

HIGHTSTOWN



EAST WINDSOR

NEW

JERSEY

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2001

## HISTORY OF THE HIGHTSTOWN-EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society will be celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, at the Society's headquarters, the Ely House, located 164 North Main Street, Hightstown, on September 23, 2001, from 2-5 p.m.

The Society has accomplished much in 30 years. The following are some of the highlights of the past 30 years:

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society was founded in 1971, on the initiative of the Junior Friday Club, under the direction of Hazel Zirkle. During Hightstown's celebration of its 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the Club felt it was time to organize a historical society and

museum. Eighty-four residents attended the historical society's planning meetings on May 23, 1971.

The first dinner meeting and installation of officers of the Society was held November 21, 1971, at the Coach and Four Restaurant. The first president of the Society was Alphaeus Albert, Vice President-Richard Lee, Recording Secretary-Hazel Zirkle, Corresponding Secretary- Mrs. Everett Swift, Treasurer-Mrs. V. Robert Carson, Jr.

On June 21, 1974, the Society bought the house that it now uses as its headquarters, the Ely House, for \$40,000. The Society managed to raise the \$10,000 down payment through

fundraisers, including an "1850's Ball". Several local families purchased furniture from the Huldah Ely estate for the Society to display in its new headquarters. Among the purchases made were a mahogany drop-leaf table presently located in the dining room, and a four poster bed with a rope spring trundle bed presently in one bedroom. Other donated furnishings include a mahogany Sheraton table of the 1820's, Ogee Clock of the 1830's, and an organ patented and built in the 1840's, and four James Marlatt portraits.

This Greek revival style house dates from ca. 1850. The house has a large entrance extending through the house.

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### SEPTEMBER

10 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

#### OCTOBER

1 7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

10 7:30 p.m. - PowerPoint presentation on the History of the First United Methodist Church of Hightstown, held at the First United Methodist Church

## THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HIGHTSTOWN

by Richard S. Hutchinson

*Continued from May-June 2001 Issue*

The Rev. T. Fiske...had an appointment in Hightstown in the early part of August, 1830. Other engagements preventing fulfillment, personally, he [Fiske] sent Rev. W.L. Hawley. This wanderer, a convert from the Methodists in Kentucky, had some difficulty in reaching Hightstown from Princeton; but, either because he was heedless of expense or because he could not get along on easier terms, he hired a coach and four horses for his purpose. The vehicle was one of the yellow-bodied stages used in that day; and my in-

formant, though a mere lad at the time, well remembers seeing it pressing along the row of cedars leading to the house of Col. Johnes, where the meeting was to be held....The date for the session of our Association approached...I knew no one in Princeton — and so, as Standing Clerk, I assumed the responsibility of changing the appointment to Hightstown — notifying whom it might concern, that the session would be held at the house of Samuel C. Johnes...Rev. J.S. Hillyer had an

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## 30TH ANNIVERSARY

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On the north side of the hall is a large "double parlor" suitable for large meetings. On the south side of the hall are two smaller rooms and a large kitchen in the rear completing the first floor. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor are five bedrooms, 2 of which are still unfinished. The home has excellent woodwork, original floorboards of random width pine, "grained" doors and many fireplaces throughout the rooms. There are square pegged oak beams in the attic.

It is believed that Abner Reed built the house. James M. Cubberly purchased the house in 1849 at a sheriff's sale for non-payment of taxes. Cubberly was director and cashier in the Central Jersey Bank that once stood next door on the now vacant lot on the corner of North Main Street and Bank Street. James Cubberly died in the house in 1889 and left the house to his daughter, Anna Cubberly Jemison Rogers, who was married in the house as were members of the Ely family. Anna apparently rented the house out, as in the early 1900's, it served as a boarding house. At one time there was a dentist's office in the back of the double parlor.

Three different families lived in the house before the Elys bought it. In 1917, Joseph J. Ely bought the house and at least two generations of Ely family lived there. Another Ely, named Joseph, also a prominent attorney, was father of Huldah and her brothers and sisters. Miss Huldah Ely never married and was a schoolteacher in Hightstown, teaching second grade. She maintained the house all alone for many years before her death.

After the Society purchased the Ely House, many of its 311 members began volunteering to rehabilitate the house. Volunteers spent the next five years scraping, painting, and plastering. It wasn't until the fall of 1979 that much of the work was done downstairs and ready for the open house.

