



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

DECEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum, 492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480, Tel: 860-342-5455
[www. PortlandHistSoc.Org](http://www.PortlandHistSoc.Org) <http://www.facebook.com/PortlandHistSoc>

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - *Deb Ellsworth*

Fall has been a busy time for the Society. Thanks to everyone who volunteered at our exhibit at the Portland Agricultural Fair. The exhibit included school photos from the 1950's to 1970's from St. Mary's, Valley View and Portland High Schools, photos of teens working on tobacco in the mid-fifties, and photos of the fair from 1919. Many visitors came through our booth, reminisced and identified people in the photos.

In October, the third graders at Gildersleeve School began their study of Portland history and visited the Museum. I would like to thank their teachers — Colleen Brede, Virginia Cox, Jennifer Esteves, Maureen Pfeifer, Janice Robitaille and Mary Tammaro — for the excellent job they do on this unit. Thanks to Principal Eileen Katz, and Society members Rick Gildersleeve and Becky Robinson for doing a great job judging the student artwork. More about this collaborative project on page 2.

Be sure to put our Festival of Wreaths on your calendar for December 1 and 2. Stop by the carriage barn behind 329 Main Street and view the display of over 24 wreaths created by individuals, businesses and organizations in Portland. Raffle tickets are only 50¢.

Our holiday exhibit will open on Sunday, December 9 with train and toy displays as well as holiday and seasonal photos. We will be open December 9, 16, 30 and January 6 from 2 - 4 p.m. Seasonal refreshments will be served. Further information is on page 2. Also available will be items from our Callander Cupboard. In addition to items pictured on page 7, there are pens and notepads, past calendars (only \$2 each and great just for the pictures!), magnets and silicone bracelets — *2011's Brownstone Rocks!* and *2012's Portland at the Big Bend in the River* — great for kids and teachers.

I wish everyone the best of holidays this year. May you enjoy your time with family and friends.

FESTIVAL OF WREATHS

We are ready for our first ever Festival of Wreaths!

You are finished with Thanksgiving so now it is time to think about December, and what better way is there than to explore our display of wreaths, take some chances (only 50¢ each) and hopefully win your favorite! It is a great way to start making your home festive for the holidays. Wreaths will range from traditionally decorated greens to more elaborate or whimsical creations. Come see how crafty and artsy our local people can be!

We invite you to come mingle with others over some holiday treats, wear your holiday sweaters, share some holiday stories with acquaintances old and new and help us make this a new holiday tradition in Portland.

All proceeds from this event will be used to restore the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History and to fund educational projects for the community.

The Festival is in the carriage barn behind 329 Main Street (not at the Callander House) on Saturday, December 1 and Sunday, December 2 from noon to 4 p.m. both days.



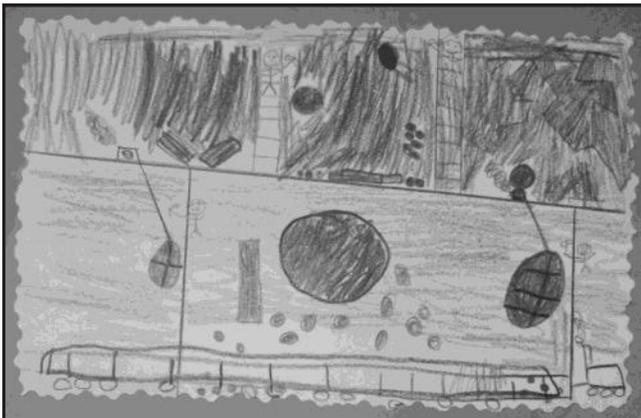
EXHIBITS . . .

