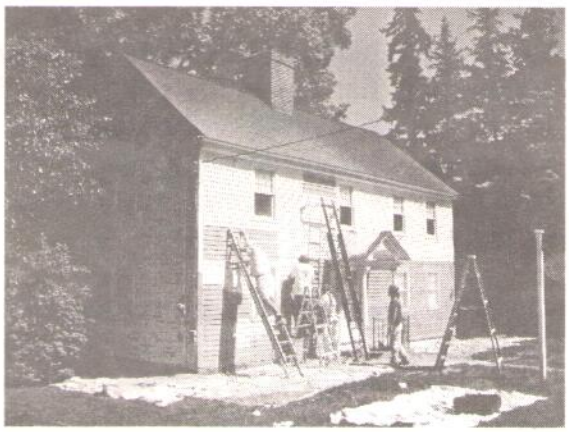
PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

MAY 2004 NEWSLETTER

President's Message - ***Regina Woltmann***

We "survived" another Tag Sale Weekend! Our Eighth Annual Town-Wide Tag Sale was held on May 8, 2004. Almost 130 Tag Sales were held throughout Portland and many other organizations held fundraisers, car washes, bake sales, plant sales, etc., so it was an exciting and busy Saturday for everyone in town. As always, our members rose to the occasion and donated tag sale items and/or baked goods and came out in numbers to help at the Society's Tag Sale, Bake Sale and Hot Dog Sale. Jim McCabe, our Treasurer, reports that it was our most successful tag sale day to date. Thanks so much to our Tag Sale Committee for all of their efforts coordinating this major fundraiser for the past few months and also to our members who are always there when we need them to price items, recruit sponsors for the map, deliver and pick up poles and all the other duties involved! The proceeds from this event will help defray the cost of painting The Ruth Callander House which is currently underway.



The RCH painting crew in action!

In a few weeks, we will celebrate the first anniversary of our Grand Opening of the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History. As always, we will hold an "Open House" on the first Sunday of June from 2 pm to 4 pm and all are welcome to attend our new exhibit featuring military memorabilia from the Civil War through the present. Special thanks to the Exhibits Committee, (Phyllis and Bill Frisbie, Vivian Dower, Chris Sullivan and Phyllis Peterson), for an outstanding job with yet another exhibit. Please remember that this museum is a storehouse of Portland's history and that your ideas for programs, exhibits, special functions, etc., are needed to ensure that our members share in the development of a museum of which the Portland community can be proud.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little about the Portland Historical Society's Officers, Board members, and Committee Chairpersons who do so much for the Society without any public recognition or acknowledgement. Although I have appreciated the efforts of so many in the Society over the years, I want to personally thank my Vice-President Eleanor Crowther, who represents the Society at Finance Board meetings, coordinates the Town-Wide Tag Sale, functions as a Museum Docent, co-chairs the Ruth Callander House Committee which is responsible for overseeing the house and property, co-chairs the Ways and Means Committee, and who, until recently, chaired the Refreshment Committee; Secretary Ruth Freeburg, who records all Board and Monthly program meetings, oversees the Bake Sale, and is a museum docent; Treasurer Jim McCabe who oversees our budget, controls the flow of money, reports monthly to the Board, and is a liaison to the Board of Finance; Bob McDougall, former President and current Board Member, who serves as Museum Chairperson and museum carpenter, is coordinating an inventory of all Society artifacts with his capable assistants Marie Keser, Joan Hughes and Darren Anderson, serves as museum docent, presents programs, creates our Heritage Calendar assisted by Doris Sherrow-Heidenis, and is currently working on a book about Portland's history.

President's Message (continued)

He also represents the Society at "Brownstone Forum" and "Pride"; Sue Anderson, our newest Board member, co-chairs the Ways & Means Committee, has invented a number of innovative fundraising techniques including the sale of historic Portland magnets which she has created from old postcards and is coordinating the Yankee Magazine subscription and community outreach efforts; Mary Ann Dolan, Board member, who, as a new Board member last year when the Museum was being prepared for our Grand Opening, volunteered to take responsibility for the Docent program on which she has done an outstanding job, creating a Docent manual, holding Docent training/orientation sessions, and serving as a Docent herself. In addition, she has collaborated with the Portland school system to coordinate student projects for display in the Museum and arranged for student class visits to the Museum. The Finance Board members: Jim Elder, Don Goodrich and Pat Crowther and our Committee Chairpersons: Chris Sullivan (Historic Sites/ Ruth Callander House Committee); Phyllis & Bill Frisbie (Publicity/Newsletters and Exhibits); and Jean Kelsey (Membership) are all to be commended for their efforts as they are involved in some way or another with every project we take on.

I have worked in the Human Resource field for over 25 years and part of the job descriptions for each job usually includes "and other duties as assigned" which is certainly something our members do day in and day out throughout the year. Thanks to all of you and to all of our members for all you do to ensure the continued success of the Portland Historical Society.

Mary Ann Dolan explaining our ancient artifacts to a Gildersleeve School third grade class.

