

Hightstown



East Windsor

Hightstown Society News

Winter 2018



President's Message

A Year In Review

Dear Members and Friends,

Well it has been quite a year for the Society and 2019 promises to be even better with your help. But before looking forward, in no particular order let's look back and give thanks to those that have done so much for the Society.

Greg Ciano, with some help from V-P Robin Smith, completed a mural on the southern wall of the freight station. You can see this behind the girl scout troop that visited us this fall.



Greg also wrote and directed a children's musical theater production of "The Story of the John Bull". Many young folks participated in both playing roles and helping with the set.

The Annual Meeting was held in May at the Society which was extremely well attended. Laura Gaulke MacDonald was a WWI nurse reenactor who narrated what it was like for both the soldiers and nurses during WWI. It was a full house.

Two senior groups were given tours and talks at the Society and a separate bus tour was given for the Meadow Lakes residents.



There was another full house presentation on the history of Hightstown and East Windsor given by yours truly at Meadow Lakes. Additionally I gave programs at the Hightstown and East Windsor branches of the Mercer County Library and at Rossmoor.



Greg and Cookie Cummings also arranged for fund raising dinners at the 12 Farms restaurant. These raised over \$500 combined for the Society.

We were also visited by a number of folks from around the country that had never been to Hightstown before

but they have some roots here. Members of the Moore, Mount, Hutchinson and of course Ely families, just to name a few.

Our annual meeting will be held in Roosevelt this year. See the separate article in this newsletter. December is dues time. Please find the dues notice herein and submit your dues. If you care to add a little extra it would be greatly appreciated.

Finally, we are always in need of volunteers, including officers. Should you be interested, please email me at cstults@allenstults.com or call me anytime at 609-712-1811. Thank you for your continued support.

Cappy Stults, President

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The Underhill Family and the Ice Plant

by Robert Craig

The 1930's were a time when many people still relied upon manufactured ice for their refrigeration needs. They had ice-box refrigerators in their homes, and they still bought ice to fill them. Hightstown had its own ice-making plant. It stood behind the houses on the north side of lower Stockton Street, between them and Rocky Brook.



Frank C. Underhill bought the ice plant in 1931. He was from Nebraska originally, and worked for the

Fairbanks-Morse company, which manufactured ice-making equipment for plants like Hightstown's. The company sent Underhill out to troubleshoot and repair its equipment in plants around the country. He was sent to make repairs to a plant in Red Bank, Monmouth County, where he met a young woman, Olive Runyon, of Belford in Monmouth County. After a courtship, they married, and to settle down, Underhill bought Hightstown's ice plant. He and Olive bought the house that still stands at 401 Stockton Street, and while there had their three children: two daughters, Corena and Janet, and a son, Frank C., Jr.

Underhill combined the selling of ice with that of kerosene and fuel oil, which balanced one another



quite well, the ice being in greatest demand in the summertime when kerosene and fuel oil were little needed. Frank had several routes, a small fleet of trucks, and several employees who helped him operate the plant.

It all came crashing down for the family in an instant. On December 11, 1946, the very day on which Corena, the eldest child, turned 14 years old, her father was performing maintenance in the engine room of the ice plant when a piece of his clothing caught in the machinery, pulling him in. He was killed instantly, caught between a 12-inch wide drive belt and the flywheel to which it was attached. He was dragged through a full revolution of the wheel before the machinery could be stopped. Bones were broken throughout his body. Local physician William G. Rose pronounced him dead at the scene, and notified the county physician. Underhill was buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery.



