



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

May 2024 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. 50 No. 1

28th Annual Town-Wide Tag Sales

Sponsored by the Portland Historical Society

Benefiting the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

TOWN-WIDE TAG SALE

RAIN
OR SHINE

Saturday, May 11th
8:30 AM to 2:30 PM

RAIN
OR SHINE

Also visit the BAKE SALE at the Ruth Callander House on Tag Sale Day

Questions? Contact PortlandCThistory@gmail.com or call 860-982-1486

Museum News and Upcoming Events

May 28 Membership Meeting at the Portland Waverly Senior Center, 7:00 pm - Vote on the Bylaws (amended)

In 2023 a subcommittee of the Portland Historical Society was named to review and update our Bylaws (last done in 2009). This group is now prepared to discuss the proposed Bylaw changes at a membership meeting on Tuesday April 23 at 7pm at the Waverly Senior Center, 7 Waverly Avenue. To read the proposed Bylaws (as well as the 2009 edition), go to our website Portlandhistsoc.com, click on the Publications in the left hand column. Choose "Proposed Revised Bylaws" to review the document. Please bring your questions and comments to this meeting. It is anticipated that a membership meeting to vote on adopting the new Bylaws will be held on Tuesday, May 28.

Bylaws Subcommittee

George Gilbert

Julie Macksoud, ex officio

Lynn Fountain

Susan Bransfield

Chris Sullivan

June 8 Portland Quarry Celebration Day & Artisan Craft Fair at the Portland Riverfront Park, 284 Brownstone Ave. 10 am - 4 pm – co-sponsored by Portland Historical Society, Brownstone Quorum and Portland Parks & Recreation

June 15 Juneteenth - at Portland Middle School, 93 High St., 10:30 am - 3:30 pm - co-sponsored by Committee on Solidarity of the Town of Portland, Portland Historical Society, Portland Public Schools, True Vine Holiness Church of Portland, Portland Library, Portland Youth and Family Services, Middlesex Habitat for Humanity, Middlesex County NAACP and Liberty Bank

Museum committee Update

By Bob McDougall, Museum Director

We have resumed monthly meetings and is primarily focused on achieving the strategic goal to "inventory all museum assets by December 31, 2025". Three initiatives are currently underway, kitchen clearing, moving inventoried items to offsite storage, and training on the CTCO (Connecticut Collections) inventory database. If anyone would like more information contact us at PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com.

Portland Local Recalls The Hartford Circus Fire

*as told to George M Gilbert III of the
Portland Historical Society*

Thursday, July 6th, 1944 started off as an exciting day for ten year old Wayne (Duffy) Duff. Wayne's mother Dorothea and he were going to spend quality mother-son time at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. The circus was close-by, it was being held in Hartford that day. Duffy lived on Main Street, in the Gildersleeve section of Portland

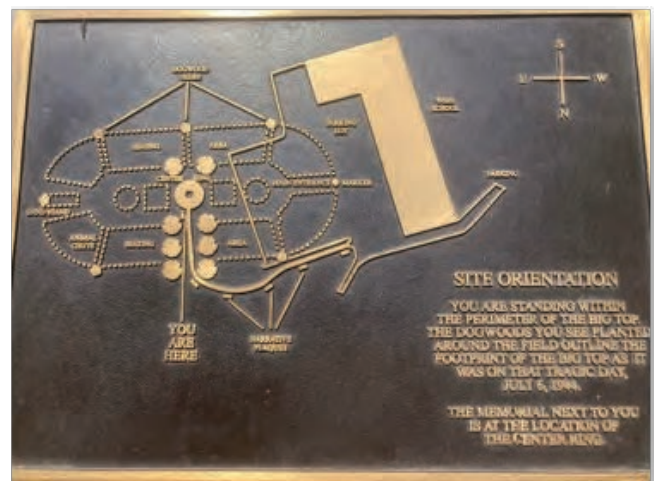
in 1944 with his mother who was a registered nurse. She was a young working mother in her thirties employed at Elmcrest Manor in Portland. This day would give her some well deserved time off from her job as well as enjoying quality time with her son. Duffy remembers the morning of July 6th being hot and humid from day start with the temperature exceeding 100 degrees F. mid afternoon.



