

Hightstown



East Windsor

# *Historical Society News*

Autumn 2022

## Crematorium and a Tragedy



By Cappy Stults and Skip Berman

A society member, Skip Berman, recently contacted me asking if I knew anything about a crematorium in East Windsor. I of course responded with information about the crematorium on Disbrow Hill Road that has been referenced in previous newsletters. He said he meant the one off of Old York Road near the Turnpike. He said it's on a hidden access road from the Turnpike used only by the State Police. I told him I was not aware of any there, so he sent me these pictures. He also said that when he poked in the old ashes, he found old metal buttons bearing the deteriorated but recognizable seal of the State of New Jersey. He mentioned a large flagpole, the remains of a circular driveway, and some very overgrown evergreens surrounding the driveway.

I had never seen this location, but I barely remember seeing the stack to the southeast when crossing the turnpike on the Old York Road bridge. The member said it reminded him of a dark time in history as it resembled the Nazi crematorium at Dachau that he had once seen. After looking at some pictures on Wikipedia, it did



*Aerial view of the crematorium location.*

indeed have some similarities.

Another research project began. I

could not find any old articles or pictures of this location. In looking at the pictures more closely, it appeared to me that the construction was more of the 1950s era than earlier. I then thought that it might be an incinerator used by Conover's Dairy Farm to dispose of diseased cows or to dispose of excess manure and other farmer's chicken droppings that were not spread on the fields.

A decade or so ago, it would have been much easier research as I just would have asked some Hightstown East Windsor octogenarians but unfortunately, they are no longer with us, and with their passing much of the knowledge is gone. But there are a few of us left that have either first-hand knowledge or have been told about many forgotten places in the area.

Mike Mendenko was brought up on the west side of Old York Road on the opposite side of the Turnpike from the location in question. He is the owner of Village Nurseries so I stopped in there hoping to find an answer. Mike believes it was the incinerator built by the Turnpike to burn the garbage from the rest stops, the turnpike offices, and their maintenance areas; Exit 8 area being well situated for same. Made sense to me.

I then recalled the horrible death of Greg Chiappone, age 13, whose family resided in Old York Estates. I went to the Gazette and Windsor Hights Herald archives and found the articles about the December 3, 1972, explosion of a 55-gallon drum that killed Greg and injured 2 of 4 friends that were with him on or next to this site. The papers referred to it as the "Turnpike's salvage

(cont. pg 3)

## President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

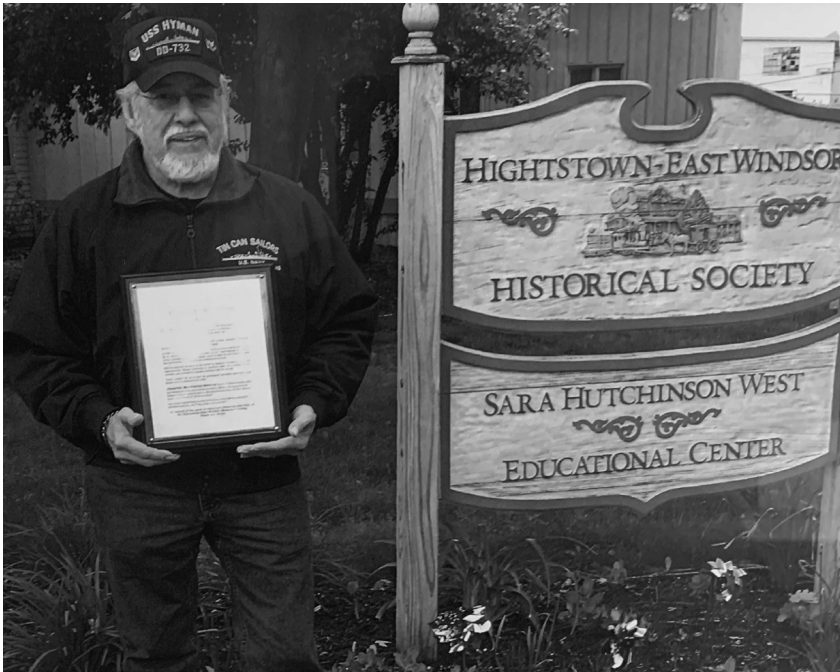
Summer is a slow time and it has been for the Society, but a number of members have not been totally idle. Bev Mann continues to keep us neat which has been a struggle with this drought. Greg Ciano again did a great job with the children's program and he has been working hard on another Virtual House Tour featuring three of your favorite houses in Hightstown and East Windsor. Thank you to the Dilgers, Smiths, and Kendalls for sharing their beautiful homes with us. The Tour will be available for viewing in October. We will send you the invitation.

