

Hightstown



East Windsor

Historical Society News

Autumn 2021

Historic Rocky Brook Floods in Downtown Hightstown

By Ken Pickering
with contributions
from Cappy Stults

Rocky Brook is a primary reason behind the founding of Hightstown. John Hight was said to have built a mill on the brook that led to the development of the village which evolved into the Borough of Hightstown.

North Main Street in Hightstown, Rocky Brook also passes under Bank Street before heading northwest to the border of Hightstown Borough and East Windsor Township where it then flows under Route 130

just south of the Town Center Shopping Center. It continues northward, flowing into the Millstone about a half a mile north of the Route 133 Bypass. Rocky Brook is prone to flooding when excessive rainfall occurs in a short period of time. The most notable damage from the Rocky Brook floods occurs in downtown Hightstown. This article focuses on the history of the flooding events during the 20th century and in recent years. No easily obtainable records exist of Rocky Brook floods during Colonial times through the first half of the 19th century. Only two mentions of flooding in downtown Hightstown are found in the local newspapers during the second half of the 19th century. It is possible



Downtown Hightstown after Hurricane Irene - 2011

However, Rocky Brook has also caused significant damage to Hightstown in the form of flooding. Rocky Brook is a major tributary of the Millstone River, which forms the border between Mercer and Middlesex Counties. The Millstone flows into the Raritan River near Manville, NJ. Rocky Brook has its origin in western Monmouth County just east of Perrineville, where there is a dam forming Perrineville Lake. It flows westward to Etra in East Windsor Township, where it is dammed to form Etra Lake. From there it continues westward into downtown Hightstown where it is again dammed to form Peddie Lake. In addition to the mill in Hightstown, a water-powered mill for grinding grain was also built at Milford (now Etra) during the colonial era. After passing under

that they occurred less often or were less extensive in earlier times because less of the region was covered by impervious surfaces (roofs, roadways, parking lots, etc.) than in more recent years. Greater coverage by impervious surfaces leads to more runoff of precipitation and greater streamflow.

The Village Record from September 3, 1852, states that Rocky Brook “rose to an unparalleled height on Saturday night, overflowing its banks and flooding all of the houses on Broad Street (now Main Street) in its immediate vicinity to the depth of 18 inches on the first floor.” Foundations of a shoemaker’s shop and a carpenter shop were undermined allowing the buildings to severely settle. A stable was flooded causing loss of considerable feed and grain, and

(cont. pg 3)

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

As my 1918 Pandemic article in the autumn 2018 newsletter (see website for copy) seemed prescient of our current trials with COVID and Ken Pickering's Spring 2021 Snowstorm article brought our snowiest February in many years (about 32"), I hesitated to say "yes" when Ken offered to write an article on Rocky Brook Floods in Downtown Hightstown. But I agreed and you'll see that Ken did another great job, but I have my fingers crossed!

I received many nice emails about the McGraw Hill story, most were with sadness to see it go considering all it did for so many families in the area. Unfortunately what is now being built in its place is another warehouse. We can only hope that trucks go to the by-pass and the grounds and architecture are as pleasing as possible.

We continue to do our walking tours and we thank everyone who has participated. There seems to be a growing demand. Also Old Hights Brewing Company is dedicating a beer to the Society and will be donating part of their income from the month of October. Thank you OHB. If you haven't been there, you need to do so (W. Ward Street, website <https://www.oldhightsbrewingcompany.com>).

I have referred to Roslyn Gross Rosenthal in prior newsletters. She is the daughter of David Gross, owner of the Gross Bros Mills (see Autumn and Winter 2020 issues on the website). She is 96 years young and living in Fort Worth, Texas. She and I have been phone pals since 2018 after her son Billy had reached out to me. In July "Roz" surprised us with a wonderful gift in gratitude for all that we and Hightstown did for her family and for the recent recognition of the Gross contributions to our town and area. We will be using part of the gift for some permanent modest recognition of Roz and the Gross family.

A reminder that we are drawing to a close of 2021 and many have not remembered to pay their dues. Feel free to include next years as well and mark you check for said purpose. You can also now pay on line via qGiv for a slight surcharge.

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Click on "Become a Member Today" on the website. Also look for further information on the Children's Theater this fall. Thanks again to Greg Ciano for his creativity.

Cappy Stults, President
cstults@allenstults.com

PS – meetings generally first Monday each month at 7 pm. We are always looking for volunteers.

