



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

Sept. 2018 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

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This article on Quality Welding Service is first of a series of articles on local businesses in our Portland Historical Society newsletter. The purpose is to make our PHS members aware of the variety of Businesses and the People that own and operate them who support our Portland Community every day.

Quality Welding Service by George M Gilbert III

May Day 2018 was a beautiful sunny day, a perfect day for my pre-arranged appointment to visit Jim Vacca, owner of Quality Welding Service. As I approached the building, I spotted a work in progress - an early frame to a JEEP sitting outside. Upon entering the building out of the bright sunshine, it took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust. I saw Jimmy cutting angle iron on a large saw inside his dark shop. Scattered throughout the shop were various pieces of large equipment used in the welding trade. This visit was a step back in time for me because I had known Jim and his family for just about 60 years. I used to deliver the Hartford Courant to the Vacca's in the mid 1960's.

Jim was raised in Portland. He is the oldest of three children of John and Caroline Vacca, and the only boy. One of Jim's first jobs was at Wheeler Farms, which was about one mile from his home on Dolores Road. I worked at the farm with him while he was attending Portland High School before he left to serve in the Navy. It was there I was introduced to a life long passion of two wheeled vehicles. Jim custom made a mini bike that I later purchased that he had meticulously engineered and welded. The dye was cast, his talent as a welder had begun before he was sixteen years of age.

In the Navy, Jim served as a Ship Fitter and Welder. He served aboard the Landing Ship LST 905 "Madera" powering it to Vietnam in 1966. When he left the service, Jim worked for Thompson's Garage on Main Street along with several local welding businesses including Hillside Welding in Middletown.

Jim married his high school sweetheart, Joyce Bajorek, in 1968. Joyce was brought up in Portland, the daughter of Francis and Helen (Szymanski) Bajorek of

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Jim and Joyce Vacca of Quality Welding Service

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Quality Welding Service

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Cotton Hill Road. Soon Jim and Joyce had two children, Frank and Heather. Joyce worked several local jobs settling in as a paraprofessional in the Portland School system for a total of fifteen years. They raised their family while Jim was working a mobile service and traveling to various construction sites, getting work any place he could find it. The business was a resounding success and in the year 2000, he and Joyce purchased land and a building at 265 Brownstone Avenue between the Connecticut River and the Brownstone Quarry where Quality Welding Service currently resides. Joyce took on the role as full time bookkeeper as well as the many other office functions required by a small business. Jim is the first to admit that he has been working for Joyce ever since. He still actively welds all type of equipment including repairs for waste-water treatment equipment, manufacturing equipment, railings, etc.

Jim and Joyce Vacca have always been very generous to our Portland community and we wish them continued success in the future.



Celebrating 80 Years of the Arrigoni Bridge

August 6 marked the 80th anniversary of the dedication of the Middletown-Portland Bridge — today's Arrigoni Bridge — and in celebration of the opening of this landmark, the Portland Historical Society will have a special program by Jonathan Ives, a structural engineer with URS in Rocky Hill. His program, "*The Design and Construction of the Arrigoni Bridge*," will be presented on Sunday afternoon, September 9, at 2pm at the Waverly Center located at 7 Waverly Avenue.

This special historical program commemorating the Middletown-Portland Bridge's 1938 opening has been presented previously to full house crowds. Ives' program will cover the bridge's design history including the alternative routes and bridge types considered prior to the selection of the tied arch; a description of the tied arch bridge as a structural system for non-engineers; and an overview of the bridge's construction including photographs and video footage taken during the original construction. At the time of its completion in 1938, the Middletown-Portland Bridge was the largest and most expensive bridge built in Connecticut, costing \$3.5 million. In 1963, the bridge was renamed to honor state representative *Charles J. Arrigoni of Durham* who sponsored special legislation in 1935 that led to its construction and served as chairman of the bridge construction committee. This program, open to the public, will begin at 2pm and refreshments will be served following the program — think "ice cream" and "root beer floats"!

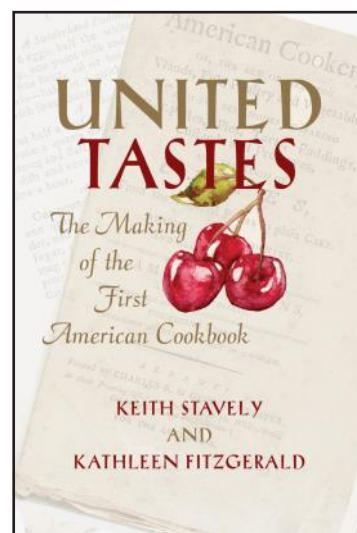


This photo, taken during construction of the new Middletown-Portland Bridge in 1936-38, shows several cars coming off the 1896 bridge on the Middletown side of the river. The old bridge remained in service throughout construction.

United Tastes: The Making of the First American Cookbook

Over the last few years, the Society has had the opportunity to host hearth-cooking demonstrations by Alexia Belperron, a member of our Executive Board. Many Portland residents have taken advantage of these opportunities and have sampled Alexia's recipes created in a fireplace with authentic cooking utensils. This fall, we're taking this journey back in time in a new direction with a program about America's first cookbook.

