

Hightstown



East Windsor

# *Historical Society News*

Autumn 2019

## The Hightstown Rug Mill

By Cappy Stults

**Hightstown Rug Company** (continued from Spring 2019 Issue)

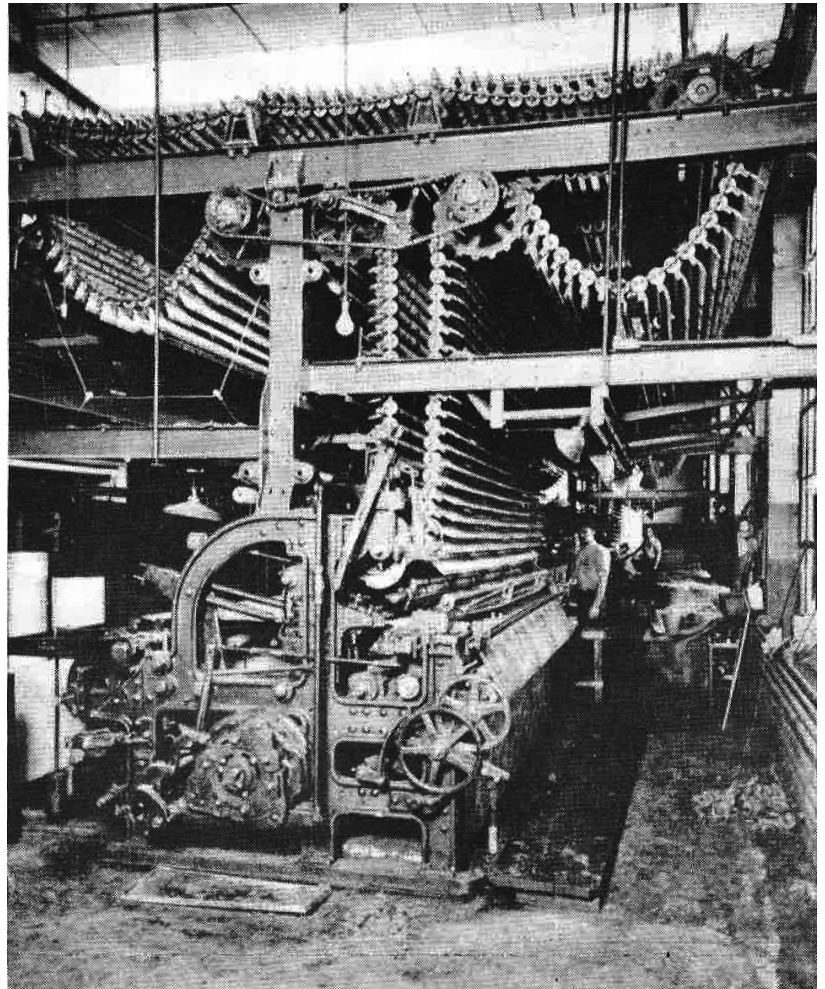
In the last issue, the “Ruggie” story was left incomplete. The new company had to expand or move and additional financing had to be arranged. The businessmen in town and the Building & Loan arranged for the financing and the Borough agreed to sell the land, which had been a dump, to the company. The lot was procured and the financing arranged. The Rug Factory was to stay in Hightstown in a new building of its own on Bank Street. It was brick, three stories with a basement, as it is today. It was occupied in February 1903, about the same time that the five-year leases on Mercer Street were to expire. Some operations remained on Ward Street until 1905. But trouble “loomed” for the factory. The popularity of Smyrna rugs was shrinking as Axminster rugs were taking hold in the market. The latter being more attractive and lower in price. The market also wanted larger rugs, where the local factory looms were mostly for runners and smaller rugs. Axminster rugs were larger, 9 or even 12 feet wide.

After having their new building, Cooke purchased all new power looms up to 12 feet in width but they were still making Smyrna, not Axminster rugs. Sales continued to drop. When the financial panic hit in 1907, Cooke found that he could not continue.