Christmas at the Callander House

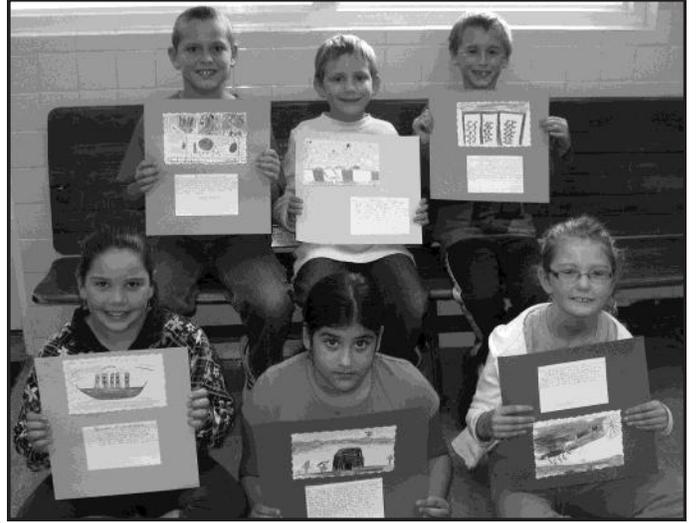
Come visit our new Holiday Exhibit. A **collection of photos** from our members and friends, of holiday celebrations, winter fun and winter storms is displayed. Tom Ladny, our train expert, is creating another wonderful operational **train display** for this year's exhibit. It will feature trains modeled on Portland's historic ones such as the Ghost Train, and the Brownstone Quarry Train. The **Portland Trolley** will be running through the antique Gildersleeve toy village. In addition, Lionel models and memorabilia, along with other **historic toys** from Jim Waller, may be seen. The Museum's latest **Portland History exhibit** is the backdrop, and all will be decorated for the holidays. Refreshments will be available to enjoy while you look for friends and relatives in the photos and watch the trains return to Portland's station. Come travel back in time and celebrate with us at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, open from 2-4 pm on Sundays, December 9, 16, and 30, 2012 and January 6, 2013.

Precious Pieces of Portland

During the month of October, the 3rd graders of Portland began studying the history of Portland. They took tours of our town and viewed many places as they are today, including Main Street, the Brownstone Quarries, under the bridge, Jobs Pond, Gildersleeve Rd, Center Cemetery, Gildersleeve, the Connecticut River, Old Marlborough Turnpike, Helen Carlson Wildlife Sanctuary (former cranberry bog), Kelsey's Pond, Penfield Hill School, Poor House, Strickland Quarry, Rose Hill School, and many others. John LeShane led them on a hike around the Reservoir and at Meshomasic Forest. The kids then participated in



Brownstone Quarry by Teddy Williams



Precious Pieces of Portland 2012 - Contest winners seated in back - Teddy Williams (First Place), Wesley Schleidt (Second Place), and Mason France (Third Place); and Honorable Mentions front row - Jenna Randazzo, Didi Yedra, and Lindsay Renk.

an art project and contest by the Historical Society – they picked their most important historical item and they created a “stamp” of it. The drawings and write-ups were judged by Gildersleeve and Society representatives; then all art pieces were displayed at the Museum for a Sunday opening and for tours taken by the kids of the Museum.

Family and friends viewed the 103 stamp designs during the November 4 open house at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History. One visiting parent was heard to say to their child, “Your work is being exhibited in a MUSEUM!”

On November 5 and 6, the six classes of third grade students walked to the Museum from the Gildersleeve School and spent an hour on a guided tour of the history exhibits. The tour covered the history of native Wangunk and European settlements, river transportation, mines and minerals, shipbuilding, brownstone quarries, tobacco and other farming, and local industries.

It is wonderful to meet and share with these young students who show such enthusiasm for Portland's past. We look forward to another group next year and hope to find other students with whom to share our history.

MEMBERSHIP. . .



**PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480
RUTH CALLANDER HOUSE
MUSEUM OF PORTLAND HISTORY
492 Main St, Portland**

December 2012

Dear Reader,

We take a short break from talking of the past, to consider the future.

The *Portland Historical Society* and *Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History* depend on the support of memberships and donations to support continued operations. Hundreds of present and past Portland residents and friends have made possible all we have accomplished to this point.

Our mission at the *Portland Historical Society* is to collect, preserve and share the history of Portland. After 38 years, we have a collection of thousands of items which require special detailed care and space for proper preservation. The *Ruth Callander House*, our museum building, demands all the usual maintenance of a house, plus this year we are pursuing a repair and restoration project targeted to make significant improvements within the next several years. A number of other capital projects, including collections technology upgrades and storage facility development, will be necessary in the near future. We continue to present educational programs, displays and tours to make the history of Portland available to as many people as possible. Our Historic Sites Committee continues documentation and preservation efforts of valuable town resources.

Please consider joining or renewing your membership now to support our valuable projects. Memberships may also be given as gifts. A membership envelope is included in this newsletter.

We are always grateful for donations, and this year our matching grants, obtained for work on the Ruth Callander House, essentially double the value of your donations. Memorial gifts in honor of someone, or gifts to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and other life occasions are a unique way of honoring another, and as with all donations, they are tax-deductible.

Feel free to contact us with any questions or comments at PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com or call Claire at 860-335-8581.

