



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY - JUNE 2004

The Missing Hightstown Businessman and his Ely House Connection

by Richard S. Hutchinson

In the first week of September 1892, William S. Jemison, 26, a well-known and popular businessman in the Borough of Hightstown, left the community on a Tuesday morning and drove to Trenton on a pleasure trip with intentions of "attending the races at the Driving Park." However, he did not return and over a week went by without his wife or family hearing a word from him. They now began to worry about his safety. Jemison was the proprietor of the grocery and dry goods store on the corner of Main Street and Mercer Streets, and with the store also being closed during this period of absence, the public became alarmed. They, too, began to speculate about his disappearance from the community.

Who was William S. Jemison; other than being a young businessman in the community? In putting together an article on the former owner and occupant of what is today known as the Ely House, I have been able to find some insight into him. On February 14, 1889, James M. Cubberley died at his residence on Main street [Ely House], having just entered his seventy-first year. Mr. Cubberley began a most active business life as a clerk for the late John P. [T.] Hutchinson when a mere lad, and was identified with the mercantile business in this place, working in both firms and by himself, for about 30 years. He had been a cashier and a director of the Central Bank, once located next to Ely House on the corner of Bank Street and North Main Street, and for another thirty years was connected with our financial institutions. At the time of his death, he held the position of director of Cranbury National Bank. He married Hannah M. Chamberlin, daughter of Joseph Chamberlin and they had several children who did not survive. - Addison (1853-1854), Ella (1855-1857), James (no dates). However, they did have one child who did survive and she was Hanna [Anna] M. Cubberley, born 4 April 1861. According to her wedding announcement in the local paper, she was described as "Miss M.A. Cubberley," who was married to Wm. S. Jemison, at the home of the bride's father [Ely House], on 6 April 1887.

By searching the Cedar Hill Cemetery, we find Anna M. Cubberley buried in her family's plot but identified on her gravestone as "Anna Cubberley Rogers - 1861-1946," not Jemison! Further searching of records shows that on 4 June 1895, she married Hightstown's earliest "band master," Elmer J. Rogers. So, we now know that she married twice - (1st) William S. Jemison and (2nd) Elmer J. Rogers. Yet, she is buried with neither. So, the question remains, what happened to William S. Jemison.

Being Jemison had failed to return to his home or to contact anyone in town, the worst was feared. A week later, his father, John Jemison, headed to Trenton in an attempt to retrace his son's route. He failed to find anything about his son's whereabouts but did find his son's team of horses at the American House stables which he brought home. I found the Jemison family, quite naturally, being very concerned as to his fate, but I found nothing.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY

- 1 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 11 Antique Road Show - Mer & Ann Ivins, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 22 "A Walk Through the Old Village of Hightstown," rain date May 23rd.

JUNE

- 7 Business Meeting and election of officers, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

Mark your calendars!

May 22nd - "A Walk Through the Old Village of Hightstown" - - a walking tour sponsored by the Borough of Hightstown, presented by Richard Hutchinson and the Society. Rain date will be May 23rd.

October 17th - Our semi-annual house tour throughout Hightstown.

Missing Hightstown Businessman

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ing coming from his wife or her family in any reports. By this time, there was much speculation within the Borough as to Jemison's fate but that began to subside immediately upon the arrival in Hightstown of a Dr. Frank. A. White, of Philadelphia. It was learned that Dr. White had come to Hightstown searching for his wife, who was also missing! His wife was the former Miss Tabitha Miller, who had relatives in Hightstown, and he came here in the hope of finding information concerning her whereabouts! Upon further conversations with Dr. White, the town soon learned that the Mrs. White had been in the habit of visiting in Hightstown frequently and it was reported that she was "intimately acquainted" with the young Mr. Jemison. When Dr. White learned that Jemison was also missing from Hightstown, he was of the belief that his wife and Jemison had eloped. If this was true, it would probably explain the second marriage for Hannah [Anna] Cubberley to Elmer J. Rogers and certainly explain the mysterious disappearance of our businessman, William S. Jemison!

It was later learned that Dr. White knew his wife was probably with Jemison before even coming to Hightstown. He had known that she had left her home on Thursday morning last, saying that she intended to do some shopping down town. Later in the day, her learned that an express man had called at their home for her trunk, which, he said, was to be sent to Albany, New York. The servants in the house, having received no order to deliver the trunk and the Doctor being absent, declined to allow the man to take it away. Upon returning home,

Dr. White was told of what had taken place during the day and he had the trunk opened. In it, he found letters from our William Jemison to his wife along with a photograph of Jemison. However, he stated that there was no truth in the published reports that the trunk contained a part of Mr. Jemison's wardrobe. Being Mrs. White did not return home that night, the doctor started for Hightstown on the following day.

It was reported that the marriage of Dr. White and Miss Miller had taken place in Hightstown about 18 months ago, while Miss Miller was visiting friends here. And, it was also reported that Dr. White would be remembered as having been one of the alleged principals in a rather sensational affair at Hamilton Square several years ago. After having been in Hightstown for the a day or two, the doctor claimed that he had traced Mr. Jemison and his wife to a town, but he would not name it. He only indicated that they were still in the United States.

