



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY-JUNE 1994

ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTION OF OFFICERS, MAY 16th

On Monday evening, May 16th, the Society's 23rd annual meeting will take place at Ely House, at 8:00 P.M. The meeting will focus on the election of officers for the coming year. Reports will also be given by committee chairmen about the activities of their committees. In a departure from recent practice, there will not be a program at this meeting. Instead, the Society will host a World War II panel discussion about D-Day and the Normandy invasion, scheduled to coincide with the 50th anniversary of D-Day. ■

Next Program!

D-DAY REMEMBERED

On Monday evening, June 6th, the Society will commemorate the 50th anniversary of D-Day and the Normandy invasion that liberated France in 1944. The third of a series of panel discussions on the war will be held that evening in the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown, at 7:30 P.M. The speakers who will make up the panel are still being selected as this newsletter goes to press. But in order to find the most appropriate panelists, the Society would like to hear from anyone who took part in the Normandy campaign in France in 1944, or in the preparations for the invasion in England. Whether you lived in Hightstown or East Windsor before the war or not, please stand up and be counted. Contact either Bernard Bush, at 443-8654 or Dr. Edgar Thomas, at 448-3533. Exhibits related to the war are also desired. If you have your old uniforms, documents related to your military service, souvenirs obtained during the war, or memorabilia from homefront activities, please call either of the two numbers above. ■



The Charles A. Mason house (1915) located at 408 South Main Street

HISTORIC SITES IN HIGHTSTOWN AND EAST WINDSOR

(The 11th Installment in a continuing Series -- begins on page 2)

News Bulletin

SOCIETY WINS GRANT!

The Society has just learned that it will be awarded a grant of nearly \$5,600 from the New Jersey Historical Commission. The money will be used to prepare a guide to the Library, including its manuscript, photograph, map, and newspaper collections. The grant project will also improve the way the collections are housed. The Society will hire a manuscript librarian to carry out the major work for this project, but volunteers will also be needed for some activities. The award from the Historical Commission will partially fund this project, and additional support from other grant sources is being sought. The Society applied for the grant back in January. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May

- 2 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 16 Annual Meeting and Election of Officers, 7:30 (Ely House)

June

- 6 Special Program on D-Day 7:30 (1st Presbyterian Church)
- 13 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)

HISTORIC SITES IN HIGHTSTOWN AND EAST WINDSOR

The Charles A. Mason house (1915) located at 408 South Main St.

This house and its near twin next door at 416 South Main Street were built for the Charles A. Mason and Forman A. Updike respectively. Mason's wife, Cora Dey, and Updike's wife, Bertha, were sisters, daughters of Thomas Dey, and the closeness of their families' business and personal lives is reflected in the similarity of their houses. Both combine elements of the Arts & Crafts style and the so called Prairie style, which were fashionable during the years before World War One. As a reaction to the complicated excesses of the Victorian Era, Arts & Crafts houses often featured a plain stucco exterior, an open plan and a great deal of stained oak woodwork. In this case chestnut was used. Both houses were built in 1915. However, the Mason house was not the first house on this site.

On 3/30/1866, Aaron Ely [3/16/1833-11/17/1909] of Millstone Township purchased 4.34-acres of land in East Windsor Township from Cornelius C. Voorhees and Lydia Ann, his wife, of East Windsor Township for \$4,300.00. Aaron Ely moved here and had built a house soon after this purchase. Aaron was twice elected as a East Windsor Township Committeeman and was a member of the Hightstown Baptist Church. He married Mary Anna Wikoff [9/11/1831-11/29/1899] at Perrineville on 12/25/1855 and they had three children. On 1/30/1906, Aaron purchased an additional 0.82-acres adjoining his property from Charles H. Polhemus and Helen L., his wife, for \$105.00.

