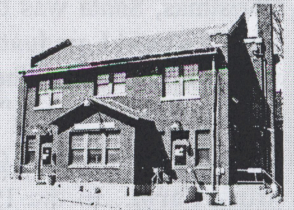


The Portage Area Historical Society Newsletter



814-736-9223

P. O. Box 45 Portage, PA 15946

Oct 2019

What does Portage have in common with the Eiffel Tower and the Panama Canal? Well, we've all used Patton Pavers!

Patton historian, Don Kirk, shared this with us, "Designers of the Eiffel Tower searched for the strongest bricks in the world to construct a walking area beneath the tower. They found and used Patton Pavers. The story of the Panama Canal also tells of the use of Patton Pavers, though no details can be located as to how or where the bricks were used. And WWII Veterans told stories of walking on Patton Pavers in the streets of Paris and Rome."

The Patton library shared their copy of *A Century of Community, Patton Centennial History* and we found this, "During the first half of the 1900s, the Patton Clay Works was one of the largest clay and brick concerns in the world, producing approximately 100,000 bricks daily. The high quality bricks were considered one of the best, the strongest in the world. The company boasted an annual capacity of 8,000 railcars of bricks each year. Besides Patton Pavers, the Patton Clay Works manufactured terra cotta pipe, tiles and building bricks. It provided most of the jobs in Patton. Today the plant is gone, with the exception of one Memorial Kiln that has been preserved on the property of the old Clay Works."

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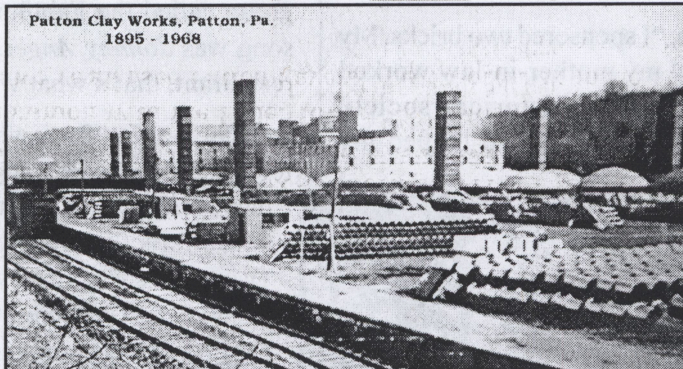


found this not to be true. "Hill climbers" were one type of brick made at the Patton Clay Works, made just for hills. They were used in front of the museum and on all the other grades in Portage.

Memorial Terrace

Saturday, September 21 was reveal day for our *Memorial Terrace*, proudly showing off 208 bricks engraved with businesses that once operated in Portage. WJAC-TV and *The Tribune Democrat* both covered our event.

We passed out pennies, "A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS" and asked visitors to put a coin on a brick and then share a story. So many stories! Here are a few, along with notes people wrote when they ordered a brick.



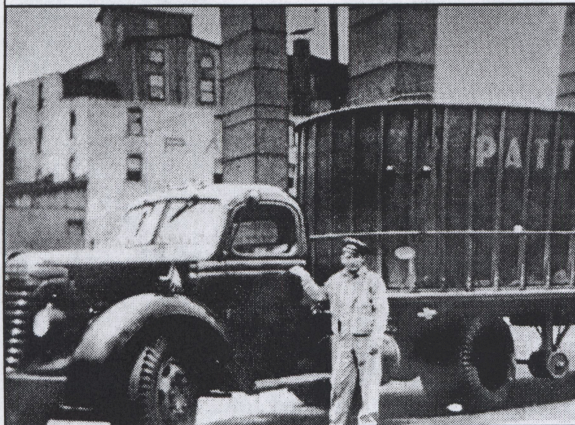
Patton Clay Works, Patton, Pa.
1895 - 1968
In 1910 the Patton Clay Works manufacturing area covered more than 25 acres with two five-story buildings and 32 huge kilns.
(submitted by Don Kirk)

Memories

Veronica Layo, "Harry's Pizza was the best pizza in the world. And I think pizza was the first word I learned to spell as my mom would say 'Hey Frank bring us home some P I Z Z A.'"