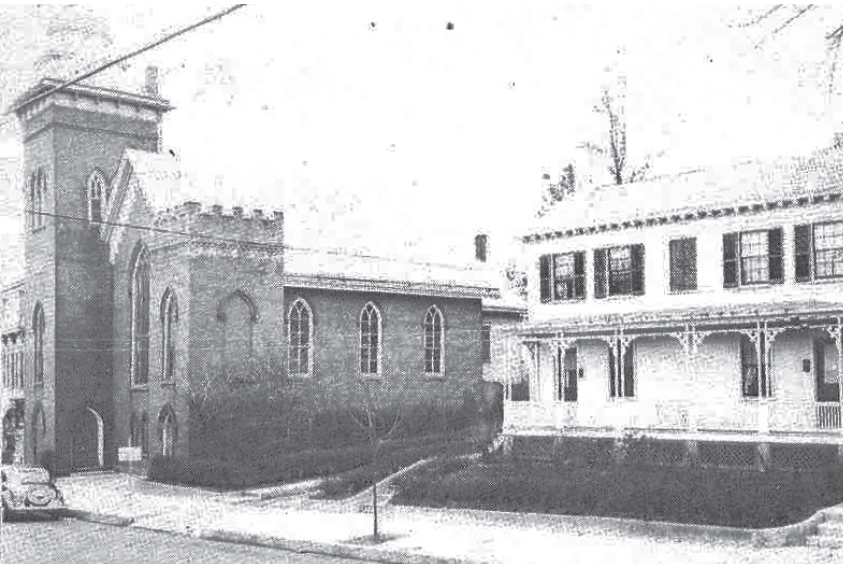
After the tragedy, Olive continued to operate the business for five more years. She sold it in 1951 to William C. Pullen, who continued for decades to be a principal local purveyor of fuel oil. Corena recently shared with the Society a collection of photos of her family. Together, they depict the ice plant, evoke the character of upper Stockton Street in the 1940's, and show the family's fondness for horseback riding.

Hightstown Churches That Have Disappeared

Universalist Church South Main Street

When I have been giving historical walking and bus tours around town, many questions are asked and a couple deserve some special attention. One is “what was where Perritt Labs is today before it was the post office” and another is “where did Bank Street gets its name? From the banks of the Rocky Brook?”

The first question will be answered by reprinting an article written by a much younger Bob Craig back in April 1981 for a periodical called The Princeton Recollector. It was entitled “Baptists Alarmed to Find New Neighbors were Universalists”.



Both the Church and the adjacent two family house were razed for the post office in 1936. You can see the Baptist Church in the rear of the brick building and the Livingston Home to the left.

Bob has given me permission to downsize and update the article since it was written in 1981 terms.

One of the important institutions in Hightstown a hundred and fifty years ago was the Universalist Church. The church edifice stood on the East side of South Main Street, where the driveway of the old Post Office is today, now Perritt Labs. The Universalists church closed for good in 1918, and it was demolished in 1935. Few living today will remember the congregation or church building. It is unlikely that there are any surviving members of the congregation. In the years 1970-1980, many of the papers of Joseph J. Ely, a Universalist, came to light and shortly thereafter, the Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society had acquired a thick file of correspondence

by Robert Craig
with updates by C. Stults

concerning the church.

In the 1870s, Hightstown was one of the only towns in New Jersey with a flourishing Universalist church, for Universalism tended to thrive in the big cities and in New England. The tenets of the faith were the universal fatherhood of God, the spiritual leadership of Christ, and the inevitability of the just retribution for sin, with this central doctrine being the ultimate salvations of all human beings. To commemorate the sect’s hundredth anniversary in 1870, two years later Reverend Abel C. Thomas published, *A Century of Universalism*. “Universalism”, he said, “is both the Heart and the Head of Christianity. The final reconciliation of our souls is the distinctive thought of our profession and faith, and we cannot cancel or suspend that, for the accommodation of any unbeliever.”

Thomas devoted a whole chapter of his book to the Hightstown Universalist church. The Hightstown church first organized informally in the 1820s among a cluster of farm families which included the Johnses and the Nortons, who lived in East Windsor near Perrineville and Cedarville Roads. Around 1828 they built a schoolhouse, which became the Cedar Grove School (aka Cedar Swamp). It stood on the easterly side of Cedarville Road on the farm of Samuel C. Johnes. However, a majority of the township voters, who were members of the Baptist and Presbyterian churches, persuaded the township committee to prohibit the use of the schoolhouse for Sunday worship services. This ordinance was strictly enforced, so the Universalists had to meet elsewhere.

