



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

JULY 2016 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

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175th Anniversary Commemorative Book

The 175th Anniversary Commemorative Book created by the Portland Historical Society is done! It was quite an effort by the volunteers of the Historical Society Book Committee and it was well worth it. The book is 144 pages packed with articles, photos and informative advertising covering early and recent history, and the present day. Many local residents contributed articles, information and photographs. Editor Robert McDougall plumbed the depths of many archives and brains to dig out previously unpublished facts and figures. Advertisers were encouraged to include historical facts and photos for their businesses. The end result is the largest Portland anniversary book in the history of the town. Copies are available for purchase for \$5.00. See page 3 for details on obtaining your copy.

Portland's 175th Anniversary

Activities continue in the celebration of Portland's 175th Anniversary. Opportunities abound to learn about Portland's history and celebrate the present. Bus tours of Portland with historic narration are being given by Robert McDougall and the Historical Society in conjunction with the Waverly Center. Lantern Tours will be happening in the fall - this is an evening walking tour of downtown Portland with historic stories along the way. Programs will be presented on the construction of the Arrigoni Bridge in August and on Thomas Pickering, a local inventor and businessman, in September. Riverfront Park Concerts happen on 4 Tuesday nights in July and August. (See page 4 for the calendar with all the specifics.)

The big celebration happens on September 10 when the 175th Anniversary Parade occurs at 9 a.m. This parade will include a number of musical groups, organizational floats and historic vehicles - some that haven't been seen for many years. Following the parade, is the town's Family Day with activities on the town green.

Activities continue through the Fall and into the holidays including the Agricultural Fair, and the Festival of Wreaths. Watch for our Fall newsletter, Rivereast News Bulletin and the Historical Society and 175th Anniversary Facebook pages for details on events.



Commemorative Book Editor Robert McDougall presents the newly published 175th Anniversary Book to First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and 175th Anniversary Committee Chair Mary Flood.

In this issue:

- Jessie Alsop found!
- 150th Anniversary Quilt donated
- Ruth Callander House update
- 175th Anniversary Products available
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History: Jessie Margaret Alsop

by Doris Sherrow-Heideneis

This is Jessie Margaret Alsop (1875-1951), who researched 18th century houses during the 1930s and 1940s, then wrote up a tremendous amount of Portland's local history. In 1979/80 when I was hired by the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust to do the book *Portland History & Architecture*, I "walked in her footsteps", so to speak – unraveling and writing down yet more of the old stories hidden in land records and probate. Thus I have long wondered what this woman looked like – there didn't seem to be any pictures in the press from that period!

Then along came my Christmas gift from my husband Kerry – ANCESTRY.COM. And thanks to ANCESTRY.COM and the Internet, I finally found a picture of her!

This picture was taken for her 1922 passport – she was 46 years old. The passport application says that she was 5' 4" with gray eyes, brown hair, and "no distinguishing marks." She had been born in New Brighton, Staten Island, New York in 1875, and grew up in Moorhead, Minnesota, where her father ran a business.

Curiously, in this picture, she looks a lot like Angela Lansbury's "Jessica Fletcher," and this makes perfect sense! And just like "Jessica Fletcher," Jessie pieced together clues to the stories of many of the old houses in this area.

In the early 18th century, Middletown had beckoned the Alsop family. Numerous members of the family were prominent business owners and professionals. One of Jessie's ancestors was Richard Alsop (1761-1815), who was part of the group known as the "Hartford Wits," and a poet and a critic of note in his own time.

Even though she grew up out west, Jessie's roots, too, seem to have beckoned her back to the Middletown area. Around 1916, she moved to Connecticut to stay with her Aunt Lucy Alsop in Middletown. She took a job working at the Middletown National Bank, which she held from 1916 to 1934.

But when her Aunt Lucy died in 1922, she decided to buy land on William Street in Portland and got

a mortgage from her employer, Middletown National Bank. Then she had a house built there for herself – the Cape Cod at #7 William Street, constructed, in part, from the old Berkeley Divinity School in Middletown, which was being dismantled at the time.

Her work was a tremendous starting point for the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust's *Portland History & Architecture* book in 1979. And I could feel myself walking in her footsteps – in the town halls of Portland, East Hampton, and Middletown; in the various probate repositories; and in the Connecticut State Library, where even in the 1940s, many old local history documents from town halls

were stored.

Ruth Callander, who gave the Historical Society her 1714 house for a museum, worked in the vault with Jessie on the Colonial Dames houses in the 1940s. Ruth was a young researcher; Jessie had been researching old houses for decades. And Ruth spoke her name – "Miss Alsop" – with awe, almost worship!

Below is a listing of her published works, at least the ones I can remember. I'm pretty sure there were more, particularly ones where she was only a contributor.

1935—*1635-1935 Connecticut Tercentenary Celebration, Portland CT*. June 29, 1935

1937—*City of Middletown, Middlesex County, Connecticut*, historical sketch of Maromas section of the city. (WPA)

1938—*Opening of the Middletown-Portland Bridge*.