Ruth Callander Museum of Portland History - 1st Year Accomplishments (June '03-May '04)
- *Mary Ann Dolan*

- Since the Grand Opening in June 2003, the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History has received almost 800 visits during regular monthly openings and several special events.

- On Grand Opening weekend alone, there were over 230 visits during the 3-day celebration, which included the dedication of the Betty Keser Scott Garden by the Portland Garden Club.

- Beginning in July, 2003, the museum was open on the first Sunday of each month from 2-4 pm. Over 250 visits were recorded during these regular monthly hours.

- The museum is also open by appointment, and several individuals and groups have visited in this way over the year. Groups included Tiger Cub Scout Den 0015 from Portland, and residents from One MacDonough Place in Middletown.

- Visitors have come from all over the State of Connecticut, as well as several of our neighboring states, New York and Massachusetts. We have also welcomed museum visitors from as far away as Virginia, Colorado, Idaho and Utah!

- Exhibits have ranged from the Inaugural Exhibit highlighting the museum's collection, to the Holiday Toy Exhibit celebrating childhood memories. Recent donations to the museum have been on display each month and highlighted in newspaper articles.

- The Portland Historical Society arranged for the display of 20 Gildersleeve School 3rd grade student local history projects between the months of February and May. As a result, a number of 3rd graders visited the museum with their families during those regular Sunday hours.

(continued on pg. 3)

Museum 1st Year Accomplishments (Cont'd)

- In April and May 2004 we were honored to host the first Gildersleeve School 3rd grade class to visit the museum. On each of two consecutive Wednesdays, three classes walked from the school to the museum for a tour that included Wangunk Indian artifacts, James Stancliff and early settlers, brownstone quarrying, shipbuilding, transportation in Portland, information about Mrs. Ruth Callander and the Portland Historical Society. The students were encouraged to look for several pieces of Portland's history on their return walk to Gildersleeve School. A total of 120 students, teachers and staff visited on those days and many of the students said that they hope to return to the museum with their families.

Military Display

To commemorate Memorial Day this year we have period uniforms on display. Our centerpiece is a 150 year old Civil War raincoat presented to the Society by the late Helen Carlson. Also, uniforms loaned by Ruth Freeburg: a Spanish-American War Naval uniform which had been worn by her father-in-law and her husband's World War II uniform. World War I is represented by a complete Army outfit from the estate of Richard Penfield. Also shown is a World War II Army uniform worn by the late Harold Krieger. Red Cross uniforms worn by Frances Cambria (in charge of the Middlesex County Red Cross Blood Drive during WW II), medals and artifacts round out the display. If you have pictures and military memorabilia you would like to add to our collection, please let Regina Woltmann know (342-3092).

Naval uniform worn by Charles H. Freeburg during the Spanish-American War (1898-1900) aboard the U.S.S.Texas.

DOCENTS -

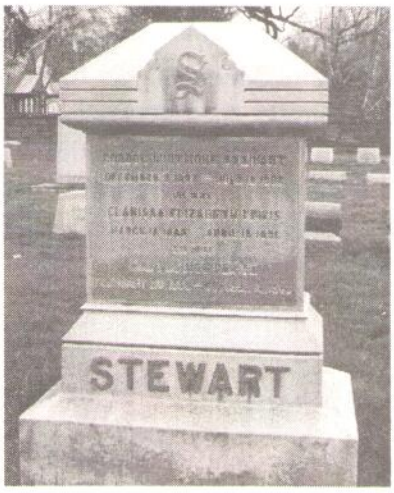
Mary Ann Dolan, Docent Coordinator

During the past year a number of museum volunteers have been responsible for opening the museum each month and, by appointment, for visits by individuals and groups. The traditional name for one of these volunteers is docent, coming from the Latin *docent* or *docens*. A look in Webster's reveals the definition of docent: "a person who conducts groups through a museum or art gallery". Our Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History docents do so much more! On a typical Sunday, one of us can be found sweeping the entrance ramp, while others are raising the window shades and turning on the lights before we open. Usually we have visitors arriving right at 2 pm, and a steady stream continues through our 4 pm closing time. The docents welcome visitors, highlight exhibit items with additional information, answer a wide range of questions, document new donations that often accompany visitors, and sell museum merchandise. Often we find that museum visitors have wonderful memories of Portland and many stories to share with us.

We appreciate the time our docents give to the museum, and have found that we only needed to meet as a group twice this year to review museum procedures and acquaint ourselves with the changing exhibits. We have several docents on hand every time the museum is open, and we have been able to arrange the schedule a few months in advance.

Our valuable docent group consists of just 14 Portland Historical Society members: Regina Woltmann, George Wilson, Norma Werdelin, Chris Sullivan, Hazel Robinson, Bob McDougall, Marie Keser, Phyllis & Bill Frisbie, Ruth Freeburg, Vivian & Walter Dower, Eleanor Crowther and Mary Ann Dolan. Many thanks to these individuals and their family members who have also helped us during the year. We would welcome other members who would be interested in joining the docent group. Please contact me at 342-0594 if you would like more information.

Civil War Raincoat on display at Museum Note similarity to Portland's Civil War Monument coat.



WHO WORE THE CIVIL WAR RAINCOAT?

