



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MAY-JUNE 1995

World War II:

DID YOU KNOW "MISS HIGHTSTOWN" IN 1943?

by Richard S. Hutchinson

While doing some research, I found a photograph on the front page of the Hightstown Gazette dated 19 August 1943, with the caption, "She's a Flighty Miss ...". This photograph was of a World War II pilot, Captain Walter E. Wright, standing in front of his B-25 bomber named "Miss Hightstown." The article went on to read:

Capt. Wright is now with the Ferrying Command and he is pictured above standing beside a twin-engine bomber which he named Miss Hightstown. He sent the photograph to his father, Elijah Wright, of the Princeton Road.

Cont. on page 8

V-E DAY COMING MAY 8th!

The Society's World War Two Commemorative Committee will hold its next program on Monday evening, May 8, the 50th anniversary of victory in Europe. It will be held in the auditorium of the Grace Rogers School on Stockton Street, Hightstown, at 7:30 PM. The public is invited to attend.

The program will feature residents of the community who will

share the interesting recollections of where they were on V-E Day, and the final days of the war in Europe.

This meeting will mark the first time that the Society will meet in the Rogers School, where so many fine cultural events have been held in recent years. The auditorium has ample seating, and we are looking for a large attendance. Please come out!



PEDDIE LAKE BRIDGE CENTENNIAL COMING IN '96

The Society has adopted a proposal to observe the 100th anniversary of the Peddie Lake Bridge during the spring of 1996. All interested citizens are invited to participate on a planning committee which will research the history of the bridge, and of Peddie School and the lake at the turn of the century, collecting anecdotes and fond recollections from residents or former residents who have special memories of the time or place.

The committee will need representatives from all segments of the community, including new and long-time residents.

A special rededication ceremony, to feature entertainment and an old-fashioned "social," is being considered. If you wish to take part on the committee, or if you have memories to share, please contact Jackie Hart, Chairperson of the Bridge Celebration Committee, at 371-1353. ■

COMMUNITY FAIR HELP NEEDED MAY 21

The annual Hightstown-East Windsor Community Fair will be held on Sunday May 21st at the Hightstown High School. The Society will staff a table once again. This is always an important opportunity for our organization to reach out to residents of the community who are interested in history but not involved. Volunteers will be needed to help out with the table. Please call Edgar Thomas, at 448-3533, or leave a message at the Society, 371-9580. ■

FREIGHT STATION REPAIRS UNDERWAY

Work began in mid-April to make structural repairs to the Freight Station. Expected to cost about \$20,000, this is the first substantial construction work on the building since the move and permanent foundation were completed in 1991, at a cost of approximately \$55,000. The structural repairs are being carried out by Patton Construction Services, of Hightstown. As part of the work, a new roof will be installed by Ecker Roofing, of Trenton. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May

- 1 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 8 V-E Day 50th Anniversary Program, 7:30 (Grace Rogers School)
- 15 Annual Meeting 7:30 (Ely House)
- 21 Community Fair, 10 - 4 (Hightstown High School)

June

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

HISTORIC SITES IN HIGHTSTOWN AND EAST WINDSOR

Thirteenth Installment in a Continuing Series.



JOHN B. POLHEMUS HOUSE (Circa 1889)
176 Stockton Street, Hightstown

by Clark Hutchinson

The land this house occupies was part of the farm of Dr. Enoch Wilson (1777-1826). He was one of the earliest known physicians in Hightstown. Enoch, son of Reverend Peter Wilson, married Delilah Applegate (1790-1864), daughter of Asher Applegate, and they had the following children: Mary F. (1811-1890) who married Richard M. Job, Oliver Hart (1814-1883), and Sally Ann Higby (1816-1876) who married Abraham P. Harris.

Enoch died intestate on 7/28/1826 at the early age of 49-years. Abijah Applegate, the brother of Delilah, was appointed administrator of the estate. Delilah Wilson died on 4/14/1864.

Oliver Hart Wilson and Anna L., his wife, of New York City and Richard M. Job and Mary F., his wife, of Hightstown sold their 3/4-interest in 2.02-acres of this farm, which contained Dr. Enoch and Delilah's "mansion house," to Sally Ann H. Harris of Mercer County on 6/3/1864.

