



Historical Society News

SEPTEMBER 2009

A Small Boy's Hightstown

Reprinted from *The Meadow Lark* - June 1998 Issue by Ed Fausak

One day in the late summer of 1923, my father told me we would take a trip from our home in Jersey City to a small town in Central New Jersey. It would be so different from previous trips, such as the Ferry (2¢) to New York City and the street cars to our relatives. We would be traveling on perhaps the oldest train in America, the Camden-Amboy Railroad.

My father had been told that a bakery was for sale in a small town called Hightstown. It was the center of a good farming area, with good crops of potatoes and tomatoes. Also, it had two good banks, a good public school system, and a private boys' school called Peddie. It had a rug mill manufacturing a long-wearing carpet called Axminster and a fine lace mill producing quality French-style lace.

I don't remember how we got on the train, but the trip seemed to take a long time, through many fine farms and fields of growing crops. At last we arrived at the station and even here it seemed so busy, with many travelers and workmen. Coming down the street from the station, we first saw the large white Old Hights Hotel and then the center of the town, with the Pharmacy and, opposite, the Luria Department Store. We were impressed by quite a few Ford and Dodge autos.

We had lunch at the Hotel and met a Mr. John Schaille, who turned me over

to some young people who gave me a tour of the downtown area. My father was taken to the bakery, which was the center store of the Davison building - modern, built in 1921. Torn down in 1964, it was next to where First Union Bank is now. It had three stores and six apartments.

Several hours were spent in negotiations, but I didn't mind, as the people were friendly. Finally my father was pleased - and he was anxious to get busy. So we took the train home, with the understanding that we would return in about ten days and begin ownership. (We sold Fausak City Bakery in 1945, and it eventually closed in 1964, when the building was torn down.)

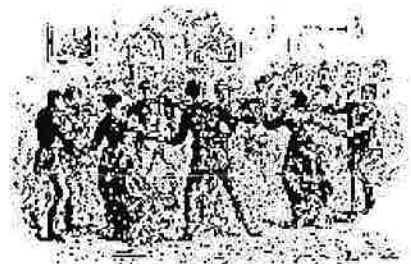
There was so much to think about, as everything seemed so different, but in a good way. I thought it so much more interesting than city life, and people so friendly that it would be fine place to grow up.

We moved into the second bungalow down by Peddie Lake. I was happy as we saw some boys fishing, and they told me skating was good in the winter. My mother was not entirely pleased, as Hightstown still did not have gas, and the kerosene cookstove was a mess with the heat and fumes.

We went to school on Morrison Avenue in a couple of bungalows, rented because of a Baby Boom several

years earlier. In those days farm boys went to school only when there was no work on the farms. So we had a couple of towering fellows who did things to the central hot air furnace and got us out of school on some days much earlier than usual.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 27 Program, "Early Pennsylvania Railroad Lines in the Garden State", presented by John Kilbride.

OCTOBER

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

NOVEMBER

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

DECEMBER

- 13 Christmas Tea, 2-4:00 p.m.,
Live Nativity, 2:00 p.m., Candle-light House Tour, 3- 6:00 p.m.

George F. Dennis' World War II Writings

by Dr. David Martin (April, 2009)

In the June newsletter I outlined the life and military service of Pfc. George Foster Dennis, brother of longtime *Hightstown Gazette* editor and publisher Kathryn S. Dennis, who served in the 45th "Thunderbird" Division and was mortally wounded in France on September 10, 1944. George was an accomplished writer and was serving as regimental historian and public relations specialist in the 180th Regiment Headquarters Company when he died. During his army career he wrote a regular column for the *Gazette* describing his experiences in training camp and at the front. While in the service he saw action in North Africa, Italy (particularly at Anzio), and the invasion of southern France.

During his final campaign he was much charmed by the beauty of the French countryside, though the rough terrain made travel difficult and combat at times intense. He also was much taken by the industriousness of the French farmers, whom he much preferred to the Italians he had met. The last column he wrote, entitled "France from a Hilltop," dated August 31, 1944, was published in the *Gazette* just a week before he was killed. It was a wistful essay eulogizing the beauty of nature and was much more poetic than his earlier columns. I hope you will enjoy reading it.

