

HIGHTSTOWN
NEW



EAST WINDSOR
JERSEY

Historical Society News

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2011

Local Railroad Historian Provides Insight into His Interest *An Interview with John Kilbride*

By Julie Ely

As I sit in the Hightstown Diner, a tall man with light hair and glasses looks toward me and I wave. With a twinkle in his eye, he gives a friendly smile, and I recalled our work together in the late 1980's, building a model railroad for the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society. Who else could have provided me with both the experience of "working on that railroad" and the history of what we were to replicate than the man coming towards me? This is John Kilbride, a local railroad historian, who gives entertaining presentations full of information and funny stories. During that time together, I learned a lot about the historic Camden & Amboy Railroad that traveled through Hightstown on its way to transporting goods and passengers to far off places.

Since that time, John has given the Society a presentation on the railroad's 1830's development, operation and corporate evolution into the Pennsylvania Railroad, and written for this newsletter a three-part article on Hightstown's railroading histories and presence.

Born and raised on Long Island (NY), John's father booked an overnight train trip to Maine to visit his grandparents. The sleeping car's berth gave a young boy the opportunity to watch the world go by through a window; viewing the darkened images all the way to journey's end the next morning. "I recall not getting much sleep that night," John recalls. "It was a different railroad travel experience than had happened before. I lived a block from Long Island's trains and

always seemed to be fascinated by the passing scenery and all the views it offered while traveling infrequently into New York City." An automobile trip to New England 35 years later brought him (by then, he was a railroad employee) back trackside to the route taken earlier. "I paused at a crossing," John revealed, "thinking I've come this way before, and only because I'd studied a map or two realized that while passenger trains don't come this way anymore, I had ridden over that (nearby) bridge!" A few years ago, John rode another portion of the train's route and found himself again gazing out that window and mentally matching the current view with the long ago memory.

While at Dakota Wesleyan University in South Dakota, he studied History and English. "Only freight trains out there. In my sophomore year, I was editor of the student newspaper," he mentioned, "and I used to (short) cut across the freight yard enroute to the printing plant. I remember the sounds and smells of cattle in freight cars, heading, I guess, to the slaughter houses! On one such trip, I was offered a ride in a locomotive that was shifting the cars around the yard. I still remember the engine's number!"

Upon graduation ("...having won a low draft number," he reveals!) John enlisted in the Air Force and spent four years in military service, initially in Kansas City and later in Panama ("I volunteered for England," he states.) Both assignments were as a journalist. While in the states, a colleague with an interest in passenger trains suggested a weekend day trip to St. Louis. "It was the first anniversary of Amtrak, my future employer," John mentioned, "so it was an appropriate thought. The first train was late, so we got off halfway across Missouri so we could get back to the base that night." On the westbound train the last car derailed "Our ride got a bit bumpy," John explained" and after bouncing over a short bridge, both men were stunned by the reality of a near-miss accident. After a delay while railroad officials solved the immediate problem and upon arrival at their final destination and now eager to tell their story, they contacted the local newspaper. The

Continued on page 4

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



November 2011

- 1 Gas & Oil Lamp Program followed by Monthly meeting, Ely House, 7:30 p.m.

December 2011

- 6 Monthly meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 11 Christmas Tea, Ely House, 2-4 p.m.
- 11 Candlelight House Tour, 3-6 p.m.

January 2012

- 15 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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Hurricane Irene and the Great Flood of 2011

On August 27 and 28, Hurricane Irene roared through New Jersey depositing torrential rains all over the state. As the water level in Peddie Lake rose higher and higher, the rush over the dam grew more violent. The powerful, fast-moving water tore out portions of the iron railings and stone walls on both sides of Main Street. Water was within one foot of the top of the wall surrounding the lake. Rocky Brook spilled over its banks and reached up to the fire house and down past the Wells Fargo bank. Homes further down the Brook and throughout the town experienced flooded basements and much loss of property.



Main Street looking north



Looking northeast from the park



The falls and spill basin



Corner of Stockton and Main Streets

At the fire house, the trucks were moved out to St. Anthony's parking lot and all the doors were opened so water could flow through the building. The basement filled with water. (*It was said they found fish swimming there.*) The water pumping station, borough hall, and police station were all flooded and had to be evacuated. Businesses on Main and Stockton Streets had up to four feet of water and silt inundating their buildings.

