

# PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1993



PO Box 98, Portland, Connecticut 06480

President: George V. Johnson Jr. Secretary: Barbara Chapman  
Vice President: Eleanor O. Crowther Treasurer: Charles J. Woltmann

Directors: Richard Gildersleeve, Hazel Robinson, Robert McDougall

## S P R I N G   N E W S L E T T E R   -   1 9 9 3

### IMPORTANT MEETING APRIL 20 - 7:30 PM

#### SELECTMEN'S WORKSHOP ON UTILIZATION OF TOWN BUILDINGS

The future of Town Hall, Central School and all the satellite offices (police, school superintendent, former senior center) will be discussed at this meeting. If you are concerned with either heritage protection or functional use of space, you should be present. This workshop will have a major influence on both concepts and the use of your tax dollars as well. All town government buildings (active school buildings excepted) are sadly deficient in meeting State and Federal codes, fire, building and ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act). For instance, 2-story public buildings require elevators for access of handicapped employees and public.



TOWN HALL (7500 sq. ft.) - To create some improved office space, a plan has been proposed to use the former Senior Center for some of the present occupants of the Buck Annex, remodel the main floor of the annex, and attach it by ramp to the Town Hall. This temporary measure, at an estimated cost of \$150,000, seems to meet some code requirements while raising others. Later, a complete renovation is projected including a large \$3-4 million addition to the rear of the Town Hall. Questions arise, of space adequacy for all town employees, parking, and preservation of an historic structure.

CENTRAL SCHOOL (17,500 sq. ft.) - The building, which is 2-1/2 times the size of Town Hall, is deteriorating but still sound. So sound that to demolish it would cost more than \$300,000. To repair the roof and seal the windows, to stop the destruction of a major town asset, \$60,000 - 75,000 is estimated. To bring it back to usefulness, an ongoing restoration/adaptation, costing up to \$1 million could be accomplished over several years. The large space would permit concentrating most of the town employees in this building.

POLICE STATION AND FORMER SENIOR CENTER - Both buildings require extensive ADA corrections.



These are some of the concerns the Selectmen must consider. Your comments and suggestions are important. We urge you and your friends and neighbors to be present and make your opinions known. We, as a Society will continue to press for a comprehensive survey of town needs, (personnel and space needs, code concerns, etc.), so that a long range plan can be prepared as a guide for the most effective use of our tax dollars. Continuous short-term solutions tend to be costly. We will also continue to remind the Selectmen that both the Town Hall and Central School represent an important part of the Town's heritage that once destroyed or distorted, cannot be recovered. - George Johnson

QUARRY WORKER'S HOUSING - (Listed in Historic American Engineering Record Inventory) - George Johnson

By chance, (a call from an FDIC lawyer concerned with take-over of the defunct quarry development), we were alerted to the Town's order to the Molloy Brothers development company to board-up 4 quarry workers houses at the end of Middlesex Avenue by April 15 or the Town would require them to be demolished. Thanks to good newspaper publicity and State support, the buildings have received a temporary stay of execution.

A letter to the selectmen from the State Historical Commission pointed out that: "The growth and development of Portland as a community is due, in great part, to the success of extractive industries in the area. Razing the last surviving quarry workers housing would represent an irreplaceable loss to the cultural heritage of the town that built cities"...and, "strongly recommends that the Town of Portland work in coordination with the Portland Historical Society and the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust for Historic Preservation to examine the feasible and prudent alternatives to this proposed undertaking."

As the Town is technically deficient in affordable housing (not low income), a restoration of the 12 apartments contained in these buildings would help to resolve a State mandate. We are searching for interested developers. Meanwhile, we have agreed to board-up the buildings. Jim Sarbaugh, Portland contractor, is contributing the labor and George Johnson, the lumber.

The houses have been boarded-up several times in the past, but vandals have removed large items from the houses (antique bath tubs, stoves, boilers) without the police being alerted.



Brownstone from the quarries ready for shipment or milling.

BROWNSTONE QUARRIES FUTURE? - A quote from a Historical Commission letter to a potential developer suggests that a more intense scrutiny of future development plans may be required. "...the Portland Quarries have been identified by the Historic American Engineering Record as possessing historic and industrial importance. We believe that the



Portland Quarries are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a significant example of Connecticut's nationally important brownstone quarries. Moreover, the National Park Service is currently evaluating the Portland Quarries as a National Historic Landmark." They also characterize the area as having "high archaeological sensitivity for historic, industrial and prehistoric resources", which would require an official archeological survey.

DEMOLITION OF BARNS - Chris Sullivan (342-4105)

Two antique barns on the Cornwall property must be removed. As the owner is willing to have them demolished, we believe they can be "had cheap" by interested persons. For more information, call Chris.

PROGRAMS - Regina Woltmann

- April 27 - Fran Curran - The Craft of the Weaver in History - demonstration and discussion
- May 25 - Steve Grant, Hartford Courant - Slide show of his canoe trip from Ct. River headwaters to the L. I. Sound.

All Historical Society meetings are held in the Library at 7 PM unless otherwise noted. Refreshment volunteers for the social hour should call Yvonne Cozzi, 342-2152.

MUSEUM ROOM - Pat Csere (342-2168)

The list of volunteer docents to welcome visitors to our Museum Room at the Portland Library on Tuesday afternoons from 2 - 4 PM needs to be replenished. Volunteers may see Pat Csere at meetings to offer their services.

Donations of Portland memorabilia are always a welcome addition to our historical collections. Visit us in our Museum Room or call if you have something you would like to donate.

MUSEUM DISPLAY - Handiwork - Vivian Dower (342-2904)

Still looking for things from our past made by hand, on loan or as a gift.

MEMORIAL GIFT - Charles Woltmann

"HISTORY OF THE DEFENDERS OF THE PHILIPPINES, GUAM AND WAKE ISLAND, 1941-1945" was presented to the Portland Historical Society by Norma DeGraff in memory of her late husband, Tom, who was a survivor of the Fall of Corregidor in 1942 and the subsequent infamous Bataan Death March. The book was accompanied by a very generous check to the Society's Memorial Fund in Tom DeGraff's memory. In appreciation, the Board of Directors voted to make Mrs. DeGraff a life member.

MEMORIAL TRUST FUND - Society members are reminded that donations in memory of their loved ones may be made to the PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMORIAL FUND at P. O. Box 98.

MEMBERSHIP - Bill Frisbie (342-0303)

In addition to the current membership, this NEWSLETTER is being sent to a number of people who were members in 1992, but who have not sent in their 1993 membership dues. If you've forgotten to renew, please mail your check to P. O. Box 98. If you are uncertain, don't hesitate to call.

HOUSE TOURS -

- April 7, 1993. East Hampton Historical Society - Six houses and an organ restoration shop. Information - Nichols, 267-0065.
- May 21, 1993. Essex Historical Society Biennial Tour. Six houses plus a museum. Information - call Eve Potts, 767-3002.

NEWSLETTER - Phyllis Frisbie 4/14/93

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Central School

NEWSLETTER!