France From a Hilltop

by Private First Class George F. Dennis, Field Correspondent with 45th Division *Hightstown Gazette*, September 28, 1944

With the 45th Division of the Seventh Army in Southern France, Aug. 31 (Delayed).

A view of one of France's loveliest valleys from a hilltop is a scene that can be duplicated nowhere in the United States, although central New York along the Cherry Valley route between Albany

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and Syracuse comes the closest to it that I know. The beauty of a France at peace is awe inspiring.

I climbed to the top of one hill to glimpse the spectacle that lay before me. Behind me was another knoll which rose perhaps 40 feet. The sides were cultivated and had a field of corn, parsnips, turnips, green beans, and tobacco surrounded by a field of freshly mown hay. Between the field of corn and me was a line of blackberry bushes, soon to be bearing fruit.

Immediately below me on a sort of terrace lies a wagon trail lined on either side by a long row of trees. The regimental CP is located along the trail and is invisible from where I sit. Below the CP is a field of green on the right which blends into a light shade of brown, evidence that hay or timothy has just been cut. At the end near a long thin strip of corn is a new mowing machine, standing idle. This field is ideal for a soccer game, remarked a soldier, and except for a slight grade he was right. It was about 200 yards wide and 500 yards long, ending in a fairly steep rise on another knoll.

A good road comes next and cuts the terrain neatly and fits easily into the picture. Trees or bushes line most of the way. Far off in the distance I can see the telephone or electric poles running cross country and disappearing behind a row of trees to the West.

Several villages lie in the bottom of the valley. The smallest is on my left, then comes the largest of the series, after which follow two or three more. Houses are clustered in groups to form these villages but here and there a farmhouse and the outlying buildings dot the landscape. The structures are all of stone and each has a red tile roof. They can be best described as picturesque; there

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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.

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A Small Boy's Hightstown

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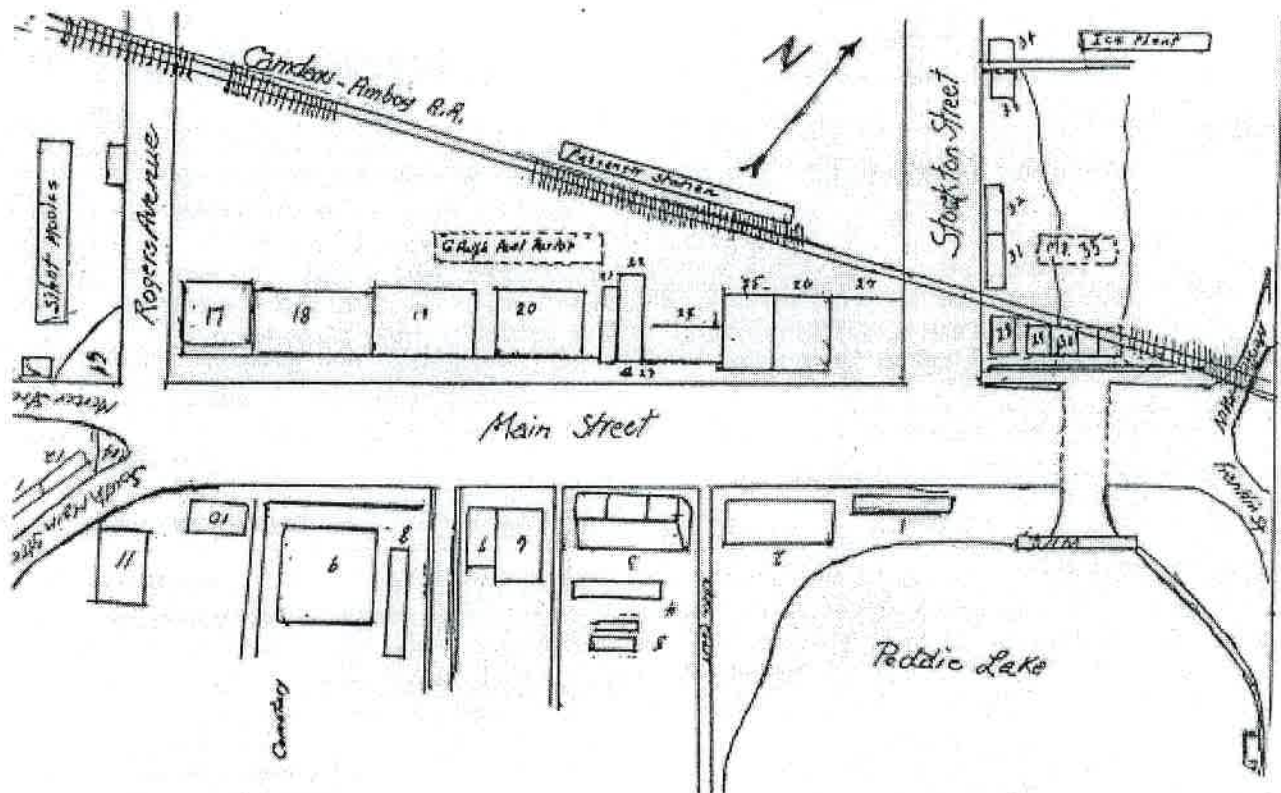
Had the first of many good teachers and enjoyed school, and on the way home I walked the busy business area and got to know many of the merchants who were friendly and also good prosperous businessmen.

