



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY - JUNE, 1993

LOCAL ARTS & CRAFTS ON EXHIBIT AT MAY OPEN HOUSE

The society is pleased to announce that its headquarters, Ely House, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown, will be open to the public from 2 P.M. to 5 P.M. on May 2, featuring local arts and crafts produced by residents of the local area. The public is invited. Admission is free and refreshments will be served. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY

- 2 Open House (2-5 PM)
- 3 Executive Committee (8 PM)
- 4 Long Range Planning Committee (7 PM)
- 11 Freight Station Committee (7:30 PM)
- 15 17th Annual Doll Show & Sale (10 AM-4 PM)
- 17 Annual Meeting (7:30 PM)
- 18 Long Range Planning Committee (7 PM)
- 21 Library Committee (7:30 PM)
- 22 Camden & Amboy Bus Trip (8:30 AM)

JUNE

- 5 7th Annual Town Fest (9 AM-4 PM) Annual Picnic/Open House (3-6 PM)

AUGUST

- 1 Deadline: Sept.-Oct. Newsletter

CEDAR HILL CEMETERY TOPIC OF MAY ANNUAL MEETING

The society's annual meeting will be held at 7:30 P.M. on Monday, May 17, at Ely House, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown. The evening's program will be a history of Hightstown's old Cedar Hill Cemetery, presented by Richard Hutchinson. Dick will discuss the creation of the cemetery in the 1850's, and will explain its layout and its

relationship to the newer section across the road. He will also mention some of the cemetery's significant burials, and will have available a complete listing of the plots and burials that he recently completed compiling. The evening's program, which will include the annual business meeting, will run about a hour. Refreshments will be served. ■

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL DOLL SHOW & SALE

The Society is pleased to announce its 17th Annual Doll Show & Sale on May 15, 1993, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., at the Hightstown Country Club on Monmouth Street. The Country Club will be transformed into a wonderland of dolls and doll related items to fascinate doll lovers, young and old. Dealers are coming from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The dolls being shown are antiques, French and German bisques, reproductions, collectibles, modern, Barbies, and paper. Accessories available will be new and old doll clothes, doll furniture, and collectibles of all kinds. The highlight of the show will be the drawing for "Hillary." She is an all porcelain standing child (approx. 24 inches tall) with blonde hair and blue eyes dressed in a pretty blue and pink dress with bloomers. She is an original "Mary Ellen & Charles Porcelain Doll" and retails for \$170.00. Door

prizes, sandwiches, homemade cakes, and beverages will be available to benefit the continuing work of the Society. Admission is \$3.00, children under 12 is \$1.00

ANNUAL PICNIC / OPEN HOUSE

The society will hold its annual picnic on Saturday, June 5, from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M. on the grounds of the Ely House, weather permitting. The society will supply the hamburgers, hot dogs, and soda. Members and guests are requested to bring a place setting for each person in their party and salad, chips, pretzels, or desert to share. This old fashioned picnic is always a popular event. Come and share the fellowship in the outdoors at our annual end-of-the-year event! The Ely House will be open to the public. ■

Camden & Amboy Railroad Right-of-Way Excursion Trip Saturday, May 22, 1993

To raise funds for the Hightstown freight station restoration project, an escorted bus tour of the former Camden & Amboy Railroad right-of-way will depart from Hightstown at 8:30 AM and follow the railroad's route between South Amboy and Camden.

Several stops will be made enroute to view items of historical interest including:



- ☞ C&A Monument at Spotswood
- ☞ Intact Stone Sleepers Near Jamesburg
- ☞ Hightstown freight station
- ☞ Bordentown Monuments
- ☞ Street running in Burlington
- ☞ Delair Bridge
- ☞ River Terminal Sites in South Amboy and Camden

All seats reserved Fare: \$24.00

A multi-paged guide booklet on the Camden & Amboy's history will be given each passenger.

Fare covers transportation and hand-out: passengers responsible for individual lunch. Trip scheduled to return to starting point early evening.

All trip proceeds to be applied towards restoration of the Hightstown freight station, administered by the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

To obtain tickets, complete the coupon below and send with check or money order before May 17th to: **C&A Trip Tickets W-11 Avon Drive East Windsor, NJ 08520-5647**

(Make checks/money orders payable to John Kilbride: include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Departure information and enroute guidance will be provided in ticket mailing. Trip questions can be directed to 609 / 443-4746 evenings 7PM-10PM.)

☞ Enclosed find check / money order in the amount of \$ _____ to cover the purchase of _____ ticket(s) for the May 22nd Camden & Amboy bus trip. A SASE is enclosed.

Name: _____ Phone # _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN AND MARY HIGHT

Robert W. Craig

Editor's Note: This is the talk given by Robert W. Craig for the program of the society's March 1992 general meeting.

Local histories of Hightstown and East Windsor have been written ever since the middle of the last century, and always the story has begun with a tale about the Hight family's arrival here. Transmitted orally long before it was written down, their story developed all the characteristics of a legend, until 1896 it was brought into print in a small booklet that has served as a springboard for all 20th-century historians of our community—until now. Research conducted during the last 20-years has made the following appraisal possible.

