



Historical Society News

JULY 2012

The East Windsor Racetrack

From *Reflections from the Shrine* written by John W. Orr, Jr., in 1998

Society was given permission from Longstreet House. Copies of the book are available at the Society or in local libraries.

Around the turn of the century men counted as among their most valued possessions their women, their children, and their horses...but not necessarily in that order. A few of the more well-to-do farmers in the Hightstown area were turning their attention more to the raising of horses bred to racing, trotting, and exhibition rather than that of the traditional work horse. Some of the local gentry were D. Ernest Johnes, Austin A. Wright and Stephen D. Ely. Austin Wright had a private dirt track of some renown at his farm on Cedarville Road, and some pretty good races could be seen there on occasion.

In the Spring of 1896 it is

recorded that Stephen Ely was pushing the idea of building another racetrack close by Hightstown. The idea of having a professional racetrack in this vicinity was received warmly by the owners of trotters hereabouts, as well as by members of the racing fraternity generally.

Stephen D. Ely was a man who did not want for the material things of life. He was born in Monmouth County in the year 1840, near what is now the town of Roosevelt. His late father, Joseph J. Ely, took up the practice of law and land surveying after having accidentally lost an eye when a young man. To restore his facial appearance, he had a glass eye implanted in place of his lost eye. I imagine that this glassy, unblinking eye may have been an asset in his role as a lawyer. In 1844 he played a key part in the creation of Millstone township from parts of Freehold, Monroe, and Upper Freehold townships. He was a deep thinker, a school teacher, a strict prohibitionist, very religious, a prolific writer and a community leader. His son, Stephen, did not seem prone to follow in his father's sterling footsteps, but rather preferred to play the part of a gentleman playboy after coming into his inheritance. An appreciation of good horseflesh was one of his redeeming qualities. For many years he lived on the site where Meadow Lakes Extended Care Facility is now situ-

ated, and was the owner and proprietor of the lake and mills located there.

With the opening of the Ward Street bridge and the extension of Ward Street around Peddie Lake and across Rocky Brook to Etra Road, the conditions for building a racetrack improved considerably. The track location chosen would be near the sharp bend on Ward Street, on the north side of Rocky Brook and west of the present-day New Jersey Turnpike. If you should stand on the sharp bend and gaze at the State Headquarters building of Local 827, I.B.E.W., you would be looking back through the years at the old racetrack.

The closing down of the Hightstown Athletic Association's baseball diamond and grandstands on Franklin Street (roughly where the Town House Motel complex now is), seems to have added an impetus to the plans to open the racetrack. In March of 1902 the H.A.A. sold the high wooden fence surrounding the baseball field to the promoters of the racetrack. The fence was torn down and moved to the new track location on Ward Street, where it was recycled into a fence for the racetrack.

About six years had passed since Stephen Ely first voiced his desire for this racetrack, and now it was close enough for him to see it from his window. The track was owned and operated by the Hightstown Driving

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 2012

- 26 Main Street program, HEWHS
7 p.m.

September 2012

- 11 Business meeting at HEWHS
Rich Pratt Book Signing 7 p.m.

October 2012

- 21 House Tour-from 1-5 p.m.
27 Train Show 9-4, Hightstown
High School

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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2012 Society House Tour

The committee will be working this summer on the upcoming house tour, titled "Time and Again" set for Sunday, October 21, 2012 from 1-5 p.m. This year's tour features seven homes owned by many of our members: Daniel and Kathleen Yurwit—165 South Street; Robin and Jay Smith—523 South Main Street; John and Nancy Laudenberg—632 South Main Street; Steve and Carol Redler—346 Franklin Street; Bill and Sandy Kendall—866 Old York Road; Chris and Holly Moriatis—208 Stockton Street; and Marcia Satterthwaite's home at 140 Stockton Street. We appreciate and thank the homeowners making this 2012 house tour possible.

