



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1992

KATHRYN DENNIS TO SPEAK AT GENERAL MEETING

The Society is pleased to welcome Kathryn Dennis, long time publisher of the "Hightstown Gazette," as the speaker at the November 18th general meeting. The "Gazette," which is Hightstown-East Windsor's oldest newspaper in continuous publication, has been printed by the Dennis family since 1912. Ms. Dennis will relate how her father, George P. Dennis, came to Hightstown eighty years ago and took over the "Gazette," which was established in 1849. She will also tell of the different locations at which the paper has been printed, will share her recollections of Hightstown-East Windsor, and relate the most interesting stories she has covered. Come out with the family and learn more about the "Gazette's" important role in the history of Hightstown-East Windsor.

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"THE APPLGATE CHILDREN" This painting was done by Alessandro E. Mario about 1860. The house is the Abijah Applegate house. The child on the left is Lydia R. Applegate and the child on the right is Williard Applegate. Both the children are from Edward T. R. Applegate's marriage to Amanda R. Reed.

HISTORIC SITES IN HIGHTSTOWN AND EAST WINDSOR

(The Eighth Installment in a Continuing Series)

THE ABIJAH APPLGATE HOUSE (333 ETRA ROAD)

The Abijah Applegate house was built circa 1823 and is a building associated with historic personages important in local history and an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of architecture. Despite some recent replacement of upstairs windows on the front facade, this house remains the finest and least altered Federal-style house in East Windsor Township. Its fine features include an original front porch and Palladian window (both unique in the Township). The facade of the house, essentially as it appears today, was painted about 1860 as a detail of a portrait entitled "The Applegate Children" by Alessandro E. Mario, a New Jersey artist. As the residence of Abijah Applegate, it was the boyhood home of his son Edward T. R.

Applegate, whose initials gave Etra its name. Edward was a prominent businessman, briefly a member of the New Jersey Assembly, Judge of the Mercer County Court of Common Pleas for a decade, and an important figure in late nineteenth-century East Windsor. During Edward's term in the Assembly he sponsored the bill setting off Washington Township from East Windsor Township. Edward was one of the founders and first trustees of Peddie Institute, one of the original stockholders and directors of the First National Bank of Hightstown, and one of the originators and directors of the Hightstown and Perrineville Turnpike Company. This turnpike is present-day Etra Road. This is the only remaining building in the Township associated with Edward's life.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November

- 1 Deadline: Christmas Newsletter
Deadline: Holiday Greeting Card
- 2 Executive Committee (8 PM)
- 18 General Meeting (7:30 PM)

December

- 1 Deadline: Jan.-Feb Newsletter
- 7 Executive Committee (8 PM)
- 13 Christmas Tea (2-5 PM)

THE ABIJAH APPLGATE HOUSE

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Abijah Applegate was born in Monroe Township on 12/17/1799. He was the second son of Asher and Sarah (Higby) Applegate. Asher was a prominent farmer and large landholder in East Windsor Township. He enlisted as a soldier in the War of 1812 and his regiment was stationed at Sandy Hook, but saw no active service. Two of Asher's other children bear mentioning: Delilah Applegate married Dr. Enoch Wilson—one of the earliest doctors in Hightstown-East Windsor and Dr. Henry A. Applegate who studied medicine under Dr. Rush of Philadelphia. On 4/28/1801, Asher purchased 210.97-acres of land lying on the north and south sides of Rocky Brook and Etra Road in the present-day village of Etra from Samuel Minor and Anna, his wife.

Abijah purchased this 210.97-acres of land from his father on 5/5/1823. Probably soon thereafter Abijah had built the present house on this land on the north side of present-day Etra Road. On Christmas eve of that same year he married Sarah T. Hunt. She was born on 10/22/1801, the daughter of Wilson and Mary (Taylor) Hunt who also lived near present-day Etra. Two of Wilson's other children bear mentioning: Thomas Hunt who donated to the Hightstown Baptist Church "its present [1907] church bell" and Wilson G. Hunt who donated to the Hightstown Baptist Church "its present [1907] pipe organ." Abijah was a farmer by occupation and "was a well informed man, a great reader, fond of the Bible and history, popular in his community, and refused offers of public office." Abijah and Sarah had the following children: Mary who was born on 9/29/1824 and died unmarried on 3/14/1872, and Edward T. R. who was born on 6/1/1831. On 6/22/1833, Abijah sold to William Vanhise 0.25-acres of his farm at the southwesterly corner of Etra and Cedarville Roads. On the 1849 map of Mercer County "W. Vanhise Store" appears at that location. On 11/17/1836, Abijah sold to Charles B. Dey 0.16-acres of his farm which adjoined William Vanhise's lot.

