



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2001

John W. Orr, Jr.



As many of you may know or not know, John Orr has had a serious stroke and is presently incapacitated. Dr.

Edgar C. Thomas, Jr., obtained a copy of the following work that was written by John in January of this year. In fitting tribute to John and all the work he has done preserving the history of Hightstown and the surrounding area, I would like to print his work here.

The Old Hightstown Tannery

In 1905, William Bilyeu, of Philadelphia, during a visit to Hightstown after an absence of over fifty years, recalled that "a small tanyard occupied the place where Embley's Carriage Factory now stands. No houses were on Mercer street. The former Academy building was just opened ..." In the earliest days of our village, tanneries were an important adjunct to the lives of the people and were relatively common.

In his "Recollections of Hightstown Fifty Years Ago," penned in 1884, Jacob Stults recalled that behind Robert Purdy's Shoe Shop on Stockton street "there was a tannery." Mr. Stults, a native of Hightstown, was the son of David

Stults and a former owner and editor of the *Gazette*, who could speak with some authority on the early days of Hightstown. His boyhood home was on Stockton street nearly across from present day Forman street. (David Stults bought this house in 1824, shortly after his marriage.) Jacob goes on to state that the small, two-story shoe shop was very early occupied by Robert Purdy, Sr., where "he conducted a shoe-making business on quite a large scale." Large quantities of new shoes were sent to the Atlantic shore villages by stagecoach where they were then sold to the Atlantic shore villages by stagecoach where they were then sold to shoe dealers. Shoes, boots, harness, razor straps, clothing and many

Continued on page 2



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER

5 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

Rush & Cane A Chair - contact Skip Cox at 448-0037

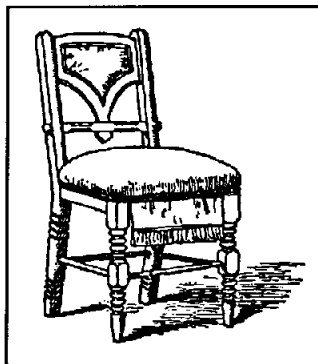
DECEMBER

2 2:00-4:00 p.m., Christmas Tea, Ely House

3 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

Rushing and Caning

The Society is inviting both members and the community at-large to come to the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center, 164 North Main Street, to learn how to rush and/or cane a chair.



Beginning in mid-October and continuing through November, the Society will have John La Salle on hand to teach and assist people in the art of rushing and caning. John has taught classes in both East and West Windsor and is most competent in the various styles. Therefore, those who are interested may call Skip Cox at 609-448-0037 for specific dates and to enroll in the classes.

So, go and find those old chairs sitting in the attic, cellar or garage with the hole in the bottom and come on down! And, even if you don't have a chair, we'd still like to see you.

The Old Hightstown Tannery

Continued from page 1

other articles were made from leather, and leather was made from the hides and skins of animals suitable for tanning.

The small, backyard tanning operations of the early settlers were usually limited to wild animals caught by trappers. This activity would eventually evolve into small businesses called tanyards, or tanneries. Other marketable by-products would result from the operation such as the production of animal fats to make grease for wagon axles and squeaky stagecoaches. Robert Purdy owned and operated such a tannery in back of his shoe shop which today would be considered in the middle of downtown Hightstown. The road leading into his tannery was from Stockton street, then called the Road to Princeton, and was between the railroad and Purdy's shoe shop. The tanyard was about 2/3rd of

an acre in size. Its boundary ran from Stockton street back along the west side of the Camden and Amboy Railroad to the millrace at Rocky Brook, a distance of about 300 feet. It then followed along Rocky Brook downstream about 125 feet to a point where it dipped southward on a zig-zag course to the point of beginning. The open stream called Grape Run ran through the tanyard. A small dam held back a pool of water useful to the operation. The polluted water would then be allowed to flow into Rocky Brook. The odors that came from this operation, depending on the wind direction, must have caused much distress to the nearby residents (that is, to those whose olfactory senses had not yet been destroyed), and particularly to the train passengers who were forced to endure these fragrances while awaiting the

Continued on page 3

The Bakery

Hightstown has had many bakeries in various locations around the town. One bakery even had its oven under the sidewalk of Main street. But, this bakery, I'm referring to was Zehnder's Bakery, which stood on the corner of Morrison Street (now Rogers Avenue) and Forman Streets.



