



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

NOVEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History
492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480; Tel: 860-342-5455

www.PortlandHistSoc.Org Email: PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com Vol 40 No 2

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - Deborah Ellsworth

It has been a busy six months for the Society. We had our 17th Annual Town Wide Tag Sale in May, another highly successful fund raiser, and before you know it, we will be planning #18 — mark your calendars for Saturday, May 10, 2014!

At the museum, our special exhibit, “Portland River Crossings” was launched for CT Open House Day on June 8. Building on this theme, we celebrated the 75th birthday of the Arrigoni Bridge in August with a program on its construction presented by Jonathan Ives, a present-day bridge engineer, featuring video footage donated to the museum by Howard Ives, formerly of Portland, who was Chief engineer on the bridge project in 1938. It was standing room only at the Mary Flood Room, proving that people love to hear about Portland's history.

I would like to thank those who volunteered at our exhibit at the Portland Agricultural Fair. The River Crossings exhibit traveled to the Fair and many visitors had stories about family members who worked on the building of the Arrigoni Bridge. By also displaying a list of our Charter Members, we were able to update our address list for the postcard mailing announcing our Sunday Social, Nov. 17, celebrating forty years since the founding of the Portland Historical Society.

(Continued on page 2)



Thank you

to all of you who support us with your **memberships and donations** every year. **A membership envelope is included in this newsletter. Your membership is paid through the year above your name on the address label of this newsletter.** The Society depends on your tax deductible donations to continue our work collecting, preserving and sharing Portland's history. Annual memberships run from January 1 to December 31. Please help us continue to save Portland's history.

Questions, call Claire at 860-335-8581, or email: portlandcthistory@gmail.com.



‘Precious Pieces of Portland’ winner Annette LeShane drew Meshomasic Forest and wrote, “You can visit the Meshomasic State Forest and see animals like deer, raccoon, squirrels and chipmunks. You can look at trees and plant life. But watch out for Poison Ivy!”

Many photos highlight the “River Crossings” exhibit as seen at this year’s Portland Agricultural Fair. Volunteers Eileen Marino, Shelley Nolan and George Gilbert assist visitors.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - Deborah Ellsworth

(Continued from page 1)

Fairgoers were treated to a magnet celebrating forty years of "Bridging History", complete with a 1938 photo image of both the new & old Middletown-Portland bridges.

Be sure to check out the article on page 4 about the work done this summer and fall to restore the exterior of our museum. This work was made possible by a matching grant from the 1772 Foundation, along with the significant generosity of our members.

In October the third graders at Gildersleeve began their study of Portland history. I would like to thank their teachers — Virginia Cox, Jennifer Esteves, Maureen Pfeifer, Janice Robitaille and Mary Tammaro — for the excellent job they do on this local history unit. Thanks to Principal Eileen Katz, and Society members Rick Gildersleeve and Becky Robinson for doing an admirable job judging the student artwork. See more about this collaborative project on this page.

Be sure to put our Second Annual Festival of Wreaths — "Jingle & Mingle" — on your calendar for December 7 and 8. Stop by the carriage barn behind 329 Main Street and view the display of wreaths created by individuals, businesses and organizations in Portland. Last year was our first Festival and we raffled 36 donated wreaths. We are aiming for 40 this year — one for each year of our existence! If you can help us reach that magic number, let me know. Contact details can be found on page 3 in this newsletter.

Our holiday exhibit will open on Sunday, December 15, with special train and toy displays. We will be open December 15, 22, 29 and January 5 from 2 - 4 p.m. Seasonal refreshments will be served.

As my term as president of The Portland Historical Society officially ends in January 2014, I would like to thank my fellow board members for their dedication and enthusiasm over the past three years. It has been a pleasure working with each and every one of you. Thank you to our supportive members who help us deliver the message — that Portland has a rich heritage worthy of collecting, preserving and sharing.

I wish everyone the best of holidays this year. May you enjoy your time with family and friends.

SOCIETY NOTES . . .



Precious Pieces of Portland Contest winners — left to right: Annette LeShane (First Place), Ginia Lin (Second Place) and Honorable Mentions: Anna Fantoli and Joe Rusczyk. Alex Hair, missing from photo, is this year's Third Place winner.

Precious Pieces of Portland

The 3rd graders at Gildersleeve School provided us with a special display, "Precious Pieces of Portland," for our November opening. This fall they began studying the history of Portland. This included a bus tour around town highlighting historic locations, and a hike at the reservoir and Meshomasic Forest with John LeShane.