In 1834, the Baptists put their old meetinghouse up for sale (immediately south of the current Baptist church’s building

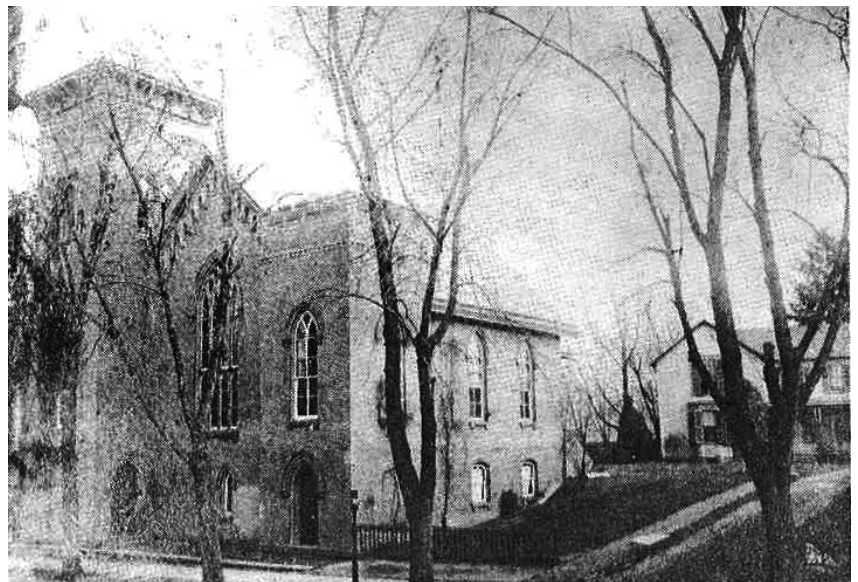
known as the Livingston Home). The Baptists had built it in 1785, when they first moved to Hightstown. The buyer was Charles D. McChesney, a Universalist. The Baptists thought he was going to use the structure as a barn; instead, two or three weeks later, he sold it to the Universalist congregation, which renovated it and refurbished it as their church, only two doors away from the new Baptist church. The Universalists held their inaugural service in their new place of worship on August 10, 1835, and Rev. La Fevre, their first minister, delivered a sermon from Haggai II:9: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former...." Understandably, the Baptist must have felt insulted by this state of affairs.

The Universalists exerted an influence on the town beyond what their number would suggest. Universalism had widespread appeal among intelligent people, and in the Hightstown church were many of the town's reformers and well-educated residents. In contrast to the Baptist congregation, which some considered a "country church", since mainly farm families belonged, most of the Universalists lived or worked in town. Dr. McChesney, one of the town's earliest practicing physicians, served as New Jersey Secretary of State from 1840-1851, and became an important collector of Revolutionary War manuscripts. Charles C. Blauvelt and Joseph Blauvelt, father and son, both served as mayor of Hightstown Borough. Joseph J. Ely, who lived in Millstone, but included Hightstown in his law practice, was, at about the time of the Civil War, the leader of a movement to make Hightstown the seat of a new county to be called, "County of Stockton". He was also active in the temperance movement, and published many pamphlets on Universalism and various reform subjects. Mary Norton, the best known Universalist of Hightstown, was active in Civil War relief work. Her friendship with Clara Barton

and her invitation to teach at the Cedar Grove School are what brought Barton to East Windsor.

For several decades the church prospered. In 1871, the congregation had the old sanctuary demolished and a new, larger one erected, celebrating its completion with ceremonies attended by Horace Greeley and P.T. Barnum. Mary Norton and Mary Kay Pepler bequeathed large sums which helped endow the church for operating expenses, and more land was bought. A parsonage also stood on the church property. It became debt free in 1911.

At its height around 1900, the congregation of the Hightstown Universalist church included about three hundred people, or about two hundred families. Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Rue belonged, as did the William Thompson family. Will Jr. was an owner of the rug mill, while his brother, Ernest owned a drug store. The Brearly family belonged, and Abijah Applegate and Albert Conover. Mrs. Walter C. Black (nee Shinn), and her



The church manse was in the rear, here on the right. It was demolished along with the church in 1936.

