

Hightstown



East Windsor

Historical Society News

Summer 2020

100 Years of Businesses Supporting Local Agriculture

By Ken Pickering

The traditional story of the founding of Hightstown begins with the establishment of a business that supported agriculture in the surrounding region – the operation of a mill by John Hight beginning in 1721. A second mill was established in the early 1770s by John Cosman on Rocky Brook in what is now Etra in East Windsor Township. Over the first two and a half centuries of the Hightstown and East Windsor history, businesses that supported agriculture were a significant portion of the economy of the region. This was true even with the establishment of major industries in Hightstown such as the Hightstown Rug Company (see newsletters of Summer and Autumn 2019), the Native Lace Mill, and much later (the 1960s) such major employers in East Windsor as McGraw-Hill, RCA, National Lead, etc. The Hightstown area is located within the major north-south transportation corridor between New York and Philadelphia, with U. S. Route 130 (originally NJ Route 25) having been built under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s and the New Jersey Turnpike opened in the early 1950s. These highways opened the door for greater housing demand in Hightstown – East Windsor, as commuting to the cities was made much easier. As a result, farms were gradually converted to housing subdivisions over the last 60 years, and the segment of the region's economy comprised of businesses supporting agriculture has nearly disappeared.

The focus of this article is on the businesses that existed over the last 100 years (1920 to 2020).

During the years prior to 1935, considerable information on agriculture-related businesses is available

from the series of *Fitzgerald's Trenton and Mercer County Business Directories*, published every five years. Advertisements in the *Hightstown Gazette* are also a good source of information concerning such businesses. Otherwise, we rely on the personal recollections of individuals, and information from web sites devoted to some of the larger businesses that



Thomas Pepler and Son Farm Machinery along Old York Road

once had facilities in Hightstown. The discussion that follows has two components: 1) businesses that provided goods or services in support of agriculture; and 2) businesses that purchased agricultural products or played a role in marketing them.

Goods and services businesses supporting agriculture included agricultural implement dealers, a foundry, blacksmiths, and cooperative associations dealing in supplies such as tools, seed, fertilizer and livestock feed. An agricultural implement dealer with a long history in Hightstown was Thomas Pepler and Son, which was established in 1878. Pepler first appears in the Fitzgerald directory in 1894. Pepler was noted as a manufacturer of plows and other farm equipment. This business was located just outside of town on York Road. Pepler advertised weekly in
(cont. pg 3)

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

First let me express my hopes that you and all of your loved ones both physically and mentally well as we wait out this storm. As an optimist and silver-lining personality, I am hopeful that you have been able to catch up on that long list of "to dos" and have been able to enjoy your closest family and friends, even if only on Facebook, Zoom or through the fence. To those that have lost anyone, our prayers are with you.

For perspective, our newer members may not remember our Autumn 2018 newsletter article on the Pandemic of 1917-1919. The issue before it was on WWI. Today we are blessed with so much more scientific knowledge and better medicines, but also cursed with too much information too soon, which many times ends up being false and or contradictory to other reports. Back in 1918 much went unreported, whether in the newspapers or from President Wilson's offices. You can find these articles at www.hewhs.com. Click on the "newsletter" drop down and then on the issue you want to read. Knowing more about then will make you feel much better about now. I believe knowledge of history can be soothing. My then President's message embraces the same thoughts.

Unfortunately the Society's calendar has been cleared of all activities. Greg Ciano's great children's theater has been cancelled. He hopes to be able to reschedule it for next year. Our monthly meetings have been cancelled as has the April Annual Meeting which was to be at the Baptist Church. The Church has invited us to reschedule it in the fall or in conjunction with their celebration of 275 years.

In closing, I thank those who have paid their dues and urge those who have forgotten to drop a check in the mail. If you can, the lost revenue from the children's theater and the annual meeting will strap our operating revenue needs, not to mention the roof replacement. I thank those that have sent in an additional donation for the roof. We will gladly accept yours too.

Stay Safe and Be Well,

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

Annual Meeting **Date TBA**

June Monthly Meeting **June 1 | 7 - 8pm**
(If given the all clear by the governor)

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Support Downtown!

Be sure to support our restaurants and businesses downtown while you're staying-at-home. Many of our restaurants can be found on the apps DoorDash and GrubHub who will leave the food on your porch or doorstep.

