

HIGHTSTOWN  
NEW



EAST WINDSOR  
JERSEY

# Historical Society News

APRIL 2012

## The Russell S. Davison Dairy

By Leo Fenity

When I began my research on the history of Decker's Dairy, I quickly established that the story of Decker's began with the purchase of the Davison Dairy. After careful consideration, I came to the conclusion that I couldn't actually write about one without including the other.

Several factors made the Davison and Decker's operations different from the other three I have researched:

Transfer of ownership — R.S. Davison started the operation in Hightstown and then sold it to Conrad Decker, Sr., who continued to grow the business at the

same location.

While the other three dairies were located in rural settings, the Davison to Decker Dairy was in a suburban (residential) location.

The other three dairies had their own milking herds and produced most of the milk they sold. The Davison Dairy purchased all of the milk they bottled. Decker's initially purchased all of their milk; however, in 1940, a small local dairy farm was purchased and the milking herd located there provided some of the milk used in the operation. About twenty years later, the cows were sold, and Decker's went back to purchasing all of the milk they sold.

### RUSSELL S. DAVISON DAIRY

In 1913, Russell S. Davison established a dairy at 239 Monmouth Street in Hightstown, N.J. It was also during this era that Mr. Davison had a large two-story home built, at the entrance to the property, for the use of his family (his wife, Grace; his son, Bruce; and his daughter, Thelma). Family members that worked in the business included Harold Farr (Grace's brother) and Ralph Farr (Grace's father).

Since the dairy did not have any cows of its own, all of the raw milk was purchased from local

dairy farmers. Due to a lack of data from 1913 to 1922, I have made some assumptions about the dairy's operations, based on what the "common dairy practices" were during that period of time:

Refrigeration of some type was a requirement to keep the raw milk fresh in the milk house and to keep the milk cool in the horse-drawn delivery wagon. In the early 1900's, ice was cut from frozen lakes and stored (insulated with sawdust) in ice houses. I've been told that during that era, the Cole family on Cole Avenue in Hightstown had an icehouse adjacent to Peddie Lake. Perhaps some of their ice was purchased by the Davison Dairy for refrigeration.

In all probability, from the start, the milk from Davison's Dairy was delivered to his retail customers in the early morning by a driver using a horse-drawn milk-delivery wagon that had narrow, four-foot high wheels with wooden spokes. The wagon was tastefully painted with stripes and scroll work and stood about eight feet high to the top of the roof. An overhang on the front of the wagon protected the driver from the weather. The side windows enabled the driver to see each side of the street in case a customer

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

#### March 2012

30 Wine and Cheesecake Tasting

#### April 2012

3 Monthly meeting, 7:30 p.m.

21 Work Day at Ely House, 10 a.m.

29 Quilt Show, Ely House, 1-4 p.m.

#### May 2012

1 Rick Pratt, Architect, Ely House, 7 p.m.

19 Taste of Hightstown

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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Typeset by Old Hights Print Shop

# "Back in Time" Quilt Show

Sunday, April 29, 2012, from 1-4 p.m.

Admission fee: \$5

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society is sponsoring a Quilt show titled: "Dating of Fabric—300 Years of America", presented by Dana Balsamo, from Material Pleasures in Princeton. Dana is a purveyor and speaker on vintage textiles and fabrics and will present her program at 2 p.m. She will be bringing 15 antique quilts to display.



The public is invited to share their family quilt treasures and display them throughout Ely House. To register your quilt or vintage treasure, contact Cookie Cummings at [cookcumings@yahoo.com](mailto:cookcumings@yahoo.com) or 609-802-2456.

## RESTAURANT COMPETITION

Taste of Hightstown, a Restaurant Competition with live music in Memorial Park, Hightstown, is being sponsored by the Hightstown Pedestrian Bridge Committee on Saturday, May 19, from 3-7 p.m. Several restaurants from the area will be participating and will be providing their best dishes to be judged by those attending the event. Pre-sale tickets are \$15; at the door \$20. Wine and beer will be sold and a "filled basket raffle" will be auctioned off to benefit the Bridge Fund.

### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**2012 DUES  
DUE  
JANUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>**

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

## Russell S. Davison Dairy

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should come running out of the house with an empty container. The narrow door on each side enabled the driver to climb in and out of the wagon to make deliveries. In the rear of the wagon were large metal containers holding the cool fresh milk. The driver would use a two-quart ladle to dip the

their early customers?