Photographs from the flood of 1915



Main Street looking south with people lined up on the railroad tracks and wall



Water pours over the road into Rocky Brook. Notice the old mill on the right.

Annual Christmas Tea and Candlelight House Tour

On Sunday, December 11, 2011, the Society will have their annual Christmas tea at Ely House from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Cathy Anzuini, choir director at Hightstown High School, will be bringing two of her choral groups to sing at 2 p.m. There will also be a holiday boutique where one can purchase some handmade holiday gifts and freshly designed centerpieces for your holiday tables.

The Hightstown Woman's Club has planned a "Christmas Candlelight House Tour" from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Seven private homes will be beautifully decorated and open to the public for view. Pre-sale tickets will be sold at Perennial Home on 119 W. Ward Street for \$10. The day of event, tour tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at Ely House.

The Rocky Brook Garden Club will start decorating Ely House and the Sara Hutchinson West Educa-

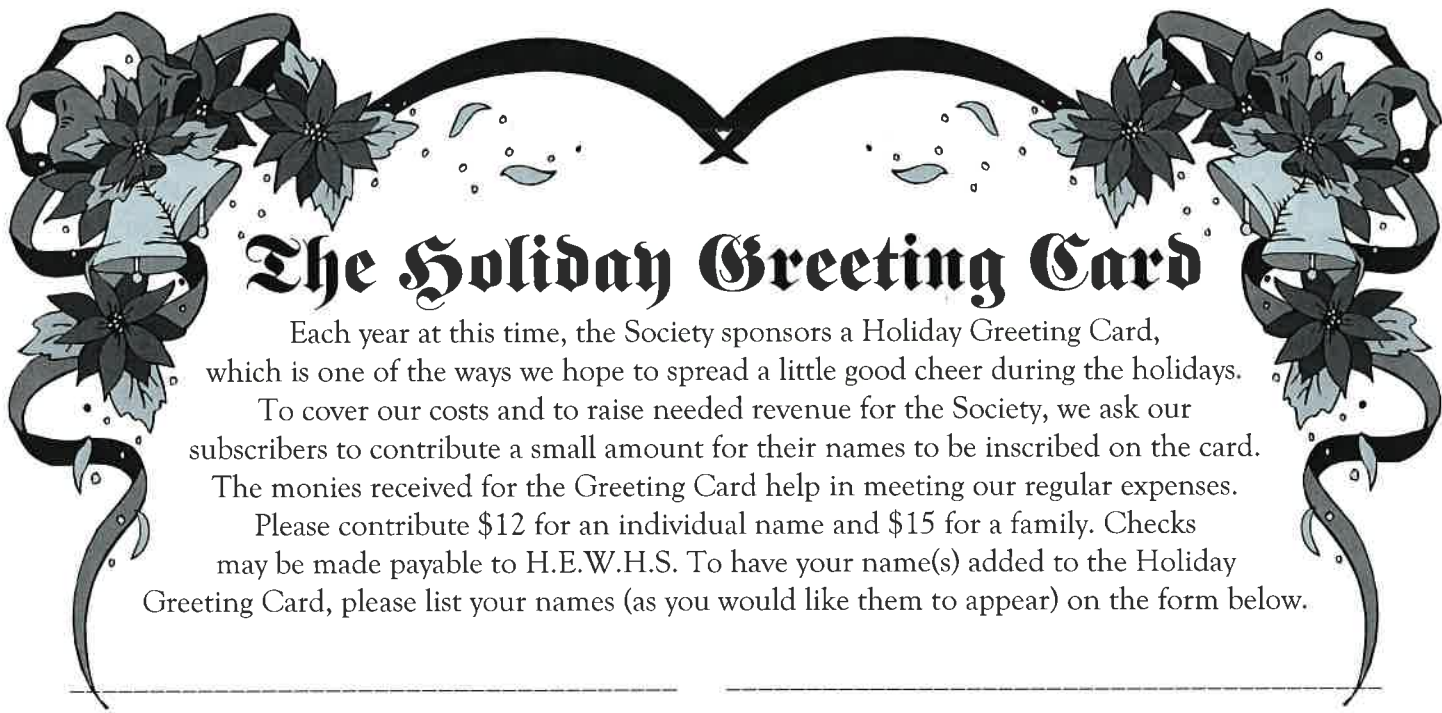
tional Center on November 18 and again on December 2. Volunteers are needed and encouraged to call Shirley Olsen if they can help or if you have an exhibit or centerpiece you would like to share for the day.