100 Years - Continued

the *Gazette* through 1955, but remained in business there at least through the early 1960s, selling the John Deere brand of tractors and other implements. Other implement dealers that were established prior to 1920 included those operated by John R. Shangle on Academy Street, R. D. Norton on Main Street, and H. D. Mount on Mercer Street. However, these three businesses no longer appear in the Fitzgerald directory of 1920. By the 1950s, implement dealerships had been established for the Case brand by Chester Tindall at the corner of Hickory Corner Road and Route 130, for the International Harvester brand on Mercer Street by C. O. Smith, for the Ferguson brand by Holland and McChesney on Rt. 130, and for a variety of brands by Hights Farm Equipment on Rt. 33 east of town. None of these businesses advertised in the *Gazette* past the early 1960s. The Roberson International Harvester dealership took over the building that had been occupied by Tindall, and later Roberson moved to the facility that had been occupied by C. O. Smith, The Roberson dealership was closed by the end of the 1960s.

Metalwork was also a service important for agriculture. A foundry operated by Wycoff Brothers located on Academy Street started business between 1905 and 1910. This facility was also in the coal distribution business. Wycoff Brothers remained in these lines of business through the early 1940s, but branched out into the sales of hardware, seed, fertilizer, and the Oliver brand of tractor in the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s. Many blacksmiths did business in Hightstown, particularly in the days prior to the automobile and tractor. Four blacksmiths are listed in the 1900 business directory, but the number was down to two by 1920 (Henry Huttinger on Mercer Street and Charles Ayers at the corner of Bank and Mechanic Streets) and none by 1930.

The first farmers' cooperative associa-

tion in the area was the Monmouth County Farmers' Exchange, which initially formed in the Freehold area in 1908. The original objective was to allow farmers to get a fair price for potatoes. The organization was very successful and quickly developed potato shipping stations at approximately 30 locations along railroad lines in Monmouth, Mercer and Middlesex Counties. This organization also gradually started marketing other crops such as grains and vegetables for farmers in the area, as well as selling seed potatoes to farmers. In addition to a potato shipping facility, the Exchange also operated a fertilizer plant in Hightstown. The Exchange is still listed as having a facility in Hightstown in the business directory of 1935. An organization by a different name (New Jersey Farmers' Exchange) advertised for purchase of potatoes in the *Gazette* in the late 1940s with a location listed as Wycoff Avenue at the railroad. Another significant player in the potato business was the Bennett – Mount Company, located on Wycoff Avenue from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. As well as processing and shipping potatoes, Bennett and Mount sold seed potatoes and was a dealer for fertilizer and insecti-



Farmers' Cooperative Association. Notice the turntable in the middle.

cides.

Other fertilizer and farm supply dealers in town were I.P. Thomas and Son at Broad and Monmouth Streets in the early 1940s and Nelson Mount on Monmouth Street in the early 1950s according to *Gazette* advertisements. An airborne crop dusting operation was conducted by Hightstown Air Service based on Airport Road in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The Farmers' Cooperative Association (FCA) of New Jersey started business in 1915, and eventually had stores in Hightstown, Trenton, Hopewell, and New Brunswick. It is uncertain when the Hightstown sales facility on Mercer Street opened, but the first advertisement for FCA in the *Gazette* was in 1940. The FCA acted as an agent for the Grange League Federation (GLF), which was a much larger organization doing business throughout the northeastern states. The FCA sold livestock feed, seed, fertilizer, tools, and small equipment. It also purchased grain from

local farmers and loaded it on the railroad across the street for shipment and marketing. The GLF also operated a fuel facility on Maxwell Avenue. GLF merged with Eastern States Farmers' Exchange in 1964 and formed Agway. FCA then sold Agway products in the store and continued to advertise in the *Gazette* through 1967. The FCA store eventually became an Agway store. Agway suffered financial losses beginning in 1990, but remained in business until 1999. In that year Agway sold or closed all of its retail stores, including the one in Hightstown, and their warehouses were sold to Southern States Cooperative.

Numerous businesses have come and gone that processed agricultural products or facilitated their sale and shipping. Since the founding of Hightstown, the milling of grain for flour or feed was for many years a major activity. The early mills of the 18th and 19th centuries were relatively small-scale operations. However, in the early 20th century, a large milling operation was established on Main Street by the Gross Brothers. This business suffered a disastrous fire in 1920, but resumed business milling grain for flour and feed. An advertisement in the *Gazette* in August 1946 indicated that Gross Brothers were still buying all kinds of grains at that time. Another flour and feed milling business was operated on North Main Street by the Norton family in the early 1900s, but was no longer listed in the 1920 business directory. The last feed mill to operate in Hightstown and East Windsor was the Central Jersey Farmers' Cooperative Association located on Mercer Street. This business began in 1929, with a feed mill originally located at Summit and Mercer Streets. The business outgrew this facility and a larger mill was built on Mercer Street across from the FCA. Here they operated the mill, a railroad loading facility, as well as a farm supply store. The Association continued to advertise in the *Gazette* for grain purchases through 1967.

