



# Historical Society News

OCTOBER 2010

## The Railroads of Hightstown

by John Kilbride

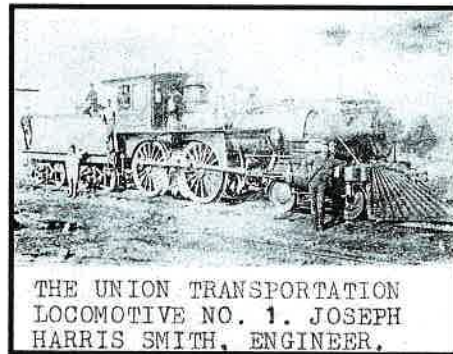
THIS STORY IS CONTINUED FROM THE APRIL 2010 ISSUE

### The Pemberton & Hightstown Line

Hightstown's second railroad, the Pemberton & Hightstown, was described as ".....nurtured by the Camden & Amboy; tolerated by the giant Pennsy; abandoned; revived profitably for 88 years by the Union Transportation Company; ended by Conrail....." by noted historian John Brinckmann.

Upon approval by the C&A, and after a series of start-up attempts, the P&H was chartered in 1864 (one of five companies which filed for the route) and immediately began construction from

each end of the planned line. Construction was slow because of funding - the C&A's dollars were being used elsewhere - and the line was not completed until early 1868. Service began a month later along a 25-mile route, with service to 11 station stops.



THE UNION TRANSPORTATION  
LOCOMOTIVE NO. 1. JOSEPH  
HARRIS SMITH, ENGINEER.

The C&A connection, known as Hightstown Junction, was about one mile south of downtown Hightstown, (just before Airport Road on the west side of Mercer Street), and initially included an engine house for the P&H. Initially, two trains operated daily plus a "mixed" freight (it also carried passengers!). By 1887, the line was owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad via stock purchase, but in 1888 became independent

again when the Pennsy lease was cancelled. After several business negotiations, the P&H leased the line to the local citizenry who then formed the **Union Transportation Company**. (Curiously, there was no participation by Hightstown officials!) Steam locomotives, long in need of replacement, was obtained from the PRR and included ex-C&A locomotives.



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### October

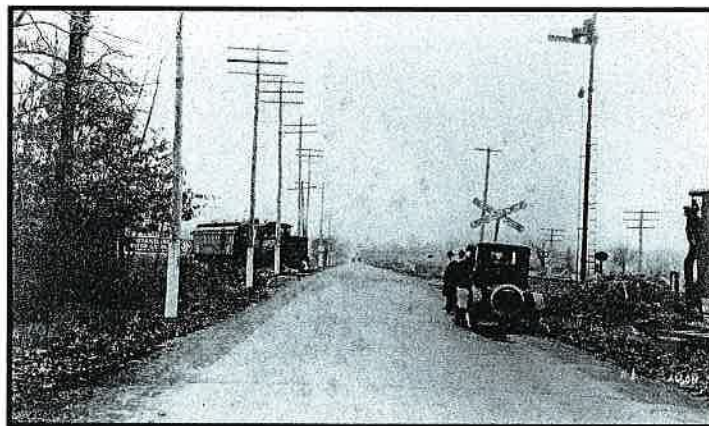
- 5 Monthly meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 17 House Tour (see article on page 6 for more information)

#### November

- 2 Monthly meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 11 Leo van den Blink's presentation, "Battle of Britain", Community Room, Meadow Lakes, 7:30 p.m.

