

Hightstown



East Windsor

Historical Society News

Spring 2020

Women Get The Vote!

By Bob Craig

When women got the vote in 1920--100 years ago this year--the citizens of Hightstown and East Windsor didn't get to ratify it with their own votes. The New Jersey legislature ratified the 19th amendment itself, without a public referendum. When the State of Tennessee ratified it, it became the 36th state to do so, making three-quarters of the states, and the amendment went into effect.



Women's suffrage had been an issue long percolating in this state. New Jersey had been the only one of the original 13 states to give women the vote, a situation that prevailed from 1776 until 1807 when the legislature took it away. The 1844 state constitution limited voting to white men. After the Civil War, many women were offended and resentful when the 15th amendment extended voting to African American men but not to women. New Jersey, which did not vote for Lincoln's re-election in 1864, also failed to approve the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments before they went into effect. In 1887, the state legislature enacted voting reforms that allowed women to vote in some municipal elections, but that law was challenged in court, and invalidated in 1894 as being in violation of the clear language of the 1844 constitution.

Once again, women had their votes snatched away.

Another chance came in 1915. The climate was changing. Some western states, starting with Wyoming (of all places!), had begun to give women the right to vote in the 1890s. When California followed suit in 1911, it added more than a million women to the voting rolls. By 1915 a dozen states, all west of the Mississippi River, had given women the vote, but no eastern states. The suffrage movement had become organized and powerful, and was pushing not only for an amendment to the U.S. constitution, but also was conducting state-by-state campaigns. The New Jersey legislature approved a ballot initiative that would, if approved, change the state constitution to give women the vote. A special election was set for October 19th, 1915, to vote on that and on two other public questions.

The Hightstown Gazette, with George P. Dennis as its editor, came out in support of the vote for women. In its issue of October 14th, he devoted nearly two columns of print to this issue.

He also came out in the local items column as being personally in favor, explaining that he had seen first-hand the impact of women voting. He also reported on some of the major groups who were working for women's suffrage, both in New Jersey and in other states. One piece was entitled, "New Jersey Men Favor Suffrage." While President (and former NJ governor) Woodrow Wilson was holding back his own commitment on the Federal amendment, but he came out in favor of state-by-state suffrage efforts, and publicly stated that he would personally vote in favor in the New Jersey referendum. Dennis reported that the U.S. Secretary of Labor was campaigning in favor of suffrage in Pennsylvania, for a vote on the federal amendment set for that November.

(cont. pg 3)

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

The new year has brought us both good news and bad news. The bad news first. On January 12th there was a windstorm with gusts over 50 mph. One or more gusts ripped back the roof of the freight station but gratefully there was no rain so we got a roofer to do emergency repairs promptly. There was no damage to the interior but the cost to replace the roof with a much better roof than existed is \$16,500. When this roof was first put on in 1999, we did not have the quality of collection and archives as we do today. Our freight station was built in the 1860s and at that time train stations had metal roofs inhibiting fires caused by the hot embers from the wood-burning steam locomotives. The officers agreed that we need the best roof possible and a metal roof is



Freight Station Roof

historically appropriate and likely existed on the original station. The cost is about four times that of replacing what existed (a rolled roof) so the insurance reimbursement leaves us about \$12,000 shy of the cost. So the good news is (1) the interior and contents did not suffer any damage, (2) we have some reserves to do an immediate replacement, (3) our successors will have a 50-70 year roof protecting our history and (4) the metal roof is more appropriate.

If you are so inclined, we certainly could use donations to replenish our reserves. It is also a good time to remind those who have not paid their dues to please do so.

The other good news is Greg Ciano has created another **Children's theater production**. Auditions begin March 7th. Check it out on Facebook. There is a link from our website HEWHS.com. His creative genius and ability to excite the young people to participate has been great for the Society and our mission. It has also raised a fair amount for us. The families love it too.

