

HIGHTSTOWN
NEW



EAST WINDSOR
JERSEY

Historical Society News

DECEMBER 2010

The Railroads of Hightstown

Part three of three

By John Kilbride

A Glimpse Into Hightstown's Rail Facilities

The original passenger station was located in a dwelling on Stockton Street originally built in 1785. A small freight house was located at the Rogers Ave. crossing. In 1885, a new freight house was built on the east side of the tracks, behind the present-day post office building. (An access road—East Liberty Street, now gone—ran parallel to the tracks and provided a way for horse-drawn wagons to deliver and pick-up their shipments.)

Arrival of the P&H (Pemberton & Hightstown) Railroad in early 1868 provided the

impetus for a new and larger freight building. Dismantling of the old building began in September 1869, with freight temporarily being handled in a brick building across from the (new) passenger station. By the end of October, the new freight station was completed, prompting the local paper to report "the new depot of the C&A (Camden & Amboy) Railroad presents a fine appearance; in fact, is no disgrace to the many fine build-

action by the fire department prevented any serious loss. Another close call occurred in May of 1873 when the roof ignited. An alarm was given, but before the fire department responded, one of the steam locomotives pulled up and water from the tender was used to douse the flames.



Postcard showing railroad tracks and bridge from south (right) to north (left), crossing Peddie lake, courtesy of HEWHS.



The "new" freight and passenger station circa 1910. Located at the top of Rogers Street, one block up from Mercer Street. This picture is affectionately called "The Lady in White." (HEWHS)

ings in that part of the borough!"

In 1870, the structure came close to being destroyed by fire, a fire caused by rain! A pile of lime had been left on the station's platform in such a locale that rain-water dripped onto it. Heat generated by slaking set fire to the side of the building and only quick

(About the passenger station: sources speak of the "new" passenger station in 1869. It is known the old structure was sold in 1867 and moved off the railroad's property and relocated next to a hotel, where it became a barber shop! It is known to have survived the great fire of 1882.)

In 1885, Hightstown adopted a sanitary code. Later that year, they asked the railroad to clean up and drain the swamp in the rear of the freight station. This was agreed

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 2010

- 7 Monthly meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 12 Christmas Tea, Ely House, 2-4 p.m.

January 2011

- 16 Annual Banquet

HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hightstown, New Jersey
 Founded 1971

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

Shirley Olsen, Editor



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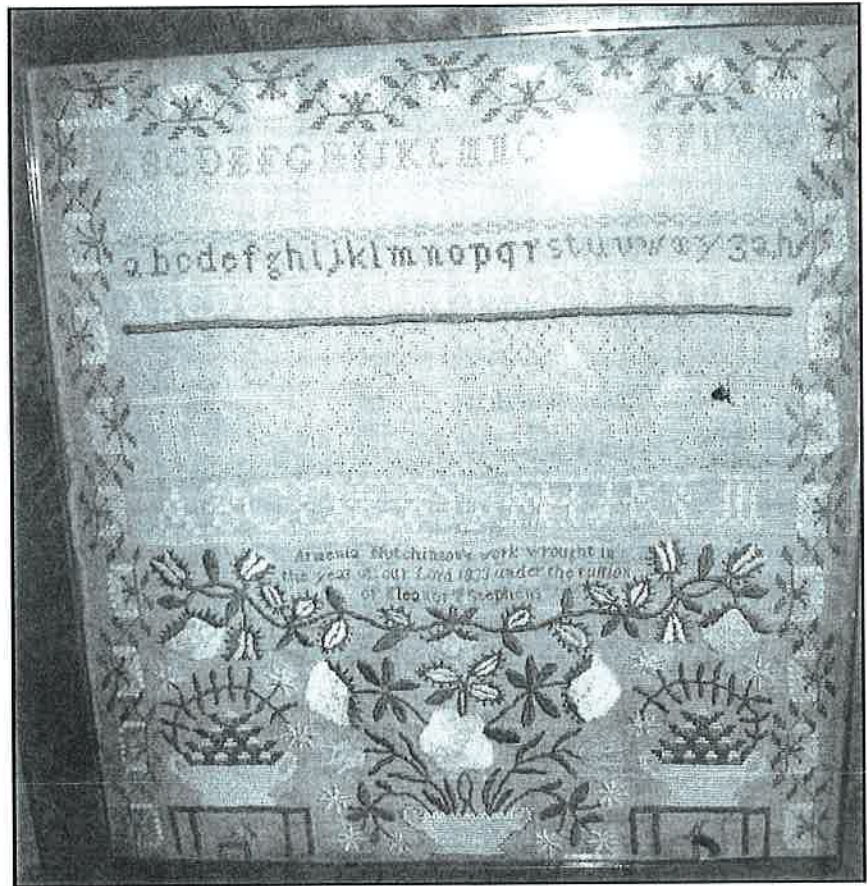
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2010 Kathy Patten
2011 Charles "Cappy" Stults
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Typeset by Old Hights Print Shop