Students then created postcards with a drawing of and short composition about their favorite landmark from Portland's history. We are proud to sponsor this contest and to display each and every one of their pieces of art. During our museum opening, visitors were fascinated by what caught the attention of these third graders. The students with the top three postcard designs were awarded a Barnes & Noble giftcard and all students were presented with a certificate for their participation and a magnet.

On November 12 and 13, the students walked to the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History for a tour and Portland history review led by docent Claire Frisbie, assisted by Bob McDougall, John Peterson and Marie Keser. This school project is an example of how the Society works to bridge history — encouraging the youngest citizens of Portland to have an interest in their local history. Thanks to all who make this collaboration possible.

2 0 1 3 F E S T I V A L O F W R E A T H S

JINGLE & MINGLE

We are excitedly anticipating our second Festival of Wreaths – “Jingle and Mingle!” on the weekend of December 7 and 8. Thanksgiving is almost here and it’s time to think about December. What better way is there, than to explore our display of wreaths, take some chances and hopefully win your favorite! What a way to start making your home festive for the holidays. Wreaths will range from traditionally decorated greens to more elaborate or whimsical creations. Come see the work of the crafty and artsy people of Portland.

**Saturday &
Sunday
December
7 & 8
12 - 4 PM
at the
Carriage Barn
329 Main St.**

Last year we raffled 36 wreaths and we are hoping to reach 40 this year – celebrating by raffling one wreath for each of the 40 years since the Society’s creation. If you would like to help us reach the magic number of forty, please consider donating a decorated wreath – it’s not too late. On our website there is information (www.PortlandHistSoc.org) and you can call Deb at 860-342-1927 or send us an email at PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com to register. Please register by Friday, November 29. Wreaths can be dropped off at the carriage barn behind 329 Main Street on Thursday, December 5, from 4 - 7 p.m. or on Friday, December 6, from noon - 3 p.m.



Visitors enjoy the 2012 Festival of Wreaths

We invite you to come mingle with others over some holiday treats, wear your holiday sweaters, share some holiday stories with acquaintances old and new, and help us continue to build this new holiday tradition in Portland.

All proceeds from this event will be used to restore the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History and to fund educational projects for the community.

The Festival is in the *Carriage Barn behind 329 Main Street (NOT at the Callander House)* on Saturday, December 7 and Sunday, December 8 from noon to 4 p.m. both days. Winning names will be drawn at 4 p.m. Sunday before the start of Portland’s Parade of Lights.

RUTH CALLANDER HOUSE REPAIR/RESTORATION PROJECT

The Ruth Callander House is well on its way in a major restoration project. In 2012, we hired an architectural firm to do a complete Conditions Assessment, a measurement of the buildings fabric and fixtures and plan of rehabilitation for any work required. The study showed no serious problems, but verified the fact that the exterior needed moderate wood repairs prior to clean up and paint. We also ascertained that the chimney needs significant structural repair, and in spring 2014 it will be rebuilt from below the attic floor to the top. In the meantime, the mason is installing a flu liner for the furnace, so that we can heat through this winter.

To address the necessary exterior carpentry repairs, we hired Jim Sarbaugh, an expert carpenter, and inci-



Front portico after repairs.



Repair work necessitated uncovering the south end girt - a large hand hewn beam from the original 1714 construction.

dentally, a member of the Society and the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, to complete a long list of repairs. He began in mid July and by November 1 had completed all the work to the museum building. He will return to complete repairs on the garage building later.

The evaluation of work to be done was all superficial, so during the actual removal and repair process, we were able to thoroughly evaluate the underlying structural components. It was a fascinating look at the original 1714 structures, and all the changes that have been made over 300 years. Unfortunately, Jim found significant problems in a number of areas, necessitat-

ing more than double the work originally expected. Other than one sill that we hope to check in the next few years (it shows no sign of problems superficially), we now know that the building is structurally sound inside and out, and with the repairs completed should be good and solid for many years to come. *Thanks to a generous donation from the late Norma Werdelin, a Society member, and a grant from the 1772 Foundation, in spite of unforeseen expense, the carpentry project was fully funded.*

Items repaired include:

Skirt and corner boards, and clapboards replaced where required, front sills required significant rebuild in places, portico roof leveled, columns repaired and repositioned to proper placement, brownstone step lifted, foundation rebuilt underneath and brownstone replaced with proper stone base. Rotted kitchen window (vintage 1950) replaced (with windows more appropriate to look of building) and wall rebuilt, another kitchen wall with significant rot repaired, all window trim and cornice trim repaired where necessary, underlying support structures repaired and replaced as necessary. Foundation was repaired/rebuilt where necessary to carpentry work. Some further foundation repair will be completed next year. Front lantern on portico rewired and replaced.

