



Historical Society News

DECEMBER 2009

History of the Mercer Street School (1894-1913)

by Shirley Olsen (April, 1994)

In recent years, Hightstown has commemorated many civic milestones in memorable ways. Do you recall the fair that marked the town's 150th year of incorporation or the fashion show that celebrated the 1996 renovation of the Ward Street Bridge?

Local residents who attended Hightstown's first public school, The Mercer Street School, probably remember its 100th anniversary on June 5, 1994. On that day, the mayor, school superintendent,

and members of the community gathered outside the former school building, which now houses the YMCA. Grace Norton Rogers, a beloved teacher at the school, was a guest speaker. Antique cars lined Mercer Street, and inside the building, refreshments were served.

The Hightstown Woman's Club organized the event. To accompany it, the club compiled a book of oral histories from students and teachers who had worked and studied at the school. This book was placed in a scrapbook, along with photos of children at the school.

However, the club didn't just commemorate the former school house. It helped to restore some of her former beauty. Because a window on the building's second-floor—the one that faced the street—had long been in disrepair, the club purchased a large, Palladian window to replace it. Members of the Lions Club installed it.

For its efforts to honor the 100th anniversary of The Mercer Street School, the Hightstown Woman's Club received a first place award from the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs. Today we are remembering this happy celebration and Hightstown's first public school

by printing selections from the scrapbook that the Hightstown Woman's Club created.

Due to the increased enrollment, money was appropriated in the spring of 1894, for a new school building. The old Academy School was removed, and the cornerstone was laid August 3, 1894, for the Mercer Street brick school. The old bell was transferred from the Academy tower to the belfry of the new building. The building was completed in December, 1894, and occupied by the pupils January 7, 1895. The building, which is built of brick and stone, is 72 x 50 ft. There were 8 classrooms, each 27 x 23 ft. There was also a library, principal's office, laboratory, and committee room, each 11 x 12 feet, and all heated by steam. Although there were 8 classrooms by 1905, it was necessary to rent 2 rooms nearby for the overflow. In 1913, a new school was built on Stockton Street for grades 5 through 8 on the first floor, and the high school on the second floor.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 1st

7:30 p.m., Business Meeting, Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

December 13th

2:00 - 5:00 p.m. - Christmas Tea and Boutique (Rocky Brook Garden Club will hold a sale of Christmas evergreen arrangements), Ely House/Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

2:00 p.m. - Live Nativity, First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown, 320 N. Main St.

3:00 - 6:00 p.m. - Christmas Candle-light House Tour, call 609-448-8388 for tickets, or available at Ely House from 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. on day of tour

6:00 p.m. - Christmas Bell Choir, First United Methodist Church, Stockton Street



Mercer Street School

Mercer Street School continued from page 1

The Mercer Street School provided reception grades through 4.

This is an excerpt of the many remembrances that Grace Norton Rogers has so graciously shared with the members of the Hightstown Woman's Club. We thankfully acknowledge her great contributions to the educational system of the community. A copy of her remembrances, in their entirety, are included in a scrapbook stored in the Ely House library.

Grace Norton Rogers I probably started in the Mercer Street School in 1905. We later came to Hightstown to live in 1909. We lived in what is known as the Maxwell property (503 North Main Street).

I remember the teachers. We had an influx of children in the Mercer Street School. The building had 8 rooms which housed the first eight grades and two years of high school which met upstairs in the front rooms on the south side of the building.

The basement had one large room with outdoor plumbing; the heater room was partitioned off. The large playground was the same as it is today.

I attended the Mercer Street School for the first 6 grades. We still had country schools and because of the influx of children, the 7th grade was in the Smith building downtown (now the parking lot).

In 1921 I came back to teach in the Mercer Street School. This was still grades 1 to 4. School policies had changed and by this time, we employed a school nurse, Miss Shuriff, who had been a World War I nurse. A PTA had been formed. At a later date I had the immense pleasure of being able to serve as PTA president for three years.

I had some interesting experiences teaching math. I remember one time Richard Lee, for a math project, rented a piece of ground, supposedly from his father,



Grace Norton Rogers (left) and Luella Dey (right) on April 1, 1924.

made a turkey yard, bought six turkeys, fed them, kept them, and sold them to market all on an imaginary trip—but at least it taught him something in business and how math was related to everyday life.