Many open houses featuring historical exhibits were held at Ely House during the 1970's to interest the community in giving contributions toward further rehabilitation of the house. The main fundraiser in the early years was the annual Doll Show with the first show being held in April of 1977, and the 16<sup>th</sup>

and final show, being held in May 1992.

The Society's current fundraiser is the historical house tour in Hightstown, which it sponsors every other year. Our first tour took place on October 14, 1990, and today, this continues to be a successful fundraiser for the Society due to the large participation of the local community.

On October 3, 1990, the Society had the remaining "freight station," of the Camden & Amboy Railroad, moved from the Coca Cola (Minute Maid), Summit Street property, through the middle of Hightstown to the back of the Ely House property. Coca-Cola paid \$40,000 to have it moved because the company needed the property on which the freight station stood. It took nine years to renovate the freight station for the Society's museum and library holdings.

The freight station, originally built in 1869, stood on Railroad Avenue. It was moved by locomotive to Summit Street in 1917, near Mercer Street. In 1910, the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased six acres of land south of Summit Street and it was in this area that the freight station was moved and lengthened to 130 feet. When it was moved to the Ely House property in 1990, only the old original section of 80 feet was moved to the site. In mid-April 1995, the first substantial construction work on the freight station, since the permanent foundation was completed in 1991, was begun.

With the bequest from the executors of the Sara Hutchinson West estate, the Society received \$276,000. This sum of money made it possible for the Society to refurbish the freight station, build a deck, attach an enclosed exhibit area to the Ely House and put new wood siding on the exterior of the Ely House. When all the work was com-

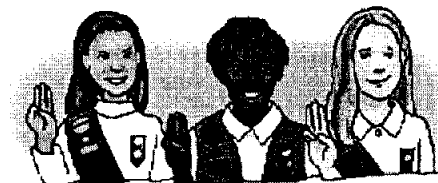
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### SOCIETY'S OCTOBER PROGRAM SET

On October 10, 2001, at 7:30PM, at the First United Methodist Church on Stockton Street, Hightstown, the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society will present a program given by Miss Sara DiCecco.

Miss DiCecco will give a Power Point presentation entitled, "From Tavern to Reconstruction: The History of the First United Methodist Church of Hightstown."

Miss DiCecco has researched this project toward obtaining her Girl Scout Gold Award, which is the highest award in Girl Scouting. The requirements necessary to earn this



**The Girl Scout  
Gold Award**

award challenge the high school Girl Scout to excel in many areas. In order to obtain this award, they must give of their time and make a commitment to the Girl Scout Promise and Law through their significant accomplishments to the community.

## 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Continued from page 2

pleted, the freight station was dedicated and named the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center. This celebration took place October 3, 1999. Housed inside the newly refurbished structure is a museum and library, rest rooms and a small kitchenette; all wheel chair accessible. The building is now used by children for programs, for school tours, and used by several community organizations for meetings. Outside the building is an original iron railroad crossing sign refurbished for the Society by the Lions Club. Also, on the site are several "sleeper" stones, which supported the rails, upon which ran the famous "John Bull" engine.

The first issue of the new format of the present "Historical Society News" was September 1991. Richard Hutchinson, a long time member of the Society, has been the recent editor of the newsletter and has won numerous national awards for our very own newsletter. On October 28, 1995, the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey awarded the newsletter first place in the state. The Society's newsletter continued to win honors annually since then in the National Genealogical Society's newsletter competition, which culminated in 2000 with the Society's newsletter being awarded the First Place Award in the national competition.

On September 20, 1995, the double parlor in Ely House, then used as our meeting room, was dedicated to the memory of Ben and Catherine Hernwall, active members of the Society, when their estate left funds to the Society. With these monies, the floors were sanded and refinished downstairs, the rooms freshly painted, and new draperies and blinds were purchased by the Society.

In May of 1996, members of the Society were active in sponsoring the 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Hightstown in conjunction with the Borough of Hightstown. Members also invited 70 clubs and organizations to come together to participate in the celebration of the 100-year-old Peddie Bridge on Ward Street. For the occasion, the Society created a fashion show of old clothing through the ages.

In May of 1996, the Society was instrumental in the discovery and recovery of a time capsule just in time for the town's celebration. This "Time Capsule" had been hidden and forgotten in the wall surrounding the lake in Hightstown in the 1920's. Over 300 interested guests came to Ely House to see the old photographs and other valuables recovered from the time capsule. After viewing the contents, the Society then returned the "Time Capsule" into the wall with new material for future generations. Since then, the Society has discovered the location of several other time capsules buried within our community and has recovered some of them.

