



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

November 2025 Newsletter

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 Tel: 860-342-5455

www.PortlandHistSoc.org Email: PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com

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2025 FESTIVAL OF WREATHS JINGLE & MINGLE

Visit a Wonderland of Holiday Generosity

As we go to press, people are responding to our call for wreaths or holiday decorations for our **14th annual Festival of Wreaths — “Jingle & Mingle.”** This year’s Festival will be Saturday and Sunday, December 6 & 7. Each year since 2012 we have had over thirty decorations donated for our teacup raffle — yes, over 450 holiday decorations have been donated and raffled to help raise funds to maintain the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History and provide educational programs for the community. We have benefited from the generosity of local businesses and organizations, members and friends who love to create decorations for the winter holidays. With tickets only a dollar each, some folks have won a beautiful wreath on a single ticket, while others have won their favorite wreath by placing all their tickets in a single bag. It’s a game of chance.

It’s not too late to help continue this tradition in Portland by making a wreath for this special fundraiser. If you like the idea of donating a decorated wreath but just don’t have the time this year, for a donation of \$30.00 one of our Society elves will make a holiday decoration in your name! If you prefer to make a financial donation, your name will be posted as a supporter during the event.

We ask that everyone register by Thursday, December 4 by sending us a quick email (Portlandcthistory@gmail.com). Drop off will be Thursday, December 4 from 5 to 6:30pm and Friday, December 5 from noon to 2pm. Please note: we will be hosting our Festival at **Hemlock Grange Hall, 17 Sage Hollow Road** again this year.

Make time to visit the Festival on Saturday or Sunday, December 6-7, from noon to 4 PM. Hemlock Grange Hall at 17 Sage Hollow Road will be bursting with holiday cheer and you could win the most perfect decoration for your home! Tickets

are just a \$1.00 each or a sheet of 24 for \$20 for this teacup raffle and we always have decorations that range from traditional to fun-loving. Put on your holiday sweater and come mingle — enjoy some homebaked treats and warm cider. Put the date on your calendar now!



Above: Friend of Society, Patty Pizzicchemi with “I Spy” wreath

Below: Society Director, Deb Freitag



Products for your Holiday Shopping from the Callander Cupboard

Items below will be available at the Jingle Mingle Festival of Wreaths

All items will be available at our Festival of Wreaths on December 6 and 7. They are also available at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, 492 Main Street. Order online by going to our website PortlandHistSoc.org and clicking on Callander Cupboard.



**John Wells Stancliff
1813-1891
Portland, CT**

8 Note cards with envelopes per pack, 2 of each of 4 beautiful oil paintings reproduced. **\$10**



**Bells from
East Hampton's
Bevin Bells**

White Bell Ornament with a choice of wintry images are imprinted with Portland CT on the back. Size: 1-5/8" **\$6.50**



Be 06480 PROUD

The Portland Historical Society has a new product displaying Portland's zipcode...a blue denim-like twill baseball hat with 06480 embroidered in white. Hats are available now by leaving a message at 860-342-5455. A Society volunteer will get in touch with you. All profits will help continue the Society's mission to collect, preserve and share Portland's past. A perfect gift item for many occasions! **\$25**



**Believe
Sleigh Bell
Ornament**

Celebrate the holiday season with a silver sleigh bell with Believe stamped into it and strung with red Believe ribbon. **\$4**

Mark your calendar:

December 6-7

Festival of Wreaths, Noon – 4:00 pm
at the Portland Hemlock Grange

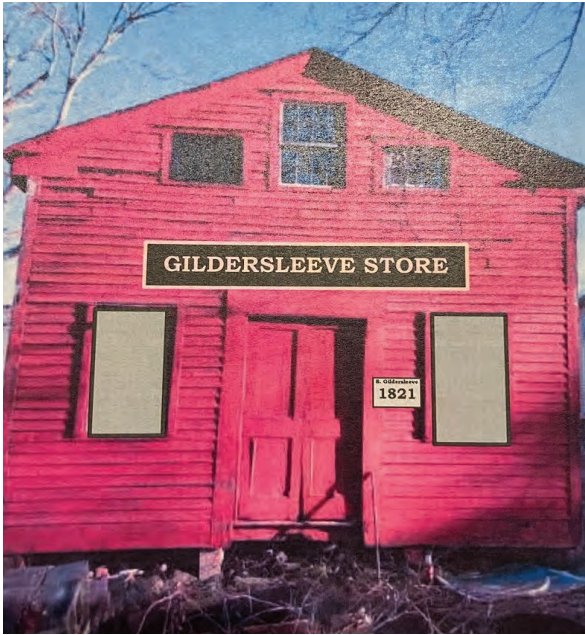
December 14

Museum Open, 2-4 pm

January 25

Annual Meeting, 2-4 pm Senior
Center, with a special presentation by
Alain Munkittrick: Castles along the
Connecticut River

Saving the Gildersleeve Store Update



Dear Members:

You may have recently read about our work to restore the Gildersleeve Store built in 1821. If you are wondering about the history of this building and the progress we are making on our project “Saving the Gildersleeve Store,” I would like to share the following summary with you.

In 1821 Sylvester Gildersleeve created the Gildersleeve Shipbuilding Company on Indian Hill Avenue located where Petzold’s Marine Center is today. In the same year he built the Gildersleeve Store on the corner of Indian Hill Avenue and Main Street. Throughout the company’s existence the Gildersleeve Shipyard built hundreds of ships while selling groceries, tools, paint, hardware and other needed supplies to the community at the Gildersleeve Store.

In 1855, the original 20’ x 30’ store had outgrown its footprint and was moved down Main Street via oxen to a private property across from Gildersleeve School where it stayed for 170 years. In its place on the corner of Indian Hill Avenue and Main Street a larger store was built where the Portland Floor and Wall Company is located today.

In 1974, the Historical Society was given the opportunity to acquire the old store. A committee was selected to investigate both the building’s history and the expenses involved in relocating it elsewhere. The Society hosted a program in 1983 about the Gildersleeve Store, which included a discussion of ledgers and other documents from the store held in the Society’s collections. However, for a variety of reasons, no action was taken to move the store.

It was not until 2020, thanks to the generosity of the Larson family, that we acquired ownership of the store. The Society’s Board of Directors made the decision to relocate the old store to 492 Main Street, in the backyard of the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History. In 2020 the Society received town zoning approval for this location.

The Portland Historical Society hired Steve Marshall, Restoration Specialist, in 2021 to perform a historical survey of the building, documenting the historic plank construction and marking all of its many pieces. This survey helped us as we dismantled the building and will assist us as we reconstruct it.

In 2022 the Society contracted with Paul Redfern, P.E. to produce engineering specifications for the re-building of the old store, taking modern building codes into consideration. In 2024 we hired Mark Aldieri, AIA, an architect from Middle Haddam, to help us develop written plans for the disassembly and reconstruction of the old Gildersleeve Store. In 2024, we requested bids to have the store disassembled. We selected William Gould Architectural Preservation LLC for the job, and in February 2025 they carefully took the store apart, preserving each piece for future re-assembly and creating replacement windows. All the disassembled pieces and the window frames are now in storage behind the museum.

The next phase of the work is the reconstruction of the store building. With the help of Mark Aldieri, we recently requested bids for the foundation. Bordonaro Masonry, a Portland business was selected. They will excavate and construct the foundation, complete with a Portland brownstone facing in March 2026, weather permitting.

Mark Aldieri is currently working on the design and construction documents to send out to bid very soon. Our hope is to complete the reconstruction of the store before July 4, 2026, when we celebrate our Nation’s 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The rebuilt “old” Gildersleeve Store will be a historic addition to our museum property, reckoning back to the days of the prolific shipbuilding and commerce that occurred in Portland. We also plan to use the store to showcase our agricultural traditions, brownstone quarrying, and shipbuilding— the three key pillars of early Portland industry and history.

cont. on pg. 6

Portland's History Detectives
When was Portland's US Post Office built?

