



# *Hightstown Society News*

Spring 2019

## **Airport Road Resident George Sumbry Ties Hightstown to Earlier Era**

From the Hightstown Gazette August 7, 1997

by Curtis Crowell

with 2019 updates with permission

**M**r. George Sumbry's home on Airport Road is surrounded by flowers, fruit trees, vegetables of all kinds that he and his wife Mayleen tend with dedication. The collection is extraordinary: fig trees that Mr. Sumbry has protected for years from the winter cold by covering with old carpets; canna lilies whose tubers must be dug up every fall so they can be stored

back of his yard.

The garden that surrounds the house has enticed many people to stop and chat with Mr. Sumbry who is

often seen working in the garden wearing a huge straw sombrero that his daughter Marie says he has been wearing for years.

Mr. Sumbry's story is just as remarkable as his garden, for his garden is the culmination of a long personal journey that helps to portray a part of this area's past that is now only a memory to some: the seasonal migrant farming community that was once located on Airport Road.



*George Sumbry with his beloved fig tree.*

indoors; salad greens, fruit trees; even peanuts, and tobacco plants he calls Nicodemus. Even the annuals reflect a degree of care that is remarkable. Mr. Sumbry collects the seeds from marigolds, Amaranthus, blue ageratum and others – even plants where the seed is almost too small to see and starts the seeds in late winter inside a small heated greenhouse in the

### **Phenix City, Alabama: 1929**

Mr. Sumbry's journey to Airport Road began in Alabama in 1929, when at age 13 he left home with his older brother "LC" (as Louis Clyde Sumbry was known) to find work. (LC passed away in 1995 in Florida). Mr. Sumbry's parents, Jake and Martha Sumbry  
(cont. pg 3)

# President's Message

## President's Message - 2019

Dear Members and Friends,

This year's annual meeting will be held on **May 19th, at 1:30 PM** in Roosevelt, NJ. We will be touring the School with the famous Ben Shahn mural, then the park with the Roosevelt bust and from there we will take a short walk down Rochdale and onto Homestead to have a mid-afternoon full meal at the synagogue. "The Jersey Homesteads Historic District" is on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places. The town historian, Michael Ticktin, will lead the program and answer our questions. Information about tickets and parking will be sent as we get closer. We expect a sell out.

**Thank you all that have paid your dues.** We are about 50% there. If you have overlooked it, please drop it in the mail today. We continue to be in the need of volunteers. Don't let a fear of lack of local history knowledge stop you from coming to our meetings and volunteering. Many talents are needed for our work. Feel free to reach out to me directly at [cstults@allenstults.com](mailto:cstults@allenstults.com) or to one of the other officers.

Cappy Stults, President

## Features

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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

- March Monthly Meeting ..... March 4 | 7 - 8pm
- Children's Theater Auditions..... March 30 | 11 am - 2pm
- April Monthly Meeting ..... April 1 (no fooling!) | 7 - 8pm
- May Monthly Meeting ..... May 6 | 7 - 8pm
- Children's Theater Production - Clara Barton Slept Here..... May 18 | 12 noon
- Annual Meeting - Roosevelt, NJ ..... May 19 | 1:30 pm

## Airport Road Resident (cont.)

were children of former slaves in this part of Alabama just across the Chattahoochee River from Columbus, Georgia. Mr. Sumbry was born there in 1916, one of sixteen children. The Sumbry's owned some land in Phenix City, but with 16 sixteen children it was inevitable that they would spread out. George and LC would have started out at just about the start of the Great Depression, when farm prices plummeted, sending many small farmers into poverty and accelerating a great migration northward into urban areas from the South.

In those days Mr. Sumbry traveled by truck, transportation provided by the "bosses" who would supply farm labor to area farms. As part of the migrant work force these workers would follow the harvest up and down the East Coast. Later during the 30's as the Depression worsened, the Dust Bowl years wreaked additional havoc on the Plains states, as small farmers there sold out in huge numbers and headed west.

### Airport Road – 1930s

At some point Mr. Sumbry came into the area bordered by Cranbury, Jamesburg, Hightstown and Allentown. He says that during his travels he kept an eye out for places that appealed to him and something about this area he liked. In the South, Roosevelt's New Deal was offering farmers a bounty not to plant certain crops or to plow them under in order to support prices for goods like cotton. This often meant the tenant farmers and sharecroppers would be out of work. The growing urban areas of the Northeast, in contrast, relied heavily on the outlying "truck farms" in areas like New Jersey for fresh produce, which meant that agricultural jobs were being shifted north.

To harvest their crops, which in this area were predominately potatoes, farmers relied on migrant laborers. There was a

large seasonal community of migrant laborers centered about the west end of Airport Road in those days, and that is how Mr. Sumbry must have first come into the area. Mr. Sumbry says that in addition to farm work he found work at landscaping, working on the small railroads that still dotted the area – anything he could find.

### Pearl Harbor, 1941

Mr. Sumbry recalls having been in Florida when he was drafted. Up until the Japanese attack, there had basically been no draft – or at least the Army had been picky about whom it would accept. After Pearl Harbor large numbers of American Blacks were drafted to meet the Army's suddenly much greater manpower requirements, although the services were still segregated. Mr. Sumbry remembers being drafted shortly after Pearl Harbor was bombed. He recalls that in Alabama at the time of his birth, "they didn't give out birth certificates to the colored," so the Army had to write back to Phenix City to obtain his actual date of birth.