In 1922, Mr. Davison put together a booklet entitled: "Marvelous Milk, the Ideal Food" that was distributed in the Hightstown area. The booklet contained information on milk including history, value, and recipes. It also contained "facts about the dairy of Russell S. Davison", enabling us to get an accurate view of what his operation was like in the early

ingly, Mr. Davison was ahead of most dairies in pasteurizing milk. Early Pasteurization Process: Milk was heated to 145° Fahrenheit and held there for 30 minutes.

The plant was completely equipped with pasteurizing machinery, Milwaukee bottling machines, sterilizers, a refrigeration system, and all the appliances necessary to guarantee his customers the safest and best milk. His output in 1922, totaled 1,400 quarts of milk a day.

Mr. Davison required that all milk purchased by him shall contain at least 3-8% butterfat thus guaranteeing his customers, rich nourishing milk.

Mr. Davison gave his personal attention to the conduct of the dairy, assuring early morning deliveries, fair treatment, and efficient service.

On the last page of the booklet were endorsements and authorized endorsements from local doctors recommending the use of pasteurized milk:

<u>Doctor</u>	<u>Practice</u>
G.A. Silvers	Hightstown
J.L. Smydam (sp?)	Jamesburg
B.S. Van Dyke	Cranbury
William L. Wilbur	Hightstown
H.D. Zandt	Jamesburg

Eventually, the dairy's milk production grew from 1,400 quarts a day to a peak of 1,600 quarts.

In later years, one of Mr. Davison's major customers was Princeton University. The University picked up 800 quarts of milk each day except on Sundays. The Sunday delivery was the responsibility of the dairy.

Using several of the dairy's milk bottles as a source of data, we know about what bottles the dairy

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*In the 1930 photo, Conrad Decker, Jr., (at age 10) is seen with a horse named Dolly (at age 20) hitched to the Decker's Dairy milk delivery wagon.*

milk out and fill the customer's container. The gentle horse instinctively knew the milk-delivery route almost as well as the driver.

Later, conversion from natural ice (frozen lakes) to artificial ice (machine-made) began to take place. Since the mechanical equipment was bulky, expensive, and inefficient, it limited the use to a few large applications such as ice plants. The Underhill family owned and operated an ice plant on Stockton Street (in the proximity of the existing CCL building) in Hightstown. Could it be that Davison's Dairy was one of

1920's.

Mr. Davison highlighted the fact that the dairy pasteurized every drop of milk that came into his plant. Definition of Pasteurization: a process for preserving some foods and beverages by heating them to destroy bacteria and other micro-organisms that transmit disease and/or cause food spoilage. Pasteurization was named for Louis Pasteur, a French scientist, who in 1864 originated the heat-treatment process. It's my understanding that local, state, and federal laws requiring milk be pasteurized began around 1934. Accord-

## Russell S. Davison Dairy

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used and when:

They at least had their own quarter pint (gill), half pint, pint, and quart size bottles. Since one of the bottles in my collection is dated 1924 and another is dated 1926, we can surmise that from 1924 to 1926 the dairy had its own bottles.

The bottles are clear with embossed (raised lettering) data on the front reading:

### Russell S. Davison Hightstown, N.J.

The Thatcher logo is on the bottles; consequently, we can assume that the Thatcher Manufacturing Company was the vendor of choice for their milk bottles.

The bottles take the standard cardboard caps with pull tabs that were in use at that time. Thirteen years after starting the dairy opera-

tion, Mr. Davison sold it to Mr. Conrad Decker, Sr., on September 1, 1926.

### A STORY WITHIN TWO STORIES

Soon after establishing his dairy operation in 1913, Mr. Davison purchased a pure white horse named "Dolly" to pull the milk delivery wagon that was used for his retail customers in Hightstown. Needless to say, Dolly would instinctively stop as required for customer deliveries. Dolly was not only a work horse, but a dearly-loved family pet.