Historical Artifacts Move as Families Move



Armenia Hutchinson's work wrought in the year of our Lord 1833 under the tuition of Eleanor T. Stephens. In the collection of the Hunterdon County Historical Society.

New items of interest turn up with regularity from surprising places. When the Hunterdon Historical Society recently cleaned out their storage area, they found this sampler with several others. This beautiful sampler was made by Armenia Hutchinson in 1833.

Unfortunately, there was no indication of who gave the sampler to the Society. Knowing that Etra (a village near Hightstown) was colonized by the Hutchinson family, the Hunterdon Society contacted Richard Hutchinson, former editor and writer of this newsletter. According to Mr. Hut-

chinson, "Armenia was the daughter of Reverend Sylvester Hutchinson, grandson of William and Ann Hutchinson. Reverend Sylvester Hutchinson was married to Phebe Phillips of the Hunterdon County area. The Reverend Hutchinson was one of four brothers who were Methodist Circuit Riders in the northwest territory of Georgia and the northeast states above New York."

For more information, see Mr. Hutchinson's articles on http://hewhs.org/hewhs_archive.html, March-April, 1992 and November-December 1994.

New Table and Chairs for Library



The table and chairs above were purchased this summer with Society Memorial funds given in memory of Anne Ivins. Mer Ivins chose the set for the Society library. We are thrilled with this new addition and thank the friends and relatives of Anne and Mer for this long lasting gift to the Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society.

The Hightstown Library ...90 wonderful years!

In 1916, the Friday Club began to discuss the establishment of a town library. In 1921, the Hightstown Public Library opened in the Smith Building with Miss Esther Schanck (who later became Mrs. Esther Hoyt) as our first librarian.



To celebrate 90 years of service to the community, the present library staff and the Hightstown Library Association are collecting stories and anecdotes about the library. Please help us by sending any information that we may include in a binder that we are assembling during 2011.

We encourage current patrons to write about recent memories of our special library, now The Hightstown Memorial Branch of the Mercer County Library System. Do you have a photograph or picture that you would like to share with us? As a note, we are planning for a 90th birthday party to be held in July 2011.



Please address your correspondence to Linda Cholewiak, Branch Manager, The Hightstown Memorial Library, 114 Franklin Street, Hightstown, NJ 08520. You may also contact Linda at 609-448-1474 or lcholewi@mcl.org.

Visit our website at
www.hewhs.org



Annual Christmas Tea at Ely House

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society invites the community to its annual Christmas Tea at Ely House, 164 North Main Street, Hightstown. Members of the Rocky Brook Garden Club and Hightstown Woman's Club have been busy decorating the house in a Williamsburg theme. Everyone is invited to enjoy homemade cookies and hot apple cider on Sunday, December 12 from 2 to 4 p.m. Entertainment will be provided by the Kid's Club Choir from

the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown.

Society members, as well as garden club members, decorated Ely House on Saturday, November 20, 2010. *Standing from left to right:* JoAnne Brogus, Cookie Cummings, Marion Rock, Meg Kibble, Christian Kirkpatrick (President of the Society), and Sue Howard. *Seated left to right:* Nancy

