

# Historical Society News

East Windsor at two hundred and twenty

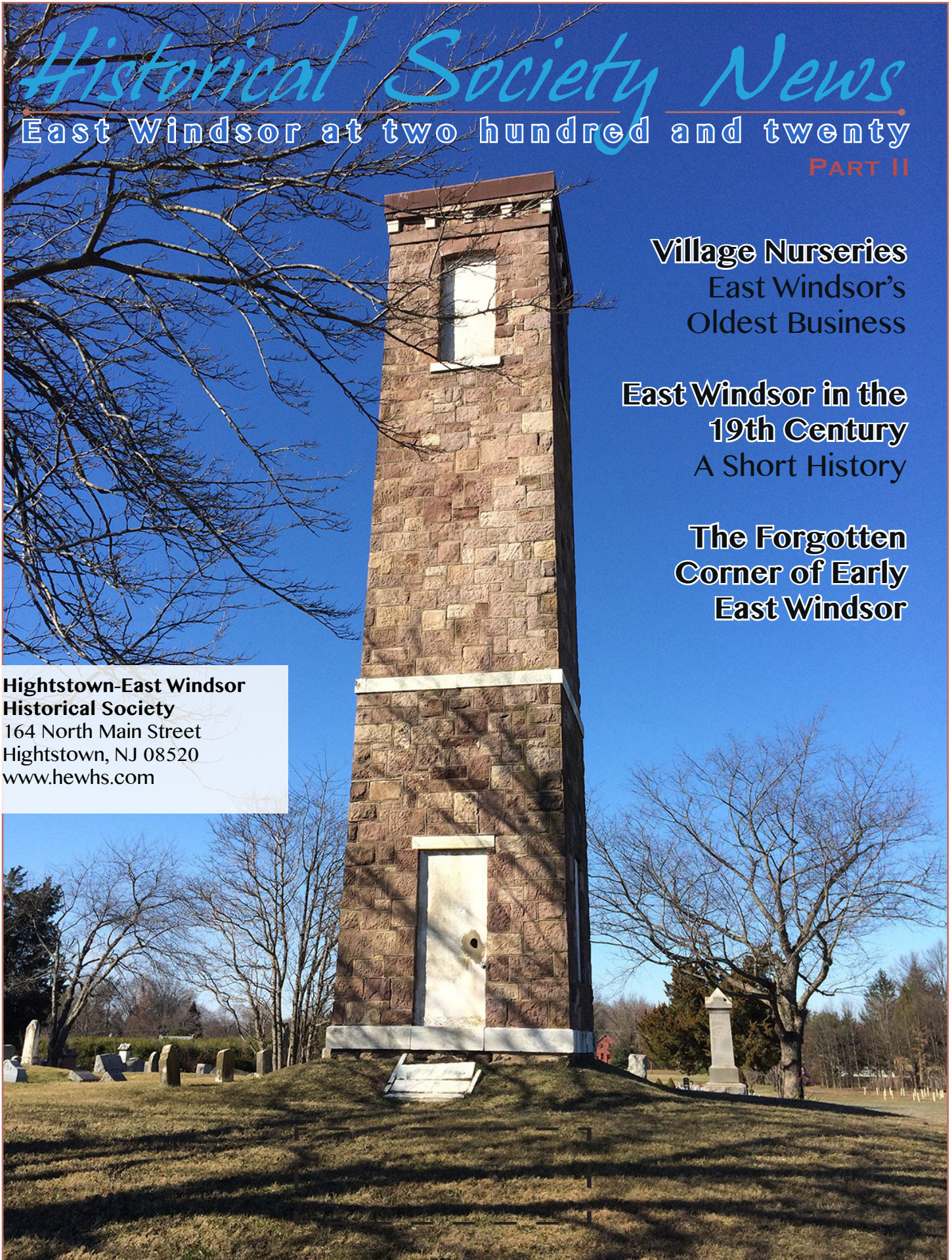
PART II

**Village Nurseries**  
East Windsor's  
Oldest Business

**East Windsor in the  
19th Century**  
A Short History

**The Forgotten  
Corner of Early  
East Windsor**

**Hightstown-East Windsor  
Historical Society**  
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Hightstown, NJ 08520  
[www.hewhs.com](http://www.hewhs.com)





3 **President's Messages**  
BY CHARLES "CAPPY" STULTS, III

4 **Featured Article**  
Village Nurseries: East Windsor's  
Oldest Business  
BY CHARLES STULTS

11 **EAST WINDSOR IN THE 19TH  
CENTURY**  
A Short History  
BY ROBERT W. CRAIG

10 **PUZZLE**  
**Where is this?**  
East Windsor  
BY RICK PRATT

10 **JOIN TODAY**  
**Become a member**  
Annual Membership Application  
(January-December)

10 **HONORING THE ASHTON  
SISTERS**  
A Public Musicology Project  
BY ROBERT W. CRAIG

14 **THE FORGOTTEN CORNER OF  
EARLY EAST WINDSOR**  
BY ROBERT W. CRAIG

16 **PUZZLE**  
**What's the Difference?**  
East Windsor  
BY RICK PRATT

### **Correction:**

*In Part One of our series on East Windsor, two places included on the map, numbers 45 and 46, were not explained in the text. Number 45, the Exit 8 interchange of the New Jersey Turnpike, was originally much smaller when the Turnpike opened in the early 1950s, and it was located farther to the west on Route 33 than where it currently is situated and shown on the map. Number 46, the Town House Motel, was a 1950s-style motel built as a response to the presence of the Turnpike and its interchange. It was for many years popular for the "Coach and Four" restaurant there.*

## *Editor's Column*

The story of Village Nurseries has been on my editorial bucket list for a long time. I grew up in this neighborhood and have always known that any history of the township must unravel the story of Village Nurseries. To have Cappy Stults tell it is even better. Not only does he have a family connection to the Blacks, he had the advantage of Walter C. Black's own writings to help guide him.

Sharp-eyed readers will notice that I prefer the older spelling of "Assanpink" with the "a" in the second syllable. This was the spelling used in the 17th through the 19th centuries, and can be seen in all the older documents. The current spelling, with a "u" instead, appears to be a 20th-century invention. The modern version seems to lose something of how the European colonists heard and transliterated the Native American place name. Even the various early corruptions (such as "Sanpink" and "Sandpink") in the 18th century placed an "a" in the same location.

Many thanks to all who have expressed their appreciation of the recent issues of our Newsletter. It is truly a team effort.

