

The Homespun Collage

The Newsletter of The Portville Historical and Preservation Society
Vol. 21 Issue 1

The purposes and objectives of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society are the discovery, preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the history of the Portville area in the State of New York.

Memorial Days in Portville



Our appreciation to Kathryn Garrity of Runnemede, NJ for sending us this original c. 1910 photo of a Memorial Day service at Chestnut Hill Cemetery in Portville. Veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic remove their hats and gather at the base of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument.

Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day and may have begun when organized women's groups in the South were decorating graves before the end of the American Civil War. However many towns in the North also began honoring their war dead in the 1860's.

General Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, officially proclaimed "Memorial Day" in 1868. It was first observed on May 30th of that year when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. New York was the first state to officially recognize the holiday in 1873. By 1890 it was recognized by all the northern states.

(Continued on page 2)

The Homespun Collage

May 2007

Special points of interest Inside

Memorial Day Memories



P. 3

Portville Tanneries

P. 4



Help Restore Portville History!

P. 7

(Continued from page 1)

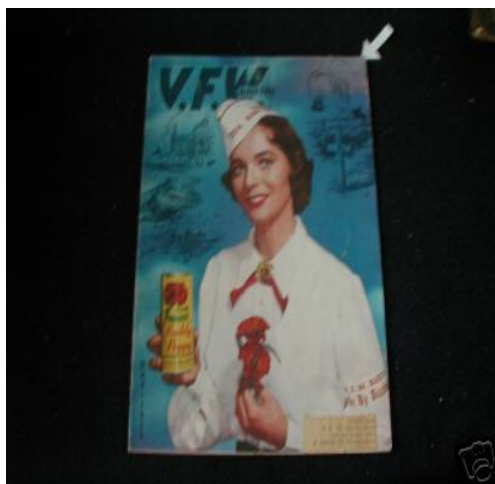
The South refused to acknowledge the day and honored their dead on other days until after World War I when the holiday became a day to honor all American who died fighting in any wars. Today it is celebrated in almost every State on the last Monday in May, passed by Congress with the National Holiday Act of 1971 when it was part of a three day Federal holiday. Some states in the south have an additional day for honoring the Confederate war dead.

We attribute the wearing of the red poppy on Memorial Day to a woman named Moina Michael. In 1915 Moina was inspired by the poem, *In Flanders Fields*, to write her own poem.



REMEMBRANCE

*We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.*



Moina was the first person to wear a poppy. She then sold them to friends and acquaintances, the money going to benefit servicemen in need.

In 1922 the VFW became the first veterans' organization to sell poppies nationwide and two years later their "Buddy Poppy Program" was selling artificial poppies made by disabled veterans.



*Purple Heart
awarded in 1943
to
Patrick
Raschella
USNR.*

PHPS Archives.

Over the years many Americans have forgotten the meaning and traditions of Memorial Day. Many towns have not had parades in decades and the graves of our servicemen are forgotten and neglected.

In Portville quite the opposite is true. We fly our flags and have a parade after which we honor those who gave their lives in the service of our country. Our local American Legion places a flag on the grave of every man and woman who served in the Armed Forces of our county. Ceremonies are held in the cemetery below the large obelisk memorial to our Civil War dead. The gates of the cemetery are dedicated to all who fought in World War I and in Pioneer Park is the memorial to the Portville men who died in World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. These ceremonies are solemn and sacred moments in our lives.

Memorial Day Memories

By
Ronda Shaner Pollock

What wonderful memories I treasure of Memorial Days in Portville! I have said many times when asked to attend another event on that day, that I don't want to be anywhere but Portville on Memorial Day. It's Portville's finest day of the year. When I attended the Memorial Day events after having lived away from Portville for many years it certainly aroused many emotions. When the band marched by my tears began to flow.

As a young child I probably didn't understand the significance of the day but I recall it as a special time when I rode my bicycle in a parade, decorated with red, white and blue crepe paper. I alternated the colors on the spokes of the wheels to create pinwheels. I am pleased to see children doing the same in recent years.