We are very excited that our **Annual Meeting** will be at the First

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Baptist Church of Hightstown. The church is celebrating its 275th anniversary. It has quite a history and of course, is the most prominent structure in town. There will be tours and attendees who desire will be able to climb into the clock steeple to get a unique view of the whole area. Tickets will be available in March.

Many other projects are in the works and we would love you to come to our meetings and volunteer for one of the projects or just to attend. There is a lot going on. Thank you for the many great comments and for your support.

Cappy Stults, President
cstults@allenstults.com

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 2 7 - 8:30pm
Children's Theater Audition	March 7 12 Noon
April Monthly Meeting	April 6 7 - 8:30pm
Annual Meeting	April 25 4pm
May Monthly Meeting	May 4 7 - 8pm
Hightstown! What's In A Name? (Children's Theater)	May 30 4 & 6pm


Women Get the Vote - Continued

The outcome must have been bittersweet. We can look back with some pride that the suffragists carried the local voting, but it being a special election, voter turnout was light, and only 204 ballots were cast on this referendum, according to the Gazette. The “no” camp, which supported the status quo, tallied 91 votes, while the supporters polled 113. Hightstown showed its progressive side, becoming one of several small towns that gave the suffrage question a majority of their votes, but those were bright spots on a larger canvas of disappointment. In Mercer County as a whole, the suffrage question went down to defeat by more than 3,200 votes. The Gazette reported that state’s political machines and the various liquor “interests” opposed it. Only Ocean County could muster a majority for women’s suffrage, and that by only about 300 votes. Twenty of New Jersey’s twenty-one counties voted to keep women away from the polls. The referendum garnered 42 percent support, but lost statewide by about 51,000 votes out of 317,000 cast. It was neither the first nor the only time that Hightstown made a progressive stand only to see that cause go down to a wider defeat. In 1864, for example, Hightstown had voted to re-elect Lincoln, even though voters statewide gave their electoral votes to his opponent, George McClellan.

With Governor Edward I. Edwards in favor of ratification, and Boss Hague of Jersey City throwing in his support, the amendment was able to win final passage in the NJ Senate by a lopsided margin on February 2, 1920, and by a narrower but still comfortable margin in the Assembly on February 10th. New Jersey thus became the 29th state to ratify the Federal amendment.

By the time the presidential election of 1920 approached, the matter of women voting had already been settled by the final ratification of the 19th amendment over the summer. Once again, the Gazette

stood behind the prospect of women voting. On September 23rd, Dennis editorialized that “women [are] taking considerable interest in politics and there will be many women who will vote. It is now the right and duty of the women to vote as much as the right and duty of the men.” On October 7, 1920, after New Jersey’s primary elections were held, the Gazette reported that Mercer County election officials estimated that “fully half of the primary vote” was cast by women.

FURTHER READING: If you would like to learn more about the women’s suffrage movement, I recommend Elaine Weiss, *The Women’s Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote* (2018); Marjorie S. Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (1995); and Felice D. Gordon, *After Winning: The Legacy of the New Jersey Suffragists, 1920-1947* (1986). 

Searching For Ben: Local Manumitted Slave

By Pat Donahue

The Mount Ely Hancock House originally stood on a 308-acre farm on Disbrow Hill Road in what was then Windsor Township. The first house on the property was built in 1774 by Richard Mount. Additions by Samuel Ely in 1800 and by Elijah Hancock in 1856, at which time the oldest portion was torn down, created the two-story, two-room deep arrangement left and right of a center hall that exists today. In the 1920s, the Estenes family took ownership of the house and what was left of the farmland. In 1981, Frances and Michael Pane acquired the house and moved it from the Sandy Acres Farm to Hidden Springs Lane. They added a great room over a two-car garage. The Panes sold to Joe and Kathleen Fox in the mid-2000s and Kevin and I purchased the home from them in the fall of 2013 at which time we were given several items pertinent to the house with strict instructions on their preservation.

