

Hightstown



East Windsor

Historical Society News

Winter 2021

Hightstown Public Library One Hundred Years & Counting

By Cappy Stults



The center section is the original library. The wings were added later.

In the last issue we included a picture of the Memorial Library board in front of the then newly completed library in Memorial Park at Main and Franklin Streets. The formal incorporation of the library was in 1921, 100 years ago this year so it is appropriate to recount its long history.

In 1958 Jim Copleston, husband of Hightstown High English teacher Katherine “Kay” Copleston, wrote a history of the library. He was President of the Board of Trustees at the time. Much of what follows is taken from his writing. Other information is from the program booklet of the dedication ceremony for the addition in 1998, the George Dennis room.

In June 1921, thirty people, representing various organizations, met at the Town Hall to discuss plans for starting a library and to form the organization for directing it. Mr. C. Herbert Davison was elected temporary chairman and he appointed Miss Jane B. Donnell as Chairman of the Library Board. Mr. Davison was the owner and President of the Hightstown

Rug Company and was very active in the community, both in time and treasure. Miss Donnell was a school teacher and principal in the district.

At this time the Friday Club had already obtained the sewing room of the Sara Smith House on Stockton Street (RM Smith house) and had furnished this room as a temporary library. Additionally, they had donated twenty-one subscriptions to periodicals and had pledges of two hundred and twenty-six dollars from various citizens. But this really wasn't the library's actual beginning. In 1916 the Friday Club began to consider the establishment of a library. During the next five years they developed their plan and five years later, in 1921, held their organizational meeting. A temporary board was appointed: Mabel MacCarnes, Mr. A.G. Conover, Mr. W.H. Thompson, William Cunningham, C. Herbert Davison, Mr. A. V. Dawes, Mr. Raymond Stonaker, and Mrs. Ferris Waite. Of the above, I'll add some personal comments. Thompson was part owner of the Rug Company with Mr. Davison. Dawes was an attorney whose father Dr. Aaron
(cont. pg 3)

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

I apologize in advance for two of the articles in this newsletter that are quite personal. I have received comments from members that love the newsletter stories but have suggested there be some more contemporary historical stories. In thinking about this I found a letter I wrote to myself in the days following 9.11.2001. As it is its 20th anniversary, I am sharing it in this newsletter. I hope nobody is offended by my then thoughts, twenty years ago!

Additionally 10 years ago in August, was hurricane Irene was included in Ken Pickering's Autumn article. Central Jersey was affected much more than the coast with Hightstown being one of the hardest-hit areas. Considering Ken Pickering's great article in the last newsletter, I thought it fitting to share some additional Irene information and pictures only seen by a few. Let me also add that Ben Zaitz sent me the following after he read the Rocky Brook Flood stories:

The flood of 1971 Rocky Brook rose so quickly that the water came over the berm into the ponds around the house. It was a continuous waterfall along the whole length of the lake until things equalized. The water got within a few feet of the house. I jumped in my rowboat and went down the field towards 130 that was completely covered in water. Every fencepost had a mouse on top of it, never forgot that image. When I got back Max was furious, he was afraid that I could get swept under the 130 bridge.

Also, this year was the 100th anniversary of the incorporation of the library. There of course is always more to the story both before 1921 and after. One such bit of information I never knew.

It is that time of year to thank everyone who contributes so much to the Society and preserving our area's history. Also, I would be neglectful if I did not remind you that it is time to pay your dues. The Ely House and freight station are in need of repairs so every little bit helps. Enjoy your holidays as we all look forward to a return to normal in 2022.

Cappy Stults, President
cstults@allenstults.com

PS – We would love to have more volunteers and any articles or suggestions for the same would be appreciated. Happy New Year.

Features

- 1 **Hightstown Public Library
One Hundred Years and Counting**
by Cappy Stults
- 4 **Hurricane Irene
Looking Back 10 Years Ago**
by Cappy Stults
- 6 **The Day After 9/11
Memo to Self**
by Cappy Stults
- 10 **Remembering Sara
Hutchinson West**
- 10 **The Names Behind Our Schools
Part 2**
by Gregory Ciano
- 13 **Ely House Holiday Tour**
by Gregory Ciano
- 13 **Woman's Club Quilt**
- 14 **The Iconography of Christmas
A Brief History**
by Gregory Ciano



Hightstown Public Library (cont.)

Dawes was Hightstown mayor for many years, Ray Stonaker was a WWI veteran and at the time part owner of Allen & Stults Co., Mrs. Waite was the daughter of Walter C. Black.