For many years, Portland had a second Post Office, as on May 3, 1872, a US Post Office opened in the Gildersleeve section of Portland, at the corner of Indian Hill Avenue and Main Street, located in the building that is now home to Portland Floor and Wall Covering. The Gildersleeve Post Office closed in 1943.

**THE STORE CARRIED MANY PRODUCTS
AND SERVED AS A POST OFFICE.
(AD FROM THE 1936 PORTLAND FAIR BOOK)**



Gildersleeve Store and Post Office



Courtesy of Edward Baines

The National Archives indicate that Portland's first US Post Office was opened on April 3, 1827, near the intersection of Main Street and Airline Avenue in what is now the Brownstone Industrial Park. As the town grew and Main Street became an established center of commerce, the Post Office was relocated several times.

In 1879, the US Post Office is listed at the Edwards Block on Main Street, located on the west side of Main Street at what is now Quarry Heights. By 1924, the Post Office had moved to 258 Main Street, at what is



now Studio L Hair Techniq. The Post Office then moved from 258 Main Street to its current location, 320 Main Street, in 1942.

The cornerstone for the US Post Office, located at 320 Main Street, was placed in 1940. Construction of the Post Office was completed, and the building dedicated, in 1942. Louis Simon was the Supervising Architect, although the design of the building is not unique and was used for many Post Offices in towns of similar size. Construction of the building was paid for by the United States Treasury as part of the Living New Deal (1933-1942), a program for Depression era Public Works projects completed under President Franklin Roosevelt.



The mural inside the Post Office entitled, "Shade Grown Tobacco", by artist Austin Meckler, was commissioned by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, an agency of the Living New Deal, specifically for the Portland Post Office. The oil-on-canvas painting offers a glimpse into Portland's past. At

the time of the Post Offices construction, tobacco was an important crop in Portland and throughout the Connecticut River Valley. Portland's shade grown tobacco was highly sought after as binding wrappers for high quality cigars.

Article Submitted by Mary Dickerson





cont. from pg. 3

The Gildersleeve family, their businesses and their works are part of Portland's fabric, which continues to this day. We have Gildersleeve School, a section of town named Gildersleeve, and the Gildersleeve Fund, established by Sylvester Gildersleeve, which still gives educational opportunities to our students in Portland's Schools.

This is a significant undertaking for the Society, but the historical importance of this structure makes it a worthwhile goal. To date we have reached 23% of the goal of \$250,000, the projected amount necessary to cover the costs from deconstruction to reconstruction. The Portland Historical Society has made substantial efforts to reach this stage, and we thank everyone who is contributing their expertise, effort, and financial support. It is much appreciated.

Thank you,
Susan Bransfield

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House Tour Thanks

We would like to thank everyone who bought tickets to the recent House Tour on October 18. Your generosity is much appreciated.

The tour provided a wonderful and vast amount of information on how to incorporate universal design, optimize energy efficiency, and design homes with easy maintenance in mind. If you were unable to attend but would like more information on building or improving your home with these elements in mind, or would like to set up a personal tour, please let us know. We are especially grateful, and would like to thank the homeowners who opened up their home for this successful fundraiser. The event netted more than \$1,000 for the Gildersleeve Store reconstruction project. We are eternally thankful to you for your friendship, and strong support of the Portland Historical Society.



Ask Portland's History Detectives



Do you have a question about Portland's history? The Portland Historical Society History Detectives just might be able to solve your mystery! We may not be antiques ourselves, but we do have hundreds of years of combined experience, a diverse range of interests, access to a great repository of Portland history, and a love of solving mysteries and answering questions that have to do with Portland's past. If you have a question you'd like answered, send an email to Portland's History Detectives at portlandhistorydetective@gmail.com. You'll receive an email reply from our History Detective Staff, and you might see your question answered in a future Portland Historical Society Newsletter.



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