

Historical Society News

"A Step Back in Time"

House Tour

presented by:

HIGHTSTOWN - EAST WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A tour of
historic homes
of Hightstown
and East Windsor

Tour begins at the Ely House,
164 North Main Street,
Hightstown, NJ.

October
23, 2016
1-5 p.m

And more...

**Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society**
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520
www.hewhs.com





Dear Members and Friends,

What a great year for your Society and there is more to come. Your board approved the moving of our annual meeting and dinner to May and we selected the venue of Historic Walnford Farm & Mill in Cream Ridge. Eighty people attended and paid! Because of the overwhelming response in attendance, we had a little surplus which was added to the treasury to fund our programming. Thank you all who helped with and a special thank you to those who attended. Your ideas for next year would be greatly appreciated.

A few years ago a collection of Kathryn Dennis/Hightstown Gazette materials were turned over to the town. The Borough turned them over to the Society and this summer your officers and committee members have been categorizing the many items and culling out the duplicate and non-historic. Ten or more of your fellow members have volunteered and been a part of this process. Next these items will be formally added to our collection list and database.

A special congratulations to Kathy and Bob Patten. After many years of hard work they were successful in obtaining New Jersey Register of Historic Places designation for the Camden & Amboy Railroad Right of Way Site on Rogers Avenue. More recently the site was added to the National Register of Historic Places, not an easy accomplishment. Thank you for your efforts.

Every week someone contacts me as President of the Society for information regarding Hightstown. Sometimes the requests are local and sometimes they are from hundreds and thousands of miles away. Additionally the Mercer County Library, Hightstown Branch, as well as Meadow Lakes have contacted us to present programs in their facilities. We are currently discussing the topics to be covered.

Although we are always in the need for volunteers, we are especially in need of someone to focus on membership for the balance of 2016 and 2017. If you are interested or know someone who is willing to help, please let me know.

Our largest event, the House Tour, is held every other year and this is the year. The date is October 23rd from 1-5pm. Tickets are currently available. The homeowners and Society look forward to showing off what Hightstown has to offer.

On a personal note, thank you all for your cards, emails and memorial contributions to the Society in memory of my mother, Virginia Puglin Stults, who died on July 3rd. She was a life member of the Society and her family was deeply rooted in Hightstown as a matter of fact, Marlatt paintings of her grandparents, the Stonakers, hang in the Museum.

Drop me an email with any request or offer to volunteer. See you all on October 23rd.

Civil War News, 1863:

Governor Parker not popular with Hightstown's Elwood Silvers.

Hightstown's Elwood R. Silvers was one of many local men who enlisted in the 14th New Jersey Volunteers regiment, a unit that was raised in the summer of 1862. Fortunately, some of the letters that he wrote home can still bring his service in the war to life. It turns out that Silvers was not a big fan of New Jersey Governor Joel Parker, the Democrat who served in the gubernatorial office for three years, from 1862 to 1865.

On June 11, 1863, Silvers wrote home to his sister Amanda, "I thought I would drop you a few lines..." from Frederick, Maryland, where his unit was encamped. This morning there is a great deal of fixing work up in Camp for the coming of that dreadful [man] Governor Parker. Col. Hall is making as much fixing up for his reception as though some Lord or great Knight was coming. But the Boys don't hold him in very high esteem.... The Boys have never forgotten that march they made to Freehold or never will. You remember that one day we marched from Camp Vredenbergh to Freehold to on purpose to show old Monmouth what they had done and that town never thought enough for us ... they even took our canteens and never brought them back and then brought around water to us in slop pails. We have not forgotten those times yet and hardly; [we] think [Parker] will meet with a very warm reception; if he [does] it will be as good as he deserves."