Copleston makes reference to books loaned from the State Library and a gift of three hundred books returned from France. It is unclear to me what this represented. By October 1921, there were five hundred books in the library. Funding was always an issue in the early years and the Borough Council allocated \$500 in its annual budget for library maintenance. But invoices had to be presented so the library promptly purchased \$300 of books. This one-room library soon became inadequate and in 1923 a committee found the Giant Potato Growers office available on 138 South Main Street. I believe this is the three-story brick building behind the building on the point of South Main and Mercer. It was also known as the Lennox and also the Davison building. The library was only there a year when the Farmer's and Traders Telephone company advised the library they had to move out as F&TT needed the first-floor space. The history in the program for the 1998 celebration (later in this article) incorrectly refers to this location as where Perritt Labs is today: the old post office which is across the street. A personal story. Harry "Bud" Locke lived in the third-floor apartment of this building. His father was postmaster (in the corner building then) and he was W.C. Black's grandson. He was only a few years old when he fell out of the window of the apartment and onto the sidewalk. No permanent injuries but always a family joke in later years.

In January the library found space in the R.D. Norton building on Stockton Street but by March 1925 the library owed four months' rent and three months' salaries. Mr. Davison and Mr. Thompson paid the back salaries but not the rent. I suspect

they wanted Mr. Norton to step up but he didn't! The library raised nearly \$600 over the next year or so and was able to pay the back rent. The Council also increased their appropriation to \$1,000 and the following year, 1927, to \$1,500.

Consideration of becoming a municipal library versus an association library was scrapped as at the time there were advantages to remaining the latter, particularly in a small town. In 1931 the library moved from Stockton Street to the second floor of the Hightstown Trust Company, 114 Main Street. The Depression hit the town and the library hard. Council funding was reduced to \$1,000 a year where it remained until 1945.

The first discussions of the library owning their own building probably began in May 1947. Attorney Robert Dietz recommended the Association be incorporated in order to ease the process of owning a building. By-laws were drafted, approved, and filed with the Secretary of State on June 23, 1947. Late this same year



Architectural drawing of the library when it was first proposed.

the Baptist Church's Reverend Powell Norton recommended that any building, when built, be a memorial to the men who served and lost their lives in WWII. This idea was presented to Council and a committee was formed to determine the most suitable memorial. The voters approved such an idea even though a location had not been determined. The officers of the association and the search committee members were a who's who of Hightstown: Donnell, Thompson, Hornberger (mother of Richard Hornberger who wrote the book "Mash" that inspired the movie and television show), Stults, Priory, Shue, Norton, Heyer Dietz, Kimnach, Cunningham, Dennis, O'Reilly, Becker, Lewis, Decker, Turp and Haring.

Existing houses and buildings were looked at as well as vacant lots that might be suitable. Building a new structure was determined to be the best solution. Fundraising began in 1949. By May 1950, \$40,500 had been pledged. With the Korean War came a Federal Government restriction on any new construction, a fact I had not heard of before. Construction plans were suspended. In October 1951, the Association advised all of the "pledgers" that they could cancel their commitment but nobody




did so. This year it was also determined that a “Friends of the Library” should be organized. Its first meeting was in 1952. Miss Donnell, who had served as President for thirty-one years, stepped down in 1952 and Elizabeth “Betty” Cunningham was elected President. Jane D. Thompson succeeded Miss Donnell as Chairman of the Memorial Committee as they continued their search for the right site and started the process of selecting an architect.

I had assumed that the location in Memorial Park was a fait accompli without any controversy. This was not the case. The business community wanted the building to be where the R.M. Smith building was on Main Street. This was the 3 story building that had been a hotel and stores, just north of the Baptist Church. A drive and parking lot are there today. I can only conjecture that the businesses preferred it to be in the center of the business district to create traffic. It apparently was so controversial that it was put on the ballot in June 1952. It only passed by 17 votes, 183 in favor, 166 against. This fact is not in the Copleston or other histories but appeared in articles in the Gazette. Quite interesting I thought.

Plans were approved and contractors hired in 1953 and the building was dedicated appropriately on May 30, 1954. Two plaques were in the vestibule, one in memoriam to those who made the supreme sacrifice (see picture on next page) and another had the library’s motto, “Peace Through Education”. The first year of occupancy was 1954. Construction cost was \$43,514. Total with equipment was \$50,000. The building was 62 feet by 28 feet.

In 1970 when the circulation reached 30,000 books, the Board decided to expand the building. They hired Eugene O’Connor to design an addition on the south end of the building. As circulation grew to 60,000 in 1994, the County decided to expand and renovate the library as an expansion to the County Library System which Hightstown had joined in 1968. This expansion was to the north side of the building, balancing out the structure.

The library continues to be an integral part of the community 100 years later. It remains part of the Mercer County Library System and the Friends of the Library still actively support its mission both with their time and money. 