Mr. Sumbry does not recall more than a few years in the Army,



*George in World War II uniform*



*Evelyn Sumbry about age 20*

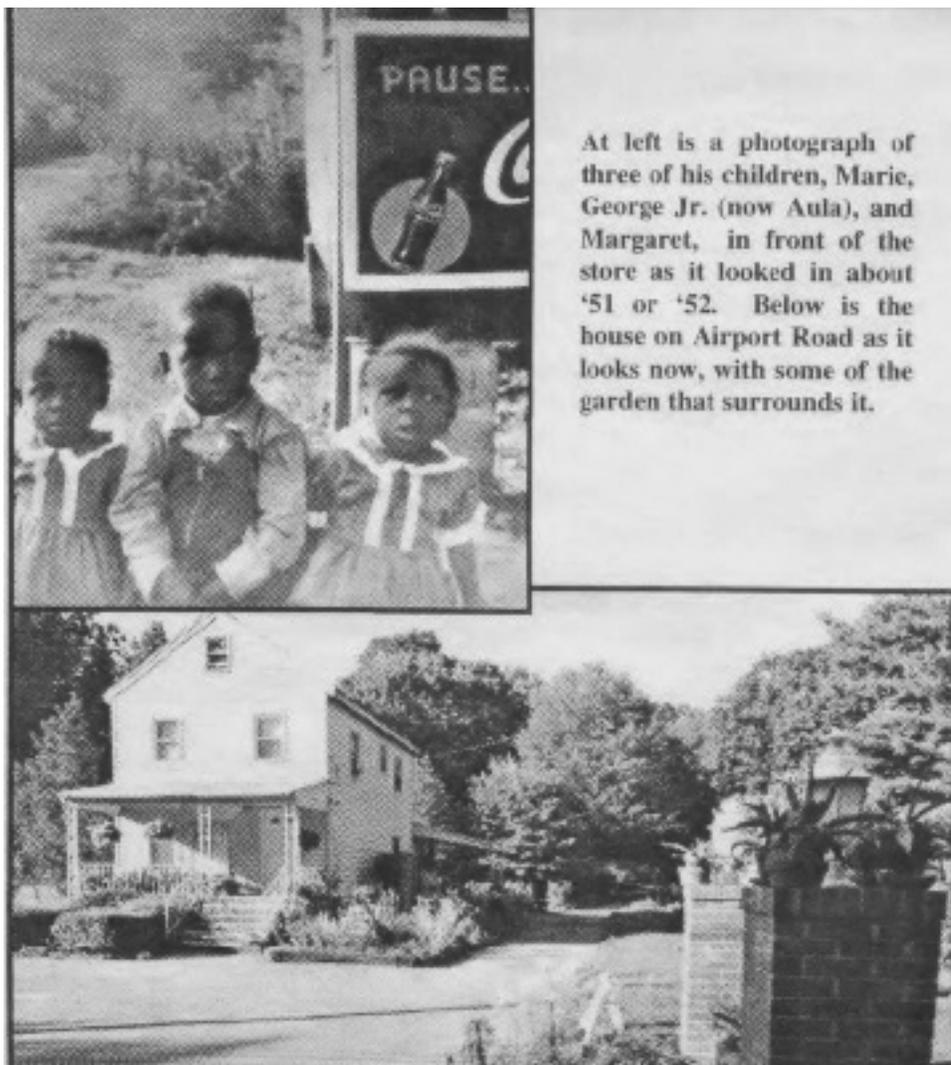
where he served in a desert training center in California, but his daughter Marie recalls seeing his discharge papers showing that he was discharged in February 1946.

After leaving the Army Mr. Sumbry headed back to East Windsor, and in 1947 he purchased a plot with a small house on it toward the western end of Airport Road, where he still lives (this is written in 1997). With his late wife Evelyn he ran a small grocery store called "Sumbry's Grocery" in the front of the house, while they raised four children. The original store was a small rect-

angular hand-built building that sat in front of the small house. Once the “Big House” was built, the front first floor room served as the store. After the store closed, that room was converted to the first floor living room. The second floor living room continued as such. “Ma’Daddy attended the male dominated Apostolic Church next door to their house. “Ma’Mah” attended the female dominated Pentecostal Church around the corner which the children attended with her. *(corrections added in 2019 by eldest son Aula).*

### Airport Road – 1950s

The description of this period of the history of Airport Road comes mainly from Mr. Sumbry’s four children: his oldest George, Jr. now Aula Maarufu Sumbry, born in 1949, followed by



At left is a photograph of three of his children, Marie, George Jr. (now Aula), and Margaret, in front of the store as it looked in about '51 or '52. Below is the house on Airport Road as it looks now, with some of the garden that surrounds it.

*Clipping from original article*

two sisters Marie and Margaret born in 1950, and a second son Nathaniel in 1951. Mr. Sumbry and his wife continued to operate the store, which catered to the large seasonal migrant population of Airport Road. As Aula tells it, the busloads of workers would stop at the store very early in the morning to pick up food for their lunch, then they would be driven off to the farms they

were working that day.

Mr. Sumbry in those days would do some farm work, including landscaping (a job he still does – look for his trademark straw hat and you might see him around town), but he also worked for a number of years at the Braun Greenhouses behind the old Hightstown High School on Stockton Street (now known as the Grace Norton Rogers School).

Aula remembers that the migrants also brought a certain amount of notoriety to Airport Road. The year-round population might have been 50 or 60, but during the farming season the population swelled to several hundred, many of them crowded into crude shacks and chicken coops. Most of them were blacks from southern states, but also the West Indies, the Carolinas, the Gullah Islands, and African countries as well. Among the permanent residents responsible adult men were treated as authorities and with respect to both them and their property.

### The Tin Top and Joe’ West’s

Catering to the migrant population on Airport Road were two “Juke Joints”, (as in juke box) as the Sumbry children called them. Needless to say, they were forbidden to go near them. The juke joints were primarily frequented by migrant laborers.

On Friday nights when the migrants were paid in cash these places were pretty rough with local police often called in to quell the disturbances. East Windsor did not have its own police force at the time and the State Police from the Hightstown Barracks patrolled the area (Note the Hightstown Barracks location has moved several times, and is now actually in East

Windsor, located on the corner Route 130 and Old Cranbury Road, in the area known as Cranbury Manor. [Note: – This building is currently vacant]. Prior to this the Barracks were on the second floor of Dey’s garage on the corner of Rt. 130 and Hightstown Princeton Road].

Aula remembered that one time there was only one black state trooper in New Jersey, who was stationed at the Hightstown Barracks. Aula and his brother and sisters, who had never seen a black police officer before, were in awe of the sight of this man driving his patrol car down Airport Road and would wave as he passed. Aula recalled that his name was Paul McLemore.