Homes on tour include the Christie's home on Compton Drive in East Windsor, the Herb Olsen home on Old York Road, the Greenwood home on Stockton Street, the L'vov's, Faxon/Foley's and Cox



homes on East Ward Street and Zaitz/Gibbons home on North Main Street. The

Hightstown Woman's Club will provide the docents for the afternoon in these beautiful homes.



The Holiday Greeting Card

Each year at this time, the Society sponsors a Holiday Greeting Card, which is one of the ways we hope to spread a little good cheer during the holidays.

To cover our costs and to raise needed revenue for the Society, we ask our subscribers to contribute a small amount for their names to be inscribed on the card. The monies received for the Greeting Card help in meeting our regular expenses.

Please contribute \$12 for an individual name and \$15 for a family. Checks may be made payable to H.E.W.H.S. To have your name(s) added to the Holiday Greeting Card, please list your names (as you would like them to appear) on the form below.

Your name _____

Amount \$ _____ Evening phone _____

Send replies by December 1st to
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, c/o Shirley Olsen, 6 Farr Avenue, Hightstown, NJ 08520.
Please be sure to include your full return address and write "Holiday Card" on the envelope.

Insight *Continued from page 1*

next day's (Sunday) paper featured their tales and photographs (complete with quotes) on the front page, and they became the talk of their base upon arriving at their work place.

Shortly after returning from Panama (which, John tells, did have passenger trains that provided coast-to-coast service in 90 minutes!) employment by Amtrak occurred. Job positions started out lowly, with varied shift work, but grew to the point where John was introduced to just about every aspect of railroading, including Material Control. "The only jobs I never did were sell tickets or repair cars; I even got to run a train every now and then enroute home," he reveals.

Then one fateful day, September 11, 2001, a terrible event happened. John was working in Penn Station and heard the reports of the World Trade Center being hit by airplanes. Initially, trains were stopped and the station, including employees, was evacuated. However, John was directed to stay behind to answer the office's phones! Later, when service resumed, train service resumed to get commuters and other travelers out of the city and home; we will all remember where we were and what we felt when we heard the news.

John's normal assignment ended but his replacement wasn't able to relieve him, so after spending two shifts under trying, chaotic conditions and with minimum amount of confirmed information about what was going on, John returned home. "It was dark, so I couldn't see anything when the train left the tunnel. The conductor announced that no tickets would be collected," John explains. "Only the next morning, on the way back into work, could I see the smoke. Curiously, when I went home that afternoon, the smoke was blowing in the opposite direction than in the morning."

Now retired after 34 years of Amtrak service, John fills his days with a variety of interests, such as the Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group, where he serves as president. The group is also a chapter of the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society. The Group was created about six years ago to encourage interest and research for both the C&A and Pennsylvania Railroad who leased, for 999 years, the Camden & Amboy. That transaction gave the growing PRR direct access to New York City and an ability to challenge the rival New York Central RR.

The historical group meets four times a year at the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society's freight station. John publishes the Group's electronic newsletter - the *BULL Sheet* - and contributes to their *JOHN BULLETIN* quarterly publication. As mentioned, he's created an illustrated slide presentation on the Camden & Amboy which will be presented in Riverside and Trenton later this year and a Readington Township audience in 2012.

"We're working on a project to identify sources of Camden & Amboy information from among the libraries and historical societies along the railroad's route," he says. "We hope to make it an opportunity to share information and

we could contribute either a program on the railroad's rich history or a display in exchange for access to their resource materials."

He served as an advisor to Alex Prunchak for Alex's Eagle Scout project that has yielded a recreation of a section of Camden & Amboy 1830's track now located on the Society's property. "I was surprised and honored when Alex presented me a (Boy Scout) Eagle Scout Mentor pin during his Court of Honor ceremony last March," revealed John.