She hired Joseph J. Ely to draw a map of this tract. Five lots were delineated and the lot which is the subject of this history was #5. Sally Ann H. Harris of Hightstown died intestate on 2/15/1876. Oliver H. Wilson was appointed administrator. The tract reverted back to Oliver H.

Wilson and his sister Mary F. Job as heirs-at-law of their deceased sister. Oliver H. Wilson and Anna L., his wife, of New York City sold their 1/2 interest in this tract to Henry A. Wilson of New York City on 3/31/1877. Henry A. Wilson, still of New York City, sold his 1/2 interest in this tract to Anna L. Wilson of New York City on 5/18/1878. Anna L. Wilson, still of New York City, sold her 1/2 interest in this tract to Mary F. Job of East Windsor Township on 8/27/1883.

John B. Polhemus (1821-1898) of Hightstown purchased the current lot on 3/25/1889 from Mary F. Job of Hightstown. He had a house constructed soon thereafter. John worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and for many years was the foreman of the Hights-

town sub-division. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had one son named William W. John died on 7/11/1898 leaving the house to his wife. She then married Anthony W. Hendrickson.

Elizabeth and Anthony of Hightstown sold the house to Sadie M. Ely (1876-1924) of Hightstown on 4/29/1921. Her husband was C. Allen Ely (1870-1956). At the time of his death on 7/11/1956, he had been the Hightstown Borough Engineer since 1913 and was president of the Cedar Hill Cemetery Association and a member of the Hightstown Lions Club. C. Allen was also a prominent local land surveyor. They had the following children: Gladys, Grace M., and Allen C. Sadie died on 7/25/1924 leaving the house to her family. C. Allen then married Sarah E. and moved to 139 South Street.

Allen C. Ely of Hightstown purchased the house from his father and sisters, all of Hightstown, on 11/7/1931. Allen (1898-1981) was a 1916 graduate of the Peddie School and Rutgers University, Class of 1920. He was employed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation as a supervising engineer. He was a member and past master of Hightstown Apollo Lodge 41 F & A M, member of the American Legion and the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, and a life member of the Engineers' Club of Trenton. Allen was married to Eleanor Stults (1901-1981), the daughter of Charles E. Stults and Adelaide, his wife, who was raised at 201 Stockton Street (the old residence of Dr. Edgar Thomas). Eleanor was an officer of the Allen & Stults Company and the Hightstown Savings & Loan Association. She was a member of the First Baptist Church of Hightstown, Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, and a past president of the Live Wire Society. Allen died on 4/22/1981 and Eleanor died on 5/3/1981, both from complications suffered from a serious automobile accident.

James W. Walker and Barbara J., his wife, of Princeton, purchased the house from the Estate of Eleanor Stults Ely on 11/8/1982. ■

ST. JAMES AME CHURCH ON SUMMIT STREET

This congregation, which worshiped in a small wood-frame church before their present sanctuary was built, was formed shortly after the Civil War. A 19th-century account of its founding appears in Rev. Joseph Henry Morgan's *Morgan's History of the New Jersey Conference of the A.M.E. Church, From 1872 to 1887, And of the Several Churches, As Far As Possible, From Date of Organization, With Biographical Sketches of Members of the Conference* (Camden, NJ: S. Chew, 1887). A copy of this book is held by the New Jersey State Library in Trenton. The brief account is here quoted in full.

"HIGHTSTOWN This church was founded in 1868 by Rev. W. W. Grimes. The church was also built by the same Elder. The names of the founders in part are George Martin, Stephen Branaugh and James Augusta."

Present Trustees: George Martin, Stephen Branaugh, and Jacob Simbo.

Stewards: George Martin and Jacob Simbo.

Stewardesses: Martha Gibson, Elizabeth Betts, and Mary Branaugh.

Local Preacher: Stephen Branaugh.

Exhorters: John Fisher and George Martin.

