



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

November 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. 2

2024 FESTIVAL OF WREATHS JINGLE & MINGLE

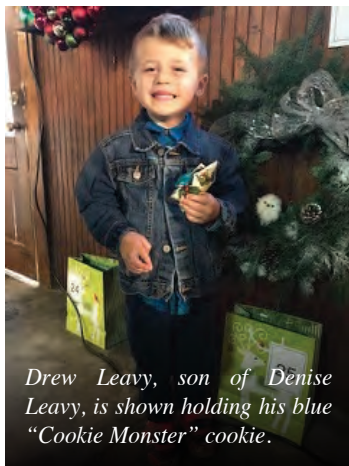
A Wonderland of Generosity and Creativity

As we go to press, people are responding to our call for wreaths or holiday decorations for our 13th annual Festival of Wreaths — “Jingle & Mingle”. This year’s Festival will be Saturday and Sunday, December 7 & 8. The past twelve years, we have had over 30 decorations donated for our teacup raffle. With tickets only a dollar each, some folks have won a beautiful wreath on a single ticket, while others have won their favorite wreath by placing all their tickets in a single bag. It’s a game of chance.

It’s not too late to help continue this tradition in Portland by making a wreath for this special fundraiser. If you like the idea of donating a decorated wreath and just don’t have the time or don’t consider yourself crafty, for a donation of \$30.00 one of our Society elves will make a holiday decoration in your name! If you prefer to make a financial donation, your name will be posted as a supporter during the event.

We ask that everyone register by Thursday, December 5 by sending us a quick email (Portlandcthistory@gmail.com). Drop off will be Thursday, December 5 from 5 to 6:30pm and Friday, December 6 from noon to 2pm. Please note: we will be hosting our Festival at a **NEW LOCATION** this year — **The Grange Hall, 17 Sage Hollow Road.**

Make time to visit the Festival on Saturday or Sunday, December 7-8, from noon to 4 PM. The Grange Hall at 17 Sage Hollow Road will be bursting with holiday cheer and you could win the most perfect decoration for your home! Tickets are just a \$1.00 each for this teacup raffle and we always have decorations that range from traditional to fun-loving. **Put it on your calendar now!**



Drew Leavy, son of Denise Leavy, is shown holding his blue “Cookie Monster” cookie.



