

PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

November 2026 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 **Vol. 52 No. 2**

2026 FESTIVAL OF WREATHS

JINGLE & MINGLE



2026 Festival of Wreaths

"Jingle & Mingle"
December 5 & 6
Noon to 4pm

Grange Hall
17 Sage Hollow Road



SAVE THE DATE!

Visit a Wonderland of Holiday Generosity

Society volunteers are busy organizing our **15th Annual Festival of Wreaths** for Saturday and Sunday, **December 5 and 6**. People are responding to our call for wreaths or holiday decorations for our 15th annual **Festival of Wreaths — "Jingle & Mingle."** In past years, we have had over 30 decorations donated for our tea-cup raffle. With tickets only a dollar each, some people 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 and just don't have the time or don't consider yourself crafty, for a donation of $30.00 one of our Society elves will make a holiday decoration in your name! If you prefer, a financial donation may be made to the Festival and your name will be posted as a supporter during the event. We ask that everyone register by Thursday, December 3 by sending us a quick email (Portlandcthistory@gmail.com). Drop off will be Thursday, December 3 from 4:00 to 6:00pm and Friday, December 4 from noon to 2pm at the Grange Hall located at 17 Sage Hollow Road.

Make time on your busy calendar to visit the Festival on Saturday or Sunday, December 5-6, from noon to 4 PM. The Grange Hall will be bursting with holiday cheer and you could win the most perfect decoration for your home! Tickets are just a $1.00 each for this teacup raffle and we always have decorations that range from traditional to fun-loving. **Put it on your calendar now!**

SAVE THE DATE!

2026 FESTIVAL OF WREATHS

"Jingle & Mingle"

DECEMBER 5 & 6 NOON TO 4PM

GRANGE HALL 17 SAGE HOLLOW ROAD







Matt Arthur is new to Portland and already a winner at the 14th Annual Festival of Wreaths.



Matt and Mallory Rowley have their holiday decorations ready for their front doors.





A Cappella Ensemble

The Portland High School A Cappella Ensemble will perform at 3pm on Saturday, December 5 during the 15th Annual Festival of Wreaths *"Jingle & Mingle"* Grange Hall 17 Sage Hollow Road



Susan Bransfield and the worker bees of the Festival, Linda Cunningham, Deb Ellsworth, Martha Lutecki, Mallory Rowley, and Kathy Richards.



Director is Samuel Tucker







Top: "Hedstrom Family circa 1909." This photo is the Hedstrom Family taken at their Portland home. L-R Oscar, Howard, Julia, Helen. Pictured above are his two Indian Motorcycles for display, a 1951 Indian Chief Roadmaster and a 1948 Indian Chief. Yes, George did drive these vintage motorcycles to and from the Portland Fair. These motorcycles represent the final years of production at their Springfield manufacturing plant.

The Life of an Accomplished Portland Resident
Carl Oscar Hedstrom (1871-1960)

As presented by George M. Gilbert III

Carl Oscar Hedstrom, Portland resident and co-founder of the Indian Motocycle Manufacturing Company, was born in Smaland Sweden in 1871. He emigrated with his family into the United States in 1880 and settled in Brooklyn, NYC. His early career started as manufacturing watch cases and watch components. During this time he learned and conquered the English language. At age 21 he succeeded in reaching a Journeyman prominence perfecting his expertise in meticulous craftmanship. So far his career was related to watch making but his passion was bicycle racing. Oscar was winning races in New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Hedstrom also hand built bicycles (called velocipedes prior to the 1890's) and was perfecting the performance of pacer bikes for racing. One of the challenges at that time was having dependable performance from the pacer bikes. These bicycles broke the air indoors for the racers enabling them to achieve better times in their performances. The pacers that Oscar engineered performed better than other pacers at that time and were more reliable.

Oscar's professional life was in full swing and so was his personal life. He met Julia Anderson who lived with her family on William Street, Portland, CT. They wed on April 11, 1898 in Brooklyn, NYC even though they were both living in Portland at that time. 1901 was a busy year for Oscar both professionally and personally. They had a daughter they named Helen who was born in May 1901.