The book also includes a biographical sketch of Reverend Grimes, tracing his career through assignments in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. In 1867 he was appointed to the Bordentown Circuit of the Philadelphia Conference, through which he continued to serve until 1869. During that time, he also organized a congregation at Crosswicks, and helped it buy land for its church building. ■

Please Fill Out And Send in Your Genealogy Chart...

...from the Jan-Feb. '95 Newsletter. Please write "Genealogy" on the outside of the envelope. Thank you. ■

President's Column

PROGRESS & PROGRAM

by Edgar Thomas

Stop by the Freight Station and see and hear the sounds of progress. The sounds of hammer and saw herald that the work has begun to make the Station into our museum and meeting facility. Strong February winds tore off the temporary plastic roof cover and with it a considerable amount of roof sub-structure.

Patten Construction Services, Inc. has already replaced or repaired rotted structural members and missing roof supports. Very shortly the building will have a new roof, which is necessary before work on the outer walls and on the interior can be started.

All of this is the beginning of the realization of the creative plans developed by Lee Stults, our architect-in-residence last summer, supported by the generous grants of the Allen & Stults Company and the Continental Insurance Company.

The work on the Freight Station, our excellent programs, and our strong community outreach attest to your Society being a vital force in our community.

An important note:

On Monday, May 8th, at 7:30 PM in the auditorium of the Grace Norton Rogers School, we will be observing the 50-year anniversary of the end of World War II. Through personal recollections, ceremony and music we will mark this milestone in the history of our nation and the world.

Please plan to attend and invite your family and friends.

In closing, I remind all members that we are always seeking new members and need financial support.

There is much to be done so that we may assure that the knowledge of our rich past forms the foundation for the present and future. ■

HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

Serving Hightstown Borough
and East Windsor Township

609 371-9580

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**Join today,
become a member!**

Individual

\$15

Family

\$20

Membership Mailing address:

Ely House

164 North Main Street

Hightstown, NJ 08520

A HISTORY OF SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

[The following is reprinted with permission from "1885-1985, Saint Anthony of Padua Church, Hightstown, New Jersey", a centennial history of Hightstown's Roman Catholic parish—Editor.]

The early Catholic history of Hightstown and its immediate vicinity can be told very briefly. The first Mass to be celebrated in Hightstown, and of which there is any knowledge, was in 1852 at the residence of John Sutcliffe, himself a Protestant, but whose family were Catholics. The Mass was celebrated at Mr. Sutcliffe's but once, and it was not until three or four years later—about 1856—that the people of Hightstown and the surrounding country had an opportunity again to hear Mass without going a long distance.

In that year, Reverend Beggio, who was pastor at Bordentown, began making visits at regular intervals to the residence of Dennis Murphy to offer the Holy Sacrifice for the little congregation that used to gather there. Mr. Murphy, who lived on the Dey Road near Cranbury, was the father of ex-postmaster Jeremiah Murphy of Cranbury, a trustee of St. Anthony's parish.

Subsequently Mass was celebrated at the home of Thomas Welch at Red Tavern and still later Father Beggio used to visit the home of William Nutt about two miles south of Hightstown where [for] a long time Mass was celebrated at stated intervals. Father Beggio's other duties eventually so engrossed his time that his visits to the Nutt home ceased and for many years afterward the people of Hightstown had no other opportunity to hear Mass than those that were offered by going to Princeton, Bordentown, Trenton, or Freehold.

It was some time in the early [18] seventies when Reverend Frederick Kivelitz, the pastor of St. Rose's Church at Freehold, came to Hightstown and learned that the faithful were without the opportunity of hearing Mass, except by going to another town—which most of them could not afford unless a

group got together to hire a large vehicle.