#### December

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

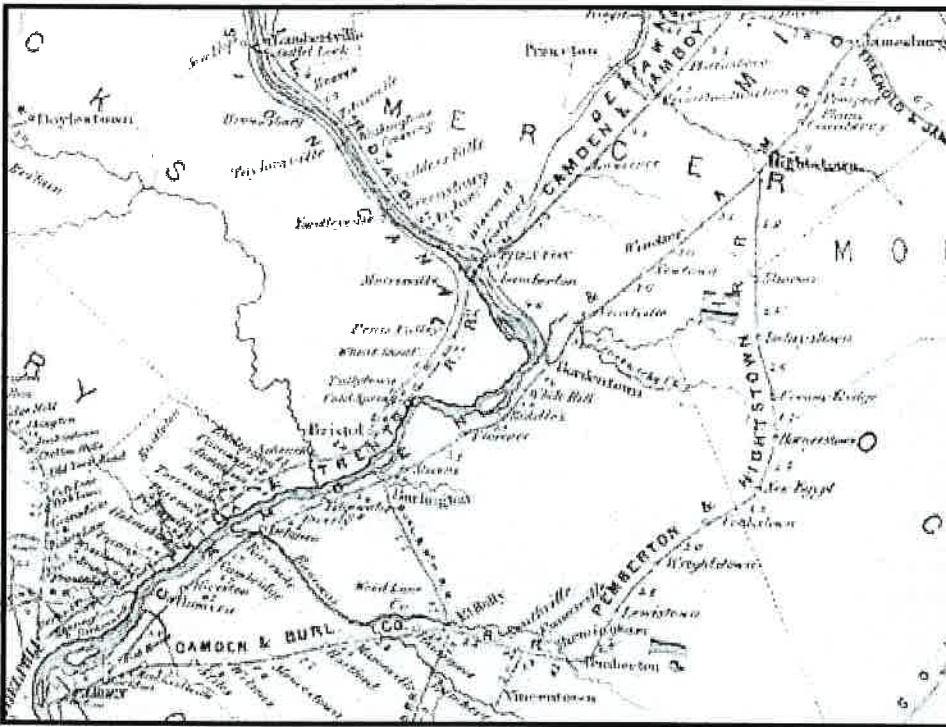


Union Transportation ("UT") approaching Hightstown Junction @ Mercer Street around 1920. Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

A 1910 timetable shows five trains, two hours apart, operated daily except Sunday between the line's end points. (No Sunday trains was a prevailing practice on the P&H throughout its varied corporate lives!)

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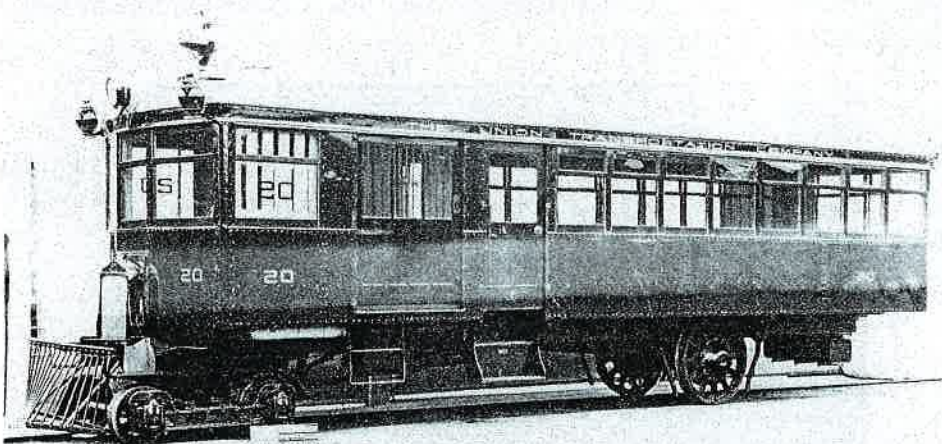
# Hightstown Railroads continued from page 1



Historical New Jersey Railroad Maps; [mapmaker.rutgers.edu/.../Railroads.html](http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/.../Railroads.html); copied from the Internet on 3.2.10.

The PRR administratively merged several New Jersey branch lines, including the P&H, into the Pennsylvania & Atlantic RR in 1915. World War I traffic levels bought a boom to the line; however, the PRR retained the "line haul" revenue, forcing the UTC to rely only on revenue gleaned from local services. In 1922, a self-propelled "Doodlebug" was purchased, primarily to be used for the transportation of school students. By 1926, a mixed train operated the length of the line, reverting to an every-other-day operation in 1931.