The above photo from the PHPS Archives, of



a the Portville High School Band in the 1940's, taken in the gymnasium of the old Brick School, reminded me of marching in the Memorial Day Parade when I was in Junior High and High School in the 1950's. As I recall it was the only time we marched, so it was a very exciting time. We would start practicing at least a week before Memorial Day, marching up and down the streets of Portville. Phil Skeps, our band director, was very particular about keeping our lines straight. He would yell "guide right! guide left!" We

were a team, striving to do our best. I played a bell lyre in the band and particularly loved to play the Sousa marches that were also favorites of our Director.

As we filed up to the cemetery we were caught up in the solemnity of the occasion and often heard speeches by our local priest and pastors. The unforgettable moments were when the flowers were placed at the foot of the large obelisk, the American Legion Color Guard fired their guns and taps were played.



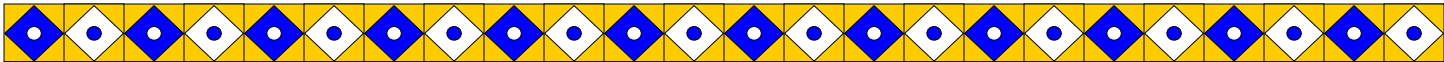
The Boy Scouts march up to the cemetery in a 1948 parade followed by ponies and children with their decorated bicycles.

After the ceremonies in Pioneer Park we often would play music for a time in the band stand there. Chairs were provided. Mr. Skeps would have my kettle drums brought down from the school so that we could play Grade 5 music such as Beethoven's, *Egmont Overture* along with popular marches and patriotic songs.

Phil Skeps challenged us to play more difficult music. We always received good marks when we went to All County.

When Memorial Day duties were done we formed a long line and walked into the Brick School (in same location as the Portville Manor today) and received a shiny half dollar from the American Legion. Many of us then went to either the Colonial

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

Quality Shop or Spring Hill Dairy to buy sodas or sundaes with our payment.

I am happy to see the Portville Memorial Day traditions continuing with a parade that gets bigger each year and a large turnout of adults as well as children attending the ceremonies.

Pictured on the right in the Portville Memorial Day Parade in 1948 is a Drum Corp that included many World War II Veterans.



The above is a copy of a postcard from the PHPS Archives. On the back of the card is written "Grampa John T. James was night watchman at tannery for years. Aunty Margaret James Brown worked at Basket factory and she excelled at piece work. They walked to work on the railroad ties.

Tanneries of Portville

Recently the historical society has had some inquiries regarding the North Western Leather Company that was previously known as The Roulette Leather Co. It was located where the Anderson Pattern Works is today. Henry McDonald and Patrick Minahan started a small tannery near there on the Whitehouse Farm. At one time there were two large tanneries operating in Portville.

Henry Holcomb wrote in his 1931 booklet *Glimpses of Fifty Years* that east of the Pennsylvania Railroad on the Ceres Road there was a farm owned for many years by Justin Searls. He divided his land and sold the part lying east of the highway to the Roulette Leather Company that for many years operated the tannery there. It was later sold to the Northwestern Leather Co. It closed in 1930. Thanks to Bill Anderson we have a map that shows the layout of the Northwest-

(Continued on page 5)

ern Tannery and a legend that tells the purpose of each building in the complex.

In the early years of our country, the tanning of hides and skins was a small operation, usually located near a farming community where hides were readily available. During the latter 19th Century it became big business and the process of tanning was more complex.



This 1889 tintype pictures Lloyd Lamn's father with his team of horses and a bark wagon used to haul the bark to a tannery.

Hides were **salted** to preserve them until they arrived at the tannery where they were **soaked** and agitated to remove the salt and soften them. Then they were scraped during the **fleshing** process before they went through the **liming** process to remove the hair and make them more pliable. The hair was sold to use in plaster and fabrics.

Next they were **beamed** (scraped) on a beam that looked like a half barrel. After this they were washed again and then **bated** (soaked in a strong acid solution to remove the lime).

Then came the **plumping** process in an acid solution that swelled the cells of the hide so that they would more readily absorb

the tannin.

