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## 12-24-10 Hazel Eaton – South Portland daredevil



Hazel Eaton Watkins is shown in this 1917 publicity photo for the Ira Watkins' Wall of Death show. At this time, she was married to the show's proprietor.

By Julia Ellsworth, guest columnist on behalf of the South Portland Historical Society

One hundred years ago, and 13 years before the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed, a petite, 15-year-old girl from South Portland left home to join the very masculine world of the carnival; first to perform shallow diving feats, then to become one of the first *mile-a-minute girls* as a trick motorcycle rider in the popular *Wall of Death* motordrome sideshow. Her name was Hazel Marion Eaton, a Preble St. resident, who drew the attention of the Johnny Jones Exposition when she successfully participated in both the House Island-to-Willard Beach and the Peaks-to-Portland swimming events.

Hazel was young and she was fearless. Dressed in English riding pants and a loose blouse, she ascended the vertical, board track walls of the motordrome cylinder by circling a slanted wood rim on a lightweight Indian motorcycle. When she reached 60 miles per hour she directed her bike up onto the 36-foot diameter walls to reach a horizontal position. The crowd, peering down into the cylinder, no doubt watched nervously from their upper rim perch as Hazel performed stunts such as the *zigzag* and *the wave*, or drove in circles with no hands. More often than not, she came dangerously close to the upper rim wire separating the audience from the performers.

In an interview with the *Sunday Press Herald* in 1939, Eaton said her audience thought she was quite “clever,” but in reality she was going through the motions – 20 to 50 times per day. Unfortunately, the motions became costly when Eaton’s back brake froze on a routine show. Thrown to the floor, independent of her motorcycle, she suffered serious head and facial injuries along with a few broken ribs. After several weeks in the hospital, she was sent home - very much alive - in an open wooden casket. Her brother, Morris, met her at the train station and took her home to recover. As soon as she was well, though, Hazel went right back to the carnival life and the motordrome.

In 1927 she retired from the motordrome to manage her own carnival. Her 30 years on the road took her far from her Willard Beach roots – all over the United States, Cuba, Europe and Mexico. Home was a stateroom railroad car where she entertained the likes of Harry and Beatrice Houdini and Jess Hawkins. She was a woman ahead of her time who, no doubt, was criticized for not taking up the traditional role of marriage, family and home. Words did not faze Hazel, though. She was adventurous, even wild by today’s standards. When she finally came back to South Portland, she admitted she found herself conflicted by the uncertainty and adventure of the road and her life as a “dignified housewife” to her husband Jesse Reis, a traveling show auditor.

She left the road in 1943 at the age of 48. In 1949 she bought a property in Yarmouth she called Rainbow Farm. The farm, she said, was her pot of gold at the end of a colorful career.

## 12-17-10 An Old View of Cushing’s Point



As the air is getting colder, the winds a little brisker, and snow coming in the near future, the South Portland Historical Society is getting ready to close its museum for a few months while we prepare for a new season. You can feel winter coming at Bug Light Park, and oftentimes we look out our windows and imagine what it would have been like at Cushing’s Point in times gone by.

The accompanying post card image shows what the view used to look like down at Cushing’s Point. The viewpoint is from close to the footprint of the museum today. There are still many residents in

South Portland who remember the geography of the area before World War II. What I especially like about this image is the view of the beach. Not a grand beach, of course, but on a hot summer day, the kids in Ferry Village could just run down to this beach for a dip, or play in boats in the protected cove.

Although the beach was one of many things lost in the war effort, what has happened in more recent years is something we all should be proud of. Bug Light Park is now a gem in South Portland, with beautiful views of Casco Bay, a grassy field for picnics, with great breezes for excellent kite flying, a shipyard memorial to remember our role in WWII, and now a museum where people can come to learn more about our special community.

A reminder that the last open days at the museum for 2010 will be this Saturday and Sunday, from 10am to 4pm both days. Also, please know that our historical society is always open by appointment, year round, to help researchers and genealogists find the help they need. Just call us at 767-7299 to make an appointment. Happy Holidays!!

### 12-10-10 Cash Corner exhibit wrapping up at museum



If you haven't yet been in to visit the South Portland Historical Society's museum at Bug Light Park, please note that the museum will be finishing up the 2010 season on Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>. One of the exhibits that residents have especially enjoyed has been the Cash Corner exhibit in our neighborhood room. Through the winter months, the museum will be undergoing changes in preparation for the next season, which will start in May. One of those changes will be the removal of the Cash Corner exhibit and mounting in its place a new exhibit covering the history of the Knightville neighborhood.

The accompanying photograph has been featured in our museum this year. It comes from the Downes-Tordoff collection at the society and shows the owners and employees at the Woodward & Purinton dealership in Cash Corner. This business was a predecessor to the Woodward & Austin car dealership – both businesses were located roughly in the area where Rite Aid is now situated. We have still not yet seen a street-level photograph of the Woodward & Austin dealership - and we hope that one exists! Please call the society at 767-7299 if you can help with that.

Another way you can help your historical society is to consider shopping at the museum gift shop for the holidays. The gift shop focuses on locally-made items. There are many talented residents of South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, and Portland who have their products available as a wonderful gift alternative to many of the other choices out there. Your purchases support both the historical society and these people here in our community. The museum and gift shop will be open this weekend and next weekend – Saturdays and Sundays from 10am to 4pm.

### 12-03-10 Seeking your old South Portland bottles



In the past week, I've spoken with both Tom Heald and Art Gaffar (both are docents at the South Portland Historical Society's museum) about South Portland milk bottles. These conversations made me think that it might be a good time to mention this in our column. Old milk bottles do in fact make very interesting artifacts of an earlier era, in the time when milk was commonly delivered directly to your home. For example, one bottle that I was able to find a few years ago was one that is embossed with "L.W. Welt, South Portland, Maine" and upon further investigation, I learned that Lowell Webster Welt was a

milk man who lived at 385 Ocean Street. I spoke with his daughter, Frances Heller, back in 2005 and she had told me that her dad would pick up his milk at Union Station and bring it back to their house to pasteurize and bottle it.

There have been more than 70 milk men and/or dairies in South Portland in the 1900s. The value of the milk bottles to most people is limited, but they hold excellent value at a historical society where they make terrific artifacts which can act as tools to help tell the story of our old neighborhoods.

If you have an old bottle that has come from a South Portland milk man, dairy, pharmacy or other business, we would love to hear from you! You can reach the Society at 767-7299 or by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

A Child's Christmas in Wales – recital by Jack Nordby on December 5th

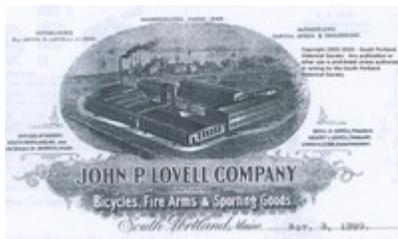
The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas was a musician with words. Writing poetry, even as a child, he loved not solely the meaning of words but also their sounds. Much of his work is best read aloud.

On Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 1pm, Society member Jack Nordby will recite the Dylan Thomas classic, "A Child's Christmas in Wales" at the historical society's museum at Bug Light Park. Unlike some of his heavier densely-compact poems, "A Child's Christmas in Wales" is a light much-loved almost lyrical tale of childhood Christmas memories. Full of beauty and wonder this "prose-poem" harkens us all back to a simpler time, a nostalgic time. Its "free-flow-of-consciousness" style leaves all of our senses unfurled. Filled with alliteration, this 25-minute star of Thomas' work is best heard or read aloud for the "music" in the words.

Jack Nordby is a South Portland resident who originally grew up in the Black Hills of western South Dakota. His father began his career as an educator teaching English and coaching forensics and speech. Consequently, verbal expression was a serious practice in their home. Jack participated in competitive forensics including debate, oratory and oral interpretation throughout high school and received a B.A. degree from Emerson College. He retired two years ago from a 30-year career as an airline pilot.

There is no charge for admission to this event, although donations are most welcome. FMI, call 767-7299.

### **11-26-10 John P. Lovell Arms Company**



Just over 100 years ago, South Portland had a brush with fame when the John P. Lovell Arms Company, a sporting goods company based in Boston, came to Maine and set up a retail store on Middle Street in Portland and a manufacturing facility in South Portland. The John P. Lovell Arms Company had originally formed in 1840 and it maintained a retail store in Boston that was considered one of the largest and finest in the United States, occupying six floors of a building on Washington Street there. The Lovell Arms also operated retail stores from several branch locations, including Boston and

Worcester, MA; Providence and Pawtucket, RI; and Bangor, ME.

In 1894, the Lovell Arms opened a retail store at 180 Middle Street in Portland; over the next several years, the store doubled in size as its business grew. In addition to carrying a full line of sporting goods, camping gear, and hunting supplies, the company invented and manufactured the extremely popular "Lovell Diamond" bicycles in its new manufacturing facility in South Portland.

Now site of the current-day River Place luxury apartments in Ferry Village, the Lovell Arms manufacturing plant was located in the large building formerly occupied by Maine Plush Company (which manufactured upholstery for automobiles). The building would later be occupied by Marine Hardware & Equipment, Maine Steel, and Portland Copper & Tank Works.

The Lovell Arms bicycle factory employed 350 men at its peak and produced 10,000 bicycles per year. This period, from roughly 1895 to 1899, was a time when the "bicycle craze" had hit America. The new design of bicycles in this period, with pneumatic tires and the "diamond" design, made for a safe and efficient way to travel, and perhaps even more importantly, the new bicycle design was considered suitable for women to ride, and the bicycle of choice in Maine was the Lovell Diamond.

The historical society would like extend its thanks to Art Gaffar who researched the John P. Lovell Arms Company and provided clippings and other material related to the factory and its operation here in South Portland.

### **Student documentary films this weekend**

**Reminder:** The Mahoney 7<sup>th</sup> grade documentary films will be shown at the South Portland Historical Society this weekend, November 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> from 10am to 4pm each day. The films will run on a

continuous loop throughout the day. The museum is located in Bug Light Park, on the eastern end of South Portland – to reach the park, take a left at the end of Broadway onto Breakwater Drive, then a right onto Madison Street. Admission is free. FMI, call 767-7299.

### 11-19-10 Mahoney Middle School student documentaries



The history of Fort Preble was one of the topics undertaken by seventh grade students at Mahoney this fall. Shown above is the double officers quarters at Fort Preble which was converted to become the McKernan Center at SMCC

The history of Fort Preble, earlier days of ice cutting at Hinckley Pond, and the South Portland Greenbelt are but a few of the many topics covered by seventh grade students in their own original video documentaries. The South Portland Historical Society participated in a new local history project taken on by Mahoney Middle School teacher, Norman Harmon, and his Society Studies classes this fall. With assistance from the school librarian, Connie Burns, and the technology instructor, Steve Koelker, the students turned a research project into actual video programs starring themselves and, in some instances, historians, docents and other members of the local community to get a new take on history. It was a unique blend of old and new as students learned more about their community, and also learned how to use new technologies to record the histories.

The video documentaries will be screened at the historical society's museum at Bug Light Park on an upcoming weekend, November 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. The videos will run on a continuous loop on both days. We

invite the public to come and view the students' work. Other history topics covered include the histories of South Portland's lighthouses, South Portland's Civil War training camp, churches and cemeteries, the SP Fire Department, the Liberty ship yards, trolley lines and bridges, Willard Beach and its casino, and sardine factories. Among the people interviewed for these histories were: historians, Ken Thompson, Joel Eastman and myself; SP Planning Director, Tex Haeuser; Society docents, Roger Murray and Ingrid Wildhage; Rev. John McCall from the First Congregational Church; Society members, Judy Kelley and Gary Hooper, and many more.

The museum at Bug Light Park will be open on Saturdays and Sundays from 10am to 4pm, through December 19<sup>th</sup>. FMI, call the museum at 767-7299.