In 1998, the kitchen in Ely House was updated with new cabinets, new countertops, and new flooring, making the kitchen more functional, after receiving a grant of \$10,000 from the State for the construction work..

The Society meets the first Monday of each month from September to June at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are open to the public and new members are always welcome to come to the meetings and are encouraged to join. Family membership is \$25 per year. The Society librarian and museum chairmen are usually on hand Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m., or the facility can be used by appointment.

### 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

#### Officers for 2001-2002

Craig Cox (609-448-3322) ..... President  
Julie Ely ..... Vice-President  
Charles Stults, III ..... Recording Secretary  
Shirley Olsen ..... Corresponding Secretary  
Frank Brennan, Jr. .... Treasurer

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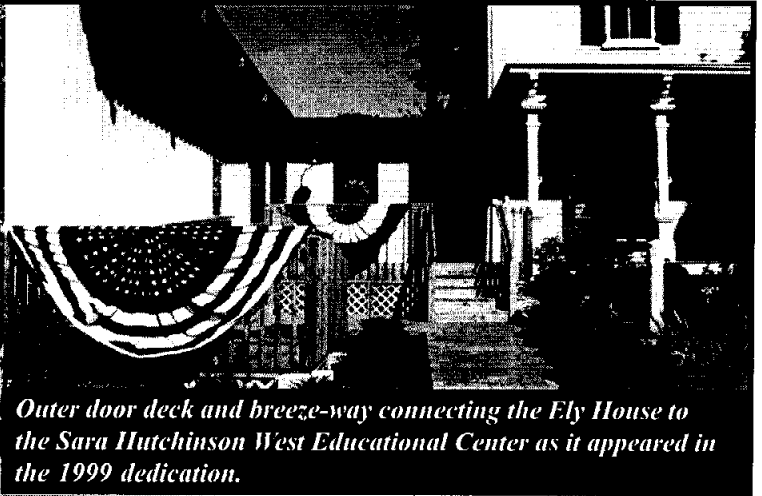
Genealogical queries pertaining to the Hightstown-East Windsor Township area are accepted, but will be printed as space allows.

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

# Scenes from the Society



*Ely House, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown*



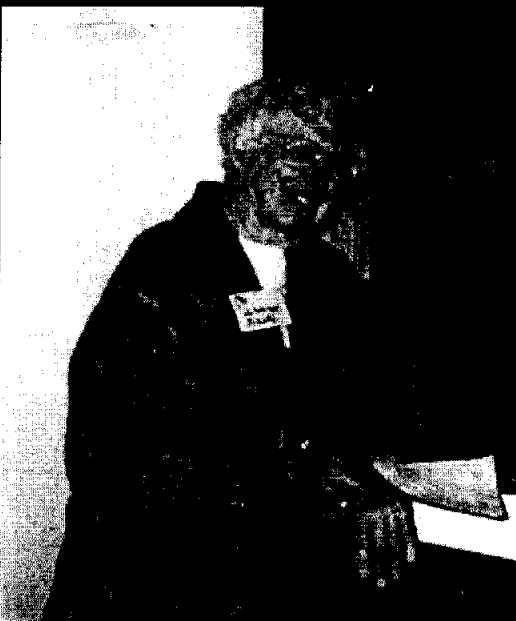
*Outer door deck and breeze-way connecting the Ely House to the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center as it appeared in the 1999 dedication.*



*Some of the ladies dressed in costume for a Society function.*



*Some of the many members who help during the Society's Teas.*



*Estelle Craig at the Society's 1994 Doll Show.*



*2001-2002 Officers from left to right - Frank Brennan, Judy Ely, Craig Cox and Lois Groendyke. This is one of the last photos take of Lois before her death.*

## AUNT BETSEY DORSETT

12 June 1879 - Miss Elizabeth Dorsett - The funeral services over the remains of Miss Elizabeth Dorsett in the Baptist church of Middletown, New Jersey, yesterday morning ... was begun ... by the Rev. E.J. Foote ... "She barely had her existence here. There was not a regret or a sorrowful thought in any Christian mind, under the bright sunshine of last Sabbath morning, when it was announced to us that Aunt Betsey had gone up to worship in the beauty of holiness. She was 102 years old, less 15 days, having been born June 15, 1777, as is undeniably attested by the record in the family Bible, inscribed in her father's own hand. She was cradled amid the clangor of war. She was one year old at the battle of Monmouth, and her infant eyes may have grazed on the red coats of the enemy as they passed through Middletown. The Rev. Abel Morgan preached in this church on the morning of the battle. It has been said that she saw and conversed with Washington. This is probably not true, though she was 12 years old when he was inaugurated as President ..."