Aaron Ely died on 11/17/1909 leaving \$500.00 to the Hightstown Baptist Church for the "Aaron Ely Library." On 3/28/1910, Martin M. Nolan of East Windsor Township purchased this house and part of the original tract from Phebe Walling of Freehold and John E. Allen of Hightstown, executors of Aaron Ely, for \$5,000.00. Martin M. Nolan was a local builder. In 1912, Aaron Ely's home was moved from this tract to a lot on the corner of South Street and

Taylor Avenue, where it still stands.

On 9/30/1913, Charles A. Mason (1877-1954) of East Windsor Township purchased 4.17-acres from Martin M. Nolan and Margaret A., his wife, of East Windsor Township for \$8,000.00. Charles A. Mason was the son of Richard S. Mason and Susan Snedeker. In 1915, Charles had built a house on this tract in the approximate location of Aaron Ely's house. Also during that year the Borough of Hightstown annexed part of East Windsor Township which included this tract. Charles Mason married Cora Dey and they had the following children: Margaret and Bertha. Charles joined with Forman A. Updike to form the firm Updike & Mason, a local coal dealership with its office and coal yard on Mercer Street. Mason also was active in local politics; he was a Borough Councilman for some years and at one time President of the Council. As a leading member of the Baptist Church, he served for a time as President of the Church's Board of Trustees. Charles died on 10/17/1954 leaving the house and land to his wife. Cora died on 4/19/1955.

On 5/10/1955, Charles S. Stults, Jr. and Virginia P., his wife, purchased the house and the current lot from Margaret M. Wetherill, widow, of Freehold and Bertha M. Conover and Clarence, her husband, of Manasquan, executors of Charles A. Mason. On 6/21/1982, Charles S. Stults III and Christine C., his wife, purchased the house and lot from his father, Charles S. Stults, Jr. Charles S. Stults III is president of the local insurance and real estate firm of Allen & Stults Co. He is the fourth generation of Stults [Charles E. Stults; C. Stanley Stults; Charles S. Stults, Jr. and Charles S. Stults III] to carry on the family business since its founding in 1881. Charles and Christine Stults have recently renovated the kitchen which features a bay window overlooking an expansive lawn with beautifully landscaped gardens and pool. ■

EARLY BRICK HOUSE IN EAST WINDSOR

Robert Craig Richard S. Hutchinson

Brick houses in Hightstown and East Windsor have always been uncommon, though not entirely missing from the local landscape. While the oldest brick house still standing in East Windsor is the Ely-Mount house (1830s) on One Mile Road, there was at least one older brick house that is no longer standing.

On April 16, 1805, William Hutchinson Jr. and his wife sold part of their land just east of Etra to Ezekiel Hutchinson. The lot they sold was described as "Beginning at a stone in the Road nigh the South Rut opposet an Elbow in a ditch the Chimlay [sic] of Joseph Hutchinsons New Brick house Bares North" This passage is also interesting because deeds for land seldom make specific reference to the buildings that stand on the property being transferred. They also rarely give any clue to the date of construction of a house. This passage is unusual, then, because it does both.

But care should be taken when encountering the word "new," the meaning of which can vary considerably. In this case, the house was standing at least by 1802, three years earlier. Francis Asbury, the celebrated missionary who has become known as "the father of American Methodism," visited Joseph Hutchinson in July 1802 and observed in his journal:

"I ... made it thirty-eight miles to Joseph Hutchinson's; with his new house, new wife, will he not by and by want a new lease on life?" When studying old houses, it is important to keep an eye open for any written source that documents their construction and evolution; one cannot always anticipate where such information will come from. ■

IN MEMORIAM

We regret the passing of our long-time members:
**Nettie Stults, David Ely
 and Isabel Duryee**

REED FAMILY PORTRAITS COME TO SOCIETY

Last fall the Society received an important collection of books and manuscript material of the Reed family of Hightstown and East Windsor. Highlighting the collection are three 19th-century portraits of members of the family, including John Story Reed and his wife Julia Hutchinson Reed. The identities of the artists are unknown. Other pictures of members

of the family are also included in the collection. Also included in the collection are a ledger and business correspondence of Edward H. Reed. Reed, a local contractor from the 1890s until after 1910, built many homes in Hightstown and East Windsor and remodeled others. These items form the largest body of material that the Society holds about any of the numerous builders that were active here. The Society wishes to thank Mrs. Catherine P. Copleston, of Orchard Avenue, Hightstown, for the donation. ■