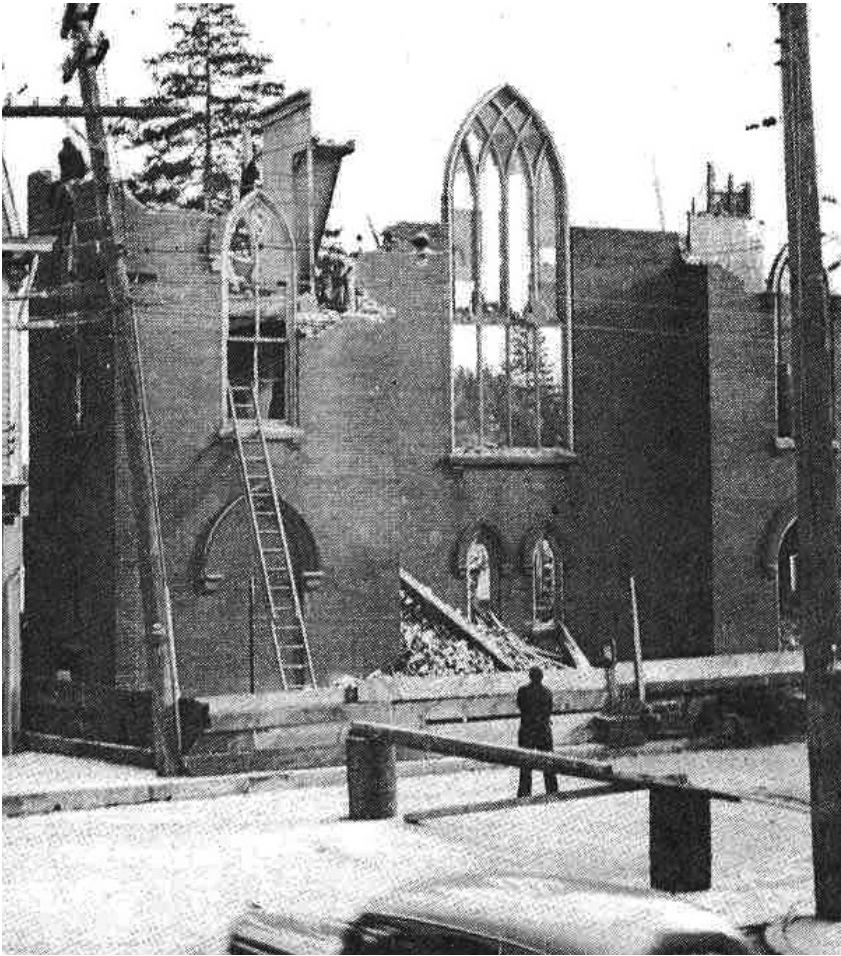
three daughters were members, (one married a Locke whose son Joseph took over Village Nurseries, and another daughter married C. Stanley Stults). It is said that Mr. Black, for whom one of the elementary schools is named, seldom, if ever, attended services. George and Joseph Shinn were members, as was Kenneth Ward, whose family at one time owned all of the land where Peddie School now stands.

After 1910, the church fell on hard times. Reverend Ashworth, who had made the church debt free, left in 1911, and with him went much of the glue that held the congregation. The church closed in 1918. It was intended to open again. Members drifted to other congregations (Nettie Black Stults

Universalist Church South Main Street (cont.)

and sister Elma Black Locke became Baptists).

After many failures to reopen the church, efforts were made to adapt the church building for other purposes. The town's bicentennial had sparked the creation of a public library, and a suggestion was offered to use the Universalist church. The legal owner was the Universalist General Convention, the offices of which were in Boston. It took many years to straighten out the boundaries and title issues, during which time the Masons and Grange continually tried to get permission to occupy it. Some other congregations wanted to use or purchase it and then in November 1935, it was announced that a new post office would be erected on the site. After that, attention shifted to salvaging what could be removed, such as pews, hymnals and prayer books. The pulpit furniture, the church records,



The demolition. The building on the left still remains and is owned by the Baptist Church. It once was the Allen & Stults Funeral Parlor and a bench from the original Universalist church were taken to Murray Grove, now Lanoka Harbor. The church, parsonage and another house just south of the church were demolished for the new post office.

