

HIGHTSTOWN
NEW



EAST WINDSOR
JERSEY

Historical Society News

MAY 2014

History of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society

From the Archives—Continued from the December 2013 Issue

Many open houses featuring historical exhibits were held at Ely House during the 1970's to interest the community in giving contributions toward further rehabilitation of the house. The main fundraiser in the early years was the annual Doll Show with the first show being held in April of 1977, and the 16th and final show, being held in May, 1992.

The Society's current fundraiser is the historical house tour in Hightstown and East Windsor, which it sponsors every other year. Our first tour took place on October 14, 1990, and today, this continues to be a successful fundraiser for the Society due to the large participation of the local community.

On October 3, 1990, the Society had the remaining "freight station" of the Camden & Amboy Railroad, moved from the Coca Cola (Minute Maid), Summit Street property, through the middle of Hightstown to the back of the Ely House property. Coca-Cola paid \$40,000 to have it moved because the

company needed the property on which the freight station stood. It took nine years to renovate the freight station for the Society's museum and library holdings.

The freight station, originally built in 1869, stood on Railroad Avenue. In 1917 it was moved by locomotive to Summit Street, near Mercer

Street. In 1910, the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased six acres of land south of Summit Street; it was in this area that the freight station was moved and lengthened to 130 feet. When it was moved to the Ely House property in 1990, only the old original section of 80 feet was moved to the site. In mid-April, 1995, the first substantial construction work on the freight station was begun since the permanent foundation was completed in 1991.

With the bequest from the executors of the Sara Hutchinson West estate, the Society received \$276,000. This sum of money made it possible for the Society to refurbish the freight station, build a deck, attach an enclosed exhibit area to the Ely House and put new wood siding on the exterior of the Ely House. When all the work was completed, the freight station was dedicated and named the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center. This celebration took place October 3, 1999. Housed inside the newly refurbished structure is a museum, library, restrooms, and a small kitchenette, all wheelchair accessible. The building is now used by children for programs, for school tours, and several community organizations for meetings. Outside the building is an original iron railroad crossing sign refurbished for the Society by the Hightstown-East Windsor Lions Club. Also on the site are several "sleeper" stones, which supported the rails upon which ran the famous "John Bull" engine.

The first issue of the new format of the present "Historical Society News" was September, 1991. Richard Hutchinson, a long-time member of the Society, was editor of the newsletter and won numerous national awards for our very own

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 3 at 7 p.m. Business meeting-
Society Library

June 7 Rocky Brook Garden Club
Garden Tour 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Tickets will be sold at Society the
day of tour for \$15.

Sept. 2 at 7 p.m. Business Meeting

October 26 Society House Tour
1-5 p.m.

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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The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society

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newsletter. On October 28, 1995, the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey awarded the newsletter first place in the state. The Society's newsletter continued to win honors annually in the National Genealogical Society's newsletter competition, which culminated in 2000 with the Society's newsletter being awarded the First Place Award in the national competition.

On September 20, 1995, the double parlor in Ely House, then used as our meeting room, was dedicated to the memory of Ben and Catherine Hernwall, active members of the Society, when their estate left funds to the Society. With these monies, the downstairs floors were sanded and refinished, the rooms freshly painted, and new draperies and blinds were purchased.

In May of 1996, members of the Society were active in sponsoring the 275th Anniversary of Hightstown in conjunction with the Borough of Hightstown. Members also invited 70 clubs and organizations to come together to participate in the celebration of the 100-year-old Peddie Bridge on Ward Street. For the occasion, the Society created a fashion show of old clothing through the ages.

The Society was instrumental in the discovery and recovery of a time capsule just in time for the town's celebration. This "Time Capsule" had been placed in the wall surrounding the lake in Hightstown in the 1920's. Over 300 interested guests came to Ely House to see the old photographs and other valuables recovered it contained. After viewing the contents, the Society then returned the "Time Capsule" into the wall with new material for future generations. Since then, the Society has discovered the location of several other time capsules buried within our community and has recovered some of them.

In 1998, the kitchen in Ely House was updated with new cabinets, new countertops, and new flooring, making the kitchen more functional. This was accomplished after receiving a grant of \$10,000 from the State for the construction work.

The Hightstown Woman's Club, The Friday Club, and Rocky Brook Garden Club continue to support the Society financially, as well as cleaning the facility twice a year. The garden club plants annuals every spring and helps keep the grounds weeded. Over the last 20 years with the addition of the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center, the Society has been able to sponsor numerous programs for the community, including sponsoring their biannual historic house tours, Christmas teas, quilting displays, and choral groups from the schools during the holidays. The Society has provided many educational tours throughout the years for girl scout and boy scout troops and Brownies. The third graders from East Windsor Regional School District have visited our facility and hundreds of children have learned about the history of their town.

The Society continues to accept local donations from the public for a variety of displays throughout the facility. Volunteers are always welcome and encouraged to help both in the society library and in the museum.

Historic Hightstown-East Windsor House Tour

"TIME & AGAIN"

Sunday, October 26, 2014 from 1-5 p.m.