## Museum Shoppers Day

The South Portland Historical Society will also be joining with other non-profit museums at Museum Shoppers Day on Saturday, November 20<sup>th</sup> from 9am to 3pm. The event will take place at Events on Broadway (formerly the Thomas Room), at 729 Broadway in South Portland. If you're trying to find thoughtful gifts to give this holiday season, this is a great place to see a wide variety of gift items, and proceeds benefit local non-profit organizations.

### 11-12-10 Evening Chat: Knightville!



On Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, South Portland Historical Society will be hosting another of its popular Evening Chat programs, focused on the history of Knightville. The program, at 6:30pm at City Hall, will start with a slide show of historic photographs of the neighborhood, and will then be followed by an open discussion among participants of memories of Knightville in earlier times. There is no restriction on time period, so feel free to share your memories of Knightville in the 1990s before the Casco Bay Bridge was constructed, or of earlier times when the Knightville School was still in session, or when you might have enjoyed shopping for doughnuts at Uncle Andy's Bakery.

Named for the master shipbuilder, Thomas Knight, who once built large sailing ships in a yard on the waterfront there, Knightville is a neighborhood that has seen tremendous changes throughout its history. With its point directly across from the Portland peninsula, it was a natural point for a bridge to be built in the 1800s to provide a more convenient way for farmers to get their goods across to Portland's shipping wharves. And once the bridge was built, Knightville's Main Street, later renamed Ocean Street, became

home to many businesses which benefitted from the regular traffic.

In the 1900s, the neighborhood continued to change with the mass production and increased use of the automobile. The beautiful large homes along the tree-lined Ocean Street were gradually taken down to make way for gas stations and other more “modern” businesses. Many residents still remember places like the Dugout, Stuart’s Men’s Shop, Bob Lewis’ Furniture Mart, the “Central” fire station on Thomas Street, the old A&P grocery, the dance hall at the old Legion Hall, and so many more places that are now long gone.

Evening Chat: Knightville! is free and open to the public. The Chat will take place in the Council Chambers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of City Hall - please enter from the rear of the building. This program is made possible with the support of SPC-TV. The event will be videotaped for preservation and it will be edited for rebroadcast at a later date. FMI, call 767-7299.

### Come and Meet the Author

On Saturday, November 13, from 11am to 2pm, local author Ellen Thayer will be at the historical society’s museum at Bug Light Park to meet with visitors and sign copies of her new book, “My Christmas Surprise.” This is a delightful book, seen through the eyes of a West Highland White Terrier. As the story unfolds, the pup discovers the joys of spending an unexpected Christmas holiday with her Westie cousin and family in Maine. Ellen Thayer is a resident of Loveitt’s Field in South Portland.

### 11-05-10 A Glimpse of South Portland in 1848



The South Portland Historical Society recently sent out a newsletter to its members with an update on recent acquisitions at the museum. With some of the donations, we have immediately started planning on how to incorporate the items into the museum exhibits next year. Actively preserving South Portland’s history through donations and acquisitions is one of the reasons that working and volunteering at the Society is such a pleasure.

The subject of this week’s column is a new acquisition – one that came in just after the newsletter went out and I’m hoping that many of our members will be reading this column to hear about this one. It is not often that we get a glimpse of South Portland (then named Cape Elizabeth) in the years prior to the Civil War. What has now come home to South Portland is a letter written in 1848 by the pastor of the North Church on Meeting House Hill (the church which is now known as the First Congregational Church). Rev. Royal Parkinson was sent by the Maine Missionary Society in September of 1847,

with a commission covering six weeks of service to the small parish. The town at the time had a population of only about 2,000. When the six weeks had expired, the parish hired Rev. Parkinson directly for a one year term (Parkinson went on to serve the church from 1847 to 1851).

In his letter, Rev. Parkinson writes of the state of the church as he found it in 1847 – the last pastor had been dismissed in 1844 and for 18 months, the Rev. D.M. Mitchell of Portland had preached for them, acting as a city missionary. Then for about a year prior to Parkinson’s arrival, no one had preached at all. The church at that time also had two buildings, the North Church on Meeting House Hill (at that time, the church building was located across the street from its present site, with Mount Pleasant Cemetery formed around it) and the South Church at Spurwink. “We have two houses of worship, four miles apart. The preaching is in one one Sabbath and in the other the next. These families usually attend at both houses. The rest seldom attend except when the meeting is in their own neighborhood. In the south wing of the Parish, they have had no Sabbath School for several years; in the north (near Portland) they have usually had one in the summer season. ... There are



27 resident members of the church: six males, the rest females. Our population are much scattered and our roads very bad in the winter...I am exerting what influence I can to induce the Parish to adopt one place of worship instead of two."

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### **10-29-10 The Other Clark's Ice House**



This week's Window on the Past opens onto the old Clark's Ice House in Pleasantdale. I call this the "other Clark's Ice House" as most local history buffs are more familiar instead with the ice house on Clark's Pond off of Westbrook Street toward the Maine Mall. A lesser known ice operation was the D.W. Clark ice house operation in Pleasantdale, with its large ice storage facility located on the shore next to Forest City Cemetery. The ice cutting operation included a large dam structure that extended across the creek to form its own pond of sorts; the closed in area was actually called Clark's Pond,

giving us two Clark's Pond s in South Portland and some confusion.

I was most pleased to discover a newspaper clipping about this ice house in a scrapbook at the historical society this past week. The news story from 1909 talks about the history of this ice house, which started out as a joint venture by Dennis Clark and Alonza Chaplin. Mr. Chaplin designed the impressive storage facility which was built and double sheathed with wood and metal. In its day, it was considered an impressive structure with 13 storage rooms, each measuring 36x100, and holding over 10,000 tons of ice.

In later years, the company was taken over first by Consolidated Ice Company, and then Consolidated itself came under the umbrella of the American Ice Company, a huge New York firm that controlled ice cutting over much of the state. In 1909, the company had not harvested ice in Pleasantdale actively for a few years. The last full harvest had been in 1906 and in the ensuing two years, the company only harvested about half of what it had previously. The decline in the business was attributed to the "new" artificial production of ice. American Ice Company had a growing capacity to manufacture its own ice and it became much less expensive to manufacture ice closer to the city where it was needed versus harvesting ice in a far off state like Maine, and then having to incur the costs of shipping the ice to New York and cities beyond.

The accompanying photograph showing Clark's Ice House comes from the Raymond "Pete" Taylor collection at the South Portland Historical Society. The photo was taken from a spot near Turner's Island, looking across toward the ice house and Forest City Cemetery. Pete Taylor grew up in South Portland's Pleasantdale neighborhood in the 1920s and we are all lucky that he was a prolific writer in his later years, writing down many of his early memories of growing up in our city in a series of unpublished manuscripts. Copies of these manuscripts are archived at the historical society and the society has plans to publish some of these works in a book next year to further preserve Mr. Taylor's memories and to make them more widely available to the public.

### **10-22-10 Program next Wednesday - Preserving Your Digital Photographs**

Almost everyone today has a digital camera and we are now shooting far more photographs than ever before. But how can we make sure that our children and grandchildren will be able to see those photos? On Wednesday, October 27, 6:30pm at the South Portland Community Center, join David Mishkin as he explains the best ways to save not only the important images, but the digital files that created them.

Making your own prints may not be the best way to preserve the images. You will also learn the best ways to store the image files so that you or others can retrieve them years from now. The digital files may last forever, but will you know where to look for them or how to retrieve them. These are important issues to make sure you properly preserve and can find those files when needed.

This 45-minute slide show and lecture will cover the most important aspects of digital preservation, what you should be doing and what you should not do. We will reserve plenty of time for questions and answers. The program is designed for many levels, from beginner to intermediate digital photography. Admission to the lecture is free for current members of the South Portland Historical Society; non-members may attend with a \$10 donation. FMI, call the Society at 767-7299.

David Mishkin received a B.S. degree in photography from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1969 and has graduated from their Photographic Preservation seminar series. He has presented lectures on preserving photographs and documents for almost 15 years from Boston, MA, to San Francisco, CA. Mr. Mishkin has recently completed two terms as the President of the New England Regional Genealogical Conference. Mr. Mishkin was a member of the Genealogical Speakers Guild and served as secretary for the organization. Currently, Mr. Mishkin serves as President for the South Portland Historical Society, and is Conference Co-Chair and Exhibitor Chair for Maine Genealogical Society.

### 10-15-10 South Portland Heights Grammar School



A lesser-known elementary school in South Portland was once located in South Portland Heights, near the intersection of Ocean Street and Sawyer Street. Of course, many of us know that the old Town House used to be located on the corner, and South Portland's first high school was located on the second floor of the Town House building until it burned in 1921. Located adjacent to the Town House, however, just behind it on Sawyer Street, was the old South Portland Heights School.

The Heights School was usually home to students in the sub-primary through third grades. While students were still attending the Heights

School as late as 1960, the school was discontinued in the early 1960s when the new Hamlin School was constructed next door.

South Portland Historical Society would like to thank its friend and member, historian Kenneth E. Thompson Jr., for locating and securing a precious item for our historical society – a small bound album containing six different views of the South Portland Heights School, both interior and exterior images. Shown here are two photographs from the album, showing the interior of the school with both the teacher and students inside the classroom. We are so pleased to obtain and preserve these very early images of the school.



Note to readers: the Society's museum at Bug Light Park is still open daily in October from 10am to 4pm, but we will soon switch to weekend-only hours in November and December. If you haven't yet come in to see the exhibits, we hope you will make a point to do so. We will be changing several exhibits this winter to make room for the new. Please also keep the gift shop in mind for the holidays – the shop has a wide range of locally-made gift items, and proceeds benefit your historical society. FMI, call 767-7299.

### 10-08-10 Knightville School



It's hard to look at an old photograph of the Knightville School without feeling some regret over what might have been. Unfortunately, there have been many times throughout America's history when various beautiful historic buildings have fallen into disrepair, and homeowners, businesses or municipalities have needed to weigh the pros and cons of restoring an old building vs. tearing it down. In Greater Portland, locals will point at the razing of Union Station as the prime example of great loss of a historic structure. The destruction of Union Station proved to be the catalyst for change in the public mindset regarding the value of historic preservation. But there have been similar cases of buildings all over

America being lost due to economic considerations.

The accompanying photograph of the old Knightville School was donated to the South Portland Historical Society by Warren Morgan in memory of his mother, Georgia Morgan. Mrs. Morgan had served as president of a committee that formed in the 1930s in an attempt to save the old school building that faced Legion Square – with a desire for it to be renovated for use as the South Portland Library. Their effort was not successful, as not only was the school building torn down around 1940, but the South Portland Public Library was not created and opened until 1966.

In the past week, we received a visit by Robert MacVane who arrived with some materials for use in the historical society's upcoming Evening Chat which will focus on Knightville. Mr. MacVane remembers attending the Knightville School and we hope to see him and other current and former Knightville residents at the program on Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm at City Hall. Between now and then, our society will be searching its archives for photographs such as this, and we hope that residents with other Knightville-related photos and artifacts will come forward to help us preserve the neighborhood's history. This winter, we will be working on a new exhibit at the museum which will focus on Knightville; we will use existing materials from the society's archives and also hope that residents will check their attics and photo albums for additional materials to help tell Knightville's story.

Anyone wishing to donate materials to the historical society can visit us at 55 Bug Light Park, South Portland, or call us at 767-7299.

### 10-01-10 Vaughan's Bridge



Many residents still remember the old Vaughan's Bridge, but it was demolished in 1954 before people of my generation were born. To find the former location of the old bridge in South Portland is rather easy – think of yourself as driving on Route 1 heading to Portland. When cars would head north on Main Street/Route 1 toward Portland, Main Street would just flow onto Vaughan's Bridge. The bridge went over the Fore River to Bramhall's Point on the Portland side. There are still signs of the old bridge that are there today – if you look closely, there are still some old iron railings that were left

standing where the bridge took off from the South Portland side.

The first Vaughan's Bridge was a wooden cobwork bridge that was about 2,600 feet long.