*Duffy at 14 years old dressed in
parade uniform as a mascot.
Picture taken at 568 Main Street.*

Mother and son left Portland that morning being driven by a friend without knowing they would be survivors of the most devastating circus fire in history. The circus had about 8,000 (est) people in attendance that afternoon. This fire would claim over 160 lives and over 700 injuries. Duffy explains that the circus was laid out with three big rings. Their seating that morning was supposed to start at the south ring along the wall. After sitting there for a while waiting for the show to begin Dorothea decided to change seats. They moved from section "C" to better seats in section "E" that were located in the center ring. Duffy feels that if they did not change seats that day he would not be here today. Duffy at 14 years old dressed in parade uniform as a mascot. Picture taken at 568 Main Street. Most of the fatalities that occurred happened right along the wall where Duffy and his mom were initially sitting in section "C".

The "Lion Show" had just finished and the "Flying Wallendas" were performing as the fire broke out. According to Duffy he heard May Kovar who was an animal trainer shouting "fight". It took a few seconds to register that she was actually shouting "fire". He and his mom were sitting by a railing so they quickly scaled the rail jumping down about two feet and started running towards a side entrance that was used to let show animals in the tent. They managed to exit out of that entrance and Duffy just remembers running, running and running away from the blaze to a nearby field. He heard screaming and yelling of the panicked people behind him. "If you tripped and fell there was a very good chance that you couldn't get up and you would be trampled by the mob of people trying to flee the inferno", he added. When asking about his mom, Duffy remembers not leaving her side, "I stayed right with her" he said. Their good seating and quick actions that day helped them beat the crowds out of the fiery big top. Time Magazine called the Hartford Circus Fire "the worst circus disaster in U.S. history".

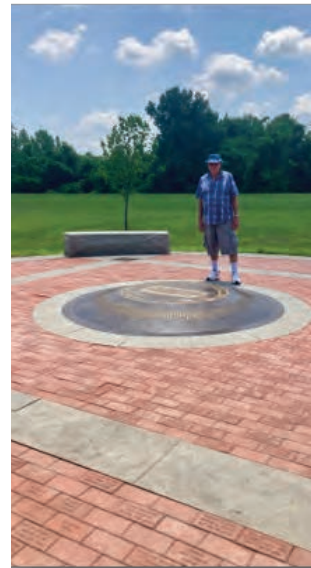


Site map of the Hartford Circus Fire and Memorial

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Top: Wayne Duff poses in front of Portland fire engine #4. This model is a 1948 Mack that Duffy remembers operating when it was brand new.



Left: Duffy looking at the monument's embossed names of those who perished in the Circus Fire



Right: A plaque that was awarded to "Duffy" on August 27, 2022 for his 70 years of service to the Town of Portland as a volunteer fireman.

Duffy recounts and still remembers vividly the horrors of the fire on that tragic day. On July 6th 2023 Duffy, his daughter Tammy and son in law Wally visited the Circus Fire Memorial in Hartford. On July 6th 2004 ground was broken for the Memorial This is located in the rear of the Wish School on 350 Barbour Street, Hartford which is the same property that the fire occurred almost 80 years ago. The monument center is where the bigtop was located. On the monument it has the names of each of the fire victims embossed on the top of the memorial. Surrounding the memorial are bricks in remembrance of all the victims, those that perished and those who were able to escape.

Wayne (Duffy) Duff has been a member of the Portland #2 Volunteer Fire Department for 71 years. This Fire Department is located in the Gildersleeve section of town and was formerly known as Engine Company #2 in Gildersleeve. At 89 years old Duffy is still a member of #2 Fire Department, however, he is no longer going out on fire calls.

Black History Month Panel

GALLERY OF PORTLAND

A BLACK HISTORY MONTH PANEL



On February 24, 2024, the Portland Historical Society, along with the Portland Library and the Portland Committee on Solidarity hosted "Gallery of Portland: A Black History Panel" in the auditorium of the historic Brownstone Intermediate School on Main Street. Following welcoming remarks from First Selectman Ryan Curley, a panel composed of Patricia Hall Jemison, David Roane, Barbara Shaw and Rev. Laurence Woods reflected on what it was like to live "under the bridge" in Portland during the 1960's and 1970's. Bob McDougall, Director and Trustee of the Portland Historical Society Museum, was the facilitator for the panel. Naji Chester-Payne, Portland's Poet Laureate, created and presented a new poem at the close of the program.

Naji and his daughter also filmed the event. It can be viewed on the Portland Historical Society's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@PortlandHistSoc>).

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In addition, Mary Dunn Maki transcribed the program. Her transcript can be found on our website (<http://portlandhistsoc.com/npublications.htm>).

The Portland Historical Society is in the process of researching the Portland Redevelopment Agency (PRA), and its work from 1965 to 1980. The PRA was tasked with redeveloping the south end of Portland, (under the bridge), including Lower Main Street, Wolcott Street, Airline Avenue, Bank Street and South Bank Street. This area is now the Portland Industrial Park. The Society is seeking additional pictures and firsthand accounts about this area of town. Please email the Society at (portlandhistsoc@yahoo.com) with any information.