The Mercer Street School will be a 100 years old in 1994. It has seen many trials and it has seen many endeavors of teachers willing to do things, and how they have been carried out. We have tried to improve education in our system throughout the years. As new thoughts have come in, we've tried to instill them in our teachers, making them want to teach and to be better teachers. We're glad for a building that has served for 100 years, which has many memories—good, bad, and indifferent. The bad we have erased. We keep the good and try to instill pride in those who will come after. I hope the Mercer Street School, as we know it, will be there for another hundred years, and that the incoming children of Hightstown will learn that Hightstown has a history all its own of which we can be very proud.

Memories from Gloria Orr It is most appropriate that Grace Rogers be honored on this 100th anniversary for the Mercer Street School. I believe I always knew it as

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HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971

To educate, while preserving for future generations, our people and our community's history.

Editor, Shirley Olsen

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Mercer Street School continued from page 2

the Primary School. I was in the Mercer Street School from September, 1930—June, 1934. I remember always walking to school, going through the Academy Street area, making friends with the children and sometimes going through Shangle Alley where later on my friend Ida Muschick lived with her parents in a home there. I remember her father had a factory on the first floor and they lived on the second floor which I thought was near. I think he made handkerchiefs.

Miss Stackhouse's office was to the left as you entered the front door and I remember her as being such a sweet gentle lady. To the right was the nurse's office where formidable Drusilla Perrine reigned. I was afraid of her, but not of Dr. E. Drew Silver, because he had brought me into the world and I was used to going to him. I think I remember his giving me my vaccination in that office.

I was in Miss Conover's kindergarten room, but did not stay there for too long since her class was too large. Beth Keeler (Wham) and I were among those moved to first grade to Grace's class on the second floor. Beth had to be placed here because her mother was the other first grade teacher and, of course, Beth could not be in her class.

I was a naughty girl, and one day put my feet up on the pants of the boy in front of me—Calvin Holmes. When Miss Norton asked him how his pants got so dirty, he told about me. Therefore, I had my feet tied to the desk and was the very last child dismissed the last day of school going down that fire escape outside the door.

I don't remember anything about eating lunch there nor much about the playground, but I do remember that when we had our yearly pictures taken, this was done on the landing of the steps going up to the second floor at the rear of the center hallway.

Every school system and every community needs a Grace Rogers. She remains a positive stalwart individual who will always be in the hearts and minds of those who have known her down through the years.

Charles H. Davison, 1916 I remember being brought to school by my parents in a model T car and sometimes by my mother with a horse and buggy. I remember waiting at my grandparents home on their front steps to be brought back home (my grandparents lived two houses west of the school).

I remember the cloak room where "bad" children sometimes were sent for their misdeeds. One of the boys used to bring garlic in his lunch, and since the lunches were kept in the cloak room it was not a good place to be.

David Mulligan and I were seeing how many times we could run around the school yard. We ran behind the batter in a baseball game just as he brought the bat back to swing, and Dave was knocked out. He was put in a small room near the front of the school, and I had to keep ice on his head (he made a full recovery).

We played "Red Rider" and marbles.

I remember the following teachers: Mrs. Edna Conover, Miss Luella Dey, Miss Nettie Donnell, Miss Harden, Mrs. Stackhouse, and Mrs. Betzong.

A ladder was used to open some windows that tilted. One of the boys had the job of opening them and fastening a thumb screw to hold the setting.

Harold Brink Remembers a popular janitor they all liked and he helped the children. When he passed away, the children all went to the funeral. He lived a few doors down from the school. He remembers all the rooms filled with flowers.

Mary Corcodilos Mastoris, 1927 I have very fond memories of going to the red brick school on Mercer Street from kindergarten to 3rd grade. As a child, I thought it to be so impressive and so close to where I lived. I would show everyone who came to visit where I went to school. Along with my brothers, Anthony and Jim, we walked from Ward Street, when we heard the first clanging of the school bell. We knew we had 5 minutes to get into class. If any one was tardy the punishment was to be put into the cloak room.

Recess was always fun, the girls played hop scotch and jump rope, and the boys played marbles.