Rachel Heath, Sarah Perruccio, Matthew Perruccio, Susan Heath

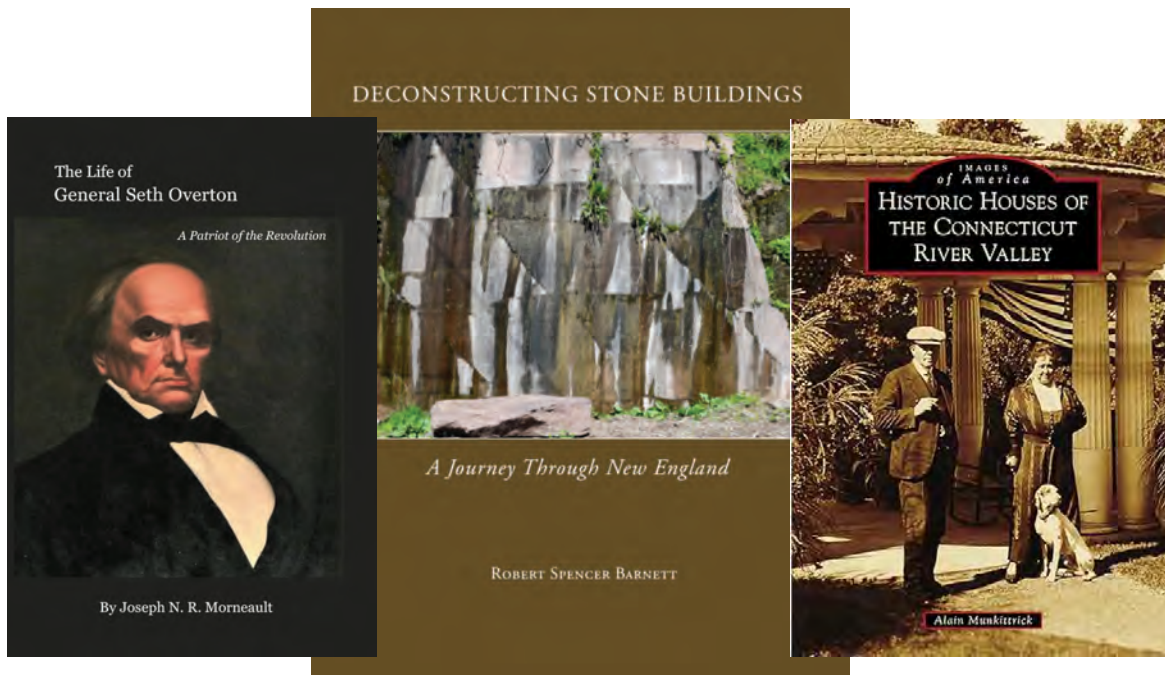


Pictured above is the Portland High School, A Capella Group, directed by Samuel Tucker. We are privileged to have them join us again this year. Sat. Dec. 7th, at Hemlock Grange.

Shopping the Callander Cupboard

The Callander Cupboard continues to offer gift items for those interested in local history. We have the “classics” — the linen Scenes of Portland teatowels and the Images of Portland book featuring hundreds of photos from Portland’s past. Additional publications of local interest include: *Portland Farms: Then and Now* by Susanne Anderson, *The Life of General Seth Overton: A Patriot of the Revolution* by Joseph Morneault, Alain Munkittrick’s *Historic Houses of the Connecticut River Valley* and *Deconstructing Stone Buildings — a Journey Through New England* by Robert Barnett. Descriptions of these books as well as other items can be seen by going to the Callander Cupboard pages on our website (www.PortlandHistSoc.com).

Do some shopping from the convenience of your home by visiting our shop on Square. After you place your order, you will be contacted for date/time of pickup at the museum. Local delivery can be arranged. Any questions can be sent to Portlandcthistory@gmail.com.



Thank You , Members & Donors, for making everything we do possible!

Check your membership year on the mailing label of this newsletter and use the enclosed envelope for your dues and/or donation. You may also use our secure Square site to pay your dues and/or make a donation. Just go to portlandhistsoc.com and click on renew your membership.

As we end our celebration of 50 years since our incorporation (1973-74), we look forward to 50 more years of preserving Portland's past.

***We thank you
for your support!***

The Historical Society provides programs for our community that highlight local history, with special emphasis on people and places. We provide an online and printed newsletter that brings you both stories of yesterday and today in our small town. We also collaborate with other local groups on special projects with historical and current merit. Our volunteers work tirelessly to better organize our collection and provide programs.

**Won't you join us? Call and leave a message.
We will contact you.**



Gotta's Farm Route 17 farm stand. This is the facility that houses the cider press, refrigeration, and sales of flowers, plants, fruits and vegetables. Diversification is a key component to be successful in the farm business.

Gotta's Farm Apple Festival 2024 *George M Gilbert III*

On a late summer day (September 15 2024) the Portland Historical Society gathered to “Celebrate the Apple” and to recognize a special family and business that has been sustaining our community with fresh fruits and vegetables for over 126 years. Jackie Gotta is the matriarch that manages Gotta's farm along with her son RJ, his girlfriend Amber, daughter Elizabeth and her fiance Aiden were present. Joining the celebration were Sebby Ruffino, and Dominic Ruitto, just two of the many workers that Gotta's Farm depends on throughout the years. Among our guests were members of the Gotta family, including Charles and Eileen Gotta, Jo-Ann (Gotta) Guild, and Beverly (Gotta) Kane Heffernan. Beverly gave a talk on her childhood experiences on growing up on the Farm. George Gilbert narrated the rich and very interesting lineage of the Gotta family, dating back to when John and Johanna Gotta left New York in 1898 to start the farm in Portland, Connecticut.