Father Kivelitz already was busy, not only with his Freehold parish, but also conducting missions at Jamesburg, Perrineville, Hillsdale and Colt's Neck. He could visit Hightstown only on weekdays and this he did for several years, celebrating Mass at the residence of James Dullard who lived on Stockton Street directly opposite the Soldier's Monument. These visits of Father Kivelitz were made the occasion of a general holiday by the Catholics of Hightstown, and after the Mass even the older folks would remain to hear the Catechism instruction which Father Kivelitz gave the children. In addition to his visits to Hightstown for the purpose of celebrating Mass, Father Kivelitz made a trip from Freehold—a distance of fourteen miles—twice a week, for the purpose of preparing a class of boys and girls for Confirmation. Father Kivelitz continued his visits to Hightstown until the Allentown mission of Bordentown was made into a separate parish with Father Borghese as its first pastor. Father Borghese celebrated Mass in Hightstown at Mr. Dullard's residence on several occasions. But his duties at Allentown and New Egypt, of which he also had charge, made it impossible for him to visit Hightstown often. Eventually he discontinued doing so. The people of Hightstown after that attended Mass at Allentown as often as they could. Those of the north or east of the town found it more convenient to go to Jamesburg or Perrineville. Allentown, meanwhile, had been made a separate parish with Reverend Rusing as the first pastor. Perrineville at the same time became a mission of the Jamesburg parish.

Hightstown continued to be connected with Allentown parish and for several years the spiritual wants of the Catholics of the town were ministered to by Father Borghese and his immediate successors, Reverend Danielou and Reverend M. O'Donnell. It was in the early [18] eighties that Perrineville was

made a separate parish with Reverend B.W. Carey as pastor. Father Carey assumed charge of Hightstown as a mission place and, previous to erection of St. Anthony's Church, celebrated Mass for his Hightstown congregation in the little building on South Main Street near the corner of Mercer that had been used as a law office by the late S. M. Schanck.

Church Incorporation

The real history of the parish began in 1885. On February 19th of that year the church was formally incorporated under the title "The Catholic Church of St. Anthony of Padua, Hightstown, New Jersey." The board of incorporation consisted of Right Reverend Anthony Smith, Vicar General, Father Carey, John P. Dullard and Frank T. McGowan.

Steps were at once taken for the erection of a church and Father Carey, who had been appointed pastor, purchased from William J. Cole and his wife three lots on Franklin Street for \$450 as a suitable site for the proposed edifice. Contractor George B. Miller began work early in 1886 and soon Father Smith, the vicar general, laid the cornerstone. The only furniture the church could boast was an inexpensive little altar and a half a dozen rough benches, and thus it remained until Father O'Donnell took charge in 1888. During his short pastorate Father O'Donnell made many improvements. In this time we find the first marriage recorded on the church books, that of Sam L. Griffin and Ella McGowan.

In the fall of 1888 Father Carey again assumed charge, but found great difficulty in managing the strained finances of the church. In 1890 it was found necessary to close the church and two years elapsed before it was opened for divine services again.

A new and happy chapter for St. Anthony's Church began in 1892, when Right Reverend Michael Joseph O'Farrell asked the Franciscan Fathers to look after the deserted parish. The story of their labors unfortunately can never be told adequately for the sons of the Seraphic Father were more fond of work than of recording what they had accomplished. Little they cared what posterity thought of their individual efforts, provided the Master took notice of them

and marked them down in the "Book of His Remembrance." This is especially true of the pioneer of the Franciscan Fathers, Reverend Angelus, O.M.C., a quiet, unassuming priest, who was more anxious for the spiritual than for the temporal progress of his little parish. He labored faithfully for nearly two years to gather the scattered flock and implanted in the hearts of the people entrusted to him that love and zeal for their holy faith which is the best guarantee of future prosperity.

After him came—in rapid succession—Reverend Edward, O.M.C., who visited the parish during the year 1893, and Reverend Berard, O.M.C., who was appointed to the charge in January, 1894. Genial and beloved by all, he labored for eight months to better the financial conditions of the church, when he was called to a new field of labor and received as a successor Reverend Aloys M. Fish, O.M.C.

Problems For the Parish:

Father Fish took charge in September, 1894, and soon found that a formidable task confronted him. The financial panic which swept like a deluge over the entire country in 1893 had not spared the little hamlet, and as a result money was scarce and the church unable to meet its obligations. No records existed and the people were in constant dread that the church would again have to be closed. Father Aloys straightened out the tangled finances, hunted up records and deeds and was forming plans to avert the threatening dangers when he was recalled and Reverend Otho, O.M.C., placed in charge.