Historic Rocky Brook Floods (cont.)

a valuable horse was injured so severely that it later died. The mill on the brook at that time, owned by R. M. Jobs, was also damaged. The dams at Perrineville and Milford broke causing the mill at Milford to suffer losses exceeding \$3000, which is over \$100,000 in today's dollars. On February 19, 1885, both the Hightstown Independent and Hightstown Gazette reported on the flood that occurred the latter part of the previous week. This was



Downtown Hightstown during the 1915 flood.

a wintertime flood, which is rare for New Jersey. The Gazette stated that the water reached nearly two feet higher than its previous record, cutting off traffic on Main Street and flooding many buildings. Frozen ground caused excessive runoff in this case. Both of these floods occurred prior to the start of official rainfall measurements at Hightstown.

Notable flooding in downtown Hightstown is well documented seven times since 1900: 1915, 1934, 1938 (June and September), 1955, 1971, and 2011. In addition, flooding possibly occurred when New Jersey was affected by a hurricane that stalled south of New England October 9 – 10, 1903. In that event, Hightstown had 6.35 inches of rain but points farther north had much more, causing heavy flooding on the Delaware River downstream at Trenton

and Burlington. However, the edition of the Hightstown Gazette following this storm is, unfortunately, missing from the digitized collection. Therefore, we cannot be certain if this storm resulted in flooding in Hightstown.

Described below are the weather conditions leading to the seven flood events and the consequences for downtown Hightstown businesses.

January 12 – 13, 1915

Nearly four inches (3.86 to be exact) of rain fell in about a 24-hour period from Tuesday, January 12 into the morning of Wednesday, January 13. Temperatures in the three days prior had lows in the 20s and highs only slightly above freezing. Soils were therefore likely to be at least partially frozen, causing more runoff than would normally be expected, leading to a second wintertime flood. The Hightstown Gazette reported that the gates at the Peddie Lake dam were raised, but water overflowed them, leading to damage to the bridge over North Main Street. The west end of the bridge was washed away, the adjacent sidewalk dropped, and 15 feet of the roadway crumbled. The high-water mark was reached at 9 AM on Wednesday, with water extending as far as what was then known as Davison's corner (now Shop for

Less grocery store). The well-known Ogborn's oyster shop had a foot of water, and the Gross Brothers mill (see articles on this mill in the Autumn and Winter 2020 issues of the society newsletter) had a basement full and overflowing with water. Other businesses suffering damage included a grocery store and two garages. Extensive flooding occurred throughout the remainder of the Rocky Brook course through the borough, and the borough sewage disposal plant at the northwest corner of town was covered with water, which presumably allowed raw sewage to flow downstream.

September 17, 1934

Over four inches (4.33 inches to be exact) of rain fell on the Hightstown area in just under 12 hours on this date, as recorded at the official station at Braun Brothers' florists on Grant Avenue. The rain began shortly after midnight and ended by Noon. Even though this date is in the midst of hurricane season, a search of the NOAA hurricane track archive reveals no active hurricanes affecting New Jersey on this date. Therefore, this heavy rain was likely associated with a series of thunderstorms or a stalled

frontal system. The Perrineville dam gave way at 8 AM allowing a large volume of water to flow downstream. The floodwa-



Main Street becomes a public pool during 1934 flood.

tters reached Hightstown by 10 AM. In the afternoon, the water overflowed the banks of Etra Lake, cutting a channel around the dam and allowing an even larger volume of water to flow toward Hightstown. Water flowed over the dirt embankment of Peddie Lake south of the retaining wall near the dam and flowed onto Main Street. The sidewalk and retaining wall along North Main Street at the site of the dam collapsed. The floodwaters stretched from the First National Bank (now Wells Fargo Bank) to beyond Franklin Street on the east side of Main St. and from the corner of Stockton Street to the location of Cottrell's Garage (the site of the now-abandoned borough hall) on the west side. The Gazette reported that "water flowed through the rear entrances and out the front doors of the Old Hights Hotel" (now Tavern on the Lake). Businesses (department stores, grocer, tailor shop, restaurant, etc.) along North Main Street had anywhere from 6 inches to more than 2 feet of water. The Allen and Stults building cellar was completely filled with water. The Hightstown Rug Company had to move thousands of carpets out of one of its storage buildings, while water covered the floor of the main broadloom building. The fire department continuously pumped floodwaters out of the municipal water plant on Bank Street to keep it in operation. The peak of the flood in downtown Hightstown was reached at about 6 PM that day. The water had receded by the following morning, and a 30-man State Highway Department construction crew was working on repairing the wall, sidewalk, and roadway. Amazing response! Traffic was flowing on North Main and Main Streets by Noon!