## *The Mayor's Message*

On behalf of East Windsor Township, we wish to thank the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society for devoting 3 issues of "News" to East Windsor, our history and citizens -- on the occasion of our 220th birthday celebration.

These commemorative issues about our Township, as demonstrated by the first number, provide a tremendous trove of information of much general interest and in many cases little-known to residents of our community. Tracing our beginnings back to pre-1700 and the settlement and formation of our municipality offers many fascinating insights into our present. The section on *places* in East Windsor recounts noteworthy points along our history, many foundational and explaining many sections in our town and in many cases highlighting names and developments very visible today.

East Windsor has had a significant and interesting past, underscored by our noteworthy transition and growth over our more recent years. This movement has put us on the map, from a sparsely populated farming area to a diverse, populated, business-appealing municipal center, often identified as Interchange 8 on the NJ Turnpike.

East Windsor Township, which is proud of our present and enthusiastic about our positive future, is appreciative and pleased for this great effort by the Historical Society to teach us all more about our formational past.

*Mayor Janice S. Mironov*  
East Windsor Township

# President's Messages

DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,

Thank you all for your 2017 dues payments. Special thanks to those of you who reached out to your neighbors, friends and relatives to join. For those who have yet to send in your payment, there is still time. We need your support!

The newsletter committee has dedicated this year to East Windsor Township and its 220<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Once again Bob Craig and Rick Pratt have done a phenomenal job. They spend hundreds of hours putting together the newsletter content, layouts and artwork. I continue to receive rave reviews from members and others about the high quality of our newsletter's content and its format. Make sure you thank Bob and Rick when you see them.

This year's Annual Meeting and event is May 7th. It is being held at the Monmouth Battlefield State Park. Additional information is in this newsletter. Next year marks the 240<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Monmouth and I can promise you that your visit with us will be an emotional experience. We were worried about how to top Walnford. I can assure you that we have and you will not be disappointed.

In closing, there is more to report than space will permit, but I want to thank all of the officers and committee members who have done so much for the Society. They have never rejected any of my requests and most often they just step in and do what needs to be done. Don't forget to do your part by paying your dues and joining us on May 7th.

Any questions, comments or suggestions may be sent to me at [cstults@allenstults.com](mailto:cstults@allenstults.com) or just call me.

Cappy Stults, President

**COVER PHOTO**

*The Norton Tower in the East Windsor Cemetery*

Photo by: Rick Pratt

SPRING 2017



## Annual Dinner at Monmouth Battlefield!

The Society's Annual Dinner will be held this year on Sunday, May 7th, at 4 pm, at the new Visitors Center of the Monmouth Battlefield State Park in Manalapan Township, near Freehold.

This venue is a premier museum of the American Revolution, and, figuratively speaking, it's right in our backyard. Years of research have gone into the preparation of the exhibits, and a 15-minute film about the battle of Monmouth highlights the visitor experience.

Although you may arrive early, the Visitors Center and theater will be closed for our private use at 4pm. We will start with our brief Annual Meeting immediately followed by presentations by Park historians. Eating will be casual and at your leisure while enjoying the Center and Park. (See map on page 15.)

To reserve your place please mail your reservation to HEWHS Annual Dinner, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown, NJ 08520

Adults \$25  
Teens 12-18 \$20  
Youth under 12 \$10

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of attendees \_\_\_\_\_ Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

For questions call Cappy at 609-448-0110 or email [cstults@allenstults.com](mailto:cstults@allenstults.com)

*Doughty's Artillery photo courtesy of G. Stone*

# Village Nurseries : East Windsor's Oldest Business

BY CHARLES STULTS <sup>1</sup>

Close your eyes and picture yourself in the year 1890 walking south on Old York Road. You start at Etra Road and South Main and two miles later end up at Windsor-Perrineville Road. All that you have seen on either side, beside a few farmhouses and Thomas Peppler's farm implement business, were apple, peach and cherry orchards, Christmas trees and other nursery stock. No turnpike, no high tension wires, no golf course and no housing developments. You have just walked the length of Village Nurseries.

Although current citizens of East Windsor know Village Nurseries as an operation run today by Mike Mendenko, and though many remember his predecessor Joseph Black Locke, only few remain who also knew Walter C. Black (1867-1962), namesake of the school, who worked and operated this nursery for over 80 years from age 9 until four years before his death at age 95. And yet still fewer know that theirs was the successor to an even older nursery. Trees have been grown commercially in East Windsor since before the railroad came.

Isaac Pullen (1805-1867), who has become a forgotten man in township history, was still in his twenties when he began a nursery on Old York Road as a tenant farmer about 1830. Unlike today, nurseries back then not only grew both bushes and trees for sale to other growers, they also operated orchards of their own, both because selling their own

fruit was very profitable, and to experiment to develop new varieties. Nurserymen had already perfected grafting, in which scions of one fruit variety were combined onto the rootstock of another, whereby they could increase a tree's yield and improve the quality of the fruit. Pullen came along just as the railroad was being excitedly talked about but before it had arrived. These two factors plus his own ambition would propel East Windsor for a brief time into a leadership position in Mercer County agriculture in the 1850s.

Brothers Charles Black, Sr. (1843-1936) and Joseph H. Black (1844-1930) were born in Prospect Plains (Monroe Township), to an itinerant Methodist minister, Joseph Black, who had emigrated from England in 1837. Joseph had been an English gardener before emigrating and once in America, he worked on local farms and sold wood in the winter when not preaching. He also owned a fruit tree farm in Prospect Plains.

Joseph Black's sons both worked on their father's farm in Prospect Plains but they also came to East Windsor to work for Pullen. In 1853 Joseph also planted 20 acres of evergreens on part of what is Peddie Golf Course. Although the name came later, it was this event that marks the beginning of Village Nurseries as a business separate from Pullen's.

Joseph H. Black managed a nursery that Pullen owned in Perrineville. In the 1860s he was also involved in building the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad. He married Jennie Dillon, whose family lived on a farm near the railroad line. Due to his proven nursery experience and with references from the Pullens, he was hired in 1870 by Col. R.H. Rush of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia to manage a nursery in the southernmost part of the Eastern Shore near Eastville, Northampton County, Virginia. Six years later, however, the nursery's owner was unable to pay his bills, so Joseph and his young family--including a young Walter C. Black--came back to East Windsor in 1876 and moved in with Joseph's brother Charles.

Charles Black had bought the William R. Norton (grandfather of Sumner Norton) farm on Etra Road and moved into the house there in 1875. It was adjacent to the acreage his father had planted in 1853. Both Charles and Joseph continued to work for the Pullens. But Isaac Pullen was having some financial problems and at one time owed Joseph Black 18 months' back wages. Brother Charles was finding his own expanded nursery too hard to handle himself, so they both left Isaac Pullen and started Charles Black and Brother Nursery.