Collecting and Connoisseurship

A TALE of TWO MANTELS

by Robert Craig

Sometimes stories "travel" with artifacts. The two mantels shown below were both built for and installed in East Windsor houses in the eighteenth century. But their similarities don't end there. The one on the right was built in the William Hutchinson [Sr.] house, which stood along the Cedarville Road in the southeastern part of East Windsor until it was torn down in 1971. Before the demolition, Harold and Alice (Everett) Applegate had the mantel removed, and they installed it in their home in Arendtsville, Pennsylvania, near Gettysburg, where it remains today.

The one on the left came from the Adam Shaw house, also on Cedarville Road, and it, too, was moved, by the

Josephson family, though only a short distance up the road to a ranch house built about 20 years ago where it has been installed. Notice the similar workmanship of the two pieces with their reeding and gouged carving. Shaw, who had been a merchant in New Brunswick, married a daughter of William Hutchinson and moved to East Windsor, later operating taverns in Hightstown and Princeton. Thus both mantels came from "Hutchinson" houses. It is possible that they were fashioned by the same, unidentified craftsman. These pieces are important because they bear witness to the high level of craftsmanship that existed in the early houses of East Windsor. ■

HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

Serving Hightstown Borough
and East Windsor Township

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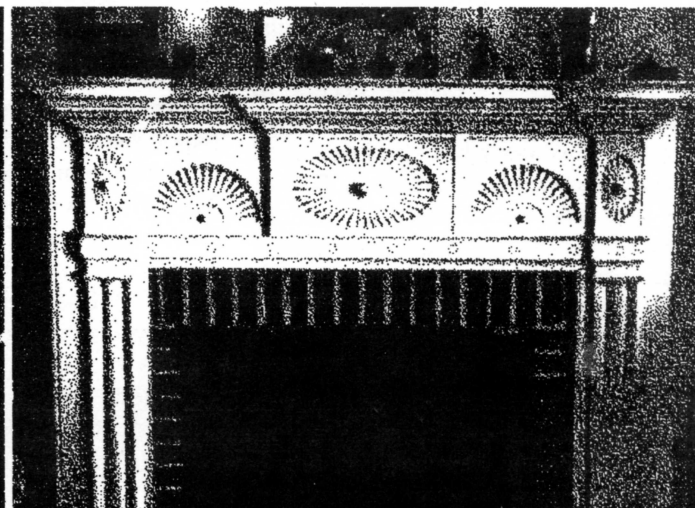
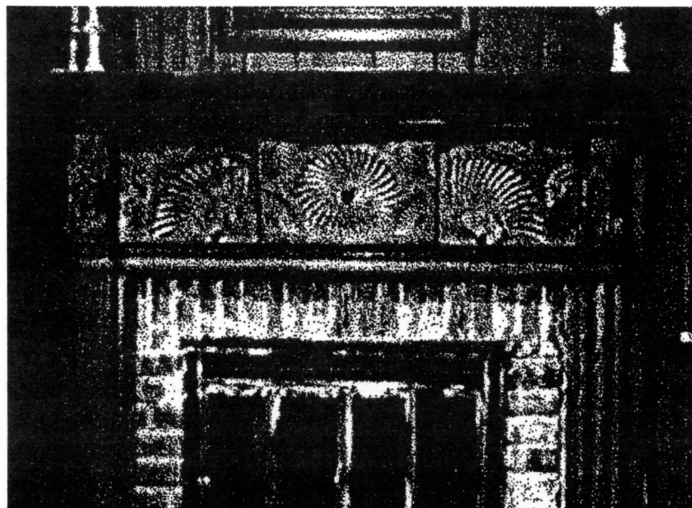
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Membership Mailing address:

**Ely House 164 North Main Street
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*Newsletter will be mailed 1st Class



Genealogy

FAMILY TREE NEWS and QUERIES

[Editor's note: This is the first entry in what will hopefully be a regular genealogy column. Library Committee member Richard S. Hutchinson will prepare this feature. Members who are conducting research into the histories of local families are encouraged to write up their findings. The Society will also maintain, in its library, a vertical file of genealogical information about local families. Queries will be run in this newsletter as space permits. If you wish either to place a query or to report your own genealogical discoveries, contact Hutchinson, at (609) 448-4252, or write to him directly at 100 Bennett Place, Hightstown, NJ 08520.]