### Keeping the Company Going

J.V. Davison’s son, C. Herbert Davison, came into the company doing chores, the payrolls, learned about yarn and the winders, dyeing and what all the departments did while his father, J.V. Davison, was traveling the country selling rugs. By 1910 it became

apparent that they could not make money continuing to make Smyrna rugs and it was decided that the senior Davison would go to Chicago and sell everything in stock and in process at whatever price could be had. Upon his return, the debts would be paid and the business would be closed down. Cooke was gone from the company, but his nephew Thomp-



*Large Twelve Foot Looms*

son remained with the company. Herbert Davison (senior) writes in his company history, “Father was gone several weeks and by the time he had returned

(cont. pg 3)

# President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

It has been a hot summer but the months seemed to fly by. Although many take off the summer, the Society has still been responding to inquiries from all over the country and by the time you received this, we will have completed our second walking tour of downtown Hightstown, sponsored by "Downtown Hightstown".

Additionally, Greg Ciano and Cookie Cummings have been updating the website and our Facebook page. Both of these have generated more contacts and additional interest.

We are still in need of volunteers for the museum, library, programs, and officers. Do not think you are lacking the talent needed to assist your Society. There is much to do and we all started from scratch.

Finally, thank you all for your very kind comments about the newsletter and our programs. Feel free to email me with any of your ideas for future articles and programming. I'd love to hear from you.

Cappy Stults, President

cstults@allenstults.com



East Ward Street and the Ward Street Bridge

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	1	2	3	4

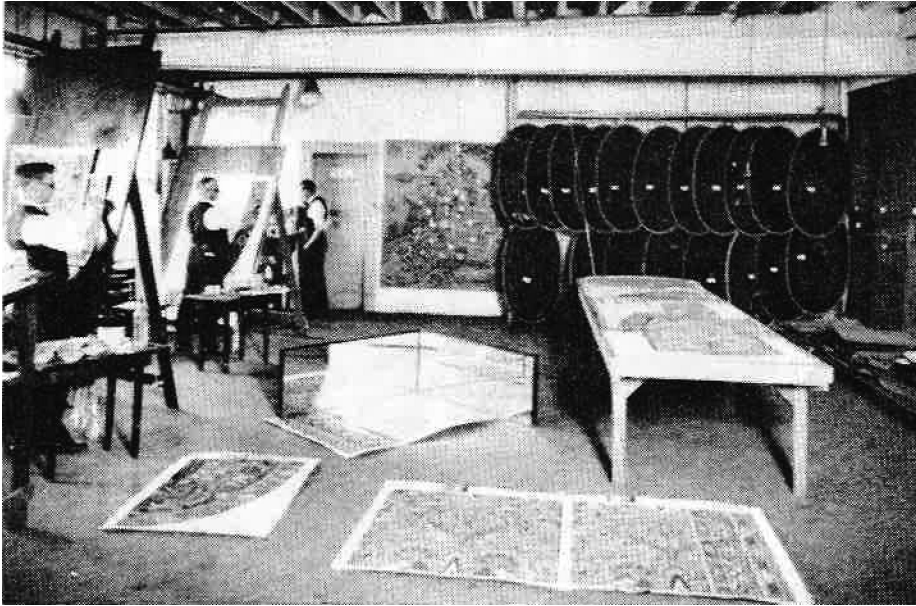
- September Monthly Meeting ..... September 9 | 7 - 8pm**
- Video Game Tournament Fundraiser ..... September 28 | 12 - 5pm**
- October Monthly Meeting ..... October 7 | 7 - 8pm**
- Antique Road Show ..... October 24 | 7 - 8pm**
- Christmas Tea ..... December 8 | 1:30 - 3pm**

*More information about the Video Game Tournament Fundraiser, Antique Road Show, and Christmas Tea on page six.*



## The Rug Mill - Continued

Thompson was raising mushrooms in the basement and I was using the top floor of the mill to manufacture canvas gloves, pounding out with a mallet and hand dyes the raw material for the gloves and having them sewed up at private homes." They did anything to pay the bills and keep the company open.



*Design Room*

He continues, "When father came home we sat down for a conference and discussed the whole situation. He had sold the merchandise we then had and would be able to make, and at a price which would enable him to pay all debts and have approximately the original investment of \$15,000 leftover, plus of course the mill and the machinery, most of which was obsolete." The younger Davison and Thompson asked J.V. if there was not a way to keep the operation going? J.V. indicated only if the factory was totally changed to manufacture Axminsters versus Smyrna could it survive. They called Crompton & Knowles Loom Works and were told it would cost more than the \$15,000. They only had \$15,000 on hand. Plus they still owed the Building & Loan.