I remember the many interesting places in town and the fine stores, with their owner-sales people; you could get most anything you desired, and Hightstown was a prosperous business area. The time to really see it at its best was Saturday night; the banks were both open, and everyone came to Hightstown to shop and just meet their friends and talk about their farms and their work at the rug mill and lace mill.

Time came when the banks closed on Saturday nights. Then the malls came, and an era came to an end.

Ed Fausak

Note from Richard Hutchinson: 1) the manager of the Old Hights Hotel (mentioned in paragraph 3 of this article) was John Scheible; and 2) as a kid, I used to go to that bakery and at Christmas I was able to pick out one gingerbread man. When I was older and able to go fishing in the lake with the guys, we would stop in the alley next to the bakery that led to the lake and the bungalows back there and ask the baker for some dough for bait. He would throw a lump of dough to us for bait.



- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Old Hights Hotel | 13. Miss J.B. Donnell,
School Superintendent | 25. Fenton's Jewelry Shop |
| 2. 1st Nat'l Bank | 14. Post Office | 26. Wilson Butcher Shop |
| 3. Davison Bldg. Rest.,
Bakery, Men's Store | 15. Dey Butcher Shop | 27. Cunningham Pharmacy |
| 4. Hightstown Gazette | 16. Oghorn's Oyster House | 28. Luria Department Store |
| 5. Bungalows | 17. Embley's Drug Store | 29. Stanley Stults |
| 6. Schlosberg | 18. Allen Ely Hdwe/Plumb | 30. Barber Shop |
| 7. Dave Horn photo | 19. Candy Kitchen | 31. Town Hall |
| 8. Sunday School | 20. Hightstown Hardware | 32. Jail |
| 9. Baptist Church | 21. Odd Fellows Hall | 33. Goldstein Men's Store |
| 10. Mueller Deli | 22. Weller Brothers Smoke | 34. Library |
| 11. Universalist Church | 23. Statue of Alwee Indian | 35. St. Paul's Lutheran Church |
| 12. Farmers and Traders Tel. | 24. Perdoni Green Grocers | |