Father Otho took up the seemingly hopeless struggle in May 1895, and remained until December of the same year. During his short incumbency of six months he put heart and soul into his work, but before he could see results of his labors, he was transferred by the chapter, and Father Fish again took the helm.

His former experience was of great service to him and he resolved to awaken interest in parish work among the scattered Catholic population. In winter he made an extended tour through Hightstown, Cranbury Station, Cranbury, and the surrounding country, partook of

the hospitality of the Catholic families he was able to find, and drew up the first accurate census. He devoted himself to that class (unfortunately to be found in every parish) of whom he sadly wrote, "The seed of faith planted in the hearts has fallen among briars, which quickly choked its growth."

When in December, 1896, Father Aloys was appointed chaplain at the Trenton State Prison, the good work he had started was continued by Reverend William, who was in charge but a short time and was succeeded by Reverend Anthony in June 1897. He labored successfully to improve the finances of the parish and made many minor improvements during the eight months he was in charge. His successor was Reverend Charles, O.M.C.

Father Charles made his first visit to Hightstown on February 13, 1898. To the superstitious this date was anything but an omen of success. Fortunately success crowned his efforts. In four years the little parish made the most astonishing progress and this progress has shown itself both in its spiritual and financial condition. Whereas previously, services were held but once every two weeks, the congregation started worship twice every Sunday of each month, three times. Services were also held on the feast days of obligation. The services were frequently augmented by solemn and impressive ceremonies, such as never before had been witnessed by the Catholics of the Borough. The church, too, was made very attractive by a handsome altar, altar rail, confessional, stations of the cross, carpets, altar decorations, and organ.

The lethargy of the past has been supplanted by zeal and fervor. The bishop, Right Reverend James A. McFaul, ably assisted the congregation in the "dark days" when ruin hovered over the little church, took a keen interest in the welfare of the parish and kindly consented to honor by his presence the celebration of the Fiftieth Jubilee of the first Mass said in the village. This festival occurred October 5, 1902.

In 1904 Father Charles was relieved by Reverend Stefan Korthas. Working

out of Immaculate Conception Church in Trenton, New Jersey, he was the last Franciscan to serve as rector of St. Anthony's.

New Rectory:

Reverend John B. McCloskey was the first resident pastor, and he served from 1906 to 1908. He resided on North Main Street at the foot of Monmouth Street. In 1908 he was relieved by Reverend John B. Conway. In 1912, Father Conway built the rectory at 226 Franklin Street, which is still in use today.

In 1918, Reverend Edward Whalen came to St. Anthony's from Oxford, New Jersey. In his four year stay at St. Anthony's, he enlarged the church to its present size. In 1923 a new Main Altar and altar rail were installed in the completed extension. Father Whalen was also responsible for acquiring the stained-glass windows and the beautiful circular window over the altar before he was transferred to St. Mary's in Bordentown in 1923. (This same window now graces the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of the new church.) Reverend Aloysius D. McCue came to us from Williamstown, New Jersey. Father McCue's short stay (1929-1930) was ended with his transfer to Sacred Heart Church in Mount Holly, New Jersey.

Reverend Francis J. Sullivan relieved Father McCue in 1930. Father Sullivan enlarged the rectory to its present size in late 1930. He was transferred to St. Paul's in Burlington, and in 1960 he was elevated to Monsignor. Today Monsignor Sullivan resides at St. Mary's, South Amboy, and is the only living expastor of St. Anthony's of Hightstown.

Reverend William Quinn relieved Father Sullivan in 1934. Father Quinn came to us from St. Vincent de Paul's at Mays Landing. During the Depression of the '30's, Father Quinn, with the aid of the men of the parish, dug out the basement under the church and installed the rest rooms. In 1941, Father Quinn was transferred to the Sacred Heart, Riverton, New Jersey.