Rick Nagy started working at Wasko Auto Supply with his dad when he was nine. "I stocked shelves and did coffee runs. I helped my dad assemble bikes and other toys, and before Christmas we would make deliveries. Every year in early November, George Wasko

opened a Toyland on the second floor. Both George and Walter Picarski played Santa. Walter, being a big man, much bigger than George, had his own Santa outfit. There was a ramp going to the second floor, and Santa would sit at the far end of the room. Sometimes the line of kids went all the way across the room and down the ramp. While waiting in line, each child was given a popcorn ball and a small toy. George was really good to the kids. George's wife Peg and daughters assisted with each evening's event. Toyland opened to the kids Fridays and Saturdays from 6:00 until the line ended. As it got closer to



DJ Moore's grandfather, William Finkle, stands in front of a 1943 Diamond T that he drove for the Patton Clay Works. (submitted by DJ Moore - Portage)

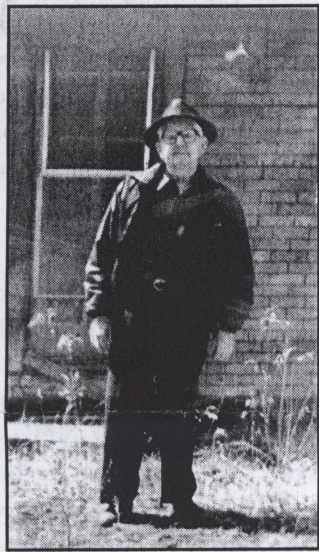
Old timers told board members that the bricks in front of the museum were put in perpendicular, not flat, so horses shoes could better grab onto the bricks when they traveled up and down the hill. While doing research for this newsletter, we



This sign can be seen at the Chatter Box. The tiny mark on the bottom: "Gully Signs".

Christmas, Santa was there every night of the week. I worked at Wasko's until I graduated from high school and then left for DC to work with the FBI. When I returned to Portage, I worked at Wasko's for a few more years."

Phil Stager, "My brick is for my father's first business, **Jake Stager's Mink Farm**. In the 1920s my father, Chester (Jake) Stager, Sr.,



trapped mink out and around Wilmore Dam. He'd catch them alive and take them back to Jimtown where he lived at the time. He would raise the mink, breed them and then sell the pelts. Dad's plan was to buy a piece of land in Canada and eventually move up there. He felt the mink would do better in the cold and the pelts would bring in more money. He put a deposit on the land but the deal fell through. So Dad stayed and continued to raise his mink here. During this same period of time, while still living in Jimtown, he started to collect scrap. Later he bought a piece of property with a side track on North Railroad Street and moved his scrap business there."

Thanks to Phil Stager for sharing this photos of his father, Chester (Jake) Stager.

Joan Reese, "I sponsored two bricks. My

husband and I met at **Peg's Diner** and my mother-in-law worked at **Wittan Department Store**. Thank you historical society members for your dedication and hard work as you helped my husband's family get in touch with their family in Scotland."

Lou Nicharot, The Villages, FL, "My mother worked at the **Smart Shoppe** for years and then became the owner."



The neon light that once hung in the Smart Shoppe window now hangs in the Station Museum. Thanks to Randy Stager for saving it and donating it to the museum.

Jen Bobolsky, "My grandfather had an upholstery shop behind his house in Sonman (**Bobolsky Upholstery**). He used to let me help by putting those little brass nails into the chairs he was reupholstering. My dad told me he was only 13 when he started driving grandfather's truck to deliver furniture."

Rita Swires, "Four men, Bud Hazlett, Bunk from Johnstown, Russell Corentte and Sonny Swires opened the **Bucorson Machine Shop** on Cambria Street in 1962. The name Bucorson came from a combination of letters in their names; BU came from Bud & Bunk, COR from Corentte and SON from Sonny.

"Sonny & Corentte invented the Soncor (**Sonny & Corentte**) fishing rod holder. It was a good seller but never made them into millionaires!"