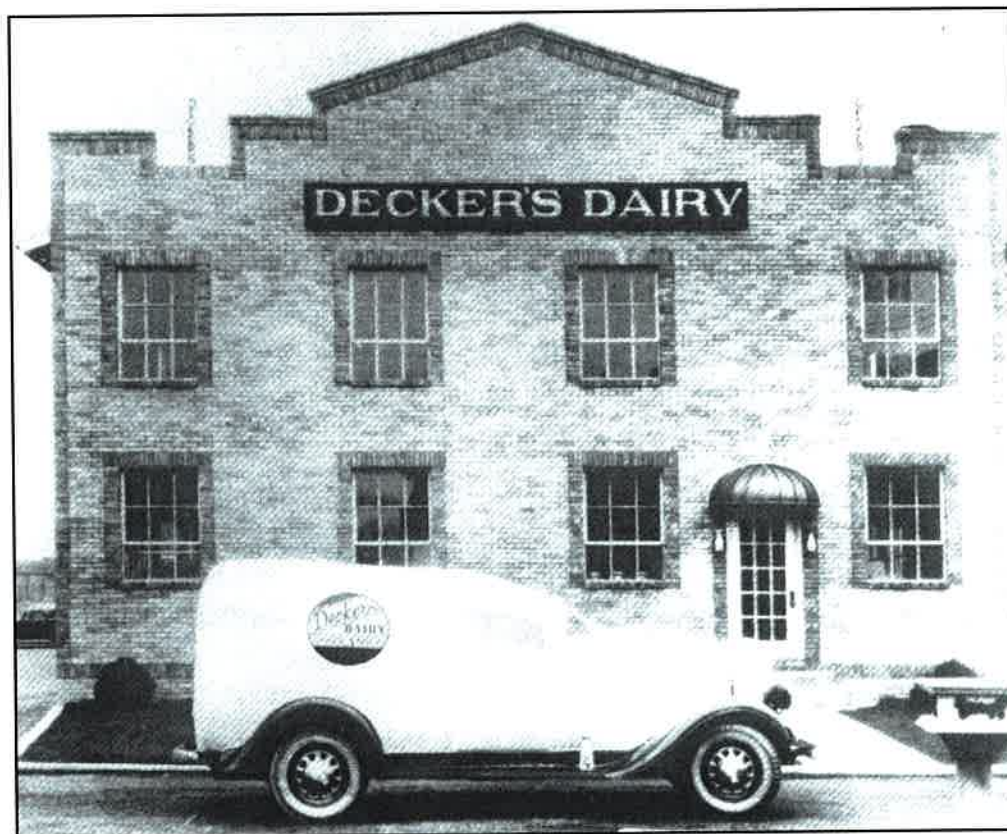
When Mr. Davison sold his milk business to Mr. Decker, an understanding was in place that Dolly would continue to work the established milk route but would remain the property of the Davison family.

From 1926 through 1932, Dolly continued on the milk route. In 1932, Dolly took ill and

a year later, at age 23, the Davison family made a fretful decision to have her put to sleep. In a field on the new family homestead (off of Davison & Farr Avenues, in the southeast section of Hightstown), a grave was dug, and lined with straw. Dolly was carefully lowered into her final resting place and Dr. Gustav H. Kinnach (a local veterinarian) humanely gave her an injection.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

R. Bruce Davison, Sr., provided most of the information for this story. Bruce also made available to me a copy of his father's booklet, "Marvelous Milk/The Ideal Food" (copyrighted 1922) as well as two Davison milk bottles: a pint (dated 1924) and a quart (dated 1926). These three items are to be eventually donated, along with my milk bottle collection from Decker's Dairy, to the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society. Without Bruce's input, the history of Davison's Dairy might have been lost. Bruce passed away on June 20, 1996.



*The "milkmobile", custom mounted on a Dodge chassis, was purchased "used" by Mr. Conrad Decker, Sr., in the late 1930's. After being used primarily to get publicity for the dairy, it was sold in the early 1940's. The two-story building in the background contained the dairy's processing plant on the first floor and administrative offices on the second floor.*

# 2012 Historical Society House Tour

If you've ever driven past the beautiful Victorian houses in our community and wondered what it looks like inside one of these amazing homes, you will have a chance to find out. Seven houses in Hightstown and East Windsor will open their doors for "Time & Again", the biennial house tour on Sunday, October 21 from 1-5 p.m. This newsletter will only feature three of the homes on tour.

## Pullen-Black House

This year's tour features a Greek Revival farmhouse known as the Pullen-Black House, on Old York Road, built in the 1850's. There has been extensive work done on this Greek Revival farmhouse, and Bill and Sandy Kendall have added their own touch in a country style, creating many details by hand with stenciling, painting, and moldings. This home sits on land farmed during the Revolution. The front of the present house, the parlor, dining room, and upstairs bedrooms, were built by Isaac Pullen, a successful nurseryman, who served three terms as Representative in the State Legislature. In 1878, Charles Black, a relative of the Pullen's by marriage, bought the nursery business and the farmhouse. He updated the house by adding the porch and quarter-round attic windows. The Kendalls purchased the house in 1986 and have continued to restore and improve the house remodeling the upstairs bath and kitchen. In the living room there is elaborate egg and dart style molding.