When Isaac Pullen died in 1867, he left his nursery to two of his sons : Thomas Jefferson ("Jeff") Pullen and James Madison ("Mad") Pullen. A third son, William Henry Harrison Pullen (all named for US presidents) had previously been funded by his father to become a wholesale commission merchant in NYC, specializing in farm pro-

1. Cappy Stults is a great-grandson of Walter C. Black. This article was based in part on a study of Black's own writings

*Oldest- continued on page 5*

**Oldest-** *continued from page 4*

duce. Jeff Pullen had the southern end of the farm and "Mad" had the northern end, which became known as Fruit Hill Nurseries. Isaac Pullen's will required each son (Mad and Jeff), to earn \$10,000 from their farms before they were able to take full ownership and receive an additional \$10,000 in cash. After the first year they had both been successful and received their land and the \$10,000 each. Unfortunately their prosperity led them to "living it up," soon followed by bankruptcy.

In 1878, Charles and Mary Black bought the Isaac Pullen house, 866 Old York Road, currently owned by William and Sandy Kendall. The house passed to one of their sons, Lemuel (Lem) Black and his wife Catherine Van Nest Black. (A side story is their son, Russell Van Nest Black became a very renowned city planner around the country and is buried in East Windsor Cemetery.)

In 1880 Charles Black and his wife Mary bought the "Jeff" Pullen nursery and house at 818 Old York Road, which remains on the current Village Nurseries location. Joseph Black and his wife and children moved in with them. In 1881 Joseph Black bought the "Mad" Pullen nursery but rented it out briefly to a Norton until Joseph's family moved in. In 1882 or 1883, Charles Black sold the Norton Farm (current Meadow Lakes) to "Lawyer" Samuel Mount Schenck and the other adjacent 20 acres to "Old Maid Mount" who lived across the street. (One of the ponds at Meadow Lakes is still called

"Schenck Pond".) Functionally, both properties remained part of the Village Nurseries operation.

Charles Black had two sons, Lemuel (Lem) and Charles (Charlie). So Charles (father), Joseph (brother), Lem, Charlie and Walter C. (cousins) all were working the nursery together. Walter indicates in his writings that when he worked the nursery in Virginia, he supervised all of the negro workers even though he was only 9 years old. When they returned to East Windsor, Charles Sr. complained that Walter (his nephew) did not pick as many berries, beans, peas, etc. as did Lem and Charlie. But Walter did not know how to pick and had not been taught the correct way. He also found that Lem was moving Walter's picked quarts into his stack when Walter was not looking. Although this was between children, they were farm workers together, and it made it appear that Walter was not pulling his weight, but Lem and Charlie were making him look bad. Walter never much trusted either of them after that.

In the early 1880s, one of Walter C's & his cousin Lem's jobs was to load a wagon with fruits and vegetables and sell door to door in Hightstown and Cranbury, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Charles' sons were going to Peddie at the time (Lem and Charlie) but Joseph did not have the money to send Walter. He continued in public school and his teacher, Mr. Swett, tutored Walter in bookkeeping and math, which later helped Joseph considerably in the family business.

Walter soon discovered improprieties in the books (Charles was taking cash payments off the books). There was also growing debt that had been taken out by Charles that his brother Joseph did not know about. That being said, Charles and Joseph remained "partners" (but apparently without a recorded partnership agreement) and the nursery grew. Walter understood that Charles had taken his father into the business and by rights he could do what he wanted with it. Father and uncle remained friends and partners but Walter's distrust of his uncle Charles and his cousins Lem and Charlie became deeply seated.

In 1887-1888 Charles Black began for the first time to spend winters in Florida from November through April, and his brother Joseph H. and nephew Walter C. were running the nursery in his absence. Walter had eventually gone to Peddie (class of 1886) followed by Trenton Business College (today known as Rider University). This education paid off. Walter began compiling catalogs, using the name Village Nurseries, which were color-printed in Cranbury. He mailed them to customers and prospects around the country. His first year of doing so ended up with all nursery stock sold before Charles' return from Florida. Walter was twenty-one.

In 1888, Charles also tried to sell the nursery to David Baird, husband of a Pullen daughter, without Joseph's knowledge or right of first refusal. After much back and forth, Walter and Joseph H. bought out Charles Black and renamed the business Joseph H. Black and Son. The price was \$5,000 and initially included just 59 acres, farm equipment and customers. There was also a separate price of \$2,000 for nursery stock and equipment. What was left of the Pullens' nursery did not continue as a separate business.

Joseph and Walter were able to turn around the business (Charles

**Oldest-** *continued on page 6*

**Oldest** - continued from page 6

had been funneling off more cash than was previously known), leaving them enough money to buy another 117 acres. Walter later agreed to bring in a struggling uncle, (Elias, the youngest of the original Joseph's children), to help expand the fruit tree business to include ornamentals, for landscaping.

In 1891 Walter, feeling financially stable, married Sara Shinn, a childhood sweetheart, and they bought another 127 acres with a house and tenant house on Old York Road. Today that land is the Peddie Golf Course. Walter and Sara's house was close to the road where the clubhouse driveway is now. The tenant house was roughly opposite Airport Road. Neither house survives.

Joseph H. Black, Son & Co. had developed some hearty varieties of peaches and apples over the years, but their most famous fruit was likely the Mercer Cherry, developed around 1885. In 1892 it was named such by the U.S Department of Agriculture, Division of Pomology. Although this writer is only familiar with the science of pomology via genetics, it is clear that the acclaim for the Mercer Cherry greatly enhanced Joseph H. Black, Son & Co.'s already stellar

reputation.

Growing fruit is a science as well as an art. Proper budding and grafting is necessary to raise strong trees with hearty fruit and high yields. But the development of the Mercer Cherry seems to have been as much an accident as a creation. Fruit orchards need to have the right soil conditions (not too wet, not too dry) and the trees age quickly, therefore an orchard lasts only for a certain number of years. Orchards are then abandoned or trees uprooted and burned. When moving an orchard to what had been a somewhat virgin area of the nursery, Joseph and Walter found a few Mazzard Cherry trees that had some very special qualities. The cherries were insect resistant, beautiful in color, of good size and the fruit shipped extremely well. A star was born with this Mercer Cherry and the nursery continued to thrive under the ownership and management of Walter C. and Joseph H. Black.