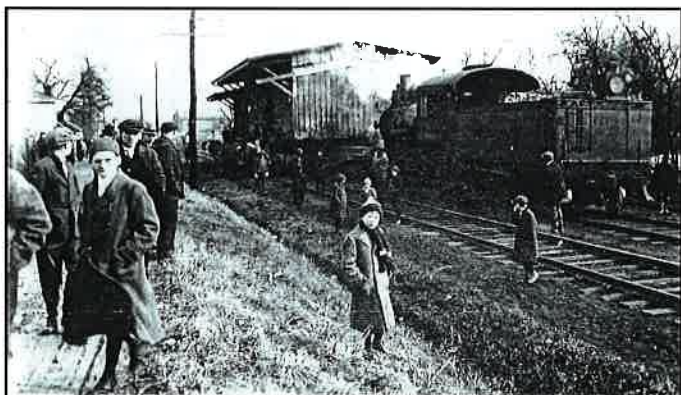


Laudenberger, Mary Mastoris, Eileen Couturier, Shirley Olsen, and Bobbi Ericson.

Railroads of Hightstown *Continued from page 1*

to, providing the nearby stream be kept free of the sewerage from the nearby slaughter houses! The problems continued, with minimal efforts being undertaken. Finally in 1895, the railroad brought in fifty carloads of gravel from Jamesburg, filling in the swamp.

A 1914 incident might have changed the town's history. On December 9, a "war train" pulling 22 cars loaded with explosives, hit an open switch and smashed into the freight building without the expected results!



"The freight house attracts a crowd of spectators during its first relocation in 1917." John Bulletin Newsletter, the Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group, Fall/Winter, 2009.

By 1915, the existing freight building was overwhelmed with produce, mostly potatoes from the surrounding farms. The Pennsylvania Railroad made plans to provide for a larger building and purchased land "near the freight yards, about two miles south of present day Cedar Hill Cemetery." Installation of a freight scale followed and after several tries on Sunday, January 14, 1917, the Bordentown construction train, with a large crew of men, divided the structure and placed it on several flat cars and moved it southward. In a few hours, the station had a new home. New platforms were added to handle the varied

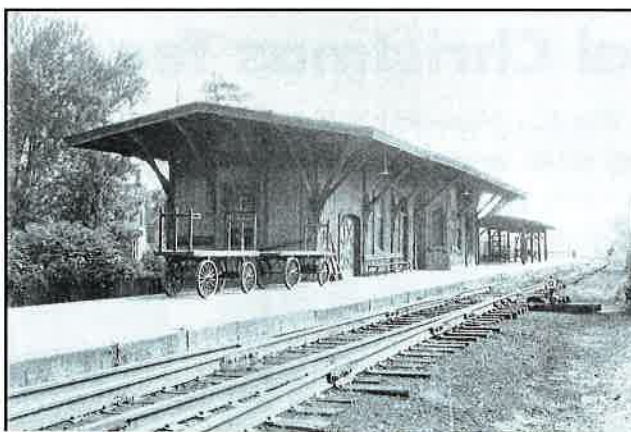
cargoes to be transported. Here the station remained until abandoned.

In October 1990, part of it was relocated back into downtown Hightstown for use as part of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society as a meeting hall and library.

Not much has been documented on the demise of the passenger station; it is believed to have quickly disappeared following the end of passenger service in 1940.

Additionally, at some time

believed to be in the mid 1800's, the route was raised to allow for a level route through town at the same time as a grade separation project was initiated. Removal of the embankment following abandonment uncovered rows of "sleepers"!



"View of the passenger station after the cessation of passenger service, circa 1940...The station was demolished not long after this photo was taken." John Bulletin Newsletter, the Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group, Fall/Winter, 2009. Note: refer to this issue for a detailed diagram of Hightstown rails from Hightstown Junction to Rocky Brook.



Before wooden ties were used to support rails, large blocks of carved stone, called sleepers, held the rails in place. Sleepers were uncovered in Hightstown because the Camden and Amboy Railroad was only the third railroad built in the United States. Wooden ties were just one of many inventions to follow. HEWHS

Reflections On Regional Rail Service

Both railroads greatly aided the growth of Hightstown as a center of commerce, hauling agricultural products to markets well over the horizon and consumer goods into town. Railroads improved the quality of land travel, to go distances with greater speed and comfort than the stage travel of old. The transportation of produce and natural resources of the region to urban consumers was balanced by bringing manufactured goods and machinery into the rural area.

Additionally, they opened up many markets and encouraged the development of unsettled area. (1838: The "Pea Line" train was introduced; it was a local train to serve local farmers that could be stopped by being "waved down." By 1840, it operated daily and was up to 16 cars in length.)