Reverend Louis F. Cogan started a twenty-five year service in 1941 with the able assistance of our first curate, Reverend A.C. Hammel. Father Cogan came to us from Bradavelt, New Jersey,

determined to clear the church from debt and build a school. In Father Cogan's tenure, a new kitchen was constructed in the basement of the church by the Holy Name society. The grotto, containing the statue of our Virgin Mother, was also constructed by the Holy Name in 1954.

Catechetical Center:

With Father Cogan's guidance, the parish purchased the Weller property at 237 Franklin Street in 1947 for the purpose of starting a catechetical Center. This building was used as a convent and was formally opened and blessed by Most Reverend William A. Griffin on January 4, 1948.

The nuns first engaged by Bishop Griffin for the Catechetical Center were the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, whose Mother House is in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1957 the Regional Convent was staffed by the Victory Noll Sisters of Huntington, Indiana. They numbered three and had as superior Sister Mary Ellen.

This center covered Hightstown, East Windsor, Cranbury, Etra, Roosevelt, Englishtown, and Perrineville. The center operated from 1947 until 1966. In 1967 the building was removed to make room for the new church.

In 1948 Perrineville Church was placed as a mission church to Englishtown.

The assistant priests who served with Father Cogan, and their present assignments, are as follows:

Reverend A.C. Hammel, September 1941 to July 1942; Reverend C.B. Poltorak, June 1946 to March 1948.... In June 1960, Father Cogan built the very practical hall and paid the entire mortgage by 1965.

Father Cogan died on January 2, 1966. He left his entire estate, including his life savings, to St. Anthony's of Padua. The church account, at the time of Father Cogan's death, had a clear balance of \$50,000. In this final gesture he practiced charity as he had taught it for so many years.

A New Era Begins:

Reverend William J. Haughney, came to us from Willingboro, New Jersey, in February 1965, as an assistant to Father Cogan. Born in Morristown on April

14, 1921, he attended Bayley High School and Seton Hall University. He studied for the priesthood at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, New Jersey, and was ordained in Trenton, May 31, 1947.

Father Haughney not only administered St. Anthony's spiritual needs, but also to Father Cogan's medical and spiritual wants for over a year. Upon Father Cogan's death he became the new pastor. It was then decided to meet our most urgent need: a new house of worship.

The original St. Anthony of Padua Church had been built for twenty-five families. In 1918 it was extended. By 1968, 1,200 registered families made the new church a real necessity.

On August 11, 1968, ground-breaking ceremonies were held and the new church, classrooms and meeting room addition to the hall were now on their way to becoming a reality. The foundations were laid and the apex started to rise. The beams were placed, walls finished, and by May, 1969, the roof was completed.

The Most Reverend Bishop of Trenton, George W. Ahr, dedicated the church and catechetical center on March 8, 1970.

The new church reflects the contemporary liturgical changes in its design and planning. The modern structure has a semi-circular exterior of brick and stucco pierced with stained-glass windows. The church is entered through a flagstone entrance plaza into the Narthex which contains the baptismal font to remind all of their entry into Catholicism through the Sacrament of Baptism. The baptismal font area has a sunken floor enabling those present to witness the administering of the Sacrament. The principal design element is a large faceted and stained-glass front wall.

From the Narthex you enter a large fan-shaped Nave roofed with wood decking carried on laminated wooden bents which rise towards the top lighted sanctuary located directly over the Table of Sacrifice. The radial pews have a seating capacity of 840 and no seat is located farther than 60 feet from the celebrant.

A small Chapel of Reservation is located directly off the Nave and Sanctuary for the worship of the Blessed Sacrament. The Priests' Sacristies are located at both the front and rear of the Nave and a boy's and work sacristy is at the rear. The entire church is carpeted and air conditioned.

The classroom and meeting room wing is added to the hall built twelve years ago. The two-story structure provides rooms for religious instruction and parish and community meetings, group activities and social functions.

After serving as Pastor of St. Anthony's for nine years, Father Haughney was transferred to St. Joseph's in North Plainfield in 1975.

St. Anthony's was then blessed with the appointment of Father Russell E. Loughman as its new pastor until his retirement in 1978. During his administration, the parish rectory was expanded to accommodate the demands of a growing parish.

