



# HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY - JUNE 2005

## The Travels of the Herbert Family Chairs

by Christian Kirkpatrick

Many of you have read about Dale Grubb's exciting discovery. For those of you, however, who did not see the article about her that appeared last fall in the *Windsor Heights Herald*, I will quickly reprise it. Then I'll tell you a little more about her story.

In January 2004, Dale began researching James Conover Herbert (1812-1893), her great-great grandfather on her father's maternal side. Because she knew he was a chair-maker in the Englishtown area, she consulted Richard Dalik, who is a local historian. They met at the Village Inn in Englishtown.

Mr. Dalik took her upstairs in the inn, to a room that contained six black

ladder-back chairs. They were all by James Conover Herbert's son, James Davidson Herbert. And they looked

like a chair she had bought from a local antique dealer many years ago. She owned a Herbert chair!



Mrs. Dale Grubb, left, and Mrs. Marion (Herbert) McGanlin, both descendants of the Herbert chairmakers, with their chairs.

room. Based on what she had learned from Mr. Dalik, however, she realized that they were constructed, not by James Conover Herbert, but by his son, Joseph G. Herbert, who was her great-grandfather.

How did she know? Mr. Dalik had lent her William MacDonal's *Central New Jersey Chairmaking of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Jersey Historical Society, 1963), which describes Herbert chairs and talks about her family's contributions to local chair-making.

According to the book, her great-great-grandfather, James C. Herbert owned and worked a farm on the Jamesburg-Englishtown Road. He also made chairs, all of which had slat-backs and rush seats. Later, he moved to Englishtown, where he made chairs in the back of his house, which was behind the central public school building.

All his chairs contain uniquely shaped front stretchers, which are wider in the middle than on the sides. His sons' chairs also feature front stretchers that swell in the middle.

He used stencils to decorate his chairs, and he particularly liked bunches of grapes. One of Dale's chairs is festooned with grapes.

Two of his sons became chair makers. Joseph G. Herbert (1848-1916) left home at 14 and seems to have become an apprentice of John Leonard, who had

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### MAY

- 2 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 15 Ely House Open 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
- 16 John Kirkbride will speak on trains in Central New Jersey

#### JUNE

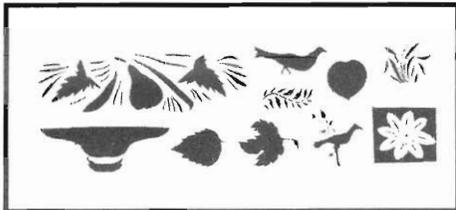
- 6 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Election of Officers, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 12 Ely House Open 2:00 - 4:00p.m.
- 13 Panel Discussion at Ely House on collecting and operating model trains.

# Herbert Family Chairs

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a chair-making shop at Rue's Corner, which is about two miles outside of Englishtown. There Joseph worked until he was 19, when he married Mr. Leonard's daughter and left to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Four years later, he returned, settled in Tennent and opened a chair shop in his home on the street connecting the railroad station and Tennent Church. For the next two years he made chairs there and helped decorate chairs made at the Leonard shop at Rue's Corner. Then he gave up chair making and opened a grocery store.

Although he decorated many of his chairs with freehand drawings, he also used many stencils, his favorite being a red rose with leaves that he put on the top slat of many of his chairs. These roses are on Joan Woome's chairs. Eighty of Joseph G. Herbert's stencils have been preserved.



Some of the Herbert chairmaker's stencils used to decorate their chairs.

When he was 10, James Davidson Herbert (1840-1924) began helping his father make chairs. He also briefly worked at the Leonard chair shop. Then at 19 he volunteered to serve as a private in the Union Army. In 1865, he was discharged from Company F, 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the New Jersey Infantry. He returned to the area and built a chair shop at the corner of Pine Street and Harrison Avenue in Englishtown. He made his chairs almost entirely himself, felling trees, preparing lumber, splitting and sawing it into appropriately sized pieces, etc.