Hurricane Irene Looking Back 10 Years Ago By Cappy Stults

I was on vacation in the Adirondack mountains the week of August 20-28, 2011; far from any television set, cable, or internet. Earlier in the week, I had heard of a hurricane in the Bahamas and on Wednesday, August 24th, I called my office to make sure disaster plans were being put in motion. This “plan” was typically for notification to clients on how to prepare and to provide emergency contact information to report a claim, 24/7. Emails would be sent out later in the week if necessary and message forwarding phone numbers would be activated.



Main Street in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene.

Over the next 24 hours, upstate NY Public Radio station was reporting on the expected track of the recently upgraded category 3, Hurricane Irene. I advised my wife Chris that I was going to cut the vacation short and return to NJ late Friday night or early Saturday. I needed to be in NJ for possible client claims. On Friday, August 26th, I advised the staff to move certain items off of the floor and place them on top of their desks before they left for the weekend, “just in case we get torrential rains that cannot drain off the street and parking lot”, I told them. I drove home at 3 am Saturday, August 27th.

Over the next 6 plus hour drive, I listened to the Weather Channel on my XM car radio. I was hoping that the usual media hype was its typical hyperbole but as it

made its way north, the possibilities of significant rain sounded more likely. I recalled how bad Hazel was in 1954. Not necessarily remembering when it happened (I was 3) but seeing the remnants of it for many years later. Teams of insurance company adjusters came to Hightstown then and stayed with employees due to the limited number of hotel rooms. Hazel was a



Flooded Allan & Stults office.

“wind event” for central and western NJ so I mainly thought about tree removal and roof repairs from Irene. The later reports seemed to make it clear that the path would mean a lot of rain and not as much wind as with Hazel.

When I arrived in Hightstown, the rain was heavy but intermittent. The air did not seem as humid as I recalled from 1971 and during other tropical storm close calls, but the clouds were low, fast-moving, and ominous. Greg Byrne and his son Kyle came to Hightstown and helped me raise all computers onto desktops. I made client and insurance company contacts and then went to sleep about 11 pm. Everything seemed under control. Scott Caster was a night owl and tenant in the corner building of 100 N Main and Stockton Street. He called me about 1 am stating, “the offices are underwater”. When I went downtown, I could not get to our parking lot from Stockton as it was too deep. I had to drive into CCL’s lot. Caster’s photographic studio was under 3 feet of water as was Allen & Stults’ corner and front offices. The water

was filled with mud and there was an oil sheen on the top of the water. Worse is that it was still pouring rain.

To shorten the story that appeared in the Patch and elsewhere on Irene’s first anniversary, we simply broke through a wall on our second floor into OGP Architect’s offices and moved everyone to the second floor there and at 106 North Main. Our staff and contractors were the best: Jim Zavacky, Hanover Construction, and George Conley of Conley Electric. They made us their priority. Cathy Mazzoli, Brent Rivenburgh, Abi Rivenburgh, Greg


Byrne, and son Kyle, Debbie Corrington, Kevin Duddy, and Adam Overmyer all pitched in some on Sunday, but not much could be done until the water was fully gone and the temporary relocation areas ready to go.

ServPro was also called to supply one crew to remove all of the wet carpets and deliver 12 blowers and 6 dehumidifiers. When the staff arrived at 8 am Monday, August 29th, only 16 hours after the water had left the building, I explained the “plan”.

The “plan” was that the phone lines would be opened at 8:30 as usual, emergency calls would be returned immediately and nobody was to tell a client the state we were in.

We made a decision at high watermark that all carpet, desks, chairs, filing cabinets, and other non-historic items or customer information that had been touched by water would be “thrown out” or given to a recycler. The mud and oil were too invasive to spend the labor to clean them and it would delay the “goal” of having everyone back in their usual space in 6 weeks, by October 10th. On Sunday and Monday, many friends and clients, including a large number of Peddie staff stopped in to offer any help they could provide. We knew we had things under control and I told them, “others in town need you more.”

Allen & Stults staff and contractors worked twelve hours a day or more, seven days a week. New office furniture was immediately ordered on a “rush basis”. The rep said the factory promised delivery in four weeks. Furniture was delivered on October 3rd and fully installed by October 5th. Staff was moved back to their fully restored work areas on October 6th, just 39 days after the flood receded on August 29th; 3 days under the “target” of 6 weeks.

Frankly, the initial goal of 6 weeks was unrealistic. But by September 24th it started to look like we could do it. Thanks to a great staff, superb contractors, and responsive suppliers, we did it, but we never want to prove that we can again! Dwight Eisenhower was once stated, “In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” I could not say it better.” 

The Day After 9-11 Memo to Self

by Cappy Stults

The following are letters I wrote to myself following the September 11th attacks. Some of what I wrote might be controversial in today's climate. I apologize in advance if I've offended.

September 12, 2001 6:20 pm

Yesterday, 9/11/01 at approx 8:45 a.m., the world as I have known it changed.