"The Officers Call has just been [beaten] and it was for the Colonel to tell them that Parker was to insect them and Companies at 5 o'clock this af-

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Step Back in Time October 23rd at the Society's House Tour

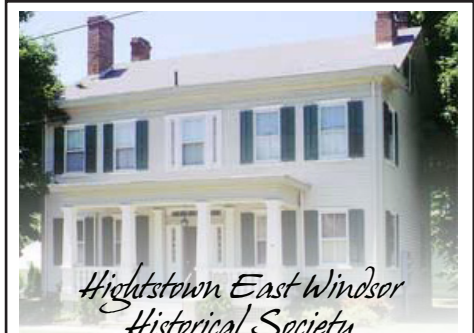
The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society will host its biennial House Tour, "A Step Back in Time" on Sunday, October 23, 2016, from 1-5 p.m. All of the houses have been preserved, refurbished, or renovated, and they represent a variety of styles representative of New Jersey architecture. Once again, classic cars will help each ticketholder find the homes. The Rocky Brook Garden Club will be decorating each home with floral arrangements. Members of the Central New Jersey Antique Car Club will furnish the automobiles.

One of the highlights will be the restored Augustus T. Skillman House, at 208 Stockton Street, Hightstown, built circa 1889. Augustus was a tinsmith by trade, selling stoves and tinware. After having served as a private residence through the 1930's, this house later became a doctor's office and then an optometrist's office. Partitioned rooms and false walls were added to make these adaptations possible, and they have now been removed to open the house up to its original beauty. The main examining room of the medical office, for example, is now the kitchen.

This house features a combination of the Queen Anne style that was popular through the 1880s and 1890s, together with Eastlake-style detailing that many of the finer houses of this period possessed. These features have been entirely refinished with the exterior cedar shingles restored and painted. The porch was entirely rebuilt with railings built to precisely replicate the original. The porch flooring is mahogany and its ceiling is yellow pine.

Gorgeous stained glass door inserts were found in pieces in the attic. The panels were reconstructed and installed in the inner vestibule doors. The oak and walnut flooring seen throughout the entire first floor is newly installed with each room having a different design element. The first floor chestnut moldings were stripped and refinished, including the staircase and functional pocket doors. Hand-stenciled walls in both front parlors and original marble fireplaces are not to be missed. There is a beautiful coffered ceiling made of quarter-sawn oak in the family room. All of the examining room walls were removed creating a large functional kitchen incorporating marble counter tops, soapstone sinks, and gorgeous wood freestanding pieces. Examining room walls were also removed from what is now the Dining Room. This house demonstrates what creativity and respect for already existing resources can produce—a masterpiece of simplicity and beauty.

see the back cover for interior photos of this home



*Hightstown East Windsor
Historical Society*

founded 1971

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

Officers for 2015-2016

President-	Charles S. Stults III
Vice President-	Robin Smith
Recording Secretary-	Shirley Olsen 609-448-8388
Corres. Secretary-	Vacant
Treasurer-	Robert Szychowski 609-448-9490

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Museum- Newsletter-	Cookie & Christa Cummings Robert Craig 609-584-1806
Programs-	Christian Kirkpatrick & Jane Cox 609-443-3138
Programs-	Nancy Laudenberger 609-443-6536
Publicity-	Shirley Olsen 609-448-8388

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Shirley Olsen, Warren Olsen, Robert
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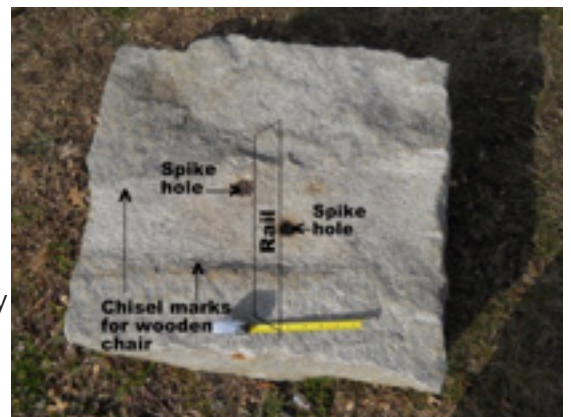
Building the railroad through Hightstown (1830-1832)

