

Hightstown



East Windsor

# Historical Society News

Winter 2023

## School Days

### A History of Hightstown/East Windsor Higher Education

by Cappy Stults



C Stanley Stults is top row, seventh from the left.

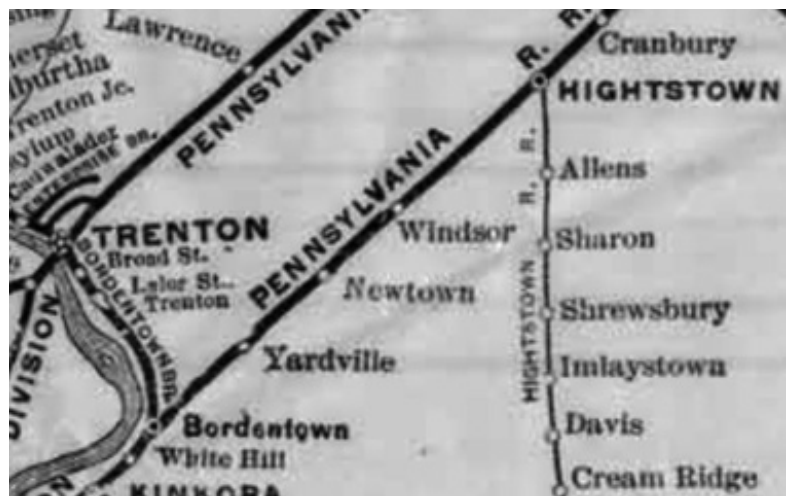
I am both blessed and cursed by being the recipient of generations of family and town papers and photographs. It is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff, but it needs to be done to make sure the most important items are not mistakenly discarded. Many years ago I found my grandfather's diploma from Trenton High School. Still framed, albeit a little water-stained and dirty. In better shape was this somewhat faded picture of his 1911 Trenton High School football team. C. Stanley Stults was born and raised in Hightstown and went to public school here but Hightstown/East Windsor did not have a four-year high school until 1913. Prior to then, there were only two years of high school here. The additional two years of free public school were available at Trenton High School, but not all eligible attended. Many just completed their 10 years, while others may have attended Peddie or other private schools.

It is tough to imagine, but the 11th and 12th

graders boarded the train either at the passenger station off of Stockton Street or behind the Mercer Street School. Most likely the latter since the Mercer Street School, built in 1894, had classrooms for 1st through 10th grades, and many students from the outlying areas were brought here by carriages, prior to gasoline school buses.

The train traveled south on the old Camden & Amboy Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, then they changed

trains in Bordentown, and then on to Trenton. Reversed route at the end of the school day. I was told that most of these Hightstown students had arrangements with friends or relatives in Trenton in case of weather emergencies so they had a place to stay overnight.



(cont. pg 3)

# President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

After 4 years of no House Tour due to COVID and two years of Virtual Tours, we are holding a Christmas Candlelight House Tour at 3 pm, December 3, beginning at the Ely House. Tickets and further information are in this newsletter and on the website, [www.hewhs.com](http://www.hewhs.com). Thanks to Shirley Olsen and her committee.

It is that time of year to send in your annual dues. Also, consider an additional amount for the library addition. Although we had many generous donations, we did need to dip into our other funds to complete the project. With increased interest rates, replenishing those accounts will greatly assist us in paying our bills and fund some needed repairs and painting.

Thank you to all who attended the annual meeting at the Old Yellow Meeting House and Albivis. There were many great comments about the OYMH as well as the luncheon. We also took the opportunity to honor, Robin Smith, our previous Vice President, who has moved to Virginia. Thank you again, Robin.

I will continue another year as President, Greg Ciano was elected Vice President, Shirley Olsen will continue as Secretary, and Robert Szychowski as Treasurer.

Bev Mann volunteered to head a committee that is hosting Open Houses. The first one has been held and there were a few walk-ins. Volunteers are needed. They will be on the first Sunday of the month from 1-3 pm. Information will be provided to docent volunteers. It is fun. Contact Bev if you can help. [fjellrose@gmail.com](mailto:fjellrose@gmail.com).

## Join us this December for our Christmas House Tour

Get into the holiday spirit while touring your neighbor's homes all done up for the holidays.

The Ely House – 164 North Main Street. Pick up program and map. Refreshments provided by the Hightstown Women's Club – 1:30 to 3 p.m.

The Mariboe House: 314 South Main Street

The Zaiser House: 402 South Main Street

The Thompson House 216 South Main Street

The LoPorto/Peppe House: 388 Morrison Avenue

Plus Bell Choir and Christmas Carols at First Presbyterian Church, 320 North Main Street, Hightstown from 6:10 – 6:40 p.m.