We inherited a picture of a man we call “Grandpa Pullen” that now hangs over the mantle in the parlor, along with several black and white photographs of him with this portrait that date to the mid-1800s. A framed map of the farm that dates to 1850, a small collection of miscellaneous documents that pertain to the home and its various residents, and a carefully researched history of the house were also entrusted to us. The history, written by Clark J. Hutchinson, includes descriptions of civil boundaries, genealogies of the Mount and Ely families, maps, and events of historical significance in the area.

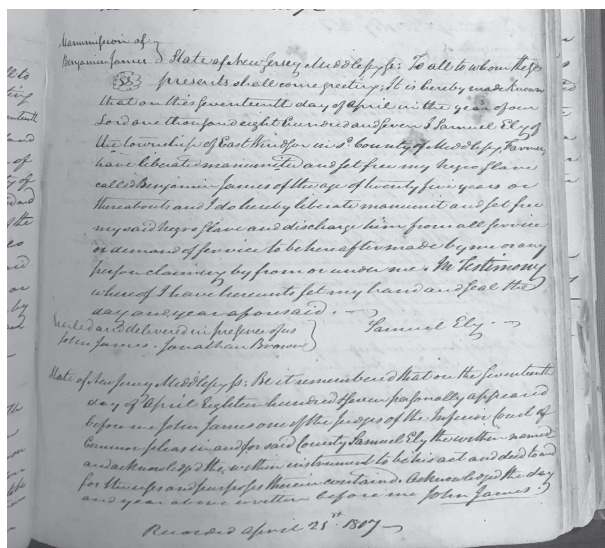
Richard Ely, along with several members of his family, died of dysentery in 1791. Appendix C of Hutchinson’s history contains a quote from Richard’s Last Will and Testament dated August 18, 1791. He left to his son, Samuel, who was born on July 25, 1771, the following bequest:

I will and bequeath unto my son Samuel the (buck?) horse and the colt he now has, the negroe boy called Ben and to him his assigns forever all that tract of land I bought from Richard Kinnan and William Martine.

Samuel Ely, at the age of 20, owned a slave.

My husband, Kevin, has read a lot about New Jersey history and understands something that the general public does not: slavery existed in New Jersey. We typically think of slavery as a southern issue, but it was prevalent in parts of the north as well. Prior to the Revolution, almost 10% of NJ's population were slaves, and Perth Amboy was a major slave trade center. Near the turn of the century, slaves represented 12% of the total population of New Jersey. While other states were legislatively emancipating slaves, New Jersey did not pass a gradual abolition law until February 15, 1804. Even so, any slave born prior to July 4, 1804 remained a slave for life.

I started my search for more information about Ben with the 1790 Census in which Windsor is listed as a town in Middlesex County. (East and West Windsor were created in 1797 and became part of Mercer County in 1838.) There were 190 slaves in Windsor in 1790. One of them was Ben. By 1800, Middlesex




Manumission showing Ben being given his freedom

County had 1,564 slaves, compared to 1,318 in 1790. I could not find a separate enumeration by town in the 1800 census. The census of 1810 is missing, having burned in a fire during the War of 1812. The 1820 census distinguishes between slaves and free colored persons [sic] and lists East Windsor separately. There were 25 slaves in East Windsor; there were 85 free colored persons. Was Ben still a slave or was he free?