They were able to convince Crompton & Knowles to lease them five looms for five years and the Building & Loan agreed to

renew the loan. Within six months they were back in operation. They did well. The WWI years brought another panic and the older Davison told his son he wanted out and he wanted \$150,000 for the business to be paid in five years. The younger Davison and Thompson agreed to the demand and went in 50-50. The European war years brought skyrocketing prices for Axminster rugs which were great for those made in Hightstown. In the Spring of 1918, they were able to pay off the notes to the Building & Loan and to J.V. Davison ahead of schedule.

The income tax was new in 1918 and they did not understand the tax ramifications of what they had done using accumulated earnings over four years to pay off J.V. This was not an uncommon error for many businesses at that time. This cost them \$50,000 in income taxes. Through hard work and great sales, they paid off the IRS in less than a year.

Early in this article, I wrote about Corner Brick Store – J.V. Davisons. This was still owned by C Herbert Davison's brothers but the brothers, Joe and Howard, did not get along. In 1912 Howard took the grocery business

and moved it to "Fountain Square" (the point of South Main and Mercer Streets). Joe continued to run the dry goods business. Howard's business closed in 1917 and Joe's closed in 1925. Howard went into the shoe manufacturing business with Dr. George Franklin's son Will. This failed too and Howard was hired by his brother Herbert in 1919.

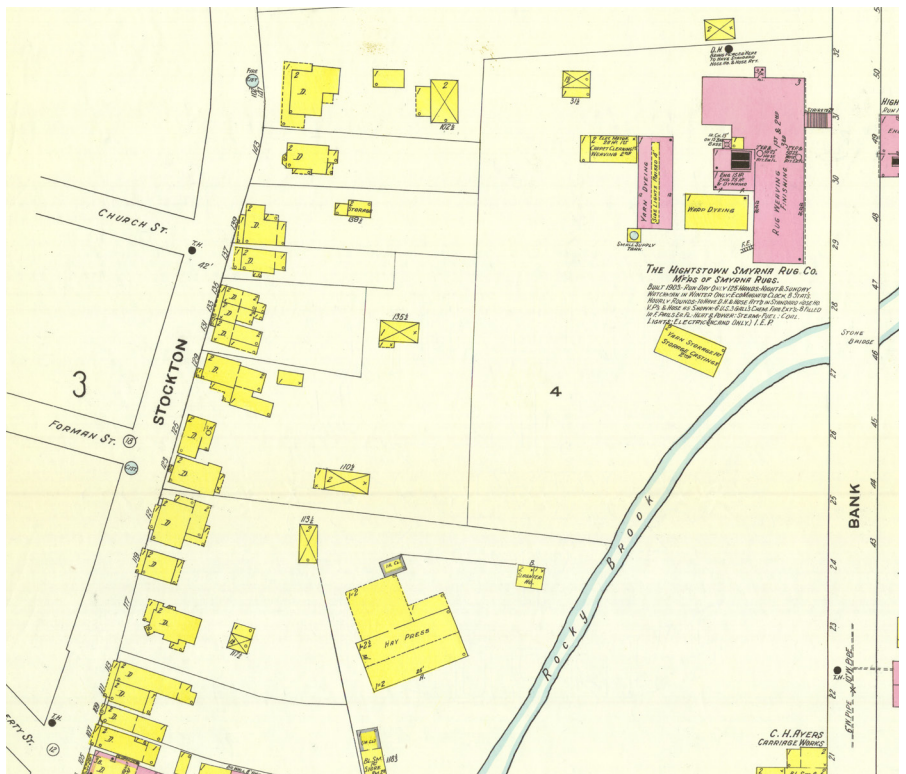
### Problems Arise

During the WWI years, Herbert Davison traveled extensively selling the rugs. William H. Thompson took over the finances and mill management. In Davison's written rug mill history, he wrote that Thompson intentionally kept him in the dark on many issues. Davison did not even have a desk in the mill due to his traveling. One year when Thompson went to England for six to eight weeks, Davison took over the daily operations. He writes that he did not find any misappropriations or irregularities, but he did find that Thompson had brought in many family members at excessive salaries without Davison's approval. Specifically, he mentions Arthur, Reginald, Ernest and Homer Thompson as well as Thompson's sons-in-law and his wife's brother. Upon Thompson's return, Davison told him this had to stop and it did. After the war in 1922, the company name was changed to Hightstown