Trinity Episcopal Church North Main & Bank Streets

by Charles Stults



Pencil sketch from 1860s. Notice the house to the South is Ely House.

The Protestant Episcopal Church had its first services in Hightstown in 1847 and it was formally admitted into the union of the diocese in 1859. For a number of years the church tried to find a suitable lot to build on but to no avail. Then, in 1875, the Central Bank of New Jersey, which was on the corner of Bank and North Main Street, relocated to a building in the center of Hightstown. The bank's President was R. E. Morrison and its cashier, T. Applegat. This bank later had some scandals which will be a subject of a future article. I am in possession of what I believe was one of the bank's last minute books.

The church was able to purchase the bank building for \$2,025 in 1875 and in 1881 the church was virtually debt free. Its approximately one hundred and forty members were able to attend services without having to pay "pew rent", which was a norm of the times. The church was stable for many years and had support of Trinity Church in Princeton. Also many Peddie boys attended services and even had formed a choir. Peddie had bought the Lantz Hotel for a boy's dormitory. It was where the fire house is now located, nearly adjacent to Trinity Church.

Unfortunately its congregation waned in the early 1950s for reasons unknown. Peddie had hired its own Episcopalian chaplain who cared for the boys spiritual needs on campus in its relatively new Ayer Chapel that had been build in 1949. Maybe this was one of the contributing factors. The church held its last service in 1956. The Borough of Hightstown condemned and purchased the lot and building for \$100 in 1958. It was demolished in 1959. Now you know why the street is



Photo after the church closed down.

called “bank street” and not “church street”. The historical society is the current owner of the lot having bought it in 1990 from the borough in order to accommodate the move of the freight station.

Newspaper Digitization Project

The Hightstown Library Association approached the Society to team up to convert all available Village Record, Hightstown Gazettes, Hightstown Excelsior, Hightstown Enterprise and Hightstown Independent newspapers to searchable PDFs. Many of the papers had been microfilmed over the years but the quality of the microfilm varies and the ability to search a paper for key words or names is virtually impossible other than by reading each line. Those

that were not put on microfilm are deteriorating rapidly even though we have done our best to preserve them.

This is a fantastic project and we are pleased that the library association approached us. The project was enthusiastically approved by the officers and board and is actually in progress as we write this newsletter. Once completed, links will be available on our website and the library’s website. For an example of what there will be, visit the following link from the Cranbury Library: <http://www.digifind-it.com/cranbury/home.php>. Click on Cranbury Press and look at an old newspaper from 1918 for example. Newer newspapers will not be available on line but will require a visit to the library. Most of our papers however will be available as they are out of copyright.

More About Our Local Newspapers

The Village Record was first started in Hightstown on June 30, 1849. The editors/owners were Jacob Stults and James S. Yard. After just five months, Yard sold his interest to Edward C. Taylor. By April 1851, Taylor became the sole owner. This ownership also only lasted a few months when Taylor sold to Dr. B.H. Peterson. After only six months Dr. Peterson returned ownership of the paper to Taylor. Publishing a weekly newspaper by writing, reporting, selling ads and collecting money is today difficult, but just imagine what it had to be like 52 weeks a year in the 1850s!

By 1952 Yard had returned to Hightstown and ran the paper again until 1854 when he sold it back to his original partner, Jacob Stults. When they had begun the paper in 1849, Stults was only 19 years old and Yard was only 23.

The Universalists Association started a competitor newspaper in 1857 named, the “Hightstown Excelsior” (see article on the Universalist Church in this newsletter). They too must have found it exhausting as they had a different editor each of its first four years: Charles Norton, Daniel Taggart, C.W. Mount and then again by Norton. Obviously having enough, the Village Record and the Excelsior merged to become the “Hightstown Gazette” in 1861, under the ownership of Stults and Norton until in 1863, Stults became sole owner again at the approximate age of 31.