After the program, many lingered, as Society volunteers served up homemade apple crisp made from apples donated by Gotta's Farm, topped with ice cream. Also served were warm apple cider donuts that Jackie brought with her, and fresh pressed apple cider. Many expressed that they enjoyed this informal gathering with delicious treats to enjoy over friendly conversation.

Today, Gotta's Farm has 35,000 sq ft of heated greenhouses, and by January, they will be sterilizing soil and start plantings for spring. They operate two retail stores (Glastonbury Road, and QP Market) and they do a large commercial business. Jackie oversees the stands and takes care of baked products, the purchasing, and all financials for the business. Gotta's Farm is busy twelve months a year. The farm has an operating apple cider press that has been in operation since the 1950s. Not only is cider sold to the public, but it is also sold to local vineyards that make apple products including apple wine. RJ has the enormous task of maintaining all the equipment along with plowing, harrowing, soil prep, planting and harvesting of their crops.

Through hard work and intelligent management, the Gotta family has found the magic formula to keep this wonderful town resource continuing for future generations.

See previous full length article, April 2020



“Celebrating the Apple” program. Group photo includes Dominic Ruitto, Sebby Ruffino, Elizabeth Gotta, RJ Gotta, Jackie Gotta, Amber (RJ's girlfriend), Beverly Kane Heffernan, Charlie Gotta, Joanne Gotta Guild, Eileen Gotta (Charlie's wife).

History of a Civil War Raincoat

By Julie Macksoud

One of the most treasured items in the collection of The Portland Historical Society is an historic raincoat from the Civil War worn by one of Portland's own. The raincoat was given to the Portland Historical Society by Helen Hedstrom Carlson [1901-1990].



The owner of the raincoat was GORDON WHITMORE STEWART (also known as G.W. Stewart), who was born on December 5, 1837, to Henry and Deborah Almira (Whitmore) Stewart of Chatham. (Portland was a part of Chatham until 1841.) Gordon's parents were married on Christmas Eve in 1834. His father died when he was only five years old; and his mother passed when he was 22. It was previously reported that Gordon came directly from Scotland but, in fact, research confirms he was among the fifth generation of Stewarts to settle in central Connecticut. (Gordon's ancestor, Daniel Stewart, was a captain in the War of the Revolution.) The Stewart family lived at Crow Hill, a peak with an elevation of 348 feet situated near the hamlet Gildersleeve. Crow Hill is comprised of historic farmland and was formerly a private hunting ground near the Carlson Preserve.



*Gordon Whitmore Stewart
January 1864, 1st Lieutenant, USA*

Gordon Whitmore Stewart was employed as a bookkeeper for G.E. & W.H. Goodspeed when he joined the War of the Rebellion. He was 24 years old when he enlisted in the Union Army on May 22, 1861, and was mustered in as a private. He served with the First Regiment, CT Heavy Artillery Company from 1861-1865. Beginning as non-commissioned staff, he was promoted several times during the conflict from Quartermaster Sergeant to First Lieutenant and then appointed (actually commissioned by President Lincoln) to Captain of Company F toward the end of the fighting. This promotion earned him an additional \$10 per month in pay.

Midway through the Civil War, Connecticut created the state's first African American regiment, the 29th Regiment Connecticut Volunteers. G.W.S. volunteered to command Company H (Colored Troops) from January of 1864 (after the Emancipation Proclamation) through March of that same year. Family history reports that this was "the most admirable action" of his life.

In the fall of 1864, G.W.S. was granted a temporary leave of absence when he suffered from "congestive fever" and a change of climate was thought necessary for his full return to health. He was granted 20 days leave and he returned to 'Chatham' to recuperate (and vote!). His



Cassie

assignments during the conflict took him to Virginia, Maryland, Texas, and South Carolina.