## Rug Company.

In 1927 things hit the fan between Davison and Thompson and a buy-sell agreement was to be signed in 1928. Within the 90-day option period, Thompson had sold the entire mill to a New York holding company. This appears to have been somewhat of a scam as they had no money but attempted to float a bond issue for \$1,750,000. It was subscribed within three months so the reputation of the company was still attractive to investors. The Hightstown Rug Company received \$.88 on the dollar and the NY holding company bled \$400,000 of cash out of the company. Thompson was to receive \$2,750,000 and pay Davison \$1,300,000 out of that amount. The investment company then came to Davison saying they would not pay the money and wanted him to loan them \$1,300,000 which he agreed to do in order to save the company.

After a number of miscues and bad decisions, the crash of 1929 actually helped Davison as the investment company filed bankruptcy. Davison got paid his notes, he got the common stock and half of the preferred stock after a lawsuit but he had to put two members of the investment company on the board. But the bottom line is that Davison got the Ruggie back. His son, Herbert B. Davison, joined the business in 1933. He held many positions but I remember "Uncle Herbie" spending much of his time on the road selling rugs, just like his father and grandfather had. He was a very likable, gracious and generous man and in later years a strong contributor to the Historical Society. During WWII the factory was converted to make parachutes for the war effort. After the war, it converted back but due to competition from the South, the "Ruggie" was sold in the 1960s to United Industrial Syndicate who later sold to Kentile Floors. All of the operations had moved to their East Windsor plant by then (now Shiseido on Hightstown Princeton Road).



### Sanborn Map Company - New York, NY

(Top: 1902, Bottom: 1910)

These maps are from the Sanborn Map Company. They published the maps in the late 19th and 20th centuries that were primarily used by fire insurance companies to determine values, premium rates and the insurance company's total risk in certain areas. Different colors meant a type of construction. The Society and Allen & Stults Co. have maps from 1895 through the 1950s.

1910 map shows the rug mill while the 1902 maps doesn't.



## More Change Comes to The Mill

As for the Bank Street property, in the 1960s, early 1970s, McGraw Hill rented the eastern building as they needed more office space (I was a “mail boy” for McGraw Hill in summers 1969-1971 and delivered mail there). Eventually, the building was purchased by North American Phillips Lighting. After they left in the late 1980s, the building has had a few other owners but has been mostly vacant for many years during this period of time. We look forward to the preservation and adaptive reuse of this brick factory building that has been so important to the history of Hightstown.



### **Axminster rug made in Hightstown Found in California, 2017**

*This rug was recovered in Chester County, California, by a California resident, Christine Fagan, in November 2016. She researched the Hightstown Rug Company, contacted the Society and arranged for the rugs shipping to Hightstown. A newfound friend from across the country. We thank Christine for her care and consideration.*

## ARE YOU HOT???

### A Look Back to 1957

By Cappy Stults



Whether the current weather is man-made or cyclical, the fact is it has been HOT this summer. But the earlier heat came with periodic rain to help lessen some of the stings of the heat, although the days were dreary. But unlike the old man stories of the deep snow and cold of our youths, we tend to nowadays talk about heat as if it never was hot before. I remember a lot of hot years too, not just the snowy ones. The first hot one was when I was six years old. My father actually went and bought blocks of ice at Carduner’s to throw in the pool to cool it off. It was my birthday week in July 1957. The temperatures were the following from July 18th through July 22nd: 90, 93, 97, 103 and 102!

This was on the heels of seven days in June that were over 90: June 12-18th: 91, 90, 94, 96, 95, 93 and 96. We should have known it was coming then because Easter Sunday, April 21st it had been 86 degrees! It was also dry as reported in the Hightstown Gazette requiring the potatoes to be harvested early. Back then the Gazette had a column on the prior week’s weather. Cooperative Weather Observer James R. Pickering was the volunteer weather reporter from 1935 to 1973. Dick Lee took over from there. Mr. Pickering was also Township Clerk and an early officer of the Historical Society. His family lived on the southwest side of 93 Old Cranbury Road in East Windsor, next to what is known as the Anderson-Holland House – Bergen House (see newsletter May/June 1992). Four generations of Pickerings had lived there. It is where Georgetown is now. His son, Ken, is also a weatherman (aka Atmospheric Scientists) and worked for NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and the University of Maryland.