Joseph H. Black & Sons, despite setbacks brought on by some unscrupulous employees, was doing quite well. They produced annual catalogues of trees and plants and distributed them widely. Their reputation for quality and standing behind what they shipped is reflected in letters sent to the nursery by customers. By the early years of the 20th century they were shipping fruit, ornamental trees, plants, vines, fruit trees and vegetables to virtually every state on the continent as well as to Scotland, Ireland, Holland,

France, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. They continued to sell produce, but their main business was the selling of young fruit trees and berry vines. At one time they shipped over 200,000 peach trees a year and raised over 22 varieties of berries, grapes and peaches. Joseph H. Black & Son also began the first Christmas Tree farm in the area, having imported spruce trees from Europe for the purpose. They lined the east side of Old York Road opposite Airport Road for over 500 feet. They would cut and deliver the trees to homes in the area prior to Christmas.

By 1906 Walter had taken over the business and was paying his father one half of the annual profits. Although business was good, Joseph H was essentially out of the day-to-day operation and was talked into entering a road building project with a partner. It went badly. Joseph lost all his cash and investments, and owed a bank over \$40,000. Walter had to step forward and pay off the debts, or Joseph's land would have been lost to the bank. Upon his death, Joseph left his remaining land to Walter C. Black's sister, Nina Black Croshaw, who lived at



Japan Giant Chestnut.

**Oldest** - continued from page 6

818 Old York Road, until she died in 1960.

Walter and Sara Black had three daughters and no sons. Two of these daughters, Nettie Stults and Elma Locke (their married names), after graduating from college, had sons who worked on the nursery in the 1920s thru 1940s when they were adolescents and young men. Walter continued to work the nursery like a young man, albeit then in his 60s and 70s. He also had many civic interests. His age and outside interests led to decreased activity in the business, particularly with the size of the orchards. Pruning and managing them was a year-round, strenuous job, mostly one for younger men.

In 1923, Walter gave permission to his son-in-law, C. Stanley Stults, and a few local businessmen, to build 9 hole golf course through his orchards and nursery stock. Walter was quite the athlete and took up golf at age 60. In 1939, after years of the Depression, Walter, a graduate and treasurer of Peddie for 30 years, gave the golf course and the remainder of that part of Village Nurseries to Peddie School for \$1.00. He retained life rights for Sara and himself to live in house.

The future of the nursery was uncertain with no sons to take it over or daughters interested in same. It wasn't until one grandson, Joseph Black

Locke returned from the navy in WWII and joined the family business after it had skipped a generation. He took over control of the nursery in 1957, his grandfather Walter C. Black still working at his side at the age of 89.

But times had changed. Large fruit growers from southern states were able to produce and sell at lower prices. The cost of labor in New Jersey was high as were other costs compared to other regions. The population of the area was changing. Princeton Nurseries in South Brunswick had emerged as the leading wholesale nursery in central New Jersey.

"Joe" Locke recognized the changing demographic and market trends. Although Walter had done much of the tree and ornamental

**Oldest** - continued on page 8

SPRING 2017

## VILLAGE NURSERIES

"[Of] the Village Nurseries, Jos. H. Black, Son & Co. are its proprietors, and its individual members are known to almost every one in this part of the State and the nurseries are known in all parts of the United States. The extent of their trade is comprehended by few, even their nearest neighbors have only a poor idea of the growth of the concern.

"Too little account has... been made of the advantage that this industry has been to our town. Their money must necessarily come largely from outside sources, while nearly all of the same has been for years kept here in town. ....They employ from 15 to 35 hands, paying for wages alone about \$10,000 per year....

"Our postmaster will tell you, if asked, that [Village Nurseries] sends each year from 15,000 to 20,000 circulars and catalogues, to as many addresses. ...last year they sent over 3,000 packages to over 1,000 customers through the mail. This was mail work alone, not counting the freight and express at all. For eight months of the year, they receive more postal orders and postal notes and registered letters than all the other patrons of the post office taken collectively. .... Over 4,000 boxes and bales were sent last year through freight and express offices, and the money was all kept here."

Source: *Hightstown Gazette*, November 2, 1893





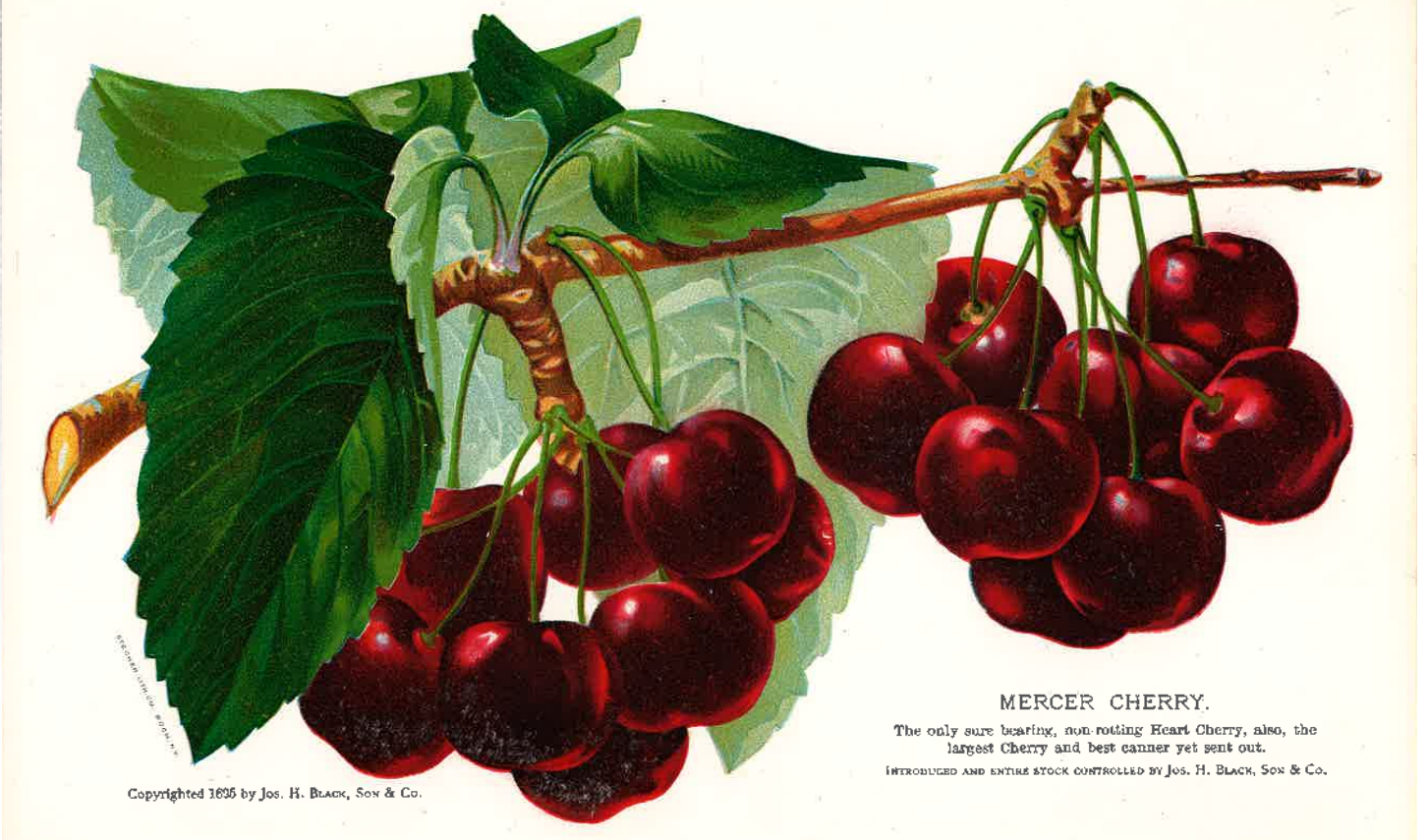
planting for Jersey Homesteads (Roosevelt) in the 1930s and other institutions throughout New Jersey, he had not focused on ornamentals for the booming single-family housing market. While they continued to grow their fruits, mostly peaches and apples, Joe began to favor ornamentals, and he expanded the retail, street-side business including landscape design.

