Portland Historical Society, Inc.
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2025 Annual Report

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General Notes

Meetings held

Executive Board (11):

Jan 7, 21, Feb 4, Mar 4, Apr 1, May 6, June 3, Sept 2, Oct 7, Nov 4, and Dec 2.

Program meetings (7):

Feb 22, Apr 25, May 1, July 12 and 25, Sept 6, Nov 13.

Membership meetings (1):

Jan 26 (annual)

Volunteer Hours

In 2025 our fifteen Executive Board Members and Trustees invested 2,592 hours of volunteer service time in Society activities, above and beyond time logged at the Museum and Society events.

Correspondence Activities – Linda Cunningham, Corresponding Secretary

Many e-mails and personal notes have been sent to acknowledge donations made to the Portland Historical Society. The year 2025 was busier than usual due to the Gildersleeve Store Capital Campaign. Every donor received a personalized note, designed by the Museum Director, Robert McDougall. The notes included all information needed for tax purposes. This correspondence has been in addition to the other letters of acknowledgement, by note or email, sent to every financial donor who made an outright gift to the Society or funds donated over and above any annual membership dues. Memorial gifts were acknowledged to both the donor and the family whose member was memorialized. Although not a specific duty of the Corresponding Secretary, Linda Cunningham has also continued to pick up Society mail at the Portland Post Office and distribute it as needed.

Trustees, Bob McDougall, Chair

Meetings held (5):

Jan 14, Mar 11, Apr 8, May 13, June 10

Actions:

Confirmed annual award recipients list

Extended the long-range plan through 2029

Reviewed a periodic update of activities, for presentation to the First Selectman

Confirmed members to the Finance Board

Committees' Activities

Membership Report – Deb Ellsworth, Chair

A total of **167 memberships** were current in November, and names were printed in our November newsletter that included membership envelopes for 2026.
Membership Breakdown:
Seniors 61 @ $10
Family 36 @ $25
Individual 7 @ $15
Business 4 @ $50
Patron 12 @ $100
Life 47 @ 0
Life NEW 3 @ $400
2025: 167 members; **$4,215 income** (2024: 168 members; $2,920 income)

Ways and Means 2025 – Deb Ellsworth/Amy Knous

2025 Total Raised: $9,159 (2024 Total Raised: $6,328)

29th Annual Town-Wide Tag Sale

145 Paid Registrations with 118 (81%) being done online using Square
71 were early March registrations, 74 were done in April
Our Map had 32 Sponsors
Bake Sale Income: $581.50
Tent Sale: $1,101.15
Registration and Sponsors: $3,270.00
Income: $5,752.65
Expenses: $693.84
2025: **$5,058.81 income** (2024: $4,609.00)

House Tour October 2025

In October we facilitated a **house tour** of a contemporary home in Portland. Volunteers worked with the homeowners for six months to plan the day. The owners graciously offered their home and provided an in-depth tour and talk about their experiences from clearing the land, to designing and building their home. A total of 21 tickets were purchased at $50 each, totaling **$1,050.00 income** No expenses were incurred.
The Gildersleeve Store Project received all of the proceeds as donations.

14th Annual Festival of Wreaths

A big thank you to Hemlock Grange for allowing us to host our Festival at the Grange Hall on Sage Hollow Road. Volunteers felt that there were many newcomers at this year's festival — both people who had moved to town recently and new to the festival. People mingled, visited with others and enjoyed refreshments. We had a total of 34 decorations this year donated by 27 people. There were wreaths, swags, tabletop decorations and even an upcycled chair.
2025: **$1,691 income**; net of expenses of $140 (2024: $1,662 income; net of expenses of $140)