Ken will be returning to Hightstown for a visit with his 1969 HHS classmates at our (yes mine too) 50th Reunion. Ugh. But the last word about the heat 2019 versus 1957 – we have air conditioning everywhere now, not just fans and window shades.

LATE ADDITION - I was just reading the August 5th, 1909 issue of the Gazette. The July Weather report stated the following: “July 1909 was remarkable for the high maxims all through the month....Highest 96 degrees and the daily maxim was 15 times over 80 and 11 times over 90. We had three hot waves. The precipitation was very deficient.” Ernest Wenger



## Antique Show and Tell

By Shirley Olsen



An “Antique Show and Tell” will be held at the Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society on Thursday, October 24 at 5 p.m. A family is limited in bringing three items. The charge for the first object is \$20, \$15 for the second object, and \$10 for the third object. The Society will be providing refreshments. Gene Pescucci, a local antique dealer, will be presenting the program.

## Christmas Tea

By Shirley Olsen



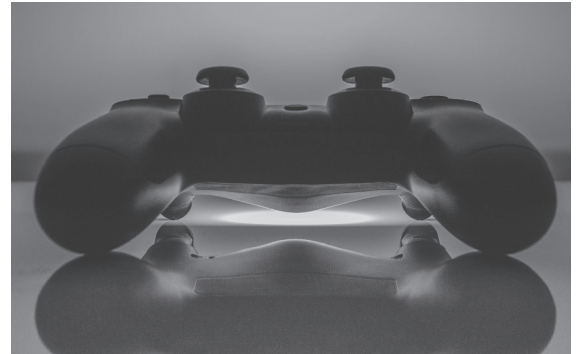
The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society will hold its Christmas Tea on Sunday, December 8 from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Ely House. All members and friends of the Society are invited to enjoy cookies, punch and shop at the Holiday Boutique.

No ticket is required for this event.

Following the tea, The Hightstown Woman’s Club and Friday Club are sponsoring a Christmas Candlelight House Tour of several private homes in Hightstown and East Windsor. The Tour will be from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. rain or shine following the tea. Advance-sale tickets for the tour are \$15 and will be available later this year at Perennial Home, 119 West Ward Street, Hightstown. Day of Event tickets for \$20 can be purchased at The Ely House, 164 North Main Street. Children: \$5. Much of the proceeds from this event will go to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society. If you would like to participate in any way for these events, please give Shirley Olsen a call at 609-448-8388 or email her at [olsenfarr@verizon.net](mailto:olsenfarr@verizon.net).

## Children’s Theater Fundraiser

By Gregory Ciano



It’s a Super Smash Bros. Ultimate tournament! Come show us what you’ve got!

All the proceeds from this event will go toward producing our children’s theater program in the Spring.

1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners get a gift card! (\$100 gift card for first, \$50 gift card for second, and \$25 gift card for third).

We’re supplying the Nintendo Switch controllers, but feel free to bring your own!

Contestant should be between the ages of 11 and 18. Registration is \$15 (admits contestant plus one adult). Please register at [supersmash.eventbrite.com](http://supersmash.eventbrite.com)

Also, the Kona Ice truck is coming to the tournament and will have ices and ice cream for sale from 1:30pm until 2:30pm!



Questions? Email me at [Gregory.Ciano@gmail.com](mailto:Gregory.Ciano@gmail.com)



## Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

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



### Officers for 2018-2019

President: Charles "Cappy" Stults  
609.448.0110 - [cstults@allenstults.com](mailto: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  
[cookcummings@yahoo.com](mailto:cookcummings@yahoo.com)  
Museum: Cookie Cummings  
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Newsletter: Robert Craig  
609-584-1806  
Programs: Christian Kirkpatrick  
Jane Cox  
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Nancy Laudemberger  
609-443-6536  
Publicity: Shirley Olsen  
609-448-8388

### Building Committee

Christian Kirkpatrick, Shirley Olsen, Warren Olsen, Robert Szychowski

### Society Trustees

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

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## 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 made 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):*

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property & Grounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library            | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Membership         | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum             |                                     |

**Hightstown-East Windsor**  
**Historical Society**  
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