Cookie Cummings and Greg have been keeping me informed of the many people from around the country that reach out to us for information about our great towns and their history. It is overwhelming how much interest there is.

You will be receiving announcements about our every popular Antique Road Show featuring Gene Pascucci of Empire Antiques. There will also be an added program this year featuring Chris Gould, our member and expert in paper money, coins, and documents. He will be available to answer any questions you have about some of your items. Thank you to the Borsuks for the items from their Aunt Bea Roger's Estate.

Joe Louderback, Eileen Couturier, and Bob Craig have their work cut out for them as our library/archive contributions continue to flow in.

This brings me to the sad news of the passing of our long-time member, newsletter editor, and researcher, Richard "Dick" Hutchinson. Without Hutch, the freight station project would likely have not been completed. Thank you, Hutch. We miss you.



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Greg and others have also been working on the Harvest Fair scheduled for October 1st. This is also the date for the Hightstown High School Reunion for all classes 1971 and prior. If you don't know about it, let me know.


We are in need of additional volunteers. Any little bit helps and of course the more backs lighten the load. Contact me with your questions about how you can help. No pressure and it is fun and educational. You will meet great people too.

Cappy Stults, President  
[cstults@allenstults.com](mailto:cstults@allenstults.com)



## Crematorium... (cont.)

dump". The Township charged the Turnpike with illegal dumping at the time. Harry Chiappone, Greg's father, was a councilman at the time (East Windsor had a council, and not a committee then).

Since there is a flagpole and ornamental bushes near this incinerator, I suspect it is a memorial placed there by family and friends but Skip thinks because of its size, it may have been what would be in front of a government facility, but a tragedy 50 years ago this year. 

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## E Ward Street Bridge History 1890s Controversy

by Cappy Stults

The "Lover's Lane Bridge", aka E. Ward Street/Peddie Lake Bridge has been a topic in recent newsletters. Although it does not look like the county or town will modify their positions, I thought it might be of interest to reflect on the citizens' thoughts back when the original bridge was being considered and built. The greatest thing that I have learned from reading and listening to history, is that many times if you hide the date on the newspaper or the date of a letter, it is tough to know if it was recent or 130 years old. The following are from the Hightstown Gazette from years long past. The first is from February 1891.

Title "The Bridge". The Board of Freeholders met yesterday and had a big row over the bridge that Hightstown wants to build over the pond. The *True American* (a regional paper) in its account of the meeting claims that the proposition is "to build an expensive bridge over a mud-hole at Hightstown that serves as a mill-pond and that if built would be for the exclusive benefit of a person or two who own real estate on the countryside of the pond that they want to bring into the market.....But the Democratic members recognizing the scheme as a steal on the taxpayers determined to frustrate it if possible."

The article continues by quoting the *State Gazette*.

At a meeting held some months ago, it was decided to build a bridge at Hightstown, but work was not to be commenced until after April 15th, 1891.....Yesterday Mr. Hurley called for a report from this committee. Mr. Cunningham, the chairman, stated that they had no report as the plans have not yet been received. Mr. Hurley moved to discharge the committee. (He) brought up the subject of politics, and gave the Republicans credit for wanting to build a useless bridge at Hightstown.