I have not done extensive research and very little has been found concerning the operation of this well-known bakery. What I have found is that prior to 1890, the bakery was run by Mrs. Elizabeth W. Zehnder and her son, A.C. Zehnder, after her husband's death. Mrs. Zehnder then left the business in September 1890, as the result of her marriage on the 14th of that month to Honorable

Benjamin P. Fortner, of Catawissa, Columbia County, Pennsylvania, and having moved to that location. However, this marriage did not last long due to the death of Benjamin Fortner, less than a year later, in June of 1891. The bakery was eventually sold. The last item I find is a death notice which indicates that Mrs. Elizabeth W. Zehnder Fortner, of Catawissa, Pennsylvania, died in July 1891. In her death notice, it indicates that she was the mother of A.C. Zehnder, then of Vineland, New Jersey.

I recently found the bakery's trade card on the internet being auctioned on Ebay. If anyone has further information on the bakery, I would be interested in hearing from you.

HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971

609-371-9580

To educate, while preserving for
future generations, our people and
our community's history.

Editor, Richard S. Hutchinson

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Genealogical queries pertaining to the
Hightstown-East Windsor Township area are ac-
cepted, but will be printed as space allows.

Typeset by Cori Hutchinson Quinlan
Quinlan Processing 609-888-4028

The Old Hightstown Tannery

Continued from page 2

continuance of their journey. At this point it should be pointed out that if they were traveling south there was a hill (Cedar Hill) to be climbed. The small engine could not always climb the hill from a dead stop at the station and had to back up over Rocky Brook to the north in order to gain enough momentum to surmount the rise. As a result, the passengers would get a double dose of what the tanyard had to offer. Later the railroad company would dig a cut in Cedar Hill and lower the tracks.

According to Mrs. Willard C. Pullen, author of The Family History of John Hight, in her writings on early Hightstown, she mentions that the existence of this tannery dates back to at least 1806, when it was carried on by Major James Cook. In 1812, it was taken over by Robert Purdy, who operated it for 28 years before taking in R.R. Forman as a partner. Purdy retired in 1846, at which time the partnership became Joseph Rue and R.R. Forman. In 1848, the tanyard was sold to Clayton I. Coward, who gave up the tanning business in 1850.

An advertised sale in the *Village Record* tells us a little more about the tanning business. Mr. Coward, in offering up the tanning business for sale, lists some of the items to be sold on March 11, 1850, as follows: Two Bark Mills, one by horsepower and the other by water power (used to bruise and strip the bark from newly cut logs, usually oak); a Currying House (to prepare the leather by dressing after it is tanned and includes the process of soaking, scraping, cleaning, beating and coloring the leather); Bark Sheds (to store the stripped tree bark that provides the tannic acid necessary for tanning and coloring); a good Barn; 21 vats, a part of which are under the Currying house; two Limes (used for soaking hides in limewater to loosen the hair); a small lake; four Bates (an alkaline solutions of chemicals used in the soaking of hides and skins), handlers and a quantity of other tools as are commonly used by curriers.

The old tanyard lay idle for several years until Dr. Jonathan English McChesney, and his brother-in-law, Edgar N. Ely, of

White Water, Wisconsin, rented the tannery site in mid-1857. Dr. McChesney and Edgar Ely had perfected and patented a new and faster process for tanning leather. But, the days of dependence on leather were waning and the business was not profitable. An advertisement in the *Gazette* of September 28, 1860, notes its demise:

"AT THE OLD TANNERY IN THE BOROUGH OF HIGHTSTOWN. At private sale: Twelve new portable vats (two with copper bottoms for heating the liquor); one large mahogany table for dressing leather; one force pump; a lot of hose; tools, tanning material, etc. To be sold cheap." And, so it was.

"Someone's road home from work this once was,

Who may be just ahead of you on foot ..."

Robert Frost

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society joins the nation and the world in extending our thoughts and prayers to those touched by the tragic events of September 11.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Some Recent Donations

The Society has received some recent donations. Both items are a great asset to our community, but it is how they came to the Society that is the real story.

First, Dr. Edgar C. Thomas, Jr, donated a long, wooden custard pie spoon to the Society, which had been put into his hands for safe keeping. In 1951, Edgar and his wife, June, bought the property at 201 Stockton Street from Miss Mildred Davenport, a retired math teacher at Hightstown High School, and Miss Jane B. Donnell, a retired superintendent of the local school district. Both ladies had operated an antique shop, The Patchwork House, in the two front rooms of this Stockton Street house. Miss Davenport gave the custard spoon to Mr. Thomas upon the sale of the property in 1951, asking him to keep the spoon

for the yet to be formed historical society "when it had a suitable home." Now, that Edgar and Clara are moving from their home on York Road and becoming residents of Florida, with now and then trips to Whiting, N.J., Edgar believed the time was right to fulfill a promise he made 50 years ago.