Joe's son David Locke grew up on the nursery learning a lot from his great-grandfather and his father. He went to Rutgers and eventually became a landscape architect and planner and moved away from the nursery, doing designs for many towns and cities around the country. Thankfully for this business that was now over 100 years old, Mike Mendenko, a neighbor boy, was hired to work on the nursery at age 13 and returned full-time in 1976. He fell in love with the business. Joe and Mike complimented each other, much as Joe had to Walter.

Between 2000 and 2003 nearly all of the nursery acreage that bordered Old York, Conover and Woods roads was sold for housing. Village Nurseries retained six acres, enough room for retail, and some field stock of trees and ornamentals. The business passed to Mike Mendenko who operates it today. Ironically Mike married a local girl, Linda Schroeder, who was raised in one of the Pullen houses on the west side of Old York Road south of the Turnpike.

In its heyday, the nursery business begun by the Pullens and absorbed by the Blacks bordered upon Etra, Cedarville and Windsor-Perrineville roads and was the largest farm operation in East Windsor. Between property that they owned and ground that they leased, they controlled about one thousand acres. Walter further innovated and expanded its reach to a countrywide and international clientele. They gave the Mercer Cherry to the world. Today, Village Nurseries catalogues are held by horticultural libraries across the United States. Although the nursery now occupies just a few acres on Old York Road, it continues to maintain a reputation for quality, and now holds the distinction of being the township's oldest business.





MERCER CHERRY.

The only sure bearing, non-rotting Heart Cherry, also, the largest Cherry and best canner yet sent out.

INTRODUCED AND ENTIRE STOCK CONTROLLED BY JOS. H. BLACK, SON & CO.

Copyrighted 1895 by Jos. H. Black, Son & Co.

## April 22nd: Honoring the Ashton Sisters: A Public Musicology Project

Westminster Choir College in Princeton is working on a public musicology project that will honor Grace and Dorothy Ashton, two sisters from Hightstown, NJ for their lifetime of involvement with music and music education. Their goal is to produce a working document that can be shared with the historical society and the public. A community event and performance at the First Baptist Church of Hightstown is being planned for April 22nd. Further details will be provided at a later date.

The College is reaching out in advance to all who remember the Ashton sisters to share your stories, pictures and any information you may have with the project's directors. Please email Margaret Woods at [taylormar@rider.edu](mailto:taylormar@rider.edu) or Dorothy Shrader at [shraderd@rider.edu](mailto:shraderd@rider.edu)

### Where is this?

In each newsletter we will show you a picture from somewhere in Hightstown or East Windsor. We will identify which town it is.

If you know where it is, send us the address by mail (see page 10 for our address) or by email: [cookcummings@yahoo.com](mailto:cookcummings@yahoo.com), and include your address and phone number.

All persons to get it right will be entered into a drawing to be held at our annual dinner in May. The award will be determined by the membership committee.

YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER IF IT'S YOUR HOUSE.

### *East Windsor*



## 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

# East Windsor in the 19th Century : A Short History

BY ROBERT W. CRAIG

East Windsor was created by taking something larger and cutting it in half, three years before the start of the 19th century. It was longer from north to south than it was wide, and in that horse-drawn era it quickly became divided informally into northern and southern portions. The northern part was centered around Hightstown and included all of the area of East Windsor today, plus the area now embodied by Hightstown Borough, and some more besides (see "Early East Windsor's Forgotten Corner"). But what was the southern part centered around?

The southern part of East Windsor lacked the single nucleus that Hightstown was for the northern part. Instead, it became organized around two centers that had both emerged around the middle of the 18th century. The first, to the east, was a hamlet that came to be called "Cattail" in the early records, because it was situated on the south side of Cattail Creek along the Old York Road. This became the village of "New Sharon" in the 19th century, as New Jersey shed its colloquial, early place names for more dignified ones. (Cattail Creek became the New Sharon Branch of the Assanpink Creek.) Cattail had become a gathering place for families in the eastern half of this southern portion.

The gathering place for the western half of the southern portion was a spot initially known as Tindall's Tavern, after the name of its operator. This was at the very center of what became the village of Robbinsville. The tavern stood along the south side of what was the early road from Allentown to Trenton, a small part of which is followed by Route 33 today. The two parts could not unite on a single center, in part because of distance. They were both closer to Allentown than they were to each other. They also were settled by two rather different groups of families. The Cattail area was settled largely by families from Monmouth County and came to be dependent upon Allentown. The western part was more oriented toward Yardville, White Horse, and Trenton, and was settled in part by families who moved northward across the line from Burlington County.

East Windsor enjoyed a location within what had already emerged as New Jersey's central corridor. Although the west side of the corridor that ran through Princeton became better known, the east side through East Windsor had already achieved an impressive number of transportation firsts. In the 18th century these had included the first improved road to cross the colony, the first commercial freight service by wagon, and both the first stage line for passengers in New Jersey and the first one to operate on the basis of a fixed and published schedule. In the 19th century, East Windsor shared in more firsts. There was the road-making revolution in which much of New Jersey's roadscape was transformed with straight roads: roads that were surveyed on straight lines for either all or at least long stretches of their length. This had been a dream of road-makers since the Renaissance. Many of what we think today are roads whose alignments are left over from the colonial period are instead replacements of those roads, made on straighter alignments in the early 19th century. Old Trenton Road (1803) and Conover Road (1812) are two such roads in East Windsor.