I remember as a child having nightmares due to the "duck and cover" drills at school and the civil defense evacuation drills of the 1950s preparing us for a nuclear attack. These threats and drills I recall ended about in 4th grade but the nightmares re-



For those under the age of 30 this was the New York City skyline prior to September 11, 2001.

mained, although not as frequent.

Then in 6th grade and junior high school were the Cuban Missile Crisis and the JFK assassination. Nightmares for many returned but soon we as Americans were back to normal.

When the Vietnam War came I was older and a young man more confident in my country and myself. Although I did not serve, my 1A classification remained intact should I be called. Thank God I was not. It all seemed important, however, as we Americans were responsible for saving the world in WWI and WWII.

Marriage and children brought me other concerns and some new nightmares: would I be a good father, husband, and provid-

er? Should I die accidentally, did I have all my papers and finances in order so I would be remembered that way as opposed to leaving things a mess for others to clean up?

How simple and trivial those concerns seem to me today (9.12.2001).

Yesterday, Tuesday morning at 7:00 a.m., I attended our monthly Greater Hightstown Improvement Project meeting. Things were happy among this friendly hard-working group as we greeted our newest member, the new Headmaster of Peddie,

John Green. Our group works hard but it abounds with folks with good senses of humor so the meetings are always a good way to start the day. Finishing at about 8:35, I leisurely walked out of the Meadow Lakes Dining Room with Gene O'Connor, a fellow member, and we passed the time of day as we walked to our cars.

It was one of the many gorgeous mornings we have had this year and I marveled at the depth of the blue sky and the few, small, high pure white clouds. Leaves had yet to begin changing and everything at eye level and below was a deep green with the mixture of many flowers still in full bloom.

When I walked into my downtown office, a few employees were in the hall talking about a plane that had hit the World Trade Center; at this point, it was thought to be an accident. Having been away the prior week, I had much work to do so I did not

enter into conversation but went directly to my office.

A few minutes later I was informed that another jet had hit the other tower and there were reports of other hijacked planes throughout the skies of the country. I was told that the TV reports were that these were obvious acts of terrorism as the second jet clearly steered into the Tower.

I have always been blessed with a strong stomach. On the few occasions when I have had to assist with pretty gruesome injuries, both my mind and stomach have been clear. But now I felt that I was going to throw up. I did not move to the TV nor turn on the radio for more reports. Should worse things occur, I was certain I would be told, but I could not bear to watch this on TV fully cognizant of how massive the loss of life was.

All day I continued with a feeling in my gut that I had never had before and could not get rid of. Having received a call that my noon appointment was canceled due to the number of Peddie student parents that work in NYC, I decided I needed some fresh air.

I left in my car to do some minor errands in Monroe and Jamesburg. The sky and landscape were as beautiful as it was in the early morning but the radio was informing me of the absolute hell that was occurring just 45 miles away.

The collapse of both Towers was confirmed and a report of a crash at the Pentagon was made. A report of another plane that had been missing over Pennsylvania was soon reported to have crashed, killing all those on board.

The remainder of the reports seemed unimportant to me. What mattered was our Country, my family, our safety, our leaders, our way of life, and the lives of those who were directly being touched by this evil.

I tried not to jump to conclusions which I did not do. I also could not bring myself

to hate anyone that was behind this nor did I have any desire to flatten the country they came from nor condemn a specific race, religion, or religions in general.

I felt helpless. Not that I needed help but that I wanted to help. I felt that I should be doing something to mitigate this horror. Surely this must not be happening but if it was, I have to help. There was obviously nothing I could do and maybe I was not capable even if there was.

I told myself not to watch any TV until I was home. I would only get sicker and not be any use to anyone should I have to be.

Only being able to concentrate on the tasks at hand for a few minutes at a time, by midafternoon I began to have different feelings. They still were not of hate, but of questions as to how we got here. It was clear to me almost from the outset that our world and our country would never be the same. Whatever might happen, it would be a very long time before any semblance of normalcy would return.

My thoughts were with all the people especially those in the planes that were so helpless. Not just helpless in saving their own lives, but clearly some, if not all, must have figured out what was happening. On such a clear day, the passengers in the two jets in NY must have known they were headed for Manhattan and possibly figured out they were headed for the Towers. In Washington, they must have figured out that they were headed for government buildings, and in Pittsburgh, they must have known they were no longer headed West but to where?

They were helpless to save their own lives but again some must have thought about the other lives that may be taken by these devils but sadly these Americans could do nothing to prevent it.

As the experts on the radio conjecture that an attack such as this was truly not preventable or those that thought it was preventable place blame on airport security, I could not help but think that the initial act may not have been able to be prevented but clearly, the outcome could have been totally changed.

Helpless Americans them all. Mothers, Fathers, Children, brothers, sisters all held captive with no ability to defend themselves or protect their fellow citizens.