Edward T. R. Applegate (1831-1915) began his education at the Cedarville School House. Later he attended the Hightstown Academy, Willis Private School at Hightstown, and the Institute at Flushing, Long Island. He married Amanda F. Reed in 1852. Probably soon thereafter Edward had built a house on that part of his father's farm on the south



Edward T. R. Applegate

side of present-day Etra Road. Amanda was the only daughter of Benjamin Reed and Lydia (Story), his wife. Benjamin Reed was one of Hightstown-East Windsor's most important merchants from 1830 to 1864. Benjamin was elected assessor and constable for East Windsor Township in 1842, and in 1850 he was the superintendent of schools. Benjamin was appointed one of the Township delegates to attend the Democratic State Convention in Trenton on 9/25/1850. Benjamin was one of the founders of the first bank in the area—The Central Bank of New Jersey at Hightstown, chartered in 1851. In 1853, Benjamin served on the first Hightstown Borough Council. Benjamin was an incorporator of the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad in 1864. Edward, soon after his marriage, engaged in peach cultivation and in dealing in livestock with his father-in-law under the firm name of Benjamin Reed & Sons. He also was the cashier at The Central Bank of New Jersey at Hightstown. From 1862 until 1870 he was engaged in the lumber business, first under the firm name of Applegate & Denise, and later under the firm name of Applegate & Dey. In 1866 the manufacturing of sash, doors, and blinds were added to the lumber business. Also during this time he became engaged in cranberry cultivation in Ocean County with his personal friend Joshua C. Norton. The aforementioned "Denise" was Sidney C. Denise who served as a chosen freeholder from East Windsor Township from 1865-1866. In 1870, Edward disposed of his interest in the lumber business to his partner Enoch Dey. Edward was one of the founders and first trustees of Peddie Institute—founded in 1863; one

of the original stockholders and directors of the First National Bank of Hightstown (founded in 1870) and assisted in the consolidation of the Central National Bank of New Jersey at Hightstown (formerly the Central Bank of New Jersey at Hightstown) with it in 1879; director of the Pennsylvania, Slatington, and New England Railroad; and one of the originators and directors of the Hightstown and Perrineville Turnpike Company, for which he obtained a bill from the State Legislature in 1859. The Hightstown and Perrineville Turnpike is present-day Etra Road. The 1875 map of East Windsor Township shows a toll-house for this turnpike located on the north side of Etra Road and to the east of Abijah's home, however the toll-house no longer stands. Edward was elected on the Democratic ticket for two terms (1859-1860) to the New Jersey State Assembly. During his first term he sponsored the bill setting off Washington Township from East Windsor Township. During his second term he was chairman of the Corporation Committee and was selected to serve as speaker of the House pro tem for two weeks. He was nominated for Senator, receiving the full party vote, however, his bid was unsuccessful. Prior to the Civil War, Governor Newell commissioned him to the rank of major in the New Jersey State Militia. In 1877, he was appointed Judge of the Mercer County Court of Common Pleas which he held until 1888. In 1890, a new post office was established at Milford (present-day Etra). However, another town of Milford existed in Hunterdon County. Apparently to get the post office the name was changed to Etra in honor of Edward T. R. Applegate. He was a member of Hightstown Lodge #41-Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. He was the oldest past master (1907) in the lodge and had been a Mason for fifty years. He was made a Royal Arch Mason at Trenton and Knighted at Jersey City. He was a member of the Hightstown Baptist Church for fifty years (1885).

