



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MARCH - APRIL 1994

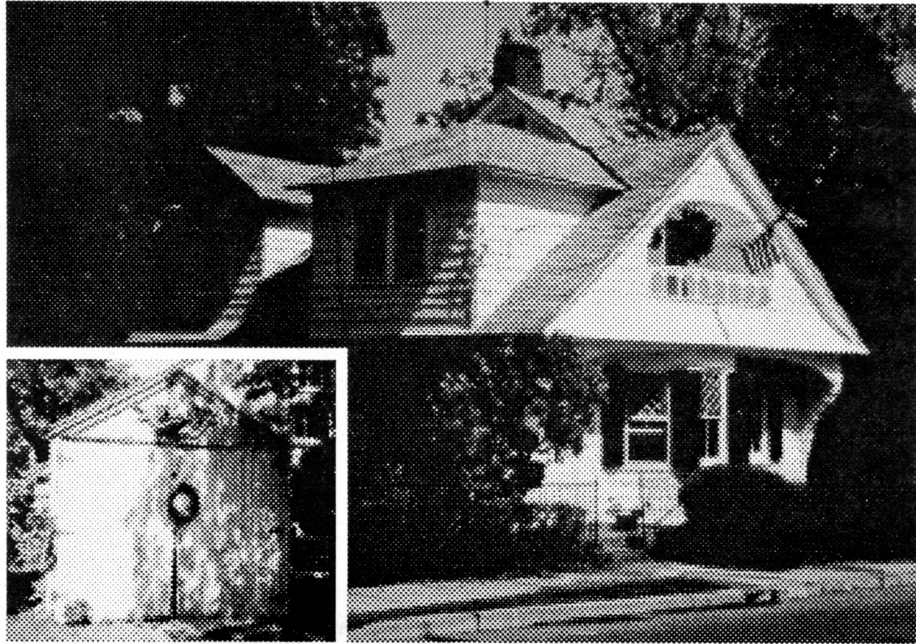
Next Meeting!

WORLD WAR II ON THE HOMEFRONT REMEMBERED

What was life like during World War II in Hightstown and East Windsor? Come and learn about it at a panel discussion on Monday, March 21st, at 7:30 PM at Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church on North Main Street in Hightstown. This will be the second of a series of panel discussions about World War II sponsored by the Society. The first was held last November, and focused on the varied duties of our fighting men and the theaters of war in which they participated.

Find out about or recall those times of gasoline and food rationing, aircraft spotting, civil defense and air raid prepara-

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The Albert M. Norton house and wagonhouse (1899-1900) located at 161 East Ward Street.

HISTORIC SITES IN HIGHTSTOWN AND EAST WINDSOR

(The Tenth Installment in a Continuing Series)

by Clark J. Hutchinson

This wonderfully compact house, which overlooks Peddie Lake, was built by Albert M. Norton, beginning in 1899. In January of 1900, when it was nearly complete, the *Gazette* described it at length and praised the design and its builder. With its hand-carved wood panels and clever use of space, it exemplified the emerging "Arts and Crafts" movement in house design. For many years, Norton operated a boathouse behind the house, where local residents could rent boats for use on the lake.

"A COZY HOME"

Within the past few months a unique and very attractive residence has sprung up on Ward street at the foot of the big bridge. It is the home of Albert M. Norton and in pleasantness of situation,

novelty of design and general convenience, there are few houses around that surpass it. To decide whether it is strictly Colonial or Swiss in architecture is beyond our province, but it certainly has some of the best features of each style and more besides. In fact, anyone who knows Mr. Norton knows that he would not build a house exactly like any one else and that the house he did build would in many ways be better than the houses most men build. The owner not only planned every bit of his home, but has done much of the work himself. Outside, the building presents a charming appearance with its balconies, gables, and dormer windows. Inside, the house is a marvel of ingenuity and workmanship. While the building is not large, every inch of space has been so admirably utilized that there is plenty of room



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

- 7 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 21 General Meeting, 7:30 (1st Presbyterian Church)

April

- 4 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)

Cont. From Page 1

ARTHUR M. NORTON HOUSE

for everyone and everything. It is just the kind of a dwelling to make a housekeeper happy, and Mr. Norton by actual count shows that it has 19 closets and more shelf room than any house in town. It is full of quaint corners and handy contrivances, most of which were designed and made by the owner. Fire places and hand carved mantels are a feature of the house, and Mr. Norton's skill as a woodworker is shown in every room. A bathroom is one of the more modern conveniences of the dwelling. The barn and wagon house is another triumph of ingenuity, and Mr. Norton expects to complete it all by building a work-shop and boat-house on his premises.