June 26-28, 1938

The rainfall from 8 PM Sunday, June 26 to 8 PM Monday, June 27 amounted to 5.30 inches, as recorded by the official observer, James Pickering, a mile north-northeast of the center of town. The heaviest rate of fall was in the 40-minute period between 5:05 and 5:45 PM on Monday, when 1.44 inches fell. Another quarter of an inch fell after 8 PM on Monday, making a total of 5.55 inches for the storm. Again, this rainfall event was not associated with a tropical storm or hurricane. Due to the rapid rate of rain accumulation, many cellars of houses and businesses

were flooded. However, North Main and Main Streets were not flooded by Rocky Brook and Peddie Lake because the Works Progress Administration (WPA) had funded a new retaining wall along Memorial Park. Construction of the wall had just been completed in the spring of 1938.

September 19-21, 1938

What is known as the "Great New England Hurricane" came ashore on Long Island at 3 PM on September 21 about 50 miles east of New York City with sustained winds of 120 miles per hour and a storm surge of 14 feet of water, causing extensive damage especially east of the storm center. The storm plowed northward at a forward speed of 60 mph into Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The storm killed more than 600 persons and left more than 1700 persons severely injured. Even though the storm passed about 60 miles off the New Jersey coast, there was considerable damage along the Jersey shore. For example, a 300-foot section of the bridge between Brigantine Island and Atlantic City collapsed, and boardwalks at Manasquan and Point Pleasant were severely damaged. Gale force winds swept over most of New Jersey and flooding was most severe in the central part of the state. Hightstown again was hit by flooding from Rocky Brook. Rain directly from the hurricane amounted to 4.35 inches at the Hightstown station on September 21. However, there had been numerous showers on the two previous days, amounting to 1.73 inches on September 19 and 2.92 inches on September 20. Over these three days, the rainfall totaled 9 inches. The over 4 inches of rain on the two days prior to the hurricane had totally saturated the soil and already caused considerable runoff before the hurricane deluge. Therefore, the Rocky Brook watershed was already primed for flooding before the hurricane. The peak rain intensity was in the afternoon of September 21. At this point, the fire department was called out to pump floodwaters from the town water

plant on Bank Street. Overnight the embankment along Etra Lake washed away, allowing a large volume of water to flow downstream to Hightstown. North Main Street flooded from the corner of Stockton Street to Cottrell's garage. Water continued to overflow the retaining wall behind the Old Hights Hotel on the morning of September 22. All businesses along North Main from Luria's Department Store at the corner of Stockton Street to Rocky Brook were flooded and the street was covered with anywhere from a few inches to two feet of water and was closed to traffic. The Hightstown Rug Company had to move large piles of finished carpets from their two warehouses located along Rocky Brook. Numerous trees were toppled due to the gale-force winds and saturated soil. However, widespread power outages in town were avoided. Apparently, the new retaining wall along Peddie Lake was not sufficient to hold back the streamflow resulting from 9 inches of rain.

August 11 – 14, 1955

Hurricane Connie was a very slow-moving storm that approached the Carolinas on August 11 and came ashore along the coast of North Carolina on August 12. It was downgraded to a tropical storm by the time the center came northward up the Chesapeake Bay on August 13. The storm moved northwestward across Pennsylvania and decayed by the time it reached Canada on August 14. However, there was a huge area of rain associated with this storm. Rain began in Hightstown on August 12 around 3 PM and totaled 2.85 inches by evening observation time and became heavier overnight and on August 13 (3.03 inches), before tapering off that evening (0.94 inches). The total for the storm was 6.82 inches. Most of that total fell in a 22-hour period. In addition, there had been substantial rains from non-tropical weather systems a few days prior to the hurricane with 1.22 inches on August 7, 1.35 inches on August 8, and 1.25 inches on August 11. Therefore, over the 8-day

period, there was a total of 10.64 inches. The nearly 4 inches of rain on the several days prior to Connie had thoroughly saturated the soil, causing much of the contribution from Connie to run off. Peddie Lake went over the retaining walls for the first time since 1938 starting at about 6 AM on August 13. Many stores along North Main and Main Streets had 12 to 18 inches of water intrude into their buildings. However, the fire department was not needed to pump floodwater from the Bank Street waterworks in this event. Considerable tree damage occurred in the storm, which produced 40-50 mph winds in the Hightstown area. Electric power and telephone companies worked around the clock, with some men working 40 hours straight to get service restored.