Now, another amazing story regarding our next donation by former residents and Society members, Henry and Gertrude May. Mrs. May was an executive secretary to C. Herbert Davison, at the Hightstown Rug Company, which operated many years ago on Bank Street. At that time, Mr. Davison's wife, Maude Outcalt Davison, had purchased two chairs in an antique shop in Freehold. Many years later, Mr. Davison gave the two chairs to his former secretary, Gertrude May. After retire-

ment, both Henry and Gertrude moved from the area to Arkansas and the chairs went with them. For some time now, the Mays believed that the chairs belonged back in Hightstown. So about a month ago, Henry and Gertrude loaded the chairs into their car and drove from Arkansas to Hightstown, and with Herbert B. Davison's approval, they donated the two chairs to the Society.

The Friday Club also bought for the Society a new Lenox china desert set, which compliments the china from the Hightstown Women's Club, already in service in the Ely House kitchen.

The Society would like to thank all of the above contributors for their thoughtfulness and trust.

Some Halloween Left-Overs

The following comes from Russia in May 1905. It was reported in the *St. James Gazette* that M. Markoff, the great Siberian railroad contractor, had died. His widow was very upset over her loss. After making several inquiries, she decided on a course of action. Instead of burying her husband, she had him stuffed. She had him fitted with glass eyes and dressed him in his best dress clothes and put him in the corner of her room. She eventually had an beautiful richly inlaid cabinet made for him, put him in it, and he then inhabited the cabinet kept in Mme. Markoff's drawing room.

The following item comes from Ocean County, New Jersey, in July 1894. Alex. Keanly, 40 years old, who had been ill for several days, apparently died Thursday at his home, at Silverton, near Toms River, and in the evening a score of his friends gathered to attend a wake. The coffin was placed in front of a large parlor, and the visitors made themselves comfortable for the night in the rear of the room. Suddenly a noise was heard coming from within the coffin. Everybody fled in terror, and it was a long time before several men got up sufficient courage to enter the room. The noise was heard again. The coffin lid was opened, and as it was pulled away Keanly sat upright, gazing at his terribly frightened neighbors. He attempted to speak, but could not.

He was taken from the coffin and placed in bed. Dr. A.J. Smithers was summoned, and a dose of brandy brought new life to Mr. Keanly. Several other physicians came, and decided that Mr. Keanly had only been unconscious or in a trance. On inquiry it was found that no physicians had attended the sick man. An old herb woman had been giving him medicine, and when he went into the trance, she said he was dead. The physicians state their belief that the man's pulse had never ceased beating. They believe that his life may yet be saved, though he is very low."

An Historic Cane Finds Its Way To Hightstown

An Interesting Relic of Early Universalism



On August 22nd 1895, Mrs. M. Louise Thomas, the widow of Rev. Abel C. Thomas, then of New York, but formerly of Hightstown, passed on to Rev. Edward G.

Mason, of the Universalist Church, of Hightstown, an interesting relic of the early days of Universalism in America that had been presented years before to her deceased husband. It was an ivory-headed oak cane made from the wood of the old church in Boston which had been purchased by the Universalists and dedicated by them in 1795. The church was built in 1742 for the use of an independent society from the North Church.

The following letter from Mrs. Thomas accompanied the gift: Rev. Edw'd G. Mason, Dear Bro. - I want to beg your acceptance of the accompanying cane which I value very highly as an historic souvenir of three of God's chosen servants. You will see by the inscription on the silver band around the top -- "Evang'st Abel C. Thomas, Philad'a. This cane came from a part of the Old Church, built 1742, in which the venerated John Murray labored twenty-two years. Is presented by George W. Brazin, 1838." -- that it is made out of a piece of the second church dedicated to John Murray to the cause of Universalism in America, and was presented by George W. Brazin, the printer of the *Trumpet*, and an honored and beloved man in the church, to Rev. Abel C. Thomas, a consistent follower of Christ our Lord.

Since Mr. Thomas passed away in 1880, I have looked carefully for the man into whose hands I could entrust this sacred relic, and I think I have found in you one who honors the traditions of the church, who will look beyond the mere letter into the spirit of divine truth, and one who prizes above all earthly things the sublime system of final holiness and happiness of the race as taught by those sainted men whose footsteps lead the way of the redeemed upward to the throne.