The "Gallery of Portland" was well attended, with approximately 70 people in attendance. One attendee described the program as "powerful, touching and emotional". The Society would like to thank everyone involved in producing this program.



Celebrate
 PORTLAND'S 6TH ANNUAL FREEDOM DAY
JUNETEENTH
 EVERYONE WELCOME
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2024
10:30AM - 3:30PM
PORTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL
93 HIGH STREET, PORTLAND, CT

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 True Vine Holiness Church of Portland, Portland Library, [Portland Historical Society](#), Portland Youth and Family Services,
 Middlesex Habitat for Humanity, Middlesex County NAACP and Liberty Bank

Outgoing President's Report:



2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the Portland Historical Society and it was a banner year for us. I am very proud of our board who contributed no less than 2,425 volunteer hours to honor our mission by bringing forth several special exhibits and events in celebration of this milestone. I am pleased to report 166 total memberships (some of which comprise families) including 40 life members.

This past summer we were able to focus on two major undertakings: showcasing the works of 19th century artist John Wells Stancliff in *A Portland Artist Comes Home* at the Portland Public Library. We also participated in the Arrigoni Bridge Stamp Commemoration.

In addition to our 12th annual Festival of Wreaths and our 27th annual Town-Wide Tag Sale, we published three newsletters, held virtual cemetery tours, and began revising and updating both our bylaws and our strategic plan.

Our doors were open for half a dozen talks and book signings and we took advantage of some wonderful virtual workshops and in-person gatherings as well. More than 500 people attended our events this past year!

Funding from the **CT Humanities Grant** we received and will focus on organizing our Collections and work on caring for more than 7,700 items. As caretakers and custodians of the Ruth Callander House Museum, we are focusing on looking inward and assessing the physical needs of our headquarters to ensure that the treasures housed there are well preserved and accessible to the public, from students to scholars. A work in progress.

In 2023 the PHS worked closely with our **community partners**: The Portland Public Library, The Waverly Senior Center, Bartlett Hill, The CT Cover Club, The Hemlock Grange and Trinity Church. We are also indebted to numerous local individuals who have generously offered their talents and time to us: Alain Munkittrick, Lynn Fountain, Ryan Curley, Brian Magee, Sarah Elliott Caratasios, Jenn Billingsley, Jonathan Ives, John Stewart and Candace Hueblein, Deborah and Ron Payne, Jos. Morneault, Dave Littlefield, Joe Gowac, Dan Pickett, Arthur Liverant, Charles Young, Robert Barnett, Barbara Shaw, Nancy Goodwin, Nancy West, George and Babs Scheer, Frank Winiski, Patty Gordon and Mary Nunn Maki.

Special acknowledgment of our treasurer Jim McCabe's 22 years of voluntary service to the PHS.

Looking ahead: we will be co-sponsoring this years' Juneteenth celebration following a partnership with the Social Justice Committee in February for Black History Month; as well as brainstorming on how the PHS can play a role in America's 250th birthday in 2026. Let us know how you would like Portland to celebrate this momentous occasion.

Thank you for your participation in our success. I am truly grateful to our hard-working board and volunteers. It has been an honor and a privilege to have served as president these past three years. I am indebted to you all for your encouragement, guidance, and friendship.

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Macksoud



From the President 2024

I would like to thank Julie Macksoud, for an outstanding job serving as our President from 2021-2023. I am personally very grateful to her and proud of the work she accomplished. Please be sure to read Julie's 2023 Annual Report in this newsletter. Our membership is looking forward to continuing the work she did. Specifically, under Julie's leadership we ratified our 5-Year Strategic Plan. We have 5 goals, which include the following: Increase the number of working volunteers and volunteer leaders; Inventory all Museum Assets by 2025; Celebrate significant historical events such as our 50th anniversary; Collect, preserve and share an appreciation of Portland history; and maintain the facilities we own. Please join us as we work on these goals to ensure Portland's rich history is alive and well. Contact me at any time to discuss how you might help. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Bransfield,
President (2024)
P.O. Box 98,
Portland, CT 06480
sbransfield0528@gmail.com
860-342-5455



**THANK YOU, MEMBERS AND DONORS, FOR MAKING
EVERYTHING WE DO POSSIBLE! RENEW OR JOIN NOW!**

Check your membership year on the mailing label. Mail a
check or go to our secure Square site from
<http://portlandhistsoc.org>

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May 2024 Newsletter!

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