When construction of the first Vaughan's Bridge was completed in 1800, it quickly became very popular as it shortened the travel time to Portland considerably. Prior to Vaughan's Bridge, travelers coming from the south would have to head out Westbrook Street and go around the long way to Portland via the bridge at Stroudwater (Westbrook Street doesn't go that far anymore – a large section of it was abandoned when the airport went in). With the shorter distance over this new bridge, travelers were very willing to pay for the convenience, as Vaughan's Bridge originally opened as a toll bridge.



Travel across the bridge became free around 1853, and the bridge was turned over to Cumberland County in 1854 at which time Portland and South Portland (then Cape Elizabeth) took over maintenance of the structure. Over the years, the bridge was repaired numerous times and the entire bridge was replaced by an iron bridge in November of 1908, reportedly costing \$402,358.

### 09-24-10 Mystery sports team from 1945



Every so often an interesting but mysterious photograph will make its way through the doors at the historical society. It can be fun to look for clues in old photos, such as clothing, images in the background and other details. This week's photograph has been a fun and intriguing challenge for us, though, and we hope that there is a reader out there who can help shed light on this.

In the photo, we see a sports team that at first appeared to be a track team, and yet we can't be sure. We see the athletes wearing cleats on their feet. Absent is the classic football and protective padding that one would see in a football team photo. In most team sports that use a ball, the old team photos have a ball in the picture. What is most puzzling is the team jersey which, instead of showing the name of their team, is instead showing the year 1945. Even if this were a championship team, we find it hard to understand why they wouldn't be proudly wearing their normal team jersey.

If you have any information to share on this photograph, we would very much appreciate it if you would let us know at 767-7299.

### Upcoming Evening Chat – Knightville!

The South Portland Historical Society will be holding another installment of its popular oral history program – the Evening Chat. We are announcing the date early in hopes that potential attendees can mark the date on their calendars - and we also hope that anyone with photographs, artifacts, or other information concerning Knightville will please contact us now so that we can prepare for the event. There are a certain minimum number of attendees needed to hold these types of events.

This Evening Chat will cover the Knightville neighborhood. We would like to talk with anyone who remembers the old Knightville schools, earlier Knightville businesses, the old fire station and police station, residents and especially people who had a part in the jazz sessions at the Bridgeway Restaurant. The Bridgeway was long considered one of the top spots in Maine for jazz musicians to come and jam. The Chat will take place in the Council Chambers at City Hall on Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm, and the program will be recorded by SPC-TV so that these memories of early Knightville may be preserved.

The society can be reached at 767-7299, [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com), or at our museum at Bug Light Park which is open every day from 10am to 4pm.

### 09-17-10 Town House Corner



One of the interesting facets of South Portland is its many distinct neighborhoods which started out as small villages within the town. In the 1800s when South Portland was then known as Cape Elizabeth, the village names were so strong, residents would have their mail sent to their village, as in "Willard, ME" or "Knightville, ME," even though they officially lived in the town of Cape Elizabeth at the time. We frequently hear about Willard, Ferry Village, Knightville, and Thornton Heights today - the names are reinforced by churches, fire stations, neighborhood associations and other facilities that still carry on with the traditional village names.

There are a few original villages whose names are not used as often, however. One of those is the old neighborhood known as Town House Corner. Also referred to as South Portland Heights, the

neighborhood surrounding the intersection of Ocean Street and Sawyer Road was long home to South Portland's municipal offices.

The accompanying 1889 photograph comes from the Etta Gregory Watts collection at the historical

society. It is a tremendous photograph – between the camera angle and the group of men standing on the front steps of the Town House, the candid nature of the image brings this old scene to life. The Town House was located roughly in the area where the old Hamlin School is now situated. In addition to housing the town offices on the first floor, the building was also home to South Portland High School, which held its classes on the second floor. The beautiful building was destroyed by fire in 1921, causing high school classes to meet for a few years at the Broadway (Henley) School until the new high school was built on the corner of Ocean Street and Broadway.

### **09-10-10 The Dyer Family and South Portland Shipbuilding**



The Dyer family name has long been synonymous with shipbuilding and ship repair in South Portland. In Ferry Village, we even have Dyer Street which was named for the Dyer families who lived in homes along the waterfront, adjacent to the shipyards that they ran. One of the earliest Dyers that we know about was Caleb Dyer, a shipbuilder in Ferry Village in the early 1800s.

An 1871 atlas page for Ferry Village shows the Dyer Shipyard located on the water side of the intersection of High Street and Pine Street. Also at that time, the Marine Railway had already begun operation on Front Street at the foot of Dyer Street, and there were many Dyer families living all along Front Street and Dyer Street, many of them in the shipbuilding trade.

The accompanying photograph comes from the Dyer collection at South Portland Historical Society. The image shows the Portland Shipbuilding Company and the Merchant Marine Railway, which built and repaired vessels in Ferry Village for decades, from the mid-1800s and well into the 1900s. Nathan Dyer was an early superintendent of the yard. His son, Nathan Randall Dyer, worked with his father and would later become the superintendent. In the 1900s, we see Albert J. Dyer had taken over as the railway and shipyard superintendent.

We are very sad to learn of the death of Charles E. Dyer last week on Thursday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>. He was a graduate of South Portland High School, class of 1942, and lived most recently in Cape Elizabeth. Charles was an active member and contributor to our historical society, and it was through his efforts and generous donations that the Dyer collection was created at the society. Thanks to Charles Dyer, much of the history of the Dyer family's involvement in South Portland shipyards has been preserved. Our condolences go out to his wife, Frances, and the rest of his family.

### **Open Lighthouse Day**

On Saturday, September 18, the second annual Maine Open Lighthouse Day will be taking place around the state. In South Portland, both Spring Point Ledge Light and Bug Light will be open. This is a rare chance to see the inside of Bug Light, which will be open from 9am to 3pm, thanks to volunteers from the South Portland/Cape Elizabeth Rotary Club. The South Portland Historical Society will be joining in the day with a barbecue fundraiser at the museum at Bug Light Park, where hot dogs, hamburgers, drinks and more may be obtained at a reasonable price.

### **09-03-10 Richardson's Market**



History has a way of repeating itself and to see that in action one has only to visit Willard Square, in the heart of South Portland's Willard neighborhood. Even before taking on the name Willard, when this section of South Portland was known as Point Village and we were still known as the Town of Cape Elizabeth, the intersection of Preble Street and Pillsbury Street was a bustling and thriving village center. Before the automobile made it possible to travel greater distances in less time, people would generally stay closer to home and would shop at their neighborhood store. For residents living at or near

Willard Beach, this meant that when groceries were needed, they would simply walk to Willard Square.

Looking at the square today, we see two food shops – the new Willard Scoops, which undoubtedly saw a

boost this summer with Red's closed for the season; and the tremendously popular Scratch Bakery which has become the "it" place to go to meet up with friends and grab a bite to eat. If you look closely at the storefront which once housed Bathras Market, you'll see the sign that indicates another exciting development – Mr. and Mrs. B's kids are planning to reopen the market. Our family is already looking forward to next summer when we should be able to stop in to Bathras Market for sandwiches on our way to the beach.

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In the 1940s, there was a multitude of food stores located in Willard Square. Before becoming the home of Bathras Market, the building to the left of Scratch Bakery was home to the Willard Square IGA store. Across Preble Street was the F.K. Richards variety store – that building is now gone. And in the storefront where Scratch now operates, there was traditionally a local drug store – in the 1940s, it was Austin C. Bean's drug store with a great soda fountain along its right wall and the post office sub-station in the back.



In the same building as Scratch, to the right, there used to be a second storefront. In the 1920s and '30s, the A & P grocery was located in that spot. Around 1941, though, Fred and Mabel Richardson moved their store into that location. They had previously run their store across the street (in the building where Willard Scoops is now operating).

The South Portland Historical Society would like to thank Joanne Tolley for donating the accompanying photographs so that they may be archived. Taken in the mid-1940s, the images show both Richardson's Market and Joanne's parents Fred and Mabel Richardson, standing inside their store.

#### **08-27-10 The Cox Farm**



Whenever my family heads out Highland Avenue toward Scarborough, we always look toward the Cox farm to see if the three horses are in the pasture. My kids have wondered if we could have our own horse and I've told them how, even if we had the land, unfortunately horses and other farm animals have been forbidden in our city as well as many other cities and towns. I don't have an

answer for why this is; seems to me that horses are a lot more "green" than many other transportation alternatives. It must be the concern over the horses' "exhaust". Regardless, we are very lucky that a few of South Portland's farms did get special exception in our city ordinances – one of them being the Cox farm which may keep horses and thus, is one of our few reminders of South Portland's farming past.

To learn more about our farming history, I contacted Stan Cox and had the pleasure of talking with him about his family, their farm and other farms (the Dunbar's, Messer's, Goodwin's, Fickett's and others) which were active not all that long ago in the Highland Avenue area. "In the 1940s there were more farm animals in South Portland than people," he said. Certainly a reminder of how fast our city has changed in just one person's lifetime. In addition to talking with me several times by phone, Mr. Cox also graciously agreed to meet me at the farm so that I could see the old barns.

"We had lived at my grandfather's farm in the Cape – the Alewife's Brook Farm which was called the Peabbles Farm back then," he said. "Grandfather let my father build a two-story hen house there...that's how he got into poultry farming." Wanting to have his own place, Stan Cox's father Ralph Cox bought the farm at 876 Highland Avenue in 1939 and moved his wife and kids to the South Portland farm. The farm had been used as a market garden growing vegetables, but Ralph converted the large barn by adding two floors to make it a three-story hen house. In the 1940s, he increased his egg production even more

by building the additional one-story barn. Most eggs were sold on a wholesale basis to Hannaford, which back then was a food wholesaler, and to Portland Fruit.

The Cox family would also sell hens to local people. Mr. Cox remembered his teacher, Miss McKenney at Kaler School, "She'd give me an order for a roaster," and he would bring the roaster to school the next day.

Over the years that the Cox family ran the farm, it started first as an egg farm, then later Ralph Cox would add squash as a sideline, then some asparagus and then strawberries. In the early 1960s, Ralph retired from the egg laying operation and changed the entire farm to a pick-your-own strawberries business. Stan Cox bought the farm from his father in 1967 and while he and his wife attempted to keep the strawberry business going, it was very difficult since he had a full time job at the Portsmouth shipyard. In the 1970s, he changed the farm yet again and ran it as a community garden for about 10 years. Mr. Cox would plow and harrow the fields, lay the water pipe for irrigation, and the community garden, roughly 20 feet by 150 feet long, was then used by about 35 different people.



#### Vintage Kite Fly at Bug Light Park on Saturday

The NorEasters Kite Club will be holding a Vintage Kite Fly at Bug Light Park on Saturday, August 28, from 11am to 5pm. Club members will be bringing out their classic and vintage kites. This will be a great chance for residents to get to see some great old-fashioned kites. If you'd like to join in the fun of kite flying, bring your own or stop by the historical society's gift shop in the park where we carry a line of unique and reasonably-priced kites. To reach Bug Light Park, take Broadway east to the ocean, then turn left on Breakwater Drive, and then turn right on Madison Street that leads into the park.

#### 08-20-10 Island Trotting Park



A new exhibit at the South Portland Historical Society's museum covers an obscure piece of South Portland's history – a trotting park, but not Rigby Park as most local history buffs are aware of. Instead, we talk about the Island Trotting Park which has been very difficult to find information about because the park existed before the Civil War, in the 1850s. We are continuing to research this interesting piece of South Portland's past.

In the 1850s, South Portland was known as Cape Elizabeth and the trotting park was located in one of the Cape's small villages: Ligonias. Although not an island at all, the area was a peninsula bordered by Long Creek, the Fore River and the creek that runs through Calvary Cemetery which emptied into the Fore River. Access to the area was primarily via bridges which spanned that creek (most of the creek in the Ligonias neighborhood has disappeared as it has been filled in over the years). During the Civil War, the land that had been home to the trotting park was taken over to create Camp Abraham Lincoln, a training camp serving all of southern Maine.