As soon as the it was clear to the residents of Hightstown, that Mr. Jemison did not intend to return, his legal problems began to accumulate. First, his creditors began to take action for their own protection. Counselor A.S. Appleget instituted proceedings resulting in Jemison's store being seized by the sheriff and placed in the hands of Thomas Mason [another Hightstown businessman in the mercantile trade] as an auditor and the store was closed for the purpose of taking account of stock. Mr. Jemison's creditors were said to be numerous and there were rumors that he had drawn

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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 accepted, but will be printed as space allows.

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Missing Hightstown Businessman

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heavily upon the private funds of his wife before leaving. It was being reported that Jemison took with him government bonds and cash amounting from \$10,000 to \$18,000. Nothing definite in this regard had been made public but the talk about it made good gossip. The *Hightstown Gazette* reported that "Mr. Jemison's wife and parents are nearly prostrated by the affair and have the sympathy of the entire community."

As a result of his actions, William S. Jemison's problems began to escalate. In the *Gazette*, dated 6 October 1892, appeared the following: "A Notice of a Writ of Attachment was given by the New Jersey Supreme Court to Hannah M. Cubberley against William S. Jemison at her suit against his various chattel items, as a "non-resident debtor" in the amount of \$1,500. There was also another "Notice to Absent Defendant" filed against William S. Jemison by his wife in order to ob-

tain a decree that Jemison pay to his wife other "divers and large sums of money due...loaned and advanced to you by her at your ... request; dated September 21, 1892."

On 3 Nov 1892, the following was found: "W.S. Jemison, the defaulting Hightstown merchant, who eloped with Mrs. F. A. White of Philadelphia, early in September, was a prisoner in the dock of the Mercer Court Friday. Jemison was indicted by the Grand Jury for forgery. He made a note for \$500 and signed the name David S. Dey to it. He was traced to Canada and arrested. He willingly returned to the United States. When arraigned in the Mercer Court he pleaded non volt, and bail was fixed at \$500. David S. Dey, the man whose name he forged, became his bondsman, and he was taken back to his former home in Hightstown."

On 24 Nov 1892, it was reported that "Dr. F.A. White of Philadelphia

has filed papers in a suit against William S. Jemison, of this place, for alienating his wife's affection. The suit is for \$25,000."

On 29 Dec 1892, Jemison pled guilty to the forgery, made restitution, and the Judge received a petition signed by numerous Hightstown residents. The judge said he was trying to lead a good life.

On 13 April 1893, it was reported that "Mrs. Anna M. Jemison, of this place, has filed a petition for divorce from her husband, W.S. Jemison, on statutory grounds. The action is the result of Mr. Jemison's elopement with the wife of Dr. White, of Philadelphia, last fall."

On 30 Aug 1894, it was reported that Frank V. Jemison [who took over the store formerly owned by his brother, William] was leaving

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Please mail the completed application, along with a check made payable to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society to:

Membership Committee
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

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Hightstown because "he has accepted a position in the large dry goods store of A.D. Matthews & Sons, at Brooklyn. His brother, William S. Jemison is in the same store."

On 6 June 1895, it was reported that "Anna M., daughter of the late James M. Cubberly, of Hightstown, was quietly married to Elmer J. Rogers, on Tuesday evening. The ceremony performed by Rev. T.B. Applege, and took place at the handsome residence which Mr. Rogers has built this year on Stockton street. Only the immediate family were present ... Mr. Rogers is the junior member of the firm of J. S. Rogers & Son and is not only a prominent young business man but is well known in musical circles as an author of ability." [This answers the question of why Hanna Cubberley's gravestone in her father's

plot reads "Anna Cubberly Rogers - 1861-1946. It also shows that she chose to be buried with her parents rather than with her 2nd husband, Elmer J. Rogers, who died in 1926 and is buried with his parents.]

And, finally, on 4 Feb 1897, it was reported that "William S. Jemison, formerly of this place and a son of John Jemison, died on Friday last [Jan 29th] at his home on Bedford avenue, in Brooklyn. Death was the result of a protracted attack of typhoid fever ... His mother was with him at the time and his father, who had left Hightstown that morning, reached the house just as he died. Mr. Jemison was thirty-one years of age and leaves a widow His remains were brought to Hightstown on Saturday ... with interment at Penns Neck." [This finally answers the ques-

tion as to why he was not found in Cedar Hill Cemetery. But, now, this death notice presents another question - who was it that was his widow??]

Beginning about 7 March 1912, an ad appeared in the *Gazette*, for the sale of the Cubberley house, which we now know as the Ely House, which ran for a long, long time: "For Sale - Handsome residence on North Main Street, formerly occupied by my father, Jas. M. Cubberley. Price moderate. Terms to suit. Mrs. Elmer J. Rogers." It remained unsold, was used as a rental property, and was eventually sold.

And, now we know the story of our missing Hightstown businessman, William S. Jemison.



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