1941—1841-1941 – *Centennial Celebration of Portland, Connecticut*, with Julia Norton McLean

1948—*Colonial Dames houses: Main Street – 311, 478, 497, 523, and 628; 3 and 46 Indian Hill Avenue; 102 Breezy Corner Road; 119 High Street*. She photographed and began some 40 others.

1951—*Middletown: past, present and future* (This was "at the publisher's," according to her obituary. But---it was likely trashed by her brother, according to a Portland Historical Society veteran with whom I spoke in 2005.)

Jessie Alsop is in the 1922 Connecticut Motor Vehicle Registry – she drove a 1919 Model T Ford Sedan, with the license plate 107414!



Museum News



Third grade students left to right, Elizabeth Windnagle, Cassidy Griffin, Maddy Varano and Abby Doncet, presenting 150th Anniversary Quilt to Deborah Ellsworth.

Thursday, June 9 was to be the delivery day for the artwork and poetry of Gildersleeve's third graders. When volunteer, Deb Ellsworth, arrived she was ushered into an assembly of third graders to accept their work. This year, being an anniversary year, the third graders chose people, places and events that they found important in Portland's past and present. They illustrated and wrote a poem celebrating 175 years of Portland history. This artwork and poetry is on display this summer at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History.

At the conclusion of the poetry reading by selected students, representatives from this year's third graders presented the Historical Society with a quilt made 25 years ago — on the occasion of Portland's 150th anniversary — by the third graders of 1991. The hope is that the Historical Society will preserve and share this quilt with the community for many years. The quilt is on display at the Museum as part of the *Anniversary Exhibit: Celebrations* - items from Portland's past celebrations.

The Museum, at 492 Main Street, is open the second Sunday of each month from 2-4 p.m., on selected other dates as announced on Facebook, in the Riverast News Bulletin, and by request. Contact Claire at 860-335-8581.

New Anniversary Products Available Now



New Products celebrating the 175th Anniversary of Portland are now available at the Museum and by mail.

175th Anniversary Commemorative Book - \$5.00

Suncatcher - depicting the wooden schooners known as "brownstoners" built at the Gildersleeve Shipyard and used to carry Portland's brownstone down the CT River, honoring our shipbuilding past, made by Pair-point Glass of Sagamore, MA – \$15.00

Decorative Tiles – 2 styles - featuring the 175th Anniversary Logo (black and white) or the Anniversary Banner design (black and white with blue) - \$5.00 each

"What's in a Name?" Bell - produced by East Hampton's Bevin Brothers Manufacturing, makers of bells since 1832 — back when Portland was still part of Chatham along with East Hampton and Middle Haddam. The bell highlights the name progression until Portland's incorporation in 1841. - \$10.00

Anniversary Logo Pins – to support the Town's Anniversary Committee – the Anniversary flag design (blue, black and white) as seen on the tile - \$1.00

150th Anniversary Commemorative Book – from 1991, to support the Town's Anniversary Committee - \$5.00

125th Anniversary Book – from 1966, Timeline by William Van Beynum, to support the Town's Anniversary Committee - \$5.00

Shipping of products - \$7 for 1-2 items or \$14.00 for 3+ items.

Contact Claire or Deb at PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com or call 860-335-8581. We now accept credit cards. Send checks to: Portland Historical Society, PO Box 98, Portland, CT 06480.

CALENDAR

- Jul 17 *Historic Portland Bus Tour* - meet at Waverly Center - 12:45 p.m.
- Jul 19, 26, Aug 2, 9 *Riverfront Concerts* - Riverfront Park - 6:30 p.m.
- Aug 14 Museum of Portland History - *Third Graders Art/Poems & Celebrations* - open 2-4 p.m.
- Aug 20 *Historic Portland Bus Tour* - meet at Waverly Center - 12:45 p.m.
- Aug 24 *NY City trip to "Today Show"* -
Celebrating Anniversary
- Aug 30 *Arrigoni Bridge Construction History*
Program by Jon Ives - Portland Library - 7:30 p.m.
- Sep 9, 17, 30 *Downtown Lantern Tours*
from Arch Pavillion
- Sep 10 *175th Anniversary Parade* - 9:00 a.m.
followed by Family Day at town green
- Sep 27 *Thomas Pickering Program* by George
Gilbert - Portland Library - 7:30 p.m.



The Ruth Callander House is sporting a new look this summer. With the assistance of a grant from the 1772 Foundation, the Museum is newly painted with a fresh color combination. The classic gold/white is an authentic early/mid 1700s combination of colors from research of Historic Deerfield and others.

NEWSLETTER

Claire Frisbie - 7/25/2016 - 860-335-8581

July 2016 Newsletter

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2016 SOCIETY OFFICERS

Portland's 175th Anniversary Commemorative Book
Now Available

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