

HIGHTSTOWN



EAST WINDSOR

NEW JERSEY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2003

Hutchinson Hall, Hightstown, N.J.

by Richard S. Hutchinson

John Tindall Hutchinson, son of James and Sarah (Tindall) Hutchinson, was born 9 December 1799, in West Windsor Twp, Middlesex Co, New Jersey. He married Elizabeth D. Ward, daughter of On Ward, and wife, Rebecca Vaughn. He died 26 April 1876 in East Windsor Twp, Mercer Co, New Jersey. He was my 3rd great-grandfather.

John T. Hutchinson was a farmer and a business man. He also was a Justice of the Peace in town from which he became known as "Squire Hutchinson". He bought the property running east from the railroad

on the north side of Stockton Street to the corner of Main Street and then north to Rocky Brook from his father-in-law shortly after his marriage ca. 1820. On this property were numerous businesses, stables, a warehouse, John's residence, and on the corner, his general store. This property was eventually passed on to John's son, George Downs Hutchinson. [At that time, the small stream Grape Run ran above ground and was located about where the Stockton Street entrance was to the later store of J.V. Davison's or what is today the entrance to Masterpiece Weddings.] All of these buildings were constructed of wood and all

of them in this entire block were destroyed by fire on March 5th 1866.

Hightstown Gazette - 8 March 1866 - **THE FIRE** - "Our borough has had exemption from fire for many years, which has been the wonder of many, considering our exposure, owing to the passage of the Railroad through the place, and the proximity of much combustible matter.

The fire on Monday originated in the stable of Esquire Hutchinson in the rear of the angle made by the union of Main and Stockton streets. The presumption is that a spark from an

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

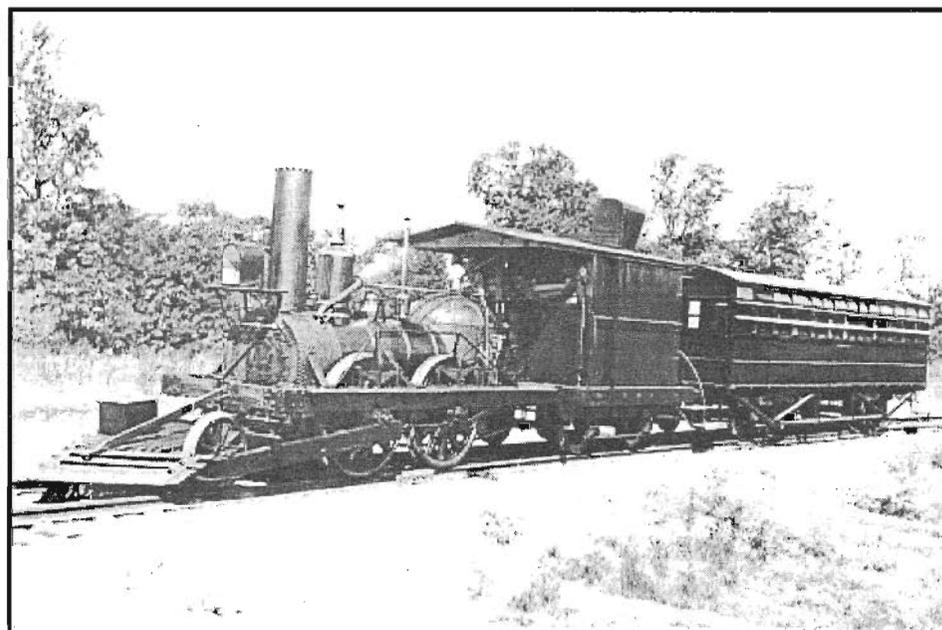
18 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

OCTOBER

6 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

11 Hightstown's celebration for its 150th Incorporation Anniversary

Incorporation Anniversary Logo - The "John Bull"