Thus the bridge was a dead issue until 5 years later in 1896 when again the Freeholders were urged to approve the bridge but



were initially thwarted. The Gazette reported, "Sometime Hightstown will find out that she has to work for a thing if she wants it. Up to date, she has not applied the lesson."

In May 1896, something broke through a little as the Freeholders actually met on Ward Street. 19 of 21 Freeholders were in attendance. Freeholder Jasper Hutchinson, East Windsor, moved that a bridge be built. Among other things, he pointed out that the roads on both sides of the pond were built but useless without a bridge. He further stated that in the prior 20 years the township contributed over \$20,000 to the county in the way of taxes, but received relatively nothing in return. Mayor W.I. Norton, Fred Applegate, and Dr. J.E. Perry also spoke in favor of the bridge. Many prominent local citizens were present to speak but Freeholder Baldauf moved to postpone any further comments and close the session. Hutchinson advised he had a petition signed by hundreds of citizens and the Common Council but the Freeholders voted 15 to 2 to close the session.

In June and July, things seemed to have heated up. Hightstown and East Windsor officials apparently did a lot of research on their own including estimates from contractors and suppliers who could build a bridge. They went to Freeholder meetings to present these facts including estimates of \$10,400 to build the bridge. The negative Freeholders Baldauf, Jones, and Vollmer, attempted to close the discussion. Baldauf stated he had been on the other side of the pond but had "seen nothing but a woods, where a jack rabbit has its haunts." Vollmer said that the other

side was “nothing more than a swamp” and added that it was only wanted by Peddie Institute. This time the motion to table was defeated 14 – 3.

In August the Freeholders met to receive and award bids for the building of the bridge. Clearly a change of heart for the majority. The committee that was appointed to solicit bids were Symmes Hutchinson, Dillatush, Dennison, Pattison, and Page. The Engineer’s name was Budd. The New Jersey Steel and Iron Company bid was \$7,900 for the iron work. There was another bidder for a wooden bridge on piers with no trusses (Ed. note – if the wooden bridge was built, the current debate would not exist). It was for \$8,600. There were 4 other steel bridge bids.

On August 20th it was reported in the Gazette, “The surveyors for the new bridge across the Hightstown pond began their work on Tuesday. The bridge will run from Ward Street to Maxwellton” (Ed – as the east side of the lake was known at the time).

The August 27th Gazette reported, in an article titled, “At the New Bridge”.

Ground was broken for the new bridge across Peddie Lake on Tuesday afternoon. The bridge will extend from the foot of Ward street across the pond to Maxwellton and will be 250 feet long. The style of the structure is known as a “through-truss” and will be entirely iron except the flooring. Two abutments will be constructed, one at each end, and a pier of masonry will be erected in the center. The bridge will have two spans, 125 feet long and 16 feet high at the highest point. The roadway of the bridge will be 22 feet wide in the clear and will be about ten feet above the water. The structure, when completed, will cost \$10,649.50, the contract price for the ironwork being \$7,900, and the masonry costing \$2,749.50. County Engineer Budd will superintend the work. The piers and abutments will be built by Wm Morgan of Trenton, and NJ Steel and Iron Company have received the contract for building the bridge. T. Ely Hutchinson will furnish the plank and other timber needed. The work of carting and digging has been sublet to Martin Nolan, who already has the stone at the spot and has a gang of men at work on the Borough side. When the middle pier is built it will be necessary to box off and pump out a large space in the pond in order to lay the stone, and it is probable that piling will have to be driven on account of mud and quicksand. It is thought the bridge will be completed by November 1st.”