The following is taken from the "Encarta" encyclopedia from the Microsoft Corporation.

Genealogy, history of the descent of a family, often rendered in a tabular list (family tree) in the order of succession, with the earliest known ancestor placed at the head and later generations placed in lines of direct and collateral descent. Genealogical tables are familiar from the Bible, especially the so-called Tree of Jesse (see Matthew 1:1-17). Genealogy also covers the study and research of pedigrees. Practical Use: The most practical use of genealogy is in the proving of wills, when knowledge of descent is necessary, especially if a dispute occurs, to ensure that property goes to the right person. Genealogy has also been used when legitimacy is in question. One of the best and most practical modern uses of genealogy is in the medical field; physicians have, with considerable success, examined genealogical records for the origin of unusual diseases in present-day families.

Methods: The traditional method of those wishing to find their ancestors is to question parents and grandparents, for they are likely to possess written

records and family Bibles, and their memories are often clear and accurate. From this start the researcher may visit libraries and courthouses and seek documentary evidence from municipal and village records and from church registers, which record weddings, christenings, and funerals. In the case of Americans, a family may be traced back to the time of its arrival in the new country. Research in the country of a family's origin is usually the most difficult because records may no longer exist and work may have to be conducted in a foreign language. British research is relatively easy because records were immaculately kept and few have been lost. Fortunately for U.S. researchers, American Mormons have the best worldwide modern records, for their missionaries spent many years copying pertinent documents in many foreign countries.

In the United States, and to some extent in Europe and Great Britain, genealogy has developed into a major hobby. The great surge in U.S. interest started in the 1930s, increased somewhat after World War II, but reached a crescendo in the 1970s, especially after the publication of *Roots* (1976) by Alex Haley (1921-92), which showed that despite few extant records, it is possible with hard work and good luck to construct one's family history. Genealogical research is an important adjunct to the study of history. ■

A LITTLE PIECE OF GAZETTE HISTORY

Students of our local history must rely heavily upon the Hightstown Gazette, but seldom is the history of that newspaper itself delved into or told. The following item appeared in the August 31, 1876 issue, at the head of the "Local Items and Comments" column, written by the editor. "LUTHER HAS GONE. It becomes our sad and painful duty to announce that Martin Luther Groves has taken the advice of the lamented Greeley and has gone west. We cannot remember Hightstown far enough back to find a time when he

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Update:

JOHN ORR'S RESEARCH YIELDS MORE ABOUT THE NORTONS

[Editor's Note: As a follow-up to the article in the last issue of the newsletter about Albert Norton and his house on Ward Street at Peddie Lake, John Orr has found some further related information from the pages of old Hightstown Gazettes.]

Albert Norton's wife, Ella Sutphen, had previously been married to Charles W. Sutphen, a Pennsylvania Railroad conductor who died in 1890. They had five sons, three of whom were Charles W. Jr., William R., and Lester Sutphen.

After Joshua R. Norton purchased to H.H. Seabrook property on Ward Street in 1885, Richard W. Norton immediately made arrangements with his uncle Joshua to build five large greenhouses on the vacant land next to the lake. Two were 64 by 18 feet and the others 64 feet by 10 feet. Water was supplied by two windmills that drew water from Peddie Lake into large reservoirs. The greenhouses were heated by large furnaces. The two large greenhouses were devoted to the growing of roses, the others to the growing of choice plants and flowers. Richard Wyckoff Norton did a flourishing business in the New York and Philadelphia markets.