In the first few decades of the 20th century, before hay balers and combines became commonly used in the harvesting of hay and grain, businesses specializing in the operation of hay presses and grain threshing machines were the norm. Farmers brought wagon loads of loose hay to these facilities to have the hay pressed into bales. Grain that had been cut and bound into sheaves was brought for threshing and shipment. In the first decades of the 1900s, hay presses were located on Monmouth Street (Chamberlain and Fields and later E. B. Chamberlain and Company), on Broad Street (Norton and Wycoff, and later Grover Brothers), and on North Main Street (Dawes and Dilatush). A much larger hay press and grain threshing business began around 1920, first known as Schanck, Hutchinson, and Field and later as Schanck and Field. The initial locations were in Windsor and on Academy Street in Hightstown. By 1925 Schanck and Field were listed as also having facilities in Sharon and Robbinsville. In 1935, the business directory indicated that the Hight-


stown location was on William Street near the railroad, and personal recollection places Schanck and Field at that location through the 1950s. They were a major purchaser and marketer of rye in the 1940s and 1950s. Schanck and Field also advertised the sale of coal from the late 1940s through about 1960.

Hightstown was also home to a least two food processing companies. Garden State Canning Company, located near the railroad freight station, was in the business of canning tomatoes. They advertised tomato contracts to local farmers in the mid- to late-1940s. Farmers signed up in the Spring for contracts at a fixed price per ton of tomatoes to be delivered later in the growing season. Farm Fresh Packing Corporation was located on Summit Street, also near the railroad. They were packing asparagus, blueberries, tomatoes, potatoes, and sweet potatoes at the time an article concerning this company appeared in the *Gazette* in August 1952. They were known as the largest packer of blueberries in New Jersey for many years.

Village Nurseries on Old York Road in East Windsor Township can trace its origins back to 1853. This business specialized in growing fruit trees (peach and cherry, in particular) and strawberry plants, supplying orchardists and other growers in the area, as well as throughout the country. Village Nurseries remains in business to this day, but now specializing in retail sales of ornamentals to supply the surrounding suburban homeowners.

The Tri-County Cooperative Auction Market located at 619 Rt. 33 was founded in 1933 by a group of farmers from Mercer, Middlesex and Burlington Counties. The co-op allowed area farmers to work together to sell their products – primarily vegetables and fruits. However, in the early days, the facility also handled potatoes and eggs, having a facility for grading and packaging potatoes and an egg washing and packaging building. There was also

a large winter storage cellar for potatoes. For many years, farmers lined up early in the morning to unload their products onto the auction platform, and over the course of the day the products were auctioned to wholesale buyers, which included grocery stores, farmer's markets, and restaurants. The early morning line-up was an opportunity for farmers to socialize, chat, and complain about poor weather or low prices for produce. In more recent years the co-op has turned to direct sales instead of auction, where orders are placed by wholesale buyers through a website. The co-op also started retail sales to the public in 2018. The Tri-County Cooperative has between 50 and 60 farmer members. The co-op is the only remaining business in Hightstown – East Windsor supporting agriculture.

Why have agricultural-related businesses largely disappeared from the Hightstown area? That has happened as the region lost farms to commercial and residential development. A follow-up article will provide details and statistics on the rise and fall of agriculture in the region. 

Many thanks to Richard Lee and Marion Bowers for providing a number of details for this article.

Searching For Ben - Pt.2

By Pat Donahue

Pat Donahue's article from the Spring 2020 issue continues.

While continuing to look through the book of Manumissions from the early 1800s, in my search to find more on Benjamin James, I came upon several names that are well known in the Hightstown and East Windsor area. Some of them were slaveholders, some were Justices of the Peace, and others were Overseers of the Poor.

The Hutchinson cemetery is at the corner of Etra and Disbrow Hill Roads. I pass it nearly daily on my way to and from home. When we first moved here almost seven years ago, we visited and were upset to find the tombstones in a state of disrepair

and neglect even though the grass is cut regularly and the area is kept clean. The tallest marker is engraved "Hutchinson." This name appears several times in the manumission records.

Several years before Samuel Ely freed Benjamin James, Joseph Hutchinson freed Samson Peters and Thomas Wildes. Their manumission papers were signed by Joshua Ely, the Overseer of the Poor in 1802. (In part one, we discuss how Richard Ely bequeathed Benjamin James to Samuel Ely upon his death from dysentery in 1791. Joshua was Richard Ely's brother.)

