



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2008

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

by Richard S. Hutchinson

THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF THE STORY PRINTED IN THE NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2007 ISSUE

The Americus, the First Fire Company in Hightstown's History Goes Out Of Existence

HG - 13 Nov 1890 - "On motion the Council ordered that the Old Americus Hand Engine Company be immediately disbanded and the Clerk notify the foreman of the company to turn over his key of the Engine House to the Common Council. The motion was carried unanimously."

HG - 4 Dec 1890 - "After all bills had been passed, the Mayor called the Clerk for a report in regard to the old Fire Company, who had been ordered to hand over the key of the engine house to Council. The Clerk said that he informed the Foreman of the old Com-

pany of the request of the Council and the Foreman had said, 'I'd like to see you get it.' The Clerk then explained that it was Council, not he, that wanted the key, to which the Foreman had replied, 'I'd like to see them get it.' The Old Company still holds the key. This report did not seem to please the Council very much...[It was moved that a new lock be put on the old engine house and that the key be given to the Steam Fire Company]..."

HG - 9 Feb 1893 - During the recent Council meeting, Mayor Anderson proposed to separate the Hook and Ladder from the Fire Company and put it under a different organization and also that the fire company be limited to 30 members rather than 45. The idea seemed to be well received but no action was taken. Councilman Cunningham said he would bring the matter up at the next meeting of the Fire Company.

HG - 2 March 1893 - At the meeting of the Fire Company on Friday night, a hook and ladder company was organized with Fred Pullen as chief.

HG - 14 September 1893 - "The most destructive fire that Hightstown has known for years broke out on Monday morning, and for a time threatened to destroy much valuable property. As it was, two stores and three other buildings were burned. At about 6:40 o'clock, Frank Reamer, a clerk in the

establishment, discovered smoke issuing from the rear of A.D. Pembrook's large dry goods and grocery store on Main street. The alarm was immediately given and in a few minutes the Fire Company were on hand with the steamer. From that time on for two hours it was grim battle between the boys and the flames ... Pembrook's store was doomed from the start, and the flames quickly spread to Fisk & Schlottman's grocery store and H.G. Rue's drug store on the other side. The stove store was separated from Pembrook's by only a foot of space and on the other hand only by a narrow alley was between Pembrook's and Rue's. If the drug store went it meant a clean sweep of all the stores to Morrison street, [now Rogers Avenue - Ed.] and for a long while it looked almost useless to attempt to check the conflagration on the south. Bordentown was telegraphed for aid ... Pembrook's store was burned to the ground, the upper two stories of Fisk & Schlottman's store were in ruins, and two wagon houses and a small store-house in the rear were destroyed ..."

HG - 30 Aug 1894 - A fire at the corner of Morrison and Forman streets, on Saturday night, destroyed Valentine Schenplein's residence and bakery and all the outbuildings of Dr. A.C. Doyle's Central Hotel...flames were bursting from the bake-shop and from the stables adjoining...In the next building to the shop William Drew, the hostler, was

Continued on page 2



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY

- 7 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 13 Society Banquet, 1:00 p.m. Dr. David Martin, Guest Speaker

FEBRUARY

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

Fire Department , continued from page 1

sleeping...All of the horses and other live stock belonging to Dr. Doyle were led out safely....As soon as the alarm was given the fire engine was taken out and placed over Grape run, on Stockton street, where a temporary dam was built...Mrs. E.E. Grover's residence, on Forman street, was only a few feet from the fire, the Hotel itself was almost in the fire, Charles F. Hunt's home was only the width of Forman street away and Rogers & Son's big furniture-store, on Morrison street, was in almost equal danger....All the buildings that caught fire were burned to the ground. They include Mr. Schenplein's shop and residence, and outbuildings, and the barn, stable, two wagon houses and store-house connected with the hotel...

HG - 15 July 1897 - "Councilman Fryer, who was appointed by Council as a committee to sell the old Americus hand engine, disposed of it last week to Senator James A. Bradley, of Asbury Park, for \$50. Last night the machine was taken to the Park by Enos Baremore and Charles Terry. It will be placed on the beach to be gazed at by the relic-hunters and played with by the children.