All About Railbus No. 20:



UT unit was an early entry into internal combustion railroading. As such it seemed primitive yet sleek with all the refinements that well-known streetcar J. G. Brill Co. could incorporate. R. L. Long Collection.

In 1939, the line was abandoned north of New Egypt and 'regular' service to Hightstown ended; the presence of the engine house at the junction still required the engine crew to pick up their motive power in Hightstown each operating day! Later the locomotive was replaced by a Model T automobile modified with railroad wheels.

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## 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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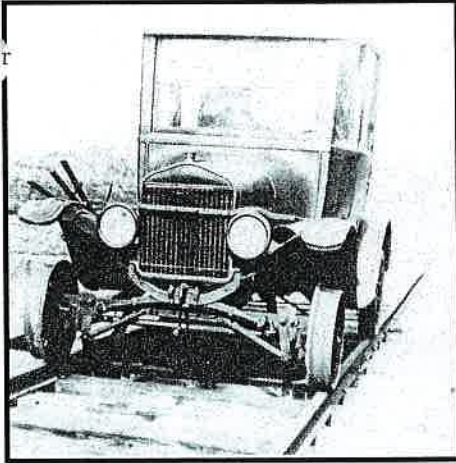
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# Hightstown Railroads , continued from page 2



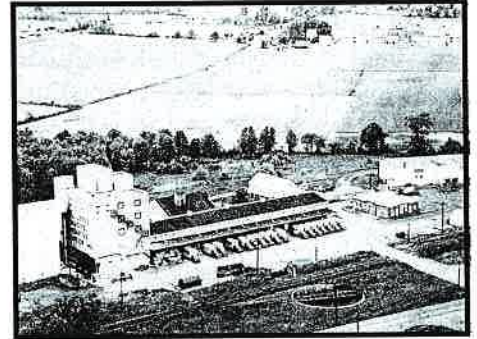
*This car was used for checking the track and taking employees to work.*

With rails remaining in place on the Hightstown end, a route up-grade was undertaken in 1942, including new power from the Pennsy parent. End of steam occurred in 1949. Through the 1950's and 60's the line continued to serve its agricultural-based customers with meager financial resources and revenue, a tribute to the line's employees. Ft. Dix coal traffic provided needed revenues, but any military

passenger movements were routed southward onto PRR rails. Under Penn Central control, their policy of trimming low-density lines greatly affected the P&H and by 1975 the PRR lease was cancelled. The UTC was, effectively, reborn by being provided the opportunity for direct operation of the line, which included the purchase of a new diesel engine. Needed revenues did not immediately occur, the result of which required the line to impose surcharges on shippers to cover costs. Business then began a gradual decline until the line was finally embargoed in 1981. By 1984, rails were removed along the remaining trackage.

*(A co-worker told me when removing the rails across Route 33 in the early 1980's, a few pieces of rolling stock were discovered just south of Hightstown, requiring them to put a few sections of rail back down to remove them. It took longer than the permit with local authorities allowed, including the blocking of traffic on the road's crossing, and resulted in a near arrest of the track gang!)*

The site of the P&H turntable pit alongside present-day Route 33 south of Hightstown can still be visited by the adventurous!



*The New Jersey Farmer's Cooperative about 1940?*

Visit our  
website  
at [www.hewhs.org](http://www.hewhs.org)



## Hightstown Grange No. 96

*by Susan B. White*

### What is This Hall, and How Did it Come to be?

Hightstown Grange was founded in 1873 to give social and economic empowerment to the numerous farm families living around Hightstown and Cranbury. It flourished and grew for the next seventy years while meeting in rented space. Then in 1935, the current structure was built as the Hightstown Grange Hall by local farm families - Applegate, Davison, Dey - and local business families connected to agriculture - Croshaw, Henderson, Tindall. Today this remarkable building

is designed with a large central room as the main meeting space, surrounded by several small rooms where those taking part dress and otherwise prepare for programs and formal meetings. A large dining room and a commodious kitchen occupy the lower level.