Edward and Amanda (Reed) had the following children: Williard who was born on 10/12/1854 and died on 12/26/1873 at the age of nineteen years; and Lydia R. who was born on 8/14/1856—she married Edward D. Stokes, an editor of the Mount Holly Herald. Amanda died on 1/6/1858. Edward remarried on 5/26/1862, Lavinia Ely, daughter of Thomas Ely and Pamela Ann (Mount), his wife. Lavinia was born on 1/31/1842. They had the following children:

1) Henry R., born on 2/23/1863 and married Isabella Bergen. Henry was a graduate of the Peddie School and was interested in raising fruit and fancy poultry, later in life he ran a feed business. He was instrumental in securing approval to enlarge the boundaries of the Borough of Hightstown which was finally approved in 1915. He served on the East Windsor Township Committee, Hightstown Borough Council, and as Mayor of the Borough of Hightstown.

2) Abijah E., born 9/18/1864 and married Eva Wright. He was an officer of the First National Bank of Hightstown for seventeen years-now retired (1907).

3) Mary H., born 5/28/1866 married Daniel P. Smith. He was the chief commissioner of Freehold.

4) Amanda F., born 6/18/1868 and now deceased (1907).

5) Arabella, born 9/27/1869 and died 12/27/1876 at the age of seven.

6) Sarah T., born 12/25/1871 and married James H. Field. He was a livestock dealer.

7) Eva, born 9/4/1873 and died 6/24/1874.

8) Wilson G. H., born 3/13/1877 married Florence Asher.

9) Edward T. R. Jr., born 2/5/1879 married Mildred Johnes. He graduated from Princeton University in 1902 and Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1906 and was the resident physician at St. Francis Hospital in Trenton.

10) Thomas E., born 1/11/1880. Graduated from Princeton University in 1902. He was a trained engineer and landscape architect who prepared the plans and supervised the construction of Memorial Park in downtown Hightstown. The park was dedicated in 1924.

11) Lavinia Ely, born 8/12/1881 married John V. B. Wicoff. He graduated from Princeton University and was a member of the New Jersey Bar. He practiced law in Trenton.

Abijah's wife, Sarah, died on 4/11/1885. He died seven days later leaving the farm and both houses to Edward and Lavinia and their family until their youngest child reached twenty-one years of age. After that the farm was to be equally divided among them. He named his grandsons, Henry R. and Abijah E., his executors. Henry R. moved into his grandfather's house shortly thereafter. On 12/13/1895, Edward and Lavinia purchased the house at 182 Stockton Street in Hightstown and moved there

shortly thereafter. Henry R. purchased the "William Norton house" at 523 South Main Street on 4/1/1899 and moved there shortly thereafter. On 3/31/1905, Henry R. and Abijah E. sold that part of their grandfather's farm north of Etra Road to their sister Sarah T. Field. On the same day they sold that part of their grandfather's farm south of Etra Road to Anthony A. and Disbrow C. Wilson (it is believed that the house in which Edward T. R. Applegate raised most of his family burned in the 1930's).

William J. Wikoff and Rose Ella, his wife, purchased the part of the farm north of Etra Road (65.47-acres) and the farm house on 3/17/1906. W. Lyle Swett purchased the balance of the farm north of Etra Road (49.44-acres) four days later. James C. Laird and Anna Getrude, his wife, purchased the 65.47-acres and the farm house on 4/1/1918. Isidor Pearlman and Rose, his wife, and Nathan Pearlman purchased the farm house tract on 6/15/1918. Joseph Ruda and Lillian, his wife, purchased the farm house tract on 2/22/1919. Wasyl Wyhnanez and Wasyl Nurko and Mary, his wife, and Philip Bagey purchased the farm house tract on 11/13/1920. Wyhnanez, Nurko, and Bagey emigrated from the Ukraine, lived in New York City, and were brothers-in-law. Wyhnanez purchased the interests of Nurko and Bagey on 3/31/1928. Wyhnanez raised chickens, garden crops, wheat, and rye. He died on 5/5/1969 leaving the farm house tract to his two

daughters Sophie Wyhnanez and Rosalie Van Handel. Wasyl also had a son, Vladimir, who died in 1954.

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KATHRYN DENNIS SPEAKS

The general meeting will be held at Ely House, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown, at 7:30 P.M. on Wednesday, November 18th. Refreshments will be served. For more information, call Dr. David Martin at 448-6355.