Samson Peters moved to Trenton where he helped organize the Free African Society of Trenton in 1811. Five years later, he formed the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Trenton's first black church. In 1822, he helped establish the Mount Pisgah AME Church, Princeton's first black congregation. This church is currently closed for renovation. The NJ State Archives contains a small slip of paper signed by Samson Peters, as the Minister of the Gospel, when, on September 30, 1824, he married Mary Leland and John Roberts. Samson Peters died in 1845. I do not know what became of Thomas Wildes. It is worth noting that Milford, aka Etra, was a population center and the Hightstown Methodist Church was previously located next to the Hutchinson cemetery.

Joseph Hutchinson waited until 1807 to free another slave, Stefan Wiles. Stefan was freed on the same day as Benjamin James. Their manumission papers are signed by the same overseer of the poor and the same justices of the peace. Perhaps these two men stayed together as they navigated their newly granted freedom. I have not been able to trace them.

In 1812, Isaac Hutchinson of West Windsor died. I do not know how Isaac and Joseph were related. The executors of Isaac's will were Daniel Hutchinson and William Tridale. To them fell the task of freeing Isaac's slaves. These men were listed only as George and a relative to George.

Another familiar local name is Conover. In 1805, Ann Ely, daughter of Samuel Ely and his wife Ann Mount, married Joseph Conover. The manumission records contain a page for Anna Conover of South Amboy who, in 1814, freed her slave named Betty. Might this be the same Ann?

The last familiar entry was that signed by Matthias Mount as Overseer of the Poor to free a slave named Simon from South Amboy who belonged to James Moyan. I do not know how Matthias was related to the Mounts who originally built my home in 1774.


As I turned the pages in the manumission book, I noted that the top left corner on some citations changed from Manumission to Removal. The language also changed.

Be it remembered that on this twenty-sixth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighteen, Nicholas Vanwickle Junior brought before us Jacob Vanwickle and John Outcalt Esqs two of the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of the County and State aforesaid his female slave named Raichel aged twenty-two years with her female child named Rozenah aged six weeks and the said Raichel being by us examined separate and apart from her said Master declared that she was willing and that she freely consented to remove and go out of the State to Point Coupee in the State of Louisiana, together with her female child and there to serve Colonel Charles Morgan and Nicholas Vanwickle.....

Received May 20th, 1818.

This was page 229 in the manumission book. I was shocked. A mother and infant being “removed” to another state? In the middle of winter? Toward slavery? I couldn’t read anymore.

The gradual emancipation law that went into effect in 1804 allowed newly born slaves to apprentice with their mothers’ owners for 21 years for females or 25 years for males and then freed. Seeing that slavery in the north was ending, some owners “freed” their slaves for a price. Some northern slaveowners forced their slaves to allow the sale of their time owed to slave dealers in southern states. This was called “removal.” The southern slave merchants, having a difficult time importing additional slaves, found it profitable to buy them from the north and transport them south. This practice was stopped in 1819 but some northern slave owners conspired with kidnappers to continue the slave trade.

My search will continue. 

Pemberton-Hightstown Railroad, aka U.T.

By Cappy Stults

Most everyone knows how the Camden and Amboy Railroad (C&A) transformed Hightstown from a small mill town into a bustling commercial center. Following the active opening of the C&A in 1833, there were five hotels, many shops, opera houses, financial institutions, fraternal organizations and numerous churches in Hightstown that did not exist prior to the railroad. But many are not aware of the other railroad in Hightstown that likely did as much for Hightstown during the decades between 1870-1950. This railroad was first incorporated as the “Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad Company” by the New Jersey Legislature on March 24, 1864, with an initial allowable capital stock of \$500,000, with allowable increases to \$1,000,000. But of course, there is more to the story.

I find its history as interesting as the Camden & Amboy Railroad. I hope you do too.

After the success of the C&A, many short line railroads were being planned or built around New Jersey. They had names such as the Burlington County Railroad, Burlington & Mt. Holly, Delaware and Atlantic Railroad, Freehold & Jamesburg, Ocean Agricultural, New Egypt & Farmingdale, Camden & Burlington, New Egypt & Newtown (Robbinsville), Farmers, Raritan & Delaware, Pemberton & New York and many more. This was both the era of the railroad but also still of the canals. Many of the northern and western railroads were useful for passenger traffic while many commodities were still transported by the canals. Canals could carry more bulk and weight, but in the Central and South Jersey farm belt, no canals existed and the natural waterways were narrow and shallow. By the 1840s C&A found itself in competition with a newer railroad further to the west that was a more direct route from New York to Philadelphia, referred to as the C&A Branch and later the Pennsylvania Railroad. Our C&A, through Hightstown, soon was relegated to providing service mainly to local passengers and to freight service, both incoming and outgoing, rather than to through traffic from NY to Philadelphia as it had previously enjoyed.