As to the raincoat, it was in our collection bearing a succinct tag identifying the owner as William Stewart, who was born in Scotland, served in the U. S. Civil War, came home to Portland with Thomas Somerset from Lower William Street, died and was buried in Trinity Cemetery.

To flesh out this image, we checked the cemetery records first. A George William Stewart, Civil War Veteran was listed. But his gravestone records Gordon Whitmore Stewart, died in 1908, apparently having lived in Portland for 40 years, during this time accumulating two wives.

At this point we turned the problem over to Doris Sherrow-Heidenis, our supreme researcher. She quickly validated his two wives and added a son, Gordon Whitmore Stewart, Jr., born to the first wife three years before she died.

Doris then found Gordon Jr.'s marriage to Dorothea Shephard in 1915. After that the family disappears from the records.

Most distressing, Doris has not been able to find George, or Gordon or William under any of his names in the Civil War data base. Whatever name could he have enlisted under?

Doris, in researching another Civil War veteran has realized how significant an effect the war must have had on Portland as 200+ young men from this village of 3600 people went to war. Every family must have been affected by their absence, and the loss of so many young workers must have affected economic life of the town.

Detail on Stewart gravestone showing he lived from 1837 to 1908 and his two wives are buried with him.

NOTES . . .

Magnetic Magnets

Sue Anderson's miniaturized hand-colored postal cards turned refrigerator magnets have established a new sales record for the Society of 306 magnets sold in about two months. The buyers say they have found the twenty little pictures are great for special occasion gifts and party favors. A new magnet design will be added in honor of Ruth Callander's birthday celebration on June 6th. For special orders, call Sue at 342-0433.

Painters

We were all glad to see the painters arrive at the Ruth Callander house. For some days they have been meticulously repairing and replacing damaged wood, grinding away old paint and beginning priming the wood. If the good weather holds, the house may look shiny new by the time you read this. Stop and admire!

MEMBERS ADDED SINCE SPRING (3-17-04) NEWSLETTER

Kollias, Paris - Portland (I)
Arsenault, Susan K. - Middletown (I)
Johnson, Robert & Christiane - Portland (F)
Dugan, Susan Sloan - Williamsburg, Va. (I)
Peltz, Ethel Grower - Middletown (L)
Swanson, Patricia & Elmer - Portland (F)
Galvin, Nora & Hendrick, Joe - Portland (F)
Flood, Mary - Portland (I)
Cummer, Janis - Woodland Park, CO. (I)
LeShane, John - Portland (I)
Flanders, Marguerite & David - Wakefield, RI (F)

CALLANDER HOUSE CUPBOARD

Portland Scenes Magnets	($2. Ea., 3 for $5, set of 20 = $30.
Portland Scenes Tea Towel	$6. Ea.
Portland Scenes Notepad .(5 scenes, repeating)	$3. Ea.
Meshomasic Forest Video	$5. Ea.
Brownstone Pen Set	$20. Ea.
Callander House Stoneware Jar	$25. Ea.
Museum Grand Opening Bookmark	$0.50 Ea.
2004 Heritage Calendar	$6. Ea.
Back Issue Calendars	$5. Ea.

When ordering by mail, include $2. Shipping charge for each $10. of order.

The Historical Society has joined the Yankee Magazine Community Partners program which donates $8. to the Society for each Yankee subscription sold or renewed. Sue Anderson, 860-342-0433, will provide a special subscription blank to you that assures the Society receives credit. Doubly useful if you are in need of an interesting gift.

Upcoming Programs: As part of our celebration of the opening of The Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, we have dedicated the past year to Portland themes only and will continue to do so through the rest of this year. We hope to offer a bus tour of historic Portland in the fall and possibly another cemetery tour.

All programs are held at the Portland Library at 7:30 pm unless otherwise indicated.

May 25 - Portland Library - *"An Expose on the World of Antiques and Collectibles"*. **Arthur Pope** and **Spencer Quinton,** owners of the Brownstone Recycled Shoppe on Main Street, present a revealing and sometimes humorous overview on the world of antiques and collectibles. They will share dealer secrets and information on how to shop for antiques.

June 29 - Firemen's Picnic Grounds (off Indian Hill Avenue). 6 pm. Our Annual Potluck Picnic featuring the **Connecticut Cellar Savers,** a group of firemen from throughout Connecticut, who are opening a museum on Main Street, Portland featuring antique fire trucks and related memorabilia. **Bring casserole or salad and plates & cutlery.**

September 28 - Portland Library - ***Portland's Tobacco Industry*** **- Don Goodrich** will provide an overview of Portland's Tobacco Industry.

NEWSLETTER - *Phyllis & Bill Frisbie, 5-24-04*

PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S.POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 19
Portland, CT
06480

SOCIETY OFFICERS
2004

President - Regina Woltmann
Vice President - Eleanor Crowther
Secretary - Ruth Freeburg
Treasurer - James McCabe

DIRECTORS

Robert McDougall
Mary Ann Dolan
Susan Anderson

FINANCE BOARD

Donald Goodrich
Pat Crowther
James Elder

Newsletter!