The most important of the straight roads in the early 19th century were the turnpikes. The Bordentown & South Amboy Turnpike was chartered by the legislature in 1816 and its route was surveyed through

the length of East Windsor, including what would become Robbinsville. A short distance north of the Assanpink Creek the route of the turnpike crossed Windsor-Perrineville Road, which had been created in 1804 from the Old York Road in East Windsor to Sandpink (Edinburg) in West Windsor. At that intersection a third nucleus emerged in the southern portion of East Windsor: Centerville, or Windsor, as it came to be known after 1850. With the turnpike in place, Centerville was much more easily reachable than any other place in the southern half of East Windsor, and the township committee decided to alternate its meetings between Hightstown and Centerville, to more fairly serve both parts of the township.

A decade and a half after the turnpike the railroad arrived. The Camden & Amboy Railroad (C&A) became the first railroad to cross New Jersey and the first to link major cities in the United States. Its original right-of-way closely paralleled that of the Bordentown & South Amboy Turnpike. The land through East Windsor was bought in 1831 and the line was built in 1832, despite a fierce cholera epidemic. Even though the track was laid through terrain that was relatively flat, the railroad embodied civil engineering on a scale never before seen locally. The Crosswicks Creek bridge, for example, was about 40 feet high and over 400 feet long. Where it crossed low, swampy ground in East Windsor, it required the equivalent of elevated causeways thousands of feet long.

The line began operating in October 1833 and it quickly

*Short - continued on page 12*

**Short** - *continued from page 11*

transformed the township. For East Windsor, the railroad ushered in a generation of prosperity on the farm. Suddenly, fruit growing was possible here on a scale never before imagined, and several local farmers developed peach and apple orchards consisting of thousands of trees, the produce from which was carried to urban markets by rail. These circumstances also led to the emergence of tree nurseries, the products of which could also be shipped by rail. Isaac Pullen who lived at what is today 866 Old York Road, began the township's first nursery about 1830, when the railroad was being talked about but before it had been built. Village Nurseries soon followed. Several new houses were built in this period, including the township's first brick house. Many barns and other farm outbuildings were added or replaced. And of the very few even older houses from the 1700s that still survive in East Windsor, in every case they were added onto and remodeled between the 1830s and the Civil War.

The agricultural prosperity that East Windsor (and much of central New Jersey) enjoyed tends to be overshadowed by the more dramatic growth of Hightstown during the same years. Hightstown before the railroad was a small village of about one hundred people, even with the modest growth encouraged by the turnpike. By 1870, however, Hightstown had become home to about 1300 people, which completely transformed the township. Hightstowners, living in a compact village, quickly came to need public services that the farmers of East Windsor Township would not pay for: improved fire protection, a rudimentary police force, sidewalks, street lights, and a public water system. All of these things were necessary to the village but pointless on a farm. To resolve the dilemma, Hightstown leaders convinced the legislature to create Hightstown Borough as a "borough commission" in March 1853. This form of incorporation did not have an immediate, direct effect on East Windsor's tax base, however, because it was an overlay of jurisdiction upon the township's own incorporation. A resident of the borough after 1853 was still a resident of East Windsor Township and still paid taxes to it. The borough was not yet the "hole in the doughnut" that it later became. This sense of Hightstown as remaining a part of East Windsor Township is most strongly recalled today in the East Windsor Civil War monument that stands at Stockton Street and Rogers Avenue in Hightstown Borough, remembering the 35 local men killed in that conflict.

While the northern portion of the township--the part that relied on Hightstown--was resigned to this change, the southern portion was not. Neither Windsor nor the village of Robbinsville were growing to the degree that Hightstown was, even though they were located on the same rail line. The people of the southern portion of the township began to advocate separating into a township of their own, which the legislature incorporated as Washington Township in 1859 (today Robbinsville Township). The separation of Washington Township gave East Windsor the southern border that it possesses today.

East Windsor before the Civil War can roughly be described as having become divided into neighborhoods defined by the one-room schoolhouses that served them. These areas were formalized after the Civil War into school districts, in the original sense of that term, mean-

ing the neighborhood from which a school drew its pupils. The southwestern part of the township, centered along Dutch Neck Road, was served by the Hickory Corner schoolhouse. The western part, centered by the Princeton-Hightstown Road, was served by the Locust Corner schoolhouse. The southern part, centered along Old York Road, was served by the "Allen" schoolhouse, which stood along Windsor-Perrineville Road near Allen Road. The eastern part including the areas where Twin Rivers is located and the areas along the Cedarville and Etra roads, was served by a schoolhouse in Etra. In the very southeastern part of the township, the Cedar Swamp schoolhouse was built in the 1820s, where the not-then-yet famous Clara Barton taught in 1851.

The last major transportation development in 19th-century East Windsor was the completion of the Pemberton and Hightstown Railroad, which was a subsidiary of the Camden & Amboy. The C&A turned over operation of the line, however, to another company, the Union Transportation Company (the "U.T."). The line was completed through East Windsor in 1868,

*Short - continued on page 13*

### **Monthly Meetings**

**Anyone is welcome to attend our meetings. We discuss progress of each committee and welcome your input for new ideas and offers to assist with our upcoming programs.**

**Meetings are held:  
The first Monday of the month at 7:00 pm in Ely House. 164 North Main Street, Hightstown.**

Short - continued from page 12

and it created in the township a place called Hightstown Junction where the Pemberton & Hightstown line reached the C&A line (a short distance northeast of the intersection of Route 33 and Airport Road). A turntable and several other railroad structures were built there to support the U.T.'s operations, but they have long-since disappeared. Other minor advances included the Hightstown & Manalapanville Turnpike Company (that was the forerunner of Route 33 into Monmouth County) and the Hightstown & Perrineville Turnpike Company (which improved Etra Road). These were incorporated in the middle decades of the century, but little is known of their operations.