Mary Kramarenko, member of the Society and local artist, has been busy sketching all the homes for the tour brochure. Please let Shirley know, if you would like to place an ad in the tour brochure or wish to volunteer as a docent during the tour. Julie Ely, Robert Szychowski, Bob Craig, Clark Hutchinson, and Debbie Hancock will be working on the histories of each home this summer. The Rocky Brook Garden Club will be designing the flowers for each home under the leadership of Dale Grubb. Let Dale know if you think you may have some garden flowers to contribute in October. The Central Jersey Antique Car Club will also be participating this year. ♦

QUILT SHOW

The Society-sponsored Quilt Show on April 29 was enjoyed by all who attended. Dana Balsamo presented an excellent program on "Dating of Fabric—300 Years of America". Many women shared their quilts for everyone to see and Cookie Cummings and Sally Grover, chairpersons of the event, had quilts displayed all over Ely House. Dana brought about 20 quilts to share. Donna Schmid made all the delicious cookies to accompany a wonderful ice cream punch served from the kitchen. We thank Cookie and her committee for providing such an informative program. ♦



*Sally Grover, Cookie Cummings
and Debbie Hancock.*



*Shirley Hancock and her daughter
Debbie Hancock with a quilt made by
Shirley's great-grandmother in the
1890's.*



*Cookie and Kevin Cummings stand next
to one of her quilts on display. Kevin
acted as a Docent during the show.*

RAFFLE TICKET FUND RAISER

Members are being asked to support the Society by selling the enclosed raffle tickets. Carole Nelson, member of the Society, has graciously agreed to provide us with a yellow and blue queen/king size quilt to be raffled off the evening of the house tour at Robin Smith's home. Raffle tickets are \$2 each for a chance to win the quilt and pillow shams. Please make sure to return your raffle stubs to Shirley Olsen, 6 Farr Avenue, Hightstown, NJ 08520, for the drawing on October 21. ♦

Lectures/Railroadiana Show to Commemorate RR Arrival

By John Kilbride

Building north from Bordentown in 1832, the Camden & Amboy Railroad reached Hightstown in the early fall of 1832 and began passenger service shortly afterwards. By year's end, South Amboy was reached and Hightstown began to experience the benefits of the railroad transporting passengers, goods and services to various destinations. Camden was reached in 1834 and Trenton similarly connected in 1838.

To commemorate the railroad's arrival in Hightstown, a day-long event has been planned for Saturday, October 27 at the high school. Jointly planned by the Society and the Hightstown-based Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group, three lectures are planned on specific historical aspects of the C&A's arrival. Con-

currently, a railroadiana show will be held in the gymnasium. A children's event will also be included, as will a hike to the railroad's former right-of-way.

"The arrival of the railroad was a great influence on the region's growth as an agricultural center," states John Kilbride, president of the C&A RHG and chairman of the planning committee. "It improved the quality of travel, providing transportation to go greater distances at improved speeds and comfort. It is appropriate on the 180th anniversary of the railroad's arrival that we commemorate the occasion with this event."

(A limited number of vendor tables remain available for purchase at \$25.)

Admission to the lectures is \$15.00 (\$20 at the door) and includes

admission to the show. The show admission is \$8.00 per person with a \$10 family fare. (Children under 12 are free).

Tickets for both events will also be available at the Hightstown Harvest festival on October 6.

Planning also continues to have local merchants provide discounts to lecture attendees.

Lecture registration is underway and can be completed by sending check/money order (*made out to the "Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group"*) to the Group at: W-11 Avon Drive East, East Windsor, NJ 08520-5647. Please indicate name(s) of attendees.

Questions on the event can be directed to 443-4746 (evenings) or jktrr@msn.com. ♦

The East Windsor Racetrack

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Association; Dr. Alexander C. Doyle, a local hotel owner and veterinary surgeon, serving as its Secretary. The grand opening was held Saturday, June 14, 1902. The grandstand was built to hold four hundred people. The green area between the grandstand and the track could accommodate at least another four hundred people. There were twenty stables built on the Association grounds, with a dug well nearby to water the horses. The concession stand, run by a Mr. Combes, sold soft drinks and sandwiches to the hungry and thirsty patrons of the track.