Thank you for your consideration and support,

Claire Frisbie and Eileen Marino
Membership

P.S. For information on your membership, check the address label on the newsletter. If there is a date above your name, that is the year of your paid membership. "Life" signifies a paid lifetime membership.

MAIN STREET, Five Obituary



1938 (age 68)

Five Main Street, 142 years old, of Portland, passed away (was razed) October 8-9, 2012 after a decade of deterioration. A lifelong resident of Portland, the two-story 3,784 square-foot building was constructed about 1870 and in its formative years served as the office of the Strong & Hale Lumber Company, which provided lumber and supplies for many houses built on East Main Street, Fairview Street, Freestone Avenue, and numerous other streets in Portland and northern Middlesex County in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1961 the Gustav Loewenthal Lumber Company of Middletown adopted the company and became the new guardian of the building. In 1969, at age 99, the property and building were purchased by the Town of Portland. Before the Water Treatment Plant was constructed, the building was moved several dozen feet onto a new foundation and then used as a Senior Center, Youth Services building and by the Portland Historical Society.

Five was predeceased by several other prominent structures from the 1870's including the 1876 St. Mary Roman Catholic Church of Freestone Avenue, which burned in 1991. Five was the last of many wood frame buildings that once composed the heart of downtown

Portland's lower Main Street area, which was abandoned for higher ground after the opening of the new bridge in 1938, known as the Charles J. Arrigoni Bridge since 1963. In the 1970's the town created the Brownstone Industrial Park and demolished many of the neighboring buildings as part of the development.



1927 flood (age 57)

Five is survived by other historic buildings of the same vintage in other parts of town, including: the 1872 Trinity Episcopal Church at 345 Main Street, the 1874 Portland Railroad Station of Marlborough Street, the 1876 Charles Bell House at 259 Main Street, and the 1877 Seventh Day Adventist Church at 13 Waverly Avenue (the former Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church). Five is also survived by a 1922 Model "T" Ford, with a wood frame house as the body, that was built for the Strong & Hale Lumber Company as an advertising vehicle, and one descendant, the 1999 reproduction "COME ON OVER" wall, done by the Portland Exchange Club, that continues to beckon visitors from across the Connecticut River. John C. Barry (1870-1958), President of Strong and Hale Lumber Company, and one of Portland's most prominent citizens, had the first sign (1925-1998) painted on the wall, standing sentinel between the second Airline Railroad Bridge (1911-present) and the first Middletown-Portland Highway Bridge (1897-1938).

After being diagnosed as unfeasible to rehabilitate, the structure underwent routine asbestos abatement, and plans were made to salvage any recyclable materials, reusable timbers or historic fixtures. There were no calling hours, burial of masonry rubble was at the place of residence following the demolition.

Legacy: Though Five Main Street is gone, it will not be forgotten; in its lifetime it survived the flooding of the Connecticut River several times, was a prominent landmark on Main Street prior to 1938, as the Lumber Company Office, and can be seen in many photographs of town celebrations. In the days before Home Depot, it served as a focal point for the community to stay informed of construction and building projects throughout the area.



2012 (age 142)

Since 1970, it hosted many social events for Portland Seniors, Youth Services, the Portland Historical Society, and other groups. In 2004, it was featured on the cover of *Images of America: Portland*, by Arcadia Publishing. The old building served us well and will be fondly remembered by all those who spent time there.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in memory of Five Main Street to The Portland Historical Society Inc., P.O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480.

By Bob McDougall



This photo, Works Progress Administration (WPA) Historic House #2 in Portland, shows the Nicholas Ames house, which still stands at 116 Ames Hollow Road. Notice the pedimented gable over the front of the house - it is no longer there. But a pedimented gable roofline was not a part of colonial design - it would have been a later attempt to “beautify” the house in a more Victorian way, not to mention, a way to let more light into the attic. WPA researcher “EDK” - Elmer D. Keith (1899-1984) - called the pedimented gable “new,” so it may have been added just a few years prior to his 1935-37 research. (Keith, a Wallingford native, did many of Connecticut’s Depression-era WPA house research forms.)

The “present owner” at the time of Keith’s research - 1935-1937 - was a “Mrs. Svoboda.” Sure enough, the 1930 City Directory for Middletown and Portland listed “Svoboda, Barney, [wife] Antonia,” with a farm on Ames Hollow Road at the corner of Gildersleeve Road. Sadly, the 1935 directory would say, “Svoboda, Antonia, wid[ow of] Barney” - still living in the house at the corner of Ames Hollow and Gildersleeve roads, though it was no longer designated a “farm.”