[Editor's Note: *The following is excerpted from the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Camden & Amboy Railroad right-of-way site in downtown Hightstown, recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The text below focuses on constructing the railroad through Hightstown, telling the story from the local point-of-view. Where ellipses occur in the following text, words or passages in the text of the nomination were skipped.*]

"Progress on the Camden & Amboy line went forward ... during the summer of 1830, [when] surveys were made under the direction of Major John Wilson of the United States Army.... Major Wilson was assisted by Lieutenant William S. Cook (1801-1865), having charge of the section from South Amboy to Crosswicks Creek (including Hightstown).... Lieutenant Cook, a West Point graduate in the Class of 1822 where he learned his engineering, had been born in Hightstown and thus was familiar with the Hightstown area. (It is unclear whether Cook was chosen for his familiarity with the terrain through Middlesex County, nor whether surveying the route through Hightstown was his decision.) He was a son of James Cook (1775-1849) who [had come] to Hightstown shortly before his son's birth. James Cook had been involved with the Bordentown and South Amboy Turnpike Company. Lieutenant Cook was appointed Engineer in Chief of the Camden & Amboy Railroad, first in 1831 while the construction of the line was underway, and reappointed in 1836...



"The turnpike was reluctant to embrace the railroad. In 1827 it had authorized one of its directors, William McKnight, a principal property owner in what would become Centreville, to inquire of the legislature whether it would be possible to obtain a railroad charter for the turnpike. Although nothing came of that effort, it was a sign that the turnpike company was justifiably concerned about having a railroad as a competitor. Right-of-way acquisition through the Hightstown-East Windsor area began at the beginning of 1831.... Deeds for the Company's purchase of right-of-way land occupy most of volume 25 of Middlesex County deeds in the county clerk's office—dozens of transactions—and those that were purchases of land in East Windsor (including Hightstown) bear dates from early January 1831 through the early part of July that year. As construction advanced toward Hightstown that summer, concerns about the impact that a steam locomotive would have apparently intensified. The turnpike company circulated a petition in November 1831 that the Camden & Amboy Railroad not be permitted to use steam engines on its rail line due to concerns for fire safety and for the reactions of horses to the noise of the locomotive. The turnpike company did not finally give in until September 1832 when it received a payment of 800 dollars from the Camden & Amboy, just before regular [railroad] service was to begin, for the right to cross the turnpike's right-of-way, which it needed to do at Hightstown and in at least one other location near Bordentown.



"The progress of construction, under Lieutenant Cook's management, proceeded through ... the first several months of 1832. In 1838, the *American Railroad Journal and Mechanics' Magazine* reported that "The foundation of this road is formed by two continuous trenches, three feet in width, and one foot in depth, being filled with broken stone; over these trenches a roller, weighing



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three tons, was passed a number of times until the whole was a solid mass." The magazine went on to describe the stone "blocks" as two feet square, 10 to 13 inches deep, and set at intervals of 3.2 feet on center in each trench.... In Hightstown at least, the crossing of the turnpike would be over a bridge, not at grade. A local woman, Eliza P. McChesney, drew a pencil drawing of downtown Hightstown in 1834 that shows the Main Street bridge in the background, topped by a locomotive and cars. The bridge was also shown in another drawing of downtown Hightstown, from 1840....