A major race event took place at the Island Trotting Park in 1859. The following excerpt was taken from an old newspaper, The Eastern Argus, dated August 26 of that year: Great Sporting Day in Maine – Flora Temple and Princess to Trot in Portland! These world-renowned horses will trot at Island Trotting Park, Portland, September 1<sup>st</sup>, for a purse of \$1,000...the citizens of this state will now have an opportunity of witnessing a contest between the two fastest trotters on the turf. These trots are patronized by the best portions of the community in New York and other cities...this will be a faster race than will ever, in all probability, be made again in this state, and the only opportunity to see the little bay mare, and her California rival, who have astonished the world with their unprecedented speed.

The accompanying photograph shows a Currier and Ives print recently acquired by the historical society. Few in today's world would have recognized the name of this horse, but the print showing the little bay mare Flora Temple in her racing days has found an appropriate home in South Portland. To reach the

museum at Bug Light Park, take Broadway east to the ocean, turn left onto Breakwater Drive and then turn right onto Madison Street that leads directly into the park. The museum is open every day from 10am to 4pm.

### 08-13-10 The Ballard House



One of South Portland's older homes is the Ballard house located on Turner's Island at 49 Ballard Street. The home was originally built circa 1857, and was the home of Robert and Jane Ballard for nearly 50 years. Robert F. Ballard was born in 1828 and lived in England until he took to the sea when he was barely a teenager. According to family records, he lied about his name and citizenry (he claimed to be his brother, who was both older and an American citizen) in order to enlist in the US Navy and he served as a first class cabin boy in 1846-47 during the Mexican War. Ballard did actually become a naturalized citizen in 1856. He became a freight conductor for the

Portland, Saco & Portsmouth Railroad, and in his last years, he worked as a night watchman at the Boston & Maine railroad yard on Turner's Island.

#### Robert

Ballard's wife was Jane Ann Evans. Jane was born in England and immigrated to America where she worked as a governess for a family in New Orleans in the 1840s. Robert and Jane married in 1854 and raised five children in the house on Ballard Street. Family papers talk about the great fun for grandchildren at the Ballard house – swimming, boating, fishing, clamming, and playing in a large barn on the property. The Ballards also had a hen house for fresh eggs.



The accompanying photograph shows the Ballard house, circa 1894, with the Ballard family gathered around. Robert and Jane Ballard are pictured seated just in front of the front door - the other people in the photo are several of their children and grandchildren. Our thanks goes to Sam Colella for donating various photographs and records related to the Ballard family so that they may be archived at the South Portland Historical Society.

### 08-06-10 Memories...with Myrtle Elliott Cleaves



This past year I had a chance for a nice visit with South Portland native, Myrtle Elliott Cleaves. Myrtle was born in her grandmother Rowe's house on Randall Street and attended the East High Street School, the Henley School and then the high school when it was housed in what is now the Mahoney building. She lived with her parents, Arthur and Florence Elliott, and her four siblings, Roy, Roberta, Mildred and Billy. The Elliott family lived first at 81 School Street, and later at 57 Broadway.

The accompanying photograph shows the house where they lived at 57 Broadway. That house was part of a long row of houses that used to line the northern side of Broadway, from the corner of Preble Street and running toward the eastern end of Broadway (along the side of the street where the large field is at the end of Broadway today). Myrtle remembers all of her neighbors. On the corner of Preble and Broadway was Billy Burns living with his aunt. Then the Madison house – the Madisons had one cow out back and the neighbors would go over at 5pm to get some milk for their suppers. After

the Madison house was the Libby house where Norma Libby lived with her father and mother on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and her grandparents on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Then there was the Inness family's house, then the Elliott's, the McCarthy's and several more.



The Elliott's house and many others were taken by eminent domain when the shipyards were constructed. Myrtle's father would say, "They paid us a nickel" for the house. These neighborhood homes were all razed to make way for a housing complex known as Cushing Village – barracks-style housing for shipyard workers.

Myrtle Cleaves has fond memories of her childhood, though. Especially how all the neighborhood kids would play a lot of pick-up baseball. "I could hit the ball and run. I could run like a deer," she said. "We had to make up our own equipment. I'd use a hockey stick to play golf." She also remembered how everyone lived by the whistle which would blow at 6am, 12 noon, 1pm, 5pm and 9pm. In the summer, she and her friends would swim at Willard Beach every day.

### **07-30-10 Evans Street Airfield**

On a recent visit to the historical society's museum, member Ron Jenkins mentioned that he had found a listing on a website of a plane crash in South Portland in 1919 at the "Evans Street Airfield." We were intrigued as we had never heard of such a place and there is no indication of any airfield on maps of the area. Jenkins later sent along the website address, [www.mewreckchasers.com](http://www.mewreckchasers.com), which has a list of military aircraft crashes in Maine, and which indicates the Evans Street Airfield as the location of the crash.

Thanks to this information forwarded by Jenkins, we found the story on the front page of the Portland Evening Express of May 23, 1919, entitled, "Aviators Escape Death in a Smash in South Portland." The airfield mentioned is most likely either Robert Fickett's field where his cattle would graze (in the area where Portland Pipe Line is now located, along Evans between Hill Street and Nutter Road) or else on the other side of Evans Street where the Cotton and Stanwood families had fields. We have excerpted some of the story, as follows:

Major Adlai H. Gilkeson and Pilot H.M. McGraw of the Army Air Service narrowly escaped serious injury when the big army plane 41874 in which they attempted to finish the last leg of their flight from Mineola, Long Island, to Bangor, turned turtle upon leaving the grounds in a field near Evans Street, Pleasantdale, this afternoon. The plane, which has been in this field since it landed about dusk Tuesday night, was tuned up and ready to start about noon. In order to make a short getaway the big machine was trundled way across the field, and under excellent weather conditions the attempt was made to hop off. With Major Gilkeson and Flier McGraw aboard, the big plane was just leaving the ground when the running gear struck the soft soil at the top of a slight rise in the ground. This completely displaced the balance, and the big plane turned completely over, pinning the two fliers in their seats. After considerable effort they were able to extricate themselves without assistance, and it was found that neither suffered any serious injuries.

### **Bug Light Open House**

On Saturday, July 31, representatives from the South Portland/Cape Elizabeth Rotary Club will be opening Bug Light to the public from 11am to 2pm. This is a rare opportunity for local residents to see the inside of the lighthouse. The next planned opening for this year will be during the statewide Open Lighthouse Day on September 18. The historical society's museum in Bug Light Park will be open from 10am to 4pm, as it is every day, and features a variety of history exhibits including the history of South Portland's lighthouses and their keepers. Admission to the museum and lighthouse are both free, although donations are encouraged to support these efforts. To reach Bug Light Park, take Broadway east to the ocean, turn left onto Breakwater Drive and then turn right onto Madison Street that leads directly into the park.

### **07-23-10 A Pictorial History of South Portland Businesses**



In a March 2009 column, we featured a story about the Marketplace Restaurant with images of a matchbook cover, with a request to the public for a copy of a photograph of the old restaurant. This past month, we were visited by brothers Peter and Paul Jeffery who arrived with a donation of photographs that they have amassed over several decades. In one of the accompanying photos, we see a photo that they took of the Marketplace Restaurant in the 1980s. It is a bit grainy, but you can still make out the very distinctive look of the building and how it sat in relation to the street. The building was later torn down and a new building erected to house East Side Mario's.

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The Jeffery brothers have had an interesting hobby over the years. They have undertaken their own preservation effort by heading out into the community and photographing businesses in transition. These might be businesses that have announced they are closing soon, or in other cases they might be businesses that are building new facilities and are about to open. Regardless, the Jeffery brothers have done a great job in documenting the stores that have come and gone in South Portland since 1980. When they have driven by construction sites, they have stopped to take a quick photo to save the image.



We have found many photographs in their collection which document businesses that we have not seen pictured previously. We send a huge thank you to them for taking the time to document these events and for sharing the photographs with our historical society and the public.

The second photograph shown here was taken circa 2000 by the Jeffery brothers, when the East Side Mario's restaurant had just closed and the building was being renovated for the opening of the 99 Restaurant. The building is now home to the Pizza Hut Bistro.

### 07-16-10 Preston Marr, Last Keeper at Bug Light



Preston Marr and his wife, Angielette

One of the current exhibits at the South Portland Historical Society covers the history of Bug Light and the lighthouse keepers and their families who have tended the light. As we were preparing to mount this exhibit, we were very fortunate to receive a visit from Steve Dulac, a descendant of Preston Marr, the last keeper at the light. Steve went back to his family looking for photographs taken from that time period, and we are very grateful that they were able to find and share some treasures with all of us.

Preston Marr served as the lighthouse keeper at Bug Light from 1920 to 1933. He and his family lived in the keeper's house that was attached to the lighthouse, at the end of the 1,990 foot breakwater. When the weather required it, the light was lit and needed to be tended to make sure it sent out its beacon to protect ships from Stanford's Ledge. A clockworks-type mechanism needed to be wound in order for a light reflector to rotate – after a winding, the reflector would rotate for six hours. The Coast Guard provided food and provisions for the family; after they dropped off the supplies, Preston would take a share of them and row them over to the keepers at Spring Point Ledge Light.

Preston's wife, Angielette, was also a midwife and as it was common in that time for children to be born in their own homes, Angie would head out to neighborhood homes to lend her skills at the needed time. Her son and daughter-in-law, Harold and Gladys Marr, came and stayed in the keeper's house when it was time for their baby to be born: Angie assisted with the birth of her own granddaughter, Doris, right in the keeper's house, on August 3, 1921.

Preston Marr's service at Bug Light came to an end in 1933. The following year, after Spring Point Ledge Light had been electrified and a cable had been run underwater from there to Bug Light, there was no longer need for a keeper at Bug Light. The keeper's house was then removed and Bug Light was operated remotely by the keepers at Spring Point, until its light was extinguished in 1942 during World War II.

The South Portland Historical Society is trying to locate other descendants of lighthouse keepers at Bug Light or at Spring Point Ledge Light. If you can help, please contact the Society at either 767-7299 or [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

### **07-09-10 Long Creek Air Tragedy**



Suzan Roberts Norton undertook a preservation effort while the funds were being raised for the Long Creek Air Tragedy memorial. Norton interviewed many of the families of victims, as well as surviving victims themselves, and recorded their first-hand accounts of the air tragedy. She is shown here, at left, presenting the compilation of these stories to Kathy DiPhilippo of the South Portland Historical Society, to be archived at the Society.

On Sunday, July 11, at 2pm, the Long Creek Air Tragedy memorial will be dedicated to the victims of the 1944 plane crash in South Portland. The dedication will take place at the entrance to Redbank Village on Westbrook Street. The memorial is the result of the tireless efforts of John Kierstead who, seeing that no memorial had ever been placed on the site of the deadliest plane crash in Maine history, decided to focus his efforts on making that happen.

During World War II, massive shipyards were constructed in South Portland to produce merchant vessels known as Ocean and Liberty ships. These ships made their way across the Atlantic Ocean in convoys to keep the Allied troops supplied in order to fight the war. At its peak, the South Portland shipyards employed 30,000 people working 'round the clock in three shifts to construct the ships as fast as possible. With a massive influx of workers to South Portland, the need for housing was critical. Broadview Park, Peary Village, Long Creek Terrace, and Redbank were some of the many government housing complexes that sprung up to address this need.

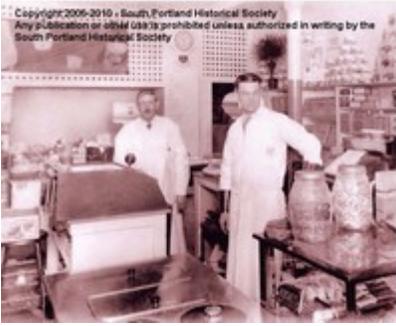
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accompanying photograph from the Al Wyman collection shows another complex that was quickly set up to house incoming shipyard workers. Known as the Westbrook Street trailer park, the site provided quick, temporary housing where shipyard workers and their families could come live to be closer to the shipyards. The site was roughly in the area where the Olde English Village Apartments are now located. On July 11, 1944, the Westbrook Street trailer park became the site of a real-life nightmare when a plane crash killed 19 people and injured another 20. Adding to the tragedy were the victims themselves, many of them wives and children of shipyard workers who were off at work.