There is something pathetic about the sale of the old hand-engine. To most of us it is simply a useless old piece of machinery, but there are many men in Hightstown to whom it has meant a great deal. They will remember when it and they were young and when the engine was a thing to be admired and revered instead of a curiosity and a subject for a jest. Many a time, when Hightstown was smaller than it is now, it stood between homes and destruction and it has saved many dollars worth of property from the flames. These older men will tell you of the battles they have fought with the Americus, when they stood together in the terrific heat or battled knee deep in snow, with the brook and ponds covered with ice and the water freezing on them as they worked. We have risen to fire plugs and a steamer now, but maybe some of us would not feel worse to see the big Button, with its shining dome, towed out of town than to witness the passing way of

an old friend. Hereafter the old engine that was once looked upon as a champion and protector will only create a smile and serve as a plaything for the children who cover it with sand. It is the way of the world..."

4 July 1912 - At Council meeting, a letter to Fred A. Doyle, president of the Fire Company, was read, from the Combination Ladder Co., Providence, R.I., stating that they were in the position to offer for \$430, on easy payment, a hose wagon which had just been traded in and was as good as new. It was 9 feet long, fitted with fire lantern holders, axes, ropes, 2 ladders, for wall and roof; a gong, 2 three gallon hand extinguishers, etc. The weight of the entire wagon and apparatus is 1,300 lbs and may be drawn by hand or horses. Being the present apparatus was inadequate and not in good condition, this offer was accepted and the borough will purchase the wagon.

22 August 1912 - After the above wagon was brought to town, it was outfitted with new hose, etc. Then in this issue of the paper, Charles C. Blauvelt, Mayor, wrote a letter to Gazette. In the letter, he noted that Council had passed an ordinance to purchase the "Voorhees & Rogers building" for municipal purposes, at a cost of \$4,800. However, by a protest of citizens, the purchase was not made. Blauvelt writes as custodian of the town's fire apparatus ... "The building in which our fire apparatus must be kept is so damp that rust and mold gather upon everything confined in the room in a very short time. This is destructive to our engine and hose, and injurious to all appliances that should always be ready to meet the emergency upon the shortest notice....the room is so crowded with our fire apparatus that it will be impossible to keep a fire [for heat - Ed] there, without causing great injury to wagons and engine....We have just had our engine put in splendid condition, the long needed hose wagon has been bought, five hundred feet of new hose were bought last year, and five hundred more feet are

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

Officers for 2007-2008

Nancy Laudenberger (609-443-6536) . President
Christian Kirkpatrick Vice-President
Charles Stults, III Recording Secretary
..... Corresponding Secretary
Robert Syzchowski Treasurer

Committee Chairs

Robert Syzchowski Finance
(609-448-9490)
Warren Olsen Grounds
(609-448-8388)
Fran Cook Library
(609-448-1864)
Shirley Olsen Membership
(609-448-8388)
Julie Ely Museum
(609-448-3155)
Christian Kirkpatrick Programs
(609-443-3138)
Nancy Laudenberger Programs
(609-443-6536)
Warren Olsen Property
(609-448-8388)
Fran Cook Publications
(609-448-1864)
Shirley Olsen Publicity
(609-448-8388)