Along with learning to read and write, we were also taught to read music in 2nd grade. This still remains vivid in my mind because I had to stay at home with the measles for a couple of weeks and missed the beginning classes of music. So I stayed after school to make up what I had lost.

Bruce Davison Remembers, in 2nd grade, getting hit in the head with a brick that some child threw. Also, Bruce remembers a ceremony in front of a newly planted cherry tree on the right side of the property.

Marion Hutchinson Bower I remember going to the basement of the Mercer Street School, to the cafeteria, and getting a 2 cent dish of spaghetti to go with my bag lunch.

Dorothy Ivins Remembers going to her grandparents, the Early's house, next door on the north side of the Mercer Street School for lunch every day. She remembers her teacher Miss Luella Dey holding up big cards for sounds. She also remembers marching into school with the victrola playing "Stars and Stripes forever" and that the same song was played every time.

Betty Reeves Klank Remembers she was taught at home until she started school at the end of 2nd grade with Miss Nettie Donnell. Miss Huldah Ely was her 3rd grade teacher and Miss Updike was her 4th grade teacher.

David Goldstein Remembers sitting behind Josephine Silvers Webb. There were ink wells in all of the school desks and he put the pen up when she reached back and the pen went into her hand. He remembers Miss Stackhouse as principal and his teacher, Mrs. Hazel Roszel Waite. He remembers some of his classmates, Betty Reeves Klank, Tom Hopkins, Annabel Hullahan and Jane Hall Probasco.

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2009

Holiday Greeting Card

Christian Kirkpatrick and Bob Murdich

Nancy and John Laudenberger

Shirley and Warren Olsen

Bob and Kathy Patten

Dale and Gary Grubb

*Robin and Jay Smith, Sarah, Emily,
Rebecca & Jack*

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Jane and Joe Baylis

Clark and Suzanne Hutchinson

Jim and Louise Mount

Karin and David Mitchell

Peg and George Dubell

Gerty May

John Orr

Dick and Fern Van Hise

William and Lynda Harrington

Leo and Betty Fenity

Gene and Faith Sarafin

*Bettie Witherspoon and daughter,
Jaymie Witherspoon*

*David Coates, Suzanne Schafer
Coates, Henry, Malcolm, and
Charlie*

Betty Lou Field

Mary Mastoris

Jim Mastoris

*Michael, Sandy, Nicholas and
Anthony Mastoris*

Ruth and Charles Davison

Carole Nelson

*Tom and Kristin Olsen, Kylie,
Jack, and Kady*

Leo and Marjorie van den Blink

Jane Cox and Cox's Crew

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Sara, and Andrew*

*Isabel McGinty and Curtis
Crowell*

Clifford Pullen

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Paul and June Parisi

*Brian and Laura O'Leary, Grace
and Colin*

Cappy and Chris Stults

Charles S. Stults, Jr.

Lillian Conley

Dick and Ruth Lee

Janet and Ronny Lee and children

Richard and Andrea Aughenbaugh

Goldie Applegate

Sandra Johnson

Ron and Eileen Couturier

Bill and Sandy Kendall

Warren Field

Russell and Barbara Beauhieu

Bob and Marlene Craig

*Bob and Pat O'Brien, Christopher,
Meaghan, Sabrina, Justin, and
Morgan*

*Doug and Kathleen Mariboe,
Kyle and Patrick*

Bob Sprout

Janet Swartz

Maribelle Taylor

Larry and Victoria Gunnell

Anne Elaine Vallaster

David and Peter Martin

Lev Golinkin

Ibby and Bob Carson

Sharon Matson

Sherry and Bob Whitman

**We wish you joy, peace and health
for the holiday season
and throughout the year**

CHRISTMAS TEA & CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT HOUSE TOUR