Yet another tragic element was the pilot himself, Army Air Corps Lt. Philip "Phee" Russell, a South Portland High School alumni who had been a popular student and athlete. Phee was flying home in a twin-engine A-26 bomber, on leave to meet his wife and three-month old daughter at the airport, when he missed the approach to the runway and after circling around to try again, somehow lost control of the plane and crashed into the trailers.

### **07-02-10 Fred and George Anderson's Grocery on Preble Street**



Although it has long served as an apartment building, the building at 185 Preble Street on the corner of Summit Street was home to a grocery serving the neighborhood for nearly 80 years. The original set-up was what was common at that time – a store on the first floor with the shopkeeper’s residence upstairs. Alfred Thrasher and his son Alfred Thrasher Jr. first began the store selling groceries and provisions in the mid-1880s. The Thrasher family is one of the early families that lived in that area – in fact the Old Settlers Cemetery on the SMCC campus is sometimes referred to as the Thrasher Cemetery.

The Thrashers ran the store until the early 1900s and between that time and 1957, there were 11 additional store owner/operators, including Mr. and Mrs. Everett Inness from the mid-1930s to about 1946 – through World War II – Frederick Deakin in the late 1940s, and Norman and Pearl Smith in the 1950s.

Two additional notable store owners were Fred Anderson and his son, George Anderson. Fred Anderson ran the store with his son for roughly 20 years, starting around the year 1906. Around 1927, Frank Seeley took over the store operation for a short time, then George Haggett ran the store in the late 1920s. After the Depression hit in 1929, George Anderson took over the store once again. Unfortunately for Mr. Anderson, he became a victim of the Depression. As was common practice in earlier days, Anderson would extend store credit to his customers and, especially in those hard economic times, he had many customers relying heavily on him for credit. Eventually, with more and more of his customers unable to make good on their accounts, Anderson had to close his store in 1932.

The accompanying photograph comes to us courtesy of George Anderson’s grandson, Rick Anderson; the photo shows the inside of the Anderson store with George Anderson on the right. If any readers know the identity of the other man in the photograph, please call our historical society at 767-7299.

#### **06-25-10 Fourth of July South Portland**



On July 4th, the South Portland Historical Society will host *Fourth of July South Portland*, a fun family event at Bug Light Park. Events will kick-off at 11:30am with the museum's Grand Opening ceremony, followed by a reading of the Declaration of Independence by Benjamin Franklin. Hot dogs, hamburgers, sausages, snacks, and cold drinks will be available for purchase with proceeds to benefit the museum. A free craft table will be offered at 1pm, provided by Yay for You!, artful birthday parties and events. At 2pm, there will be old-fashioned games for kids in the field across from the museum. Of course, the museum will be open throughout the day, with no charge for admission.

The Grand Opening is the culmination of a four-year effort to bring this history museum to life. The journey began in 2006 when the historical society first approached Portland Pipe Line Corporation about the historic Cushing's Point House which it owned on Madison Street. The building was the last surviving home at Cushing's Point, from a neighborhood that was sacrificed during World War II to make way for the Liberty ship yards. Over the next several years, the historical society worked out an arrangement with Portland Pipe Line

to acquire the building as its permanent home and a capital campaign was launched to raise funds. In 2009, the pipeline donated the building to the society and it was moved to its new home just around the corner in Bug Light Park, on land provided by the City of South Portland. Major donors to this project include Portland Pipe Line, the Davis Family Foundation, Saco & Biddeford Savings Institution, the Community Development Block Grant program, Greater Portland Public Development Commission, Applicators Sales & Service/Paradigm Windows, the Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust, the South Portland Lions Club, and the New Century Community Program.

Come have some fun, some food, and help us celebrate South Portland's new history museum.

Afterward, get a good spot to watch the fireworks! You can reach us by car, by boat, by bicycle or by foot – you can even take advantage of South Portland's Greenbelt Walkway to reach the park. We hope you will make Bug Light Park part of your family's July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday tradition for years and generations to come! FMI, call the museum at 767-7299, visit our website at [www.sphistory.org](http://www.sphistory.org), or join our Facebook page at South Portland Historical Society.

### 06-18-10 Jimmy Lano's Diner



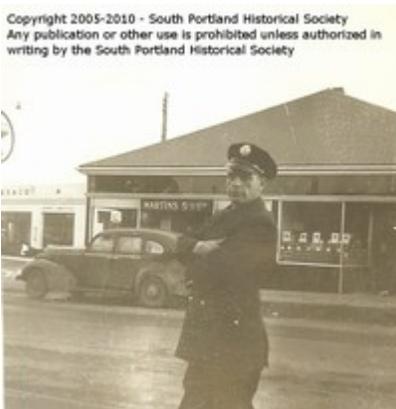
The accompanying photograph comes from the Lano collection at the South Portland Historical Society. It was taken in the 1940s inside Lano's Diner at Cash Corner. We know only that the man standing behind the counter in the middle of the photo is Jimmy Lano, but we would like to identify the other people in the photo. If you know of the identity of anyone else pictured, please call the society at 767-7299 – we would appreciate your help!

The diner building was moved to Cash Corner in 1942 from its previous location near the shipyard; this was during the time when the Maritime Commission was taking over the land at Cushing's Point, when buildings needed to be moved or razed. The diner car was moved from there by George Ganem to a platform at 285 Main Street on the site where the old Cash's Market had previously been destroyed by fire.

Known first as "Jimmy's Diner", the business was renamed several times. Jimmy Lano leased and ran the diner in the 1940s but, wanting to own his own restaurant, he purchased the land across the street and built a new restaurant, Lano's Restaurant, which opened around 1950. Our thanks goes to Ted Lano for sharing some wonderful pieces of Lano's history with the historical society.

One of the society's exhibits for the coming season covers the story of how the automobile has changed the American neighborhood, using our own Cash Corner as an example of how these changes have come about. Prior to the invention of the automobile and its increasing use by the public, cities and towns across America had neighborhoods that were more like village centers, where residents could find most of the services that they needed (stores, schools, churches, and more) within walking distance of their homes. When the American public began to rely more and more on the automobile, traveling farther and farther from their homes, the need for gasoline and other on-the-road services caused changes in many communities. With Route One running through Cash Corner, this neighborhood felt the effects more than most.

### 06-11-10 Officer Murphy at Martin's 5 Cent to \$1.00 Store



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For someone from my generation, hearing the name "Martin's" may conjure up images of the Martin's Shop and Save Store in Mill Creek. I love the accompanying photograph which was so foreign to me the first time I saw it. It shows the Martin's 5 Cent to \$1.00 Store that was located on Cottage Road in the building that was later taken over by DiPietro's Market. Long before it was DiPietro's, the building actually was a duplex-type building, with a dividing wall and stores on the left and right side. Many residents probably remember that Martin's later moved across the street to 378 Cottage Road into the storefront where the A&P used to be. This is a great early photo documenting the store's original site.

In the photo shown here, we can see SPPD Officer Murphy standing in front of Martin's back in the 1940s. At that time, Milesen's Market occupied the right side of the building. Later stores on the right side of the building included Norman Shaw's Market, Lynd's Market, Sue's Variety, and Langella's. When Sam DiPietro took over the space, the dividing wall was removed to make the one large store that we are familiar with today.

Another interesting part of this photograph is the glimpse of the Texaco station to the left, on the spot now occupied by Cape Veterinary Clinic.

### Willard Neighborhood Program

On Thursday, June 17, historian Kathryn DiPhilippo will present a program on the history of the Willard neighborhood at the monthly meeting of the Willard Neighborhood Association. The program will be held at the Betsy Ross House Community Room, 99 Preble Street, at 7pm. Parking is located off Stanford Street. The event is free and open to the public.

### 06-04-10 Redbank's Your Handy Store



This week's Window on the Past looks on the old Your Handy Store in Redbank, run by Alford Vigue from 1948 to 1971. I recently spoke with Alford's son, Sonny Vigue, about his memories of his dad, the store, and growing up in Redbank. Although originally from Bar Harbor, Alford Vigue and his family lived in Kennebunkport for a few years and then moved to 49 Colin Kelley Road in South Portland during World War II when he went to work at the shipyard here. In 1948, he opened Your Handy Store at 565 Westbrook Street. "It was not much bigger than a one-car garage when he started," says Sonny. Alford would add on to the store three times over the years. As the shopkeeper's son, Sonny had an early start in the working world; starting at about eight years old, he was already working the penny candy counter in the store.

Your Handy Store was like the general stores of that time, selling anything from food to household supplies to toys. Sonny particularly remembers that in the 1950s and 1960s, the

TV in the store would be set to the Monday, Wednesday and Friday night fights. Anyone who wanted to watch, including people who didn't have TVs, could come pull up an empty wooden keg and sit and watch TV.



Alford Vigue also made his own ice cream in the store and had a side window where customers could walk up and order a cone. The store was sometimes called the "Redbank Dairy Queen." The store was open seven days a week, so as most small business owners can relate, Alford spent a lot of time working. Sonny remembers that when his dad had some spare time, he liked to head to Scarborough Downs with his friend, Jimmy Lano.

### 05-28-10 Summer in Maine Auction – May 30 to June 5



It's time for the South Portland Historical Society's annual **Summer in Maine Auction!** With a huge variety of summer treats, this year's auction presents the best that Maine has to offer – it's a great way to get some great ideas for fun things to do with family and friends in Maine, and your winning bids go to support your local historical society in its new home at Bug Light Park. With cruises, museum passes, amusement park tickets, restaurant gift certificates, hotel stays, golf outings and more, the Summer in Maine Auction has something for everyone. To bid on the auction, go to the Society's special auction website at [www.SummerInMaineAuction.com](http://www.SummerInMaineAuction.com), and link to the exciting auction items.

Thinking of taking a vacation this summer? Bid on a five-day stay at a lakeside vacation home, or an overnight at the Hilton Garden Inn or the Courtyard by Marriott. There are dozens of great certificates and tickets for day-trip outings such as Aquaboggan, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, the Songo River Queen, the Amtrak Downeaster, Willowbrook Village Museum, York's Wild Animal Kingdom, Palace Playland, and the Theater at Monmouth. You can bid on golfing for

four at the Sebasco Harbor Resort, a cruise for two with Odyssey Whale Watch, or a dinner at Joe's Boathouse overlooking a marina and the bay.

Special to this year's auction will be some interesting additions including a custom crafted kite, designed and made by Tony Heeschen, with the image of Bug Light, and lobster rolls served at a reserved table for four on the historical society's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor deck on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

We hope you'll check out the auction and consider bidding on some of these great items, whether for yourself, your family, or as a gift (Father's Day is right around the corner). You can check out the site at [www.SummerinMaineAuction.com](http://www.SummerinMaineAuction.com). The auction will go live on Sunday, May 30th and will run until the bidding closes on Saturday, June 5th. All proceeds benefit the South Portland Historical Society. For more information, call 767-7299 or email to [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

#### **05-21-10 Robinson Bros. Nation Wide Store**



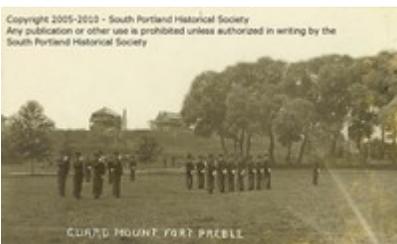
The accompanying photograph should be nostalgic for many residents. The image comes to us courtesy of Phil Alexander and shows the front of the old Robinson Bros. Nation Wide Store that was located at 181 Cottage Road. According to Mr. Alexander, that is his old friend Dave Curran standing out on the front stoop.

The Robinson Bros. store began operating around 1950 when brothers Alvah and Norman Robinson moved here from Bangor and took over the grocery. The building had previously housed the Hillside Market from around 1932 to 1934, then Ames & Faraday Grocers, and later William and Maria Menneally operated

Menneally's Nation Wide from this site.