(Hightstown Gazette, January 18, 1900)

John Orr has written the page 3 article (Reflections from the "Shrine" No. 55) about Norton and his house, and he tells the story based on local history and extracts from the *Hightstown Gazette*. The following information is based on local history and extracts from deeds, mortgages, and wills at Mercer County Court House in Trenton. When all taken together the story is very complete.

On 1/28/1885, Joshua R. Norton [4/29/1822-11/12/1897] purchased a tract of land on Ward Street from the heirs of Henry H. Seabrook for \$3,630.00. Joshua was formerly a farmer living "near Hightstown" until 1882 when he moved to Ward Street. He then engaged in the business of insurance and real estate. Joshua was a member of the Universalist Church. He gave land in 1883 to the East Windsor Cemetery and in 1884 had built the brownstone tower that stands there now. Because of this, this cemetery was also known as "The Norton Burial Ground." Joshua R. Norton is buried in the East Windsor Cemetery.

On 4/13/1899, William R. Norton [11/10/1819-6/11/1903] purchased part of this land (the current lot) from J. Howard Williams, executor of the estate of Joshua R. Norton, for \$100.00. William R. married Mary Elizabeth Taylor [9/16/1820-7/13/1895] and they had two children: George W. [8/28/1848-5/22/1902] and Albert M. [circa 1858-2/4/1925]. William R. Norton purchased the grain mill and saw mill in downtown Hightstown on 9/

DONATIONS BOOST FREIGHT STATION FUND



The Society is pleased to announce that it has received matching donations of \$1,000 each from trustee Charles S. Stults III, president of Allen & Stults Insurance Co., and the Continental Corporation Foundation, a charitable foundation funded by the Continental Insurance Company. At a recent lunch at the Coach & Four Restaurant, William Nail (right), Regional Director of the Foundation, presents a check for the donation to president Robin Smith, and Charles S. Stults III.

3/1872. George W. Norton purchased the said mills from his father on 4/19/1882. George W. Norton died on 5/22/1902 leaving the mills to his widow, Eva (Case) Norton. William R. Norton [4/26/1882- ?], son of George W. and Eva (Case) Norton, inherited the mills from his mother. On 10/8/1913, William R. Norton sold the mills to Gross Brothers, Inc. On 7/21/1899, Ella L. Norton [? - 12/18/1930], wife of Albert M. Norton, purchased this lot from William R. Norton. Ella had been previously married to a Sutphin. During 1899-1900, Albert had built a house on this lot. In 1923, Albert and Ella divorced. Albert apparently signed over all his rights to the property and the house to Ella. Albert M. Norton died on 2/4/1925 leaving no real property. He devised his woodworking tools from around the world to the Hightstown Public Library and a certificate of membership of David Cunningham as a "Volunteer Fireman of New York City" in a hand-made frame to the Hightstown Engine Company. Ella L. Sutphin (she reverted back to using her first married name) died on 12/18/1930 leaving the

house and lot to her son, William R. Sutphin. Apparently William ran into financial difficulties and lost the house and lot.

On 11/17/1937, the Citizens Building & Loan Association of Hightstown purchased the house and lot from Herbert W. Bradley, Sheriff of Mercer County. The Citizens Building & Loan Association would later change its name to the Hightstown Savings & Loan Association of Hightstown. On 10/12/1950, Spenser H. Merriam [1/6/1898-2/17/1981] and Martha T. [3/16/1897-2/20/1990], his wife, purchased the house and lot from the Hightstown Savings & Loan Association. Martha operated an antique shop out of the house known as "Martha Merriam Antiques." Spenser H. Merriam died on 2/17/1981 leaving the house and lot to Martha. Martha T. Merriam died on 2/20/1990 leaving the house and lot to her nephew, Richard F. Taylor.