September 19, 2001, 5:15 pm

Eight days later and seven days after my initial recording of thoughts. What has changed? The events themselves will be part of history so they are not recounted here. My own thoughts and feelings are what I will try to convey.

Although I continue to be horrified by the events, the sick feeling has waned but still occasionally reoccurs. I have attempted only

to watch a few hours at most of the news. Thirty minutes or so in the morning while exercising and 1 hour or so off and on at night being the max. Ironically I have been an avid reader of newspapers my entire adult life but find that I have little interest in the words on paper of these events. Most articles as well as some of the news have fallen back into the anecdotal stories that all sound the same.

What is important is what do we do from here and what support will there be? History may forget to tell us that the immediate reaction of nearly all Americans and most of the world was outrage and some immediate retaliation was necessary. Even those that had a hand in putting us in this un-secure position are singing a new song.

Decades ago our country had hundreds if not thousands of career CIA and other individuals in our intelligence ranks who were clandestine members of terrorist groups. This allowed us to know of the whereabouts and intentions of them and many times these evil-doers were thwarted by embedded agents.

In the past 30 years however these have slowly disappeared as our leaders felt that this was too "dirty" for the land of the free. We have paid the price.

Also, airplane pilots and security at public places were trained to do whatever terrorists told them and negotiations would take place later. Let the plane be hijacked to a foreign country and we would get them back, later.

These terrorists are different and I believe them and others to come will be worse. We need to protect ourselves as opposed to believing our government will take care of us in every personal defense situation. This does not mean underground militias but a rebirth of the Civil Defense groups and training of the public in local defense, self-defense, etc.

After a week of the American flag being flown everywhere, total support of the President and Administration, and universal outrage, I am now, after only the 8th day, beginning to see some of the old (last 30 years) "experts" reverting to their old colors. Some say that America is at fault for our interests around the world. We are at fault for the Gulf War that injured or killed some innocents. America's capitalism is to blame.

This is why I continue to feel ill about the events. What point of view will prevail? Who will the Press highlight? Whose views will be looked at as American and good for the world?

Fear is being preached about terrorists attacking nuclear plants or spreading biological weapons but not in the context of what we should currently do about the World Trade Center but I believe as a scare tactic to the public (by the Press and others) they

preach to not take any action against these terrorist groups. More restrictions on good citizens' rights are how to increase our safety they say. More government guards at airports, more inconvenience, and tougher handling of 99.99% of the public as opposed to focusing on those that are most suspicious.

September 21, 2001

We were supposed to travel to Florida next week for a company meeting. As Chair of the group, I was successful in getting it canceled, not due to fear of flying safely but due to fear of not getting there on time or not being able to get back after. Hawaii IIAA convention is in four weeks and I am still inclined to cancel. A family cruise is scheduled for January 1st and I am told that Carnival lines have had more cancellations than bookings in the past three days: a net loss overall.

President Bush spoke last night but I was in a meeting in North Jersey. I read the text today and it was both reassuring and firm without being fanatical. Although the reports are mostly positive, there are those that think he is being too firm. He continues to pledge to eliminate terrorism around the world. A noble goal and one that should be America's priority forever.

The financial effects are starting to hit very hard. The Stock Market has lost nearly all of its gains over the past five years. This will affect retirees, prospective retirees, and businesses.

As for the insurance business, reinsurancees that all was fine were released the first week. Over the past few days, however, estimates of losses have quadrupled and many reliable sources are predicting insurer failures: both reinsurance and primary. Some have said Lloyds will collapse.

Besides the losses, insurers now will have to (and probably have been) liquidating investments in order to have cash. They are doing so in a severely devalued market, thus further hurting their position. This will

not improve in the short term. Insurance companies are reacting with non-renewal notices in order to be able to re-underwrite and re-price nearly every account. The next months will be hell for me and our clients. We however are still here, with family close and healthy. We will make it.

December 14, 2001

Three months since the attack on the Towers. The aftermath to date has been distressing but unbelievably positive in many ways. The President's approval rating on how he and the administration are handling the "war" is unprecedented. This was especially true during the 4 weeks immediately following when actually nothing publicly was being done and continued after we started bombing Afghanistan.

The Press, although never fully supportive, has been very careful not to overdo the criticism although pockets of the usual negative editorials occasionally surface. Special concern on the liberal and conservative side has been for individual rights. Many (although a very small percentage of the Islam population) have been interviewed and a few hundred have been detained if they are not citizens. Special wiretapping and internet privacy rules have been temporarily waived allowing for the FBI, CIA, and Justice Department to do investigations. Many feel that this is a violation of Constitutional rights but the vast majority of the public seems to believe it is necessary.