Father John H. MacDonald was appointed as pastor and served St. Anthony's until 1980. Father MacDonald was responsible for the formation of the Senior Citizens group, better known today at the Antonians.

Our current pastor, Father Francis E. Santitoro, is celebrating his fifth year administering to St. Anthony's spiritual and physical needs. Under his leadership there have been many necessary improvements to the parish buildings and grounds, as well as the return of the annual parish carnival, which is a major fund raiser for the parish. ■

Reminder:

PEMBERTON AND HIGHTSTOWN: A Chronicle of Railroading Through the Farm Belt of New Jersey

by John Brinkmann.

Copies are still available from the author: write to him at 404 Lanny Drive, Winchester, VA 22601. \$36.50 includes postage and handling. ■

THE METHODIST CHURCH... MILFORD AND HIGHTSTOWN

by Richard S. Hutchinson

Since my previous article dealing with the Milford Methodist Church, which gave us a glimpse of its rustic appearance, further research has uncovered additional information pertaining to this structure. This research has also shown that three Methodist Church structures [made of brick, wood frame, and stone] have existed on the present church property on Stockton Street in Hightstown after the congregation made its final move from Milford to Hightstown.

In 1935, Addison B. Hunt prepared a history of the Methodist Church in preparation for the church's 153rd Anniversary. In preparing his history, Mr. Hunt used the church's records as his source of information. Excerpts of Hunt's history were printed in the *Hightstown Gazette*, October 27, 1938. One cannot discuss the origins of the Methodist Church in this area without mentioning the children and grandchildren of William and Ann Simpson Hutchinson, who lived at Milford and were instrumental in the church's origins. One of the principal benefactors of the Methodists in their effort in Milford was the son of William and Ann, who was known as "Father" Joseph Hutchinson (1731-1828). The church held its earliest services in a tavern kept by Adam Shaw, which according to Hunt's history, was located "near the site of the present Old Hight's Hotel," now the location of the Great American Saloon and Eatery on Main Street in Hightstown. [It is unclear whether Hunt was correct—Editor]

Adam Shaw's wife, Mary, was a daughter of William and Ann Hutchinson. After hearing the preacher, "Father" Hutchinson invited him "to come and hold services regularly, instead of at the tavern. This change was made, and church was held there instead of at Hightstown. Mr. Hutchinson's home was about one mile east of Etra, and is now [1938] occupied by Benjamin Brown [site of the Hechalutz Organization of America farm].. This house

became the regular place of worship, and a class or society was organized. This society had erected, principally at his own expense a small plain wooden structure, about thirty by fifty feet, on the east side of the little settlement of Milford, now known as Etra, where worship was held until 1835. The setting of this little church was very picturesque. It stood at the brow of a low hill, overlooking the quiet pond a short distance away, just across the road from a little cemetery which holds the remains of the members of the Hutchinson family..."

[If you visit this area today, you can see how the topography of the land where the church once stood has been dramatically changed, probably through the construction of the road. However, part of that low hill referred to above can still be seen in the unchanged topography of the existing cemetery.]

The Methodist society in Milford "increased to forty members..." which apparently was too great for the little structure. "Efforts were made to enlarge the old church, but all plans failed.... Under authority of an act of the New Jersey Legislature, the old house of worship at Milford was sold, and the Methodist preaching, which was established first at Hightstown in 1785, then removed to Milford, was thus brought back to Hightstown after a lapse of fifty years. As late as 1840 the Milford church was still standing, but fast going to decay. Long ago, it was torn down, at the present there is nothing to denote its former location. The graveyard, referred to as being opposite, was opened in the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century...."

"In 1835, a brick church was erected in Hightstown on Stockton Street" opposite the present church. [This is the brick structure, now a two-family residence, which still stands on the corner of Stockton and Church streets and was once the residence and business location of the Vetick family.] At the time that this brick church was built, Church Street did not exist. From 1835 to 1852, this brick church was "connected with the Allentown and Crosswicks circuit... more land was purchased next to the new church and on March 9, 1842, the New Jersey Legislature passed a bill giving permission to this church to change the name from the "Methodist Episcopal Society of Milford" to "The

First Methodist Church of Hightstown."