When the hall was built and for many years afterward, Hightstown



Grange was the largest in the state. There were more than 650 members, some 200 attended twice monthly meetings, with a separate meeting held at the same time of the Juvenile Grange, for those under the age of 14. Music was important with two pianos on each level which were kept in tune. These accompanied singing, dancing, and of course marching. For new member initiation and officer installation, drill teams of two dozen members executed elaborate floor figures, the men in tuxedos and the ladies wearing matching floor length gowns, ordered from the best formal wear shop from the elegant Trenton of an earlier day.

While offices in the Grange were held by both men and women, in some

*Continued on page 4*

## Hightstown Grange ,continued from page 3

aspects farm families followed traditional gender roles. Grange ladies gathered weekly to use the dozen treadle Singer Sewing machines in the Hall to make clothing and household goods for their families, and in season joined together in the Hall to share labor, and use the huge stoves in the kitchen to can dozens upon dozens of jars of fruits and vegetables for the winter. The men met in the Hall to create joint arrangements to buy railway boxcar loads of fertilizer, seeds, and seed potatoes, and to contract with the railroad to ship their crops at a good rate. At the Hall, dinners were frequently served to two or three sittings of 200 each. These were often for the Grange, but also as fund raisers for community groups such as the Sons and Daughters of Liberty. Wedding receptions, large birthday celebrations, dances, and gatherings to support troops going off to war were also hosted here. For some forty-five years, the Hall was a popular venue in a day before hotels and banquet halls were common, since the Grange was noted for its excellent cooks and good country hospitality.

But the world changes. In the Grange we say, "Nature's motto is Onward, she never looks back!" By the late 1970s, America had shifted from a farm based society to an urban one. The 80-20 percentage of farm to urban dwellings from around 1900 had flipped to 20-80. While Hightstown Grange retained an active membership, by 1979 its size reflected the smaller farming base with some fifty members and many of those having retired to Florida. Only 15 to 20 came out to a meeting, and community meals were a memory of an earlier time. Membership was active, but small, and such a large hall was no longer needed or sustainable.

At the same time, the Masons in Hightstown and Cranbury had joined together, and were looking for a new

home. Their former lodge downtown was too large, while the Hall on North Main Street was an excellent fit to their modern membership. A deal was struck between the Grange and the Masons - the Hall was sold to the Masons, and the Grange retained Life Rights for meetings. Now 30 years and counting later, this arrangement continues to work well

Meanwhile, the Masons updated the building and continue to maintain it in excellent condition, and today use it to host numerous local and regional Masonic gatherings, as well as community-wide events, such as the Blood Drive and the whole town Garage Sale.

### Who is a modern Granger?

Several Grange families are representative of today's Grangers. Near Cranbury, the Davison family grows the largest spinach crops in the whole region; the DeSandre family produces much of the hay and straw used in race tracks stables in New Jersey, while the White Family of Hightstown tends sheep flocks which produce fancy long staple wool for hand spinners.

Non-farm Grangers are interested in ecology, pure foods good land use, farm based renewable energy, and charities which feed the hungry, in diverse locales ranging from Trenton to Haiti. Today we still enjoy taking part in baking contests, and entering vegetables and fruits we have grown, along with flower arrangements, in Horticultural shows. Crafts, sewing, paintings, photography, and Something Out of Nothing, each have their own contest, all Grange traditions.

Our monthly meetings feature music - we love singing, and programs that help us know more about our communities - business, services. Current programs will investigate the

ghosts at the Cranbury Inn, and hear from Grover's Mill Coffee Roasters, the official coffee of the 1939 Martian invasion - but that is another story.

For more information on the Grange, which is rooted in Agriculture and the farm, but open to all those interested in ecology and the community, contact Hightstown Grange Master Allan White at 609-258-4814, aewwhite99@aol.com.

### On the House Tour

At 535 North Main Street, hosting Masons and Grangers will welcome you warmly to this architectural gem.

They will show you displays created especially for the House Tour, talk about the history of the Hall and both organizations, and answer your questions.