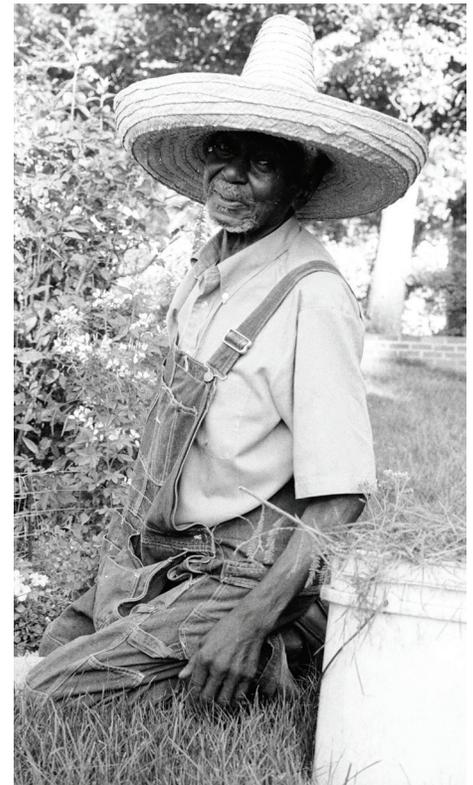
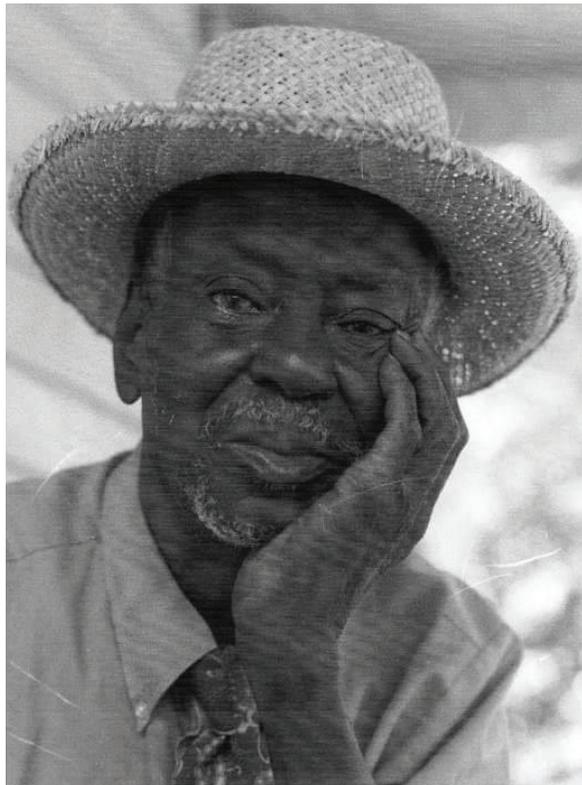
Mr. McLemore, now a practicing attorney in Trenton (this was 1997), recalls his days as a state trooper in the Hightstown Barracks. He pointed out that although the State Police were formed in 1921, he was the very first black officer in the state police, appointed in 1961 (apprx). “Airport Road” in those days was famous’, he says, because of the constant need to break up fights and other problems at the two “gin mills.” The migrant population relied on the police to break up all kinds of disputes, and the police appear to have been the only symbol of authority these workers had. He recalled being appalled at the living conditions of the migrants, who were at the mercy of the area farmers who paid them very little.

Mr. McLemore also recalled other black businesses in the area, such as Paul’s Inn located where the Club 8 now stands. Paul Davis (the proprietor) and his wife, who lived on North Main Street in the Borough,

were famous for their food, and the other officers from the State Police barracks would send McLemore to pick up fried chicken and other dishes that the Inn offered.

### The 1960s – an Era Ends

As the 1960s began, Edward R. Morrow of CBS broadcast a program called, “Harvest of Shame” about migrant farm workers in Florida. The program aired the Friday after Thanksgiving 1960, as part of a series of investigative programs called, “CBS Reports”. Immediately there was a large public outcry which focuses attention on the living conditions of the migrants. Mr. Sumbry’s children remember the Governor of New Jersey visiting the Airport Road community for a firsthand look at the living conditions



of migrants in the area.

In the same time period, the Civil Rights Act was passed, and the Urban Renewal program was changing the face of downtown Hightstown. The two gin mills, the Tin Top and Joe West’s, didn’t last into the 1970s. The migrants stopped coming, and Mr. Sumbry closed the store that had been in the front of the house. His four children all grew up around the store, and they are all fond of saying that they “ate up all of the profits” – an opinion echoed by Mr. Sumbry himself.

Mention Airport Road to most residents and they think of baseball and soccer, and the roar of the speedway on Friday nights - memories triggered by the activities at the Police Athletic

League fields and the East Windsor Speedway. The other memories of Airport Road are limited to those few who were aware of the seasonal migrant community located up the road a bit near where Sumbry's Grocery operated. As the Centex homes go up in the area and new residents move in, the Airport Road area will change yet again.

### The next Sumbry Generation

*written in 1997*

*updated at the end of this article*

George Henry Sumbry and his late wife Evelyn (he has since remarried), raised four children on Airport Road. All of them speak fondly of their parents, and they speak of the time spent growing up as if it was almost another world, which in a way it was. All four graduated from college. Aula, the oldest, is a ceramic artist



*Evelyn, Margaret, George, and Marie*

and lives in Twin Rivers (2019 – he has since moved). Marie one of the twin girls, is a medication aide at a continuing care retirement community in Houston; Margaret, who lives in Lakewood, is a senior rehabilitation specialist; Nathaniel, who came back to teach history at Hightstown High School before moving to Houston, is a supervisor in a juvenile probation department there in Harris County.

Mr. Sumbry is well known by some of the older residents in the area, as is his reputation for honesty and hard work. It is hard to imagine what Airport Road used to be thirty and forty years ago, but harder still to imagine what it must have been like to set off to find your place in the world at age 13. Mr. George Henry

Sumbry found his way to East Windsor and in the midst of a world changing so rapidly from the time of his birth until today (1997), and both Mr. Sumbry and the world itself show no sign of trying to slow down.