Rita's father-in-law, John Herman, started the **Herman Lumber Co.** in 1948 on Webster Avenue. Her husband, Jack, became his partner. John purchased 397 acres of land at Ciokota's Curve to supply wood for his business. After John retired in 1972, his son Bob moved the lumber mill to a location just off Route 53.

Ray Kargo, "My parents, Peg and Harry Kargo opened **Peggy's Dairy Diner** at 1800 South Main Street on May 30, 1951, featuring the foot-long hot dog. They instituted curb service in 1952, and in 1953 they opened a dance hall for teenagers. It was *THE* place to go!"



Ray Kargo submitted this picture of his parents' diner.

John and Kathy Gartland owned **Johnny Angel's Bar & Restaurant**. Kathy told us, "John once played with a group called the Fabulous Flashbacks and his favorite song was *Johnny Angel*. So when we opened our bar/restaurant, that's what we decided to call it."

Deb Novotny, "Back when I was in junior high, I used to fold pizza boxes at **Harry's Pizza**. That's where I met my future husband Mike for the first time. We were high school sweethearts, but after graduation went our own ways. Twenty-five years later we came back for our high school reunion. I just happened to go the mixer the night before at **Johnny Angel's** and ran into Mike. A year later to the date, we got engaged at **Johnny Angel's**.

"I was very young when my grandparents still had **Custer's Star Restaurant**. I remember it as a warm, comforting place. We always parked in the alley and came in the back door. There was a huge iron stove in the kitchen and wonderful smells of cooking as well as



John & Kathy Gartland converted Johnny Angel's from a bar/restaurant to an antique/furniture store. The building was torn down this past summer to make improvements on the Cassandra intersection.

PHOTO PAGE



(top) Main Street © 1900 - Bricked in 1913 - (left) Checking out Memorial Terrace



The 208 bricks now permanently installed next to the Station Museum represent only a fraction of the businesses that once served our community. Besides saving some of our street bricks and showcasing past business, another goal of the Memorial Terrace has been to show what a large, thriving community Portage once was. If you would like to sponsor a business, send \$15 and a business name to:

Portage Area Historical Society, PO Box 45, Portage, PA 15946. (Make check payable to Portage Area Historical Society) If you would like to be part of the project but have no business in mind, the historical society will provide a name.

Just a few advertisements from a 1947 newspaper. (Paper submitted by Bob Koval)

WIDE VARIETY OF OTHER MEATS

Alex Tavernini PHONE 21
813 Conemaugh Av Port

SANTA CLAUS AT
WASKO'S TOYLAND
Saturday, December 20th, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
FREE PRIZES TO THE CHILDREN
SEE OUR LIONEL TRAINS IN ACTION

MONRDE JEWELRY STORE
Main Street Portage, Pa.
IS YOUR CLOTHES EARLY
Phone 3171

Magazine Basket 2.99

MOSKAT FURNITURE CO.
"BETTER THINGS FOR BETTER LIVING"
Main St. PORTAGE Friendly Credit

\$4.90 up

KEENAN'S Confectionery
Main Street Portage, Pa.

Portage Cleaners

Dunda's Gift RECORD SHOP

A true portrait can be captured only in the natural atmosphere of the home.

GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE SUPERIOR METHODS USED IN HOME PORTRAITS BY DIALING PORTAGE 5321 FOR AN APPOINTMENT.

DON'T DELAY
ERNIE HARRISON
511 Main St. Ph. 5321 Portage, Pa.

EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR
HENRY BRUNETT
Portage Phone 2401

BASILE'S
"Home of the Flying Red Jeep"

CHRISTMAS PHOTOGRAPHS
TURNEY STUDIO
Main St. Portage

SAVE ON TOYS
MOST TOYS HALF PRICE

SMITTY'S
Ph. 4932 Main St. Portage

ORCHARD MARKET
Orchard

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL
Permanent Waves \$4 and up

LENA'S BEAUTY SALON
BENS CREEK Phone Portage 2605

MOSKAT'S
"JEWELERS SINCE 1914"
Portage, Pa.