On this auspicious day the record shows there was an exhibition of Austin A. Wright's "Alcanfancy", driven tandem before D. Ernest Johnes' saddle horse; exhibition by Stephen Ely of an "eighth in twenty" with his "Lodi"; that the Combes concession did well; that William Rhoades, the well-known trainer, worked a string of

a half dozen horses from Matawan at the track; that C. D. Emsen sold his "Sophia Russell", winner of the 2:40 race, to William A. Washbourne of New York and that the register at the Railroad Hotel in Hightstown showed nearly three hundred persons had eaten their meals at that place on Saturday. Among the notables in attendance in the grandstand were Senator Elijah C. Hutchinson, County Collector Thomas H. Thropp and Sheriff Samuel T. Atchley.

The Hightstown Driving Park remained open for about eight years, its assets being sold in the summer of 1910. On June 7 the sheds, box stalls, fencing, grounds, and several thousand feet of good lumber were sold. The farm came into the possession of Anthony Wilson and his brother, Disbrow C. Wilson. In 1917 the farm of 147 acres on which the old racetrack had been located was purchased by A.W. Gertzel. And so, with the changing panorama that is uniquely ours, another fond recollection takes its place in our garden of memories. ♦

Camden & Amboy Railroad Historical Group
and
Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society
are sponsoring

180th Anniversary Event/ Train Show

All day event commemorates the arrival of the
Camden & Amboy Railroad into Hightstown!

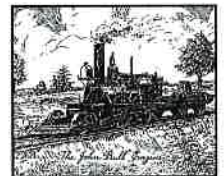
Saturday, October 27, 2012

Hightstown High School

25 Leshin Lane—9:00am-4:00pm

Planned activities:

- Three history lectures
- Children's event
- Tour of sleeper site
- Railroadiana show
- *model train displays *vendors
- *collector items *refreshments



Fares

- Lectures: Pre-registration \$15 (\$20 at door), includes show admission
- Show admission: \$8 (family fare: \$10, under 12 free)

Vendors sought! (tables \$25)

Contact information

Camden & Amboy RR Historical Group

jktrr@msn.com 609-577-7281

Reflections of the Past

The board members of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society are interested in your recollections of the "days gone by" in the "good ole days" of our community. The historical society wants your story on growing up in the Hightstown-East Windsor area. Include your place of birth, residence(s), educational and economic information, modes of transportation and your views on the status of the roadways of our town's past, costs of retail goods of the times, weather and climate memories, and the news of the times. What are your classroom memories and what did you and your friends do to "pass the time away" as a child? Name the motion pictures and television shows that you viewed and what kind of music did you listen and danced to? And, of course, who were your "American Idols?" What was the technological world like in communications, entertainment, transportation, electronics in the kitchen and workplace? Who were the people and what were places and things in town that you recall? How do you compare your past with the present...and what is your vision for our town's future?

Now, you can be part of recording our community's history in your own words. Perhaps you have photographs to show your reflections of the past. If you want to participate in bringing the past of the "good ole days" to our present time, please submit your "reflections of the past" to either Bob Patten at bobpatten@verizon.net or by calling 609-448-6352. ♦

Special Talk at Ely House

On July 26 at 7 p.m. Donna Harris from Heritage Consulting, Inc. will be coming to the Ely House. She will be speaking about the Hightstown Main Street program, as well as preservation and restoration of historical downtowns such as Hightstown.

Thank You

A special thanks to Bob Patten and several ladies from the Friday Club and The Hightstown Woman's Club for cleaning our many museum collectibles. Time was spent on two separate Saturday mornings washing our many stored items in cases and those items sitting around the freight station. The Society appreciates everyone's cooperation in getting the museum looking good for the recent Quilt Show. ♦

Book Signing

Rick Pratt will be at the Society's first business meeting on Tuesday, September 11 at 7 p.m. signing his new book titled "A Guide to the Architecture of Hightstown Houses". Light refreshments will be served, followed by our regular meeting.

Contact Rick for more information rick.pratt@stocktonstreetsolutions.com.

Visit our website at
www.hewhs.com

Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society
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