Products

In May, we had zip code baseball hats embroidered at Wearhouse in Middletown. A total of 95 hats have been produced for us. Our first order of 34 included a setup fee so the cost of each hat was $13.88. The second order of 36 hats cost $13.00 per hat. A third order was placed in the fall. They have been sold for $25.00 each with a NET profit of approximately $800 from the first two orders. Approximately $560 of other products including books were purchased in 2025. Products can be purchased by the public on our Square site (accessed by clicking on Callander Cupboard on our website) and arrangements can be made to pick up items at the museum.
2025: **$1,360** (2024 information not available)

Programs, Events and Collaborations – Deb Ellsworth

In 2025 the Society strove to create and continue collaborations with other local groups.
January: Annual Meeting with Bob McDougall giving an overview of the **Society's First 50 Years**.
February: ***Voices of Portland***, a Black History Month Panel, was presented to over 70 attendees at the Portland Middle School in collaboration with the town's Solidarity Committee and Portland Library. We are grateful to CT Humanities for providing a $2,300 Quick Grant to the Society to help pay for the expenses associated with this project. There is a video tape of the panel available on the Society's YouTube Channel, and a bound book, available at Portland Library and the Society.
April: ***The Brownstone Timeline***, presented by S. Bransfield was co-written and sponsored with Brownstone Quorum (T. Bransfield, Frank and Carol Winiski) at the Waverly Center.
May: **Interfaith National Day of Prayer** at St. Mary Church. S. Bransfield presented ***Immigration in Portland*****,** using research conducted by Regina Woltmann.
May**: Gildersleeve Store Display**, prepared by Bob McDougall at Brownstone Quorum's Quarry Celebration Day & Artisan Craft Fair.
June: **Juneteenth Celebration** display; Event was co-sponsored with Portland's Solidarity Committee.
June: Gildersleeve School **3rd grade classes** visited the museum, coordinated by Babs Scheer, Museum Teacher.
July: **Gildersleeve Family Reunion** A Proclamation written by Bob McDougall and S. Bransfield was delivered by Michael Pelton, First Selectman. Tours led by Bob McDougall of Center Cemetery and the museum, and a car tour of the Gildersleeve area were included as well.
July: **Noyes School of Rhythm** - Special Presentation by Bob McDougall to members of Noyes at the Museum
September: **Voices of Portland Vol. 1** book launch at Portland Library, presented in collaboration with Portland Library, Friends of the Portland Library and Portland's Solidarity Committee.
September – The Town **250th Anniversary Committee** met at the museum.
October - Gildersleeve School **3rd grade classes** visited the museum, coordinated by Babs Scheer, Museum Teacher.
October - A poster on the rebuilding of the Gildersleeve Store was prepared by Bob McDougall and displayed all three days at the **Portland Fair**.
October-December – **Our Oral History Project**, with Mary Maki, Jan Nocek and S. Bransfield started in October and will continue into 2026. It is in celebration and in collaboration with the 250th Anniversary.
November – Presentation at the Senior Center: ***Sweet Treats Conversation with Community Leaders.*** S Bransfield presented updates on recent activities at the Society.
November – December -***The Brownstone Timeline***, recorded by S. Bransfield at the Connecticut Valley School of Music & Dance, was posted to both the Society's and the Town of Portland's YouTube

channels. We are grateful to Brownstone Quorum, our co-sponsor, for paying the expenses associated with the taping and editing of this 40-minute presentation. As of January 15, there have been more than 400 views on the two YouTube Channels.

Publicity/Newsletter – Deb Ellsworth/Susan Young

Over thirty articles were submitted to RiverEast in 2025. Articles covered programs, events, meetings, museum openings, calls for volunteers and more. Thank you to Mike Thompson at Glastonbury Citizen/RiverEast for always getting our articles and Reader Forum letters printed. Issues of RiverEast can be found by googling Glastonbury Citizen and clicking on Archives. Publicity for the tag sale was also done on several online sites for tag sale listings. Paid ads for the tag sale were in the Glastonbury Citizen, Rivereast and Rare Reminder.