At the close of the war G.W.S. spent two years in Australia. In 1887 he served on the board of relief for the town of Portland. In the summer of 1896 he participated in the centennial of Hartford Commandery, Knight Templar. G.W.S. was an expert accountant working in Hartford where he was well known. He was a member of the Warren Lodge, A.F. and A.M. located in the American Legion building at 12 Freestone Avenue in Portland. He was an excellent carpenter and enjoyed sailing on the Connecticut River in his boat named "Cassie," the nickname of his first wife, Clarissa Elizabeth Lewis, whom he wed in March 1869. Cassie was the eldest daughter of William Lewis, a farrier (a specialist in equine hoof care). They married in Trinity Church when she was 24 years old. Clarissa had attended St. Mary's Hall School in New Jersey, a student in the class of 1866. G.W.S. was seven years older than his spouse.

Their son, Gordon William Stewart, was born on June 9, 1888 after 19 years of marriage. Unfortunately, Clarissa died on April 19, 1891 at 46 when her only child was three. She was described in her obituary as possessing "mental abilities of a high order, but was ever of quiet, cheerful and very unassuming disposition, that won the respect of all, and the affection of many friends."

Seventeen months after Clarissa's death, Captain Stewart wed school teacher Ella Louise Pierce (b. Feb 23, 1860), originally from Amherst, MA. Ella was 22 years younger. They were married for 16 years.

Civil War veteran Gordon Whitmore Stewart died in 1908 on Friday afternoon, June 12, at 2:30 at his home in Portland after a long illness. He was 70 years old and is buried at Trinity Cemetery.

Portland has a rich history of involvement in the American Civil War (1861-1864). The town's Soldiers' Monument, located at the intersection of Main Street and Bartlett Street, is a tangible symbol of honor and respect paid by the town to the 29 sons who died in the Civil War. It is constructed of local brownstone and stands 20 feet tall. The names of the deceased soldiers and a simple message to remember those who had fallen are inscribed in the stone. A total of 198 men from Portland served in the Civil War, part of the 38 units from Connecticut in total. The monument cost \$4,500 and was erected on May 30, 1872.

It is not known how often the Civil War raincoat was worn by Gordon Whitmore Stewart during his service of four years and five months. But it is known that weather played a vital role during the War of the Republic, impacting movement, morale and outcomes on both sides. This one precious artifact serves as a solid reminder of the practical, physical things that played a role in Stewarts' day-to-day experience during this tumultuous time in American history. We are grateful to be the keepers of this precious reminder.



*Gordon Whitmore Stewart
5 December 1837-12 June 1908*



*Stewart's Grave Marker in
Trinity Cemetery, Portland, CT*

Information for the article was obtained from the *Connecticut National Guard's "Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1865"* and from the generous assistance of the descendants of Gordon Whitmore Stewart.

Portland's History Detectives Presents: 706 Glastonbury Turnpike The Indian Head Filling Station & Tourist Cabins

By Mary Dickerson



Indian Head Filling Station

The neighborhood surrounding the historic Gotta's Farm and Cider Mill on Glastonbury Turnpike is a mix of Cape Cods, Colonials, and Ranch Style homes situated to take advantage of the spectacular Connecticut River Valley Views to the west. But one home, 706 Glastonbury Turnpike, hints that it may have had a life somewhat different than its neighbors. A little detective work finds that the first building on the site where the attractive ranch style home with the inviting front porch and the enviable backyard views now stands was built in 1927. But by 1934, a business was operating on the site, The Indian Head Filling Station and Tourist Cabins.

In the 1920s and early 1930s simple roadside tourist cabins were a popular temporary lodging option for travelers throughout New England. Tourist cabin accommodations of the 1930's were simple seasonal offerings of an unheated cabin containing a bed, table, chair, lamp, and separate toilet facilities. Many, like those at the Indian Head Filling Station, were co-located with automobile service stations and often included a sandwich shop or diner on the same or nearby property. By the 1940s, many of these types of tourist cabins were expanded to include additional rooms, indoor plumbing, and screened porches and by the 1950s many of these cabins had been connected to create "motels". As the interstate highway system was developed, motels with more attractive amenities became popular options and the roadside tourist cabins faded. A few examples of these simple tourist cabins exist today, often as part of private family compounds in the lakes regions of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

There are no known surviving business records for Portland's Indian Head Service Station and