Through much of the building's history as a small grocery, the store operators would live in the apartment up over the store. After the Robinson brothers closed their grocery, the building would later be used as the Holy Cross Credit Union. The site is now a parking lot next to the Cherished Possessions building.

#### **05-14-10 May 19th lecture: Military Presence at Spring Point: 1776 to 1950**



On Wednesday, May 19, military historian, Kenneth E. Thompson, Jr. will present a lecture and slide show at the South Portland Historical Society's annual meeting. The event will take place at 6:30pm at the South Portland Community Center, 21 Nelson Road. Entitled "Military Presence at Spring Point, 1776-1950," the lecture will cover the construction and fortification of the Spring Point Battery, Fort Hancock, and Fort Preble, including Camp Burdett, the Spanish-American War camp in South Portland that was home to the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. The slide show will include rare

images from the Society's extensive collection covering Fort Preble's history.

Mr. Thompson is the author of several books related to local history, including *Civil War Maine Hall of Fame*, *Civil War Commodores and Admirals*, *Deceive to Win: the Maine – New Hampshire Border Controversy*, and *Portland Head Light and Fort Williams*. Books will be available for purchase and signing at the event and the historical society also carries these titles in its museum gift shop.

This is a unique opportunity to learn about South Portland's own Fort Preble, from one of the most knowledgeable historians on the subject. Anyone wishing to join or renew their membership in the historical society may do so at the door. Memberships start at \$10 for seniors/students and \$15 for individuals. For more information, visit [www.sphistory.org](http://www.sphistory.org) or call 767-7299.

#### **05-07-10 History for your (grand)kids – American Revolution 101**

As I have visited with elementary school children over the years, and watched my own children going through the school system, it has struck me how little history education our kids are getting with the educational focus in schools now centered on reading, writing, and math. History curriculum is scarce in today's elementary schools and when I talk with elementary school classes, the students are largely

unaware of major events in American history.

This doesn't have to be the case, and I'm hopeful that parents and grandparents will consider stepping up a bit to fill this gap. This is storytelling with a purpose. The elementary school years are an ideal time to talk with kids about American history – children at this age are eager to learn and are usually very interested in our country's history. I thought that I might put out a column from time to time with some talking points for parents, grandparents or anyone else who has a child in their life. I welcome your feedback and suggestions!

Talking about the American Revolution and the birth of our nation is a wonderful place to start a discussion about American history. When I talk with kids, I normally start with a question to see what they might already know. You might start with "Have you ever heard about the American Revolution?" or "What can you tell me about it?" With children this age, dates are not important - history should be fun for them, not a chore of memorization. Thus a simple general time period (the Revolution took place in the 1700s) should be fine to start with. With young children, the only date I'll be sure to mention is July 4, 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress. This date is meaningful since it explains why we celebrate July 4<sup>th</sup> today; whether or not they remember the 1776 is not important.

Other talking points that are educational and interesting for this age group could be:

- Who was fighting in the American Revolution
- Why were the colonists fighting against Britain and King George III?
- What was life like for people in America before the Revolution?
- The war began with battles at Lexington and Concord – Paul Revere had ridden through warning that the British were coming.
- Imagine how history might have been different if the colonists didn't fight for independence.

On this topic, I highly recommend the book, "If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution," available at your local book store or library. The "If You Lived..." series of books present American history material in a kid-friendly format that makes learning fun. The books can even be fun for adults who may not have thought much about the American Revolution since their own school years.

If you show an interest in talking about history with the children in your life, then you will help them learn to have an appreciation of history themselves. Gaining an understanding of how our ancestors made a difference in our world can help set the stage for teaching civic awareness and responsibility.

#### **04-30-10 The People's Ferry Company's "Cornelia H"**



Long before the original Portland Bridge was installed over the Fore River in 1823, a ferry service operated regularly across the span. In his book, *A History of Cape Elizabeth*, author William Jordan noted that a ferry service was operating here from time to time, as far back as 1678. In 1719, a year after the Town of Falmouth was incorporated by the Massachusetts General Court, (the original Town of Falmouth included the modern-day cities and towns of Portland, Falmouth, Westbrook, South Portland and Cape Elizabeth), a ferry man was officially appointed to maintain regular service. Before 1800, without even the Vaughan's Bridge to get across the river further down, it was either take a boat across or go by horse or foot the long way around by Stroudwater.

This week's Window on the Past shows the "Cornelia H", a steam ferry built in Bath in 1885 for the People's Ferry Company. The Cornelia H was in service on the ferry line for about seven years. On the Cape Elizabeth side, the ferry landing was located in Ferry Village just off the end of Sawyer Street, on Portland Street. For the first four years of her service, the Cornelia H landed on the Portland side at

Custom House Wharf, until a new ferry landing was completed at the Portland Pier. Unfortunately, the Cornelia H was destroyed by fire in 1892.

#### 04-23-10 View of Knightville



This week's window on the past looks at South Portland's downtown in the early 1940s. I think it is a wonderful period photo and trying to date it has been both challenging and interesting. This image of Ocean Street in Knightville comes to us thanks to Art and Marlene Tordoff. One of the reasons why this photograph is significant is that it offers a rare view of the gas station that went in on the piece of land where Cottage Road runs off from Ocean Street. Now site of the parking lot and park next to the South Portland Post Office, up until about 1940, the land was covered by the impressive Knightville Primary School. After the school was demolished, a gas station was put in on the spot and it is rare to find a photograph that shows that

gas station.

In trying to date the photograph, there are a number of gas stations and business signs to help. What is not in the picture is the large building that used to be on the corner of Ocean and E Street that housed the old Devine Pharmacy. Instead, we see the Tydol gas station that went in around 1940 after that large, beautiful building was demolished. The residential home just to the left of the Tydol station was at 104 Ocean Street; that building was taken down circa 1950. Another element is the sign on the business on the right that says Columbia Market. Herbert Smaha opened the Columbia Market there around 1938 and his brother, John, purchased the business about a year later and changed its name to Smaha's Legion Square Market. Add in the vintage automobiles and this makes for a great view of South Portland history.

Note to readers: The South Portland Historical Society's museum at Bug Light Park is now open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 1pm, and other days by chance or appointment. The museum hours will be expanding within the next few weeks. Please mark your calendar and plan to join us for the upcoming Bug Light Kite Festival on Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, from 11am to 4pm. FMI, call the Society at 767-7299.

#### 04-16-10 Then and Now: The Trolley Car Barn in Knightville



The old trolley car barn has been a fixture in Knightville for over a century. When the Portland & Cape Elizabeth Railway started building a trolley system in South Portland in 1895, it acquired the piece of land near the foot of the Portland Bridge that had previously been home to the Portland Dry Dock and Warehouse Company. This impressive car barn, 70 by 225 feet, was built by the railway as a site to build and repair trolley cars. The railway also built the steam power plant adjacent to the car barn to generate the power it needed to run the large trolley line.

The accompanying photographs show the old car barn in 1916 with the power plant just to the left, and the buildings as they exist today. We would love to know more about the small lunch room in the old photo. If you have any information to share, please contact the historical society at 767-7299.

Since the end of the trolley system in South Portland, the power plant was converted to become an electrical substation, and the car barn has been divided up for commercial and industrial use over the years. South Portland residents have missed the old Snow Squall Restaurant that was once housed in that building for roughly 20 years, and have welcomed back the now re-opened Snow Squall at the same site.



Note to readers: The South Portland Historical Society's museum at Bug Light Park is now open on

Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 1pm, and other days by chance or appointment. Take Broadway east to the ocean, then a left on Breakwater Drive and a right on Madison Street that leads into the park.

#### **04-09-10 Larry Rowe**



One of Maine's most notable golfers was our own Larry Rowe from South Portland. Larry was born on March 22, 1898, and grew up on Westbrook Street. This was at the time when Portland Country Club was operating in the Thornton Heights neighborhood, so it should be no surprise that he learned the game of golf by hanging out and caddying at the country club that was nearly in his back yard. After the PCC clubhouse burned to the ground in 1913, however, the country club leased a temporary clubhouse in 1913 and 1914 then moved to Falmouth (where Rowe would later join as a member).

After serving in the Army during World War I, Rowe returned from Europe and really started to develop his skills as a professional golfer. He worked as a pro at the Kennebunkport Country Club, then moved on to clubs in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Florida and Indiana. In 1925, he returned to Maine and was hired on as the pro at the new Purpoodock Club in Cape Elizabeth, where he is credited with designing the first nine holes (today's front nine). He served as the Purpoodock Club's pro from 1925 until 1941. In 1937, he won the Maine Open.

In 1930, Larry Rowe began designing and planning a new golf course in Thornton Heights, on farmland that was behind his house on Westbrook Street. Larry Rowe's Public Golf Course opened in 1931. Nelson Harmon, who grew up in Thornton Heights, remembers working at the golf course. "I worked for Larry in the mid-1940s...started caddying at the golf course then tended the greens in the summers for six or seven years," he says. Harmon remembers mowing the greens with a Model A Ford tractor, pulling three Worthington fairway mowers behind.

Larry Rowe was also involved in two auto businesses. After his brother Raymond died in 1948, he took over and ran the Rowe Motors dealership in Westbrook that Raymond had been operating. For many years, Larry and his sister Dorothy ran a Lincoln Mercury dealership in Saco. Larry Rowe retired in 1970. In 1974, the course was acquired by the City of South Portland and is now known as the South Portland Municipal Golf Course. Larry died in St. Petersburg, Florida in March, 1976.

I would like to thank Jim O'Connor for his help researching information for this column. Do you have any additional information to share? The South Portland Historical Society would very much like to obtain a photograph of Larry Rowe. If you can help in any way, please call the Society at 767-7299 or email us at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

Note to readers: The South Portland Historical Society's museum at Bug Light Park is now open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 1pm, and other days by chance or appointment. Take Broadway east to the ocean, then a left on Breakwater Drive and a right on Madison Street that leads into the park.

#### **04-02-10 Bug Light Kite Festival – May 8**



Although no one knows exactly when people first began flying kites, there is no denying that it is old-fashioned art. Thought to have originated in China more than 2,000 years ago, kite flying has been used for many purposes through the ages, including warfare and scientific research. Kites were used and studied in the development of the airplane. But in more recent times, kite flying for recreation has developed into a true art and is enjoyed by people of all ages.

The South Portland Historical Society will be joined by the Noreasters Kite Club next month in a new event in South Portland: the Bug Light Kite Festival. Many people don't realize that Bug Light Park is considered one of the premier spots for kite flying in northern New England. With its location on a windy

point of land and with no power lines to catch a kite line, the ocean-side park is a destination spot for many serious kite flyers, some of whom travel here and stay in hotels in order to enjoy flying in this great spot. The variety of kites flown in our park is astounding – whether they are purchased commercially or hand-sewn with great care; we have seen kites that look like giant squid, scuba divers, fish and even cats chasing mice. Some kites are so strong that they need to be tethered to the ground.

We hope that you will help spread the word and join us as we celebrate this time-honored tradition. Please mark your calendar – the Bug Light Kite Festival will be held on Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> from 11am to 4pm. The day will start with a “how to fly a kite” program. Throughout the day, there will be displays of show kites by the kite club, a candy drop for the kids (think “large kite pinata”), and bol racing with parachute-type kites. The kite club will also maintain a kite hospital to help anyone with assembling or fixing kites. Kites will be for sale at the event and the historical society will also be running a barbecue with hot dogs and hamburgers. For more information, call 767-7299.

Museum hours: The historical society museum is now open on Fridays from 10am to 1pm, and other days by chance or appointment, as we begin mounting exhibits for the coming season. We will be adding open hours throughout April and May, with the museum planned to be open daily, 10-4, during the summer and fall. Interested in volunteering? The Society still needs some volunteers for three-hour shifts. Training will be provided.

Today's photo:

Today's Window on the Past photo looks at two South Portland police cars in 1944. These were Hudson sedans equipped with two-way frequency-modulated radios.