Building Committee

Christian Kirkpatrick
Suzann Fallon
Shirley Olsen
Warren Olsen
Robert Syzchowski

Society Trustees

2007 Frank Brennan, Jr.
2008 Charles "Cappy" Stults
Christian Kirkpatrick
2009 Robin Smith
Craig Cox
Nancy Laudenberger

Typeset by Cori Hutchinson Quinlan
 *Quinlan Processing 609-888-4028*



Allen & Stults Company * Harold Applegate * Jeff & Catherine Tolmie Bond & Julie, Kyle & Vanessa * Peggy & Frank Brennan * Ibby & Bob Carson * Scott Caster * Kay Christie * Barry & Delores Clark * David & Suzanne Schafer-Coates, Henry, Malcolm & Charlie * Fran Cook * Cox's Crew & Snuggles too * Jane Cox * Bob, Marlene & Jared Craig * In Memory of William & Estelle Craig * Charles & Ruth Davison * Jim, Judy, Elizabeth, Sara & Andrew DiCecco * Louise & Nick Di Dia * George & Peg Dubell * Don & Dolly Eldridge * Alma Eriksen * Don & Suzann Fallon * Betty Lou Field - Greetings from Tampa, FLA * Janet & Warren Field * Dave & Marie Gerland * William B. Gilmore & Family * Gary & Dale Grubb * David Goldstein * Shirley Hancock * Bill & Lynda Harrington * Clark & Suzanne Hutchinson & Family * Bill & Sandy Kendall * Richard & Lorraine Kerr * Howard Klank * Mary Kramarenko * Joel & Judith Larsen * John & Nancy Laudenberger * Nichole & Pavel L'vov * David & Peter Martin * Mary Mastoris * James N. Mastoris * Michael, Sandy, Nicholas & Anthony Mastoris * Sharon P. Matson * Gertrude May * David & Adrienne Moore * Jim & Louise Mount * Christian Kirkpatrick & Bob Murdich * Carole Nelson * Gene & Suzy O'Connor * Warren & Shirley Olsen * John & Gloria Orr * Bob & Kathy Patten * Eric & Judy Perrine * Alex & Margaret Perritt * Ruth, Jody & Bob Pierce * Clifford R. Pullen * Marion Rock * Faith & Gene Sarafin * Cathy & Dick Simmons * Jay & Robin Smith - Sarah, Emily, Rebecca & Jack * Bob Sprout * John & Carol Sprout * Charles S. Stults, Jr. * Cappy & Chris Stults * Robert & Corinne Szychowski * Maribelle Taylor * Dr. Edgar & The Rev. Mrs. Clara Thomas * Woody & Lynne Wallace * Judy & Torry Watkins * Bob & Sherry Whitman



*Happy
Holidays
2007*

Fire Department , continued from page 2

needed now....The present condition of the Council Chamber is nothing short of a disgrace to any town, and I doubt if a similar one can be found elsewhere. The "lock up" is not fit to put any man in for any length of time. The bed and bedding is covered with mold one week after it is renewed, and, in the winter, water and ice are upon the floor from two to four inches deep. To remedy these deplorable conditions will cost hundreds of dollars, and we have nothing after the money is expended....The "Voorhees & Rogers building," when repaired, and put in such shape as will be a credit to the town for years to come, will not call for an expenditure of more than six thousand dollars, above the receipt of the sale of the present town hall....To buy a lot, centrally located, and build thereon a suitable municipal building, would cost from ten thousand to twenty thousand dollars. The proposed purchase and repairs can be accomplished without bringing any burden upon anyone. One fire, with injured apparatus, might cost much more. The town needs and must have a different town hall and fire house. [Signed - C.C. Blauvelt, Mayor.]

6 August 1914 - The old bell tower on the fire engine house was torn down on Tuesday. The tower had been in position for about 40 years, although it had since that time been enlarged and improved.

20 August 1914 - The Borough building on Stockton Street is undergoing further improvements. The old stairway to the Council room has been torn out, thus making the room beneath, used for storing the fire apparatus, considerably larger. The stairway next to the former one, in the portion of the building recently purchased by the Borough, is now used to reach the Council room, a door having been cut through this room to the hall.

27 August 1914 - The new front doors have been placed in the fire engine house. They are larger than the ones formerly used, and conveniently arranged. The new bell tower has also been placed in position on the building.

5 August 1915 - The Hartford Steam Boiler and Inspection Company of New York has condemned the fire engine of the Borough. This engine has been in use for the past twenty-eight years.

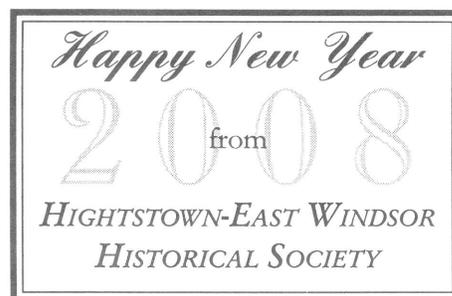
In 1923, the new fire company was incorporated under the name "Hightstown Engine Company, No. 1." For many years, and perhaps still to this day, the company's business meetings are hammered to order with a gavel that was presented to the Company in 1916, by A. M. Norton, who made the gavel from one of the pump handles from the old "Americus" engine.