### 2019 Updates

*by Cappy Stults from the family members*

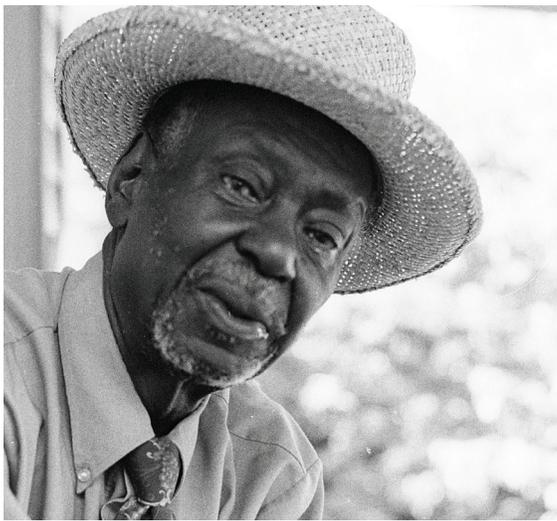
Mr. Sumbry passed on October 23, 1997, shortly after this article was published. His daughter, Pastor Margaret Sumbry-Draughn, 65, passed away in her home in Toms River, NJ on Oct 31, 2015. Her children are Thea Jackson-Byers, an Elementary School principal in Asbury Park; Michelle Jackson, deceased; Barry Kearney II, NJ Division of Youth and Family Services; Christopher Kearney, Administrator of the Delaware Department of Corrections.

Aula Sumbry is retired from his paid work as a "Community Specialist/ Job Coach" for "Opportunity For All" which is a Community Resource Center for the New Jersey State Parole Board. He also served as a contracted independent counselor for the Administrative Office of the Court's "Intensive Supervision Program." He has had some health issues including a liver resection and kidney transplant, ending his "paid" work. But he has continued as a very active volunteer in the area community, including many awards. He has been the founder of the Trenton Afrikan Peoples Action School and Movement, and is currently Graduate Chapter Advisor to the Basileus On Community Issues and Affairs (Trenton). Has four children, Diallo, a Univ of the District of Columbia Administrator; Niambi, who is deceased; Nkenge Sumbry-Cunningham, a teacher in Washington, D.C.; and Aula II, a master's degree student at Wagner University and a Twin Rivers resident.

Marie Sumbry Ceres, relocated to the

Houston area in 1980. After pursuing a career as a medication aide and a nursing home aide, she retired. Currently, she's active with her Jehovah Witness religion.

Nathaniel Sumbry - since he relocated to the Houston area 1977, worked as a Regional Field Services Administrator for the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. After he retired from there in 2002, he became certified and taught social studies in grades 8 through 12. In 2010 he began a lifelong passion of gardening, and speaks with local church and school groups. His biological children are Uhura



Sumbry, 48 years old police investigator, Liangu Sumbry, 45 years old independent truck driver, Bayana Sumbry-Taylor, 36, a curriculum administrator in the Houston Independent School District, Hasani Sumbry, 26 years old, an MBA accountant and preparing to take the CMA exam.

*[Note: The Sumbry family contacted the Society after reading the East Windsor Township articles that mentioned Airport Road and the Speedway. They correctly pointed out that Airport Road had a more significant history than just the Speedway. The Society is embarking on a project to expand and memorialize information on the Sumbry and other black families of Hightstown and East Windsor that were a significant part of our history. We are looking for volunteers to assist in this project. Contact the [cstults@allenstults.com](mailto:cstults@allenstults.com).]*



## Clara Barton Slept Here

by Gregory Ciano

**C**lara Barton. Before she was the “Angel of the Battlefield” and before she started the American Red Cross, Ms. Barton spent some time right here in Hightstown. This is the story of how that came to be and her impact on one particular resident.

Before she became involved in humanitarian efforts, Clara Barton was a school teacher throughout Massachusetts from 1838 to 1850, but she always felt that her education was lacking. So, in 1850 she enrolled at the Clinton Liberal Institute in Oneida County, New York State, a Universalist co-ed preparatory school. It was here that she met siblings Charles and Mary Norton of Hightstown and started a friendship with them. At some point in 1850, Charles and Mary invited Clara to their family farm. Looking for a change of scenery Clara took them up on their offer and made the trip from New York State to Hightstown in October 1851.

Clara stayed with the Norton family at the Ely-Norton Farm at 75 Imlaystown Road, in the southeast corner of East Windsor. According to the letters she wrote to her nephew, Clara found the Norton home to be a “large, well-cultivated” farm. On the day she arrived she and the Norton’s went for a walk in the woods after dinner where they picked chestnuts, gum berries,



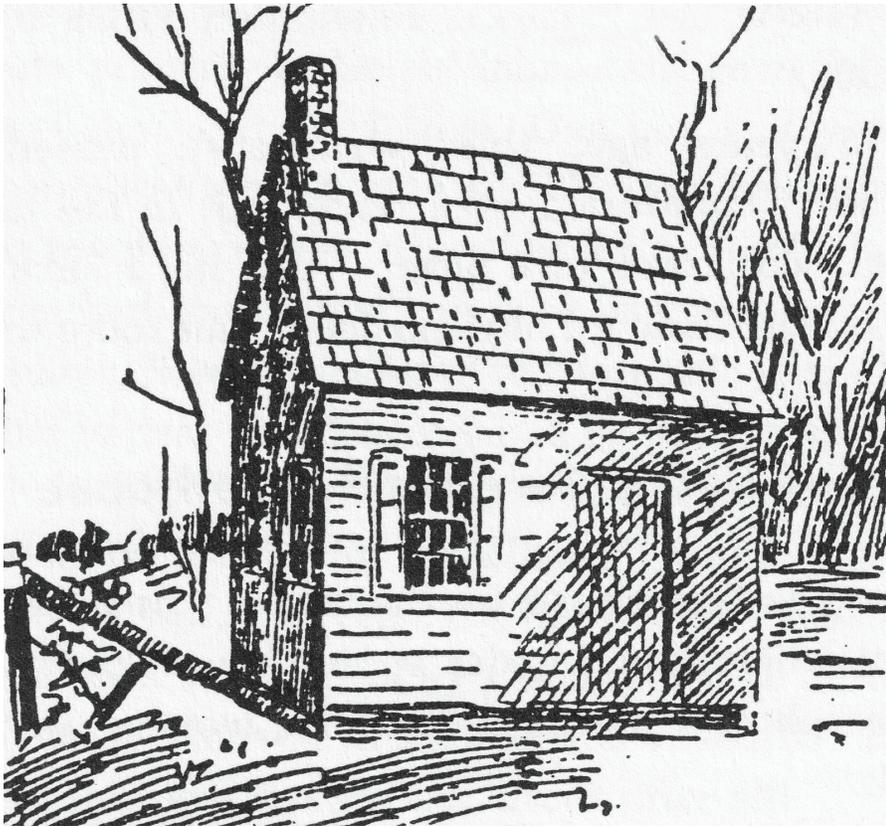
*Ely-Norton Farm at 75 Imlaystown Road in East Windsor*