**Tickets:** \$20 in advance, \$25 the day of the event, & \$5 for Children day of.

### Purchase tickets at:

Joseph Varo's Hairstylist, 169 Mercer Street, Hightstown

Lee's Turkey Farm, 201 Hickory Corner Road, East Windsor

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

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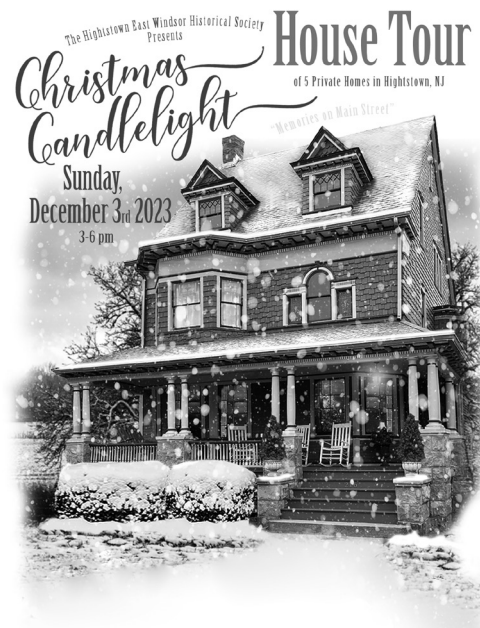
by Bob Craig



We hope you had an enjoyable Thanksgiving and we will see many of you at the Candlelight House Tour. Also, a reminder that our meetings are generally on the second Tuesday of every month at 7 pm. All are invited to attend. We rarely if ever go past 8:15.

Cappy Stults, President

609.712.1811 | [cstults@gmail.com](mailto:cstults@gmail.com)



## School Days (cont.)

The brick Mercer Street school replaced the smaller Academy which was in the same vicinity; thus the name "Academy Street". The Academy School was built in 1841. This "new school" was closed in 1941 and bought by the Free and Accepted Masons. It was later sold to the YMCA. It will soon be the new Borough Hall.



*Mercer Street School.*

The school district eventually voted to build a new high school. It purchased 7 acres from the Cottrell family which fronted on Stockton Street, with its rear on Morrison Avenue. The first graduating class was in 1915. The graduates were Margaret Bergen, Mary Spaulding, Eleanor Mount, Blanche Rue, Marion Field, Marion Embley, Henry Wolf, Mildred Stults, Herbert Butcher, and Otilie Puerschner.



*First Hightstown High (Walter Black Elementary sits here now) and Second Hightstown High (now known as Grace Norton Rogers Elementary School).*


The first floor had classrooms for 5-8th grades and the top floor housed the high school grades.

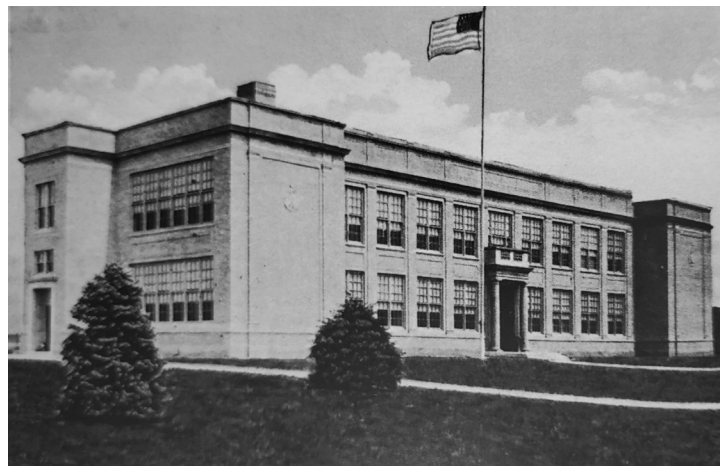
Many my age attended school here in the 1950s and 1960s. By then it had been changed to just the middle school for 5th and 6th grades. In the basement was the cafeteria which served this school and the Walter C. Black, school which horseshoed around it, built in 1953 with many additions over the years. This school was razed in 1967.

The population of students grew quite rapidly back in the 1920s, and houses were rented on Morrison Avenue for classrooms. The district approved the purchase of ground across the street from this first high school. It was part of the Job Farm and the new high school, complete with a gymnasium and auditorium, was built in 1924 missing its completion deadline, and was occupied in January 1925. This we now know as the Grace Rogers School.

Ironically the newest high school, off of Lesh-in Lane, also missed its completion deadline for September 1965. I was a freshman and we had split sessions. Ten periods a day. 10-12th grades attended normal hours, but we freshmen came in at period 3 and stayed until period 10 which was nearly 4 o'clock. The new school was occupied after winter break in January 1966.

