

PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

JANUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History 492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 Tel: 860-342-5455 www.PortlandHistSoc.com Email: PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Happy New Year! It's been quite a while since our last newsletter and we've had a lot of activity since March 2015.



Customers flocked to the Society's tag sale on Town Wide Tag Sale Day. Volunteers Jim Elder and John Peterson can be seen helping customers.

We enjoyed a successful 19th Annual Town Wide Tag Sale in May. Thanks to the efforts of our Tag Sale Committee, many helpful volunteers, generous sponsors, involved townspeople having tag sales and Tag Sale shoppers from all over, the Society was able to earn \$5000 to support our Museum and history projects.

Throughout the last year, we collaborated with the Friends of Portland Library to host Portland-themed history programs including: Portland History 101 with Bob McDougall; comprehensive histories of the Gildersleeve Shipyards by Rick Gildersleeve, and of Oscar Hedstrom and the Indian Motorcycle by George Gilbert; and a 300 year timeline and photographic history of Portland by Claire Frisbie. We are so fortunate to have such talented members who are able to share their knowledge of Portland's History! This successful partnership will continue through 2016 and bring many more fascinating history programs to our Portland audience. Watch the Rivereast News Bulletin for information.

SOCIETY NEWS INSIDE

Membership Envelope - Please renew! History article - Captain Cicero Brown Festival of Wreaths success/photos Upcoming Programs/Exhibits/Events In Memoriam Members and Friends

At the end of August, we had an **Ice Cream Social** with entertainment provided by Ruth Harcovitz singing songs of the World War II era, as we remembered the 70th anniversary of the end of the war.

All our programs have been very well attended and enjoyed by society members, local residents, as well as a number of people from out of town.

Our Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History continues to be open on a monthly basis, with a new open date of the *second Sunday of each month*, as well as by appointment. We thank our exhibit chairs and docents for all their work. This year's focus exhibit has been on collecting and preserving Portland's history with interactive displays of textile packing, object identification, and inventory methods.



Trustee Chris Sullivan demonstrates textile packing to Board Members and museum volunteers: Ruth Freeburg, Martha Lutecki and Deb Ellsworth.

President's Report (Continued from page 1)

The Callander House Committee continues their efforts toward the restoration of the house with painting and further repairs planned for the spring.

The 4th Annual Festival of Wreaths was held in early December (see below). Thanks to all who donated wreaths, time and energy to create a successful fund-raiser.

It is time again for our annual Membership Drive. Your support is critical for our continued mission to col-

lect, preserve and share Portland's history. Please consider returning the enclosed envelope with your donation. Thank you!

Martha Lutecki, President

What's Happening In 2016

The *175th anniversary* of the Town of Portland will be celebrated in 2016 (1841-2016). A number of related events will be presented during the year, both by the Society and by the town's Anniversary Committee. Members presently are: Mary H Flood-Chair, Mary Dickerson, Sharon R Hoy, Edna M Markham, Robert W McDougall, Sarah Russell Melluso, Janet M Nocek, Mary E Pont, William J Willinsky. More members are welcome and interested parties are asked to contact First Selectwoman, Susan Bransfield.

4th Annual Festival of Wreaths

2015 marked the fourth year of our Festival of Wreaths — Jingle and Mingle. Held the weekend of December 5 and 6 in the carriage barn at 329 Main Street, the weather was with us — no snow, no ice and no need for heaters! With thirty-one wreaths donated by local businesses, organizations and friends of the Society, doors opened both days at noon. Sunday afternoon ended with a crowdpleasing performance by the PHS A Cappella — a group of 23 kids from Portland High led by their director Sam Tucker. Over \$1200.00 was raised from raffle tickets, products and donations on those two days. And thirty-one wreaths went home to help folks celebrate the holidays.



IN ANNIVERS

1841 - 2016 PORTLAND, CONN.

Visitors view the wreaths at the Festival of Wreaths while volunteers Mallory Perrucio, Deb Ellsworth and Tricia Ackerman sell raffle tickets.

In loving memory of Historical Society members and supporters who passed away in the last year:

Lois Berndtson Yvonne Cozzi Frances Ellsworth Mary Hayn Terrance Hetrick Beatrice Hummel

Robert Jackson Violet Jackson Christiane Johnson Susan Larson Beverly Newberg Claire Packard

Kathryn Sharr Salvatore Storo Hildur Sullivan Thomas Valk Sr. Mary "Betty" (Conklin) Young

We apologize if we have missed anyone and ask you to please contact us if we have not listed a loved one who was one of our supporters.