My acquaintance with you commenced in New Jersey, the landing place in America of John Murray, and at Hightstown where Mr. Thomas has also lived and preached.

There had been an annual gathering of the people at Good Luck, the house of Thomas Potter, ... I thought of the time, which is also a tradition to me, when Abel C. Thomas, then a very young man, went with Richard Norton on a pilgrimage over the sands of New Jersey -- the first Universalist to find the home of Potter and his grave near the church he had built which was yet unmarked by stick or stone.

He returned to his home in Philadelphia, had a monument made ... and the next year went again to the spot accompanied by Dr. LeFevre and Moses Ballou and a few others, and had it put in place, and a simple wooden fence to enclose the lot. The cost he paid out of his modest salary of \$700 per year.

It is because I find in you, Bro. Mason, the same spirit of self-sacrifice that I ask you to accept the cane which he prized. Sincerely your friend, M. Louise Thomas. New York.

The Beaded Bag

Margaret E. Sangster -1894

Worked by Priscilla, a child of ten,
Dated, Eighteen Hundred and Two,
A wonderful pattern of stars and flowers,
Red and white on a field of blue.
I am a little Colonial Maid,
Mother's a grand Colonial Dame,
And this beaded bag we have oft displayed
Wrought by an ancestress of our name.

Poor little Priscilla, so sweet and prim,
Pulling her needle in and out,
Wishing herself at leave to play
And romp with her brothers, I have no doubt.

But, ten years old, in Eighteen Two,
Was expected to sit at her mother's side,
To study and knit, and otherwise do
Everything quiet and dignified.

The little Priscilla grew up as sweet
As a summer rose in her lovely prime,
She married a soldier brave and bold,
And had no end of a splendid time,
And in this beaded bag her whole gay life
Was a purse to carry her silver and gold.
To think it should be but a relic now.
A little butterfly's pence to hold.

But money won't buy this beaded bag,
For I am a small Colonial Maid,
And Mother's a grand Colonial Dame.
And when our treasures are all displayed,
We hang Priscilla's wonderful work,
Red and white on a field of blue,
And show what our little ancestress did,
When the century's birthdays counted two.



A True Daughter of the American Revolution

The following article honoring the ancestors of Mrs. Nancy Clark Chamberlin of Franklin, Ohio, appeared in the Franklin, Ohio *Chronicle* on August 31st 1899 and was reprinted in the *Hightstown Gazette*, 14 September 1899.

Many years ago two brothers, John and Joseph Chamberlin, came to Ohio from New Jersey and bought land in this vicinity. Last Thursday over a hundred of the descendants of these stalwart men held a reunion at the Fair Grounds near Franklin and honored the oldest living member of their family. Mrs. Nancy Clark Chamberlin was a pretty girl when this century was young and her name was Nancy Compton. Her father had fought with Washington in the great Revolutionary War and was a captain of guerrillas under the first American General, wintered at Valley Forge and knew Washington intimately.

After dinner the gathering was called to order by Mr. Lloyd Stockman, Mr. J.D. Miller was chosen chairman and accepted the honor in a neat little speech. Mr. S.S. Tibbals was chosen secretary. After the organization, Chairman Miller stated that the object of the meeting was to present Mrs. Nancy Clark Chamberlin with the badge and certificate of honorary membership in the Ohio Daughters of the American Revolution.

Mrs. Frances Albaugh, Vice Regent of the society, was introduced and spoke as follows: ".... But we have one among us, who unlike most of us, does not need to go back several generations to find her Revolutionary ancestor, as her father, Joseph Compton, was a soldier of the Revolutionary War, as most of you are aware of; but you probably are not aware of the fact that her de-

scendants can lay claim to another Revolutionary ancestor. In my researches I have found that Joseph Chamberlin (grandfather of Israel Clark Chamberlin) served as a private, 'Minute Man,' in the Middlesex Co., New Jersey Militia, during the Revolutionary War.

".... Joseph Compton, father of Nancy Compton, enlisted at the age of seventeen years as private in Captain Peter Wikoff's Company, Second Regiment, Monmouth Co., N.J. Militia; also served as private, Captain John Conover's Company, 1st Regiment, Monmouth Co., N.J.; private, Captain Cavard's Company, Second Regiment, Monmouth Co. Militia; also enlisted in January, 1778, in a Troop of Light Horse, Monmouth Co., N.J. and served therein until the end of the war. After the war, November 1, 1779, he was commissioned Adjutant of the Fourth Regiment, Monmouth Co., N.J. Militia, and served five years."