Santa
610 Main Street
McFadden's Men's Store

THE DISPATCH

the Family
PLUMMER HARDWARE
Main St., Portage

EVANS JEWELRY
CRYSTALS WHILE YOU WAIT
ALL WORK GUARANTEED - PORTAGE

Barbara E. (Barrett) Yetsko

We are saddened by the loss of Barbara Yetsko, our dear friend and the co-founder of the Portage Area Historical Society. No one individual has done more for the Historical Society or the Station Museum than Barbara.

In the spring of 1989, the Portage Planning Commission discussed the idea of forming a local historical society. Barbara Yetsko was chosen to be the first president. The first major project taken on by the group was the book *Portrait of a Town, Portage, Pennsylvania, 1890-1990*. This 326 page

book tells the history of Portage and was compiled by six board members, Barbara being one. What an amazing documentation of our community.

In 2015 Barbara was the Grand Marshall, our Coal Queen, in the Summerfest parade.

Barbara's large painting of the Washington House Hotel hangs on the wall of the first floor and tells the story of the Allegheny Portage Railroad. It's the foundation of our town. Since no photos of the Allegheny Portage Railroad were ever taken, this painting is especially important and pointed out to all visitors. Barbara sat with a friend's grandmother who, as a young girl, spent many hours at the hotel. Grandmother relayed her memories of the hotel while Barbara researched, painted and added all of the details. A true treasure.

Our award winning video, *63 Men Down, the Story of the Sonman Mine Explosion*, was written by Barbara. Hundreds of copies of this video have been sold and viewers watch spell bound by the amazing story. It's brought a tear to many visitors' eyes. This important part of our mining history will live on forever, thanks to Barbara.

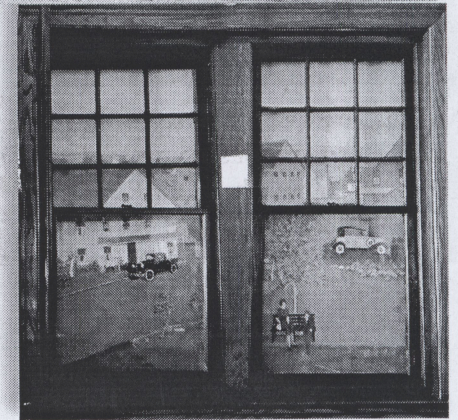
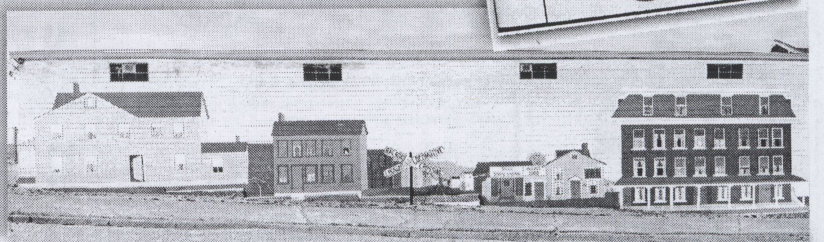
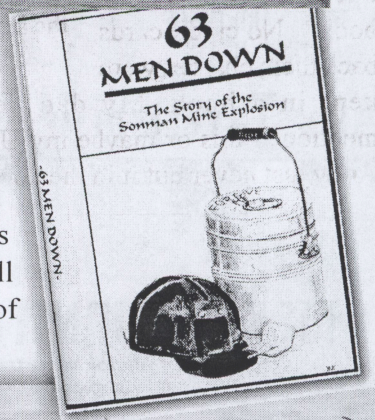
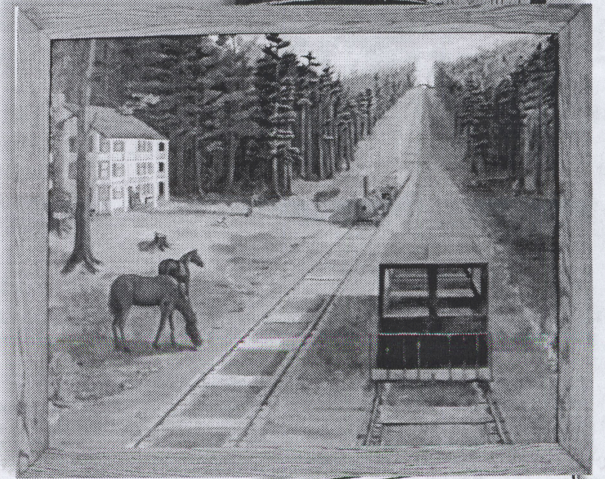
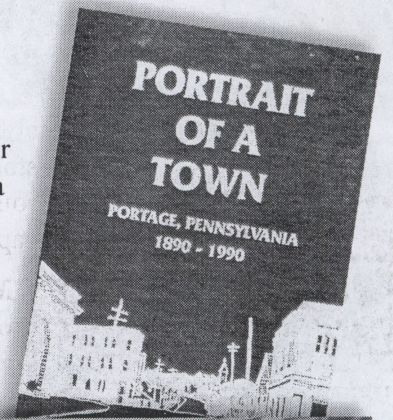
The large painting on the building next to the museum tells a story from our past. Though many, many volunteers assisted with the painting, it was Barbara's vision that made it all happen.