We would like to thank all our past members and donors and take this opportunity to ask for your support for the new year. The Society depends on your donations and membership dues to support our mission of collecting, preserving and sharing Portland's history. We do this through our Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History and through history programs for the public. Your donations also support the Society's work for the preservation of Portland's historic structures and places; connecting the town and owners with preservation assistance and funding possibilities, and supporting the process of State and National Register listing.

A membership/donation envelope is enclosed. Your membership expiration date is above your name on the newsletter mailing label. Any questions, call Claire Frisbie 860-335-8581 or email PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support,

Martha Lutecki, President

George Gilbert, John Peterson, Vice Presidents

Shelli Nolan, Secretary; Jim McCabe, Treasurer

Alexia Belperron, Ruth Freeburg, Julie Macksoud,

Eileen Marino, Deb Ellsworth, Directors

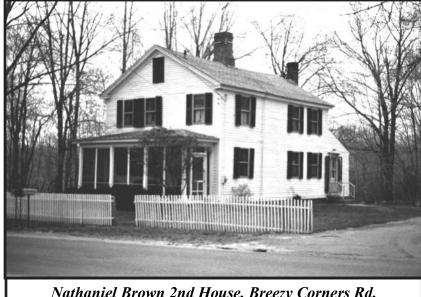
Bob McDougall, Regina Woltmann, Chris Sullivan,

Claire Frisbie, Trustees

HISTORY...

Captaín Cícero Brown by Richard Gildersleeve

Ship-owner, shipping agent, Vice-Consul and sea captain Cicero Brown was born in Portland on April 12, 1827, the son of Nathaniel Brown 2nd and Harriet Shepard. Nathaniel died one year after Cicero's birth, and six days after moving into the Federal style house he had just completed building on Breezy Corner Road. The Brown family already had lived in that area for at least two generations - the house Nathaniel built was just to the west of a large Colonial era house built by his grandfather, Nathaniel. When Nathaniel Brown 2nd died, he left his wife Harriet and three small children - Charles L., Sarah and Cicero. They remained in the house, and Harriet raised her children there.



Nathaniel Brown 2nd House, Breezy Corners Rd, built by 1828.

On February 6, 1851 Cicero married Mary

Ann Strickland of Portland, the daughter of Asa Strickland and Hancy Bliss. On December 22, 1851 their daughter Mary Alice was born, and in 1852 the Browns moved into their stylish new Italianate home at 629 Main Street, Portland. Documents from that time show Cicero as being variously a mariner and a merchant. Whether or not he was a merchant he was certainly a mariner, and probably from a young age, as he became a ship captain only a year or so later. Still in his twenties, Captain Brown already had achieved great success.



Cicero Brown House, 629 Main St, built 1852 A call to the sea would have come naturally to Cicero Brown. His father-in-law, Asa Strickland, was a part owner of the sloop Mary Elizabeth, built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard in 1836, as well as its captain, although he later turned to carpentry - working at the shipyard and building houses. Cicero was also the nephew of ship builder Sylvester Gildersleeve - his mother Harriet Shepard being the sister of Sylvester's second wife Emily. Having grown up without a father, it would appear that his uncle Sylvester became a father figure and a major influence in his life. In 1854, at the age of twenty-seven, Cicero became captain of the clipper ship *S. Gildersleeve*, the pride of the Gildersleeve Shipyard.

The Mystic Seaport has in their collection a letter dated December 1853 from Captain Brown, written aboard a ship which, although not named, was most likely the *Ravenswood*, built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard in 1852. It was sent to J.H. Brower & Co. of New York - shipping agent and partowner of many of the vessels built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard. The letter is as follows:

St. Marks Dec. 29th 1853 Messers J.H. Brower Co. New York, NY

I regret exceedingly that I am not able to report you on this date my readiness to leave this port. It is so nevertheless and from concerns wholly beyond my control. I was ready and



