



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: October 11, 2016 • 7:00 pm • 1723 Main Street



History of the Robbinstown School, Main Street, Port Norris

THEN



NOW



Metamorphosis of a Treasure

By Jordan Robbins

Age 17 - September 29, 2008

Research paper for Robbinstown School Scholarship Program

Situated in the quiet, peaceful town of Port Norris, New Jersey, the old Robbinstown School resides at Main and Lincoln Streets. This piece of the past has been given a new name and a new lease on life. It is now the Robbinstown School Library. On most days, the outside sun continues to glisten through the wavy glass panes and reflect gently off the glossy book covers within - just as it has done for the last 141 years.

Constructed in 1856, it was erected for use as a house of worship for both Baptist and Methodist. One of the churches had burned down and the closest established church was located in Dividing Creek, an approximate four mile strenuous walk or ride in a horse and buggy.

In 1867 it began to be used as a schoolhouse, and in 1874 Richard W. Robbins deeded the building to the schools trustees and it officially became Robbinstown School.

A barbed wire fence protected the students from the trolley tracks in front of the school. A hand bell called the students to class. Boys and girls formed separate parallel lines before entering. Chest-high slate blackboards embellished the whitewashed walls.

A potbellied stove in the center of the room radiated an equator of heat to the students surrounding it. The teacher's dog was often a regular in the classroom, resting on the plank floor alongside its owner. A small pump organ, later replaced by a piano, accompanied daily singing. Black splatters from pens dipped in inkwells gave character to the student desks.

After 1952, the outhouses at the rear of the building were replaced with an indoor bathroom and the potbellied stove was replaced with oil heat.

The school closed in the later 1960s until was reopened for special education classes through 1977. In 1981 Commercial Township based a tool loan program there for a short time until federal funding ran out.

In mid 1997, concerned citizens of Commercial Township acquired ownership from the school board and extensive renovations were done. The roof was replaced and new plumbing and heating systems were installed. The floors were refinished to a glowing luster. The addition of a central air conditioning unit advanced the building to a modern luster. On October 19, 1997, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held dedicating the tiny, but enduring, building for use as an informal library and museum.

Much of the population surrounding the Port Norris area does not even know of the library's existence. You could drive by it a few times and not even know you have passed it. The library doesn't resemble any of the new "high tech" facilities, nor does it look like

Robbinstown School Free Public Library Today

By Faye Hickman

especially pretty from the outside. The cracked repainted siding and towering crooked oaks, whose limbs dangle without a single trace of green, testify to its age.

Walking up to the library you will most likely encounter the bed of crushed clam shells crumbling boisterously underneath the soles of your shoes. After completing that obstacle, you will arrive at a little, uneven wooden platform that has faded with time. You are met with a steel door that doesn't particularly invite you to explore the contents held in security on the other side of the threshold.

As you enter and move across the wooden floor boards that creak with every step, the past closes around you, insulating you from the computers and new editions used as decoys to attract a "younger crowd" and "out of towners".

If you are a newcomer you may be impressed with the obvious age of the building or the restoration, or even the quantity and diversity of the books available. But, if you are one of the "insiders", about ninety percent of the towns population logged in to the genealogies housed there, you feel a sense of belonging, an embrace as real as a loved one's return from a long journey.



As Jordan noted, it started out with a group of citizens wanting to have a Library in town and put to use the old school house. In the beginning many

volunteered their time cataloging the many books that were donated to us. Vertie Kunkle was one of the volunteers that helped us learn how to catalog. When the library opened the volunteers took turns opening the doors and manning the desk.

The township provided us with the building and utilities. The volunteers did sales and fund drives to raise the money to help buy supplies and books. (at the time most books were donated) Every spring we would hold a big Book, Bake, Flower and yard sale. We usually made around \$1000. We received generous donations from the township residents and businesses to help us along.

A few years ago we were concerned with the deterioration of the building foundation. The township got a grant and the building was raised and a new foundation was laid. Also at the time the downstairs bathroom was remodeled and made handicap accessible. Most of the books and shelves from downstairs were packed and moved to the Building next Laws and Laws. This building was used as the Library until work was complete.