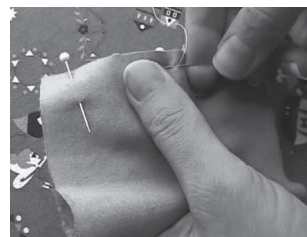
My research in the census documents was not yielding more specific information. Perhaps the Surrogate Court archives would have more. From them I learned a new vocabulary word, manumission, which means release from slavery. Freed slaves were given manumission papers. I was told that finding any manumission papers from the turn of the 18th century would be highly unlikely. If they existed, no one was sure where they might be. After several false starts and dead ends, I heard from Christine

A. Lutz of the Rutgers University Archives. She assigned a graduate student, Kate McCarthy, to look. Kate found it!

Samuel Ely did the right thing. On April 17, 1807, Benjamin James, became a free colored person. He was "of the age of twenty five years or thereabouts." Now I had a surname and an approximate birth year, ~1782. What else might I be able to discover? I'd like to accomplish three tasks: find out what happened to Ben; find his gravesite; and, find his descendants. (As of this writing, I wait for a response from the NJ State Archives.) Most of all, I would like a photograph of Benjamin James to hang in the Mount Ely Hancock House.

Afterword: The research for this project and the typing of this article took place in my office in the part of the house built in 1800 by Samuel Ely – after he had inherited Ben but before freeing him. As I wrote this article it occurred to me that Ben had probably been in this very room. I hope I honor his memory. 


Community Art Quilt



The Hightstown Woman's Club is creating a Community Art Quilt to commemorate Hightstown's 300th anniversary.

The quilt will represent a "slice of life" of old and new Hightstown and will include areas that were originally part of Hightstown, notably East Windsor.

Use your sewing and creative talents to make a quilt block that brings to life some of the places and things (past and present) that are unique to our area.

You are invited to apply to participate as a fiber artist and resident of Hightstown or East Windsor (must be over 18 years of age). More details and Application form are available in local libraries and at hightstownborough.com 

The Lab Formerly Known As The Post Office

By Gregory Ciano

I recently had a chance to tour Perritt Labs on South Main Street, formerly the location of the Hightstown Post Office. They came across some old blueprints and photos of the building and wanted to share it with the society.

In case you're not aware of what Perritt Labs does they are the leading child-resistant package testing laboratory in the world. In fact, they are a pioneer in child-resistant package testing. So, if you've ever opened an ibuprofen bottle or a container of weed killer odds are the package was tested at Perritt Labs.

- The Allen and Stults building at 106 North Main Street
- Then to the building that once stood where Wells Fargo's parking lot is now
- Then back to the point where Mercer Street and South Main Street meet

Then in 1936, the United States Post Office noticed that the annual receipts for Hightstown Post Office went from \$8,000 in 1910 to \$27,000 in 1935. This dramatic increase in sales meant that Hightstown was ready for a building built specifically for use as a post office, and nothing else. Up until that point the post office was tucked away inside a building that was already in use as something else (like how the Smith Building was also a grocery store). Two properties were purchased, the Universalist



Universalist Church & Mrs. Keeler Home

Main Street Post Office being built

Main Street Post Office (aka Perritt Labs) today

Before we get into the tour, I'd like to take you through a brief history of the Hightstown Post Office.

The first post office opened in Hightstown on February 24, 1819, on the second floor of the Smith House (now Musings Antiques) at 137 Stockton Street. At the time, the building was also a general store and the residence of Sara Smith. The first postmaster was Robert Purdy who lived across the street.

Then the post office moved several more times due to the need for a larger space. After the Smith House, the post office moved to:

- A building that used to stand where Wells Fargo Bank currently stands at 105 South Main Street
- The building that once stood at the point where Mercer Street and South Main Street meet (109 Mercer Street)

Church for \$6,500 and the home of Mrs. Charles J. Keeler for \$7,000. [Side note: the Keelers tended to sell their properties to institutions. Their home prior to this one was sold to Peddie School in 1906 to be used as a dorm.]

The opening of this new post office was a big event in Hightstown. The office opened on July 17, 1937, with a parade featuring three bands, the Lions Club, the Hightstown Fire Department, Girls Scouts, WPA Playground Children (recreation leaders for public parks), Parade Marshall J. Ernest Davison, and the volunteer organizations Grange and Junior League. The businesses all along the parade route were decorated with flags, bunting, and banners. This was followed by an opening day ceremony featuring speeches by Senator A. Harry Moore and Congressman D. Lane Powers.