Among the many relatives in the congregation was ex-Gov. Joseph Dorsett Bedle. His mother, Mrs. Thomas I. Bedle, who was present with her husband, and whose golden wedding was described in *The Sun* two years and a half ago, is a niece of Miss Dorsett. In the little graveyard near the old Dorsett homestead, where Aunt Betsey, as she was called by her friends and relatives alike, lived, lie buried five Joseph Dorsetts, fathers and sons of five generations. All substantial farmers of Monmouth County. The first came from the Bermuda Islands having emigrated thither from England in order to enjoy, without persecution or annoyance, his Baptist faith. The last was an only brother of Gov. Bedle's mother. He died when a young man without having been married. Gov. Bedle named his son Joseph Dorsett Bedle. Miss Dorsett was a cousin of Gerit Dorsett Wall, United

States Senator from New Jersey, whose daughter married the late Gov. Peter D. Vroom of the same State. Only two more direct descendants of the Dorset family are to be buried in the little graveyard, and then it will be closed. The church in which Miss Dorsett was christened, and from which she was buried, was founded in 1688. For many years she lived with Miss Nancy Dorsett, the sister of Mrs. Thomas I. Bedle. Twenty years ago, when she was 82 years of age, she went to live with her niece, Mrs. Ezra Osborn. In the course of time, Mrs. Osborn and her husband died at a ripe age, and after that she continued to live with her two grand nieces, their children, until her death. She was twenty years of age when her niece, Mrs. Ezra Osborn, was born. She saw her married, was at her golden wedding, and attended her funeral, though she lived to be 79 years of age.

The only relics of her childhood now in existence are a singing book copied in ink by her mother, and a valentine which she received when she was 12 years old. The valentine is an elaborately folded paper, on which several hearts in red ink are represented as pierced with darts. Impassioned verses are illustrated with pictures of clouds, houses, and trees, all being very cleverly drawn, though apparently by an amateur, in colored inks. A large red heart, in red ink, was so drawn on the outside of the valentine that it was necessarily broken when the missive was opened. Attention is drawn to this fact by a couplet inside. When Miss Dorsett received this valentine she was teased so much about it that she wept ninety years ago.

Among the stories told of Miss Dorsett's father in the village, is one that just before she was born some Tories entered his house and made him prisoner. In such haste were they that they would not wait to let him get his hat, which, however, was thrown after him by a woman who was attending his wife.

He was brought to New York and locked up in the old Sugar House prison. It is further related that a wealthy resident of Red Bank, three miles away, had three sons who were on terms of intimacy with some British officers. He was a friend of her father, and told his sons that unless they could procure his release he would disinherit them. Soon afterward he was set ashore beyond British lines on Sandy Hook, whence he made his way, after a narrow escape from being shot by an American picket, to his home, and then for the first time greeted his child.

When Miss Dorsett's grand nephew was elected Governor, his picture in an illustrated journal was shown to her. She recognized it, though her sight was failing her. Her remark was that Joseph was always a nice boy, and now he'd been made Governor.

Though in her later years Miss Dorsett's sight and hearing were imperfect, she retained her reason to the last. When on her centennial birthday many presents were brought to her she said that one thing had been forgotten. That was a pair of spectacles that would enable to see them. She died painlessly, of the slow wasting away of her vitality.



## UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

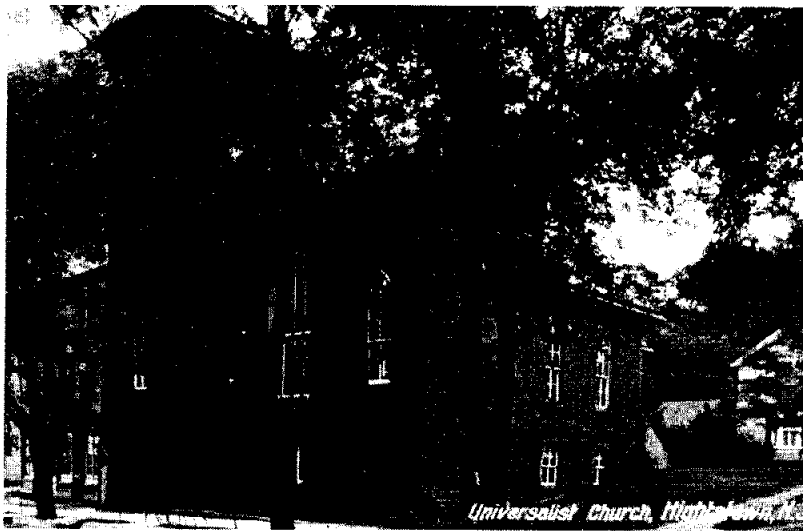
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ment there for June 24, 1832. [Here Ely again writes a note - "I was at that meeting. J.J.E."] It would seem, too, that I had some correspondence with Hightstown friends — for on Friday following the Association, Richard Norton and James G. Ely accompanied me to Toms River...Our gatherings for public worship were in private houses — partly of choice, for we had learned that our most glowing religious experience was in private dwellings, school-houses, & etc; and partly of necessity, for application for the use of 'consecrated ground' was refused — by no one more tartly than by Rev. Symmes C. Henry of Cranberry.

In Dec., 1831, Mr. Salmon C. Bulkeley (who afterward entered our ministry) took charge of the Cedar Grove School. He boarded at Richard Norton's, and there he preached his first sermon... Monday evening, May 13, 1833, there was a Universalist gathering in Hightstown, and next day Rev. T.J. Sawyer, Andrews Hillyer, Moore and Thomas, and several laymen, were taken by Richard Norton and Samuel C. Johnes to Toms River, where we had a sermon in the evening — and on Wednesday four sermons were preached in Potter's Meeting-House, Good Luck. On the same day we erected a tomb-stone in memory of a good man. The stone, prepared in Norwalk, Conn., had been forwarded to Hightstown, and was thence carried to its destination in the wagon of Col. Johnes. [More on this later.]

In Sept, 1833, in the old Methodist meeting-house that stood on the bank of the mill pond in Milford, Rev. Mr. Bull, a Methodist clergyman, made a vehement and violent assault on Uni-

versalism. Mr. Bulkeley took notes of both the tirade and argument, and on Monday afternoon, Sept. 16, I reviewed the assailant...The great gathering of people was in the orchard of Col Johnes. Extemporized seats and benches, and trees and surrounding carriages filled with an interested auditory, were enough, it would seem, to quicken the occupant of the wagon-pulpit into searching thought; and it is doubtful whether any neighborhood incident has been more vividly preserved among the traditions



*The Universalist Church, Hightstown, with the parsonage in the background, which was demolished to make way for the "old" Post Office. Photo taken prior to 1910."*

of that region...Often in memory have I stood in the midst of that orchard-scene, and considered what would probably have been the result, had an average pastor or preacher of our order been settled at that time in Hightstown as his centre. Many influential men and families who afterwards (by social considerations chiefly) connected themselves with the orthodox congregations, were with us, at least in sympathy, and even now are not far from the kingdom of heaven; and the young people, as they grew into maturity, found a religious home among their kindred according to the flesh...Many of them have passed into the communion of worshippers on high. Of the few who remain, there can be nothing invidious in naming John C. Ward.

Jan. 5, 1834, John Meirs and Samuel C. Johnes furnished both conveyance and company to Potter's Church... In March, 1834, the Baptist Church, desiring to erect a new brick meeting-house, sold the old frame building. It was bought by the elder Dr. McChesney, who passed it into the hands of the Universalists, and Major Cook presented them a desirable lot, to which it was removed, fitted up neatly, and dedicated anew, August 10, 1835...The

Baptists...supposed the old building had been bought for service as a barn, and were not pleased that it should be held forth by Universalists...It seemed almost a desecration of the ancient edifice. Men of most acidity deplored that it had not been run into the mill-pond, (a destructive baptism,) or put to the baptism of fire. There were persons, however, of more catholic mould, who had the faith to see, and the manliness

to acknowledge that there might be value in even a Universalist Church in the village.

James G. Ely departed this life Nov. 15, 1835, aged thirty-five years. He was one of my companions on my first pilgrimage to Good Luck...Joseph J. Ely, Esq...though 'nervously affected,' and therefore unfitted for oral discussion, was a vigorous controversialist with the pen, and had more than usual resources in self-education, extensive reading and a retentive memory--as must be conceded by all who have read his numerous essays and letters, on a variety of subjects and on many occasions, even until now.