John is a member of several other historical groups and actively participates in their varied interests. Travel continues too, especially since his years of service entitle him to a rail pass. He's been able to use it overseas too!

Model railroading also remains an interest, although he's presently without his own layout. Weekly, he operates on miniature railroad lines of several colleagues, a pastime that provides him opportunities to provide guidance on replicating the operations of the big ones! Most recently, he's discovered the PRR had a sleeping car named "Hights-town" in its fleet and did some research. It was built in 1923, one of 24 similar cars, and operated until 1956. He has found a model railroad car that is close enough to encourage him to replicate the real one. "I have no information as to whether it ever was operated through its name-sake location," he reports.

I asked John what can be done to get involved in railroad history, especially if you teach history. He was quick to offer guidance on providing suggestions for possible resources. "I have this extensive library of books that aren't doing much good just sitting on shelves," he mentioned. "I'm also available to do programs on a variety of railroad-themed subjects. We'd love to have anyone interested in a unique piece of New Jersey's railroad history to join us at Camden & Amboy meetings. To reach us; they can check our web site for our meeting dates (www.trainweb.org/camdenandamboyrhistoricalgroup). Next up is a thought to commemorate the 180th anniversary of the John Bull's first run in Bordentown. We're working with the Bordentown Heritage group on an all-day event on November 12." Their web site is www.bordentownheritage.org for more information.

"Thank you for helping me to give Hightstown's railroad a bit more publicity." John concluded. "The rails may be gone but the tales continue. I've just finished writing about their rolling stock and locomotive fleet and the Stevens family is my next writing assignment; they founded the railroad and might be better known for Hoboken's Stevens Institute, but they also left a legacy when they built the railroad that has evolved into today's Garden State high-speed Northeast Corridor."

Accessions

On September 24 Tina McQueen, now living in Malvern, Pa., gave the Society an old sign of Davison's store in Hightstown, that she had bought at Bunch's Auction online May 24, 2011. Tina was born and raised in Hightstown and is a member of the Thompson family. Tina has done much research and



The photo shows Tina McQueen, right, and her friend Nancy LePore, with the old sign she donated to the Society.

discovered that in 1885, Joseph Van Doren Davison moved to Hightstown, N.J. and purchased the general store of C. W. McMurrin, which he developed into a department store. When he retired in 1906, he left his three sons, Joseph B., Charles Herbert, and Howard Crosby, in charge of the store. It operated under the name J.V. Davison's Sons.

Joseph Van Doren Davison was a manufacturer and president of the Hightstown Rug Company until his death in 1923. His son, Charles Herbert Davison, after working at J.V. Davison's Sons from 1905-1908, was employed in November of 1908 by the Hightstown Rug Co.

Tina has shared with us the genealogy of Joseph Van Doren Davison which will be presented in a later edition of the Society newsletter. This

information, written by Tina, was taken from "Prominent Families of New Jersey, Vol. 1, Page 97-98.



Note from the Editor

I had a very nice visit in late September with Russell Beaulieu, my Hightstown High School history teacher. Russ has donated a framed copy of a newspaper, titled "Views of Hightstown"—*The Daily Graphic New York, Tuesday, April 8, 1879*, an edition that he received as a gift from Catherine P. Copleston, English teacher at HHS. She had held on to this document herself for 35 years and decided it was time to give it to Russ as a gift for his 40 years of service at HHS, on June 22, 1993. Russ explained that it had belonged to "Doc" Williams and he remembered it hanging in his classroom along with many photos of all the graduating classes all around his room.

We appreciate this wonderful gift of photos of Hightstown taken in 1879 by George Cox and sketches by the newspaper's special artist. This new gift will be hung at the Society Christmas tea for everyone to see and includes photos of Trinity Parish Church, the railroad bridge on Stockton Street, Universalist Church, Zimmerman's Railroad Hotel, public school, Masonic Hall 7, Van Rensselaer Institute, First National Bank, Methodist Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, The old and new Baptist Churches, The Independent office, the Peddie Institute, and Well's School.

Russ Beaulieu was born and raised in Hightstown and taught history at Hightstown High School. We appreciate learning about these memories.