CHRISTMAS TEA

This year the Christmas Tea will be held on Sunday, December 13th from 2:00 to 5:00 P.M. The theme for this year will be Nutcrackers. In addition to Ely House being decorated with beautiful holiday finery it will also be filled with nutcrackers! Other memorable highlights will be: homemade cookies, hot spiced cider, candycanes for the children, hostesses in traditional costume, holiday music, a christmas tree with handmade decorations, antique toys, etc. All ages are welcome and especially the children. Please do not miss this unique chance to experience an old fashioned Christmas and see the Ely House at its best!

QUERIES

1) Information is wanted on the life of the prominent nineteenth century circus clown, Dan Rice. A biography of Rice records that Rice's parents were married in Hightstown by a Justice of the Peace in 1821. The mother was Elizabeth Crum, born March 4, 1803, daughter of Richard Crum, a Methodist preacher of Ocean Township, Monmouth County. The father was Daniel McLaren, Jr., New York City grocer, born circa 1795. The story goes that McLaren met Crum at Long Branch, New Jersey. Stories are also told of McLaren's connections with Aaron Burr (law clerk

under Burr, matchmaker between Burr and Madame Jumel in 1830, bought Texas land with Burr in 1830). If you can help please contact: David Carlyon, 632 Garrett Place, Evanston, Illinois 60201.

2) I am an amateur bottle collector and I found one from Conover's Dairy. Would you know what years that company was in business? If you can help please contact: Paul Clark, Box 8551, Red Bank, NJ 07701.

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HOLIDAY GREETING CARD

As strange as it may seem, when you read this newsletter, the holiday season will have drawn ever closer. And with the ever faster pace of time your society has begun to contact you for participation in our annual Holiday Greeting Card. What a wonderful way to send holiday greetings to neighbors and friends! Simply arrange to have your name appear-listed as you would like in our holiday card. We encourage everyone to participate whether you are a member or not. New listings are always welcome! Your early words of good cheer will usher in the holidays on a note of expectancy that will be welcomed by all the members of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

This year the Executive Committee has decided to publish the annual Holiday Greeting Card as part of a special-edition Christmas issue of the newsletter. The Holiday Greeting Card will not appear in the local newspapers. The Holiday Greeting Card is one of the society's major annual fund-raisers, however, the news-

paper publication charges take more than half of its profits. All listings in the Holiday Greeting Card, who are not members, will have the Christmas newsletter mailed to them first-class.

Please tell us exactly how you wish your name(s) to be listed and the exact spelling. We want you to be pleased with your listing on the Holiday Greeting Card. Your contribution will be \$12.00 for an individual and \$15.00 for a family or business. Please mail your check payable to HEWHS to: William W. Craig, 12 Dover Lane, Hightstown, NJ 08520. If you have any questions please call (609) 448-2965. We send our thanks to all of you for your generosity and support - along with all good wishes for happy holidays and peace and prosperity all year long.

NEW PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENT

"The Mercer County Genealogical Quarterly." 20 pages per issue, 8 1/2" x 11", hole punched for a three-ring binder. Published by Faye Hutchinson, P. O. Box 1147, Hightstown, NJ 08520. Yearly subscription: \$15.00.

Congratulations to Mrs. Hutchinson for her ambitious project—the publication of genealogical material on the County of Mercer. Created in 1838 from an area originally in both East and West Jersey, this central county was formed from parts of Burlington, Hunterdon, Middlesex, and Monmouth Counties. The unusual and often frustrating history of the county's boundaries, however, is balanced by the fact that within it is found the State Capital of Trenton, the university town of Princeton, and our very own Hightstown-East Windsor. As a result, residents in this county circulated and intermarried readily, and as a result, residents can often trace their ancestry from southern New Jersey/Philadelphia Quakers as well as Presbyterians, Baptists, and Puritans originating in East Jersey, New York, and New England. The first issue of "Mercer County Genealogical Quarterly" (March 1992) included abstracts from Will Book A, Surrogate's Office Applications for Probate, and Deed Book A. The quarterly is presented in an easy-to-read format, in large type. Congratulations to the author for this worthwhile endeavor, and best wishes for wide circulation and a long run!

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

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Mr. & Mrs. William Craig
12 Dover Lane
Hightstown, NJ 08520