

## Porterfield Condo complex – origin of the name and some history

*By Mark Forgetta, resident at Porterfield Condos, and Doris MacLachan Cole, Porterfield family member*

The beige house at the right of our entrance as you enter our complex was owned by Robert and Charlotte Porterfield, who raised six children there. Charlotte passed away in 1977 and Robert in 1981. He was the last Porterfield to live there. The property was then sold and by 1985 Porterfield condominiums had been completed.

### **Their Scott-Irish roots:**

Robert's father, John Porterfield was born in 1853 in Lasswade, Edinburghshire, Scotland. He emigrated to the United States in the early 1870s. By 1892, he became a U.S. citizen. Robert's mother Annie (Wylie) Porterfield was born in Scotland in 1856. They raised a family of 10 children, seven of whom survived until adulthood, in Manchester, Connecticut.

John Porterfield's parents were William Porterfield, born 1814, and Mary McComie, born 1819. Annie Wylie's Porterfield's parents were William Wylie, born 1821, and Margaret Jones Wylie, born 1822. Margaret emigrated from Northern Ireland to Manchester in 1887 and lived with her daughter Annie and husband, John. She died in 1906 and is buried in East Cemetery.

### **Where the family lived in Manchester**

Although there is some discrepancy in the early U.S. census records, it appears from my research John and Annie married in the early 1870s and John emigrated to the U.S. first. By 1880, he was a boarder in Manchester and worked in a local cotton mill. Later that year, Annie joined him in Manchester.

By 1900, Annie & John were living on Oak Grove Street with their growing family. Their original house was at 37 Oak Grove St. That house no longer exists and must have been torn down to make way for the nature preserve. It would have been toward the end of the Oak Grove Nature Preserve before Porter Street.

By 1917, John and Annie moved into the present house at 178 Oak Grove St., at our entrance, which was built in 1876. Around the same time, Robert, who had previously lived on Hilliard Street, moved to 158 Oak Grove St, which is the white two-family house next door to the beige house.

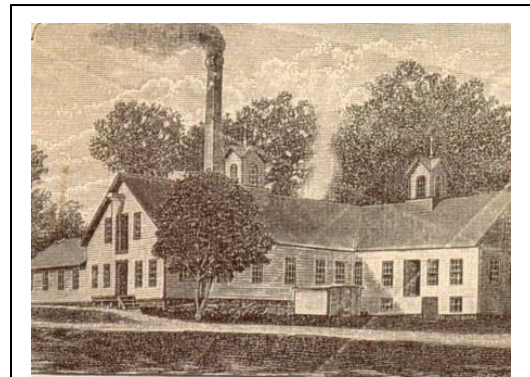
In 1921, John Porterfield (Robert's father) died and Annie and her sons Clarence and George continued to live in the house. In 1923, Robert and his wife Charlotte moved into the house and lived there until their deaths. In 1926, with Robert's growing family, mother Annie, and her two youngest sons, Clarence, age 30, and George, age 25, moved into two apartments upstairs in the building at 66-68 Spruce Street. Downstairs was Clarence's business, Porterfield Tire Works, which moved into this building in 1923, after its School Street building was destroyed by fire. It is here that Annie died in 1943. Clarence, who was widowed at a young age, remained in the Spruce Street apartment until his death in 1981 at the age of 85. At some point George moved out and, at his death in 1984 at age 82, he lived at 57 Wellington Road, close to the East Cemetery.

### **A Working-Class Family**

John Porterfield originally worked at a cotton mill in town but eventually moved to Case Brothers Paper Mill. The Oak Grove Paper Mill was located in the area of the nature preserve across from our condominiums. The mill used the pond and waterfall to operate. It is believed the mill was actually in the area of the current Oak Grove Nature Center Building and parking lot. There were several mills in this area. The Oak Grove Mill burned in 1898, so John may have worked there or at another one of their mills in the area. John's children held various jobs in and around Manchester. Many worked





178 Oak Grove Street, Manchester, CT



1883 postcard of Oak Grove Mills, located near the intersection of Autumn, Highland, and Oak Grove Streets. Archives of Manchester Historical Society.

for the Cheney Silk Mills in various positions. Robert, the son who lived at our property, worked for Case Brothers paper mills and Cheney silk mills. Early on he worked as a “baggage master,” the person in charge of the baggage car on New York, New Haven Railroad. Also, for a short time, he worked as a sprayer at a local typewriter factory. Eventually, the factory work ended and he became a house painter. In his obituary, he was described as a retired painter.

<p>As previously mentioned, in the 1920s and 30s, Clarence Porterfield owned a tire company at 66-68 Spruce Street and George worked with him. The upstairs was apartments. When the tire business closed, they converted the downstairs into apartments, too. The building remains a multi-family building today. This unique building was constructed in 1923.</p>		
	<p>1920's era view of Porterfield Tire Works, 66-68 Spruce St., courtesy of Doris MacLachan Cole.</p>	<p>2021 view of the same building, courtesy of Susan Barlow.</p>




When the tire business closed, George became a machinist at Pratt and Whitney. Clarence became a mailman in the 1940s and also opened the All-Pets Supply Co. at 68 Spruce Street. By 1956, Clarence & George opened the Porterfield Pet Supply company in South Windsor. It was located near the East Hartford Family Drive-In at the corner of Chapel Road and Route 5. I'm unsure of when it closed, but at their deaths they were described as retired owners of the pet supply store. As of 2014, all of Robert and Charlotte's children had passed away, including their only son Sherwood.

– Mark Forgetta, September 15, 2020

**Photos and information from Porterfield family member Doris MacLachan Cole**

The Porterfield garage belonged to my Great Uncles, Arthur and George Porterfield. It is now an apartment building. I used to live in the second-floor apartment with the three windows facing the street corner. I only stayed for a little bit back in 1982. Uncle George let me rent it, then I moved back to Colorado. The Condos, named after the family, are built on my grandfather Robert Porterfield's property on Oak Grove Street. Lots of fond memories!

– Doris MacLachan Cole, March 16, 2021

<p>1935, Charlotte and Robert Porterfield at 178 Oak Grove Street. These three photos courtesy of granddaughter Doris MacLachan Cole.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">1935</p>	<p>Robert and Charlotte Pentland Porterfield, 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, 178 Oak Grove Street.</p> 	<p>Porterfield children, left to right: My mom, Eleanor Sarah, 1915-2010; Blanche, 1925-1927; Roberta Mary, 1916-2005; Doris (Tootsie), 1922-2001; Sherwood (Sonny), 1919-2001; Shirley (not in this photo), 1929-2014. Circa 1926 photo.</p> 
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