



Port Norris

Be a Part of History Today

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Port Norris Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the history of our unique village, located in Commercial Township in Cumberland County, NJ.

Current Happenings:

PNHS Next meeting: August 8, 2016 • 7:00 pm • 1723 Main Street



Happy Summer! Happy 4th of July!

SAVE THE DATE: Heritage Day August 20th

Race Through Time

#9

**Come See Us
July 17 and Aug 20
1 - 4 PM
Get Your
Passport Stamped**



Volunteers Needed

The Delaware Bay Watermen's Memorial Committee would like to invite volunteers to participate on different committees. If you have some time and would like to be part of making this memorial happen, please send us an email. [Click Here.](#)

[Delaware Bay Watermen's Memorial
watermensmemorial.org](http://Delaware Bay Watermen's Memorial watermensmemorial.org)

Commercial Businesses Through The Years In Port Norris

By Logan Sutton

Eighth Grade Graduate - Port Norris Middle School
Report presented at school on April 9, 2016

Logan was the special guest speaker at our regular second Tuesday evening meeting on June 14. He also completed a model of the K of P Hall. Excellent job and we are pleased to have it in our building. His report was so well done we are publishing it for everyone to enjoy. Thank you Logan.

If you walked outside your house in the early 1900's you wouldn't believe what you would see. Businesses were flourishing because of the Oyster Industry. There were over 90 some businesses thriving in Port Norris. But sadly if you take a stroll through Port Norris now it seems like a ghost town compared to back then. Businesses in Port Norris were a offspring of the oyster industry. Some of the booming businesses were Capaldi Farms, K of P Hall (Knights of Pythias), Miller Berry & Sons and The Palomino just to name a few. Things were different in the early 1900's for Port Norris it wasn't until around 1955 when a terrible disease hit the oyster industry that things started taking a turn for the worse. Little by little people stopped coming to visit the area, work started slowing down and businesses started to feel the pain.



Logan Sutton with his model of the Knights of Pythias Hall.

I took the time with this project to make a point to go out and talk to the business owners who's businesses were still up and running in Port Norris. They had some amazing stories to tell about how their business were started and also what things were like back in the day.

My first business man I stopped and talked to was Mr. Dominic Capaldi. He has Capaldi Machine Products located on Main Street which was started back in 1995. He gets orders every day from a business down the street (Miller Berry & Sons). He makes parts for the elevating mechanisms which is the crank unit inside of a casket that raises the body up for a viewing and lowers it when the casket is closed. But little did I know there was a reason he had to start this business because of the family farm that was starting to struggle. In 1906 Mr. Capaldi's grandfather started Capaldi Farm's. It was a thriving business and produced many crops. In the spring he would plant lettuce and strawberries. In the summer he planted tomatoes, cabbage and string beans. In the fall he planted broccoli and cauliflower. He had around 900 acres to plant and farm all of his crops. Some land was leased off of the sand plants. Now he is down to farming only 300 acres with soybeans. This year he told me he will not be planting soybeans because he had trouble with the weeds over taking the plants last year. So this year he is leasing his land to another farmer to produce corn and hopefully next year he will be able to plant soybeans again. Both of his businesses seem to be struggling now. The farming business had a higher market back in the day and now his machine shop is struggling because everyone is being cremated because of the high cost of burial.

The business that went hand and hand with Capaldi Machine Products is Miller Berry & Sons. They are located on Robbinstown Road. Miller Berry & Sons is run by Dean Berry. He said the business was started in 1968 by his father Clarence Berry. He use to have 22 employees but now only has 8 employees. His company manufactures casket mattresses, spring beds and elevating mechanisms. Mr. Berry told me the business has gotten worse over the years because everyone is being cremated which means no one is in need of a casket. He also has another business as well. Miller Berry & Sons Salt Hay was started back in the early 1900's. They bailed over 100,000 bails of salt hay a year. To this day they only bail around 2,000 a year. The salt hay industry was very popular in Port Norris. Both businesses are still family owned and operated but struggling day to day.

Ricci Brothers Sand Co was next on my ventures through Port Norris. This business is located on Dragston Road. Mr. Samuel Ricci Sr. sat down with me and told his story about how this company came to be. The Sand Company was started back in 1958 but only by accident. In the 1940's two farmers Anthony Ricci and Sam Ricci were getting ready to put in a irrigation well for the farm and when they went down 60ft they realized the silica sand and gravel looked good for mining and distributing to buyers. So they sent it away for testing and the sample came back with perfect results. The brothers knew that their farm would not support four additional families so plans were made to someday start mining. In 1980 they started drying sand. The company started with around 10 employees and in the 60's had around 35 employees. They service customers along the Atlantic Coast, Canada and even as far as the Middle East and Asia. Mr. Ricci said business has grown and is better now. He deals with a lot of water filtration companies but also has to be on top of making sure everything meets the standards. Not that long ago when Super Storm Sandy hit our area it washed away Fortescue Beach so Ricci Brothers Sand was brought in by the truck loads to restore the beach and bring it back to life.