"The section of track from Bordentown to Hightstown was underway during the summer of 1832, when public attention was drawn to the spread of a raging cholera epidemic. On July 12th, Charles G. McChesney of Hightstown wrote to the editor of the *New Jersey State Gazette* in Trenton of a case of the disease brought to Hightstown by a man who had hiked there from New Brunswick. From the onset of symptoms, he died in five hours. After stressing in his letter the importance of cleanliness in fighting the disease, McChesney reported that this death "has occurred among the laborers on the Rail-Road along which there are many places extremely filthy." The track was evidently completed to Hightstown by the middle of September 1832, because the first train with passengers was run according to some sources on September 19th. The date of commencement of regular service is somewhat at issue; the *New Jersey State Gazette* reported on October 6th that service between the two towns had started on October 1st. The company was still not ready to transport passengers or freight by steam, so the inaugural run to Hightstown was ... "drawn by 2 horses in tandem harness." It also reported that "The Cars are very handsome vehicles and capable of carrying 30 passengers. They glide in fine style rapidly along the rails."The trip from Bordentown to the Raritan Bay, a length of thirty-four miles, took two and one-half hours, with fresh horses staged at intervals along the route. Finally in September 1833 the steam-powered *John Bull* locomotive began drawing cars from Bordentown at 7:00 in the morning and returning from South Amboy at 4:00 in the afternoon. By January 1834, the railroad track was extended to Camden, ... completing the 61.5-mile route from South Amboy to Camden."



Camden & Amboy Railroad Site Honored

A project that was several years in the making came to fruition this spring and summer. A small site of twenty-two stone blocks along Rogers Avenue in downtown Hightstown that still remain in place from when the Camden & Amboy Railroad put them there in 1832 was formally recognized with listings in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Listing in the Registers is an honor not easily earned, but this downtown site holds a special place in railroading history and in local history. The New Jersey Register listing occurred on March 17th, and the National Register listing came on June 16th, according to the Historic Preservation Office, in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

The project was led by former Society president Kathy Patten, who was helped in the early stages by Christian Kirkpatrick. Two essential elements came together to make the listing possible. Railroad historian Caroline Scott conducted extensive research, finding many obscure records from the 1830s that detail the progress of the Camden & Amboy's construction, and geologist Pierre Lacombe has undertaken a study of the several types of stone that appear along the length of the Camden & Amboy right-of-way, and of the sources of each of the different types. The stone that the railroad used in Hightstown, for example, came, not from the Sing Sing quarry in Ossining, New York, but rather from a local quarry about six miles southeast of Hightstown in Millstone Township. The site in Hightstown was discovered in 1983 when the railroad bridges over North Main and Stockton Streets were removed and downtown parking was expanded.



The Society wishes to thank the Hightstown-East Windsor Lions Club for undertaking this past June to repaint the railroad crossing sign that stands outside the Society's freight station building. This cast iron sign, which was once a common sight at railroad grade crossings, especially in rural areas, is now a rare artifact in New Jersey. It was probably made about 1910 by the J.L. Mott Company in New York. But being exposed to the elements, it needs repainting every decade or two. Earl Groendyke and Bob Harris of the Lion's Club prepped the sign for repainting. Club member Elise Cousineau, paint and brush in hand, is shown here putting the finishing paint on the letters and the border. Standing left to right in the foreground are Club members Paul Cousineau, Bob Harris, and Linda Harris, who also shared in the project.

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ternoon and to have the men all in good trim."
 "There is nothing [else] new down here all the talk this morning is about Parker. The Boys are White Washing their stockades which will make them look better."

Editor's Note: It's worth observing that for Parker to face a "warm" reception in this context did not mean a friendly one. He was a Democrat from Monmouth County who was elected Governor in the fall of 1862 and took office in January 1863. Parker was a "war Democrat;" he supported fighting the war but also hoped for a negotiated end to the fighting. He faced a legislature that was loaded with "peace Democrats"--Copperheads--which gave New Jersey a reputation as a Copperhead state, especially after March 24th, 1863, when they passed a series of "Peace Resolutions" that outraged Republicans across the country, and probably a solid majority of the soldiers, themselves.

Elwood R. Silvers was killed in action on September 19, 1864. He was buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery.



Governor Joel Parker

Upcoming House Tour...

Sunday, October 23rd, 1-5 p.m.