When the museum was a railroad station, there was no building to the left of it. A large field, houses, people and cars of that time could be seen through those windows. A road to the left of the building went behind the station where freight pickups were made. Barbara helped paint some of the windows on the inside of the museum to depict what ticket buyers would see when they looked out of the railroad station in 1926.

And so much more...

Barbara visited the museum just three weeks before she passed. She got to see the bricks she purchased for her father's garage, **Barrett Motor Company** and her son's business, **All Around Builders**. Several visitors were thrilled that they got to meet the artist who painted our Washington House Hotel/Allegheny Portage Railroad canvas.

Barbara, thank you for all you did for our organization and for our community. You will be missed.





Bertha and Howard Custer ran Custer's Star Restaurant. ©1949

kisses and hugs from my grandparents as they greeted us. There was always ice cream and soda to be enjoyed at the counter, and those red stools that were so fun to spin round and round on. Very happy and inviting memories.”

Mary Ann Dividock sponsored a brick for **Hi-Jo Pizza Shop**. Mary Ann told us, “There were so many Joes in the family that when we got together we heard ‘Hi Joe’ - ‘Hi Joe’ again and again.”

Irene Huschak, “I went to first and second grade at the township high school. Every day after school I walked home and stopped at my Uncle **Andrew Timura's Grocery Store**. Every day I ordered a piece of penny candy and told my uncle, “Put it on the book.” No credit cards back then; charges were kept in a book. My dad never mentioned this or maybe my Uncle Andy just never put it in the book?”



Andy and Sue Timura has a grocery store in the front room of their house on Springhill.

Our Jewish Community

Little did we realize that so many of our early merchants were Jewish until **Barry Rudel** from the Beth Shalom Congregation Community of Johnstown sponsored bricks to honor 20 of Portage's Jewish merchants. When we contacted Barry, he told us this, “The amount of coal underground in the Portage area and the jobs it created demanded a great deal of immigrant labor. Essentials such as clothing, household items, groceries, produce, and furniture were, of course, needed as were numerous commercial goods. This is where our Jewish people, in general, came in. Longstanding within the merchant class, Jews were historically more of an urban people, unable to own land in many parts of Europe. The immigration of Jewish-

Americans happened during the era of 1890-1945. With credit established from wholesalers (some their fellow kinsmen), pioneering Jewish peddlers were able to establish shops, stores, and businesses along Main Street as early as 1889. In 1924 Abraham Goldstein erected a two story brick building at 600 Main Street. Dave Wittan worked for Goldstein until he bought and then opened his Dave Wittan's Department Store. Harry Horoff was the store manager for Mr. Wittan until he bought and then opened Horoff Department Store. Schoenfelds opened the House of Bargains after that. (all Jewish business owners) Today the location of our post office.

