



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY - JUNE 2007

Turmoil In Hightstown, or, the Origins of a Fire Department

THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF THE STORY PRINTED IN THE JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2007 ISSUE

The *Hightstown Gazette* reported the following on 8 March 1866 – A few weeks since we endeavored to awaken an interest here in the organization 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 and 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. 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 prepared 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.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY

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

JUNE

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

No further information available at the time this issue was printed.

Moth Problem at Ely House

With horse hair couches, chairs with horse hair upstairs, and wool everywhere the upstairs, including rugs, we are infested. When you look underneath the carpet or into the floor boards, you can see the bugs everywhere. We never knew enough to look under the carpets even though we saw damage on the edges of them. Currently, there are moths flying everywhere upstairs. The adult flying moths are a problem but the moth larvae and the little webs are a greater concern. The Society was not aware of the problem until now. So, something needs to be done very soon with so many items in the house that

moths like to eat. Several experts have been contacted and they have examined the problem. They have all indicated that they have never seen such a moth infestation and have estimated that it has been ongoing

for at least 10 years. The experts all lean toward immediate eradication rather than treating and controlling the problem until eradicated.

However, that means "tenting" Ely House and fumigating for several days at an estimated cost of between \$10,000 & \$20,000! As of this moment, no decision has been made as the Society is investigating several ways to handle the problem.



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Public Meeting - A Fire Engine To Be Purchased

A meeting of the citizens of Hightstown was held Tuesday evening, at Hughes' Hotel. Mayor Seaman [Capt. Gilbert Seaman - Ed.] was called to the Chair, and Charles L. Robbins appointed Secretary. R.A. Outcalt [Richard A. Outcalt, Harness Maker - Ed.] moved that money be raised by taxation, at the next borough election, to purchase a fire engine. On Motion, a committee of five was appointed to ascertain how much a fire engine suited to the wants of this borough would cost, and were instructed to report at the caucus meeting to nominate borough officers, to be held in April. Committee - A.J. Smith [Andrew Jackson Smith - Ed.], J.C. Norris [James C. Norris - County Collector - Ed.] Charles Keeler [town merchant - Ed.], E. R. Cole [Ezbon R. Cole, undertaker - Ed.], S. Holcombe.

Mr. E.C. Taylor [Edward Crowel Taylor, printer - Ed.] moved that a committee of five be appointed to consult with the persons who have sustained losses in the late fire, to ascertain the amount of said losses and to represent the same to the railroad company. The following committee were appointed: E.C. Taylor, John C. Ward, Joseph H. Jameson, R.M. Job [Rescarrick Moore Job - Ed.], and M.F. Mount [Morgan F. Mount, retired merchant - Ed.]; and on motion the mayor of the Borough was added to the committee. It was moved that a committee of three be appointed to draft resolutions thanking the firemen of Bordentown and Trenton for the aid rendered by them on the occasion of the fire. Carried. The committee appointed were Samuel Holcombe, Charles Keeler and C.I. Coward [Clayton I. Coward, railroad agent - Ed.].

It was ordered that the Mayor issue a proclamation thanking in a suitable manner all who so nobly assisted in staying the ravages of the flames.

Hightstown Gazette - 6 April 1866 - "The borough election on Monday passed off — as usual of late years — very quietly, a little more than half the voters making their appearance at the ballot-box. ... \$2,500 was voted for the purchase of a fire engine and hose, and the erection of an engine house, but met with some opposition. A bucket and 'ladder' company would be so much cheaper, it was argued. We hope to be able to announce at no distant day that our town possesses not only one good engine, but a pair of them."

Hightstown Gazette - 24 May 1866 - "The New Fire Engine — Fire At Cranbury — The Committee appointed by Common Council to purchase a fire engine for this borough, bought in the city of Newark a hand engine, hose carriage and 500 feet of hose for \$1,250. — The apparatus arrived on Saturday night and was safely housed, awaiting a trial of its merits. On Monday afternoon it was brought out and prepared for action. — Various experiments were tried, but nothing very satisfactory elicited. Instead of a fair trial of the engine — which those of the committee present, Messrs. Holcombe, Smith and Keeler, endeavored to bring about — we had during the greater part of the time, a disgraceful exhibition of rowdiness and ruffianly behavior. Every crowd of men and boys was disposed of by a stream of water from the hose-pipe. Even travelers passing through our streets in carriages were thus assaulted, and ladies and children were obliged to seek shelter, subjected to annoying detention, and in some cases did not escape a drenching. Another difficulty experienced was that of finding a sufficient number of persons to man the engine as at the late fire in our borough, the crowd was great but the laborers few — so that altogether the capacity and utility of the engine were undetermined.