This change prompted locals to discuss building a railroad that went southeast from Hightstown deep into the agricultural areas. Such a line would feed the C&A main rail. The C&A had originally been the shortest route between New York and Philadelphia, indeed the first in the country to connect major US cities. For the Hightstown area, this allowed for the prompt delivery of the farm goods to these two major markets with little or no spoilage. But the C&A’s eastern Mercer and western Middlesex/Monmouth/Burlington location failed to fully tap the farm belt. The dirt roads of this area were still very crude and susceptible to weather conditions, especially in spring and fall. The roads would turn to mud and were nearly impossible for loaded wagons to traverse. Local businessmen and farmers dreamed

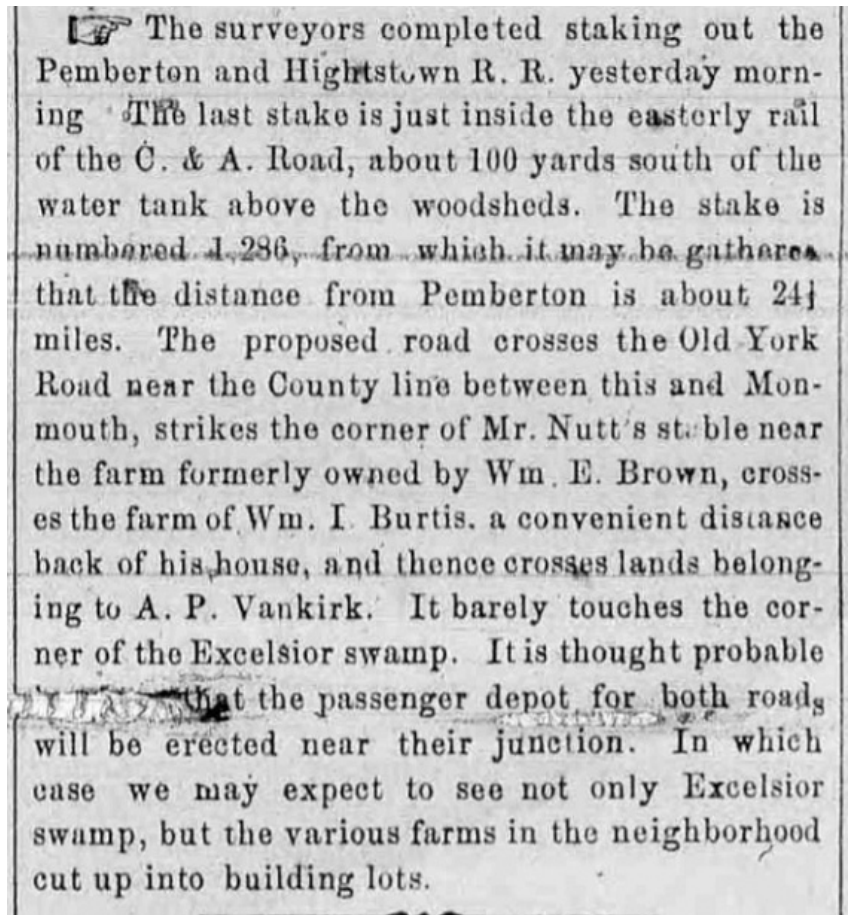
of a four-season method to both send and receive freight.

Two such groups of men met, laid out plans, raised money and petitioned the state for incorporation. One of the first was the New Egypt & Hightstown Railroad Co. It was incorporated on February 18, 1853, the day after the New Egypt & Newtown Railroad Co. was incorporated, both fully a decade before the P&H incorporation. The New Egypt & Newtown rail was to go through Allentown and intersect with the C&A at Newtown, which we now know as Robbinsville. The first incorporation, New Egypt & Hightstown railroad, a forerunner to the topic of this article, would be a longer route from New Egypt to Hightstown, but it went through more farm communities and would intersect with C&A closer to New York and northern New Jersey markets and its ports. Incorporators of the New Egypt & Hightstown Railroad were Rescarrick M. Smith (future state treasurer), Jacob M. Taylor, Charles Allen, James S. Lawrence, Andrew J. Allen, Forman Hendrickson, and Edwin Shreeve. For unknown reasons neither of these railroads even got passed the planning stages. It was not until nearly a decade later in 1861 that the Farmers Railroad Co. was chartered and essentially followed the same route from New Egypt to Hightstown as had the planned New Egypt & Hightstown Railroad. This appropriately named railroad also never got further than its incorporation in March of 1861.