C. Frisbie - Ruth Callander House Committee



New kitchen windows have similar design and trim to original window (right).

HISTORY. . . THE GILDERSLEEVE LEDGERS

THE MUSEUM COLLECTION INCLUDES A LARGE NUMBER OF LEDGERS FROM THE GILDERSLEEVE SHIPBUILDING AND STORE BUSINESSES. **RICK GILDERSLEEVE** HAS SPENT MANY HOURS DOCUMENTING WHAT IS CONTAINED IN EACH. HE HAS SUPPLIED THIS LIST OF ITEMS FROM AN 1879 LEDGER, AND **DORIS SHERROW-HEIDENEIS** HAS ANNOTATED WITH HELPFUL INFORMATION TO PROVIDE THIS INTERESTING LOOK INTO 1879 PORTLAND.

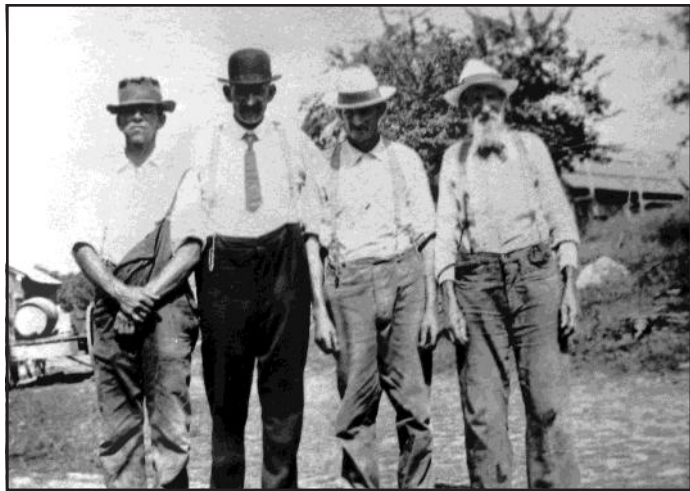
These are all from autumn of 1879.

Light Ship #7 was in the shipyard undergoing repairs for the U.S. Government.

The Schooner *Rebecca* (98 ft. in length) was under construction at the shipyard.

John Sullivan was paid \$24.25 for 24 days work at the shipyard between Aug.1 and Sept.1.

Watson Hale bought a pair of shoes for \$1.55 *Watson Hale was 42. He was married, to the former Elizabeth M. Taylor of Glastonbury. She died in 1899, but Watson survived till 1924, a month after his 87th birthday.*



Herbert R., Lewis, & Willis with their father, Watson B. Hale, at Hale farm, early 1900s.

The Siam Dock bought 5 nails for 18 cents. This was the dock on the river by the fairgrounds where many bulk shipments including timber and manure came in.

Mrs. Alvord was paid 75 cents for making two shirts, 25 cents for a pair of pants and 25 cents for shortening coat sleeves. She was paid in goods.

Mrs. Alvord likely lived in 159 Summer Street (formerly 61), sold to her by Sylvester Gildersleeve in 1873. Her husband, Francis Alvord, was still alive - this may represent a late 19th century ten-

dency to deed property to the women of the family because men were likely to die earlier.

D.N. Markham was paid \$325.63 for timber planks to be used on the *Rebecca*.

Mike Barry, who worked at the shipyard for many years was being paid \$1.65 a day - more than most. He received \$37.95 for working 23 days from Aug. 1 to Sept. 1.

Michael Barry would have been about 57 in 1879. He was a long-time laborer & quarryman. He may have been married more than once, or it may have been the problematic nature of hand-written record keeping, but he and Ellen/Mary [Gorman]/Johanna [Finn] had at least eight children between 1848 and 1870, an 1868 daughter being designated as "seventh child" in the birth record.

Rodney McKay bought a broad axe for \$3.25 *Rodney McKay might have been a part of the McKay/Lawrence family at the end of Indian Hill Avenue in a house that burned in 1910, though so far no listing for him has been found in the records. However, the clerk might have written his name wrong, or he might have been using a nickname which wasn't officially recorded...*

Mrs. William Dixon bought a pair of "Alaskas" for .50 cents. She lived on Indian Hill Ave. and put up boarders for many years. Most were shipyard workers who came in for specialized jobs. John Kavanaugh paid her \$18.86 for five weeks board. \$1.14 had been deducted because he missed six meals. He was paid \$2.00 a day at the shipyard so he was a skilled worker.