You can be sure of a warm welcome, a cup of hot cider, and some excellent cookies as a sample of the wonderful hospitality offered in this Hall for so many years. We hope that you enjoy your visit to the Hall on North Main Street.

*Thank You!*

Frances Cook, our Society librarian since 2002, is moving to Wisconsin, and we will miss her so very much. We thank her for the many years of service to the Society in so many of our projects, not just in the library. We thank Fran for writing to all the people inquiring about their family histories and all the research she did volunteering her time. She championed the purchase of our new computer system. It is working well and making the research for our volunteers much easier. We wish Fran much happiness in her move.

# Camden-Amboy Railroad Reconstruction

by Shirley Olsen

Alex Prunchak of Boy Scout Troop 59 in Hightstown, has just completed his Eagle Scout Project. Alex's project was the construction of "The Camden & Amboy Railroad: First Railroad in New Jersey". Alex designed and built a full scale 20 foot replica of the C & A Railroad track that ran through Hightstown. This is now located on the Bank Street side of the property where it can be seen by the public. This project will educate the community about the John Bull and become a learning tool when the third graders visit our facility. Alex and his troop landscaped around the area and built a sign post explaining the project. We thank Alex and the troop for all their hard work they have done to make such a fine exhibit for our Society.



*The end of my second work session involving edging the back of the Ely House on July 17, 2010. (Left to right: Kyle Cetin, Robert Prunchak, Kenny Carlson, Alex Prunchak, Rishab Sud, Spencer Wasilewski, Anthony Sosa, Chris Keedy, Andrew Hill, Mr. Bernas)*

Photos attached are pictures of the boys during very tough work sessions spreading gravel, moving topsoil, cutting and placing decorative timbers, spreading mulch, digging post holes, cementing the posts in place, and placing the rails on the sleepers.

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## Thanks to our Society Historians

Our Historical House tour is a very special tour because of your many hours researching each home on tour. The House Tour committee thanks your commitment to this community. You are our unsung heroes behind the scenes. Many thanks to Clark Hutchinson, Julie Ely, Bob Craig, Dick Hutchinson and Jennifer Worringer.



*Alex Prunchak, Robert Prunchak, and Warren Olsen (left to right).*

## Society House Tour Set for October 17 from 1-5 p.m.

by Shirley Olsen

Shirley Olsen, chairman of event, has announced that we still need hostesses for our biannual House tour of historic homes in Hightstown and East Windsor on Sunday, October 17, 2010, from 1 to 5 p.m. Please call and volunteer your time.

Titled, "The Way We Were", this tour will feature five private homes as well as Musing Antiques (The Smith House) and the Hightstown Grange #96 and Masonic Lodge. Advance sale tickets for the tour will cost \$17 for adults and \$5 for children. They can be purchased at Perennial Home at 119 West Ward Street; Old Hights Print Shop at 177 Mercer Street; Hair by Sharon at 128 Stockton Street all in Hightstown. In East Windsor, they are available at Weichert Realtors at 417 Route 130. Tickets for \$20 can be purchased the day of event after 12:30 p.m. at Ely House. For more information [www.hewhs.org](http://www.hewhs.org) or call 609-915-8125 .

The Rocky Brook Garden Club will be providing floral decorations for each house and refreshments will be served at one of the homes in the historic district. Antique cars will also be out front of each home on tour.

Once you have picked up your map and program booklet at Ely House guests can proceed to any of the following locations to view the homes.

On tour is the Keller House on 4 Drew Lane in East Windsor, a house dating roughly the period of 1750-1800 located in the Brooktree area. This family just decided to put in a new kitchen before the tour, incorporating original wooden beams from the attic. Visible upstairs is use of "gunstock" corner posts, a traditional practice in English timber framing that disappeared in N.J. about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, well before the Revolutionary War.