and persimmons. She also describes the Norton home as being “prettily furnished” with a “good piano” and a “large window looking into the garden.” Through Clara’s letters we also know that she thought the Norton’s were “a sterling family” that were

“good as gold and true as the sun.”

Shortly after Clara arrived in Hightstown Charles and Mary Norton’s father, Richard Norton, approached Clara with the idea of becoming a school teacher at the Cedarville Road School. Clara, being a very private person, didn’t divulge to the Norton family her past experiences as a teacher, so Richard was at first unsure if Clara would be willing to take the position. You see, the Cedarville School was known for having a rough gang of boys who were particularly troublesome during the winter term. Fortunately for Richard, and for Hightstown, Clara had dealt with rough boys in the past. In fact, it was well known throughout Massachusetts that not only was Clara able to handle rough

in that she would need to win him over. On the first day of school, Clara asked Hart to collect the long, thin tree branches known as “whips” that prior teachers used to discipline the children. I’m sure Hart was uncertain where this was going but was probably surprised when Clara asked him to break the whips into tiny pieces. Then she took Hart by the hand and told him that she would never need the whips because he was one of her big boys and she could depend on him to help her keep the other students in line.



Sketch of the Cedarville Road School

boys but she was able to tame them and gain their respect. Clara took the position, but only if Mary would go along to help. Clara’s pay was \$2 per student for each eleven-week session.

According to Clara’s diary she started school on October 23, 1851. She described the younger students as being eager, but timid. The older boys, however, looked challenging and defiant. This was familiar territory for Clara and she won over the older boys as she had in the past, by aligning herself with them instead of against them. There was one boy, however, who required a little more attention.

Hart Bodine was a big boy. In fact, he towered over five-foot-tall Clara. Hart’s reputation proceeded him, so Clara knew going

From that day forward Hart was a changed boy. Later in his life, his mother wrote, “from that time on Hart was a model of obedience in the schoolroom.” He was always ready to help no matter how small the task. He was the first to greet Clara at the school in the morning and at the end of the day he wouldn’t leave the schoolhouse until Clara was ready to head back to the Norton farm. Overnight, Hart went from being the most troublesome boy in school to the best-behaved student all because Clara showed him respect instead of discipline.

Years later, after Hart was married and had started a career as a carpenter, Hart and his wife had a baby girl. This daughter was named Clara Barton Bodine in honor of the school teacher who turned his outlook on life around.

### One-Act Musical

We’re putting up a one-act musical about Clara Barton in the Freight Station called *Clara Barton Slept Here*. Auditions for the show will be on, Saturday March 30 and are open to all children from 4th grade to 12th grade. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at [Gregory.Ciano@gmail.com](mailto:Gregory.Ciano@gmail.com).

Also, be sure to keep the date of our performance open. It’s Saturday, May 18! We look forward to seeing you there!



# Central Bank of New Jersey

by Cappy Stults

The last newsletter in 2018 had a picture and a brief article about the Trinity Episcopal Church that stood on the southwest corner of Bank and North Main streets in Hightstown. The question has many times been asked, “Where did the bank go?” The

and other items in the eaves of the attic where they had been untouched until yours truly started to dig through them during renovations in the 1980s. One such item was the Board of Director’s Minute Book covering the period from June 1858 through its final meeting on January 10, 1871.

I had copied the minute book and gave same to Richard Hutchinson and the Society about 1998. “Hutch” did some additional research and published an article in three issues of the newsletter, from November 1999 – April 2000. The minute book is not an easy read and some words can be read two different ways due to the penmanship of the time. I had read it a few times back in the 1990s and decided to re-read it due to the recent interest.

The minute book reveals a number of stories that are surprising and intriguing. First, a little history about banking in New Jersey during the 19th century.

Most banking in the 18th and early 19th century was a private enterprise. Member owners of the banks lent to each other or to those vouched for and backed by the owners. Although this was very helpful to the commercial growth of small towns like Hightstown, it did not promote lending to other than these insiders. Borrowing and lending were private transactions on simple pieces of paper. Each state had their own banking laws and regulations and only a couple of federally chartered banks existed and they were located in larger city financial centers (New York and Philadelphia).

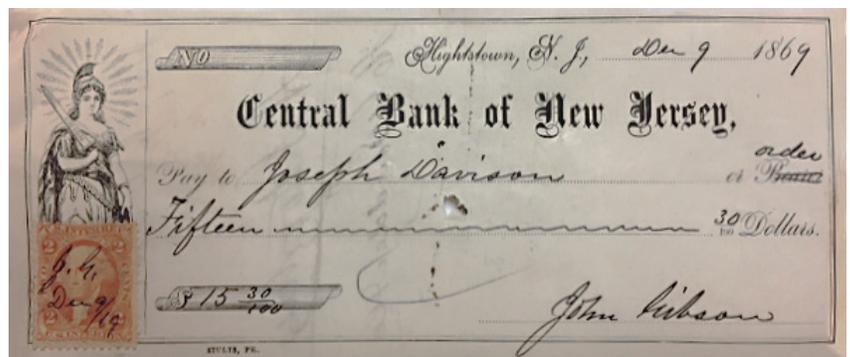
By the 1840s much of banking was through State banks, most of which did not even require a state charter. These local banks actually printed currency, known as bank notes, as well as checks or drafts against deposited accounts. U.S. Internal Revenue stamps were required beginning in 1862 on most if not



Original Vault 106 N Main c. 1875 and Original sign from 1851

short answer is that the business relocated to 106 North Main Street, the present location of Allen & Stults Insurance. Anyone who has been in these current offices will see the old walk-in vault that dates from 1875 and the “Bank” sign above it which was from the original bank building from the 1850s, which began as the Central Bank of New Jersey, next to where the Ely House now stands.

