



# HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2005

## A Special President's Message - - A Tribute to Harold "Skip" Cox

By now I'm sure you've all heard about the death of Skip Cox. I cannot begin to say what a loss this is for the Society, the Hightstown area, and of course his family. Rather than try, I'm going to quote something Julie Ely, our Museum Chair, wrote to me about him shortly after he passed away:

"Dr. Harold Cox allowed me to call him "Skip." This meant a lot to me, since I knew that he was a prior mayor of Hightstown and an educator in the East Windsor Regional School system. When we moved back to my hometown, about 8 years ago, Dr. Cox was someone who I met through the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, and he became my teacher. I learned about local history not through rote memorization but through stories. History was always a dry subject to me, something



separate from my life experiences. Skip changed history into a part of my life though the light in his eyes, the excitement in his voice, the animation of his hands and body language. And before I knew it, I was caught up in a zest of finding out about people, not just things or events. It is the people in this town that make history every day of every hour. It is the every day of living that gives us the memories of yesteryear. As a member of the society and Museum Chairperson I am now touched with a sense of personal attachments to our people and the places they have been and the lives they led and are leading now.

There was a day, not so long ago, when Dr. Cox spoke about the history of ETRA Park to a group of school children at the Melvin H. Kreps School. As I sat there, a wonderful thing happened. There was an intimate exchange between student and teacher, the children laughed and smiled as this kindly man related not facts but stories about people at ETRA Park. The park grew from a piece of land into a summer place for people to escape the heat and relax from hard work, a place of children playing and

food being cooked and small bungalows inhabited by everyday people. This related to the students in an intimate way. They could understand stories, stories that came alive with a smile and a wink that was Dr. Cox.

After the talk, I asked Skip what his doctorate was in, and his response talked about education. He spoke about the schools and the students. The certificate had a place of pride but I got the feeling that education and students were the key aspect of the conversation. The humble roll of his voice, the laugh and jokes echo in my memory. After speaking with others about Skip, I found out that he did so many things I knew nothing about. I now know he was a prior Mayor of Hightstown. I know he volunteered for many organizations.

So, how do you sum up a lifetime of commitment and pride in family and town, to hard work and passion? I don't know. I am clueless on how to conclude this eulogy. Perhaps, because in my mind, Skip will always be a part of this town, its history and its people."

Skip's funeral, held at the First Baptist Church, was moving, often funny (full of lots of stories about him) and very well attended. In lieu of flowers, his family asked that friends of Skip send a donation to the Society. The response has been overwhelming, and a fund has been established in his name. At the first meeting in September, we will begin discussing how to use this money to honor his memory.

*continued on page 2*

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**SEPTEMBER**

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

**OCTOBER**

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

11 Meadow Lakes, 2:00 p.m., Mae Silver will present a program on "Thomas Paine," who lived in Bordentown at one time.

**President's Message**, *continued from page 1*

Now Skip would never have allowed me to talk only of him. He would have wanted me to tell you about what is ahead for the Society. And so I shall.

On October 27th at 7:30 at Meadow Lakes, Mae Silver will speak

to the Society on Thomas Paine. The author of *Common Sense* lived in nearby Bordentown for many years. She will talk about his life there and show slides of places connected with this great propagandist for the American Revolution.

**My Life's Experiences Knowing Skip**

*by Richard S. Hutchinson*

Although, he had a Doctorate, he was always "Skip" and I was always "Hutch." My first encounters with Skip were back in the 1950s, when I was about ten years old and he was about ten years older than I. However, the encounters at that time were one-sided; they were my encounters with him.

Skip and I lived within 100 feet of each other for awhile on adjacent properties. And, around both of us were several other guys that I played with. Most of the activities of my friends revolved around "cowboys & Indians" or "Army." In order to be good in either one, you needed to have the ability to sneak up on your target and we practiced day and early evening playing these games. Sometime during the evening hours in the summer, Skip became our "target" when we saw there was a party at his house. So, that signaled to us to begin our "surveillance" of his back yard to watch the party. A sliding door led out into the back yard and there was a stone fireplace at the rear of the yard, which was surrounded by large pine trees, with their branches reaching the ground. They provided perfect cover as you laid on your stomach under the branches. Every once in awhile, a young man and a young lady would go out into the backyard by the fireplace. H-m-m-m, wonder who that could have been???

As I went through Hightstown High School, I never really had contact with Skip. But, after graduation and US

Navy, I returned to Hightstown and Skip was making a name for himself in town. It wasn't until mid-1980s that Skip and I ran into each other when we both sat down at the high school in an adult evening class for a beginner's course on computers. Anyone knowing Skip, can only imagine what that course was like with him sitting in the class. Several times I became the "teacher" and he became the "student." At that point in his life, Skip and computers didn't seem to mix too well but we learned something, had fun doing it and got to know each other.