John Hight (circa 1705?—1792) can be rightly considered the founder of the village of Hightstown, and because the neighborhood that relied on that village became East Windsor Township, both towns can claim him as a historical figure. Most of his very long life he spent here, and we know much about his career and the times that he faced. In other ways, however, he remains mysterious. No portraits of him or his wife are known, and we have no physical description of him. Traditional accounts are fragmentary and inaccurate. His story has never been properly told, but because he died two hundred years ago this winter, it is fitting to remember him. Right away there are two points that should be unlearned. First, John Hight never owned 3,000-acres of land here, previous histories notwithstanding. All of the land has been accounted for, all of the earliest landholders have been

identified, and Hight was not among them. Second, the Hights did not come to Rocky Brook in 1721, to the best of our knowledge. This point is awkward, however, since our community held major celebrations of this event in 1921 and 1971. The real date of the Hight's arrival may have been 1731, or even later, even perhaps 1747. We don't know where they lived in 1721, but John was probably still a minor child in his mother's household.

Theory of Hight's Ancestry

John Hight's origins are strictly speaking, unknown. Who his father, mother, grandparents and other ancestors were is no longer known with certainty. In fact, nothing is positively known of his life before the 1740's, when his presence at Rocky Brook can be demonstrated. But we have a *theory* of who he was. There are earlier records of a John "Haight" who might have been our man, and if evidence someday shows conclusively that the two namesakes were in fact the same individual, we will then know much more about him. Until then, the case must be stated with some caution, because it still contains some educated guesses.

Samuel "Haight" Jr. of Flushing, New York, descended from a New England family that sojourned for a long period in Windsor, Connecticut. He flourished in Flushing during the latter decades of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, and when he wrote his last will and testament in 1712, he provided for four of his sons who were under 21 years of age: Nicholas, Jonathan, David, and John, an order that probably reflected their relative ages. And the will offers further evidence that John was the youngest. Like so many Long Islanders in that period, the Hights looked toward New Jersey for land opportu-

nities. Haight had acquired a tract of 150 acres and a town lot in Perth Amboy, and he bequeathed them to his four sons. If Nicholas had been the oldest and John the youngest as the order of their naming would suggest, the difference in their ages would have been several years, with the date of John's birth falling after 1700. As a result, John, the youngest, almost certainly would have still been a minor in 1721. He would not yet have been married, nor would he have been setting out to establish a new household at Rocky Brook or anywhere else.

There are tantalizing suggestions that this John Haight of Flushing, New York became the John "Hight" of Rocky Brook, but firm proof is elusive. In the nineteenth century, the leading genealogist of the Hight families in the United States, David W. Hoyt, could not tie the two together, nor could he tie the John Hight of Hightstown to anyone else. That John Hight was, genealogically speaking, an orphan. But Hoyt noted that within the Hight clan in America the given name "Nicholas" was highly uncommon. All the more extraordinary that a Nicholas Hight settled within the present bounds of West Windsor Township probably in the 1730's. It is unclear when he became a landowner, and he may have first been a tenant. He was at Penns Neck, however, and one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence is the tombstone of his wife, Catherine Hight, who was buried there in 1751.

Further evidence is even more suggestive. When the Hight land in Perth Amboy was sold in 1717, two men bought it: George Willocks, an important New Jersey landowner and politician (who owned a large estate at Imlaystown among other places); and John Harrison, Jr., a merchant formerly of Flushing but by then of

cont. page 4

*Cont. from Page 3***JOHN & MARY HIGHT**

Rocky Hill on the Millstone River.

Harrison had evidently known the Hights in Flushing. Hoyt found documents in New York that linked Samuel Haight and Harrison's father, John Harrison [Sr.] as partners in the buying of a large tract of land known as "Harrison's Purchase," which after 1775 became the town of Harrison, New York. In his will, Samuel Haight explained that he had conditioned the sale of his Perth Amboy property to John Harrison [Jr.] on Harrison's transfer of 400 acres to Haight's four sons, who were to share equally in it. Although the will does not state where the 400 acres was located, it does mention that Harrison was "of East Jersey," not New York.

(To be continued.)

DID YOU REMEMBER TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

The society has come a long way since its organization on May 23, 1971. We own and maintain Ely House as our headquarters. The Freight Station is now part of our museum complex, and we have steadily increased our membership. At this point in time our needs are three-fold: 1) to continue to maintain Ely House and restore the Freight Station; 2) to improve our library; 3) to broaden our offerings within the Hightstown-East Windsor community and preserve its history. In addition to all of the above, a large part of your annual

dues goes toward the cost of producing and mailing the society's newsletter. In order to continue the society needs your help. Renewal forms and reminders have already been sent to you, so please send in your dues for this year and check the boxes on the form next to the areas in which you would be willing to help. If you are unable to be an active member, mark the contributing member box. This type of membership is necessary to the society as part of our financial income. If you have questions, please contact Joel Larson at (609) 448-4304

**Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society**
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