After the hides were cut in two they were suspended on rockers that suspended them and agitated them in large vats, sunk in the ground that contained the tanning **liquor** (bark from which tannin was leached).

After the **tanning** process the hides were dried and steam heated and oiled

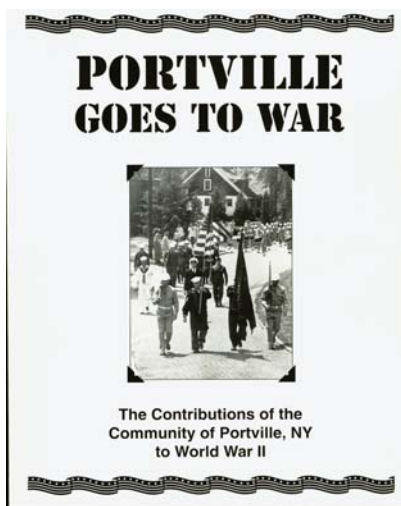
The final step was rolling and beating the hides to produce a firm surface. Large quantities of water were used in all the operations.

The before mentioned map indicated that **chrome tanning** was used at the Northwestern Leather Co. It replaced the dependence on bark.

According to most 19th Century articles on the subject, it is agreed that it took one cord of bark to tan four to five hides.



Another view of the Northwestern Leather Co. looking toward "Bear's Cave". In the foreground is the Pittsburg, Shawmut and Northern Railroad tracks and the siding that went to the tannery



**WNYAHA Award winning
PHPS publication!**

Read about the Home Front and the men and women who served in WW II. Over 180 pages.

Available at the Portville Library and by mail from PHPS, PO Box 59, Portville, NY 14770
Now at a special price of \$15.00.
Mailed anywhere in the US for \$19.50.

Portville First in County to have Cement Sidewalks

In the winter of 1907 Portville residents were having an easier time cleaning snow off their sidewalks. During the summer of 1906 the village board borrowed \$7,000.00 and along with a gift of \$2500.00 from a private citizen lined Portville streets with cement walks.

Olean Times Herald January 24, 1907

Thanks and Appreciation to the following:

Kathy Hanley for “A Little Book of Poems” by Ruford Keeler, 1946, Dedicated to Mr. F.O. Langworthy

Kathryn Garrity of Runnemede, NJ for sending us a box of photos belonging to the Ludden family. Of Portville.

IN MEMORIUM

Our members and friends

Clarence W. Allen 1927-2007

Ruth Rottstedt Anderson 1916-2007

Robert Biehler 1932-2007

Monica Burdick Deland 1941-2007

Ross B. Frair 1919-2007

Bernice Polen Morris 1908-2007

James K. Wilson Jr. 1921-2007

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I wish to support the goals of The Portville Historical and Preservation Society

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State & ZipCode _____

I would like to become a member.
June is renewal month for members.

Thank you! To many of our members who have already renewed for 2007

My dues are enclosed.

- _____ \$3.00 Senior
- _____ \$3.00 Student
- _____ \$4.00 Individual
- _____ \$6.00 Family
- _____ \$25.00 Supporting
- _____ \$50.00 and above
PATRON-ANGEL

Please detach and mail to:

**P.H.P.S.
PO BOX 59
PORTVILLE, NY 14770-0059**

Welcome To Our New Members!

**Jan Caya
Patricia Eastman
Amy Elman
Robert Stevens Jones
Faye Klang
Pat Miller
Bill & Marilyn Reynolds
Rod Williams**

Help Us Restore Our Schoolhouse!



MEMORIAL FUND

A contribution to the Memorial Fund has been made in memory of Loretta McCollough by Mary and Jim King

PHPS is looking for volunteers to do painting and other carpentry projects on the Schoolhouse this summer. Hours are flexible. Be part of something important and call us to join in! contact Chairmen Terry and Cindy Keeley 585-968-8489

P.H.P.S
17 Maple Ave.
P.O. Box 59
Portville, NY 14770
phpsemail@yahoo.com



<http://www.portvillehistory.org>



Philip Skeps, Portville High School Band Director, checks the marching band as they march to the Cemetery on Memorial Day 1948. See article inside.