August 27 – 28, 1971

Flooding on these dates resulted from the combination of two weather makers. Rain began about midnight and continued for much of the daylight hours on August 27, producing 7.16 inches. This was at that time the largest amount ever recorded for a 24-hour period at Hightstown in the years of record that stretches back to the 1890s. This downpour resulted from a stationary front that stretched across New Jersey. The front was fed by considerable tropical moisture ahead of Tropical Storm Doria. Doria came ashore in eastern North Carolina at about 2 PM on the 27th with 60 mph winds. It moved rapidly north-northeastward and the center passed just east of Hightstown at about 5 AM on the 28th. Doria brought an additional 2.50 inches of rain by early morning, making a total of 9.66 inches for the 30-hour period. Water from Peddie Lake overflowed the retaining walls in several locations (Memorial Park near the library and at the rear of the stores on the east side of Main Street) by early afternoon on the 27th during the first installment of precipitation. The longevity of the flooding event was increased by the additional rain overnight. The fire department pumped out numerous stores and homes, some several times. They also sandbagged the waterworks on Bank Street to prevent severe flooding of this facility. Due to the intensity of the downpour, flooding also occurred in other parts of town in addition to that directly from Peddie Lake and Rocky Brook. For example, water flowed into the Hights Theater on the south side and out of the building on the north side. The water subsided sufficiently by Noon on the 28th to allow traffic to pass through town. However, the reopening of the street was not in time to avoid a huge traffic backup due to a large volume of vehicles heading to the Giants vs. Eagles football game in Princeton. Cars were backed up on Route 33 as far as the turnpike exit.

August 27 - 28, 2011

Exactly forty years passed after the major flood of 1971 without a downtown Hightstown flood. However, in 2011 Hurricane

Irene ended the 40 years of no flooding by delivering record 24-hour rainfall in Hightstown. Irene first came ashore in eastern North Carolina around 2 PM on August 27 with winds of minimal hurricane force. The storm center passed over Virginia Beach and then paralleled the Delmarva Peninsula just offshore before a second landfall at Little Egg Inlet, New Jersey as a tropical storm about 5 AM on August 28. Irene then moved northward along the Jersey Shore and passed directly over New York City. Rain began in the early afternoon on the 27th and continued into the morning of the 28th. Rainfall of 7.89 inches was recorded by official observer Richard Lee during the 24-hour period ending with the morning observation on the 28th. This rainfall amount surpassed the previous 24-hour record set in 1971 by about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. An additional 0.15 inches fell after observation time on the 28th, making the total for the storm 8.04 inches. The soil in the Hightstown area had been thoroughly saturated prior to Irene. The area had received 11.25 inches over the first 26 days of August. Runoff was likely enhanced because of the previously soaked soil, creating prime conditions for flooding when the intense rainfall from Irene arrived. Unfortunately, the U. S. Geological Survey does not maintain any stream gauges on Rocky Brook. State-wide there are 94 gauges with 20 years or more of record, and 39 of these gauges registered their highest peaks on record during Irene. Another 23 gauges recorded their second highest peak. The closest gauge to Hightstown is one on the Assunpink Creek near Quaker Bridge Road in Lawrence Township, which recorded its second-highest peak during Irene. This station's highest flood height (about a foot higher) occurred during the August 1971 event. However, within the Millstone River drainage area the gauge (with over 90 years of record) at Blackwells Mills in Franklin Township did register a record peak stream height during Irene. No official flood height for Hightstown is available, but it is thought that the Irene flood in Hightstown also reached record height based on the extent of the damage.

The floodwaters completely overflowed the Peddie Lake dam along North Main Street, and water was at nearly similar levels from the upstream end of Peddie Lake to Route 130. Immediately adjacent to Peddie Lake, the Tavern on the Lake restaurant filled with at least knee-high muddy water. Businesses on the other side of North Main Street experienced similar water depths. The Hightstown Fire Department and Borough Hall were flooded with 3 to 4 feet of water. According to The Times of Trenton, the municipal waterworks on Bank Street was under 13 feet of water, causing major damage to pumps and motors, requiring a near-total rebuild. A boil water advisory was issued for borough residents. A connection to the East Windsor Municipal Utilities Authority was used to supply water to the borough. The

sewer plant was also flooded and barely functional. The fire department pumped water out of the sewer plant, such that the damaged pumps could be rebuilt. The borough police station had 39 inches of water that destroyed much of the station's equipment and electronics, and a temporary police headquarters was established first at the St. Anthony church on Franklin Street and later in leased space at Lucas Electric on Mercer Street. The Borough Hall had substantial water damage and




The dam overflowing during Hurricane Irene - 2011 was declared unusable. Borough employees moved to office space in the Public Works building after it was cleared out, and will eventually move to the former Mercer Street School (see Summer 2019 society newsletter article). The North Main Street bridge over Rocky Brook also incurred severe damage and was closed to traffic for some time before temporary support structures were installed. A full-bridge repair was completed the following year.