Also on tour, of interest to antique lovers, is home to Olde

Country Antiques, 346 Franklin Street, now owned by Steve and Carol Redler. The previous owner was Mer Ivins, also an antique dealer and member of our Society. This home is filled with many antiques collected by the Redlers over the years. A beautiful family room and kitchen addition was added to the back of the original house in 1999. Of special interest in this wonderful great room is the walk-in fireplace designed by Earl Groendyke, local mason and member of the Society. Earl designed this fireplace to be identical to one he had once seen in a historical home in Princeton. At the top of the fireplace is a bump that in Colonial days was a place filled with black gunpowder to keep it dry.

## Marcia Satterthwaite House

New to the tour this year is the home of Marcia Satterthwaite, 140 Stockton Street, a small home built around 1789, sometime after the Revolutionary War and before the War of 1812, during the first half of the period of the Federal style's popularity. Bob Craig's research has shown that this home was owned by Woolsey Baldwin. From 1785 until 1789 he owned the property together with his brother, Enos Baldwin. Enos lived across the road at what became 137 Stockton, The Baldwin-Purdy-Smith house. Our historians feel that this home is the oldest house in the Borough. The front living room has a nice Federal style mantelpiece, probably original to the house and the back has an old lean-to-style kitchen. There is a chimney with a cellar fireplace and

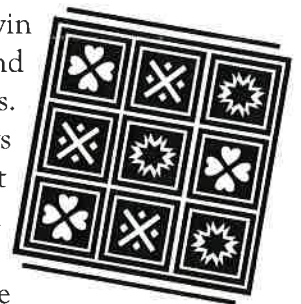
bake-oven in the basement.

The house tour committee historians are working on the histories of the remaining houses on tour and those updates will be in the next newsletter.

Hostesses will be stationed at every house on tour throughout the day. Society members and friends are encouraged to contact Shirley Olsen if they can participate in this worthwhile fundraiser.

## Quilt Raffle

Carole Nelson, Society member and President of the Hightstown Woman's Club, has graciously agreed to make a king/queen sized handmade quilt to be raffled off the night of the house tour. Raffle tickets are \$2 each for a chance to win the quilt and pillow shams. Raffle tickets will be sent out to all members with the hope that we will have full participation in our fundraiser this year.



Expenses at Ely House and the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center continue to increase. We are now working on the sewer line for Ely House and plumbing in the freight station. Warren Olsen, Bob Patten, and George Keith are to be thanked for keeping our property in good order. The Society thanks all those members who have contributed for the upkeep of these buildings.



# Rick Pratt, Architect, to Speak

At 7 p.m., on May 1, at the Ely House, Rick Pratt will be speaking about his book entitled, *A Guide to the Architecture of Hightstown Houses*. It is the result of three years of work with input from Christian Kirkpatrick, Julie Ely, Doug Mariboe, and Bob Craig. The book will showcase the architecture in Hightstown from 1785 through approximately 1970. Each style is described pictorially and in text from various sources. There is information about the restoration of houses, window restoration, the do's and don'ts of various architectural aspects, definitions, etc. There is a complete history of John and Mary Hight, as written by Bob Craig, and a lot of interesting snippets on other topics. This book is sure to be a handy reference for people in and out of Hightstown, as well as the building department to aid in keeping house styles cohesive. Rick will have a draft copy for view and pre-ordering.

# Work Day Planned

The society thanks all the members who came to help clean our many possessions in Ely House and freight station in January. Another workday is planned for Saturday, April 21 at 10 a.m. China and dishes in all the cabinets in the front parlor need to be washed, as well as the articles in the upstairs bedrooms. We thank The Hightstown Woman's Club, Rocky Brook Garden Club, and The Friday Club members for helping keep the house and its possessions looking presentable.

# Wine and Cheesecake Tasting



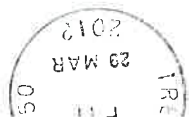
Hightstown Pedestrian Bridge Committee presents a Wine and Cheesecake Tasting with Specialty Beers on Friday, March 30, 2012 from 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Hightstown Diner, 151 Mercer Street, Hightstown. Tickets \$20 in advance; \$25 at the door. 100% of the donation go to the Bridge Fund. For more information, contact Darek Hahn at

darekleo@yahoo.com

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

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