In 1921, when the successor bank sold 106 North Main Street to the Allen & Stults Co., it left behind many boxes of old checks



1869 Central Bank of New Jersey check, with Revenue stamp.

all legal documents, including bank checks. The purpose of these stamps was to aid in meeting the costs brought on by the Civil War. As with many government tax programs, the war concluded but the revenue tax stamps continued. (*lower left hand corner of check on prior page*).

The Central Bank of New Jersey, Hightstown's first bank, was formed in 1851 and became a State bank in 1852. Robert Elder Morrison (1800-1873), who had previously been the minister of the Methodist Church in Hightstown from 1843-1845, became President of the bank, and T. Appleget (Applegate?) was Cashier.

By 1858 the Central Bank's assets were \$265,000. Monthly meeting minutes included appointing committees to oversee the "sinking" of the bank notes, which meant a scheduled burning of the Central Bank's own issued currency, to ensure that the amount in circulation remained limited. The destruction of old, worn-out notes needed to keep pace with the issuance of new ones. The bank's directors at that time included local leaders and business figures Benjamin Reed, James A. Reed, George Hunt, James D. Robins, Enoch Allen, nurseryman Isaac Pullen, Isaac Norton, Cornelius Wyckoff, mill-owner Redford M. Job and Edward C. Taylor, who was the secretary.

Why Reverend Morrison was named president remains unclear. He was controversial, and Richard Hutchinson characterized him as a "not so reverent Reverend." My own recent research indicates that the Hightstown Methodist Church records show him as pastor for two years, (1843-1845). He was born in Lancaster, Pa., in 1800, and that he entered the ministry in 1833. As was customary for Methodists ministers in that era, he moved from church to church according to assignments he received from the Methodist conference. Thus he filled the pulpits of Methodist churches in Chester, Pa.; Tuckerton, NJ; Haddonfield, NJ; Swedesboro, NJ; Pemberton, NJ; Long Branch, NJ; Hightstown, NJ; Pennington, NJ; Allentown, NJ; and Crosswicks, NJ. He retired from the ministry in 1847, after his "vocal powers failed" him in 1846. His family history states that his largest salary was \$425 per annum. He, Robert Elder Morrison, and his wife Martha Swift, had 6 children between 1827 and 1838. It would be natural for him to seek a higher salary to help support their children. It is not certain what he did between 1847 and when he became president of the bank in 1852, although we know from the Village Record that he entered into a partnership in a store with T. Appleget who had previously been partners with a Norton. Partnership was Appleget & Morrison.

My records do not tell us anything about the bank between 1851 and 1858. As of this date, I have not found anything in the local papers other than annual meeting notices. But then in

1858, the intrigue begins. Of course, the major event of the year before was the Panic of 1857, which ushered in an economic depression that caused many banks to fail.

At the August 2, 1858, meeting, Mr. Robins offered the following: "Whereas, there has facts that have come to our knowledge since the recent defalcation of some forty thousand dollars more; and whereas the late president (Morrison), cashier and clerk have conspired to conceal their facts from the directors by covering up their defalcations by false statements there and other misdemeanors committed by them we believe should not go unpunished, Therefore, be is resolved that the president of this institution be directed to bring all these facts before the Grand Jury of Mercer in order that the guilty parties, if guilty, may be brought to justice." The motion was passed unanimously. (Spelling is verbatim, not this writer's errors. Note that it says "fourty thousand dollars more." They clearly knew there were prior losses).

The next meeting was September 6, 1858, at which time the following "preamble" and resolution was prepared and presented to the board: "Whereas, Edward T.R. Applegate through the earnest solicitation of the president and directors of the Central Bank of N.J. has accepted the office of cashier of said institution thereby assuming the responsible duties attached to the same, and whereas through the delinquency of R.E. Morrison, Joseph S. Ely and the former officers of said institution, the assets have in all probability suffered a loss to the amount exceeding one hundred thousand dollars."

The minutes went on to state that "E.T.R. Applegate is not to be held liable directly or indirectly for any loss or depreciation that have arisen or may hereafter arise in the assets of said corporation against whom a suit is now pending in the Court of Chancery of N.J."



\$3 note proof for Central Bank of New Jersey July 1854 – plate below

As mentioned earlier, banks at this time printed and issued their own currency. The proof copy herein is a \$3.00 note. These printed notes could be used almost anywhere that would accept them. Back then, another town’s merchant would deposit it in his bank; that bank may present it to a larger bank, etc., until they would be returned to Hightstown for payment to the last holder. Every month, as indicated in the minutes, the numbered bills were “burned.” A committee of three or more would observe and verify their burning. The minutes state the denomination and number of circulated “bills” that were burned, but not the “No.” on each of the bills. The denominations recorded were \$1, \$2, \$3, \$5, \$20, \$50 and \$100s.



Central Bank of New Jersey \$3 note actual printing plate found in A&S attic – thought to be zinc

The banks then of course had blank “sheets” of bills by denomination that had yet to be cut, hand numbered or recorded on the bank records.

Now back to the minute book. In the

following month’s entries, usual business was handled including the sale of a Hutchinson property that had been foreclosed as well as the sale of the previously foreclosed “Sloan Mansion”, as it was called in the minute book, to Jonathan E. McChesney for \$4,500 (corner of South Main and South streets, currently the Peddie Headmaster’s House and owned for years by the Dawes family).