This year the Christmas Tea will be held on Sunday, December 13th from 2 - 4 p.m. In addition to the Ely House and Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center being decorated with beautiful holiday finery, a Hightstown High School chorus under the direction of Cathy Anzuini, will be entertaining us around 3 -3:30 p.m. The theme for this year will be Nutcrackers. The new display cabinet in memory of Skip Cox will be filled with Nutcrackers. Other memorable highlights will be: homemade cookies, hot spiced cider, two Christmas trees with lots of decorations and a boutique with items for sale made by members of the Rocky Brook Garden Club and the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown. Ely House will be opened early at 1 p.m. by members of the Hightstown Woman's Club, selling Christmas Candlelight House Tour tickets for \$15 for adults, \$5 for children. The house tour itself will not start until 3 p.m. and will end at 6 p.m. The First United Methodist Church on Stockton Street has invited everyone to hear the Bell Choir starting at 6 p.m. The First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown, 320 North Main Street will be hosting a Live Nativity in front of the church at 2 p.m. the same Sunday, Dec. 13. Mark you calendar and see Ely House plus the 7 local Victorian homes at their best this Christmas season. Be sure to look at the beautiful Persian rug Peg and George Dubell donated to the Society for the double parlor. Fran Cook also donated a lovely rug for the upstairs bedroom. We are extremely thankful for these new additions to Ely House.



#1, L'Vov House



#2, Schmid House

House Tour Descriptions

1. L'Vov House - 201 East Ward St., Hightstown. This gracious home was built in 1926 on a 20 acre tract of land and was previously the home of Beth and George Wham for more than 50 years. Expansive and artistically renovated by the Wham's and the L'Vov's, this farmhouse has delightful surprises in every room especially the new kitchen. Nichole will be decorating with black and white Christmas decorations that will surprise everyone.

2. Schmid House - 301 Mercer St., Hightstown. This large Victorian home built in 1894 will feature several decorated trees featuring the owner's wonderful collections of different ornaments. A hand carved wooden Nativity scene made in Germany will also be featured.

Hightstown Photo Project

by Lev Golinkin (December, 2009)

New to downtown Hightstown are 15 framed historical photographs around the intersection of Stockton and Main streets as well as the Point near Rogers Ave. The project was done by Lev Golinkin, Chris Edenfield, and Mike Vanderbeck, all members of Downtown Hightstown, Inc. The project was funded through GHEWIP (the Greater Hightstown East Windsor Improvement Project). Cappy Stults came up with the idea of having the photographs laser-engraved into metal plaques. They look very old and are extremely durable for outdoor presentation. Fran Cook, Society librarian, donated hours of her time and expertise in helping find the perfect Society photos. Dr. David Martin gave access to the Peddie archives. The photos represent various aspects of Hightstown's history and unique attributes: the railroad, commerce, the Peddie School, local people, and old celebrations, complimenting the Hightstown Revitalization Project. Be sure to take a moment and stroll down the center of town and visit various aspects of Hightstown's history. Many of the images came from the Alpheus Albert collection.

The Hightstown Library I remember when ...

In 2011, the Hightstown Library will be 90 years old! To celebrate, we are collecting information, stories, and anecdotes from newspapers and patrons. These stories will be included in the programs associated with our special week centered on July 21, 2011. Please help us by sending us any information that we may add to our book of memories. Please address your correspondence to Linda Cholewiak c/o The Hightstown Memorial Library, 114 Franklin Street, Hightstown, NJ 08520. If you wish, you may email us at lcholewi@mcl.org. Thank you for your help in this historic project.

Jennifer Worringer for Linda Cholewiak, Branch
Manager, Hightstown Memorial Library Branch,
MCLS

609-448-1474

jworringer@mcl.org or
lcholewi@mcl.org

Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- Individual (\$20)
 Family (\$25)
 Booster/Patron (\$40)
 Sustaining (\$50)
 Life (individual) (\$20)
 Life (married) (\$275)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Please mail the completed application, along with a check made payable to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society to:

**2010 DUES ARE DUE
JANUARY 1ST**

Membership Committee
 Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
 164 North Main Street
 Hightstown, NJ 08520

Hightstown Women's Club

Hightstown Woman's Club will be providing the Society with oral histories of our early Hightstown residents as part of their 2010 Civic Improvement Project. If members of the Society have knowledge of someone we should contact, please call 609-448-8388.

We are looking for a Museum volunteer to help at the Society.

Visit our website at www.hewhs.org



The Lindbergh Baby and The Aftermath of The Toddler's Death

by Leo van den Blink (December, 2009)

On March 1, 1932, the two-year old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh disappeared. His little body was found a few months later. After a two-and-a-half year investigation by the New Jersey State Police, Bruno Hauptmann, a German immigrant, was arrested. After a long trial, he was convicted of the murder of the child, and executed in Trenton. But there have always been people who had serious misgivings about the effectiveness of the investigation, and the evidence advanced by the prosecution, let alone the overall fairness of the trial. Moreover, there have always been serious questions about Charles Lindbergh's own role in his son's disappearance. There is more than enough evidence to assume that "The Crime of the Century" actually was not committed by the hapless Bruno Hauptmann.