**03-26-10 Cash's Market fire in 1936**



On the evening of August 27, 1936, the two-story Cash's Market building in Cash Corner was found ablaze by SP police patrolman Bartley Murphy. Since Patrolman Murphy had just gone by the building five minutes earlier and seen no flames or smoke, the police immediately suspected that the fire had been intentionally set. Murphy continued investigating the case and within a few days, he arrested a man at the Rigby rail yard who confessed to setting the fire. The man, who had recently arrived in the area from Boston, was found guilty of breaking and entering the market and stealing goods;

he confessed to setting the fire to get rid of any fingerprints.

The accompanying photograph comes from the Cash Family collection at the South Portland Historical Society. On the left is Cash's Market, just to the right is Ward's Market, and to the far right is a glimpse of Irving's Garage with the Tydol sign. These three businesses are situated roughly in the area where Rite Aid is located today. At the time of the fire, Cash's Market was owned and operated by Harold Cash. Rather than rebuilding on the site, Cash built a new store at 327 Main Street.

Note to readers: The historical society's museum at Bug Light Park is undergoing continued renovations; all windows are being replaced in the building and work on the surrounding grounds will take place this spring. We will be open again in April for several days each week as we begin mounting exhibits for the coming season. By the end of May, we expect to be open daily from 10am to 4pm. The museum's Grand Opening will be part of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July South Portland celebration. During this transition, open hours will be recorded on the museum phone line at 767-7299. FMI, visit [www.sphistory.org](http://www.sphistory.org).

**03-19-10 Willard Beach Bath House**



Willard Beach certainly has had an interesting and varied history. The shacks that remain at Fishermen's Point are one of the last glimpses of Willard Beach's early history as a fishing port. In fact, early in the 1700s, Simonton's Cove was a busy port – the site of William Simonton's wharf and warehouse where he carried on an extensive trade with the West Indies – exporting items like lumber, barrel parts and dried cod, and importing products like molasses and sugar. After the West Indies trade ended, the cove and beach

continued as a fish landing locale.

When trolley service began in South Portland in 1895, it marked a change in Willard Beach's history. The trolley company built the Willard Casino to encourage ridership on its line and, even though the casino itself was short-lived, the change in the Willard Beach area continued with small hotels, inns and boarding houses sprouting up and many Canadian tourists finding the area a very pleasant recreational destination for their summer holiday.

This week's window on South Portland's past is the old Willard Beach Bath House that was built in the mid-1940s by the City of South Portland. We are sure there are many residents who have memories of this structure and we would love to hear about them. If you remember what the inside of the building was like or have any other information about activities there, please contact us by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com), by mail at 55 Bug Light Park, South Portland ME 04106, or on the South Portland Historical Society page on Facebook. Thank you!

### **03-12-10 Mountain View Park**



When people today visit South Portland High School, there is only one sign of the wartime neighborhood that was once spread across the grounds there, known as Mountain View Park. The street that runs along the side of the high school, Mountain View Road, was named for the federal housing project established there during World War II to accommodate the influx of new shipyard workers and their families.

I have found Mountain View Park to be one of the least documented wartime neighborhoods in South Portland. Most of my research has centered on tidbits gleaned from the City's annual reports. I am hopeful that someone reading this article will have more information and will contact our historical society to help preserve the history of this temporary neighborhood. We had hoped to hold an oral history night to talk about Mountain View Park, but we have located only one person who lived there.

As the end of World War II neared, the City of South Portland embarked on a progressive effort to improve the quality of life in our city and attract new businesses to replace the coming loss of roughly 30,000 good-paying jobs at the shipyard and related industries. The City created the Parks and Recreation Department on May 1, 1944. Over the next two years, the Parks and Recreation Department set up playgrounds, built the Willard Beach Bath House, started the conversion of the city dump into Mill Creek Park, and established a significant program of recreational activities at the Mountain View Community Center and Gymnasium. According to the Recreation Department in 1944: "With the cooperation of the South Portland Housing Authority and its staff, this splendid Federal building was opened up as a full-time community center. It has been open five afternoons a week for children from six to 13 years of age, and six evenings for people 14 years and up, including adults."

The accompanying photograph shows the Mountain View Community Center and Gymnasium. Some of the activities offered there included basketball, dancing, movies, bowling, ping pong and arts and crafts. The programs at the Community Center were discontinued in the fall of 1946, however, as Portland Junior College leased the building for its 1946/1947 school year; South Portland Housing Authority closed the Mountain View Community Center in June 1947.

If you lived at Mountain View Park or have any information to share, please contact the South Portland Historical Society at 55 Bug Light Park, South Portland, ME 04106, by phone at (207) 767-7299, or by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

### **03-05-10 1965 Shipyard Fire**



For long-time residents of South Portland, it may be nothing new to hear about the massive fire in the old World War II shipyard complex back in 1965, but as I've learned through discussions with many natives and even firefighters who actually fought the blaze, details have dimmed through the years. Most have had difficulty identifying the location of the building that burned, due in part to the fact that the fire took place at night and most people weren't extremely familiar with the layout of the old shipyard. Add to that the confusion of flames, explosions, emergency vehicles and a crowd of onlookers, and it's no surprise that the details get fuzzy. I'd like to thank Ann Ridge for her help in researching the event so that we can recap the

story here.

The building that burned to the ground in about an hour on May 5, 1965, was known as Building 25 during WWII, a giant 750-foot long fabrication building that ran along the length of Madison Street on the north side, the side where Portland Valve operates today. The fabrication building is shown in the center of the accompanying photograph.

At the time of the fire, the building was being used by South Portland Engineering Corp. to build a \$1.1 million research vessel as well as components for nuclear-powered submarines. The fire started in the evening when a ball of flame shot out of a crane inside the building, lighting the roof on fire and spreading quickly. Workers on the night shift were eating in a lunch room in the middle section of the building and the fire moved so quickly, they barely had time to escape the burning building.

Firefighters responded from South Portland, Portland, Cape Elizabeth and Scarborough. Due to exploding nitrogen, oxygen and acetylene tanks, the fire was out of control and posed a significant danger with flames and sparks erupting out of the building and showering onto neighboring structures. Many residents with whom I have spoken have talked of the fear they felt during the fire, that the flames might spread and consume homes in Ferry Village and beyond. South Portland was lucky that day that the firefighters were able to contain the mighty blaze.

If you have any photographs showing the 1965 shipyard fire, our historical society would appreciate receiving copies. The Society can be reached by phone at 767-7299 or by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

## 02-26-10 Cap'n Newick's and Yerxa's



Many South Portlanders are excited that Cap'n Newick's is back in town. Newick's Lobster House has opened in the old TGI Friday's building out by the Maine Mall on Gorham Road. The old Cap'n Newick's Seafood Restaurant was located in the Pleasantdale neighborhood at 740 Broadway for over three decades. Locals remember it as the place where diners would arrive, sometimes by the bus load, to enjoy heaping plates of fried seafood. Dinners were served up by a friendly wait staff, many of whom had been employed by Newick's for decades, as well. What I remember most is the décor - tables covered with red checkered tablecloths, buoys and nets for

decorations, and the tourist gift shop. For those in the know, Newick's was the place to go for your birthday, when the birthday honoree always ate for free.

Cap'n Newick's opened in that building in 1976. Because Cap'n Newick's was there for so long, many locals have forgotten that the building was home to another long-running South Portland business first. The accompanying photograph comes from the historical society's Philip R. Yerxa collection. It shows the building prior to 1976, when it was first occupied by Yerxa's Garden Center. Throughout the 1960s and into the mid-1970s, Yerxa's operated from this site then moved across the street to 741 Broadway – the site that had been occupied by the old Globe Discount department store.

After the Cap'n Newick's restaurant closed in 2007, the building was torn down and replaced with two buildings. J.P. Thornton's moved into one of those buildings in 2008; the popular eatery has thrived in its

new location and plans to expand into additional space in the building in March 2010.

If you have photographs of the old Globe Discount store, or the old Cap'n Newick's restaurant, our historical society would appreciate receiving a copy. The Society can be reached by phone at 767-7299 or by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

### 02-19-10 Woodward & Austin



In the accompanying photograph, we get a glimpse of Cash Corner in the early 1950s. On the left, we can make out the tall Engine 5 Hose House building (the second floor has dark siding, first floor has white), and just below that is Lano's Restaurant at 300 Main Street, built around 1950. At the intersection of Main and Broadway in the foreground, we can make out the Amoco gas station and, just below that, Hubert Hawker's greenhouses. Mr. Hawker retired from his florist business in the mid-1950s.

Across Main Street, in the spot which is now home to Rite Aid, we see the very large Woodward & Austin auto dealership building. I have digitally marked its roof with an X. As far back as the 1920s there had been an auto service garage at that spot. At one time run by Fred Stubbs before he moved his garage across the street; at another time it was Arthur Irving's garage. By the 1940s, the site became home to Woodward & Purinton auto dealers, and in the 1950s and 1960s, the time that most of our older residents will recall, it was known as Woodward & Austin.

We would love to see a street level photograph of Woodward & Austin, especially with an image of the dealership's sign. If you have a photograph to share, we would appreciate hearing from you. The historical society can be reached at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com) or by phone at 767-7299.

## Program Announcement, Thursday, Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> – Lighthouses of Casco Bay

On Thursday, February 25, South Portland Historical Society will present a program, The Lighthouses of Casco Bay with Jeremy D'Entremont. This event will take place at 7pm in South Portland's City Hall, Council Chambers; free and open to the public. Mr. D'Entremont is the leading expert on lighthouses throughout New England; he is the historian for the American Lighthouse Foundation and has authored many books, including The Lighthouse Handbook: New England and The Lighthouses of Maine. With two of our own lighthouses in South Portland, we are looking forward to the entertaining and enlightening stories that Mr. D'Entremont will have to share with us.

### 02-12-10 1940s Parade thru Mill Creek



The accompanying photograph was sent on to the South Portland Historical Society, courtesy of Sherry Roberts DiCenso. Her friend's grandfather, Alfred Witham, is in the front car in the parade. We believe this to be a mid- to late-1940s parade, possibly part of South Portland's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1948. While the onlookers' cars appear to be from the 1940s, the cars on parade are notably "antique." Although I'm no car expert, I'd guess them to be pre-1910 cars; the car that Mr. Witham is driving has the look of the Model N Ford that was produced from 1906-1908.

The image is a wonderful historic piece for many reasons. The parade is coming up Ocean Street in South Portland – to the right in the photo is the area that has become Mill Creek Park. The land there used to be the city dump, but was converted from 1945 to 1955 into a city park.

Toward the rear right, the building with the curved roof is the old Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. (A&P) grocery. The A&P opened on Thomas Street in the late 1930s and continued in this building until the early 1960s when a new building was erected next to it. After the A&P closed in the early 1970s, the site would later become home to the Mill Creek Financial Center.

For those familiar with SP Fire Department history, a glimpse of the old Central Fire Station can be seen – the square top of the white station building can be seen peeking over the A&P roof on the right side.

Do you recognize anyone in this photograph? If you can tell us anything more about this image, we would love to hear from you! Please contact the Society at 55 Bug Light Park, South Portland, ME 04106, or by email at [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com). The society is also now located on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com). If you are on Facebook, please search for South Portland Historical Society and join our group where you'll find updated events, historic photographs, and more. If you need help joining the group, please call the society at 767-7299.

### 02-05-10 Genealogy Research



Alice Branson recently completed her history of the Hinckley family of South Portland. Ms. Branson is shown here (far right) donating copies to the collections of the South Portland Historical Society and the South Portland Public Library. Lucy Littlejohn looks on; Ms. Littlejohn edited and published her mother's work

Along with preserving photographs and other artifacts related to the history of South Portland's places, our historical society also covers the history of South Portland's people. To that end, the Society maintains a library of genealogy materials at its museum and volunteers are available to help people with their genealogy questions and research.

Some of the family histories that are available at the Society's museum cover many South Portland and Cape Elizabeth families with names that are very recognizable even today. Families with names like Cushing, Willard, Skillin, Jordan and Kaler are represented, to name a few. Even new residents can recognize some of these families because of the streets, neighborhoods, schools and other places decorated with their names.