The Seabrook house that was bought by Norton was built about 1866 for Sidney C. Denise, a charter member of the Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Classical and Scientific Institute (now Peddie School), and its first secretary, from 1865 to 1869. Denise sold the house to Seabrook in the latter year for \$11,000., and moved to the Carolinas [Hightstown Gazette, 8/19/1869]. Denise's previous house, on South Main Street, was the first property bought by the new Institute. The Gazette noted on May 4, 1865 that the Denise residence was being immediately fitted up for the reception of students. The following week, the Gazette reported the purchase of eight acres from the Ward family, thus marking the beginnings of the Peddie School campus. ■

EARLY WATER SYSTEM BROUGHT TO LIGHT

Last summer, the Public Works Department of Hightstown Borough was conducting some excavations in Main Street in front of the Great American Saloon and Eatery. One of the items that unexpectedly turned up in the digging was a section of log with a hole drilled longitudinally through the center—an early wooden water pipe.

This was the first evidence known to this author that wooden water pipes were once used in Hightstown. The year in which they were installed is unknown, but bored logs of this sort were the pipes of choice for the earliest public water systems in the United States. For example, in Morristown in 1799, when the first water system for that town was installed, bored logs were used. An early experiment in the use of clay pipes was tried there several years later, but, surprisingly, the water company found logs to be more effective, and reverted to using them exclusively. The joints between logs were sealed with a pitch-like substance. A small segment of a similar pipe was recently excavated in Trenton; it may date from that city's first water system of 1801.

The earliest known water system of a public nature in Hightstown was authorized by East Windsor Township in 1817. According to the Hightstown Gazette of August 3, 1876, the township, meeting at Isaac Britton's house (where Cunningham's Pharmacy now stands), "gave Major James Cook the privilege of sinking a fountain where the spring exists at this time near widow Mounts, and in the highway, to be well covered and protected and be free of access to the neighbors, and to have connected with it a conduit or trunk or water pipe to convey the water to his house and stabling under ground and for the said Cook's accommodation and that of the public."

This decision suggests that wood was the material used in what became the first local water system. Cook owned land adjacent to the site of the Great American Saloon and Eatery, and since in 1817 wooden logs drilled through the center would have been the method of piping most likely used, the wood found last summer may well have been part of this system. ■

Mystery! "UNDERGROUND RAILROAD" IN HIGHTSTOWN & EAST WINDSOR?

by Robert Craig

Before the Civil War, a clandestine network emerged across the northern States that came to be known as the "Underground Railroad." Its purpose was to secretly ferry fugitive slaves from the South where they were held in bondage to northern States and to Canada, where slavery had been abolished. The name was invented by slaveowners, who likened it to a railroad because of the evident speed by which escaping slaves were whisked away, and they called it "underground" because to pro-slavery people the entire operation was kept invisible. The name stuck.

The network was active in all northern states, including New Jersey, but it was carried on in extraordinary secrecy, especially after 1850, when the Fugitive Slave Act was passed by Congress. This act set forth draconian penalties for anyone caught assisting a runaway, including long prison terms, heavy fines, and liability for civil damages to the aggrieved slaveowner. High rewards for the recapture of slaves led to an invasion of Southern slavecatchers into the border states that made participation in the network highly risky. Still, probably hundreds of New Jerseyans, both black and white, took part.

But now, more than 130 years later, how can historians identify the individuals who "operated" the "railroad"—the men and women who were its "conductors" and "stationmasters?" What were the routes used and how were the fugitives sheltered and transported. And the network was expensive; who paid for it?