S. Gildersleeve, built 1854 at S. Gildersleeve & Sons.

engaged the steamer to tow me on Friday last (23rd) to the lower bay but she failed to comply with her engagement and the next day there was no water which was also the case for the succeeding three days. On Tuesday (27th) we started with a doubtful chance of getting down and our efforts resulted in the realization of our doubts. We stopped in the shoalest part of the channel and before the next highest water the wind blew a hurricane from the Northward. We are now laying hard and fast and the chance is very doubtful of our floating today. The vessel can sustain no injury as she lays straight on a soft-bottom. I hope soon to announce my departure hence till when I remain Yours Respectfully

Cicero Brown

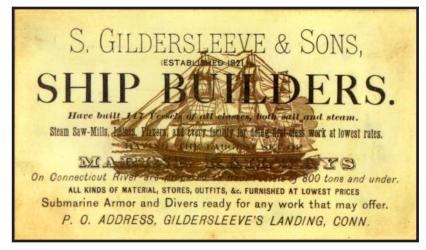
St. Mark's, on Florida's Gulf Coast, was a port used primarily for shipping cotton, which was brought there by a railroad built for that purpose. The *Ravenswood* would have been fully loaded with hundreds of tons of cotton en route to England when it ran aground.

Another letter in the Seaport's collection tells of how two years later, in January, 1855, the S. Gildersleeve, under Captain Cicero Brown, when sailing into the port of Le Havre, France, collided with a wall protecting

(Captain Cicero Brown continued on page 6)

(Captain Cicero Brown continued from page 5)

the harbor. There was major damage to the ship and for a while it was refused entrance to the harbor for fear it would sink and block the shipping lane. After undergoing temporary repairs in France the ship was sailed back to Portland for a major overhaul at the shipyard. This was done at the request of Sylvester Gildersleeve, who felt his shipyard was better equipped to repair one of its own vessels than the shipyard in Le Havre. It was apparently at about this time Cicero Brown decided being a shipping agent and ship owner was much less dangerous and more profitable than being a



sea captain. By 1856 W.S. Johnson was captain of the *S. Gildersleeve* and there are no further records of Cicero Brown as a captain, although, as was the custom, he retained that title for the rest of his life. And he maintained a close family and business relationship with the Gildersleeves until his death.

On July 4, 1859 Cicero Brown's wife, Mary Ann, died. Cicero was in Le Havre at the time, and a few weeks later he wrote a letter - also in Mystic Seaport's collection - to Sylvester Gildersleeve. In it he authorized a



Grave of Mary Ann Brown at Center Cemetery Portland.

trust fund of \$3,000 to be established for his eight-year-old daughter, to be turned over to her on her thirtieth birthday. He also authorized \$500 to be withdrawn from his account to pay his wife's funeral expenses. Mary Ann is buried in Center Cemetery in Portland. The 1860 U.S. Census has him living at his home on Main St. with his daughter and in-laws, the Stricklands. By then, however, he was primarily living in Le Harve, getting established in business, leaving his daughter Mary Alice in the care of the Stricklands. At the age of thirty-two he had lost his wife, father and older brother; he had enjoved great success but also suffered terrible losses. Cicero never gave up his American citizenship, and was to remain an expatriate for the next fifty-plus years, living in Le Havre until 1910 when he moved to England.

In 1873 Captain Brown's daughter Mary Alice married Thomas Perry, a Lieutenant in the U.S.

Navy, in Paris. Sadly, she died of complications from childbirth in September of 1874; Mary Alice was twenty -two years old. A month later, Maxwell, the son she had delivered, died. They are both buried in Center Cemetery. Thomas Perry apparently never married again, and went on to become a Rear Admiral in the navy. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

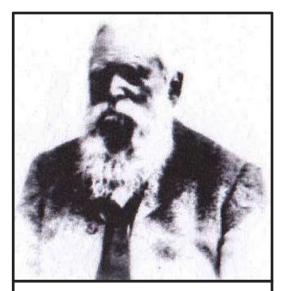
On a *Certificate of Registration of American Citizen* filled out in Le Havre, France on October 8, 1907 Cicero lists another daughter, Harriet Guise, born July 30, 1866 in Le Havre. In 1907 she was living in Uniston, England, a suburb of Manchester. The mother's name is not given. He did ultimately remarry, however. On November 7, 1886 he wed Anna Maria Ford, a widow with two sons; she was the daughter of an old friend. They

(Captain Cicero Brown continued on page 7)

(Captian Cicero Brown continued from page 6)

were married at Clapton Christ Church, in Hackney, London, England. She was born in London in 1846, almost twenty years his junior.