Hutchinson Hall

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engine (attached to the 4 P.M. line) in passing must have lighted upon the roof. When first seen the fire had made but little headway, and it was supposed that a few buckets of water would extinguish it. The wind, however, was high, and the flames spread with surprising rapidity. When it was found impossible to save any portion of the buildings within the area of the triangle bounded by the Railroad, and Stockton and Main streets, attention was immediately directed to the Hotel of E.[Ezekiel] Hughes, and other buildings on the south side of Stockton street, and to the Hotel and out-buildings of J.[ames]B. Richardson C. The most imminent danger was at Hughes' hotel, where the heat was so intense that it was almost impossible for men to work. Carpets were placed upon the roof and saturated with water. Had this building caught, hardly a building between Main street and the Railroad south of Morrison street [now Rogers Avenue] could have been saved. Much credit is due a few men who worked persistently on the Stockton St. side of the house. The hotel [located at the present site of Theo's Lakeside Tavern] occupied by Mr. Richardson, nearly opposite the burning block, was also in great danger. At one time the stables adjoining this hotel were on fire, and with considerable difficulty protected. Some of those on the hotel roof were injured by the heat and flying sparks. Major Smith and John Ford, Jr., each had their eyes quite badly burned. The only building burned outside the block mentioned, was that opposite the Odd Fellow's Hall building, and occupied by A.S. Stoneberger.

The parties thrown out of home and business by this conflagration, certainly will receive the sympathy of those who might very easily have shared their fate. The losses sustained, so far as ascertained, are about as follows: Geo. D. Hutchinson, owner of

all the property in the triangle designated, is insured for \$3,000. His loss will be heavy, probably not less than \$12,000. T.J. Pullen, dealer in dry goods and groceries, who occupied the corner store, had in stock over \$4,000 C insurance \$3200. J. Woolley, (Wall Paper and Book Store, adjoining Mr. P's) saved his stock by timely removal. John T. Hutchinson, who occupied the residence adjoining the Book Store, and the buildings in rear, in which the fire originated, loses personal property to the amount of \$300. Jos. D. Chamberlain, dealer in dry goods and groceries, who occupied the lower floor of Odd Fellows and Masonic Hall building, had stock valued at \$2,000. Insured for \$1,000. The Masonic Fraternity lose \$250.— The Odd Fellows, who occupied same room, lose their all — books, papers, etc. The Widow Ford, who occupied the next building, saved a good portion of her stock and furniture. The last building in this Main St. row was occupied by Messrs. Perrine, Carriage makers. They lose heavily in stock and unfinished work. The building occupied by A.S. Stoneberger belonged to the estate of R.M. Smith, dec'd. The loss we have not heard estimated. Mr. Stoneberger's stock of Paints, Oils and Lamps was insured for \$1,000 which he states does not cover his loss. Benjamin Rice, Tobacconist, in Stockton street, loss stock valued at \$5,000. Insured for \$1,800. The barber saved all his property. The entire loss will reach about \$25,000 ... It might have been far worse. There is no loss of life. The portion of property consumed is probably the most susceptible of any of future improvement, now that the entire space is open for rebuilding. So that out of a partial disadvantage we may have something to recompense for this in future.

A few weeks since we endeavored to awaken an interest here in the or-

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HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971

609-371-9580

**To educate, while preserving for
future generations, our people
and our community's history.**

Editor, Richard S. Hutchinson

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Genealogical queries pertaining to the
Hightstown-East Windsor Township area are ac-
cepted, but will be printed as space allows.

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Hutchinson Hall

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ganization of a fire company, and the procurement of an engine. Had our counsel been received and acted upon, much of the loss by the late fire might have been prevented. We hope now that the necessity is so apparent, our people will wake up and perfect an arrangement which will give us, at the least, a hope of protection. A stitch in time saves nine. Since writing the above, measures have been taken to procure a first-class engine.

During the fire, it was noticed that many able-bodied men stood and looked on, and did little toward arresting the progress of the flames. Others (among the earnest laborers many ladies were to be seen) were unremitting in their efforts, and to them the property holders are greatly indebted.

At the outbreak of the fire on Monday, intelligence was forwarded to Bordentown and Trenton, asking for aid from their Fire departments.



pared to come, but got word that their aid could be dispensed with. A number of rowdies accompanied the firemen from Bordentown, and created considerable disturbance. Many people were more alarmed at the presence of these ruffians than they had been at the fire.