January Craft Class

At our January craft class Robin Smith will teach us how to make crazy quilts on Wednesday, January 13th from 1:30 to 2:30. Bring a needle, thread, and scraps of material, preferably cotton.

We would like to offer various craft classes in the freight station and perhaps start a crafting group. Please join us if you're interested. For more information, call 443-3138.

ANNUAL BANQUET

Longstreet Library

Peddie Campus (next to Kalamathia House), Hightstown, NJ

Sunday, January 17, 2010 ♦ 1:00 p.m.

\$30.00 per person - Catered Special Buffet Menu

The program will be presented by Leo van den Blink, resident of Hightstown. His program is titled, "The Lindbergh Baby and The Aftermath of The Toddler's Death". A brief summary of the program is written to the left. The public is invited.

Leo's Dutch parents spent 7 years in the then Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia). Later Leo's parents traveled to the United States, where his father finished his Ph.D. Leo was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in late 1939. World War II prevented them from returning to the Netherlands, so his family sailed to Singapore, where his father became the chaplain of the sizeable Dutch colony there. Later they were interned by the Japanese Imperial Army for more than 3 years, and after the war, again, this time by Indonesian insurgents. In August, 1946, the family finally sailed back to Holland. In 1957 Leo enrolled at the Mount Hermon School, in Massachusetts. Later he graduated from Amherst College, got a Master's from the George Washington University, and a Ph.D. in History at Rutgers University. Leo's first wife, Lila, gave him two daughters, Sasha and Karen. After her death, he met and married Marjorie. After more than 35 years here, Leo has come to love Hightstown.

*Send reservations with check payable to: "H.E.W. Historical Society" to:
 Shirley Olsen, 6 Farr Avenue, Hightstown, NJ 08520*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____

Mercer Street School

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David Mulligan Remembers running around the school ground inside the fence and getting hit in the head with a baseball bat. After World War I, when the soldiers were coming back home on the train, they would throw coins over the fence and Dave collected a tin box full of foreign coins.

He remembers that your mouth would be washed out with soap if you said cuss words. He said John Hutchinson drove a bus with 2 horses every day, and Perrine drove a team of mules. Mr. Terry used a chain drive school bus.

In first grade he remembers Myrtle Campbell would sing: "I ain't gonna give you my jelly roll."

Esther Conover Robbins Remembers wearing a brown fur-like coat to the school. She was four year's old when she went to school in 1918. Because she was so young, she was elected to take messages around the building. When she was in 2nd grade, a little girl taught her how to knit with lollipop sticks and strings, and when she was older she did a lot of knitting. This happened outside during recess and they sat on the window sill under the fire escape.

Robert Sprout He remembers having his mouth taped by Grace Hutchinson for talking in class.

Ernest Thompson He remembers when he and his pals kept going over to the girl's side of the playground so 'Grace Hutchinson made them dress as girls with paper skirts and stand in the front of the room. For lying on the grass across the street from the school, he had to lie on the floor all afternoon.

John Sprout He remembers when the students making hand gestures (thumbing their noses) at each other when the teacher had to leave the room. He didn't see her return and was caught in the act. For punishment, he had to stand at the blackboard with his head on the chalk tray. He remembers Marjorie Matlack being very strict with tardy students, causing them to really hurry so they wouldn't be late.

Betty Lou Field I do remember Miss Conover and kindergarten at the old red brick school. My Aunt Grace Hutchinson taught 5th grade there. Louella Dey taught 1st grade and she was a sweet lady. Miss Conover also taught my mother. She was a lovely, loving little lady and I can still see her. When recovering from pneumonia, she would bring me pieces of rubber sponge, with glue and show me how to cut out and make animals to play with while I was in bed. She was truly a wonderful teacher.



Mr. and Mrs. Robert Craig
4002 Nottingham Way
Hamilton Square, NJ 08890

Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, New Jersey 08520