The newest family history to be added to the South Portland Historical Society's collections is that of the George and Florence

Hinckley family. This family history written by Alice Marilyn Mitchell Hinckley Branson, with contributions from Nancy Pearson Kinney and edited by Alice's daughter, Lucy Hinckley Littlejohn, is a not only a treasure trove of photographs and information on the local Hinckley family and its ancestry, but it also casts a glimpse on South Portland in earlier years.

George Hinckley and his brother, Frederick Hinckley, were attorneys and kept a law office on Exchange Street in Portland. George served as an alderman in South Portland, the municipal judge for South Portland, as well as a state legislator. For 18 years, he served as the chairman of the city's Parks and Recreation Commission, during which time he undertook the creation of Mill Creek Park; Hinckley Drive that is adjacent to the park was named in his honor. Fred Hinckley served as mayor of South Portland in 1919; he also served as a state legislator and senator, and was the developer of Sylvan Site in South Portland, off Sawyer Street. Hinckley Park was developed on land that was given to the city by Fred Hinckley.

Amongst other genealogy research materials available at the South Portland Historical Society are volumes of Maine Families in 1790, Portland Directories, the Modern Maine series, Adjutant General's Reports listing Maine soldiers in the Civil War, scrapbooks, town/city histories, and other genealogy and family papers.

South Portland Historical Society is located at 55 Bug Light Park, South Portland. If you have a published or unpublished history of a multi-generational South Portland family, the Society would appreciate receiving a copy for its genealogy collection. The Society can be reached at 767-7299 or [sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com](mailto:sphistoricalsociety@maine.rr.com).

### 01-29-10 The South Portland Trolley System, Part 4 - Trolley operators



A busy day in Portland's Monument Square. Trolleys made it much easier for residents of South Portland and Cape Elizabeth to make a trip to downtown Portland

When the trolley line was first installed in South Portland in 1895, the Portland and Cape Elizabeth Railway purchased 14 trolley cars, which included six open cars that riders would come to enjoy in the warm, summer months, and eight closed cars that would protect passengers from the elements in inclement weather. As the years went by, more and more trolleys were added to the South Portland line.

Unfortunately for the first men who were hired to operate these trolleys, both types of cars had open platforms where the two-man crew would be stationed to operate the trolley. The motorman would suffer through bitterly cold winter days, using buffalo robes to try to keep warm.

An 1899 legislative bill was introduced in the legislature by South Portland's Honorable Edward C. Reynolds, calling for the enclosure of the operating end of trolley cars with a vestibule. According to Charles Heseltine's history of South Portland's trolleys, Reynolds "stated he was proposing the bill after watching motormen operating cars across the Portland Bridge in extreme cold weather...backing him up was a Portland minister who declared that no animal would be permitted to be exposed for such long periods of cold as were trolley motormen." The bill was turned down by the legislature after the general manager for the Portland Railroad testified that the railroad "was not concerned with the cost as much as of its men and their safety. The company felt that motormen were healthier than conductors who had an opportunity to occasionally go inside their cars out of the weather. Further, vestibuled cars had been tried in Portland but with unsatisfactory results...the company was even then paying sick benefits to one man who took a vestibuled car in October and, in November, after opening a window on a warm day, came down with pneumonia."

A similar bill was brought forward again in 1903; this time around, though, the bill passed and the trolley motormen no longer had to suffer the extreme exposure through the winter months.

### 01-22-10 The South Portland Trolley System, Part 3 - Willard Casino



Willard Beach-goers heading to the trolley at the foot of Willard Street in 1915

When trolley lines extended throughout the Greater Portland area, resorts were built by the trolley companies to stimulate ridership on their lines. In 1896, the Portland Street Railroad Company built Riverton Park in Portland beside the Presumpscot River where visitors could enjoy dining, dancing and games inside the casino. The park also featured an open air theater, a zoo, pony rides, a boat launch and bicycle facilities. In South Portland that same year, the Portland and Cape Elizabeth Railway opened the Willard Beach Casino on June 10, 1896. In our continuing tribute to Charles Heseltine, we take a few excerpts from his manuscript, The Portland and Cape Elizabeth Railway:

"The casino at Willard Beach was opened...with the American Cadet Band riding in the first car of a procession of electric cars carrying prominent citizens to the resort. The casino was a grand affair, built at a cost of \$30,000, no small sum in those days. It featured a bowling alley, dining rooms, spacious verandas, dance hall and many recreational facilities."

The Willard Casino was a tremendous success and with ridership on the trolleys swelling, the company installed double tracks on its line wherever possible to handle the increased traffic. The success was short-lived, however. The following summer, trolley tracks were extended as far as Cape Cottage in Cape Elizabeth where, at a clam bake in September of 1897, the trolley company announced its plan for a "newer and finer" casino to be built there. "On January 16, 1898, the casino at Willard Beach caught fire and burned to the ground, a total loss. With it several nearby stores and cottages were also consumed by the blaze...the fire, suspected of having been of incendiary origin, roared through the huge structure, feeding on the large quantities of varnished woodwork and flammable furnishings. The company reported that it was fully covered by insurance and that a new and finer resort would be developed further out, at

Cape Cottage, rather than replacing this structure.”

### 01-15-10 The South Portland Trolley System, Part 2



The old Portland Bridge; South Portland is in the background. Note the trolley trestle that hugs the left side of the bridge, and the car barn on the South Portland side

When the first trolleys started running in South Portland in August of 1895, the trolley line ended in Knightville as the Cumberland County commissioners had rejected the railroad's request to lay its line across the old Portland Bridge. The commissioners' concerns were that the majority of the railroad's operations resided in South Portland, with only a planned one mile of track in Portland; if there were damage to the bridge, the commissioners thought they would have trouble collecting damages from the railroad company.

Once the trolley lines began operation in South Portland, however, it only took a few days of active trolley service, and some public outcry, before the County commissioners agreed for the track to be laid

across the Portland Bridge to open up service between the two cities. The track was then laid across the bridge and on to Monument Square, which made for much easier access to the amenities of downtown Portland.

As trolley traffic increased, the electric railroad company would install double tracks around the City where it could to make it easier for the increased number of trolleys running on the lines. There were some areas where double tracks weren't allowed, and where needed, a trolley turnout would be put in that would allow a trolley to move off the track so another could pass. After the Cape Cottage Casino opened in 1898, the trolley traffic became so frequent across the bridge that the company built its own double-tracked trolley trestle that extended from the South Portland side to the draw on the bridge.

The railroad company paid \$100,000 toward the cost of the new Million Dollar Bridge that opened in 1916. During construction, the trolley tracks were used to haul fill from the sand pit on Sawyer Street to the dump site on the South Portland side of the bridge.

One interesting story that Charles Heseltine related in his history of the Cape Elizabeth Railway: "A very close call occurred on the High Street Hill [Portland] the night of January 3, 1918 when a heavily laden car slipped out of control and raced down the steep grade, failing to make the turn at York Street. The car left the rails and plunged toward the thirty foot drop to the steam railroad tracks below. Striking a utility pole, the car came to rest with one wheel over the edge of the drop. Although some riders were shaken up, all considered themselves lucky to be able to leave the car in one piece."

Note to readers: The South Portland Historical Society is in the process of moving its collections to the museum at Bug Light Park. During this time, the museum is open by chance or appointment; please call 767-7299 to arrange a time.

### 01-08-10 The South Portland Trolley System



Trolley No. 196 sporting a Libby fender, also commonly referred to as a "cow catcher."

When talking with South Portland's older residents, some of the most common fond memories that are mentioned are of the trolley car system that used to run here. A tremendous resource for researching South Portland's trolleys is the unpublished manuscript written by Charles Heseltine in 1964 and titled, "The Portland and Cape Elizabeth Railway."

Charles Heseltine was a great lover of the street railways that were the popular form of public transportation from the late 1800s until the coming of the automobile. Mr. Heseltine, a South Portland resident, was indeed an expert on the subject and amassed a huge collection

of trolley photographs. I'm not sure what happened to that collection, but I'm very pleased that this manuscript found its way to our historical society. I recently reread this piece and was again impressed with Mr. Heseltine's knowledge of our local history. Over the next few weeks, I'll select some of the interesting tidbits of history that he brought forth in his paper.

Before the trolley began carrying passengers in South Portland in 1895, the only real mass transit available on the eastern end of the city was the public ferry that ran between Ferry Village and Portland. There was a steam railroad running, but the stop was at Cape Elizabeth Depot, at the intersection of Broadway and Evans Street; not a terribly convenient location for most residents of the city. If you wanted to go somewhere in South Portland, or go over to Portland, the most common method of transportation would have been your legs or your horse.

Thus, on August 26, 1895, when the trolley line allowed people in Knightville to climb on board a trolley for a free test run to Ferry Village and back, it instilled instant excitement about the prospects of this new form of transportation. The initial rails were laid from Ocean Street at the bridge to Cottage Road, down Broadway to Pickett Street, over to Fort Road, back to Preble Street, through Willard Square and then to Willard Beach via Willard Street. A western line was laid, as well – from Ocean Street to Broadway, then running all the way down Broadway until turning right on Lincoln Street, then to Main Street and on through Cash Corner to Rigby Road where the Rigby Trotting Park was in operation at that time. These were the initial rails laid; many additional line expansions occurred over the years.

### 01-01-10 Home milk delivery



Photos courtesy of Gloria Ahern; her husband Jerry drove for Oakhurst Dairy and later operated his own home delivery.

By Craig Skelton, guest columnist  
South Portland Historical Society member

Home milk delivery goes way back to horse and buggy days. My memories of milk being brought to the house were formed back in the 1960s by what were known as DIVCO trucks. Like the easily-recognized Checker Cab, Divco trucks were commonly used by milk delivery companies. They were manufactured from 1926 to 1986 by the Detroit Industrial Vehicle Company.

Our milk man was named George and if the old poem wasn't swirling in your head, another kid in the neighborhood was often reciting "Georgie Porgie pudding and pie..." upon seeing him in the neighborhood. George the milk man loved kids. It must have been a job requirement back then when our mothers stayed home and we would bug the delivery guy making his rounds. Our house had a milk stoop just inside the door where you would find milk bottles with those recognizable cardboard tops. The milk delivery would be placed in a galvanized box that sat outside our door in the event we

weren't home and our door was actually locked. That box still sits on the front steps at my mother's old house and has substituted as a newspaper box since home milk delivery came to an end. A neighbor saved my life one time during a visit from the milk truck. As a child I wasn't usually in trouble unless my buddy Brian Fox had something to do with it. Visits by the milk truck were counted among many fond memories because George would let us go in the truck and get ice slivers out of the milk crates. It gave us some relief from the heat on a few unbearable summer days. One visit took a different turn I will never forget.

George parked his truck across the street and went into the Lincoln's house. Brian and I walked up from his driveway and I jumped up into the truck to get some ice. Brian stood outside the big sliding door and pointed at a handle and said squeeze that. Not knowing what I was doing, I squeezed the handle and the truck jerked forward and started to roll down the hill on Sterling Avenue. Dale Lincoln was looking out the window at Brian and me while this unfolded and sprung into action the moment he saw the truck move. Dale has since been inducted into the Maine Running Hall of Fame. I don't think I could have appreciated his love of running until that day when he charged down his driveway and flew down the sidewalk to jump in the moving truck. I was standing there in shock not knowing what to do and just stared at the dash board being too short to see out the windshield. I had no idea we were approaching the brick wall Ken Fox had built between his yard and the Welch's.

Dale applied the brakes and when stopped re-applied the emergency brake. We came to rest only precious feet from the brick wall. In spite of that incident, George did not stop us from boarding his milk



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truck but you can be sure us kids were told what we could and could not touch. If you are a fan of these old trucks check out the DIVCO Club of America website on the Internet.  
Photos courtesy of Gloria Ahern; her husband Jerry drove for Oakhurst Dairy and later operated his own home delivery.