We here in the Hightstown area have been especially affected due to Anthrax laced mail that passed through the Hamilton Postal Facility, the main sorting facility for our area. A few people have died and some have become sick. Over 800,000 pieces of mail were quarantined for over 6 weeks and have been treated with radiation to kill the virus.

Because of this, we in the northeast and especially New Jersey and New York think about terrorism daily. American flags have

never been so prevalent as over the past three months. Nearly every house, business, and almost every vehicle have a flag displayed. People are wearing American flag pins on suits and casual clothes alike.

There have been warnings of additional terrorist attacks every week or so. Yesterday there were warnings of possible biological or other attacks sometime in the next two weeks. Although there is a concern, most are now taking it in stride.


I personally canceled three business trips requiring flying in September and October. Chris and I took our first flights in November. Security was like never before but due to the decrease in passengers, the delays were minor.

Unfortunately, we observed a couple of people who voiced their objections for being singled out for searches. They felt they were being profiled. On the other hand, others were very pleased to be searched. It is a shame that some people are so thin-skinned and self-centered to put their personal feelings before the safety of everyone else.

The insurance industry continues to shake due to 9/11. The decrease in the stock market partly due to the attack and the recession has exacerbated the situation. Unfortunately, some are misunderstanding the effects on business and the insurance industry and speculate that price increases and non-renewals are the results of opportunistic capitalists. Although this possibility cannot be totally discounted, anyone would be a fool to not realize that the largest insured loss in history, the negative returns on investments, and the reduction in capital would necessitate these kinds of actions.

Layoffs continue to be announced in nearly all industries but it has not yet seemed to affect the local economy any more than a minor downturn has in the past.

What will next year bring, more of the same or a return to normalcy? Hopefully, it will not take more of the same for us to remember. Hopefully, it will never be "normal" again which allowed us to be so vulnerable to haters and evildoers in so many ways. But I fear we will forget. [Last entry 12/14/2001]

Writers 2021 note. I again apologize if anyone is offended by the printing of my thoughts as written in 2001. I did not modify anything based on today's opinions. I'd like to add that as a result of my helpless feeling, I signed up and joined the Community Emergency Response Team. It provided 20 hours plus of training on how to assist police, fire, and rescue squad workers during and after an emergency. There was also some training in recognizing terrorist groups and see something, say something. It made me feel better about myself as a community member who did not suffer at all from 9.11. 

Remembering Sara Hutchinson West

This year being the Historical Society's 50th anniversary we wanted to take a moment to recognize Sara Hutchinson West. We have our museum, known to most as "The Freight Station", thanks to a donation from Sara. It's why the actual name of the museum is Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center. Here's what the Hightstown Gazette wrote about the museum's dedication back in 1999.

Freight station museum dedication will take place Sunday, October 3, 1999. Pictured above is the late Mrs. Sara Hutchinson West who gave the money for the museum. This picture was probably taken when she was in her late 30's or early 40's. She was well known in the area and loved Hightstown and children. Before moving out of town, she worked for D. William L. Wilbur, local physician, as his secretary. She returned to the area when she married John West and lived on Stockton Street for many years. The dedication is open to the public. The freight station is located in back of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical building, 164 North Main Street. (Picture is courtesy of Clark Hutchinson).



NJ). A "Normal School" was an institution that trained high school graduates to be teachers.

Ethel began teaching in 1924. Over her 45-year career, she taught 6th and 8th grades at the Stockton Street School (the building that used to stand in front of Water C. Black Elementary) eventually becoming Teacher-Principal for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. But her involvement didn't stop at education. Ethel was also the Director of Audio-Visual Aids, the Coordinator of Curriculum, and the Supervisor of Instruction. Ethel liked to keep busy as you're about to see.

Ethel was involved in numerous associations, clubs, and societies. Hold on to your hats. Here comes the list. Ethel was a member of the National, New Jersey, Mercer County, and Hightstown Education Associations; the National Council of Social Studies; the New Jersey and Mercer County Elementary School Principals Association; Delta Kappa Gamma Society (a society of outstanding women educators); State and Local PTAs; Hightstown Friends of the Library; Hightstown Women's Club;



The Names Behind Our Schools

Part 2 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. Last newsletter we learned who Grace Norton Rogers and Melvin H. Kreps were. This time we learn who Ethel McKnight, Perry L. Drew, and Walter C. Black were.

Ethel McKnight Elementary School

Ethel McKnight moved to Hightstown after the death of her father with her mother, brother William, and sister Katherine. She attended the Mercer Street School (was the YMCA, soon to be Borough Hall) as a child and went on to get her Teacher's Certificate from the Trenton Normal School (now The College of

Ethel McKnight

Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society; National Society of Literature in the Arts, and a member and Department Chairperson for the YMCA's Women's Club. She must have had energy to spare. I'm tired just from writing that sentence.