"And in honor of these services I am commissioned ... to present to his daughter, Mrs. Compton, in their name, this certificate and badge and to welcome her as an honorary member of the Society of Daughters of Revolution."

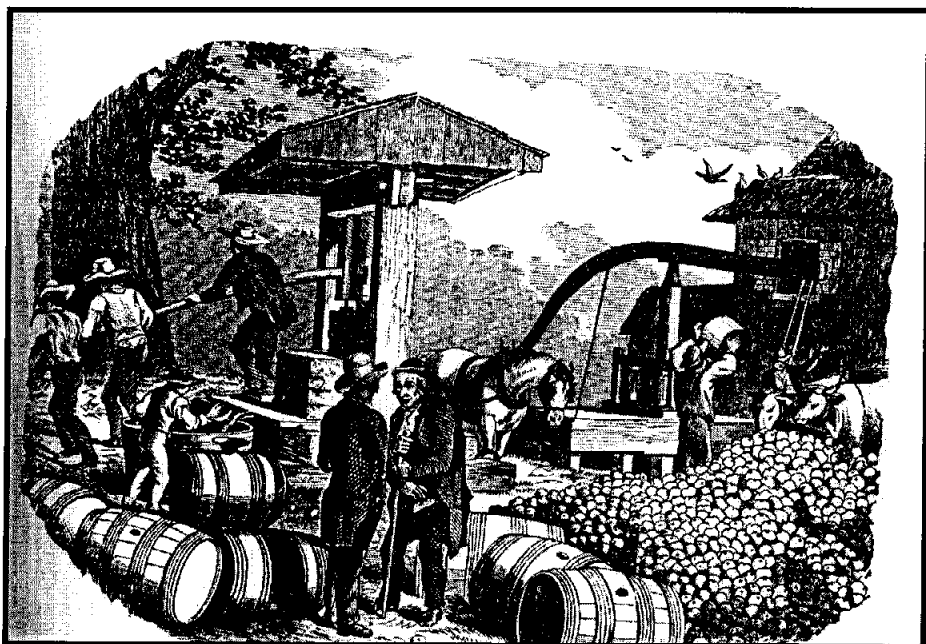
There were tears in "Aunt Nancy's" eyes when the badge was pinned upon her bosom, and no doubt her thoughts went back to the days when that grim veteran of the War of Independence held her upon his knee and told her of those terrible days of 1776....

Mr. Lloyd Stockman told the story of how "Aunt Nancy's" father received a compass from the hands of General Washington to guide him in a move-

ment against the British forces at Valley Forge. The compass is now in "Aunt Nancy's" possession...Mr. J.D. Miller spoke eloquently of the trials of the pioneers...Mr. J.D. Chamberlin, of Hightstown, New Jersey, spoke briefly in reply to calls for an address...

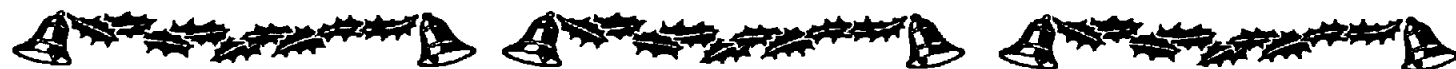
The following ladies and gentlemen sat down to a dinner...Mr. Clark Chamberlin of Spring Hill, Kansas; Mrs. J.D. Chamberlin, Miss Luella B. Chamberlin and Mr. J.D. Chamberlin, of Hightstown, New Jersey; Mr. and Mrs. F.K. Bowers, of Miamisburg; Mr. and Mrs. Irwin McFadden, of Middletown; Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Emley and daughter, of Miamisburg; Misses Eva and Helen Monger, of Piqua; Mrs. Frances Albaugh and four children, of Phoneton, Ohio; Mrs. R.H. Koepfel and daughter, of Germantown, Ohio; Dr. G.L. Lane and Mr. H.P. Lane, of Middletown; Misses Mae and Bertha Weiland of Troy, Ohio; Mr. and Mrs. Jos. A. Chamberlin, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Chamberlin, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Chamberlin and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. John Chamberlin and family, Mrs. Nancy Clark Chamberlin, Mrs. E.V. Ingraham, Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Mount, Hazel Chamberlin, Wilbur Chamberlin, Lutie Chamberlin, Bessie Chamberlin, Jos. C. Chamberlin. Mrs. W.I. Chamberlin, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Stockman, Mrs. Eleanor S. Dey, Clark, Charles and Ray Chamberlin, of Carlisle; Mr. and Mrs. I.C. Chamberlin and son, Mrs. Geo. White and daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Croll and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lane, Miss Jennie Lane, Mr. and Mrs. D.H. Sheets and family, Mrs. Nancy T. Chamberlin, Mrs. Jane Anderson, Mrs. H.B. Anderson, Dr. C.D. Wilson and Mr. J.D. Miller, of Franklin.