William Dixon was a master carpenter for the Gildersleeve ship yard. In fact, the Gildersleeves had the Greek Revival-style house at 52 Indian Hill Avenue built for him, and likely by him, as well, then they sold it to him. Dixon died March 6, 1877 at age 70-- "Old Age & Blind" says the record. Mrs. Dixon's "Alaskas" are probably boots.

(Continued on page 6)

THE GILDERSLEEVE LEDGERS (CONT.)

(Continued from page 5)

The Middlesex Quarry deposited \$1500 in The First National Bank for their vessel repair account.

John Kenefic who worked at the wagon shop next to the shipyard, was paid \$38.03 for 23 days in September.

John Kenefic was about 29 in 1879. He was married to Mary nee Colbert - they were both Irish immigrants. In 1880, they had the second of their (at least) five children.

Norman Goff bought a pair of spectacles for \$1.00.

The Strickland sisters bought 3/4 bushel of timothy seed for \$2.21.

Mary Bell put \$50 in the Middlesex Quarry store account. Her connection to the quarry is unknown.

John Cornwall (sic),
John Cornwall would have been about 14 in 1879 - he was 25 in 1890, thus born around 1865. He married Annie Teller in 1889.

F. Alvord,
Francis Alvord, married to Jane (Taylor) Alvord, also lived at 159 aka 61 Summer Street with their children, two daughters born in 1859 and 1862, and an 1865 son..

Thomas Pitkin
Thomas Pitkin may have been an "immigrant" from the East Hartford Pitkins...

and Edward O'Brien bought coal from Capt. Wellington S. Coe for \$4.50 a ton.

Wellington Coe would have been 62, with a wife and several children; they lived in the Greek Revival house located at 284 Main Street.

Henry Kilby bought a grapevine for \$3.25. He



The Gildersleeve Store

worked for S.G. & Sons in various capacities for many years.

Henry Kilby would have been about 49 in 1879. He had married Emily Strickland in 1854, and they probably lived at 582 Main Street, in the old 1755 Ebenezer White house. This house was referred to as "the Kilby house" on an early 20th century assessor's card, and deeds show that they owned it at least as early as 1907, and may have rented before that.

Alvin Miller paid \$16.50 to Henry Gildersleeve for pasturing four head of cattle on Gildersleeve Island for 22 weeks.

This would probably be Henry Gildersleeve (1817-1894), who built the house at 625 Main Street.

The Schooner M.M. Brainerd paid \$3.90 for oak for a new rudder.

William Murphy bought 3/4 cord of hardwood from William Evans for \$3.50.

William Murphy was likely about 51 during this transaction; William Evans would have been about 52. Evans died the next year.

The Alms House bought one gallon of K oil (kerosene) for .25 cents and 1/2 barrel of flour for \$5.00.

The "Alms House" might be a reference to the 1779 colonial at 5 Indian Hill Avenue. This house was bought by Mrs. David (Minnie) Williams in 1869 to be run as "a tavern called 'The Union House.'" It went into foreclosure in 1877, and was bailed out in 1882 by Mrs. J. Allen (Emily) Butler.

Owen McAuliffe bought a 4th grade reader for .90 cents and a writing book for 15 cents.

(Continued on page 7)

THE GILDERSLEEVE LEDGERS (CONT.)

(Continued from page 6)

Owen & Bridget (Twomey) McAuliffe had several children, including a boy unnamed in Vital Records in 1864, a girl Ellen--their fourth child--in 1871, and a fifth child in 1874--Margaret. That Margaret McAuliffe became the historian for the 1916 booklet "Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Portland." She would have been five in 1879, when her dad bought this book, so it was more likely for one of her older siblings. However Margaret McAuliffe found several other women in late 19th century Portland who shared her interest in local history-- Julia Norton McLean (1866-1948), Mary Ranney Lewis (1870-1946), Mary Eva Cramer (1873-1969), and Jessie Alsop (1875-1951). Their works total at least nine, including Alsop's famous Colonial Dames historic house write-ups.

Dr. Hammond bought 20 gallons of K oil for \$.3.60. From J. B. Beers' 1884 History of Middlesex County, page 520-521: "C. E. Hammond, born at Ellington, May 7th 1824. He was a private student of Dr. Alden Skinner, of Vernon. He graduated from the medical department of New York University in 1848. He practiced medicine with Dr. Skinner, his former preceptor, for four years then settled in Glastonbury, where he practiced 17 years and came to Portland in 1870."

Martin Kavanaugh, Yankee, bought a hammer, hinges and 8 nails. There were two Martin Kava-naughs, they're usually distinguished by where they lived - one was "in meadows" and the other was usually "out east". But in this ledger it's "Yankee" for this one.