There are several theories on why the flood associated with Irene was of greater depth than the flood of 1971, which had a roughly similar amount of rainfall in a 24-hour period. The New Jersey Turnpike widening project had recently begun in 2011, and a large area in the Rocky Brook watershed had been stripped of grass and trees, allowing for much greater runoff than normally would be the case. A large amount of mud associated with this flood also is indicative of runoff from the Turnpike construction site. A second possible

contributing factor was the large amount of overgrowth of vegetation along the embankments of Rocky Brook that likely narrowed the channel causing a backup of water. In addition, the Bank Street bridge and Route 130 bridge over the brook had been rebuilt in the years prior to 2011 using larger I-beams, reducing the clearance over the stream and therefore causing a damming effect. All of these factors could have contributed to the worst flooding that downtown Hightstown has experienced.


August 22-23, 2021

Tropical Storm Henri's center passed well to the east of New Jersey making landfall in Rhode Island, but the heaviest rainfall associated with the storm was on the western side (New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania). The official total rainfall for Hightstown was 6 3/4 inches. One of the maximum areas of rainfall was in the Cranbury-Plainsboro-Jamesburg area with 8 to 9 inches (only 5 to 10 miles away to the northeast), but the upstream area of Rocky Brook only had 2.6 to 3.9 inches, minimizing the downtown flooding to water flowing over North Main Street, but not entering any of the downtown businesses. If the center of maximum rainfall had been just a few miles farther south, the flooding in Hightstown would have been much worse.

What about the future? Statistical analyses that have been conducted by major climate research centers have shown that there has been an increasing frequency of large rainfall events in the United States. These analyses have generally considered large events to be those greater than two inches. This increase is not surprising since warmer air temperatures allow the atmosphere to hold more water vapor that can be converted to rain in storms. However, the 7-inch plus events that have caused the two most recent Hightstown floods are so rare that it is difficult to determine whether their frequency of occurrence is changing. 

Memorial Park Groundbreaking 1921

By Cappy Stults

After the Gross Bros Mill fire of May 29, 1920, a number of community-minded men raised money to purchase and build what is known as Memorial Park. David and Harry Gross were instrumental in this project. If not for their generosity and that of the other "committee" members, the municipal lot, park on the south side of the dam, the improved dam and stone walls and the ground on the north side would not be what we are so proud of today, not to mention it providing the ground for the eventual building of the Memorial Library in 1954, after years of hard work and setbacks. 



From left to right: Frank Grover, Joe Schanck, John Scheible, William Thompson-Mayor, R.W. Swetland (Peddie headmaster), Jos B Davison, John W West, Thom. Applegate, Sr.

The More Things Change...

By Cappy Stults & Gregory Ciano

It wasn't until March 26, 1953, that Dr. Jonas Salk announced the breakthrough that was the polio vaccine. At one time polio outbreaks were fairly commonplace and if it didn't kill the patient it could leave them partially paralyzed (like it did to President Franklin Roosevelt in 1921).

In 1945 there was a surge in polio cases that reached Hightstown. It was enough of a surge that the Board of Education postponed school.

School Opening Postponed to September 17

Number of Polio Cases in County Forces Change From Original Sept. 5 Date

The Hightstown public schools will open Monday morning, September 17. This date was set at a special meeting of the Board of Education Tuesday night. The opening time was originally scheduled for Wednesday, September 5. The postponement is due to the polio.

From the August 30, 1945 edition of the Hightstown Gazette:


The Hightstown public schools will open Monday morning, September 17. This date was set at a special meeting of the Board of Education Tuesday night. The opening time was originally scheduled for Wednesday, September 5. The postponement is due to the polio.

School Opening Again Postponed

The opening of the Hightstown public schools has again been postponed. Scheduled to re-open Monday the new date has been set for Monday, September 24.

But as September 17 drew near the number of new cases hadn't dropped sufficiently enough to open the schools so they postponed the opening yet again.

From the September 13, 1945 edition of the Hightstown Gazette:

The opening of the Hightstown public schools has again been postponed. Schedule to re-open Monday the new date has been set for Monday, September 24. 

The Names Behind Our Schools

(part 1 of 2)

By Gregory Ciano

Rogers, Kreps, McKnight, Black, and Drew. We all know the "short-hand" names of the East Windsor Regional Schools, but how many people know who Grace Norton Rogers, Melvin H. Kreps, Ethel McKnight, Walter C. Black, and Perry L. Drew were. These are their stories.