On 2/14/1991, Merwin F. Ivins and Anne Roach purchased the house and lot from Richard F. Taylor. Mer and Anne have restored and redecorated this charming home. ■

A COZY HOME WITH A SWISS TOUCH

Reflections from the "Shrine" No. 55

by John Orr

There is a unique and attractive house nestled on the banks of Peddie Lake, seemingly misplaced among the dominant Victorian homes nearby. It looks out over the ancient millpond, with the old iron bridge that leads to "Maxwelton" beyond. It can be found at the foot of Ward avenue, across from the Peddie Institute campus. This story will tell us a little bit about this quaint residence, and something of the man who designed and built it.

Albert Murray Norton, son of William Richard Norton and Mary Elizabeth Taylor, was born near Etra circa 1858. His brother, George Washington Norton, would become the owner and proprietor of the Hightstown Cereal Mills. His grandfather, Richard Norton, had been a close personal friend of Clara Barton and it was at his home that Miss Barton stayed while teaching school in East Windsor. Among his uncles we find Wicoff Norton, grandfather of our own dear Grace Norton Rogers. Albert's uncle, Joshua Richard Norton, built the brownstone tower that stands in East Windsor Cemetery. Another uncle, Charles McChesney Norton, was Editor of the Excelsior newspaper. He would later become the agent of the New York Tribune Fresh Air Fund, and responsible for the placing of many thousands of inner city children on central Jersey farms so that they might enjoy a week of country living during the long, hot summers. Two close cousins, Washington Irving Norton and Richard Daniel Norton, served several terms as mayor of Hightstown. Cousin Horace Greeley Norton was a noted physician. His relatives could be found in many phases of the local business community. The agricultural knowledge of the Norton families was of the highest order; trade magazines and newspapers often carrying their articles on the subject.

Albert Norton was a well-educated and multi-talented individual. He traveled a great deal as a young man, writing back to the Gazette of his experiences. He was a mechanical genius, artistic, a wood-working expert, adventuresome, and a patriot son who loved his community. He was a Universalist by faith, often using his wood-working talents to beautify its sanc-

tuary. But the restless lad had trouble finding his niche in life.

At his maturity we find him returning from two months in Bermuda, bearing with him a handsome cane he had gathered, and which he gave as a gift to Civil War Major, and Hightstown Gazette Editor, Thomas B. Appleget. He also let it be known that he did not enjoy being seasick. Another time we find him in the Hudson valley attending the bicentennial celebration at Saratoga, New York. At still another time we find him at Ocala and Drayton Island in Florida, writing of the history and cultivation of orange groves. At age twenty-two he built for his cousin, W. Irving Norton, a pretty boat to use on the lake. It seems he continued in the boat business for another year or two until he took charge of the Hightstown saw mill, then located on Main street on the south side of the Peddie Lake dam, across from the Cereal Mills of his brother. It was recorded that in February 1884 Albert's mill sawed up a large white oak tree, cut in Hagen's swamp near Windsor, that yielded 1,909 feet of lumber. The widest plank was four feet across the middle. It was about this time that he established his reputation as an ingenious worker in wood, building mantel-pieces to place over fireplaces, furniture and carved ornamentations. He was also at work developing an invention he called the "Jackson Ventilating Grate", which he believed to have a great future. On another occasion when the turbine wheel of the Cereal Mills stopped working, Albert helped his brother to repair it. Only it didn't need repairing; it just needed about two bushels of very large eels removed from it. In the Spring of 1886 Albert took over the operation of the Bergens Mills recently purchased by his father. I don't know that he stuck to this job very long as we find him off traveling through New York State that summer when the grain harvesting business should have been brisk enough to keep the millstones grindin' overtime.