His future partner George Hendee was a former velocipede racer who raced Penny Farthings. Penny Farthings were velocipedes that had a large front wheel and small rear wheel. In addition to racing he also owned a manufacturing facility that made "safety bicycles" that were similar to bicycles made today. They had the same size wheels front and rear, pneumatic tires, and chain drive. In addition to racing he also owned a bicycle manufacturing company and promoted sponsored contests. Hendee was looking for a reliable pacer and was very impressed with the Hedstrom pacer. In January of 1901 Hendee and Hedstrom formed a partnership written on a piece of paper at Madison Square Garden that would revolutionize the future of the motorcycle industry. Hedstrom went right to work developing a reliable motorized bicycle by renting space at the Worcester Cycle Manufacturing Company in Middletown, CT from his friend Brook Paige. At about the same time that his motorized bicycle prototype was nearly completed his daughter Helen came into this world. In June 1901, Oscar had completed his motorized bike and was ready to demonstrate it's ability to his new partner and a large group of spectators on Cross Street in Springfield, Massachusetts. Hedstrom used the skills developed in the watchmaking industry creating the details to develop a very reliable and highly performing concentric carburetor that excelled greater than any carburetor to date in a moving vehicle. Hedstrom also developed and cast an engine from patterns of his own design. They called the bike the "Indian" out of respect of the American Indians the original American pioneers.

Julia and Oscar also had a son they named Howard who was born in 1904. During this time Julia and Oscar split their time between living in Portland and Springfield, MA. Oscar was in charge of motorcycle development in addition to running the manufacturing plant at Indian. Oscar who also headed the engineering team at Indian was consumed by travel. He was promoting his machines at racing events all around the United States and Europe. His son Howard died in 1910 by contracting polio. This deeply affected Oscar throughout his life and he often said he would never leave Portland since that is where his son Howard was.

Oscar left Indian Motocycle in 1913 due to a disagreement with the Indian Board of Directors regarding business practices. 1913 turned out to be the largest production year that Indian Motocycle ever had in it's history. That year over 32,000 ***cont. on pg. 4***



Portland Historical Society Trustee George M.Gilbert III portraying Oscar Hedstrom. The hanging picture of Oscar Hedstrom is a photo of him on one of his early motorcycles, most likely a 1902 or 1903 Indian. George Gilbert is shown on his 1954 Indian Scout bicycle that was made under license by Philips in England and sold by Indian in the United States. The Sturmey Archer hub dates this bicycle as a 1954 model.

Carl Oscar Hedstrom cont. Indian Motorcycles had been sold. After Hedstrom left the company sales started slowly slipping downward being chipped away by Harley Davidson and other manufacturers until the Springfield manufacturing plant was eventually closed in 1953. The Indian name lives on today by manufacturers who have purchased the licensing rights to the iconic "Indian" name.

After retiring from Indian Motocycle in 1913 Oscar and Julia spent much time traveling throughout Europe and hosting the occasional social event at their Portland home. He did go back to the company briefly to help out after George Hendee retired in 1916. President Teddy Roosevelt awarded Hedstrom an Award of "Outstanding Achievement" for his contributions to the WW1 effort. Oscar was also an avid sportsman who enjoyed hunting and fishing. He had his fishing lodge on Gospel Lane and for many years people came from miles around to get water from a spring located directly across the street from his property. On many a day Oscar could be seen racing his speed-boat on the Connecticut River. His daughter Helen went on to marry David Carlson who was to be the Town Clerk in Portland for many years. Julia died in September 1954. Oscar lived to the ripe old age of 89 and died in August 1960. David Carlson died in March of 1975. Helen also lived to be 89 years old passing away in March of 1990. All are buried at the family gravesite at the Swedish Cemetery on the corner of High and William Street in Portland, CT.