Besides crops and passenger service, was there another reason for the passion to build a railroad in this vicinity and for the later success of P&H where the other short lines did not get out of the gate? Well, there was something called "marl." After over 100 years of farming in New Jersey, soil in many areas of the state and eastern Pennsylvania had become nutrient depleted. But the area east and south of Hightstown in Monmouth, Burlington and Ocean counties were rich with marl: a lime-rich mud and clay. Marl often con-

tains carbonate such as calcite, aragonite, dolomite, siderite, and lime. Spreading this on fields often brought them back to life. Obviously, it was a heavy material so transporting it by wagon to the depleted fields in other parts of the state and neighboring states was difficult. A rail line through the center of this marl rich region would be a boon (incidentally Marlton's name comes from its marl deposits).

Our area now was not only the breadbasket for New York and Philadelphia, but it now was becoming the source of a natural product that could sustain New Jersey's soil viability for years to come.



The surveyors completed staking out the Pemberton and Hightstown R. R. yesterday morning. The last stake is just inside the easterly rail of the C. & A. Road, about 100 yards south of the water tank above the woodsheds. The stake is numbered 1,286, from which it may be gathered that the distance from Pemberton is about 24 1/2 miles. The proposed road crosses the Old York Road near the County line between this and Monmouth, strikes the corner of Mr. Nutt's stable near the farm formerly owned by Wm. E. Brown, crosses the farm of Wm. I. Burtis, a convenient distance back of his house, and thence crosses lands belonging to A. P. Vankirk. It barely touches the corner of the Excelsior swamp. It is thought probable that the passenger depot for both roads will be erected near their junction. In which case we may expect to see not only Excelsior swamp, but the various farms in the neighborhood cut up into building lots.

Hightstown Gazette article from August 23, 1866 referencing the start of construction.

So why did so many of these railroads get incorporated but flounder? All of the fits and starts could have been caused by a couple of other influences of the times. The one big one was the Civil War which did not end until April 1865, having begun four years earlier in April 1861. Many young and even middle-aged men were engaged one way or another in the war effort. Crops were of course very important for the Union troops but there was limited idle money for investment in any new venture, let alone a railroad. A recession began on the last days of the war in April 1865 and lasted 3 years to December 1867. Another recession occurred in 1869-1870.

But finally, the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad officially

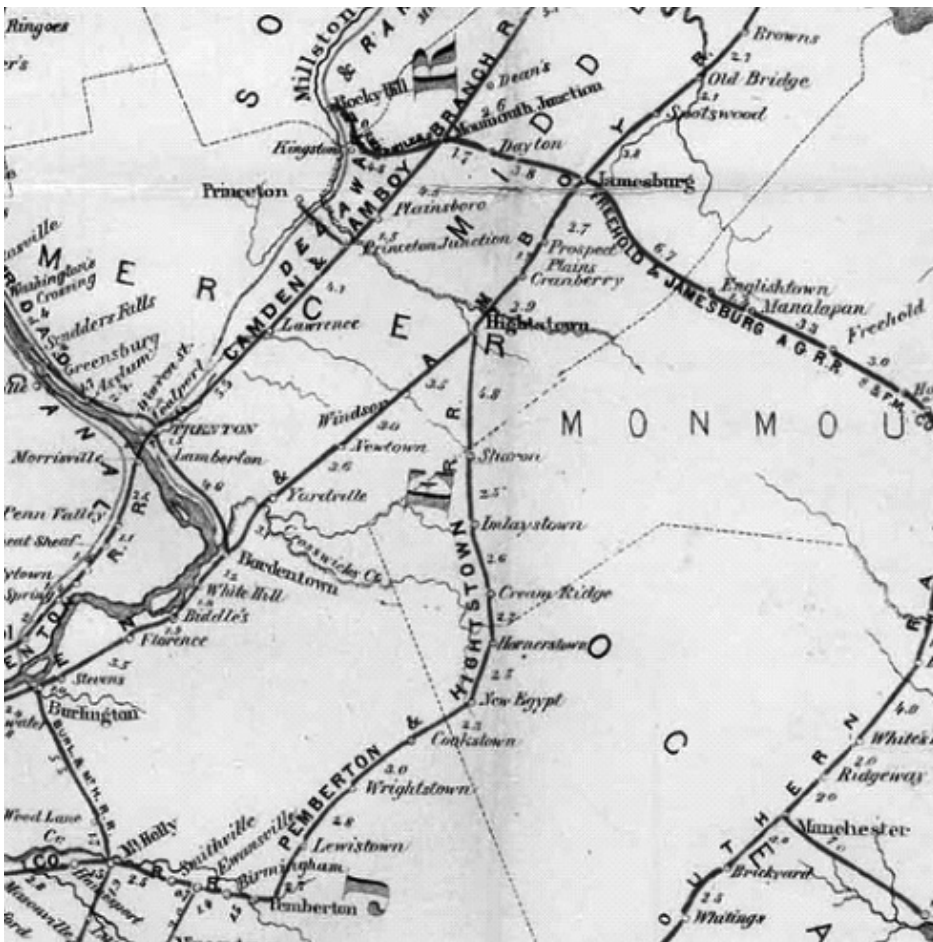
opened its single-track line in February 1868, although some report it as having been in the fall of 1867. The P&H had out-paced most of the other attempts at similar lines. According to the P&H charter, it was to run through points at Cookstown, Hornerstown, Fillmore (about 2 miles from Imlaystown) and Imlaystown. Most of you probably know where Imlaystown, Cookstown, and Hornerstown are, but I had absolutely no idea where Fillmore is or was. After a lot of searching and a little luck, I found it. I stopped in the Upper Freehold municipal building on Route 539. I asked the administrator and clerk if there was a township historian. After them looking at each other and shrugging, they both said, “not that we know of.” I told them what I was looking for and neither of them nor a senior public works man who walked in had ever heard of Fillmore. But the administrator said he saw an old map in the frame shop on the corner of 539 & 537. So there I went. Sure enough, there was an 1870 map, likely from an atlas, that I had not seen before. There it was with the boldest print on the page, Fillmore P.O. It was located a few hundred yards off of 539 on Burlington Path Road. Fillmore became President in July 1850 when Zachary Taylor died in office. Fillmore was a Whig, the last one, and also a Unitarian. He was vehemently opposed to slavery but thought it was a state issue, not federal. He is famous, (or infamous) for having managed the passage of the Compromise of 1850 shortly