Surviving manuscript evidence from before the Civil War is quite rare, so what we are left with are occasional eyewitness accounts written by participants after the war. In February, Antoinette Ford, a staff writer for the Trenton Times, wrote

an article about the Underground Railroad, which explored the role evidently played by Enoch Middleton of North Crosswicks, in Hamilton Township, Mercer County. Middleton, a native of Burlington County, was a Philadelphia merchant who retired to North Crosswicks about 1836. Middleton's house, recently rehabilitated, stands today overlooking the Crosswicks Creek, the dividing line between Mercer and Burlington counties. In her article, Ford wrote that Enoch's youngest son, Rudolph Middleton, wrote a newspaper account in 1915 to the effect that when he was a boy he saw his father shelter fugitive slaves, and he described under what circumstances the slaves would be moved forward to the next station of the line. The account appeared in the *Trenton Times*, on July 26, 1915, and was summarized again in that paper on September 16, 1956. Rudolph Middleton would appear to have been a fairly reliable witness. Census records for 1850 show that he was part of Enoch Middleton's household in that year, which confirms that he was present when the events that he narrates took place.

Few operatives on the Underground Railroad have been identified in even one eyewitness account, but Enoch Middleton has been named in at least two. In addition to his son Rudolph, his nephew Edward H. Ogden also wrote about Middleton's courageous activities. In 1898, Ogden, by then of Riverton, New Jersey, wrote a letter giving the following account:

"I remember when a lad, while staying at my uncle Enoch Middleton's, at Crosswicks, nine miles from Trenton, being aroused one night after midnight by the arrival of a runaway slave very much alarmed. My cousin, William Middleton, and myself drove him to Hightstown, having him concealed and covered with straw in the bottom of the wagon. We delivered him safely that night to the Underground agent to whom my uncle consigned him. I remember being badly scared at the toll gate* as we drove through fearing the wagon would be examined."

But he does not identify the name of the agent in Hightstown. Therein lies the mystery: who was the agent or "stationmaster" in Hightstown? Was he (or she) black or white? Did the agent live on South Main Street or Old York Road, which would have made him easier to find for a driver approaching from

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A LITTLE PIECE OF GAZETTE HISTORY

was not a fixture here, and he has been connected with this office, off and on, for many years. We believe he took his first degrees under Col. [Edward C.] Taylor or Mr. C.[harles] M. Norton, and it is needless to say he was up to all the tricks of the trade. He tried Freehold, Long Branch, New York and railroad-ing at different times, but his heart yearned for the old ties, and he always came back. For the last four years he has worked faithfully at the case and press, and we once thought that he would probably die with the handle of our old "Foster" in his hand and a joke on his lips, but the inducements held out by relatives in the west have been too much for him and he has gone. Good luck to you, Luther, and our hope is that you will give your next employer as faithful service and as much entertainment as you have always given us." ■

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"UNDERGROUND RAILROAD"

Crosswicks in the middle of the night? Who in Hightstown or East Windsor was acquainted with Enoch Middleton? How often did the Hightstown stationmaster take "deliveries?" Where and to whom was the slave sent after leaving Hightstown; where was the next station on the line? These questions will probably remain unanswered, at least for a considerable time to come. It will take the discovery of additional eyewitness accounts to identify the Hightstown operative on the Underground Railroad.

There is every reason to believe Ogden's story, though we only have his word to go on. The Underground Railroad apparently operated over most or all of the major transportation routes across New Jersey, and there is other evidence that our community was involved. In East Windsor Cemetery on Windsor-Perrineville Road lies the grave of one Patience Track, who died in 1879. She was a black servant in the

family of Aaron Ely and later of his son Joseph Holman Ely. According to a story handed down through the Ely family, Track was born into slavery on a Southern plantation. She escaped and made her way northward, but when she reached East Windsor she was captured by a slavecatcher, or agent of her owner. Rather than permit Track to be returned to the South, Ely paid her "ransom," or purchase price, to the agent, and thereby bought her freedom. She decided to stay with the Ely family as a paid servant, and when Aaron Ely died in 1863, he provided for the support of Track in his will. If anyone has more information about Patience Track or other participants in the Underground Railroad, please contact me at (609) 586-4702

*Old York Road was chartered as a turnpike in the 1850s during the heyday of the plank road movement, and was operated as such for some years. ■

[The author thanks John W. Orr Jr. for the information about Patience Track, which comes from articles #37 and 61 in his "Reflections from the Shrine" series.]

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