George M Gilbert III, Trustee of the Portland Historical Society

Gildersleeve Store Reconstruction Begins

On September 24, 2026, the Portland Historical Society, Inc. awarded Kronenberger & Sons Restoration (KSR), Inc. of Middletown the contract to rebuild the historic 1821 Gildersleeve Store. The award marks a major milestone in the Society's multi-year effort to preserve and share this distinctive part of the town's history. The store will be reconstructed on the grounds of the Society's Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History at 492 Main Street. Work is expected to begin in early October and be completed by the end of the year.

In 1821, 20 years before Portland was incorporated, the shipbuilding firm S. Gildersleeve & Sons was established in Chatham. Formerly known as East Middletown, Chatham then included the present-day towns of Portland and East Hampton. The company's shipyard occupied the area now owned by Petzold's Marine Center on Indian Hill Avenue, in the section of Portland now known as Gildersleeve. Established that same year, the Gildersleeve Store became an important commercial hub when no bridges crossed the Connecticut River ***cont. on pg. 5***



The reconstruction of the historic 1821 Gildersleeve Store reached another milestone on September 24, 2026, when the Portland Historical Society, Inc. awarded the reconstruction contract to Middletown-based Kronenberger & Sons Restoration (KSR), Inc. The store, which was disassembled in 2024, will be rebuilt on the grounds of the Society's Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History at 492 Main Street. Shown at the future site are Society President Susan Bransfield; Museum Director Bob McDougall; KSR Vice President Brian Kronenburger, Jr.; project architect Mark Aldieri, AIA; and KSR project manager Aaron Landau. Work is expected to begin in early October and be completed by the end of the year.







Gildersleeve Store cont. in this area, and most goods arrived by boat at Gildersleeve Landing. The store is also architecturally distinctive. Its box-plank construction has no conventional frame; instead, vertical planks form all four walls, with openings cut for windows and doors. Clapboard siding, interior wainscoting, lath-and-plaster walls, and millwork trim in the ceiling-joist bays conceal the simplicity of the underlying structure.

Since acquiring the building in December 2020, the Society has completed several major phases of the preservation project. We retained Stephen C. Marshall, a Coventry-based historic preservationist and restoration specialist, to survey the Gildersleeve Store and prepare a historical narrative based on physical evidence. Marshall concluded that the store was probably built by shipbuilders using wood salvaged from the shipbuilding operation. In 2024, Mark Aldieri, AIA, Architect was retained to oversee the dismantling and reconstruction of the building. In the fall of 2024, The William Gould Architectural Preservation, LLC carefully dismantled the store and repaired and restored all its windows, which are ready for installation. The disassembled building is stored on the grounds of the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History. In spring 2026, Bordonaro Masonry of Portland completed the excavation and foundation work; the foundation wall is faced with Portland Brownstone.

All photos taken on October 27, 2026



East Wall Exterior



West Wall Exterior



North Wall Exterior



South Wall Exterior



South East Corner planking replaced with new planks.



North Wall Interior



West Wall Interior



South Wall Interior



East Wall Interior

Want to celebrate the birth date of your house or the building that houses your business in Portland? We are pleased to announce the expanded plaque program.

Every house and building in Portland is now eligible for a plaque. If you want to celebrate the birthday of your house or business, we're ready to help you get a plaque marking its birthdate. Recognize your house or business for being a part of Portland's story — 200 years ago or ten years ago.

HISTORIC HOUSE PLAQUE APPLICATION

Name of Homeowner: _____

Address: _____

Date home/building was built: _____

Name of original owner: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

After recently reviving our Historic House Plaque Program, The Portland Historical Society received many requests to open the program to homes of all ages. Therefore, we are now offering the program to everyone. Whether your house was built in 1692 or 2026, or anywhere in between, you are eligible to purchase one of our beautiful plaques.

The house plaques will be like the one shown at right and will include the house's year of construction, the name of the original owner, drilled holes and stainless steel screws for installation on the front of your house. The plaque is a recognition of the history of your house and carries no legal protections or restrictions on the property.

To order your plaque, please submit a completed application, along with the $100 fee and a member of the society will contact you. Applications can be emailed to PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com or mailed with your check to Portland Historical Society P.O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480. Please allow 6-8 weeks for the processsing of each application. Thank you for your support of the Portland Historical Society in its mission to collect, preserve and share Portland History.