Like his brother, James Davidson Herbert decorated some of his chairs with freehand drawings and some with stencils. Twenty-four of his stencils sur-

vive.

All the Herberts sold their chairs locally, though James Davidson Herbert, the most dedicated of the three, did sell to furniture dealers as far away as Freehold and New Brunswick. They were clearly a gifted family, able to make sturdy furniture that can still be used today and able to decorate it attractively.

Anyone who knows Dale, knows that this talent did not die with the sons of James Conover Herbert. She is very good with her hands and has an exquisite sense of design. And when she has the time, she likes to adorn items—baskets, bits of slate, etc.—with stencils! Surely, the Herberts would approve.

Addendum: Since this was written, Joan Woome has sold her house on Ward Street and bought another close to her mother at the shore. She is leaving her Herbert chairs in Hightstown, however, and Dale Grubb is now the proud owner of four more Herbert chairs.

**Editor's Notes** – The following is research found pertaining to James Conover Herbert's family line. In the 1850 Census of Monroe Twp. Middlesex Co., taken on 1 Oct 1850, we can find the James Herbert Conover family in household #274, consisting of the following persons: **James C. Herbert**, 38, farmer; b. NJ, wife, **Elen**, 30; children – **James D.**, 9; **Cornelia**, 7; **William**, 5; **Joseph**, 4; and **Mary**, 5/12. A search of Middlesex Co. marriage records shows: **James Herbert was married to an Ellen Davison, of Middlesex Co, on 28 Feb. 1839**, and this appears to be our James Conover Herbert.

The early US census records are not always accurate re: ages because you don't know who gave the information in them but it does give us a potential birth date of ca. 1812. Several people indicate that James Conover Herbert was baptized at the Tennent Church, in Monmouth Co. in 1810. Being I do not have the

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## HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Editor, Richard S. Hutchinson

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**Genealogical queries pertaining to  
the Hightstown-East Windsor Town-  
ship area are accepted, but will be  
printed as space allows.**

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later baptismal records available, I can not check this date at the church. Also, with all the "James Herberts" around, the baptism may refer to another and not be accurate for "our" James Conover Herbert. Perhaps, this may have already been checked by Dale's research.

Now, knowing the naming patterns of children in this period, the middle name usually indicated the surname of an ancestor. In the case of James Conover Herbert, the middle name Conover is likely the maiden name of his mother or grandmother; either Conover or Covenhoven, which is the Dutch name "Kouwenhoven" from which Conover is derived. The Conover/Covenhoven name is found predominantly in early Monmouth County, where many of this large family settled in New Jersey. Therefore, it is likely that a search in this area will uncover a Herbert/Covenhoven marriage in the past.

Assuming that the baptism information is correct and if James Conover Herbert was baptized in the Tennent Church, then one would assume that his parents were also members of the

church. Again, I do not have access to the church's baptismal records after 1800. However, I did find buried in the Tennent Church Yard a William Herbert, who d. 3 Oct 1834, aged 59.5.25 and Hannah, his wife, who d. 14 Nov 1866, aged 83.7.1. These dates indicate that William was born ca. 1775 and Hannah was born ca. 1783. Hannah's maiden name is said to be Hankinson and both of these individuals are purported to be the parents of our James Conover Herbert.

Now on wills, I only have abstracts of the NJ Wills from 1600s to 1813 in my library. However, I do have the Indices of NJ Wills for this period. These indices show that William Herbert, above, left a will, in Middlesex Co, NJ, dated 1834 and an Inventory of his estate was dated 1835. [See NJ Wills- File 10129M] This will should be reviewed. [William's Will and Inventory, as well as any NJ will in any county thru the 1800s, can be viewed and copied at the NJ Archives, Trenton, NJ.] I do not find a will in the indices, or an intestate filing for his wife, Hannah Herbert, who died 1866 in either Middlesex or Monmouth

Co. Now, this is fairly common for this period being that women rarely owned real estate individually. However, due to Hannah's age, at the time of William's death, she may also have remarried and have left a will under another name.