But that's not all. Ethel was very involved with the First Presbyterian Church. She was their Sunday School teacher, Department Superintendent, Youth Leader, member of the Board of Directors, and a member of the choir. She also sponsored and taught for the American Red Cross and worked with a Mercer County Committee to prepare school courses in social studies. Maybe we should have named two schools after her?

Somehow, she also found time to get her Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and a Masters Degree in Education from Rutgers University. She also attended New York University, University of Maine, Pittsburgh Temple University, and the University of Puerto Rico. So not only was she a long-time educator she was also a lifetime student!

During her lifetime Ethel was honored as Jaycette's first Woman of the Year in 1968 and was recognized by Hightstown VFW Post 5700 as Hightstown's Outstanding Citizen in 1969 (which is also the year she retired from teaching). There are also two awards named for her; the Ethel McKnight Social Studies Award and the Ethel McKnight Scholarship Award (awarded to students who are going to study teaching).

Ethel enjoyed traveling in the United States and abroad. In fact, she was in Beirut, Lebanon at a Delta Kappa Gamma seminar at the Beirut College for Women when it was decided that the new Twin Rivers school was going to be named for her. A friend from the Hightstown Gazette sent her a telegram to let her know. The school was named for her in 1970 in recognition of her many, many contributions in education over her career.

Ethel passed away on July 12, 1982, at Princeton Medical Center. She was 78 years old.

Perry L. Drew Elementary School

Perry Drew came to Hightstown from Miami, Florida in the 1930s. He lived on Second Street near Summit Street.

In 1937 he was hired for the job of custodian and fireman in charge of the coal boilers at the old Stockton Street School (formerly where Walter C. Black Elementary is now).

In time he added Attendance Officer (Truant Officer) and bus driver to his custodial duties. In fact, he was the first district bus driver after the district purchased their own bus.

In 1960, Perry was made the Head of the Custodial Staff after Walter West retired. At that time he was in charge of three employees and two buildings. By 1966 he added the new Hightstown High School, Kreps School, and Ethel McKnight Elementary to his list of responsibilities.



Perry L. Drew

Perry took this position very seriously. In the winter, if snow was predicted, he would check to ensure that the oil boilers were running so they wouldn't freeze up. He could also be found outside at 4 am during a snow storm to check the conditions of the roads to determine if school should be canceled.

Throughout his life, Perry was also very active outside of his job. He came up with the idea for the Safety Patrol with Dorothy Young and Frank Fucarino with the support of Superintendent Melvin Kreps. The Safety Patrol were older students who were crossing guards for the younger students.

He was a Civil Defense Worker (ensuring the safety of civilians during wartime). He was a member of the Elk's Special Children Committee. In 1947 he started the Friday Night Canteen giving the local teenagers a place to go on Friday nights. He supervised dances, sporting events, and proms. He lobbied to move the high school band from the back of the legion parade to the front

so they'd be more prominently displayed. He and his wife, Julien Drew, hosted annual spaghetti dinners at their house for the special education class for a day of fun. All this while raising two daughters.

As you can see, Perry was very active in the community and because of that involvement, he was beloved by all the students. The high school yearbook of 1970 has a dedication to him. He was made aware of the dedication when he was called into the principal's office. As Perry walked through the door the principal started reading the dedication to him with the kids looking on. When I asked Cappy Stults for information on Perry, Cappy wrote back "all of us kids loved him."

When he retired in 1972 he was treated to several dinners given in his honor. Several local papers wrote articles about his retirement.

Walter C. Black Elementary

Walter Black was born in Trenton on Valentine's Day 1867 to Joseph H. Black and Jennie Dillon Black. Eventually, the family moved to a small farm near Etra. After a short stint managing a farm in Eastville, Virginia Joseph and Sarah moved back to Hightstown where Joseph started to work for his brother Charles at what would eventually become Village Nurseries on Old York Road in East Windsor. Soon Charles and Joseph owned the nursery. Walter worked at the nursery after school picking fruit.

As a young man Walter's teacher, Mr. Swett, saw an aptitude for math in Walter. He would tutor Walter in math and book-




Walter C. Black

keeping. After graduating from Peddie in 1886 Walter started working at the nursery full-time. Walter had a brain for business. He began putting together color catalogs that he shipped all around the country. The first year he sold all the stock by April. Soon they were shipping fruit, trees, and vegetables

all around the country as well as Scotland, Ireland, Holland, France, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. By 1888, Walter and his father bought out his Uncle Charles and expanded the farm by 117 acres, and feeling financially stable, he married his childhood sweetheart, Sara Shinn in 1891. The farm was expanded again adding another 127 acres including a house and tenant house (today this is Peddie Golf Course). This is where Walter and Sarah lived.