Grace Norton Rogers Elementary School

Grace Norton Rogers Elementary School was named for a beloved teacher who taught in our school system for over 40 years.

She was born Grace Mary Norton on September 28, 1899, to Mary and Tracy H. Norton. They lived in a house on East Ward



Grace Norton Rogers

Street. When Grace's mother passed away six months later Grace was sent to live with her Aunt Anna and Uncle Charles Dey who had a farm on Wyckoff Mills Road (where National Lead Industries was once located along the Northbound side of the New Jersey Turnpike) until the Deys sold the farm and moved the North Main Street.

Grace went to the Mercer Street School (soon to be Borough Hall) until the 6th grade and was the fourth

class (Class of 1918) to graduate from Hightstown High School, but not from the building that is currently named for her. This was the Hightstown High School that stood where Walter C. Black Elementary is now.

Grace's started teaching in 1919 when she temporarily took over Edna Conover's class for three weeks because Edna was ill. She did the same thing the following year, but teaching wasn't initially what Grace wanted to do as a career. For three years she

attended the Baptist Institute for Christian Workers in Philadelphia. Like her grandfather Wyckoff Norton, she was interested in helping the lives of urban immigrant families, but this career was not meant to be. In 1921 she accepted a third-grade teacher position here in town.

After marrying Stenson W. Rogers in 1934 Grace voluntarily gave up her teaching position so that it could be filled by someone more in need of employment during the Great Depression, but she did continue to be a substitute teach for the next seven years.

Grace came back to teaching in 1941 taking over the first-grade class from Grace Hutchinson. She continued to teach until 1965 when she retired, but she would still occasionally substitute teach.

Even though Grace would move back and forth from third grade to fourth grade she is mostly remembered as a first-grade teacher since this was the grade she taught the most.

Incidentally, it was Grace's great-uncle Charles and great-aunt Mary Norton who were responsible for bringing Clara Barton to Hightstown to teach for one year. They were all students together at the Clinton Liberal Institute in Upstate New York. Charles and Mary invited her to visit them. It was only coincidental that a teacher was needed for the Cedarville School.

In 1980, the East Windsor Regional Board of Education voted to recognize her life-long dedication to the students of Hightstown/East Windsor by renaming the Hightstown Intermediate School (formerly the second Hightstown High School) the Grace Norton Rogers Elementary School. That same year Grace started to deliver an annual address to the students at the start of each school year and was an active participant in the open house activities.

Grace passed away on December 20, 1995, at the age of 95.

Melvin H. Kreps Middle School

Melvin H. Kreps had a personal philosophy, and that was “Trying to do the most you can for every child”. He was a big believer in developing personal relationships with students and staff, but found that harder and harder to do as the East Windsor Regional School system grew from 800 pupils in 1950 when he started to 3,800 in 1969 when he retired. The inability to continue to create personal relationships “irks me more than anything else,” he was quoted around the time he retired.

Melvin started his career as a teacher in a four-room high school in Landisburg, Pennsylvania during the Depression. Due to the small size, he became a bit of a jack of all trades. While in Landisburg he taught all the sciences, coached all the athletic teams, taught gym to both the boys and the girls, directed the school plays, taught English and Social Studies, and worked as a janitor every third week!

He most certainly was doing the most for every child when he and the students installed a water tank on the roof of the school so that there would be running water for chemistry experiments. The water was pumped in by hand each morning.

From there Melvin moved on to Palmyra, New Jersey to become the science teacher. Eventually, he was promoted to Vice Principal and then Principal.

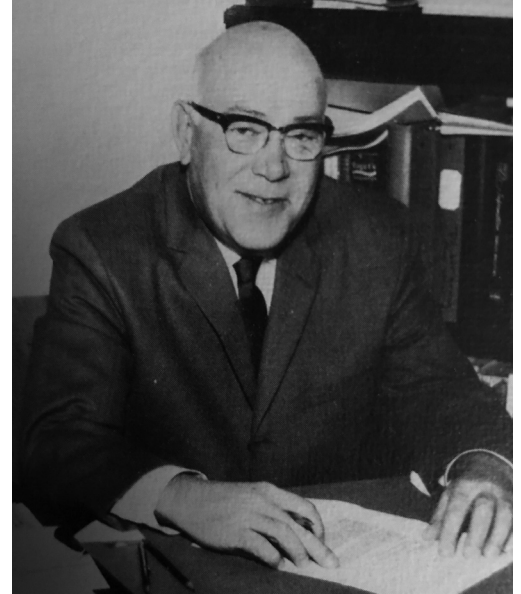
He came to Hightstown/East Windsor after his time at Palmyra when he took the position of Superintendent in 1950. While Superintendent he made many improvements to the local educational program such as hosting the first pilot work experience program in the state and creating nationally recognized reading classes.