The Railroads of Hightstown To Be Featured

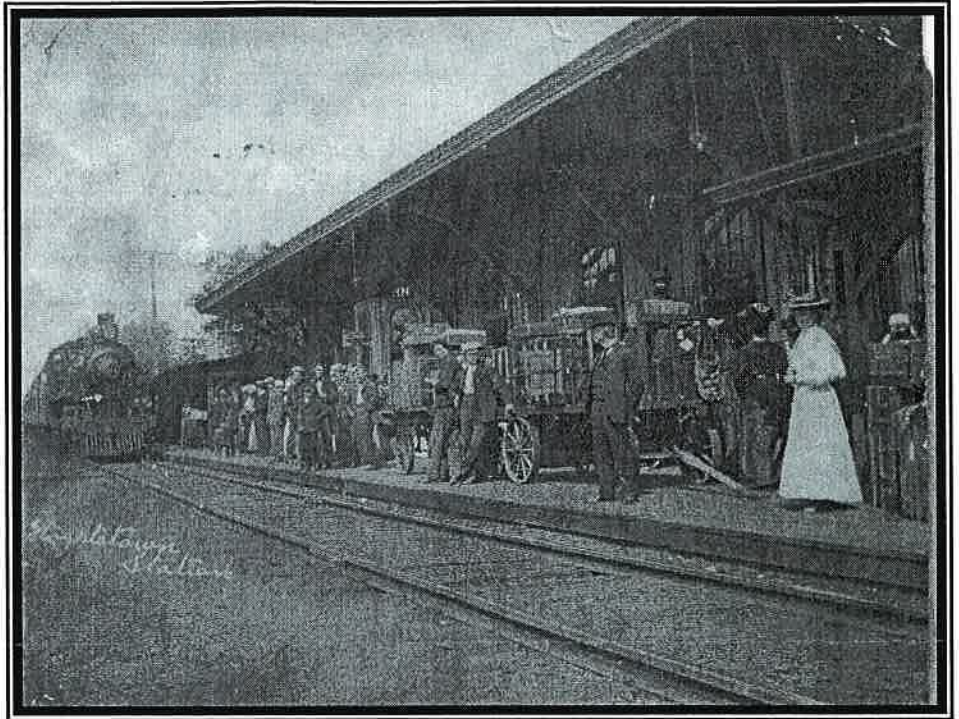
(Hightstown, NJ) - "The Railroads Of Hightstown" will be the subject of an illustrated lecture at the next program of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, Sunday, September 27, 2009 at 3:00 pm at the Ely House and Museum, 164 No. Main Street in Hightstown. The program will be presented by local rail historian John Kilbride, president of the Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group.

The presentation will provide a retrospective of the Camden & Amboy Railroad's historical significance in the development of the region's commerce. "Initial 1830's stagecoach trips between New York and Philadelphia took six days," said Kilbride. "With the introduction of steam power by the railroad, the time was cut to eight hours!" The story of the "John Bull" locomotive will be included in the program. Arriving from England in several crates without instructions, it was assembled in Bordentown within three months and operated along the railroad's routes for thirty years before retirement. The initial rivalry with the Delaware & Raritan Canal, construction and operation of the railroad through Hightstown and early glimpses of railroad travel will be reviewed, and provide attendees with unique insights into the development and influences of both the Camden & Amboy and Pemberton & Hightstown Railroads that has evolved into today's modern conveyance.

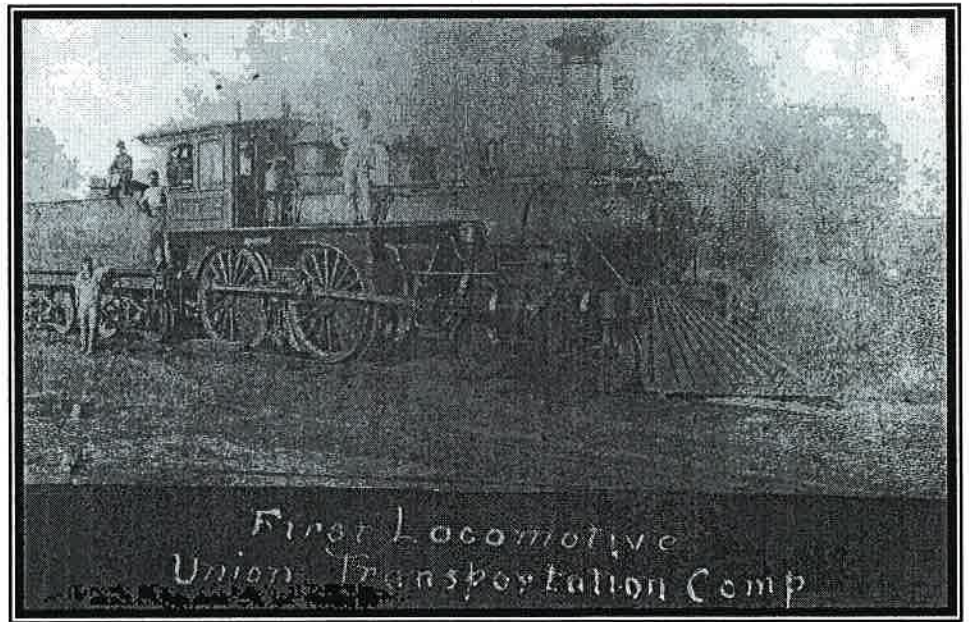
Kilbride, an railroad employee, is also an avid train modeler and published rail historian. A resident of East Windsor, he has recently led two formal tour groups along varied

present-day railroad routes and published accompanying illustrated tour guides.