On **Sunday, October 28**, Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald, authors of *United Tastes: The Making of the First American Cookbook*, will give an illustrated talk followed by refreshments (including a sample item from "the first American cookbook") and a book signing. Their talk will explore multiple histories — of food, cookbooks, printing, material and literary culture, and region — to illuminate the meaning and affirm the importance of America's first cookbook, Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery* (1796). The Library of Congress has designated *American Cookery* as one of the eighty-eight "Books That Shaped America."



This program, open to the public, will begin at **2pm at the Waverly Center on Sunday, October 28**. With the cooler weather of November, Alexia will be demonstrating her hearth-cooking skills one more time — on Sunday, November 11.

A Crookneck, or Winter Squash Pudding from Amelia Simmons



Alexia Belperron will demonstrate hearth-cooking on Nov. 11, making Amelia Simmons' recipes, and sharing her wealth of knowledge about how to cook and bake without electricity.

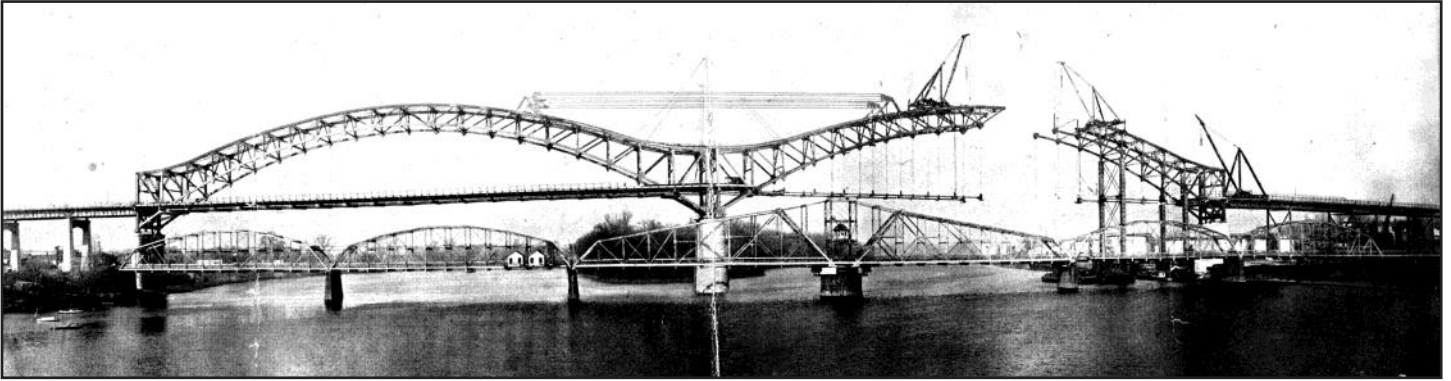
(Note in a more modern version: Amelia Simmons likely used a crookneck or winter squash. When boiled with the skin on, rubbing a winter squash through a sieve will separate the pulp from the skin, which will remain too tough to push through the holes of the sieve. For the wine, she did not specify red or white. Cooling the squash will prevent the eggs from curdling. A 20th century version of the recipe used 1 cup of sugar.)

Core, boil and skin a good squash, and bruize it well; take 6 large apples, pared, cored, and stewed tender, mix together; add 6 or 7 spoonfuls of dry bread or biscuit, rendered fine as meal, half pint milk or cream, 2 spoons of rose-water, 2 spoonfuls of wine, 5 or 6 eggs beaten and strained, nutmeg, salt and sugar to your taste, one spoon flour, beat all smartly together, bake.

The above is a good receipt for Pompkins, Potatoes or Yams, adding more moistening or milk and rose water, and to the two latter a few black or Lisbon currants, or dry whortleberries scattered in, will make it better.



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS



1938 photo showing the new Middletown-Portland Bridge under construction with the 1896 bridge still functioning below.

- Sept 9 - The Design & Construction of the Arrigoni Bridge** program (details page 2)
by Jonathan Ives - 2pm at The Waverly Center, 7 Waverly Ave.
- Oct 20 - Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History** - open 10 am to 12 pm, 492 Main St.
- Oct 28 - United Tastes: The Making of the First American Cookbook** program (details page 3)
by Keith Stavely & Kathleen Fitzgerald - 2pm at The Waverly Center, 7 Waverly Ave.
- Nov 11 - Hearth Cooking Demonstration, Recipes of Amelia Simmons** (details page 3)
- Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History - open 1-4 pm, 492 Main St.
- Dec 1 & 2 - Festival of Wreaths** Start planning your wreath to donate AND Save the date to win a wreath!

NEWSLETTER - Claire Frisbie, 9-1-2018, PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com, 860-335-8581

September 2018 Newsletter!

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*Celebrating the 80th anniversary of the
 Portland Middletown Bridge - Sept 9 Program*

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