Christmas Tea at Ely House



Busy at work, Society members prepare juice for their Christmas "Tea."

The Society's annual Christmas Tea, will be held at Ely House, December 2nd, from 2- 4 PM. All members of the Society and the public are invited to visit for an afternoon of good food, music, exhibits, and conversation. Some of the highlights will be "The Madrigals", the running of the model trains through the recreated 1930 Hightstown, Christmas cookies, and hot apple cider. Ely House will be decorated by the local Brownie troop, the Rocky Brook Garden Club, and Society volunteers. For more info call Shirley Olsen at 609-448-8388.



The Holiday Greeting Card

Each year at this time, the Society sponsors a Holiday Greeting Card, which is one of the ways we hope to spread a little good cheer during the holidays.

To cover our costs and to raise needed revenue for the Society, we ask our subscribers to contribute a small amount for their names to be inscribed on the card.

The monies received for the Greeting Card help in meeting our regular expenses.

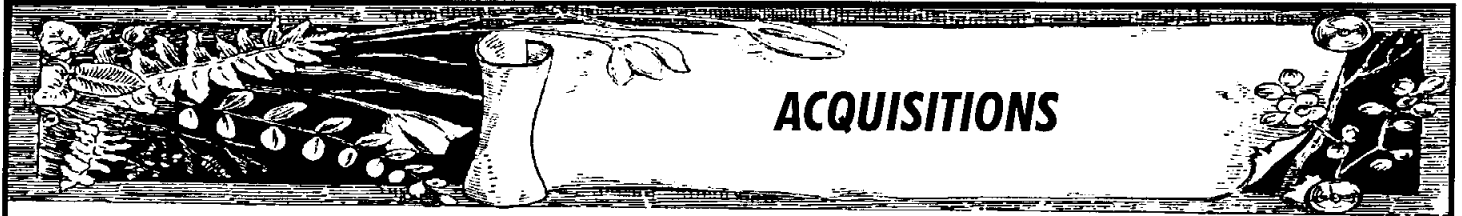
Please contribute \$12 for an individual name and \$15 for a family. Checks may be made payable to H.E.W.H.S.

To have your name(s) added to the Holiday greeting card, please list your names (as you would like them to appear) on the form below.

Your name _____
 Amount \$ _____
 Evening phone _____

Send replies by December 1st to Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, c/o Dr. Harold C. Cox, Jr., 183 E. Ward Street, Hightstown, New Jersey 08520. Please be sure to include your full return address and write "Holiday Card" on the envelope.





1. 2001-1 / Loan for copying: Original photographs of the Morrison House, 234 Stockton Street; *Etude Magazine* (01/1937), which includes an article about the composer Robert Morrison Stults, by his widow, as well as a complete list of his compositions. (Loan from Frank & Peggy Brennan)
2. 20001-2 / Year 2001 Calendars from Manino's, 4 Main Street and Hightstown Fuel, Franklin Street, Hightstown. (Anonymous)
3. 2001-3 / Program from the Borough of Hightstown Re-Organization Meeting; 1/01/2001. (Anonymous)
4. 2001-4 / Laser copy photograph of a class posing, ca. 1902, at the back door of the Hightstown School, Mercer Street, now the home of the YMCA. Includes identifications of the students on the back. (Gift of L. Dey)
5. 2001-5 / Original photograph of the A.B. Wyckoff house, 421 N. Main Street; original Horn photograph of an address to a crowd at Stockton & Main Streets (1932); "By-Laws of the Cedar Hill Cemetery" (1858), including a list of the trustees and plot owners; A deed from the Universalist Society to Peter D. Hibbets (1/15/1859), which includes additional land transfers and signatures from Joseph J. Ely, Chas. W. Mount, J.R. Norton, Augustus M. Taylor, and Edward C. Taylor; program for the "Closing Exercises for the Hightston Public School" (6/21/1901), with the name Bertha L. Cox; *NJ Farm and Garden* (Vol 12, 9; 9/1941), which features the opening of the Tri-County Cooperative auction. (Gift of Vinton and Maribel Taylor)

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

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Organization
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