In 2003, the township agreed to hire a Librarian for 10 hours a week. Since then we have had 4 different ladies as librarian. Maureen White (2002-03), Lisa Jones (2005-2009), Sandi Watson Lore (2010), and Cindy Tawles (2011 to present).

I am not sure of the year but the township provided us with computers and internet.

In 2007, we started a scholarship program. Encouraging junior and senior high school students to get involved with the daily running of the library. We set up a program that they would work at the library a designated number of hours and they would received a \$500 scholarship when the started college. From 2007 thru 2014 we have provided 11 students with scholarships amounting to \$9500. Recipients have been Jordan Robbins, Lisa Jones, Katherine Hawley, Barney Hollinger, Allison Ball, Grace Watson, Chris Moore, Dawn Watson, Bethany Watson, Megan Moore, Keira McMeekin.



During the Summer Reading Program this year, 344 books were read by the participants. The awards were presented on Tuesday, September 13, 2016 at 5:30 pm. Pizza and sweet treats served as well.

1st place - Kaden Bevan Read 155 books
2nd place - Robert Romano Read 27 books
Both under the age of 13 years old.

You can following the activities of the library online at

[Facebook Click Here](#)

[Township Website Click Here](#)



Faces from the past. Dates unknown.



Annual Fundraiser *Legends of Port Norris Dinner*

In 2008, the Port Norris Historical Society began a yearly tradition of honoring those who have made a significant impact on our community. Honorees come from three categories: 19th Century, 20th Century, and Living Legends. Be they business owners, community leaders, or simply great citizens, they represent what is great about Port Norris. [See Past List](#)

WHEN: Sunday, November 13, 2016

Program starts at 3:45

Woman's Club of Millville

300 E Street (corner of 3rd and E St.)

Dinner prepared by the Runaway Chefs

Tickets are \$40.00 each

Please visit our website for more details
[Click Here](#). Seats are limited.

2016 Legends to be Honored

LEGENDS IN HISTORY

Samuel Shinn

20TH CENTURY

Willis Robbins, Jr • Joseph N. Fowler • Vera B. Sockwell

LIVING LEGENDS

Barbara Adams • O'Connell Brown

Membership and Renew for 2017

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**

If you are getting this email from a friend and would like to be added to our list, please [click here](#) and we will add you. If we received your email at one of our events and you do not wish to receive this newsletter, [click here web@historicportnorris.org](#), we will remove you from the list. We do not sell or share your email with anyone!

Pickings of the Month

September 11, 1888 Our schools opened on Monday the 3d, with a good attendance. In the lower primary, taught by Miss Amy Ames, there are eighty pupils, too many for one teacher. A new primary school will have to be organized in the near future. Several kinds of old and obsolete readers are in the schools. These readers are not adapted to the new and approved methods of teaching reading and are a very great hindrance to the work. This evil is to be remedied by the ordering of a new series of readers by our wide-a-woke and progressive School Board. Our people, alive to the educational as well as the material interests of our thriving town, will cheerfully endorse this action of the Board.



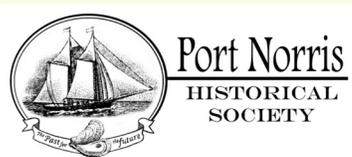
NORRIS ASKS

How many schools are in Commercial Township?

The Commercial Township School District is a community public school district that serves students in Kindergarten through eighth grade.

Haleyville-Mauricetown Elementary School - K through 5th grades - The Tigers
Port Norris School 6th - 8th - The Panthers

[Visit the schools website click here.](#)



Officers

Rachel Cobb, President
Richard Smith, Vice-President
Alvina Baum, Secretary
Robin Berry, Assoc. Secretary
Liz Hoffman, Treasurer

Trustees

Rev. E. Barnes
Eileen Bernhardt
Virginia Campbell
Joanne Hickman
Sam Ricci