*Obadiah Herbert/Archibald Forman House, Drew Lane, built in the 18th century circa 1850*

The Reese-Embley-Smock-Butcher House- home of the Pavlovics on 220 Mercer Street in Hightstown has been extensively remodeled. The original house was built circa 1854 for John Butcher. John Butcher was a tailor by trade having a store opposite the Baptist Church. He was elected a Justice of the Peace and Mayor of the Borough of Hightstown. Many residents now know this house as the Embley House. Edgar Embley manufactured carriages, buggies, and wagons in Hightstown.



*Butcher-Smock-Embley-Reese house (photo taken 1991 before renovations- 220 Mercer Street)*



*Pavlovic - 220 Mercer Street at present*

The Charles F. Hunt House, now owned by the Schuberts on 185 East Ward Street built in 1933, is a vintage home that stands out as a testament to the Art Deco Era of gracious living. The dining room's lovely French doors open to a side porch, allowing views of the beautiful forest in which the oldest trees in Hightstown can be found.



*East Ward Street House*

The Augustus T. Skillman House, 208 Stockton Street, now home of the Moraitis family was built circa 1889. Augustus was a tinsmith by trade selling stoves and tinware. His store was located on Stockton Street near the Railroad Bridge. In 1896, he was in the plumbing, steam heating, and hot water heating business and had been for 20 years. The overall impression of this house is dominated by the Queen Anne style with its asymmetrical form, the windows, bay windows and dormers,



*Left is Chris Moraitis; Right is Bob Craig, Society historian, viewing some of the stained glass that was found in 208 Stockton attic*

## House Tour continued from page 2

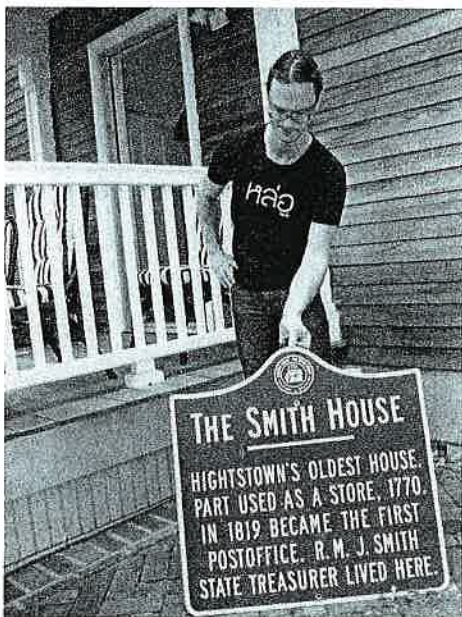
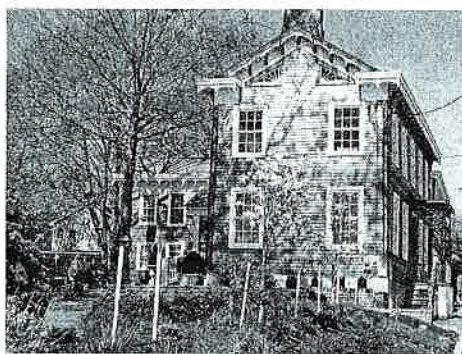
and Eastlake style (the bold porch posts and balustrade). The home was sold to Mr. Harold C. Cox, Skip Cox's father in 1927. Harold was a medical doctor and maintained a practice in the house.

The Edward W. Caine House, 321 Stockton Street, now owned by the Fourman family, was built circa 1913. This home retains its original construction that of an American Foursquare house. The lot was originally part of the Morrison family farm. The house was gutted because of a fire several years ago, except for the principal staircase, making most of the inside of the home now new. Paul Haring, former principal of Hightstown High School, and his wife purchased this house in 1947.



321 Stockton street, home of the Fourmans

The Baldwin-Smith House at 137 Stockton Street, now the home and antique business of the Musing family is the oldest house in Hightstown. Enos Baldwin bought the home in 1785 and he lived here until his death in 1821. When the estate was inventoried, it included cider whiskey and cider works, which suggests that in addition to the store that operated here as early as 1802, an applejack trade developed here as well. In 1819 Daniel Mount began to operate the post office at this site where the stagecoach dropped the mail each day. In 1852 a local businessman, named Rescarrick Moore Smith bought the place. He became State Treasurer in 1853. Smith remodeled the house in the 1850's and the house remained in the family until 1944.