Scarlett Srb is the granddaughter of Bill and Kathy Richards and daughter of Ben and Holly Srb. Scarlett is the newest lifetime member of the Portland Historical Society. She is twelve years old and attends Portland Middle School.

As we close another year, we thank our active members. Active can mean several things — you are current in your membership dues...you help out at events...you bake for our bake sale...you attend our programs...you decorate a wreath for our Festival and more. In 2026 we were able to collaborate with other town groups to sponsor events and programs. These collaborations brought us new members.

Be sure to check your address label to see if your membership year is current. If you are receiving this as a complimentary copy, please consider becoming a member in 2027. Consider becoming a Life Member for $400. We recently welcomed our newest (and youngest) Life Member, Scarlett Srb.

Current Historical Society Members

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Susanne Anderson*
Kathy Bagadinski
William Barrows
Diane Bascom
Barbara Benashski
Sandy Bourret*
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* Denotes Life Membership

From the President...

Dear Members,

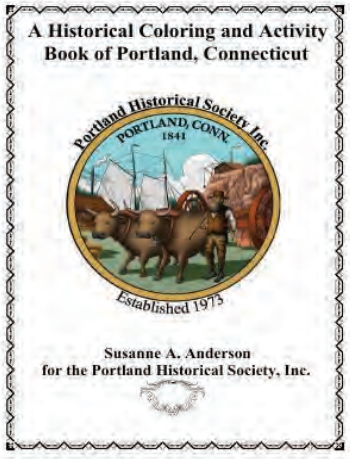
I want to thank you for your membership in the Portland Historical Society. Your loyal support means everything to us. Your dues help us accomplish a lot. We maintain the 1715 Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, we are rebuilding the 1821 Gildersleeve Store, running a very successful "Historic Plaque Program," producing displays, like the Oscar Hedstrom story at the Portland Fair, publishing books such as "The Voices of Portland - Volume 1: Celebrating Portland's Black History," and the "Portland Coloring Book." While we are proud of these recent accomplishments, we hope to do even more in the near future. We will be publishing another oral history book, "Voices of Portland - Volume II: Three Pillars of Portland History: Agriculture, Quarries & Shipbuilding," hosting a series of events and displays on "The Native Wangunks," as well as featuring a new visiting display on the "Building of the Arrigoni Bridge." Please help us as we continue to collect, preserve and promote Portland history. We need you, and we thank you so much for renewing your membership. We can't do this without you.

All the best, Susan Bransfield.

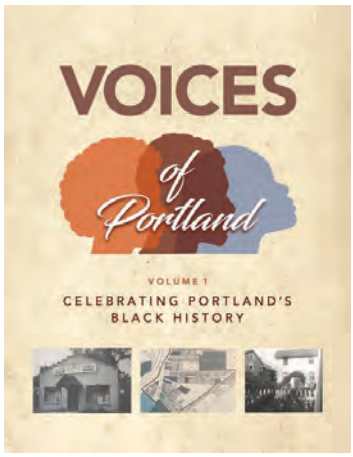
These items and more will be available at the Festival of Wreaths on December 5 and 6. Items can also be purchased on our website by going to the Callander Cupboard. For more information send an email message to PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com.



The ZIP Code Hat
Show you're from Portland CT and not all those other states by wearing a 06480 baseball hat. Made from a denim-like twill and embroidered with 06480. Show you're Portland Proud! **$25**



"A Historical Coloring and Activity Book"
By Susanne Anderson
A celebration of the history of Portland CT for children. Good for crayon or colored pencil work. **$5**



Voices of Portland - Volume 1 - Celebrating Portland's Black history
Produced by The Portland Historical Society, Committee on Solidarity and Portland Public Library with funding from CT Humanities. Proceeds will support future Voices of Portland projects. $30

NEWSLETTER - *Co-Editors: Susan Alyson Young & Paul Santagata* PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com
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November 2026 Newsletter!

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