His retirement party was a bit of a who’s who of Hightstown/East Windsor schools. He shared the party with Ethel McKnight since they were both retiring the same year, and the party chairman was Perry Drew. It was jokingly reported the Melvin

was lured to the party by Frank Dewees’ pies. Mr. Dewees pies had a reputation around town and Melvin was a fan.

Melvin H. Kreps School opened in 1968 as a 1,000 student elementary school. By 1970 an addition was needed to house the quickly growing area. It became the middle school we know today in 1994.

Melvin received a Bachelor of Science from Shippensburg State College, a Master of Arts from Temple University, and completed graduate work at Pennsylvania State College and Rutgers University. He was active in a bunch of local and state organizations that kept him busy ten nights a month.

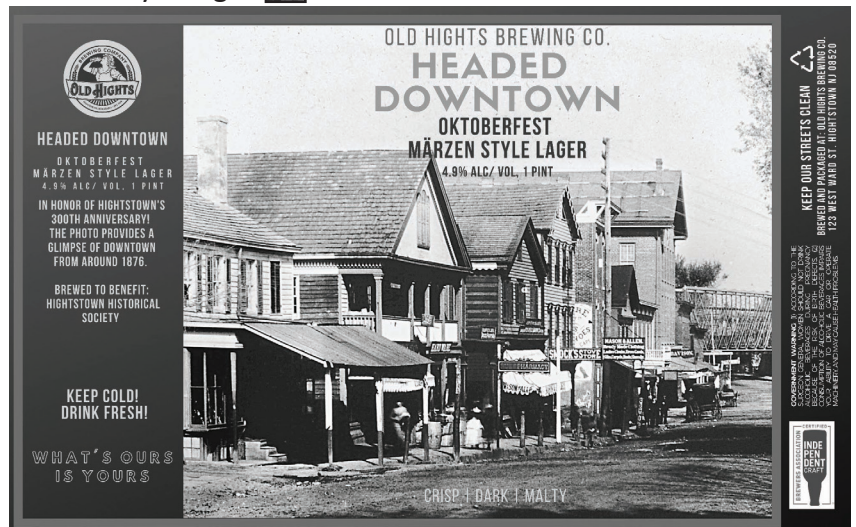


Melvin H. Kreps

Melvin Kreps passed away on November 20, 1998, at the age of 90.

Old Hights Brewery Donation Beer

We were fortunate to be one of Old Hights Brewery’s new round of donation beers. Our beer is currently available now through the month of October. A portion of each beer sold goes to the Historical Society so if you love beer, or know someone who does, get on over to Old Hights and tell them you want a can (or maybe a case!) of the “Headed Downtown” Oktoberfest Marzen Style Lager.



Label for Old Hights Brewery’s “Headed Downtown” lager. A donation beer benefitting the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

McGraw-Hill Follow Up

by Cappy Stults

I erroneously identified the wrong house that was the Barclay house, occupied and farmed by Leonard VanHise, Dick's and Shirley's father. They were brought up on the farm that was where the McGraw-Hill north building stood. The picture in the newsletter was the Scott Farm which was where the south building was built.



The VanHise Farm (left) was located where the McGraw-Hill north building stood. The Scott Farm (right) was located where the south building stood.

We also received this letter of memories from Pam Mount Watkinson:

Dear Cappy,

I was shocked to read in the Summer 2021 Historical Society Newsletter that the north building of McGraw-Hill is no more. The building wasn't that old. David Van Hise was in my class throughout school, and I remember being on the same school bus with him for about a year when we were quite young. The photo of the Van Hise farmhouse brought back memories of our bus stopping there to let him off.

My mother was hired by McGraw-Hill in 1962 while the north building was being constructed. At first, she and the other employees had to take a bus to the headquarters office in NYC. My mom hated that! I was in Miss Linda Kay Thompson's 4th-grade class. Parent-Teacher Conference time was approaching, and I assured Miss Thompson that my mother worked in NYC and would not be able to come to the conference (I hoped!). But sure enough, somehow my mother made time to go to the conference. She left me in the car while she went into the WCB School to talk to my teacher. When she came out, she was not too happy. Miss Thompson told her a number of things, one of which I remember being that my cursive handwriting was "worse than the boys". Little did Miss Thompson and my mother know that I, too, would become an elementary school teacher and have to teach cursive handwriting someday. I guess my handwriting improved! Thanks for bringing back the memories.