History of Lighting Program, Nov. 1

On November 1, 2011, Robert Szychowski, treasurer of our Society will present a half-hour program in the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center. starting at 7:30 p.m. titled "A History of Lighting from the 17th through 19th Centuries."

Robert has written the following article about his program:

"I have collected and sold early lighting for the past years. Before that time I was primarily a clock collector and dealer. One of my best sources for clocks, an older woman in Lancaster County, Pa., also dealt in lighting, and gradually it sparked my interest. I will discuss lighting from the colonial era—which means first of all, candles and rush lights, then lamps using various oils such as lard, vegetable oils, fish oils, whale oil, burning fluid or camphene lamps, and then finally lamps from the kerosene era which began in the late 1850's with the discovery of oil in Pa. Prior to kerosene, lighting was often dangerous and smelly.

Some of the main manufacturers of early lighting such as Cornelius and Company, who made lard oil "solar" lamps, the Sandwich glass factory on Cape Cod and various others.

I will demonstrate the differences in various lamp types, and also include miniature lamps, which were the night lamps of the time.

I will also show how kerosene and other oil lamps can be converted to electricity by screwing in an electrified burner. This is a manner that is non-invasive to the lamp. However, there are smokeless and odorless lamp oils on the market for those who want to burn oil lamps as they originally were intended."

Hoffman/Boye Photo Display



Edith Hoffman brought a very interesting display of her family photos to the Historical Society which were all placed in the new Skip Cox cabinets. Edith grew up in Hightstown where

her father and uncle owned Boye's Florist on the corner of Franklin Street and Manlove Avenue where Comisky's is now located. Edith's display also includes photos and mementos of Hightstown High School in the 1930's and some interesting photos of her Sunday School class at the First Presbyterian Church of Hightstown

~NOTE~
Ely House will be open the last Sunday of each month from 2 to 4 p.m.

WANTED

Does anyone have a laptop projector they would like to donate to the Society? We would use it for the many programs we have here at the Ely House.

Annual Membership Application (January-December)

JOIN TODAY ~ BECOME A MEMBER!

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership—\$20.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership—\$25.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Booster/Patron Membership— \$40.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Membership—\$50.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Individual) Membership—\$200.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 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:

**2012 DUES
 ARE DUE
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 164 North Main Street
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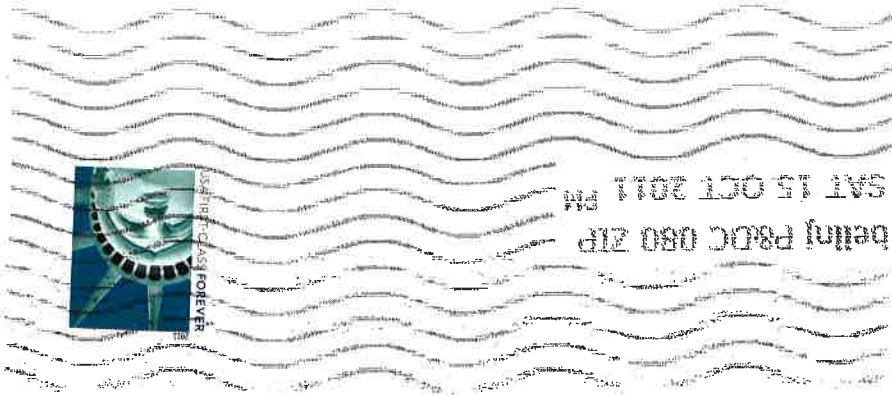
ANNUAL BANQUET SET FOR JANUARY 15

The Annual Banquet is set for **Sunday, January 15, 2012** at 1 p.m. at the Longstreet Library, at Peddie School. Mark Alan Hewitt, author,

architect, historian and preservationist, will be our guest speaker. Mr. Hewitt recently served as a consultant to Rick Pratt, Chairman of the

Hightstown Historic Preservation Commission, who is writing a book on Hightstown's architecture and history.

Mrs. And Mrs. Robert Craig
 4002 Nottingham Way
 Hamilton Square, NJ 08690



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 SAT 15 OCT 2011 PM

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www.hewhs.org**

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