From that point on, we became more familiar with each other through our participation as members in the Hightstown - East Windsor Historical Society. Although I was a member in the mid-1970s, my job took precedence over my activities and I dropped out of the Society. I came back to the Society in the late 1980s and began attending the Society's business meetings. Upon retirement in 1994, I became more aware of the Society's needs, and as a result I began to become more active in the Society. It was through this involvement with the Society that old relationships with many people were rekindled. There was Dr. Edgar Thomas, Jr., my music teacher, who took over the Society as president and brought together many people, male and female, to move the Society forward. There was my 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin, twice removed, "Cappy" Stults, a long time active member; my Morrison

*continued on page 3*

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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## Experiences with Skip , continued from page 2

Avenue neighbor, Frank Brennan and his wife; and my computer buddy, Skip and his wife. It was during this period that Miss Josephine Dawes made an offer to the Society that was rejected. She believed Dr. Thomas was the cause of the rejected offer, and in a fit of pique, referred to him as "that Bandmaster." Of course, Skip heard about it, and if you know Skip, from that point on Dr. Thomas has always been referred to as the "Bandmaster."

It was through the Society that I began learning of the early history and make-up of the Hightstown & East Windsor Township area, and its people, and Skip was "along for the ride." It was during this period that he and I truly became friends. It was Dr. Thomas and Skip, planning together behind my back, who took me to a house one night and told me to wait in another room alone. After a period of time, I was ushered into a room of men from the community and told by Skip, who was an officer of the group, that I had been voted into an old "secret society" within the area.

When Skip took over as president of the Society, if I mentioned or suggested anything, he was the first to say, "put it together, let's do it." When I told him that the cellar was really a mess and items stored there were being damaged, he said let's clean it up and we spent a hot summer afternoon doing so. In 1997, when I told him that I was planning to sell our home and move to Delaware, he tried several times to persuade me to stay in town. His first concern was for the Society. I assured him that I could continue everything other than caring for the Library and the Society's holdings. He asked for my advice and by this time, we knew each other well enough to seek each other's advice and either take it or reject it. After purchasing a home, but before moving to Delaware, Skip drove down with me to see the new house, to see what drew me to the area and to know a little of the history of the area. When he passed the president's baton on to his son, he called and asked me to give the same support given him, to his son. He was truly concerned for the well being of the Society because he believed

that the Society was a very important part of the town and the area.

Over my past 8 years in Delaware, Skip and I have continuously stayed in contact with each other, either by phone, email, or my frequent visits back to Hightstown friends, and ALL conversations, other than "how you doing?," dealt with the Society or the history of the Hightstown area. He would answer my questions and I would answer his questions. When I told him that I had found a lost branch of the Wm & Ann Hutchinson family from East Windsor Township in Georgia, who had left the Hightstown area in the 1780s, he was eager to learn more. I told him of my visit to their Georgia reunion and meeting with one, Will "Buster" Hutchinson. Skip asked for "Buster's" address and on a trip attempted to visit him, but he wasn't home. Skip was always joking with me about my becoming a Southerner. In order to "get back" at him, which wasn't easy, I found a great "blue grass" album, made a tape of a song or two, and sent it to him. I told him that "Buster" had

*Continued on page 4*

### Join today, become a member!

Individual Membership  
\$20.00

Family Membership  
\$25.00

Booster/Patron  
Membership  
\$40.00

Sustaining Membership  
\$50.00

Life (individual) Membership  
\$200.00

Life (married) Membership  
\$275.00

### Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- Individual       Family       Booster/Patron  
 Sustaining       Life (individual)       Life (married)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Experiences with Skip , continued from page 3

felt bad about missing his visit but had gotten his band together and taped a few songs for me to give to him. I told him that "Buster" was the one playing the mandolin. After sending the tape, I never heard a word from Skip about it! Well, I found out that Skip thought so-o-o much of the tape that he gave it to the Society to be accessioned into the Society's holdings. [By the way Fran, I think it is still there.]

In May of this year, "Buster" Hutchinson, from Tifton, Georgia, came north to visit with me and to make a trip to New Jersey in order to see his ancestor's homestead and their grave-stones, which are located in the family's private burial plot in a field just off of Cedarville Road in East Windsor Township. So, I called Skip to ask a favor. I told "Buster" about the tape that I had sent to Skip and reminded him that he might be asked about his "mandolin"

playing ability. Truth is, "Buster" said he can't play a musical note on anything. We drove to Hightstown and I gave "Buster" a tour of the area and later in the day, we met Skip at the Ely House. Skip took "Buster" on a complete tour of the facility, stopping in every room, pulling out and pointing out various items, telling "Buster" about everything he showed him and telling him how great Hightstown and the East Windsor Township area was. When "Buster" left Ely House, his arms were full of various "freebies," as Skip would say, "Here take one of these" and then "Here, take this," as items were placed in his hands. Skip also sold him everything that was for sale in the building! As we left, I had to take some things from "Buster's" hands so that he wouldn't drop them. Skip never asked "Buster" about his band or his mandolin playing! So, I figure that he once again had the last laugh!

This was typical Skip. Always eager to tell you what he had found for the Society, or to show it to you, or to tell you about it, and how he found it and then he would always ask you what you thought about it, and then always end up saying, "I think that's pretty good, don't you?" And, the item always dealt with the history of the Hightstown area or its people. He was a true ambassador for the area. I truly considered him a friend and I will miss him, as will the Society, and all his friends.

With Skip's passing, his family asked that in lieu of flowers, a donation be made to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society. It is obvious that many other people also knew Skip and have fond memories of him, because as of this date, the Society has received over \$5,800 in his memory.

Hightstown-East Windsor  
Historical Society  
164 North Main Street  
Hightstown, New Jersey 08520

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