In the Fall of 1888 we find Albert in the belfry of the Universalist Church

HIGHTSTOWN / EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

**Serving Hightstown Borough and
East Windsor Township**

Mailing address: Ely House 164 North
Main Street Hightstown, NJ 08520

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Robert Craig Newsletter / 586-4702

Joel Larson Membership / 448-4304

David Martin Programming

..... & Publications / 448-6355

Bud Perrine Property / 448-1376

John Kilbride Train station / 443-4746

SOCIETY'S THIRD HOUSE TOUR COMING IN OCTOBER

The Society will sponsor its third biennial house tour in October, and some additional houses are needed. If you wish to show your home on the tour, contact Society president Robin Smith, at 448-8487. Hostesses are also needed. ■

removing the largest of the three bells and then taking it to the church at Good Luck, New Jersey, as a gift from the Hightstown church. The following spring people were Ohing and Ahing over a beautiful wall ornament, handsomely carved of wood, on display at the Cunningham store. It was made by Albert and presented as a gift to Civil War Captain William T. Ackerman. The unique and tasteful carvings showed flags, mottoes, and weapons of war, and a list of the battles in which Captain Ackerman had engaged.

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MY MILITARY SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR II

By John William Orr, Jr.

CONTINUED FROM THE
JANUARY / FEBRUARY ISSUE OF THE
SOCIETY NEWS LETTER

ANGUAR

From Morotai I was transferred to Anguar in the Palau Islands. My island hopping was in a Grumman Bearcat fighter plane, where I sat in the seat behind the pilot. This was the only time I would travel in a fighter plane and it gave me a new appreciation of these fighting flyboys. Anguar was an island built upon a coral reef from, perhaps, several million years of bird droppings. The guano and phosphate deposits were highly prized by the Japanese and they had extensively mined these resources before being driven out by the American soldiers.

I again took up my job of maintaining Loran equipment, this time at a slave station location. In addition I became one of the operators of the dual DeVrie movie projectors. These reels of film, when we could get them, were usually pretty well beat up when we got them. After learning how to splice film and synchronize projectors, I fancied myself working in the Old Hights Theatre projection room some day, back in good old Hightstown. There were a few natives on Anguar and they were very helpful in doing our dirty laundry. The mess hall had the most cockroaches I have ever seen in one place. One night, as I came off duty, I noticed that the mess hall had been fumigated. The recently deceased bodies of these obnoxious creatures covered the floor of the hall and a seaman was busily sweeping them up into little piles.

Our commanding officer must have had a cache of liquor stored in his quarters as he usually appeared to be in another world. The day that news arrived of Germany's surrender, he came back to life. He must have been thinking about his possible rotation state-side.

I recall that we did have a medical facility of sorts in this camp. A friend of

mine, who lived in the same quonset as I, decided to have a circumcision done on himself. He was doing it, he said, to surprise his wife when he came home. I know he certainly surprised the little native girl when she came to get his laundry!

I GET MY SEA LEGS AGAIN

My next assignment was to the Philippine Islands. This time my orders took me on board a Navy ship bound for Luzon. The ship, whose name I do not remember, was an AKA (cargo carrier) loaded with all kinds of equipment and overflowing with sailors and soldiers. I found a cozy spot beneath a big Army truck that was lashed down to the deck, and this was the place where I slept and kept out of the burning sun. As the trip was scheduled to take about a week, I decided now was a good time to go to the sickbay and see if they could do something about my ingrown toenails, which were now hurting quite badly. Before I knew it they had cut both my big toes and removed these ingrown nails. I think they really enjoyed their work! My feet were now so sore I had to cut the tops out of my shoes. I was extremely careful to keep away from anyone who might brush against my toes, something that I was not always able to do.

PHILIPPINE DUTY

Upon arrival at Subic Bay I was driven north to Coast Guard unit 346, near a little village called Castillajos. Here I continued my tech work and dutifully took my daily atabrine tablets to ward off malaria. Mosquitoes were very plentiful here and I am sure my blood was mixed with many others, including the very common caribao (water buffalo). In spite of my yellow skin I still managed to come down with a mosquito-borne disease, dengue fever. My joints ached so bad I could hardly stand it. The medic told me that I had a temperature of 104.4 degrees. Warm indeed! I had a lovely Philippine girl who would try to soothe me with water-soaked rags. She also became my laundress and pie maker. From her I learned a little of their native language, Tagalog. Occasionally I would take a trip with some of my buddies across the mountains to the China Sea. The shoreline here was beautiful with

its black volcanic sand sparkling in the sun, and we would swim here like free spirits, free of all inhibitions and clothes.