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HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971

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

Editor, Richard S. Hutchinson

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In the evening, unhappily, a more serious occasion and fairer opportunity for trial occurred. About 9 o'clock a man came riding through the streets, making various startling exclamations, the purport of which was that a fire was raging in Cranbury, and that the whole village was in danger of destruction. A rush was made for the engine, and an enthusiastic crowd dragged it at a round pace to the brow of Bergen's hill, where teams overtook them and took it in charge. Arriving in Cranbury, it was found that two barns had been consumed, and that another, a very large two-story oak-framed building, was in process of destruction, while the various dwellings and other buildings in the vicinity were in great danger from the flying sparks and falling coals, and still greater from the rapidly approaching fall of the heavy frame. The engine was promptly manned, and a powerful volume of water continuously thrown for nearly an hour, extinguishing the burning frame and allaying all danger from the heaps of burning ruins.

During the time of the fire there was scarcely a breeze of wind stirring, while

but an hour or so before a succession of most frantic gusts prevailed, which, had they continued, would have caused a most alarming spread of the conflagration, the seat of which was in the very heart of the town.

The three barns destroyed belonged to the Hotel property of Stafford B. Sutton, which loss was about \$2,000 — insured for \$1,000. One of these barns was occupied by Chas. W. Christopher, who succeeded in saving horses, stages, etc, but lost his stock of hay and feed. Joseph Hutchinson occupied another, and lost a horse, carriage, and harness, valued at about \$400.00. The origin of the fire is unknown.

The fire engine worked admirably at Cranbury, as many citizens of both towns will testify. There was no lack of willing hands, and the test of its merits was thorough and completely satisfactory. We congratulate our citizens on having at last secured a safeguard against the destruction of the town by fire."

HG - 22 November 1866 - On November 9th, during a Common Council meeting, the following took place: "Committee on lot for an engine house reported progress. By Councilman Pearce- Resolved that a committee of four be appointed to procure plans for a building to be used for an Engine-house and Lockup. Adopted, and Messrs. Pearce, Mount, Applegate and Mayor Shangle were appointed such a committee."

HG - 14 February 1867 - At a meeting of Council on 11 February 1867, they discussed the building for the housing of the engine, etc. Opposition still was being raised regarding the fire engine and house. However, a chimney fire on Sunday in a full February wind, made a big impression on everyone in the meeting. The fire itself could have, but did not, cause heavy damage in the town.

"A meeting of the citizens of the Borough was held this evening at Dawe's Hall, to take into consideration the propriety of building the Engine House two stories high, instead of one. The meeting was organized by calling

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\$25.00

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Membership
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\$200.00

Life (married) Membership
\$275.00

Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- Individual Family Booster/Patron
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Name: _____

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

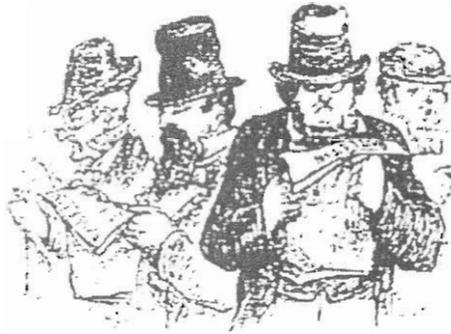
Membership Committee
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

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J.E. Rue, Esq., to the chair, and appointing William G. Pearce, Secretary. A statement was made by T.C. Pearce that there had been \$2500 raised for the purchase of an engine, and the erection of a building; that the money had been expended, or was about to be, in the completion of the 1st story of the engine house; that the addition of another story would cost about \$500 more. A motion was made by J.C. Norris that the Common Council be empowered to add the 2nd story to the engine house, and proceed at once with the work. The motion was thoroughly discussed by those present. Mayor Shangle thought that as a matter of economy the building should not be left in its present state; by adding another story a room suitable for a Council chamber, and for holding trials, and meetings of the citizens of the borough, would be provided, and the expense of room rent saved. He also stated that a lock-up had been put up in the rear end

of the 1st story. After a full expression had been given, the motion was carried almost unanimously...Mr. E.T.R. Applegate stated that the probable amount needed for this purpose [bringing cisterns nearer to some residents] and the completion of the engine house, would be about \$800.00. The meeting adjourned."

*** To be continued ***



Film "Losing Ground" To Be Shown

The West Windsor Historical Society will be showing the 85 minute film, "Losing Ground," on May 7th, at 7:30PM, at the Schenck House, 50 Southfield Road, West Windsor Twp., NJ. The film, which was featured in the New Jersey Section of the "New York Times," is about the loss of farmland in New Jersey. It was produced by Michael Levine, a graduate of the West Windsor Township school system,

Editor - It is my understanding that Dr. Edgar C. Thomas, Jr., who is recuperating from heart surgery, is presently residing on a temporary basis with his daughter, Beth Jackson, at 201 Stockton Street, Hightstown, NJ.



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