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Railroads of Hightstown *Continued from page 4*

The C&A was one of the first railroads to haul mail, and initiated an early version of containerization, by which containers loaded with common destination contents were loaded onto flat cars. Equipped with rollers, the containers could easily be moved and the contents protected, thus minimizing handling and enroute damages.

In addition to the passengers who arrived and departed, (greatly aided by student tickets from the nearby Peddie School) a local historian, John Orr, writes, "The Camden and Amboy Railroad could justly be called the commercial heart and muscle of Hightstown. Imagine all the loads of brick, tile, mail, violets, ice, logs, lumber, fancy moldings and other wood products, poultry, eggs, beef and pork products, nursery stock, corn, hay, straw, grain, berries, apples, cider, peaches, potatoes, rugs, shirts, shoes, livestock, horses and mules, milk, cheese, butter



View of the freight house in its second location south of Hightstown, circa 1975.

and farm machinery that have been shipped from Hightstown. Think of all the products that were shipped here from other places, such as gravel, marl, coal, oil, fertilizer, furniture, clothing, books, stoves, horse and buggy accessories, paints, slate, granite, marble, drainage tile and a myriad of other items that sustained the local economy. In just one day – December 21, 1869 – our farmers shipped 3,318 pounds of turkeys from the freight station. East Windsor farmers and

other nearby farmers did their part for the holidays and the railroad did the rest."

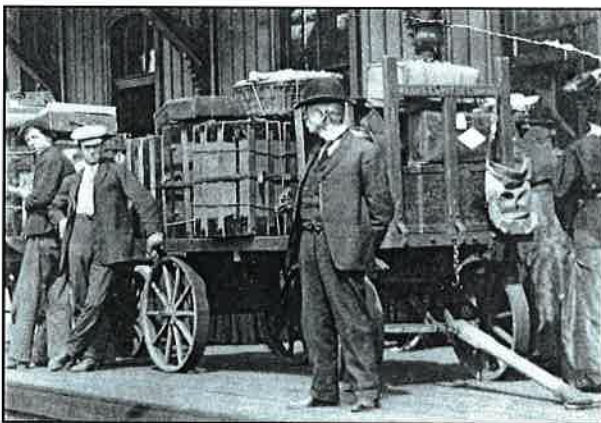
As the surrounding lands reverted from agricultural plots into residential communities, the role of the railroad also transitioned, until the emergence of auto and truck conveniences, and the varied economies of the growing nation prompted the railroads to consolidate their resources. The region's agricultural base still encourages a seasonal rail freight busi-

ness in nearby Cranbury and commuters must now drive eight miles to park prior to a high-speed rail sprint to places of work in several metropolitan locales. Subject to political action and gas prices, the existing re-born rail passenger service on the former C&A's south end (light rail south from Trenton to Camden) might see expansion in any direction, although freight



Site of the rescued freight station connected to the back of the Historical Ely House at 164 North Main Street. It is now the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center at Ely House.

service is gradually being reduced. The gentle topography of the region prompted early transportation planners to pick the route situation between growing river cities, a decision that greatly affected the growth of all who dwelled alongside the line. ■



"George Wilson Eldridge...served as freight agent at Hightstown for nearly forty years. He was only the third freight agent to serve here since the beginning. The other two had been Aaron Coward, followed by his son, Clayton I. Coward. Frank G. Sterling succeeded George Eldridge." Orr, John W., Reflections from the Shrine, 1998. "George W.'s family moved to Hightstown from a farm in Hamilton Square in the mid-1800's," wrote Don Eldridge, 1996, HEWHS.

Annual Banquet



is set for Sunday,
January 16, 2011 at 1 p.m. at
the Longstreet Library, on
Peddie School campus. The pro-
gram will be announced at a
later date.

Flowers for House Tour



Members of the Rocky Brook Garden Club made floral arrangements for last October's successful house tour. Seated, left to right: Marion Rock, Mary Mastoris, Shirley Olsen. Standing, left to right: Joanne Brogus, Dale Grubb, Norma Swale, Lynne Wallace.

Annual Membership Application (January-December)

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

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:

**2011 DUES
ARE DUE
JANUARY 1ST**

Membership Committee
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
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Hightstown, NJ 08520

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

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