Smith House

## Presentation on the Battle of Britain

Leo van den Blink will give a presentation on the Battle of Britain in the Community Room at Meadow Lakes on Thursday, November 11 at 7:30 p.m. A retired history teacher at the Hightstown High School, Dr. Leo van den Blink speaks throughout Mercer County on topics of historical interest, including famous first ladies, the music of Louis Gotchalf, and turning points in World War II.

Attendees of last January's Annual Banquet enjoyed his presentation on the kidnapping of the Lindberg baby. His lectures are always lively and well researched, and each features music from the era under discussion. Leo, a popular keyboardist who plays regularly for religious services at Meadow Lakes, plays this music himself on the piano. The public is welcome to attend.

### Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- Individual (\$20)   
  Family (\$25)   
  Booster/Patron (\$40)  
 Sustaining (\$50)   
  Life (individual) (\$200)   
  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:

**2011 DUES ARE DUE  
JANUARY 1ST**

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

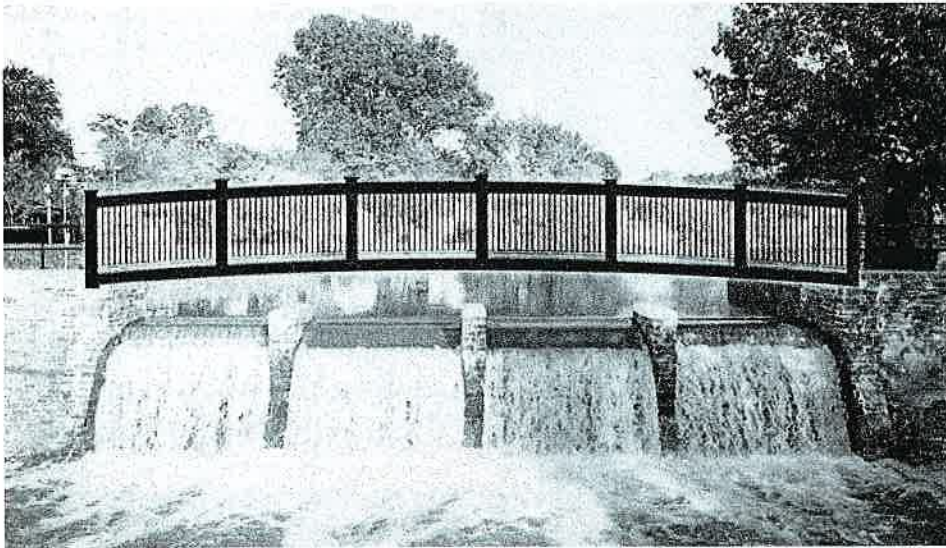
# Greenway Walking Bridge

A committee has been formed to raise funds to replace the walking bridge across the Peddie Lake Dam, along with some other improvements to Memorial Park. In our last issue we presented the history of this park and the importance the bridge is to our wonderful community. The Memorial Park was created in honor of our World War 1 heroes. The committee hopes that residents who live in Hightstown and those who lived here previously will take an interest in participating in the reconstruction of the downtown Greenway Walking Bridge, which was removed due to structurally unsafe conditions.

A check can be written out to the Borough of Hightstown and send it to Shirley Olsen, 6 Farr Ave., Hightstown, NJ 08520, a member of the Greenway Walking Bridge Committee. Costs for engineering and construction of the pre-fabricated

bridge is approximately \$50,000. The goals of the committee are to raise \$15,000 by November 1, 2010. Already, funds are coming in from local organizations. The committee has already pursued a grant to make the new bridge a part of the existing "Greenway" trail. We very much expect this to be a COMMUNITY effort. If you can help in any way, please let us know, and we'll get this done together.

For more information please contact Darek Hahn at [darekleo@yahoo.com](mailto:darekleo@yahoo.com) or 609-865-1081, chairman of committee.



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