From the late 1850s until well into the twentieth century Captain Brown traveled frequently between England, France and the U.S., which he visited almost annually. There are many passport applications that attest to his travels; the reason for travel was usually given as business concerning shipping interests. His business interests were many. Through the 1870s and 1880s he owned a part interest in three schooners built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard for the brownstone and coastal trade. For much of the latter half of the nineteenth century, he and a Monsieur J. Barbe operated a shipping company in Le Havre with several large French steamships under their management. From 1892 until 1900, he was Vice-Consul at the American Consulate in Le Havre, the port that serves Paris and one of Europe's major seaports. In 1896, he and a partner, Edouard Corblet,



Captain Cicero Brown, aged 89 1915 Passport Application photo

formed a company, Brown & Corblet, for the purpose of shipping newly discovered nickel from New Caledonia, an island chain in the Pacific east of Australia, to Europe on three-masted barques. Brown & Corblet was sold in 1917 and remained in business under several different owners until 1962.

In 1910, at the age of eighty-three, he retired from all his ventures and with his wife moved from Le Havre to Folkestone, England, a port town on the English Channel in Kent. That year he also made his last visit to the U.S. A few years later in a 1915 *Affidavit to Explain Protracted Foreign Residence*, he stated that most of his friends in France were dead and his wife desired to be near her relatives in England. As proof of his continued connections with the U.S., he stated that he owned securities in Seattle, Washington; Houston, Texas; had step-sons in both those cities; and also had distant relatives in Connecticut. Two of those relatives visited him at home in Folkestone in August, 1911, when Ferdinand Gildersleeve's daughters, Sarah and Emily, who were touring Europe, spent a day with Cicero and his wife, as reported in an article in The Hartford Courant. The article was captioned: "Portland Travelers Renew Acquaintance with Old Sea Captain from Penfield Hill District."

DESCRIPTION OF	APPLICANT.
Age: B9 years.	Month: Moustached
Stature: 5 feet, 9 inches, Eng.	Chin: Bearded
Forehead: High	Hair: Fhite
Eyes:Erown	Complexion: Healthy
Nose: Straight	Face:Cval.

Cicero retained his house on Main St., Portland, until 1906 when he sold it to his sister-in-law Elizabeth Strickland. Elizabeth, a dress-maker, had lived in the house with her parents. Her father, Asa, had died in 1877, and her mother, Hancy, in 1882 - from

the 1850s. However even after selling the house, Cicero often claimed it as his legal residence on passport applications. Over the years as his U.S. passports expired he would have to apply for new ones. In the later passport photographs, he looks to be the quintessential old sea captain, with a long white beard.

Captain Cicero Brown died June 8, 1919, at the age of ninety-two, in his home at 1 Ravenlea Road, Folkestone, England. He is buried in the cemetery at Ste. Marie's Church in Le Havre, France. His wife, Anna Maria, died on March 12, 1930, also at their home. The location of her grave is unknown.

CALENDAR During 2016, the Portland Historical Society and Friends of Portland Library will produce a series of **Programs on the History of Portland**. Topics include Thomas Pickering and the steam governor, Cemeteries of Portland, History & construction of the Arrigoni Bridge, Portland Trivia, Main St - then & now. Watch Rivereast News Bulletin and local media for dates for these programs.

Feb. 14, Mar. 13, Apr. 10, May 8 - Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History open 2-4 PM Mar. 8, Apr. 12 - Town-Wide Tag Sale Org. Meetings - Volunteers Welcome - 7 PM Ruth Callander House Mar. 25 - Opening for Sign-ups for Town-Wide Tag Sale - Barrel on porch at Ruth Callander House Apr. 16, 23, 30 - Society Tag Sale Collections - Ruth Callander House Garage, 492 Main St.



May 7 - 20th Annual Town-Wide Tag Sale 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM

On Aug 7, 2015, residents from Covenant Village in Cromwell, visited Portland for a two hour bus tour and lunch at Quarry Ridge, guided by Bob McDougall.

Watch for upcoming bus tours, history and sightseeing, for the Anniversary Year, to be announced in Rivereast News Bulletin, on our website and facebook pages - Portland Historical Society, Inc.

NEWSLETTER - Claire Frisbie, 1-31-2016, 860-335-8581, PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com

January 2016 Newsletter!

James Rau Rebecca Robinson Frank Winiski Pat Crowther James Elder George Law

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