Rev. J. H. Gihon preached in Hightstown. His engagement one half

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# UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

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in Hightstown and the other half at New Egypt and New Brunswick...He eked out a livelihood by teaching school in Cedar Grove...Until the Spring of 1838 the Universalists of Hightstown and vicinity seem to have been held together by...social affinities, without any formal recognition—a defect remedied, April 6, 1839, by the regular organization of the Universalist Society.

In the close of May 1844, Rev. Thomas J. Whitcomb (whose daughters are particularly remembered for their musical abilities) became pastor, and continued until August, 1846...Following the removal of Mr. Whitcomb, there was no settled pastor in Hightstown for twenty months...On April 1, 1848, Rev. Asher Moore took charge [in Hightstown]. There was an increase in the congregation, in both numbers and vitality...but the support of public worship, as before, depended mainly on the standards. One of these, Samuel C. Johnes, died July 30, 1848, aged fifty-eight years. A seemingly slight accident with a farm-fork developed tetanus and death. He was understandingly and religiously a Universalist, upright in demeanor and strong in influence...January 23, 1851, Mr. Moore's two sons came to a sad end. The elder lad broke through the ice of a mill-pond: The younger went to his rescue, and both perished...After a pastorate of three and a half years, Mr. Moore relinquished charge, Oct. 1851, and resort was had, as before, to temporary arrangements for pulpit ministry.

Two children of Richard Norton, being at school in the Clinton Liberal Institute, formed the acquaintance of a Universalist young lady, recently a graduate in that seminary—which acquaintance resulted in her acceptance of an invitation to take charge of the Cedar Grove School. She came Oct., 1851, and remained seven months, teaching two terms, having her home in Richard Norton's family...The name of *Clara Barton* has since been sounded in all the civilized world, as one of the ministering angels of humanity.



## In Memoriam

During the past few months, the Society has lost two of its long-standing members; Estelle Craig and Lois Groendyke. Both of these members were early supporters of the Society, and continued to be so through the years, always working for the Society's future. As many of you know, Lois was the Society's Corresponding Secretary. What you may not know is that she held this position for over twenty years.

**Join today, become  
a member!**

Individual Membership  
**\$20.00**

Family Membership  
**\$25.00**

Booster/Patron Membership  
**\$40.00**

Sustaining Membership  
**\$50.00**

## Annual Membership Application (January - December)

Individual     Family     Booster/Patron     Sustaining

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail the completed application, along with a check made payable to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society to:

Membership Committee  
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society  
164 North Main Street  
Hightstown, NJ 08520

## Kindness Expressed At Time Of Need, Not Forgotten

5 October 1905 - Those who assisted S. Hinman Bird, the Princeton student, was seriously injured in the recent automobile accident here, in which his chauffeur, Robert L. Kidd was killed, will long remember the remarkable evidences of gratitude and generosity displayed by the young man and his family. Last week John G. Scheible, proprietor of the Railroad Hotel, where Bird remained from the day of the accident until he was able to be taken home, received a costly loving cup upon which is engraved this inscription:

"John G. Scheible From Sarah R. and Charles T. Cook  
In Kind Remembrance of His Kind Attention To Their Son,  
Singleton Hinman Bird, When Dangerously Injured In An Auto-  
mobile Wreck At Hightstown, New Jersey, September 19, 1905."

The cup is of silver, very massive and of beautiful though plain design, and was made by Tiffany & Co., of New York, of which concern Mr. Cook is president. The cup was accompanied by a letter in which Mr. and Mrs. Cook expressed their gratitude for Mr. Scheible's kindness and thoughtfulness. After the accident the latter gave up an entire floor of the hotel to Mr. Bird and his family and attendants, and personally superintended the preparation of all the food given to the injured man.

This week Mr. Scheible received from Mr. Cook a case containing four watches for presentation to those who were first on the scene of the accident and rendered immediate assistance. Three gold watches were given to Samuel Ely Gordon, Harry Taylor and Samuel McCue, and a silver one to William Paxton. All the watches are very handsome and valuable and are attached to costly chains and all were made by the Tiffany Co. On each is engraved the recipient's name and the following inscription:

"In Grateful Remembrance Of His Services To Singleton Hinman Bird 1905"

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

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