The minute’s next mention of the bank “defalcation” was not until April 4, 1859, wherein the president was directed “to pursue if prosecution of the prior directors was possible.” Months passed with the directors handling the usual business and at the January 1860 reorganization meeting, Benjamin Reed is elected president. E.C Taylor continued as secretary and E.T.R. Applegate as treasurer. The early months of 1860 brought many foreclosures and demands for overdue payments. The local economy would have still been suffering from the depression. The bank’s problems made matters worse. Its assets in March 1860 were only \$189,000, well below the figure of a few years before. Stock certificates were being reissued as the bank was being recapitalized at a lower amount. Stockholders at the time were (not including first names) Applegate (3), Allen (2), Bergen (2), Brown, Cubberly, Chamberlin, Cox (4), Crane, Conover, Downs, Dey (2), Day, Ely (4) English, Emley, Early, Forman (3), Fort, Frilder, Giberson, Hunt, Johnston, Jamison (2), Job & Son, Imlay, Keeler, Leane, Lawrence, Meirs, Mount (4), Galliard, Mason, Morrison,

Miller, Norton, Pullen (2), Pearce, Perrine(2), Reed(6), Robins (2), Rue (2), Rosel, Slack, Schuyler, Slokes, Snyder, Taylor(2), Vannest, Wyckoff(2), Warwick, Wilson. (the number represents the number of different owners with that surname).

At this reorganization (1860) president Benjamin Reed stated the following: “having now the pleasure of beholding our institution on a permanent basis and in prosperous situation allow me to

express the wish that our affairs may never again experience reverses, and that those whose peculations once lightened our cash may receive lodgment in quarters (?) enough to secure indemnity for the past and security for the future. (To save you time searching your dictionary, he said: may those who stole/ embezzled from us go to jail).



Original 1860 Central Bank of New Jersey Stock Certificate issued to D.C. Perrine  
– 2 shares 1860

In the Court documents found by Richard Hutchinson, the bank testimony said that Morrison and Ely were in the habit of taking bills, numbered as well as in sheets, to their own houses for cutting and trimming, nor did they leave a record of the numbers of the bills or amounts. It was also testified that Ely when picking up currency in New York, opened the sealed packages on his own before he returned to the bank in Hightstown.

The bank also alleged that when Ely became Teller he was a man of modest means but became an owner of a lot of real estate and always seemed to have plenty of cash.

The testimony seemed to reveal, in Hutchinson's findings, that Thomas Applegate may not have been aware of these schemes, although his position as cashier, required him to be the overseer of the currency of the bank. He resigned on January 4, 1858, and he told the court that the minutes reflect that the directors praised him for his service (unfortunately our minute book starts in June 1858). Morrison, on the other hand, advised the Court that the blame all was with James M. Cubberly, Teller, who had the "keys" to the bank. Morrison further accused Benjamin Reed and Cubberly as being co-conspirators since 1856. None of this later Court status was reflected in the minute book.

July 1860 - the minutes reflect that the bank pursued collection for significant overdue balances from Joseph S. Ely. The bank has been operating in what they referred to as the "banking house" which was adjacent to the store of J. H. Walters. It appears the bank was renting. In this year they purchased ground from Benjamin Reed and built a bank building. In November Pres Reed was requested to urge on "the Chancery suit." Also on November 23rd, 1860, the directors voted at a special meeting to authorize the Cashier to "suspend specie payment whenever the extension of suspensions and prevalence of the panic in his opinion demanded such an act." I assume this was more due to a concern of a national bank "panic" in 1860-1861, rather than the shortages at Central Bank. The "panic" did not happen. Although

not stated, this was likely in reaction to Lincoln's election and fear of southern secession.

First directors meeting was held in the "new bank house" on May 6, 1861, but business was still being carried on in the old quarters. This new "bank house" was on the corner of what is now Bank Street and North Main Street next to the Ely House and what was later sold to the Trinity Church (picture in the last issue – Winter 2018). The writer believes that Bank Street was built at this same time from the grounds of the Reed's.

Business activities moved here on May 9, 1861. In August 1861 the directors approved maximizing any person's liability (maximum a borrower could be lent) at \$10,000 and to attempt to reduce any already higher amount to said \$10,000. At the same meeting the secretary was directed to notify the attorneys employed to "bring on the Chancery suit immediately."

Hutch's research of the Court record showed no activity between 1858, when the initial filings were made, and May 1, 1866, when Cubberly gave a lengthy deposition to the Court. He was the only one to ever give a deposition.

January 1862 the directors of the bank advised the "discount committee" (loan committee) to as far as possible give preference to "home loans." It appears also that during the last year Mr. Benjamin Reed had been behind on loan payments. This had been discussed at a couple of meetings but at this time Mr. Reed offered to give his bank stock as security on \$34,000 of his loans, the banking "house" as security for \$4,000, and \$4,000 in cash. A monthly payment plan was drawn up of 10% of the balance per month until it was paid off. The Bank retained the right to require total payment on a one month notice.

June 1, 1863 - the Cashier was ordered

to not allow any person to withdraw his account. There was no mention as to why, but it occurred at a moment when the Civil War was at a low point for the North, and when the finances of the Federal government were very unstable. Mr. Reed was required to bring down loan balances to \$50,000 total. The two may be related meaning that the bank also needed cash. We now know from other sources that Benjamin Reed was suffering from poor health.

In 1864 Olmsted H. Reed (son of Benjamin) was elected director to replace Isaac Pullen due to his "non-qualification." It is not stated whether said non-qualification was due to health or financial matters. During the prior eighteen months or so, many meetings were cancelled due to lack of quorum. President Reed was also absent a number of times. Olmsted Reed resigned as Teller and was replaced by CL Robbins, Clerk and Teller.

October 25, 1864 minutes: "Whereas it has seemed good to the Almighty Dispense of Events to remove from our midst our late worth and esteemed President Benjamin Reed and whereas our respect to his memory render it proper that we should place on record our appreciation of his services, therefore: Resolved That we deplore the loss of our late President softened only by the belief that his spirit is at rest." Edward C. Taylor was elected President.