The public is invited to attend the lecture. For more information on this topic, email jktrr@msn.com. For information on this event or the Hightstown - East Windsor Historical Society, please call 609-448-1294.



Camden & Amboy Railroad in Hightstown, 1832-1964 - Carried passengers, industrial freight and farmer's crops to large cities



Pemberton-Hightstown Railroad in Hightstown, 1868-1977 - Brought local farmer's crops and dairy products to large cities

Christmas Candlelight House Tour

The Christmas Candlelight House Tour is sponsored by the Hightstown Woman's Club and will be held on Sunday, December 13, 2009 in conjunction with Annual Historical Society Christmas Tea 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Several of our Society members' homes are included in the tour, and we thank them for their participation in this worthwhile fund raiser.

Tickets can be purchased after 1:00 p.m. on the day of tour for \$15 at The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society Ely House at 124 North Main Street, Hightstown where the Society will be having their Christmas Tea. Christmas Arrangements and gifts will be for sale in the freight station, designed by Rocky Brook Garden Club. Pre-Sale Tickets can be purchased for \$10 at Perennial Homes on Ward Street, Hightstown, or at Lee's Turkey Farm, 201 Hickory Corner Rd., East Windsor, and at the office of the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown, 320 North Main Street, Hightstown.

Live Nativity at 2:00 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown, 320 North Main Street, Hightstown.

House Tour is from 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. followed by Christmas Music at the First United Methodist Church, 187 Stockton Street, Hightstown at 6:00 p.m.

1. The First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown - Live Nativity - OUTSIDE in front of church property—320 North Main St.

2. Nichole and Pavel L'vov, 201 East Ward St.

3. Eva and Richard Teller, 218 South Main St.

4. Kathy and Dave Zaiser, 402 South Main St.

5. Donna Schmid, 301 Mercer St.

6. Lora Lee Swab and Vincent McDonald, 309 Mercer St.

7. Kristina and Jim Zito, 123 Morrison Ave.

8. Tom and Susan Muza, 160 Second Ave.

9. Ronnie and Janet Lee, Lee's Turkey Farm, 201 Hickory Corner Rd. East Windsor

10. The First United Methodist Church 6:00 p.m. following tour, 187 Stockton St., Hightstown

Note: Homes may be toured in any order.

Proceeds will go to Music Department at Hightstown East Windsor High School and other Woman's Club Charities including state project-Autism New Jersey



Arts and Crafts house is the home of Kathy and Dave Zaiser (members of the Society)



Donna Schmid's home (also a member of the Society)



Left to right is Peg and George Dubell, Kathryn Dennis, and George and Beth Wham in front of the Wham House on East Ward street. The Wham House, owned by the Wham family for over 50 years, will be featured on the Candlelight House Tour on December 13th. Both the Wham and Dubell Families are Charter Members of the Society. Peg has been our Museum Chairman and George our Society Treasurer in the past. Both families continue to support our Society. The L'vovs, also Society members, now own this beautiful farmhouse to be toured on December 13, 2009.

France From a Hilltop ,continued from page 2

is no other word for the scene that presents itself to the human eye.

The rolling countryside is divided not into formal patterns as devised by the "experts" but rather into designs conforming to the terrain itself. Trees of all varieties are everywhere. They form lanes, windbreaks, and fences. Three hillsides are covered with them except for a clearing or two. The verdante [sic] green of their luxurious foliage makes the rustic tile roofs of the houses stand out as if nature had wrought her handiwork like that on purpose.

There is a small lake off to the right and I can barely see it because of the trees. Houses are plentiful along the sides. From here the water appears motionless, but as I passed by the lake earlier I could see the blue waves caressing the shores with loving tenderness. God blessed the valley and made it complete when he put that body of water where he did.

A mountain range far away seems to top the hillsides in one long, ragged line. There is but one space where I cannot see a jagged peak dominating the background. The sun is shining through a thin veneer of clouds, giving a hazy outlook but nevertheless enhancing the beauty of that upon which it beams. There is a cooling breeze which wafts to my ears the voices of men and women below and which keeps the day from being excessively hot.

