA tells us this, "In the late 1940s Morris's Tavern, affectionately called 'Millie's,' was a bar owned by Millie and Steve Oravec's. It was across the street from 'the Jive,' run by the Cornell Family. The Jive was a popular dance spot for jitter-bugging, the 'thing' to do back then. One of my classmates said she used to walk from her home on Portage's Cemetery Road to the Jive, and then walk back home, 'cause her mother warned her not to accept any offered auto rides.'"



Michele Jaikes and Joann Nickol staff the tent at this year's Portage Summerfest.



August Display
Throughout the month of August, the historical society was pleased to display the art work of the late June Voyzey. June taught at Portage Area School District for many years and passed this summer.

Her favorite medium was water colors, but she also enjoyed pencil sketching and mirror painting. Over the years she taught her students many techniques, several which were on display, like her pet rocks and her ceramics. Daughter Sherrie donated several of June's pieces to the museum.

We are in search of a picture of the Portage Railroad Station when it was used as a station. Though we have a picture of its construction, we have no pictures of it from 1926-1954. Can anyone help?



Construction of the Railroad Station
photo submitted by Bob Sease

Memorial Plaque

What better way to remember a loved one than with a gold plaque displayed at the Station Museum? Plaques can be purchased for \$100, \$500, and \$1,000. One new plaque has been added to our board In Memory of Tony and Jean Mignogna.

New Board Member

Frank Yurchik was born and raised in Portage and graduated from PAHS in 1994. He attended the Sawyer Business School in Pittsburgh and then moved to Chambersburg, where he graduated from the Harrisburg Community College in Gettysburg with an associate Degree in Business management. After being away for 17 years, Frank is back in Portage and now working at Sheetz in Claysburg. "I am excited about being a Historical Society Board member, it gives me a chance to be involved. I love going to the museum to give tours and I love talking to the people of Portage, they are our best resources. Portage is taking great steps forward and I am proud to be part of it."



Recent Acquisitions

Many thanks to all those who donated items to the historical society. Linda Gagagen of Portage recently donated a display case that was once used in the Smart Shop on Main Street. Thanks to Linda we have

been able to extend our sports display.

Upcoming events: Book sale beginning in December and "Next Generation of Native American Dancers" October 20.

****Newsletter by Irene Huschak****

PAHS Board - Irene Huschak-*President/Education Coordinator*; Ruth Richardson-*Vice President*; Mary Kostan-*Recording Secretary*; Barbara Havrilla-*Corresponding Secretary/Memberships*; Charles Edwards-*Miniature Mainline*; Pat Fedorko, Judy Smith, Rose Sral, Judy Dubreucq, Michele Jaikes, Frank Yurchik and (HM) Betty Cann

2014 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Only members receive our newsletter

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**

(If you do not wish to cut this form from your newsletter, just include a note with your check)

Museum hours: 12 pm to 4 pm - Tuesday through Saturday

Complimentary Copy

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