In 1894 the State legislature enacted a law that converted all of the "borough commissions" like Hightstown into boroughs--fully independent municipalities. The impact of this decision was felt quickly. The township was effectively impoverished by it. In an instant, most of East Windsor's tax base disappeared, with most of its population (the Borough part). And much of East Windsor's population increase during the generation that followed would locate in areas adjacent to the Borough that the Borough would later annex. Without the Borough population, U.S. Census figures for East Windsor, enumerated in 1900 and afterward, showed the Township population below one thousand persons. And after 1900, when East Windsor was forced to relocate its township office, it chose a small, one-room, frame building in Etra--because that's what its financial resources could afford. East Windsor's population, now spread across 15.7 square miles would not exceed that of barely 1-square mile Hightstown Borough in any U.S. Census until 1970.

At the end of the 19th century, East Windsor was what it had been at the beginning: a rural, farming township populated by farm families. Both transportation and the nature of farming changed during those hundred years, and Hightstown grew up in its midst from a small, mill village to a town of more than 2,000 people--the third most populous place in Mercer County (behind Trenton and Princeton). These realities set the stage for East Windsor in the twentieth century.

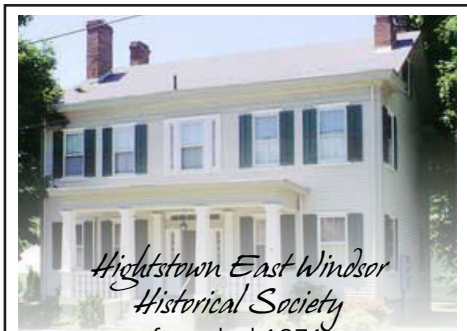
## October 26th: Save the Date !! Get Your Antiques Ready! Appraisal Show Coming in October

We are excited that Gene Pascucci of Empire Antiques, Monmouth Street in Hightstown, is volunteering his services to appraise that antique you always wanted to know more about. Gene is very highly regarded throughout the region for his expertise.

The "show" will be held on Thursday afternoon, October 26th, and will begin at 4 pm. It will be held in the Freight Station (Sara Hutchinson West Education Center) in the rear of the Society headquarters at 164 South Main Street in Hightstown.

This is a fund-raiser to support the Society's library and museum functions. The fee for the appraisal will be \$15 for the first item and \$20 for each additional item. Light refreshments and beverage will be available.

SPRING 2017



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

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# The Forgotten Corner of Early East Windsor

BY ROBERT W. CRAIG

In 1761 a survey was made and a map prepared of the boundary line between Middlesex and Monmouth counties. From where the Old York Road crossed the Assanpink Creek, the boundary followed a long, straight northeasterly line to Machaponix Brook in what is now the Township of Manalapan. It was the easterly line of Windsor Township. When East Windsor was created in 1797 it inherited this line with Monmouth County. The line, however, reached the Millstone River well to the east of East Windsor's present boundary. East Windsor's northern line is on the Millstone River as it has always been, and its boundary with West Windsor has been essentially unchanged since 1797. Its southern boundary with Robbinsville Township has never been changed since the latter was incorporated as Washington Township in 1859, but the fact has been forgotten by nearly everyone that the township once extended more than two miles to the east of Twin Rivers. It not only extended beyond Applegarth Road, but also nearly a half-mile eastward of the Jamesburg-Perrineville Road. Keeping this land would have added more than three square miles to East Windsor.

For more than forty years a large, roughly triangular stretch, like a lateen sail on a schooner, was indeed part of East Windsor, yet the forces that would change that boundary had begun to take shape even before East Windsor was created. Trenton had emerged in the 18th century as a port town on the Delaware River, and it had been the seat of Hunterdon County since 1720. But in 1785, Hunterdon moved its court to a small, up-county village, Flemington. The clerk's office followed a few years later. It was the first of a series of county seat movements that would also affect Middlesex, Essex, Burlington, and Bergen. The 19th-century response would be to create new counties.

This change in Hunterdon sparked a new county movement after the Revolutionary War, to make Trenton once again a county seat. It was short-lived. But Trenton was also in the nation's spotlight, as the leading candidate to become the capital region of the entire United States, so much so that New Jersey took steps to acquire some of the land that would be needed if this "Federal City" became a reality (Federal City Road in Hopewell Township still remains to bear witness to that effort.) But Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson struck their famous bargain to put the nation's capital on the Potomac instead of the Delaware. Trenton was left out, but its consolation prize was to become the state capital. That didn't answer the following question: why compel down-county residents, who handled all of their business affairs in Trenton, to go up-county only for legal matters?

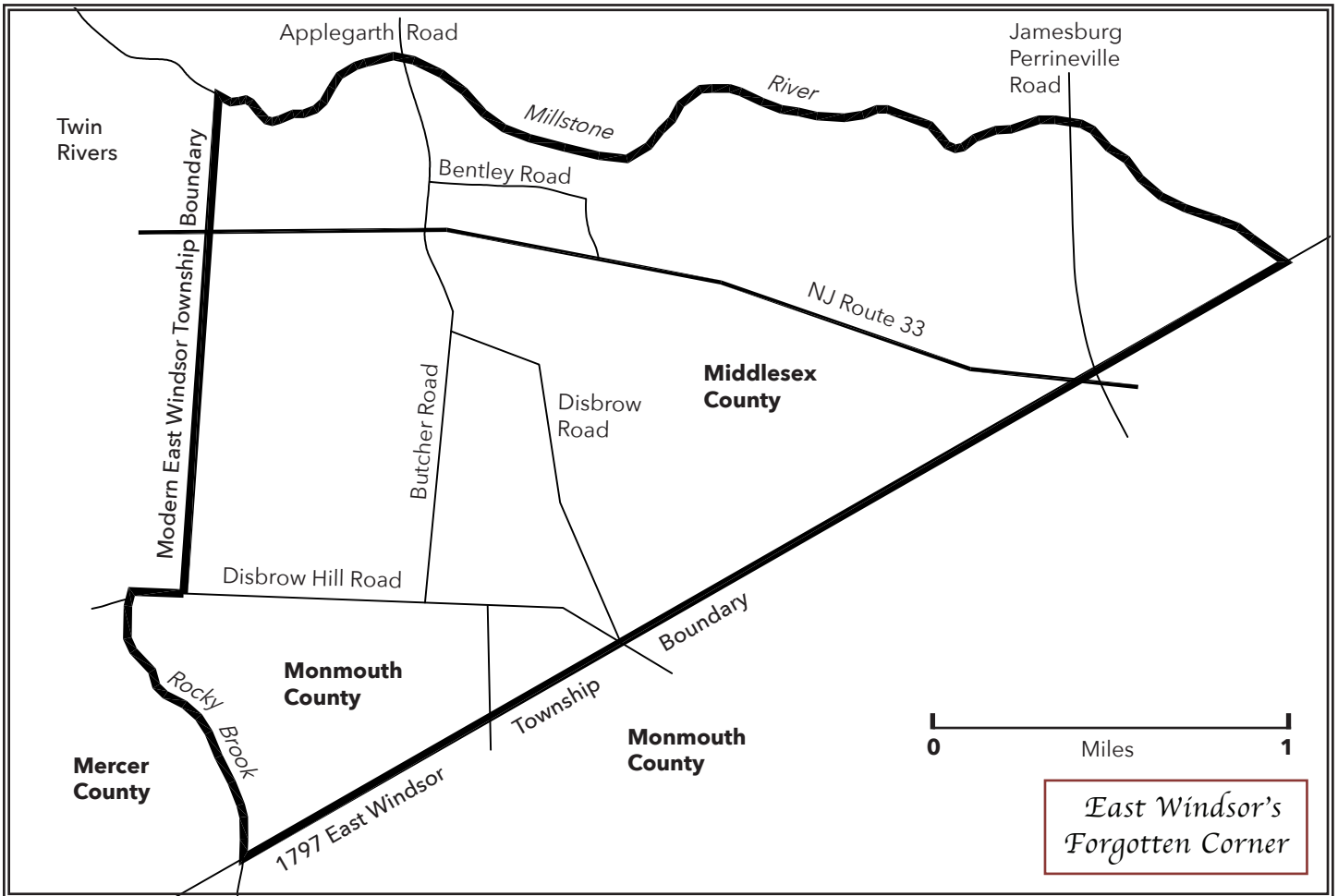
Wherever court towns existed in New Jersey, roads radiated from them in all directions, and Trenton was no different, with roads reaching into Burlington, Somerset, and Middlesex. Wherever new county movements were fostered, the proposals their advocates came up with always examined the distance their most remote residents would be from the newly-proposed county seat. To be closer to the new county seat than to the old one was an important selling point. Even small differences could be important. It was hard to succeed with such arguments (as Hightstown and East Windsor would later learn), and some movements failed, but New Jersey created eight new counties before