Above and Right: Indian Head Filling Station Tourist Cabins

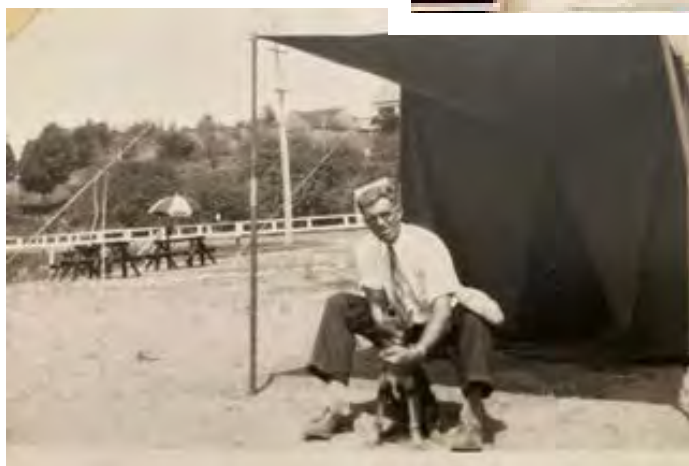
Tourist Cabins but there are several photographs from 1934 to 1937 when the station and cabins were run by John and Mildred Dillon. (If you attended St. Mary School in the 1960s and 1970s, you might remember Mildred as St. Mary's kindergarten teacher.) During that time, The Indian Head Service Station and Tourist Cabins





Left: John Richard Dillon, Mildred Healy Dillon, John Paul Healy

Right: Mildred Healy Dillon, John Richard Dillon & Mary Conroy Healy



Above: Mildred Healy Dillon

Left: John Richard Dillon and dog Diablo

offered four cabins, men's and women's toilets, a designated camping area, picnic tables and umbrellas, and amazing views of the Connecticut River Valley. Just down the road, the then barely 40 year old Gotta's Farm Stand and Cider Mill provided visitors with a notable local attraction, seasonal produce, and in the autumn, fresh apple cider. The photographs show the Service Station offering Coca Cola, so at least some form of refreshment was provided on site. After 1937 there is no advertising or mention of the tourist cabins. Records show that from 1937 to 1970, the property and service station business changed hands several times and operated as Indian Head Service Station, Sacony Vacuum Oil Company, and Waldo's Service Station.



Ask Portland's History Detectives



Do you have a question about a unique feature of your house? Have you found a strange object in your basement that keeps you up at night? Do you wonder about the people who lived in your house 50 or 100 years before you? The Portland Historical Society History Detectives just might be able to solve your mystery! We may not be antiques ourselves but we do have hundreds of years of combined experience, a diverse range of interests, access to a great repository of Portland history, and a love of solving mysteries and answering questions that have to do with Portland's past. So, if you have a question you'd like answered send an email to Portland's History Detectives at portlandhistorydetective@gmail.com. You'll receive an email reply from our History Detective Staff and you just might see your question answered in a future Portland Historical Society Newsletter.

New Society Officers



Dave O'Brien
Treasurer



Linda Prelli
Recording Secretary

A Quick Note from our President Susan Bransfield

CT Humanities Grant: we have been awarded a \$2,300 grant from CT Humanities for a podcast project entitled "Voices of Portland". We are partnering on this project with the Portland Library and the Portland Solidarity Committee and will be producing a series of podcasts about the area "under the bridge" in Portland from 1965-1980. Using the funds from the grant we will host one podcast session at the podcast studio located at Dave Kuzminski's CT Valley School of Music and Dance on Main Street, and we will also host a live-in-person panel discussion session in February 2025 at Portland High School. Both sessions will be recorded and transcribed for publication on our YouTube Channel and on our website.

Monthly Museum Openings: Our monthly museum openings are starting again, beginning in November. Please visit us at the Ruth Callander Museum of Portland History, 492 Main Street on Sunday November 17th from 2:00pm - 4:00pm. Hope to see you soon.

FESTIVAL OF WREATHS

December
7 & 8
Noon to 4pm

NEW location!
The Grange Hall
17 Sage Hollow Rd

SAVE THE DATE !

NEWSLETTER - Editor: Susan Alyson Young PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com
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