Special digital announcements/email blitzes of our events and programs, new products, and pop-up openings were sent to members and friends of the Society for whom we have email addresses. Hundreds of special postings were placed on the Society's FaceBook page, managed by Bob McDougall and S. Bransfield. Postings occur on a daily basis.
We advertised in the Portland Fair Book, the Middlesex County Historical Society's ad book at its car show, the Portland Parks & Recreation 5K Road RaceT-Shirts, the Riverfront Rumble/Fight Cancer ad book and the CT League of Museums "2025 Awards of Merit Booklet."
Three newsletters were issued, edited by Susan Young. They included historic articles on the Portland U.S. Post Office, and the Gildersleeve Store.

Two articles were written by S. Bransfield and were submitted by the Society and published by CT Humanities connecticuthistory.org. The articles are entitled "Under the Bridge – Urban Renewal in Portland, CT" and "Portland – CT History – A CT Humanities Project." We are grateful to CT Humanities for granting the Society $400 for writing these articles, which were dedicated to the Gildersleeve Store Capital Campaign.

Museum Committee – Bob McDougall

2025 Statistics

- 31 Events
- 427 Visitors
- Visitors from 12 Connecticut towns
- Visitors from 12 States
- Events at 4 venues (Museum, Library, Senior Center and Middle School Auditorium)
- 42 Active Museum Volunteers
- 163 Days of activity at the museum
- 1,077 Volunteer Hours (or 134, 8 hour Volunteer Days)
- 127 increase in followers of our Facebook Page (1,910-2,137)

2025 Highlights

- Nine, 3rd Grade Class Tours (5 in June, 4 in November)
- Black History Month Panel (Middle School School)
- Gildersleeve Family Day (July 12)

- Noyes School Board of Directors Visit
- Portland's America 250 Committee Meeting
- Voice of Portland Book Release (Portland Library)
- 9 Regular Museum Openings
- 8 Private or by appointment openings

2025 Other Activities

- America 250 kick-off "Two Lights for Tomorrow" (April 19)
- Digitized St. Clements Guest Book (600 pages)
- Add 11 rolling shelving units for organizing materials
- Presented 50-year review at 2025 Annual Meeting
- Provided Connecticut Collection Orientation Material to Board
- Provided 27 articles to Trinity Cemetery Board for promotion
- Developed Crossword puzzle and Word Search for 3rd Grade Visits (Babs S.)
- Completed Index of past newsletter articles (Linda C.)
- Provided 175th Anniversary Books to 5 Class Reunions (1965, 1967, 1975, 1980, 2015)
- Veteran's Day Exhibit on Beatric White (Sue B. & Linda C.)
- YouTube Channel: added Brownstone Timeline and Black History Month Panel videos
- Facebook: post Rivereast Articles about Portland weekly and promoted our events
- Completed Index of fair book ads (Linda C.)

Facilities Committee – Bob McDougall

2025 Routine Activity

- Exterminator Visits (Modern Pest Control 2/21, 3/31, 4/29, 5/12, 7/29, 8/12, 9/9, 10/14, 11/18, 12/29)
- Annual Fire Extinguisher Service (Encore Fire 12/4/2025)
- Annual Furnace Service (Mirabito Energy 3/29/2025)
- Security (Associated Security ongoing)
- Internet/Wifi (Frontier ongoing)
- Refrigerator Defrosting (LindaC ongoing)
- Town-wide Tag Sale Signage (setup/takedown)
- Festival of Wreaths Signage (setup/takedown)
- Hedge Trimming, Power washing, Branch pickup (ongoing)
- Air Conditioner/Dehumidifier/Garden Hose (seasonal setup/takedown)
- American Flag (on museum Memorial Day to Veteran's Day)
- Electric LED Candles in windows (Thanksgiving to January 6)