So now it's fair to ask "Why do we have a school named after a local businessman?" Here's why. In 1896, Walter became a member of the Hightstown Board of Education where he remained for 56 years! He also started working as the East Windsor Township tax collector in 1902 and had a 100% collection rate mostly because he would pay the residents' taxes for them if they were short. He held this position until 1961. At 95 years old he was the oldest tax collector in the country.

In 1906 Walter took over the nursery after his father retires but still pays half the profits to his dad. He continued to work the nursery into his 60's and 70's and in 1923 he gives a few businessmen, including his son-in-law C. Stanley Stults, permission to build the Peddie Golf Course on part of his nursery and then gives the golf course to Peddie for the price of \$1 with the stipulation that he and Sara can live in the house for the rest of their lives.

In 1950, an elementary school was built, and in honor of his 56 years (and counting) of dedication to the Board of Education (he was also its president for some time), it was named Walter C. Black Elementary School. Two years later, at the age of 85, Walter retires from the Board of Education. In 1957 his grandson Joseph Black Locke takes over the day-to-day of the Village Nurseries and then Walter retired in 1958 at the age of 91. In 1961, Sarah passed away and Walter retired from his Tax Collector position. One year later Walter passed away on August 9. He was 95 years old. 

Ely House Holiday Tour

by Gregory Ciano

Our Ely House Holiday Tour plus Holiday Special took place on Saturday, November 20. The house looked beautiful decked out in its holiday greenery plus Santa and his elves stopped by to help the young ones create their own holiday ornaments. After the tour we watched *A Gift For Santa*, a holiday special (starring Lily Rivenburgh, Helena LeCompte, Suzie Borg, Catalina Lorien-Rivera, Nyla Hopkins, Nicholas Ciano, and Joseph Ciano) shot in the Sara Hutchinson West museum. The special can be found on the homepage of our website at www.hewhs.com.



L-R: Lily Rivenburgh, Catalina Lorien-Rivera, Suzie Borg, & Helena LeCompte help kids create their own ornaments.



Woman's Club Quilt

The Woman's Club displayed a quilt they have worked on for two years at the Hightstown firehouse on November 14. Each square represents a part of Hightstown and East Windsor's history. They also were taking orders on a book Barbara Harrington wrote about the past local businesses represented.



The Iconography of Christmas: A Brief History

by Gregory Ciano



Christmas Trees

Christmas trees didn't become prominent in America until the 1850s and then could mostly be found in the homes of German families or families of German descent. These trees were decorated with strings of popcorns or beads, nuts, oranges, lemons, candies, homemade ornaments, and small candles. The candles were lit only when the family gathered to sing Christmas carols with a bucket of sand and water kept nearby in case of fire.

By the 1870s, tree ornaments changed. Glass ornaments, balls in bright colors, wax angels, tin cut in different shapes, and spun glass wings were common. These ornaments were originally sold on street corners but could be soon found in toy shops and variety stores (the Dollar Store of its day).



Christmas Cards

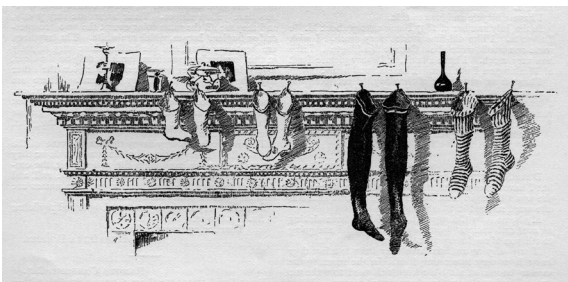
Christmas Cards were first printed in America in 1850 by a variety store owner and printer R.H. Pease of Albany, NY. By 1875 they were more widespread as German immigrant Louis Prang recognized a need. Prang saw his Christmas cards as small, affordable works of art (seen to the left). They were so popular he couldn't keep up with demand and soon Christmas cards would replace Christmas letters and personal holiday visits as the way to communicate well-wishing during the holiday season.



Santa Claus

How many times did he come down this chimney? Santa Claus first appeared in Clement Moore's story *A Visit From Saint Nicholas*, now more commonly known as *The Night Before Christmas*. By the 1850s artists had created a large collection of Santa drawings, but it was Thomas Nast, a German immigrant raised in Manhattan, who created the image we're familiar with today.

Nast added a workshop, the infamous "list", a home at the North Pole, elves, a wife, and once in a while children to Moore's reindeer.



Stockings

The idea of hanging a stocking to collect gifts was brought to America by Dutch immigrants in the 1800s. Most stockings in the late 1800s included a large Brazil nut in the toe, a fat peppermint stick, walnuts, butternuts, hickory, hazelnuts, oranges (a special treat at the time), mittens, and sometimes a top or small doll.

Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

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



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Recording Secretary: Shirley Olsen
609-448-8388

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Membership Application

Support us this year at the following rates:

- | | |
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| <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: _____

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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 |
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