after becoming President after Taylor’s death. It included the Fugitive Slave Act. So this little village wanted a post office and had petitioned then Congressman Dr. William Newell, who happened to be from Upper Freehold township, to award them one. It was granted in 1851. The actual village had carried the unwritten name of Varmintown. Newell likely suggested the name of Fillmore to expedite its approval. The post office name, without much fanfare, was changed to Cream Ridge in 1874, 23 years later.

The P&H right of way was to be 100 feet in width. The Charter of 1864 stated that construction was to have begun in 3 years and the rail completed within 6 years, or July 1870. It was completed ahead of time in 1868, 152 years ago.

I referenced that the Civil War and the recessions during this period had halted investment and construction in other railroads. So how did the P&H get finished when others faltered?

One of the incorporators of the P&H was former Governor George F. Fort (1846-1848), a physician from New Egypt. He was charged with approaching President Edwin Stevens of the Camden & Amboy Railroad for financial assistance. He explained to Fort that the line would be 24 miles in length, was generally flat and only had to cross a couple of minor streams. He further explained it would go through some of the best, if not the best farmland in New Jersey as well as “rich deposits of marl.” Also along the route were many “thriving villages”. Fort further explained to Stevens that the line would be 8-12 miles east of the C&A and had many established stage lines from the villages. Fort asked Stevens, representing the Joint Companies (formerly the C&A) to commit to assisting in the funding. Fort closed his request by



Map showing the route of the P&H R.R. (middle of photo)

stating, "The people generally on the route prefer connecting with your road but such is their anxiety and even earnest determination for railroad facilities that they will no doubt avail themselves of any feasible opportunity which may present itself from any source by which they can be accomplished. Trusting to a favorable issue from our application we remain with great respect, etc., etc. On behalf of the Committee, signed, George F. Fort, Prest."

I suppose Fort was taking a chance by including a threat of other feasible opportunities. One said opportunity would be taking the line to the east as the Ocean Agricultural Railroad into Manchester, thus not linking with the C&A/Joint Companies line at all.

Stevens, or rather the Joint Companies' Secretary J.P. Bradley, responded that they were "very interested" in the road being built and felt bound to give all the aid they could, but money was scarce and currently was out of the question. He added, however, that Fort should raise all of the money they could, "say \$150,000 to \$200,000 in bonds" and Stevens would endorse them and raise the balance needed on them. After several months the discussions between the P&H and Joint Companies were turned over to be moderated by Ashbel Welch on behalf of the Joint Companies.