2025 Improvements

- Porch Light fixture upgraded to Motion Activated LED fixture. (April 5)
- Front Door latch installed (Jim Sarbaugh, July 17)
- Window Treatments added to entry door, Kitchen and Bathroom. (SusanY)
- Tree Pruning around Museum. (SusanY)
- Wall sconce bulbs in museum replaced with LED bulbs. (September)

2025 Gildersleeve Store Rebuild

- January – Deconstruction Completed by Contractor William Gould/Architectural Preservation LLC, and sub-contractor Dan Shields/18th & 19th Century Recycling

- May – Site visit with Mark Aldieri to William Gould's to review considerations for window frame and sash restoration and/or replacement.
- August – Release RFP for excavation and Foundation work
- October – Selected Mike Bordonaro as the contractor for the excavation and foundation with a likely start day in March 2026.
- November – Received Surveyor report from Ian Jackowiak, of Snyder Engineering

2025 Gildersleeve Store Fundraising

- June – Fundraising group established with George Gilbert, III as chair.
- July 12 – Launched Capital Campaign at Gildersleeve Family Day, with initial campaign flyer.
- Sept 4 – Save the Store page included in Society Newsletter
- Sept 26 – Rivereast Insert distributed to Portland and Cobalt residents
- Oct 4 – Save the Store ad appeared in the Portland Agricultural Fair Book
- Oct 5 – Save the Store ad appeared in the MCHS (Middlesex County Historical Society) Car Show book.
- Oct 21 – Save the Store ad appeared in CLM (Connecticut League of Museums) Annual Awards Book.
- Dec 31 – Campaign has raised over $88,000 from over 95 donors.

Historic Sites and Buildings – Chris Sullivan, Chair

In 2025 we developed a Historic House Plaque Program. It will start in January 2026. The Program is being headed up by Kathleen Richards.

A car crashed into the historic Penfield Hill Schoolhouse in Portland on June 23, 2025. The building was secured by the owners with a repaired brick wall in January 2026.

The 3 historic houses at Brainerd Place continue to be renovated by the owners. Two historic houses (160 Marlborough St., and 15 Indian Hill Ave.) were dismantled by experienced crews who had plans for reuse.

The Society participated in discussions with the town on the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan, including the brownfield property on Brownstone Avenue. Discussions on the 2026 Plan of Conservation and Development are ongoing.

Collections and Finance Boards' Activities

Collections Board – Susan Young

Linda Ginter expertly restored one of the frames used for the Overton portraits. Charles and Susan Young coordinated this project.
Susan Young cleaned a silver tea and coffee set, which is now being exhibited at the museum.
All new window blinds by Budget Blinds are now in place on the first floor. Susan Young coordinated this project.
Several historic artifacts and items were donated to the Society in 2025 and will be catalogued in 2026.

Finance Board - Dave O'Brien, Chair**; Linda Cunningham and George Scheer**

The Finance Board met 3 times in 2026 to review our investments with our advisor, Jim McCabe, of Ameriprise.

The budget results for year ending 2025, and the proposed budget for 2026 were completed. The 2026 budget will be voted on at the Annual Meeting.

The Finance Board is assisting the Trustees and Executive Board members with fundraising for the rebuilding of the Gildersleeve Store. The leader of the group effort is Trustee George Gilbert, III. To date the efforts have yielded $88,515. This figure is in addition to a $100,000 allocation made by the Executive Board in 2021. The goal is to have a total of $250,000 for the re-building of the Gildersleeve Store.

Ad-Hoc Committees

Nominating Committee Deb Freitag, Chair **(ad hoc) Report–**

The nominations for 2026, to be voted on at the Annual Meeting On January 25, are as follows:

President	**Susan Bransfield**
1st Vice President	**Kathleen Richards**
2nd Vice President	**Amy Knous**
Recording Sec'y	**Open**
Corresponding Sec'y	**Linda Cunningham**
Treasurer	**David O'Brien**
Directors	**Debra Freitag – 3-year term**
	Paul Santagata – 3-year term