the Civil War (and none since).

In making such proposals, township boundaries were not sacrosanct. All of East Windsor was closer to Trenton than any part of it was to the City of Perth Amboy, the Middlesex County seat since the 1680s, but when Middlesex moved its seat to New Brunswick in 1793, it may have helped undercut a new round of efforts that were made in 1794 to seat a new county at Trenton. The southern and western parts of East Windsor were closer to Trenton, but the easternmost corner was closer to Freehold (Monmouth Court House). When the statute creating Mercer County was finally enacted in 1838, the easternmost edge was located near this point of equidistance.

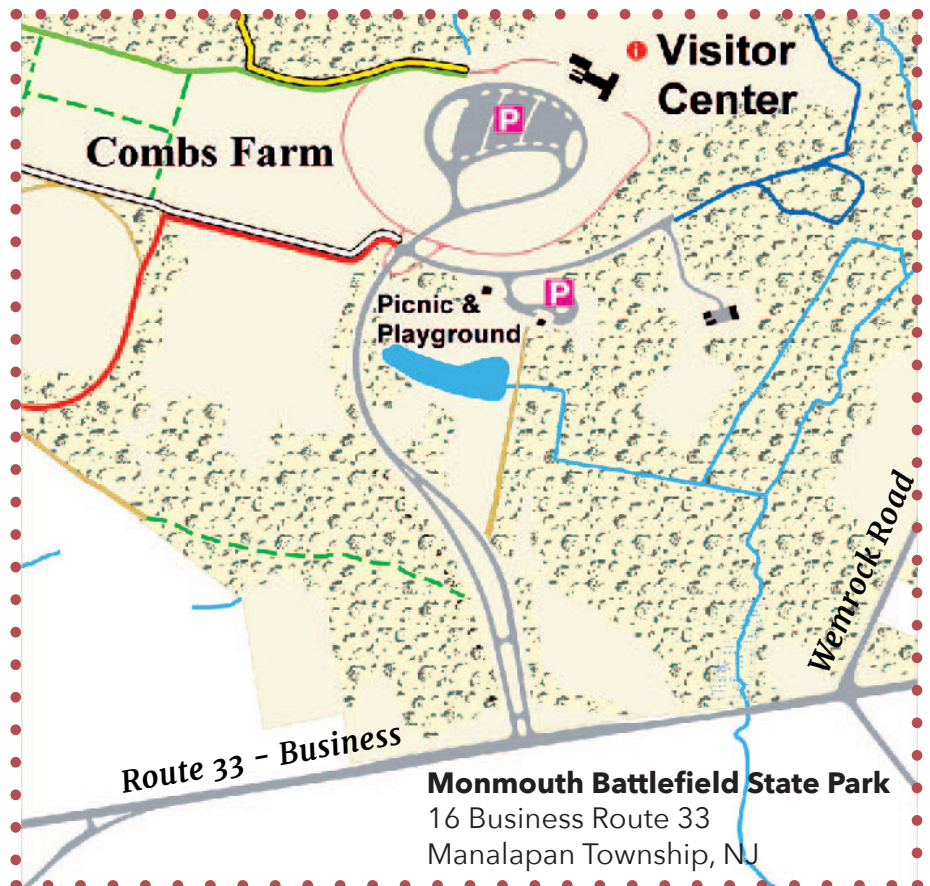
So what happened to this 'forgotten' corner? When Mercer County was created, the eastern corner of East Windsor was added to South Amboy Township, its neighbor to the northeast in Middlesex County. But almost immediately the southeastern portion of that township was separated to form a new township to honor the fifth President of the United States, James Monroe. Monroe Township remained in peaceable possession of this forgotten corner for eight years, until the legislature in 1844 shifted it to help create Millstone Township in Monmouth County. Politics was the apparent cause of this switch. Both before and after the state constitution of 1844, legislators were elected to represent counties. Thus if manipulating the boundaries of a county could change the outcome of

*Forgotten - continued on page 15*



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important races, the legislature was not above making those changes. For political reasons, such changes also affected Hopewell Township in the same years, with land moving back and forth between Mercer and Hunterdon counties. No one has yet shown what specific politics caused the loss of East Windsor's missing land, but the fact that the creation of a new county might affect the balance in the legislature could not be discounted. It was in effect a form of redistricting. The pendulum swung again in 1845, giving back to Monroe what it had lost the year before. Then in 1847 it swung once more, cutting a smaller notch out of Monroe Township that has never since been reversed. East Windsor's forgotten corner has remained quiet ever since, in an awkward division between Middlesex and Monmouth counties.



**MAP FOR OUR ANNUAL DINNER**