This year the tour will feature eight private homes. The "Samuel Sloan" House, 238 South Main Street, will be on tour. This home was built before the Civil War and is an elegant two-story frame house of Italianate design, built in 1856. It is now owned by Peddie School.

The Samuel Sloan who built this house is not the famous architect from Philadelphia. This owner became financially over-extended when he tried to



build this beautiful new house and purchased a new woman's and men's shop downtown all at the same time. Samuel, his wife, and four children only lived in the

house for a year. When the house was completed, he didn't have the funds to pay all the bills. Dr. Joseph E. McChesney, a prominent local physician, purchased the house. His brother, Dr. Charles G. McChesney, had served for more than a decade as New Jersey's Secretary of State. The McChesneys kept the house until 1884, after which it passed through the Chamberlin family and then to the Dawes family, which had the property for nearly 80 years.

But the question remains whether the famous Samuel Sloan originated the design of the house. No evidence one way or the other has been found, but builders often bought and executed fancy designs from out-of-town architects, and this one has the look of an architect-designed house.

Architects were beginning to notice possibilities in Hightstown. The year 1857 saw the construction of three churches, one of which brought a new and talented architect/builder to live here, Thomas Tibbs, who built the First Presbyterian Church. In July, 1857, an even more talented Trenton architect, Charles Graham, began advertising his services in the "Village Record". But we have no reason to think that either of them designed the Sloan house.

This information, about Samuel Sloan, was written and researched by Robert W. Craig. Shirley Olsen has condensed Robert's article found in the March-

April, 1996 Society Newsletter.

The seven other homes to be toured are: the Catherine and William McMann house at 429 South Main Street, Hightstown; the Robin Conrad and Lyn

Beamesderfer house at 326 South Main Street; the Barbara and Kristopher Grudt house at 508 South Main Street; the Robert and Corinne Szychowski house at 676 Windsor-



Perrineville Road, East Windsor; the "Mount-Ely-Hancock" house (previously owned and restored by Michael and Frances Pane) now owned by Patricia and Kevin Donahue at One Hidden Springs Lane, East Windsor; the Beth and Keith Jackson house at 201 Stockton Street (previously owned by June and Dr. Edgar Thomas) and the Octagon House at 231 South Main.



For more information, call Shirley Olsen 609-448-8388 or Robin Smith, 609-448-8487, Co-Chairs of the House Tour.

Volunteers are needed to work on the research of each home and to host at the homes on tour.

Please tell your friends and neighbors about the Historical Society, its programs, and its ongoing contributions to our community. Much work is needed to maintain and improve Ely House and the Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center. With your support the rich history of our community will be the gift we give to future generations of Hightstown and East Windsor citizens.

Volunteers are always welcome and encouraged to help both in the society library and in the museum. The Society holds their monthly business meeting the first Tuesday of every month (except July and August) at 7 p.m. in the Society library. We encourage guests to attend and become familiar with the facility.

Society Assessments

Cataloguing of the Collections has been upgraded by the Library Committee headed by Kathy Patten. Among them are:

- Framed maps from 1875 and 1916.
- Photos and a scrapbook belonging to **Grace Norton Rogers**; clothing, family photographs of the Conover, Jones, and Rogers families; slides taken by Grace Norton Rogers; Friday Club History written by Grace in honor of the Club's 75th Anniversary; donated by Brenda MacMurray, niece of Grace Norton Rogers, 2013.
- Thirty journals kept by **Walter C. Black**, starting in 1930-1966, detailing weather and activities relating to Village Nurseries, donated by Michael Mendenko, 2013. The journals were read by Mr. Black's great-grandson, Cappy Stults, who added a summary and timeline of W.C. Black's entries, putting much of the information in context for readers or researchers interested in his life.
- The **John Orr, Jr. Family Collection**—29 boxes of Orr, Davison, Braunfels, and Herbert family memorabilia; donated by Beth Orr Hegeman in 2009.
- The **Smith Family Collection**—This historically sig-

nificant collection is quite large and includes:

- ♦ A sword with a sheath, three feet long, with decorative brass trim, brass crosses on both sides, and a soldier's head with a Roman-style helmet on the head of the sword. The name J. Mount Smith is etched on the sword.

- ♦ A gold pocket watch with chain (dated 1894) belonging to John Mount Smith. It is engraved on the front with his initials and on the back with a village scene, made by the American Waltham Watch Company, enclosed in a glass case. The watch has hour, minute, and second hands with Roman and Arabic numerals on the face.

- ♦ The only pair in existence of glazed yellow earthenware pitchers, made for Rescarrick Moore Smith, a former NJ State Treasurer, in the 1850's. According to notes accompanying the pitchers, it was the custom of the times to present South Amboy Pottery, inscribed with the name of the recipient, to prominent citizens as a token of honor and respect.

The Smith Family Collection was donated by Judith C. Perkins, Ocean City, NJ, Executrix of Richard Mount Smith's will. Richard Mount Smith was the last descendant of the Rescarrick Moore Smith and John Mount Smith, Jr., family.



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

Visit our website at
www.hewhs.com



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