One of the last businesses that I visited was Vic's Service Center located on Main Street. Again every business that I went to had a story to tell. His business was started back in 1972 but before that there were 3 other thriving businesses there. Mr. Vic Hruza told me there was a Brick making business called Port Norris Concrete Block and it was started back in 1934. They made brick and concrete blocks. Around 1938 Port Norris Express was started. They were a trucking and auto repair company who to this day is now located on North Ave. In the front of the store in the 1950's was a grocery store called Sal's & Joe's. It was a little convenient store for the local town folk. Mr. Hruza said his auto repair shop use to be busier back in the day. Most of his current customers are from out of town. He puts in many hours but enjoys his work.

There were three businesses that intrigued me in Port Norris but they are no longer here. Trotters Race Track which was located on Yock Wock Road, The Palomino which is located on Main Street, and Knights of Pythias Hall which was located on the corner of Main and Market Street. Trotters Race Track was started back in the early 1930's. They were known for doing sulky racing which is a single person cart that's attached to a horse for races. People came from out of state to race their horses. I was told it was a very booming place to visit on the weekends. I came across a couple of

Picking of the Month July 11, 1890

Walter S. Chambers and party had exceedingly good luck yesterday; they arrived at Bivalve wharf with a catch of one hundred and ten nice weak fish. Walter says he has broke his record.

photos from the track that were neat to see. I can only imagine what it was like.



Trotters Race Track

The Palomino to this day is still standing on the corner of Main and Bacon Street. It was built in 1850. Every person I talked to seemed to have a fond memory of The Palomino. In the 1920's it was a private home owned by C.W. Hand. Mr. Hand was a oysterman and owned a garage in Port Norris where he sold Dodge and Graham Trucks. This house/restaurant was sold and rented to numerous people over the years. There was some amazing food and many intellectual meetings between Rotary and Oysterman's Associations. If these walls could talk I can't imagine what they would say. It's sad to drive by and see The Palomino house vacant and knowing the history of it.

The one that intrigued me the most was the K of P Hall. It was a happening business in Port Norris. It was built in

1872. It was a three story high building with many thriving businesses. The first floor was the American Store (which reminds you of a ACME) and located out back was a small candy store. The second floor was The Gem Theater, a dance floor and roller skating rink, and it also held high school plays and a opera house. The final floor was Knights of Pythias headquarters and meeting hall. I'm not sure when but it did burn down and was rebuilt in 1902. Unfortunately the building is no longer there. It is just a empty lot. I was able to locate with the help of Mr. Richard Smith (Vice-President of the historical society) a lot of show programs from the K of P Hall. He was a wealth of knowledge and I'm so thankful for all the help he gave me.

From the start of this project I couldn't of imagined I would walk away with a clearer image of how Port Norris use to be. From the bustling street with the trolley car to the busy marines with the oyster boats and the many visitors from out of town. I spoke to a lot of my family members and family friends who grew up when Port Norris was the happening place. The stories they told me made me chuckle and made me feel they truly loved this place and were happy to grow up in such a amazing town with such history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Mr. Smith for his knowledge and his literature about the history of Port Norris.

Thanks for the time all the business owners sat down with me. Mr. Capaldi, Mr. Berry, Mr. Ricci Sr., Mr. Hruza

Thank you family & friends for all of the fond memories of how Port Norris use to be.



1906 Main Street postcard with the K of P Hall on the right.

Membership and Renewal for 2016

We would love to add your name to our growing list of members. Please give some thought to joining the PNHS. Membership fees are for Individual - \$10, Family - \$15, Benefactor - \$50 and over, and Student - \$1 (no voting privileges) and entitles you to discounts on our merchandise. Click here to renew or join, historicportnorris.org/membership.htm.

Or mail your check to: Port Norris Historical Society, PO Box 187, Port Norris, NJ 08349.

Thank you for your support. Membership is key to applying for grants as well as your dollars help us continue with all of our endeavours.

See us on Facebook and our website
historicportnorris.org

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The Port Norris Historical Society Recognized **Nahzeem Gales** For Outstanding Efforts in History for 2015-2016 Academic Year at the Port Norris Middle School June 13, 2016

Liz Hoffman, PNHS Treasurer presents award to Nahzeem Gales, at graduation. See our past student awards historicportnorris.org/awards.htm



On June 23, 2016 we enjoyed the company of members from the Seabrook Education and Cultural Center. We shared the stories of our building and some of our donated treasures. Pictured under the sign from the the long gone train station. In the photo are let to right, back row, Karl Viire, Ginny Campbell, PNHS, Beverly Bradway, Helgi Viire, Front; Bonnie Bertram, Alvina Baum, PNHS, Kaelyn Riddle. Thank you for visiting our Historical Society. We will be open July 17th 1-4 PM for Race Through Time. See historicportnorris.org/community-race.htm Also visit seabrookeducation.org

NORRIS ASKS

What was the name of the well known store that once occupied the first floor of the K of P Hall?

Answer: The American Store

If anyone has photos of the American Store, we would love to see them. [Email us.](#)



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