### **Impossible Pace Of Construction You Might Think?**

Well, in October it was reported that the masons were constructing the middle pier and will be finished in a week and that the iron part will soon be shipped from Trenton. The main work of the pier was driving 12-foot-long pilings until they are five feet below the level of the water. There will be 60 pilings, 40 already had been driven. Although there had been a number of storms, by December the bridge was ready for the trusses. The article also noted that the bridge will be so constructed as to add a

“path for pedestrians whenever it becomes necessary”. (Note – this additional “path” was done and paid for by Peddie over a century later.

Christmas Eve, 1896, Gazette:

The new bridge now presents quite a finished appearance. Nearly all the iron of both spans are in place and, beyond riveting, little remains to be done except to lay the planks and the rails to support them...The mechanics at work on the structure will take a vacation until Monday from tonight.

On January 1, 1897, Gazette reported:

Joshua R. Norton on Tuesday afternoon drove from Ward Street to Maxwellton, the first man to cross the new bridge in a wagon.

“Hightstown’s new bridge was completed on Monday afternoon, and on Tuesday the workmen went away with their tools and machinery. The bridge is a handsome one and is probably the finest in the county, outside of Trenton.....The iron in the bridge weighs over 151,215 pounds.”

The Gazette went on adding a little historical review.

The bridge has long been a subject of speculation and discussion in Hightstown and has caused considerable trouble for more than one Freeholder. Just when the idea was first proposed it is hard to say, but for years various citizens of Hightstown have been intermittently booming the project. Among the most enthusiastic at the start were Peddie Institute and Joshua R. Norton, but others gradually became interested in the matter until, when the subject came up last year, the bridge was found to be a very popular project. As early as 1889, the late Edgar Embley, then a Freeholder, introduced a resolution before the Board that the bridge be built. The resolution was adopted and a committee appointed to prepare plans and arrange for bids. The matter went no further. Wm. N. Cunningham, who succeeded him, did the same thing and also had no success. Freeholder

Charles Keeler then tried it and it got no further.

Early last year (Ed: 1896) the subject came up again with fresh vigor. A petition was circulated and signed and Freeholder Jasper Hutchinson got the board here on April 28th. Then he moved that the bridge be built. It was expected that some of the prominent citizens would be allowed to present their arguments, but after three short speeches, Hermann Baldauff moved to adjourn, Eberhard Vollmer seconded and the vote was carried, 15-2 to close the meeting.

On May 12th, several citizens appeared before the board in Trenton and urged the bridge be built. When the vote was taken, the motion carried..... After that, it has been smooth sailing.

On January 11, 1897, the building committee of the Board of Freeholders inspected the bridge and it was accepted. Interesting further notes in later Gazettes.

Contractor Wm Morgan of Trenton purchased a building lot of Joshua R Norton at the west end of the new bridge. (Gazette 2.04.1897).

The bridge proved to be a big attraction on Sunday afternoon and many idlers wandered across it and into the woods beyond. (Ed – to see the jackrabbits in the swamp I assume).

### **Everybody Is Happy And Loves Each Other!!! Not So Fast...**

April 22, 1897, Gazette

It appears that the county believed that the contractor rigged the bids by having straw bids submitted. Also, it was being alleged that he charged for work that was never done or done with cheaper materials.

At first reading, I thought it was the county Freeholders who were against the project trying to undermine its legitimacy and make the local Freeholders look bad. But in actuality, it was Jasper Hutchinson from East Windsor who was a Freeholder and on the committee overseeing the con-

struction that believed there were some nefarious activities by the contractor both during the bid process and during the work. Hutchinson was to be out of town and told the contractor as much. Hutchinson ended up not leaving town because he was ill. He didn't go to the bridge that day but did the following and as stated in the Gazette, "and lo, while the cat was away the mice had been at play." The contractor realizing there would be no oversight did not drive piles in the amount and manner he had billed.


During the hearings in early May, it was also affirmed by Judge Buchanan that Peddie Institute did not ask for the bridge, but three hundred residents had petitioned for it. The Judge actually sent a letter to the Gazette to correct the record:

Dear Friend Appleget (the owner of the Gazette at the time who had re-printed the State Gazette's report of the Judge's remarks about the Peddie Bridge).