Quite likely, this was the Martin Cavanaugh born in 1826, and dying in 1893. He and his wife Ann had at least two children, a son born in 1854, and a daughter born in 1861.

The Marine Railway (used for hauling vessels out of the water for repair) paid F.E. Stearns \$3.00 for diving, probably to check for damage on the bottom of a ship prior to hauling it out.

"F. E. Stearns" was probably Frank Stearns, who married Mary Green in 1870, and had three children, all daughters, between 1871 and 1876.

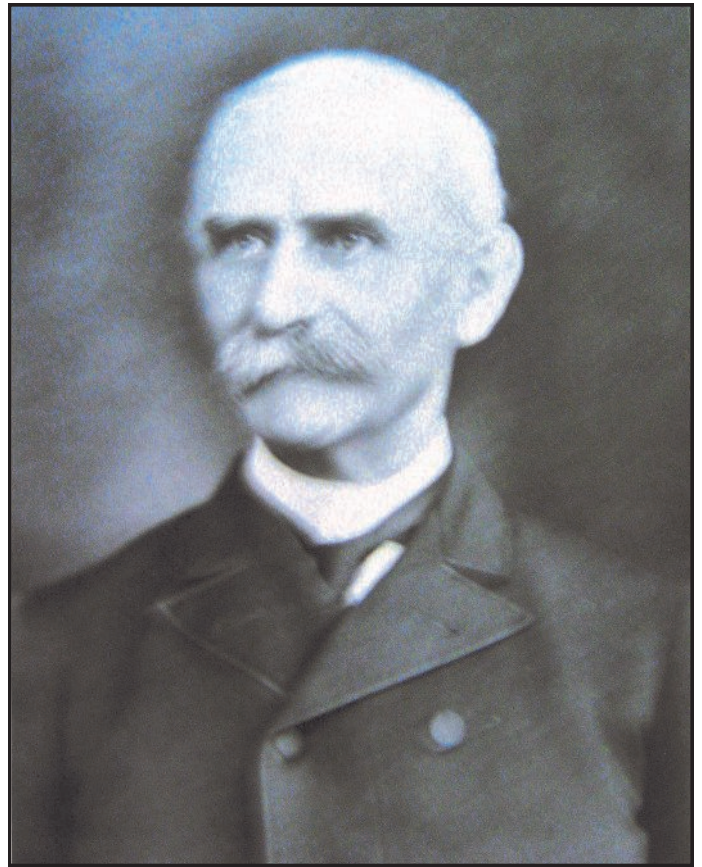
Ellery B. Taylor bought two augurs for \$1.15.

Ellery Taylor would have been a fellow in his 50s, married to Betsey, the daughter of Kellogg & Almira Strong. Betsey Strong would have grown up at 448 Main Street.

The store bought ten bushels of charcoal from Ward Hollister for \$1.00.

Angus Parson paid Mrs. Dixon \$24.57 for 6 1/7 weeks board.

[Mrs. Dixon who bought the "Alaskas"...]



Ferdinand Gildersleeve

Ferdinand Gildersleeve paid \$1.00 freight bill to the Steamer Sunshine for a new "chamber set." This was a couple of weeks before he got married.

Ferdinand, son of Sylvester Gildersleeve, was 39; his bride-to-be, Adelaide Smith, was 34. They were married soon after, but she died the following year.

The Schooner Louise P. Mallory bought one piece of window glass for .20 cents and 12 sail needles for .55 cents.

CALENDAR

- Dec 5 Festival Wreath Drop off - Carriage Barn 4-7 pm*
- Dec 6 Festival Wreath Drop off - Carriage Barn 12-3 pm*
- Dec 7 & 8 Festival of Wreaths - Carriage Barn, 329 Main St.
Open Sat and Sun 12 - 4 pm*
- Dec 15, 22, 29 Holiday Open House at Ruth Callander
Museum of Portland History, 2-4 pm*
- Jan 5 Holiday Open House at Ruth Callander
Museum of Portland History, 2-4 pm*
- Jan 28 Society Annual Meeting - Review of past year,
election of officers, refreshments - Portland Library,
Mary Flood Room, at 7:30 p.m.*



*An imaginative Owl wreath from
the 2012 Festival of Wreaths*

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NEWSLETTER - *Claire Frisbie, 11-25-2013, 860-335-8581, portlandcthistory@gmail.com*

November 2013 Newsletter!

- FINANCE BOARD**
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Festival of Wreaths - December 7 and 8
Information enclosed

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PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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