It is worth noting that E.C Taylor had served as secretary during the above years. His penmanship was mostly extraordinarily legible. Olmsted Reed's pen, on the other hand, is not as easily deciphered, nor were others' who served pro tem as secretary.

In early 1865, there was a disagreement over Cashier Cubberly's salary. He resigned and was replaced by William C. Norton. Cubberly later changed his mind. It is not clear whether he was given a raise.

March 1866 – the bank had been looking

at buying a new building but a turn in the economy and national banking rules caused the directors to put off the new building and to look into "winding down the bank."

Directors January 1867 were Edward C. Taylor, Isaac Norton, R.M. Job, James D. Hall, Enoch Allen, George Hunt, Olmstead H Reed, Isaac Pullen, James A. Reed. The reasons for Isaac Pullen's return are unclear, though his tree nursery was an important local business that brought a good deal of outside money into the local economy. In any case, his presence was short-lived, due to his death later in the year. In May 1867, director James A. Reed also died, and Cornelius Wyckoff took his place on the board. As was always fitting, the following resolution was passed: "Whereas we have learned with deep regret of the death of our late associate, James A. Reed. And whereas a due respect for his character as a citizen and member of this organization require that we should pay a tribute of respect to his memory. Therefore, resolved that while bowing in meek submission to this sudden dispensation of divine wisdom we deeply sympathize with the bereaved family in this loss and desire to mingle our tears with theirs to the memory of an honest man."

Committee was appointed Sept 1868 to determine the status of suit against Morrison and Ely. In October they reported "progress" but on November 2, 1868, the minutes state "President reported that the suit of Central Bank of NJ against Morrison and others has been dismissed for want of prosecutions."

Directors for 1869 were E.C. Taylor, Isaac Norton, R.M Job, George Hunt, James Hall, Enoch Allen, Olmsted H. Reed, R.S. Mason, J. S. Robbins. This year, 11 years after the foreclosure on Samuel Sloan's property, the bank wins a judgement in Supreme Court against Sloan and his business partner Andrew Gaddis. Sloan had borrowed from the bank in the form of 7 promissory notes, which he used to finance construction of his house at 230 South Main Street and to keep his dry goods store operating downtown. He had defaulted on these notes. The bank sued him in 1857 and won a judgement against him in Chancery Court in 1858, but he absconded in April 1857, leaving his partner Gaddis behind, holding the bag. With the Panic of 1857 and its resulting depression, Gaddis was unable to make good on these note. This unpaid debt hung over the bank as unfinished business, even a decade later. The minutes in 1869 reveal the bank settled with Gaddis but keeps judgement against Sloan who could not be found.

August 1, 1870 - " on motion it was resolved that the Bank continue on in the same course as formerly and that we show a bold front and do all we can to brake down the influence in reference to starting a new Bank and that the President be directed to

ascertain if starting new bank is legal and if not contest it.” This was in response to a new bank that was to open in town in 1870, the First National Bank of Hightstown.

At the January 2, 1871, director’s meeting the board unanimously approved converting from a state bank to a national bank under the National Bank Acts which were enacted to stabilize the national currency and banking due to the debts of the Civil War. It was agreed that all capital would be converted share for share and an additional 280 shares of bank treasury shares were offered. All were purchased by the current owners with the most being purchased by E.C Taylor, William C. Norton and Isaac Norton.

The name of the bank was changed to the Central National Bank of Hightstown. It formally opened its doors as a national bank on January 16, 1871.

There are no further entries regarding the Central Bank of New Jersey so there must be a subsequent minute book of the new Central Bank of New Jersey from this point forward. However the last entry in said 1858 to 1871 minute books is as follows:



E. Norton Check for new shares of the bank after conversion to a National Bank January 11, 1871

“Whereas after many years of earnest effort to maintain a reliable banking establishment in this town, dishonorable exertions furthered by misrepresentations of pretended friend has located here an association started to crush us out and erect on our ruins an association of foreign capital, and whereas the directors of the said The Central Bank have used every means in their power to protect our interest; therefore, Resolved That the action of said Directors meets our hearty approval and we hereby tender to them our thanks for all they have done and pledge to them our cooperation and support in all further management of our corporation.”

The aforementioned is not dated or signed but follows the minutes of the January 10, 1871 meeting.

The final item in the records of the Central National Bank is a seven-page indenture dated March 8, 1879. This document records the sale of the Central National Bank of New Jersey’s building and lot to its rival, the First National Bank of Hightstown. It was on this date that the Central National Bank liquidated and consolidated all its assets into the First National Bank of Hightstown.

(cont. pg 15)

## Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

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



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Much is lacking in my research and there are some conflicts. What happened to Morrison, Applegate and Ely and why was a prosecution not completed? What happened in the years between 1871 and 1879? Was the "foreign capital" of the First National Bank too great for the Central National to compete with? Was the leadership of the Central National Bank too old and tired to compete? The directors were certainly still successful business people and property owners in the town.

Now that the local newspapers from this era are digitized, it may be easier to fill in some of these blanks. However, due to the nature of the events, much of the story and intrigue was likely never reported on. The only hope may be some letters to the editor or information in Trenton regarding the various attempted prosecutions. Also the newspaper's may not have been reporting what was heard on the street.

On October 9, 1868, the Court dismissed the case against Morrison and Ely. Thomas Applegate did not appear to have been included in the original action a full 10 years prior to this dismissal. Morrison died of a stroke while vacationing at Ocean Grove in 1872.

In 1879, the Central National Bank of Hightstown, successor to the Central Bank of New Jersey, liquidated and was consolidated into the First National Bank of Hightstown. That bank operated at 106 North Main Street until 1921, when they moved into what is now the Wells Fargo Bank building on the east side of Main Street. Allen & Stults Funeral Directors and Insurance which had been immediately south of the Baptist Church, moved into 106 North Main in 1922, with many of the old bank records in its attic.

Will we ever know the answers to the many questions that remain about Morrison, Ely, Applegate and Cubberly? Maybe they are hidden in the papers I have yet to dust off. Maybe someday soon. If any reader has more information about the above, I would love to have it for the Society. Even if only "leads." 

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