I know from past research that the Methodists also had a cemetery adjoining this brick structure. As reported in an earlier article [see the "Cedar Hill Footnote" Sept./Oct. 1994 newsletter. Editor], the removal of bodies from this cemetery to Cedar Hill Cemetery and other locations was being completed in July 1857 in order for the new church of "frame construction" to be built. This frame structure and its adjoining sheds were located on the east side of Church Street, midway between Rogers Avenue and Stockton Street, to the rear of what was then the brick church. Therefore, the cemetery was also located in this same area and under the present day Church Street. [The location of this structure was made possible by examining the old fire insurance maps.] In 1868, the present day Church Street was "cut through the property to give better access to the church."

On 27 May 1858, the *Hightstown Excelsior* reported that "Joseph McMurrin has purchased the old Methodist Episcopal Church on Stockton Street and intends, we understand, completely refitting it for dwelling purposes... We regret the necessity which compels the trustees to part with this old meeting house. We think it should have been retained as a session house for prayer meetings, Sunday School purposes, etc...." In 1898, the cornerstone of the present stone Methodist Church on Stockton Street was laid and in 1900, "the old frame church was sold to M.P. Chamberlin. It became the Hightstown Opera House. According to Hunt, it was destroyed by fire on April 14, 1929.

On April 18, 1929, the *Hightstown Gazette* had a front-page story about that fire. The story related how 16 individuals, including a 4-month-old baby escaped from the burning opera house. The article stated, "The large frame building, originally a Methodist Episcopal Church, and for over twenty years used for road shows and dances, burned rapidly... The building was first erected in 1857 for the First M.E. Church. In 1898 the present stone church building was erected and shortly afterwards the old structure was sold and remodeled as an amusement house. The property has been owned by Gross Brothers for several years." ■

MISS HIGHTSTOWN

Captain Wright learned to fly back in 1939 at the Bennett Air Service, four miles south of Hightstown. Later he acted as an instructor at Princeton University. From there he went to Miami, Fla., to Pan-American Airways. Soon the army took over, and Walt became a member of the Ferrying Command.

Today, he flies planes, mostly fighters, to all parts of the world. He has been to South America, Africa, Alaska, and England. His latest report was that he was in Russia and hoped to be able to stop in Hightstown to see his father on his trip back to the United States and a new assignment."

I decided to do further research on this family hoping to find a better photograph of "our" plane. I found that Walter and his family have been involved with Hightstown and East Windsor Township since at least the

1700s. Walter's parents were Elijah E. Wright (1869-1946) and Amy A. Chamberlin (1876-1924). Walter had two other brothers—Wilton and Carlton. Their grandparents were Morgan (1846-1928) and Mary J. Wright (abt 1849-1915), and their grandparents were Thomas Jefferson Wright (1801-1883) and Rebecca Applegate (abt 1806-1894). Walter's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery.

At the time of his father's death and while still in the U.S. Army, Walter was residing at the family farm on Princeton Road. Shortly thereafter in 1946, he returned to Miami. Using Social Security records, I believe I have found what appears to be our pilot. The subject in their records was the only "Walter Wright" whose Social Security card was issued in New Jersey. Their records show that this "Walter Wright" was born on 11 September 1907 and died January 1981 and his primary residence was Miami, ■

MUSEUM COMMITTEE NEEDS REBUILDING

Volunteers are needed to "restore" the Museum Committee. The Society has been unable to mount exhibits, hold open houses, or even administer its collections properly in the last few years due to a lack of museum committee volunteers. We want to restore these activities and add others. If you are interested, please call the Society, at (609) 371-9580, or contact Edgar Thomas, at 448-3533. ■

In the Library:

The project to organize, re-folder, and re-box the Library collections is moving forward. About 100 pages of an in-house finding aid have already been compiled, and several of the largest collections have been processed. Among these are the Alphaeus Albert, Eleanor Shuman, John W. Orr Jr., collections, and the Cedar Hill Cemetery records, among others. One large collection of Ely Family papers has been processed, and the principal collection will be processed soon. ■

**Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society**
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