Pam Mount Watkinson

Hightstown's Bi-Centennial

Unfortunately COVID is keeping us from doing a big celebration for Hightstown's Tri-Centennial, but let's look back and

Committees in Charge of Bi-Centennial Celebration

To make a success of a four-day celebration of the size of one on which Hightstown is entering, means work and then more work and it may be said of the committees which have been arranging for the bi-centennial that they have worked with a spirit seldom seen in civic enterprises of this kind and have accomplished wonders in the time allowed. To them will belong the credit for however great a success the affair may be. These committees in full are as follows:

Executive Committee: Chairman, William H. Thompson; vice chairman, John G. Schuble; David R. Prory; treasurer, Emer B. Chamberlin; secretary, William H. Franklin.

Bi-centennial Committee: James C. Norris, Addison B. Hunt, Forman A. Uptike, Harry Gross, Joseph B. Davison, R. W. Swetland, Joseph B. Schanck, James I. Hutchinson, R. R. Prory, G. A. Bennett, J. Albert Forman, Dr. William L. Wilbur, James M. Vandenberg, A. V. Dawes, Martin Nolan, Michael Holland and C. Doren, James E. Bennis, W. H. Howell, James I. Hutchinson, C. J. Keeler, and J. V. D. Perrine.

Decorations Committee: Chairman, Charles J. Keeler; Clarence S. Grosver, Thomas E. Applegate, and Raymond C. Stonaker.

Costumes Committee: Chairman, Mrs. R. W. Swetland; Mrs. C. Herbert Davison, Mrs. W. H. Burke, Mrs. K. P. Breathey, Miss Mariana Hutchinson, Mrs. J. Walter Reeves, Mrs. William H. Thompson, and Miss Hannah Smith.

Music Committee: Chairman, R. R. Forman; J. Albert Prory and Joseph B. Schanck.

Committee on Public Safety: Chairman, G. T. Fenton; Frank P. Field, James M. Vandenberg, Joseph B. Schanck and F. A. Uptike.

History Committee: Chairman, Mrs. Farris Waite; R. W. Swetland, A. V. Dawes, and R. M. J. Smith.

Committee on Historical and Antique Exhibit: Chairman, Miss Caletta Davison; Miss Mary Simp-

see just how much work went into the borough's Bi-Centennial. According to this article from the Hightstown Gazette they had a committee for pretty much everything.

Hightstown Gazette - Oct. 6, 1921

Some of these committees give us an insight into just how big this celebration was. Costume committee, a committee for public safety, music committee, committee on historical and antique exhibit. It sounds like they closed down the town for 4 days! Here's a transcription of the first paragraph. The rest of the article just lists the names of the people on each committee.

To make a success of a four-day celebration of the size of one on which Hightstown is entering, means work and then more work and it may be said of the committees which have been arranging for the bi-centennial that they have worked with a spirit seldom seen in civic enterprises of this kind and have accomplished wonders in the time allowed. To them will belong the credit for however great a success the affair may be.



The Bicentennial Commission was formed in April 1921 with 58 members serving on 18 different committees for the 4 day celebration.

Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

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



Officers for 2020-2021

President: Charles "Cappy" Stults
609.448.0110 - cstults@allenstults.com

Vice President: Robin Smith

Recording Secretary: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

Treasurer: Robert Szychowski
609-448-9490

Committee Chairs

Finance: Robert Szychowski
609-448-9490

Property & Grounds: Warren Olsen
609-448-8388

Beverly Mann
Library: Joe Louderback
Robert Craig
609-584-1806

Eileen Couturier
Website: Gary Stevens
609-469-1860

Membership: Cookie Cummings
cookcumplings@yahoo.com

Museum: Cookie Cummings
cookcumplings@yahoo.com
Robin Smith
Sue Dilger

Newsletter: Charles "Cappy" Stults
609.448.0110 - cstults@allenstults.com
Gregory Ciano
gregory.ciano@gmail.com

Programs: Gregory Ciano
gregory.ciano@gmail.com
Christian Kirkpatrick
Nancy Laudenberger
609-443-6536

Publicity: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

Building Committee

Christian Kirkpatrick, Shirley Olsen, Warren Olsen, Robert Szychowski

Society Trustees

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

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Membership Application

Support us this year at the following rates:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual\$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family.....\$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Booster\$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining.....\$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Individual)\$200 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Family).....\$275 |

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

Or pay online by clicking "Become a Member Today" on our website: hewhs.com

- 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
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