.... The report you copied was very inaccurate. I enclose what I did say as nearly as possible to get it without a verbatim report. Yours Truly, James Buchanan:

"As to the bridge at Peddie Lake: The first fact that we are met with is that there were undoubtedly bogus bids put in. It is equally as clear that the Freeholders did not know they were bogus and had no means of knowing....The piling in the abutment was put in on a day when the Freeholder in charge was sick at home. He has refused to pay the bill.... There has been as yet no illegal expenditure."

In February 1898, Morgan, the contractor, still had an outstanding bill for \$2,250. The committee assigned to investigate recommended that the contractor subtract \$800 from the bill. The contractor would not agree to the \$800 but would accept \$400.

It would appear this was the end of it as the only other bridge stories for the next couple of years were how many enjoyed walking across the bridge on Sunday to picnic in Peddie Park. Any "bridge stories" were about new railroad bridges being put over Main and Stockton Streets. 

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## **Friday Club 125th Anniversary June 3rd**



Front row: Joan Newell, Dale Grubb, Linda Earley, Kathy Moran, Chris Stults Second row: Dilys Henninger, Karen Klimpl, Linda Gaspar, Meg Kibble, Shirley Olsen, Lynne Wallace, Barb Harrington, Linda Martinelli, Terri Tuliszewski, Sue Dilger, Nancy Laudenberg, Third row: Heidi Franzo, Jean Miller, Cathy McMann, Karin Mitchell, Kathleen Mariboe; Missing from picture but present at this event: Christian Kirkpatrick, Elaine Villani, Lee Brown



## All Aboard! The Story of the John Bull

by Gregory Ciano



We premiered our annual Children's Production in the Spring. This year's production was about the locomotive the John Bull which ran through Hightstown from 1833 to 1866. We started filming the productions last year due to COVID restrictions. The kids had such a great time performing for video that they wanted to do it again.



Shooting the show, as opposed to doing it live, is a new performance experience for children, tweens, and teenagers. We spent seven Saturdays shooting against a greenscreen (something new for 2022), and then I dropped in backgrounds and some light animation through the magic of digital editing. After that I cut all the footage together. We're very happy with how this production turned out and look forward to doing it again next year.

We premiered the video in the Freight Station behind the Ely House on Saturday, June 25, but you can see the full production on our website at [hewhs.com/childrens-theater-program](http://hewhs.com/childrens-theater-program) or by scanning this QR code. Be sure to check out our bloopers video too.

On that page you'll also find audition information and a form to sign up for notifications of when the next audition will be.



Scan this QR to watch the video and learn more about the next auditions

## House Tour Showing

We'll be doing a "virtual" house tour again this year. When we started looking for homes in October 2021 people were still uncomfortable having large groups of people wandering through their home. So, like we did in 2020, we'll be producing a video about the homes featured below to be shown at the Old Hights Brewing Company. Stay tune for date and time!



513 South Main Street was built by the Thomas Ely Applegate family in 1908. It is referred to as Colonial Revival style. It is currently owned by Sue and Tom Dilger.



523 South Main Street was built in 1853 by William & Elizabeth Cunningham Norton. It was a farmhouse just before Hightstown became a borough. It is currently owned by Robin and Dr. "Jay" Smith.



866 Old York Road was built in 1849 by the Pullen family who started what became Village Nurseries. Charles Black bought it and left it to Lemuel Black. The current owners are Sandy and Bill Kendall.

## Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

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



### Officers

President: Charles "Cappy" Stults  
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Layout by Gregory Ciano. Printed by Harwill Express Press

## Membership Application

*Support us this year at the following rates:*

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual .....\$20         | <input type="checkbox"/> Family.....\$25         |
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Where did you hear about membership?

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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):*

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
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