Large quantities of goods were stolen during the fire, and it is supposed a large portion of the missing articles are 'out of town.' Mr. Woolley had all his goods removed from his store, but up to the present hour has secured but a portion of his stock. The thieves have made sad havoc with his cutlery, stationary, books, etc. For the present Mr. Woolley may be found at his residence in Main St."

After the fire in March 1866, George Downs Hutchinson began construction of a new 3-story brick building on the corner of Stockton and Main Streets. It was started on June 14th 1866 and was nearly complet-



These two carte de visites were taken by Hightstown photographer R.R. Priest who operated his photographic business from 1864-1867. It is quite probable that the subjects in these two cartes may have appeared at Hutchinson's Hall. The one carte of the gentlemen in their top hats gives us a clue to the time it was taken and to its cost. During the Civil War, these cartes were so popular that they were taxed and a tax stamp had to be affixed to the back of the card and hand-cancelled when it was sold. This particular card has a \$.02 cent stamp on the back meaning that it sold for less than \$.25 cents and was sold between August 1864 and August 1866. It is also quite probable that if we looked at any existing newspaper issues for the town during these two years, we might even be able to identify this group of performers.

The Bordentown Co. responded, and were on the ground ere the fire was wholly subdued, and rendered some services, for which we tender thanks. The Trenton companies were pre-

ed by December 20th. On the 2nd and the upper floor of this corner building was a hall and meeting rooms used by both the Mason's and the Odd

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President's Message

Since I have accepted another term as President, I must say that I have great expectations for the coming year. Our community is certainly behind the Society. The Rocky Brook Garden Club, the Friday Club, and the Hightstown Women's Club have made wonderful contributions that have enabled us to purchase a new rug for our dining room, desert plates for our functions, and the shrubbery that keeps the Ely House looking so grand, as well as many other items. The Boy Scouts and all the other folks that volunteer their time deserve the Society's deep appreciation. I was able to have Janet Wright Leary, from Hershey, PA, take a walk through the Society buildings, and as always being a Hightstonian, she sent us a gift for our upkeep. Hightstonians are great in their support.

Our officers and board members are just great. Not enough can be said for Treasurer Frank Brennan and our newsletter man from Delaware, Dick Hutchinson. We always have folks who are willing to pitch in on a specific task but board members are always there when needed.

More good news!!! Our new librarian, Fran Cook, has been working during the summer and informs me that this fall we will be open on a regular basis. Fran can always use more help, and therefore, if you can be of service call Fran or me.

We are excited that the Society will be a vital part of Hightstown's 150th Incorporation celebration on October 11th. Our great collection of historic gowns and dresses are being cleaned as I write. Wait until you see them being worn as they will be shown walking over the bridge at the dam. The Ely and Sara Hutchinson West buildings will be open on this day.

Yes, the Society will have a great year thanks to all of our volunteers. Come and join us and have some fun.

Hutchinson Hall

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Fellow's. It was also used for many public events such as dinners, organizations, community meetings, debates, plays, etc. and became known as Hutchinson Hall. In May of 1867, Hutchinson's Hall was officially inaugurated with an affair to raise money for the soldier's Civil War monument. Just a few of the known people speaking there were P.T. Barnum in February 1869 and Horace Greeley in March of the same year. In December 1874 and February 1876, the community held their old fashioned Tea Party's there, where they served real tea. Even today, although covered and hidden by paneling in the present day businesses in what used to be Hutchinson Hall, the actor's names and their lines can be found written on the original walls by the stage, apparently written so they could go over them while waiting to go on stage.

George D. Hutchinson died August 25th 1907 and in December of that year, his heirs sold three stores and the Hutchinson Hall brick building for \$9,000. Electric lights were added in March 1909, and in September 1910, Davison put in the stairs leading to the 2nd floor and that signaled the end of what was known as Hutchinson Hall, in Hightstown, New Jersey.

However, on 12 August 1915, it was reported by the *Gazette*, that John T. Hutchinson, [son of George D. Hutchinson] "owner of the store occupied by Joseph B. Davison, is remodeling the store to suit the increased needs of the tenant. The partition has been removed, adding the space formerly occupied by the grocery department. The stairway leading to the second story department has been

turned, also adding considerable room and convenience."

And now, you know a little more about the building on the corner of Main & Stockton. ■



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