Ticket Information

Advance Tickets: \$20
 Day of Event Tickets \$25
 Children \$5

*Includes Special Floral Arrangements by
 The Rocky Brook Garden Club
 Antique Cars from Central Jersey Antique Car Club*

(HOUSES MAY BE TOURED IN ANY ORDER)

Pick up program and map at

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. THE ELY HOUSE—Tickets for Sale
164 North Main Street, Hightstown | 2. The Thomas Thompson House
108 Etra Road, Hightstown |
| 3. The Abijah E. and Eva Wright Applegate House
216 South Main Street, Hightstown | 4. The George W. Conover House
309 Stockton Street, Hightstown |
| 5. The Augustus T. Skillman House
208 Stockton Street, Hightstown | 6. The Mount House
201 Stockton Street, Hightstown |
| 7. The Methodist Church of Hightstown
171 Stockton Street | 8. The William Riley House
231 Morrison Avenue, Hightstown |

**Membership
~Application~**

Support us this year at the following rates:

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$20
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Booster	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Life (Individual)	\$200
<input type="checkbox"/> Life (Family)	\$275
<input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter ONLY	\$10

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email 1: _____

Email 2: _____

Where did you hear about membership?

Please mail the completed application along with a check payable to:

**HEW Historical Society
 Membership Committee
 164 North Main Street
 Hightstown, NJ 08520**

I would not like to be part of the New Member Spotlight.

Volunteer Opportunities

I would like to volunteer to help out with the following committee(s):

Property & Grounds

Library

Membership

Museum

Newsletter

Programs

Publicity



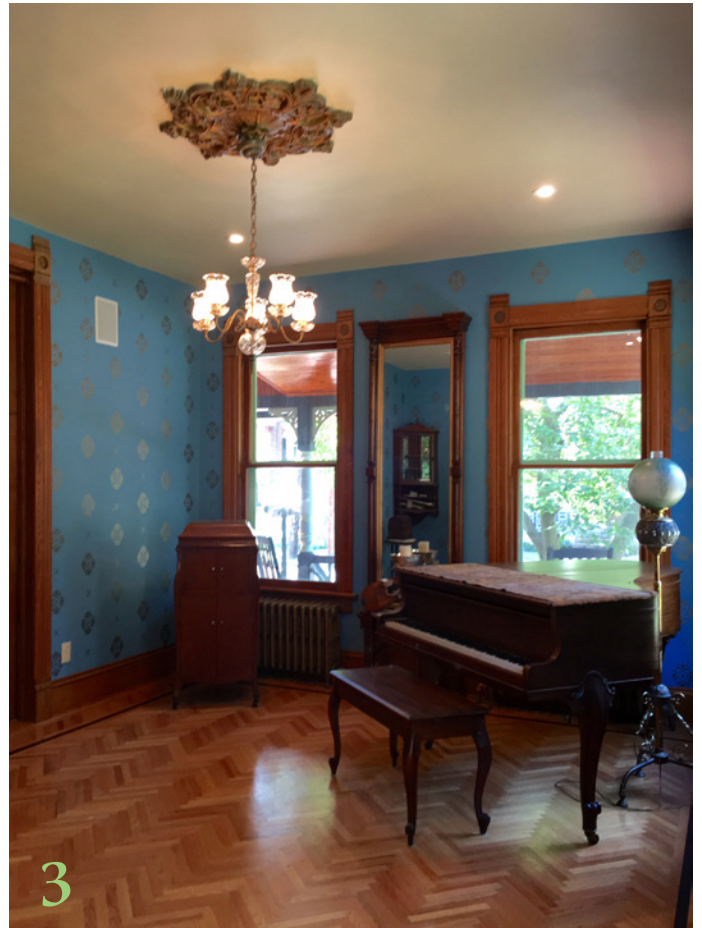
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The Augustus T. Skillman House
208 Stockton Street

1. TV Room
2. Bedroom
3. Music Room



2



3