In addition to William and Hannah (Hankinson) Herbert being buried in Tennent Church Yard, I also found William's purported parents buried there - James Herbert, Esq, and his wife Elizabeth (Covenhoven) Herbert. And, here we have exactly what we were looking for - a mother or grandmother named Covenhoven. [One can see how knowing the naming patterns of various ethnic groups can, at times, aid in identifying ones ancestors.] James Herbert, Esq.'s gravestone, indicates he was born 20 Dec 1744 and died 7 Nov 1814, aged 69.11.13. The gravestone of his wife, Elizabeth, indicates she died 30 Oct 1813, aged 72.9.9 and indicates that she was born ca. 1741.

Additional Herbert/ Covenhoven Connections

*Continued on page 4*

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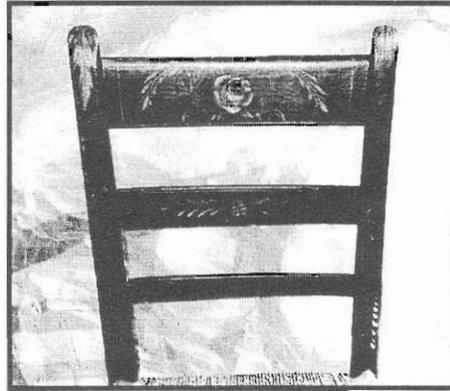
# Herbert Family Chairs , continued from page 3

Another search of the Middlesex Co. marriages records shows a marriage of a William Herbert and Ellener Covenhoven on 31 Jan 1801.

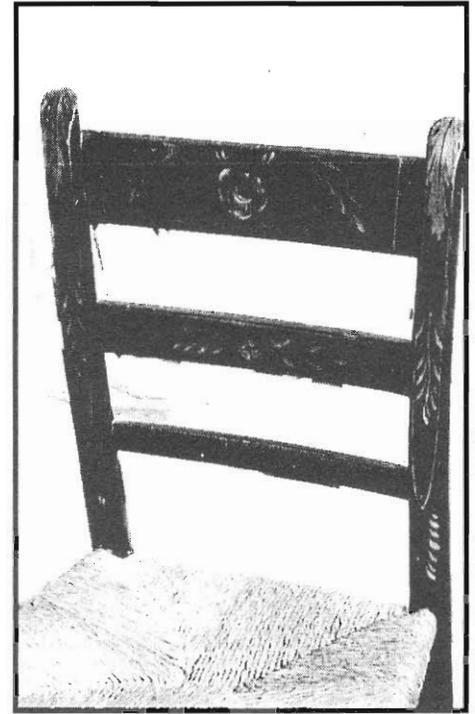
A Benjamin Covenhoven of South Amboy, Middlesex Co., died intestate, and on 14 Jan 1802, a William Herbert was appointed Administrator of the estate, with fellow bondsmen, Benjamin Brown and William Taon; all of said Co. The estate's Inventory of \$542.78, was made by a John Herbert and William Hillyer, on 12 Jan 1802. {NJ Wills-40:18, file 9910L.} I also found that John Covenhoven, of Middlesex Co., son of the above Benjamin Covenhoven, of said Co., dec'd, being upwards of 14 years, by his petition, makes choice of William Herbert, as his Guardian, on 28 Dec 1802, with fellow bondsmen, John Herbert; both of said Co {NJ Wills-40:229; File 9913 L}.

So, the Herbert's were definitely inter-married with the Covenhoven family.

And, as it turns out, the Benjamin Covenhoven in these two probate documents above was the father of the Ellener Covenhoven, who married William Herbert above in 1801. They later resided in Indiana. It is obvious that more research is needed on these various Herbert families.



*The red rose stencil, was used by Mrs. Dale Grubb's g-grandfather, Joseph G. Herbert, while the grapes stencil, was used by her g-g-grandfather, James Conover Herbert.*



*Some of the "found" Herbert chairs have a red rose on the top slat, while another shows lots of grapes.*

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