So it was the widow Antonia Svoboda (with the “v” pronounced as if it were “w”) who led Mr. Keith through the house. Keith’s guess of “1760-80” for a construction date is not bad - Greater Middletown Preservation Trust researchers came up with 1771 from land record and vital record research. There is no evidence of the WPA researchers having done title search work for the houses they did - they relied on local knowledge, which was far greater in the 1930s. By 1946, Antonia Svoboda, too, was dead.

Does anyone remember when the pedimented gable came off the house? (Doris may be contacted through our email at PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com.)



*Attending the fair in 1919, held on the oxen lot where the Brownstone Intermediate School now stands, was an elegant affair.
Photo donated by Martha McCabe.*

NOTES . . .

Get involved with history!

“Many hands make light work.” We need your hands, head and heart to help us continue the mission of the Portland Historical Society. Volunteers who are interested in Portland’s history can help us in so many different ways to pursue the operation of the Museum and the Society. Whatever your interest, talents and availability, there is something to give you fulfillment while assisting to collect, preserve and share Portland’s past. Reach us at PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com or call Claire at 860-335-8581.



John C. Barry, president of Strong & Hale Lumber Company, seated in the downstairs office at 5 Lower Main Street in this photo from April 25, 1937, the company’s 55th anniversary. The mantel behind the flowers was found in the building.

Demolition of 5 Lower Main Street

The Historic Sites Committee was able to thoroughly document the remaining structure at 5 Lower Main Street, the former Strong and Hale Lumber Company, prior to its demolition in October. Through the assistance of the company doing the demolition, Cisco, our members surveyed and photographed the building. A number of significant pieces were salvaged including original mantels and pilasters from formerly elegant offices. We were also able to observe the building methods and materials; an interesting look into the past. Our thanks to Chris Dickman of Cisco, and his employees, and Susan Bransfield, Rick Kelsey and Lincoln White of the town, for making this possible.

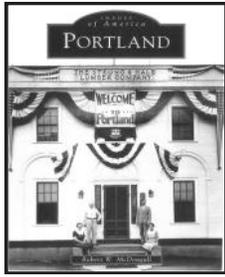


Extensive woodwork, probably of oak, remained in one office upstairs in the former Strong & Hale Lumber Co. building prior to demolition. The pilasters were detailed with rosettes.

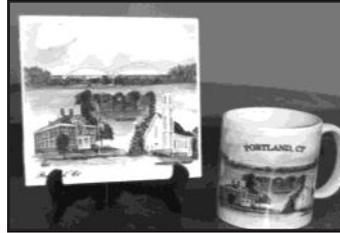


An excavator was used to take the building down. Here the front is pulled down after the side and part of the interior was collapsed.

Give a unique Portland Gift and support Portland History!

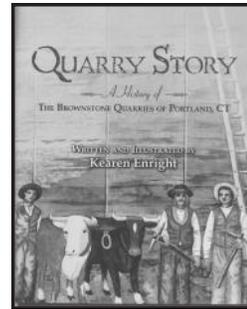


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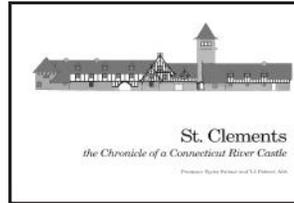


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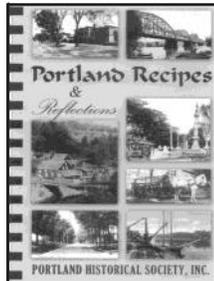
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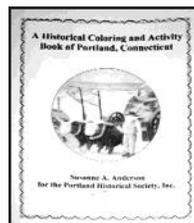
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2012 CALENDAR . . .

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

Dec 1-2 Historical Society Festival of Wreaths - Sat and Sun, 12 - 4 pm
 in the carriage barn (behind Ameriprise) at 329 Main Street
 Enter the raffles and win a wreath, enjoy hot drinks and home baked goodies

Dec 9, 16, 30 & Jan 6 Christmas at the Callander House - Sundays, 2-4 pm
 Winter & the holidays in pictures, historical train display
 at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

Jan 22 Historical Society Annual Meeting and Program

Society historical programs are the fourth Tuesday of the month, check Rivereast News Bulletin for details.

NEWSLETTER - *Claire Frisbie, 11-29-12, 860-335-8581*

Dec. 2012 Newsletter

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