Eventually, even this location wasn't large enough to handle the influx of mail and several annexes were added to manage the overflow.

- 1970 – Auto Boys store at 116 North Main Street (now Rise and Metro PCS)
- 1971 – Fabric Mill in Warren Plaza West Shopping Center at the corner of Route 130 and Dutch Neck Road

- 1974 – 625 Mercer Street (Now Pawsitively Perfect). This took over for the Auto Boys store when the overflow became too much for them to handle.

But the flow of mail kept growing (up to \$3 million dollars annually by the early 1970s!) and a new post office, our current post office, was built. That opened on October 28, 1975, to a lot less fanfare. By 1975, post offices were all over the place, so it wasn't that big of a deal anymore.

Ok, I promised you details of my Perritt Labs tour. Here goes.

Richard Jakober, VP Director of Laboratory Services, invited me to check out the photos taken during the building progress (taken so the main postal office in Washington, D.C. could see how construction was coming along) and the numerous blueprints that lay out every detail of the building from how the molding should be created to how the letters should be stenciled on the doors.

The first thing that struck me was how much of the building still looked like a post office. The lobby was currently being used as a cubicle workspace, but if you cleared all that out it would be easy to imagine dropping off and picking up mail in this space. Even the safe was intact (door, alarm, and all!), but now it was being used as someone's office. The postmaster's office was now Mr. Perritt's office. Some rooms were altered, but these were mostly rooms being used as labs that needed to be brought up to date.

While in Mr. Perritt's office, Mr. Jakober showed me what I considered to be the most interesting part of this building. In the bathroom was a door that led to a hallway that was painted black. This hallway led down to a hidden room next to the sorting room. There were two slots built into the wall that allowed the postmaster



Back hallway & the former sorting room. Notice the two slats in the upper right corner. to see into the sorting room without being detected and allowed him to watch the sorters ensuring that pieces of mail weren't being opened and read or having money taken out of them. That's why the walls were painted black, so no light would come through the slots which would let the sorters know that the

postmaster was watching them. Today the sorting room is a break room and the black painted hallway is used for storage.

It was an interesting morning touring Perritt Labs and I thank Mr. Jakober for taking the time to show me around.



First day mail was flown to Airport Road by helicopter


But let's end this article with some Hightstown Post Office fun facts.

1833: The Post Office Department arranges to have the Camden and Amboy Railroad carry mail to towns along its route. This allowed mail to come to Hightstown daily.

1847: The first stamps are issued. Before this, the postmaster would write the postage amount on the envelope.

1902: Free rural delivery starts due to an increase in residents in East Windsor. William Hutchinson was the first letter carrier. He delivered the mail in a horse and carriage.

1919: Free home delivery in Hightstown starts. There were two letter carriers, Calvin Perrine and William Bardell. They delivered twice daily and once on Saturday.

1953: New York Airways delivers mail to Air Service Field on Airport Road by helicopter. There were two flights a day, 6:53 am and 7:33 pm. Air Service Field was chosen for its lights which made night landing possible. Like the South Main Street Post Office, this event had an opening day ceremony as well. Helicopter service ended in the early 1970s. 

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
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Vice President: Robin Smith

Recording Secretary: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

Corres. Secretary: Vacant

Treasurer: Robert Szychowski
609-448-9490

Committee Chairs

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609-448-8388
Beverly Mann

Library: Robert Craig
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Eileen Couturier

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Newsletter: Robert Craig
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Jane Cox
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Nancy Laudemberger
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Publicity: Shirley Olsen
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Christian Kirkpatrick, Shirley Olsen, Warren Olsen, Robert Szychowski

Society Trustees

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

Layout by Gregory Ciano. Printed by Harwill Express Press

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 | |



The blue sheds by the Rug Mill are gone!

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Historical Society**
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