“In 1909 Hyman Goldstein built Goldstein's Department Store, one of the largest department stores in this part of the country. Hyman was president of city council, borough treasurer, first president of the Chamber of Commerce, and stockholder in the First National Bank of Portage. After several other businesses were at this location, the Goldstein building eventually became Schoenfeld's Furniture Store. Today it's the Chatter Box.

“Herman Sedloff, a native of Kiev, Russia was a longstanding publisher and printer in Portage and Nanty-Glo. Gerbers, Moskat's and so many other Jewish shops lined the streets of Portage.

“Hyman Goldstein (son of Abraham) grew up in Portage and went to Dickinson College where he played against the famous Jim Thorpe. Jim claimed, ‘Goldie was the toughest quarterback I ever played against’. Hyman



Hyman Goldstein

Dave Wittan's Department Store.



(Above) Horoff Department Store on the right, up the street Moskat's Furniture Co. ©1960

(Left) Goldstein's, Wittan's and then Horoff's were located in the same place, at the corner of Main St. & Caldwell Ave.



also played semi-professional baseball with the Philadelphia Phillies. Goldstein went on to Dickinson Law School, remained close with Thorpe and Pop Warner, and is in the Dickinson College Sports Hall of Fame.

“High Holy Day services were held at Portage in rented quarters with a Torah scroll brought up from Johnstown. Local histories report that ‘Main Street was dark as the shops were closed for Rosh Hashana.’ Religious schools were held on Sundays.

“Portage was saluted in the Jewish War Veterans WWII newsletter for the disproportionate number of Jewish members it had in the service. From a town with 63 Jews, 17 served in the military, with two of the Wittans making the ultimate sacrifice. Sam Nederlander was a leader within local Veteran’s organizations.

So what happened to the Jewish community in Portage? Pre and Post-World War II kids went off to college, chose a field other than the family store, and never came home.



We tried to group the Jewish business bricks together.

As a double whammy, many of the parents eventually followed them to Johnstown, to Pittsburgh, and elsewhere. Long gone the era when the mines were humming, Main Street was crowded, and the shops were busy.”

Memorial Plaques

A new plaque has been added to the Memory Board: **In Memory of the Francis Berzinsky.** Francis

worked as a volunteer at the museum for six years. An avid reader, she read every document in the building, including the coronor’s report of the 63 men who died in the Sonman Mine Explosion. Francis was easy to talk to and enjoyed telling visitors all about the museum. Francis, you are missed.

Winterfest

This year for Winterfest we would like to showcase George Wasko’s Santa Suit. We also plan to display vintage Portage Christmas items like the bells that once hung in front of Jones’s Newsstand. If you have a vintage Portage Christmas item that you would like to share the the community, please call 814-736-9223.

2020 MEMBERSHIPS now due

Annual Member \$10.00 - Life Member \$75.00

Send Name, Address & Phone #: Portage Station Museum
PO Box 45 - Portage, PA 15946

Make check payable to: Portage Area Historical Society

PAHS Board - Irene Huschak-President; Austin Rodgers-Vice President/Miniature Mainline; Debra Novotny-Recording Secretary/Facebook/Memberships; Judy Dubreucq-Store/Corresponding Secretary; Charles Edward-Miniature Mainline; Rose Sral-Maintenance; Pat Fedorko-Store Deposits; Rose Pfeilstucker-T-shirts; Bonnie Fox, Frank Yurchik; Lori Jones-Education Coordinator/Coal Figures, Jeff Sral-Repairs, Tyler Spaid-Junior Engineer, HM: Ruth Richardson

Visit us on Facebook: Portage Area Historical Society
Administrator, Debra Novotny

Newsletter by Irene Huschak

Museum hours: 12 pm to 4 pm - Wed through Sat

15235
Pittsburgh, PA
140 Fenwick Dr
Barry Rudel

FOREVER / USA



JOHNSTOWN PA 159
22 OCT 2019 PM 2 L

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