We were reminded one day that the war was still real when one of our men was killed by a sniper. He had been driving his tank truck back to camp with a load of fresh water when the end came. Shortly afterward we heard the news that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Soon the war was over. But not our duty. That would take time to accomplish. The Loran stations in the Pacific theater would be needed for some time to come and my reenlistment time still had a year to go.

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

In April of 1946 I and a fellow radio tech, Kenneth Meis, received our orders to proceed to Guam for reassignment under another Loran chain. When our C-54 arrived at Guam we received further orders to proceed to Iwo Jima to replace reserves there waiting to go home. The station was located on a pile of volcanic rocks about 200 yards square off the northern tip of the main island. A very uninviting place. No wonder the men there were so glad to see us. Here I served duty not only as a technician but as their radioman as well. After only one week of duty a message came in with orders that took me off this bleak pile of rocks. They needed a man at Okinawa who was a radio operator and who could also stand technician watches. Somehow the barrel pointed at me.

OVER TOKYO BAY

The following day a B-24 Coast Guard Privateer, carrying a load of relief personnel for the various Coast Guard stations in this chain, stopped at Iwo Jima on their way to Japan. I hopped on board as they were also scheduled to stop at Okinawa. We circled all around Tokyo Bay and the city of Tokyo at about 500 feet on a sort of sight-seeing flight before landing. Our stopover lasted for about three days while supplies were taken off and replacements made at a Loran station located on the small island of Oshima, in the mouth of Tokyo Bay. This gave me an opportunity to do a little shopping for Japanese silken goods, which I mailed home.

COZY HOME WITH SWISS TOUCH

During the following year Albert went into the cigar and plug tobacco manufacturing business, setting up his factory and retail store in part of the Cereal Mills of his brother. It was ornamented with many fancy wood carvings displaying his ingenuity and skill. No doubt there was a wooden Indian and a wooden Turk among them, typifying a tobacco store. Albert then opened a paper-box factory using the most modern machinery then available. In February of 1890 he was supplying 500 boxes a week to the local Allen Shoe Factory. Later that summer he gleefully sounded off his new steam whistle for the first time, signalling the factory changeover to steam powered machinery.

Expansion was inevitable and the Cereal Mill was becoming a bit too crowded. Albert renovated and expanded the building across Main street, painting it red, white and blue and calling it the U.S. (Uncle Sam) Building, a nice patriotic touch. In January of 1891 the new factory was opened by invitation, with music provided by Doyle's Orchestra. In addition to cigar manufacturing he opened a pool and billiard room, quickly followed by a full line of gentlemen's furnishings, a reading room, a section devoted to paints, brushes and oils, and by the end of 1891 was installing the machinery to do pork-packing on a large scale. The U.S. Building was a-hummin! In spite of all his many activities he found time to make and present a handsome pedestal to Hightstown Council, No. 70, Jr. O.U.A.M. It was of stained wood, with the emblem of the order, a Bible, flag and eagle engraved in its four sides and placed on a base painted in the National colors.

In April of 1892 the restless Albert opened his U.S. Shirt Factory on the first floor, with about twenty employees. He was also sales agent for the Ladies Park Phaeton, a handsome carriage vehicle. But Albert was about to take a big loss. Two months later his U.S. Building burned to the ground, including the vegetable market rented to W. J. Cole. Albert suffered a loss of about \$6,000, a pretty severe blow in those early days.

But Albert bounced back. He began making daily trips to New York City with commission runs, and taking assignments

given him by merchants and others wishing to have business done, but not wishing to make the trip themselves. That winter Albert was peddling a line of pictures for holiday gifts. He then purchased the business of the Brunswick Express Company of New York. In the Fall of 1894 he made a proposition to the Hightstown Council in which he would, for the sum of \$30.00, restore the old hand-engine pumper of the Fire Company to good working order. Albert was a charter member of Engine Company No. 1. After much discussion it was referred to committee, where it died.