And, in 1927, Hightstown's present day Fire Department Building or Engine House on N. Main Street, had its cornerstone laid on Monday 17 Oct 1927, on the old site of the Lantz Hotel that had been a landmark in Hightstown since 1850. The cornerstone for the building was filled with documents with the names of the members of the Americus Hand

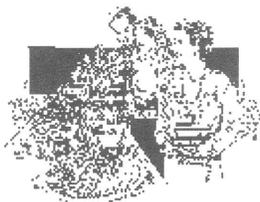
Engine Company, the reorganized Americus Company, and the Hightstown Steam Engine Company, also the names of the various committee members involved in the new structure, coins, watch fobs, and many other items. But, most significant, placed into the box in the cornerstone was that old key to that old fire lock.

And, with this last bit of information, so ends this early history dealing with the formation of the first fire company in Hightstown and the later formation of what is today's Hightstown Fire Department.

(concluded)



ANNUAL BANQUET



Longstreet Library

*Peddie Campus (next to Kalamathia House)
Hightstown, NJ*

Sunday, January 13, 2008 ♦ 1:00 p.m.

\$25.00 per person

Catered Special Buffet

Speaker

Dr. David G. Martin will be speaking on his new book - "Tossed Around" - the World War II Writings of Pfc. George Foster Dennis

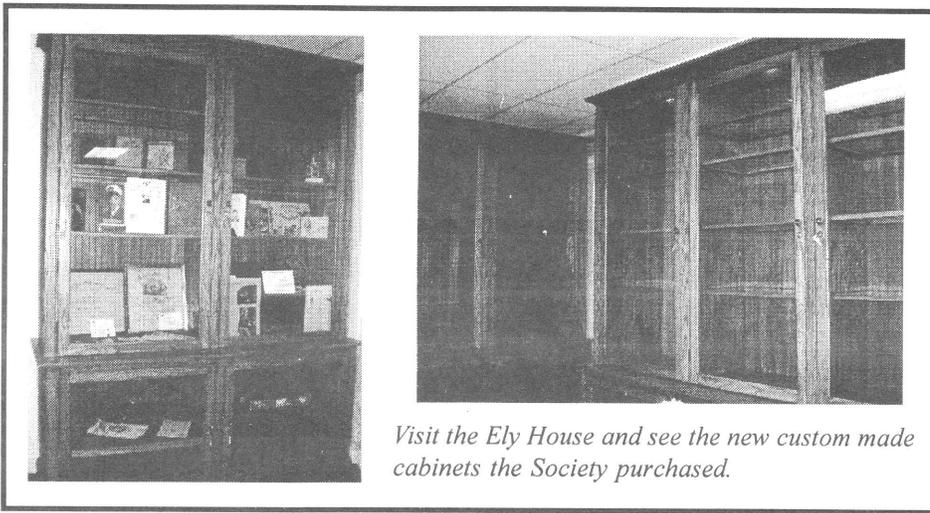
*Send reservations with check payable to: "H.E.W. Historical Society" to:
Shirley Olsen, 6 Farr Avenue, Hightstown, NJ 08520 (609-448-8388)*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____



Visit the Ely House and see the new custom made cabinets the Society purchased.

REPRINTS FROM THE PAST

Hightstown Gazette - 2 March 1893 - "A marriage took place at New Diggings, Wis., the other day at which singular physical characteristics were noted - The bridegroom stood six feet and two inches, the bride three feet two and one-half inches. The officiating clergyman had but one leg. The witnesses were a man without arms who signed the marriage contract with a pen between his teeth, and a woman who weighed three hundred and fifty pounds, and a man seven feet six inches tall. The bride was fifty years old and her grandmother, aged ninety-eight, attended the wedding."

The Ragbag

My mother kept a ragbag hanging on the closet door;
 If you chanced to cut your finger, as lads used to do of yore,
 It was there the softest linen could be found to make a band
 Around the wounded member, or a sling to hold the hand.
 A humble bag of gingham, but it served its purpose there
 In the daily household incidents of trouble and care.
 It held the scraps and snippings, colored calico and all -
 O such a place of treasure when a lass would dress a doll!
 What! Everybody's mother had a ragbag, did you say,
 In that sweet, olden region of the golden yesterday?
 Well, then you'll join the chorus, and we'll sing to days of yore
 And to mother's gingham ragbag hanging on the closet door!

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

FIRST CLASS
 POSTAGE
PAID
 Permit No. 21
 Hightstown
 NJ 08520