I conjecture P&H's success was also due to the fact that they benefited from local labor along the line. In my great grandfather Walter C. Black's autobiography, he records that his father Joseph H. Black worked on building the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad during the 1860s along with his workers. He was a nurseryman but certainly had some seasonal time on his hands and also required additional income. The line itself was adjacent to the Old York Road nursery to the west and easy to get to as the tracks were being laid. I can only assume that other farm families along the entire route were involved in its construction too. Many were also investors. A share

was \$50.00. But the local stock subscriptions could not support that construction. The P&H petitioned the recently aligned United Companies, (C&A and the western line) to secure the bonds they had promised to do previously. The bonds would pay 7% interest. The United Companies agreed.

By 1868, the eastern end of the P&H had been completed from Pemberton to New Egypt, and the western end from Hightstown to Hornerstown. A partial part of the track line had been opened in the fall of 1867 with the Hightstown terminus being off of the current Route 33/Mercer Street, just north of Airport Road (then called Wilson's Road). This area became known as the "Hightstown Junction". Attempts were made to develop a planned community next to the Junction to be called "Excelsior." The assumption was that it would be convenient for railroad workers to live there. The promoters were William R. Norton and Edward C. Taylor. A couple of minor streets were laid and only a few houses were built. The Junction was also known as the "Woodsheds." It is assumed that this name referred to the sheds that stored the wood for the steam engines before they had converted to coal.

The western end of the line went right through the very rich plane of marl in Hornerstown. This allowed for the mining of marl and loading directly onto cars sitting on the P&H line. Heading just a little to the west, the line went through "Fillmore," later changed to Cream Ridge in 1874. This area was celebrated as one of the most fertile in the country.

The line in Pemberton connected with the Camden to Pemberton line, thus completing an eastern line from Hightstown to Camden, in addition to the original C&A railroad.

Most important to Hightstown and the farm areas to the southeast was that the long, tiresome stagecoach journeys over rutted, muddy and then dusty roads were gone. The stages were relegated to transport from train stations to villages that weren't along the line. Marl indeed became the primary bulk commodity. Even some minor short lines were built between the P&H and newly found marl beds. In 1874 14,846 tons of marl were transported.

The total final cost of the line is recorded to have been \$538,691.85. Remarkably this was very close to Fort's estimate he had made in 1865. There had been 6,843 shares issued at \$50 and the balance of the cost was from the \$160,000 bonds guaranteed by the mainline United Companies. The United Companies benefited greatly from the P&H as both freight and passengers fed into the NY-Phila through-line. Western Union had also been granted permission to build a telegraph line along the P&H right of way, greatly enhancing communication between towns.

Next Issue – the U.T. in the Twentieth Century

HIGHTSTOWN GAZETTE.

Vol. xxv. No. 39.

Hightstown, N. J., 1870.

Whole No. 1270

News From The Gazette - 150 Years Ago

Two drug stores and Dr Exton advertise full line including "full stock of wine and liquor for medicinal purposes". Five local doctors advertise: Deshler, Fairbank, Exton, McGeorge and Wilbur.

Borough Council proposes a tax on dogs because they can cause rabies which may cause a person to have hydrophobia (human fear of water as a symptom of rabies).

Advertisement for Psychomancy, or Soulcharming, book that "shows how either sex can festinate (to move someone along quickly) anyone they wish, instantly."

Cranbury petitions Postmaster General to spell its name as "Cranbury" rather than "Cranberry."

Hightstown Classical Institute's (Van Rensselaer) Boarding and tuition is advertised as \$300 for 40 weeks.

An application is sent to legislature to incorporate the Hightstown to Cranbury Turnpike.

New Store opens in Milford (Etra), *Hughes & Pickering Dry Goods and Grocery*. "Produce accepted in exchange for goods."

Notice for incorporation of the Hightstown to Princeton Turnpike.

Soldier's monument Committee reports \$826.03 on hand for Civil War monument on Stockton & Rogers Streets.

Now & Then: West Side of Main Street (early 1870's) Behind the flagpole is Washington Hotel (1st floor) and the Britton Tavern (2nd floor), owned and operated by Alfred Smith. Hightstown Pharmacy is there today. Three-story building next to it is currently the site of Allen & Stults Company. Next is the Central Bank of New Jersey. Originally located between the Historical Society and Bank Street (now an empty space), it moved here in 1869 when it was organized as a national bank.



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

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

Museum: Cookie Cummings
cookcummings@yahoo.com

Newsletter: Robert Craig
609-584-1806

Programs: Christian Kirkpatrick
Jane Cox
609-584-1806
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

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 | |

Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520
www.hewhs.com

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