Directly across the highway is another cultivated knoll which has a patch of corn, potatoes, and turnips in the midst of another field of freshly mown hay. Here I can see the brown earth competing with the green stalks as to which shall first catch the eye. To the left are the farmhouse and the barns. A haystack is near one of the latter. As it is noon the workers are eating now. Two rakes lie idle in the meadow.

The French peasants are preparing their fields for the coming fall and winter. An industrious people, they have worked hard to clean up their property, bringing in the fodder for their cattle, harvesting the crops, and in general drawing everything as close to the houses as possible. Pumpkin patches are amongst the corn. I've seen names of children (Renee and Annette) cut into the melons as is a Hallowe'en custom in the States.

Some of them are already a deep yellow and pumpkin pies are in the offing.

The bells in the churches are ringing out the hour; 12 times their notes are pealed and roll across the hill and dale. They can be heard far away because the stillness is conducive to easy passage of air waves which bear the musical lyrics.



George F. Dennis

Below on the right, beyond the MP at the road leading into this CP, is a walled in garden with sundry vegetables

growing therein. Ah, there go a group of women to distract the attention of the MP. They gather about him to chatter noisily, for we are the first Americans they've seen.

The only sound to break in on my peaceful thoughts is that of a peep, a two and one-half ton truck, or an occasional passing half-track vehicle. Now there is not a murmur but that of the wind. There goes a truck, roaring by. Ah, an airplane skirts the valley and speeds away. A solitary blackbird glides o'erhead, contented to flap its wings enough to keep it in air as it watches the calm scene below.

"God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." Robert Browning would have agreed.

Trees, trees, trees. They are everywhere. There is no broad expanse of wheat or open potato fields as is New Jersey or in the Middle West. There is no soil erosion problem here. The popular song "Study in Brown" might have been written from a similar hilltop a little later in the year.

On the edge of the woods to my right is an ancient chateau with rounded towers topped by spires on each corner. A man, his wife, and three children with their governess greeted the men as they came to set up the CP. Before a half an hour was gone they had served the first comers hard boiled eggs, bread, and "du vin rouge" (red wine). They were overjoyed to see the Americans.

Now we must leave this scenic wonderland and move onward again. There is no one who has not been impressed by what he has seen. He will keep this vision ever in his memory when he returns to the United States. Seen from a hilltop, France, at peace, is a thing of beauty.

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Hilltop continued from page 6

[Editor's note: this is the last column George F. Dennis wrote. It was penned on August 31, 1944, shortly before his death on September 11, and was printed in the *Gazette* seventeen days after he died.]

Kathryn showed her love for her brother by requesting in her will that his writings be collected, edited and published. As I outlined in the June newsletter, I located and transcribed around 60 of his letters and published them in 2007 along with a brief history of the Dennis family.

Note:

Dr. David Martin is past President of the HEWS, and has also served as the organization's Treasurer and Library Committee head. He is Head of the Language Department and Archivist at the Peddie School in Hightstown and resides in nearby Twin Rivers. Copies of *"Tossed Around": The World War II Writings of Pfc. George Foster Dennis* are available for \$25 (\$30 postpaid) from Longsteet House, PO Box 730, Hightstown, NJ. 08520.

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

Society News

Mary Sullivan, member of both Hightstown Woman's Club and our Society, is working on a grant proposal for a Society part-time curator.

Alex Prunchak, a local boyscout and member of Society, is working on his Eagle Scout project with John Kilbride. Alex has asked permission to place a strip of railroad track on sleepers as a exhibit on the North side of the property along side of the freight station.

JOIN TODAY, BECOME A MEMBER!

Individual Membership
\$20.00

Family Membership
\$25.00

Booster/Patron
Membership
\$40.00

Sustaining Membership
\$50.00

Life (individual) Membership
\$200.00

Life (married) Membership
\$275.00

Annual Membership Application (January - December)

Individual Family Booster/Patron
 Sustaining Life (individual) Life (married)

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:

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

Society Acquisitions



Julie Ely needs a volunteer to help her record asessions, and she is willing to teach a member what would be required.



Nancy Cunningham gave the Society the Cunningham Pharmacy scale from 1877 on permanent loan.



Harry Koon's grandmother's wedding certificate. The marriage certificate is for Mary Ella Emmons and George Norris dated 1887.



Mrs. And Mrs. Robert Craig
4002 Nottingham Way
Hamilton Square N. J. 08690

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