In 1870 a Thomas Appleget purchased half of the paper and in 1873 became the sole owner. In 1891 he brought his

More About Our Local Newspapers (cont.)

son, Fred B. Appeget into the business which also included a printing business. L.D. Tillyer bought the Gazette in 1908. Annual subscription had been \$1.50 which he reduced to \$.75 to increase advance sale circulation. In 1912, George Dennis acquired the Gazette which he published until his death in 1955. Few will remember George Dennis but many remember his children Palmer and Kathryn, who published the Gazette until its closing in 2005 and Kathryn's death in 2005.

The "Enterprise" was owned by C.F Swett and was only published for about two years. The "Independent" was published for four years from 1903 to 1907. It was owned by Richard Merton Johnson Smith and the editor was William G. Smith.

Annual Meeting

April 28, 2019, 4pm at "The Hightstown Project"

What was the Hightstown Project? Many may know the name "Jersey Homestead" and nearly all know the current town name, "Roosevelt", but few probably know that



for a long time this 1930s planned community was known as "The Hightstown Project". We are very pleased to be able to hold our annual meeting this

year in Roosevelt. Town historian Michael Ticktin will lead us on a walking tour of the unique town plan and the even more unique Bauhaus architectural home designs of Alfred Kastner and his

young assistant, Louis Kahn. We will also view Ben Shahn's famous mural in the school and his son's bust sculpture of Roo-



sevelt. A video and meal will be at the synagogue on Homestead Lane. More details to follow. Mark your calendar.

Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

Founded 1971 to educate while preserving for future generations, our people and our community's history.



Officers for 2017-2018

President: Charles "Cappy" Stults
609-448-0110 - cstults@allenstults.com

Vice President: Robin Smith

Recording Secretary: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

Corres. Secretary: Vacant

Treasurer: Robert Szychowski
609-448-9490

Committee Chairs

Finance: Robert Szychowski
609-448-9490

Property & Grounds: Warren Olsen
609-448-8388
Beverly Mann

Library: Robert Craig
609-584-1806
Eileen Couturier

Website: Gary Stevens
609-469-1860

Membership: Cookie Cummings
cookcumings@yahoo.com

Museum: Cookie Cummings
cookcumings@yahoo.com

Newsletter: Robert Craig
609-584-1806

Programs: Christian Kirkpatrick
Jane Cox
609-584-1806
Nancy Laudenberger
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Publicity: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

Building Committee

Christian Kirkpatrick, Shirley Olsen, Warren Olsen, Robert Szychowski

Society Trustees

Nancy Laudenberger, Bonnie Lou Field, Warren Olsen, Irene Schubert, Bev Mann and Gary Grubb

Layout by Gregory Ciano. Printed by Harwill Express Press

Successful House Tour Thank You

Our house tour, "A Walk Through Time" featuring five private homes, was a very successful tour, thanks to the many members and friends of the Society who contributed their time and talents. Those who have driven passed the many beautiful historic homes in Hightstown and wondered what they looked like inside had their curiosity satisfied on Sunday, October 21, 2018.

From the sale of 400 tour tickets, and the monetary contributions from 13 local businesses from the paid ads publicized in the tour booklet, the Society made an income of \$10,350. Members of the Rocky Brook Garden Club are to be thanked for contributing the beautiful floral centerpieces throughout the homes. I want to recognize the art department in The Hightstown Woman's Club for the ink drawings of each house in the tour booklet. The Central Jersey Antique Car Club contributed vintage cars at each home as an added touch of nostalgia.



The Dilger's house on the day of the tour.

We thank all the tour committee chairmen, the fifty docents, our historians who worked on the tour, as well as the after-tour social committee under the direction of my co-chairman, Robin Smith, who with her husband Jay prepared and donated the food, Lynne and Woody Wallace for donating the paper goods and Allen & Stults Insurance for donating the beverages.

Most Importantly, a Very appreciative THANK YOU to our homeowners

- Doug and Kathleen Mariboe
- Tom and Mary Palilonis
- Dave and Kathy Zaiser
- Tom and Susan Dilger
- Swetland House-Peddie-Maryanne Quinn

and after tour party-Bob von Riegan and Linda Earley. They made the 2018 House Tour possible by opening their lovely homes for us. And finally to all of the members and friends who came on tour, supporting the Society.

*Shirley Olsen,
Chairman Society House Tour 2018*

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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