Along about this time the lovebug bit Albert. The widow Sutphen, whose husband Charles, had died a few years previous leaving her with five sons, was his undoing. They married. Albert owned more than enough land on Ward Avenue to build his bride a dream house. He selected a lot next to the lake for their new home. Being the kind of man he was nothing conventional would do, so he became his own architect. It had to be convenient, pleasant and novel. He must have had a liking for Alpine construction as the Swiss look began to show in the roof lines, gables, dormers and balconies. Albert did much of the work himself, his skillful talents showing throughout the interior of the house. While the building was not large, Albert utilized every bit of space. He built nineteen closets, and more shelf space than any house then in town. He wanted his wife to be happy in her new home. He filled it with quaint corners and useful

contrivances, most of which Albert designed or made. The fireplaces all had hand-carved mantels and his wood-working skill showed in every room. No outhouse for his bride! An inside bathroom was included in the new house. For himself he would build a barn, a wagon-house, a work-shop and a boat house that opened onto the lake. By Christmas of 1899 the house was almost finished. By the first of February 1900, Albert and Ella had moved in.

Ella seemed to take to the house quite well, entertaining friends and her family frequently, often excluding Albert's side of the family. Albert did not incline to the social level of his wife so they drifted apart, Albert devoting most of his time to his crafts and to his work in the cabinet shop. In 1923 Albert and Ella divorced, she continued to live in the house Albert had built for her. Albert M. Norton died in February of 1925 leaving a most peculiar will and an estate valued at only \$175.00. On a piece of yellow scrap paper he directed that his tools and books be left to the Public Library.

In September of 1927 Mrs. Ella Sutphen (having reverted to her first husband's name) fell and broke her arm on the stairs that Albert had built. Albert must have had a wry smile on his face as he looked down from his wood-working shop in the sky. By the end of 1930 Ella Sutphen had departed "this vale of tears". The following year saw the Robert Henderson family taking up residence in the fascinating cottage with the Swiss touch. ■

NEWSUPDATE!

1860 MAP OF HIGHTSTOWN OBTAINED

The Society has obtained copy photographs of a map of Hightstown (opposite) that appears on the Map of Philadelphia, Trenton, and Vicinity, published in Philadelphia in 1860 by Lake & Beers, map publishers.

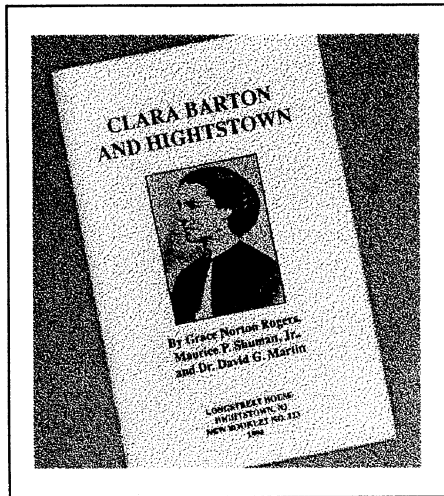
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NEW PUBLICATION



Clara Barton and Hightstown, a new booklet edited and co-authored by Dr. David G. Martin has just been released by Longstreet House, as a benefit for the Society. The booklet brings together for the first time a brief biographical sketch of Clara Barton that Grace Norton Rogers wrote in 1922, together with a 1971 paper about Barton's 7-month stay in East Windsor in 1851-2 by Maurice P. Shuman Jr., revised and expanded by

Martin. It also includes an essay by Martin about Barton's later visits to Hightstown and her relations with friends here.

Copies are available for \$10. by writing to: Booklet, c/o H.E.W.H.S., 164 North Main Street, Hightstown, NJ 08520. Please add \$2 for mailing. ■

COMMITTEES NEED HELP!

Volunteers are needed to help staff both the Library and the Museum Committees. If you're interested in joining, or even if you have archival or curatorial skills that you would be willing to teach or to share, call the chairpersons: for Museum, Eileen Coururier, at 443-3906, and for Library, Clark Hutchinson, at 448-3332 or 448-9543.

**Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society**
 164 North Main Street
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