A little-known but interesting fact is that the superintendent of schools in 1947 was J. Harvey Shue. Sixty-plus years later, his grandson, Andrew Shue, actor on Melrose Place and professional soccer player, bought the Sloan House at 238 South Main Street. Many remember this as the Dawes house and is now the Peddie Headmaster's House. Shue's ex-wife, Amy Robach, is a reporter and Good Morning America host.

See Newsletter Summer 2019 for additional information on the early schools. 



# In Memory of Margaret Nixon and the Others Resting in the "Nixon Family" Burial Ground

by Curtis Crowell



here or close by”<sup>[1]</sup>. The area may have been a meadow at one time, but saplings and trees now enshroud the row of stones in constant shadow (image below-left). In this image, the gravestone of Margaret Nixon is fourth from the left, slightly to the left of the center.

Local historian John Orr wrote in his book Reflections from the Shrine in 2000, mentioned the possibility of this graveyard:

“There is the probability of a Black burying ground having existed along the Millstone River near the present GE Space Center [Now the Windsor Corporate Park]. Though I have not seen it tradition has it that a gravestone near this spot marks the last resting place of a Black person by the name of Nixon.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Which brings us to the name in the title of this story, Margaret Nixon. The inscription on her gravestone, shown here, was recorded in 1938 by William D. Perrine.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Margaret Nixon**

**Died 13 December 1874**

**Aged 42 years & 4 mos**



Searching for Margaret Nixon in Mercer County records for deaths yields a deceased Margaret Nixon of East Windsor, “colored”, with the same date of death as recorded on the gravestone but with an age of 45 instead of 42 as carved on the stone.

Starting with that lead, a search of census data shows a Margaret Nixon listed for a Taylor Farm household in both 1850 and 1860. The Taylor Farm household does not include Margaret Nixon in the 1870 census.

The Taylor farm, according to the maps examined by Cappy Stults, was in the area

An abandoned graveyard, not marked on any conventional maps, nor situated along a road that might permit visitors to browse the gravestones, sits in the Northwest corner of East Windsor Township in Mercer County. Situated on an overgrown bank of the Millstone River, almost equidistant from Old Trenton Road and the Millstone Road, the graveyard is referred to as the Nixon Family Burial Ground in the book *New Jersey Graveyard and Gravestone Inscriptions Locators Mercer County*, by Edward Raser<sup>[1]</sup>.

There are a number of stones aligned in a row. 11 were identified by William D. Perrine in an article published in the August 25, 1938 issue of the *Matawan Journal*<sup>[1]</sup>. That article appears to be lost, as there are no extant hard copies of that weekly, and the issue is missing among those that have been digitized.

A crude path cut through brambles and poison ivy leads from the edge of a soybean field to an area of East Windsor Township that Perrine reported had a tradition “that Indians and slaves were also buried



of East Windsor Township that included the area where Millstone Road crosses over the Millstone River, The Taylor farm was located in the same area that John Orr identified as being the site of the “GE Space Center” and included a popular meeting area known as “Taylor’s Grove”- thought to be the area where the Millstone Road bridge crossed over the Millstone River. This is mentioned in Orr’s book as a popular meeting place for church groups and would have required road access; The low-lying banks of the Millstone at that crossing remains an attractive area for people fishing or canoeing (the latter as I have often done).

In the map at the beginning of this article, there is a wooded area that is currently surrounded by tilled farmland growing soybeans. On Google Earth, this wooded area includes several apparently paved areas all overgrown (the paved areas are impossible to discern from the ground at a distance as the overgrowth is so thick as to make entry difficult)

Further, in William D. Perrine’s original article about this graveyard, per Raser’s book<sup>[1]</sup> Perrine referred to it as the “Taylor Grove Burial Ground” - not the “Nixon Burial Ground” as it is named in Ed Raser’s book.

### The 1850 United States Census

A. Margaret Nixon appears first in the 1850 Census, which recorded individuals in each household, including their name, age, sex, color, profession, value of real estate, place of birth, and whether they can read and write. Margaret Nixon appears as a member of the Taylor farm dwelling.

The 1850 Census records of “Free Inhabitants” were recorded by hand on a printed ledger page with 13 columns, with rows for each inhabitant organized by dwelling and by family within each dwelling. The farm dwelling of the Taylor family, lists Joseph N Taylor, 58, as a farmer (column 7 “Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age”); his wife Sarah, 58, and Augustus, 21, (listed as a farmer), Sarah, 18, and Elisabeth, 15. Column 7 was generally blank for females, as presumably they generally did not have a ‘profession’ per se). All of the Taylors are

listed as having a Place of Birth (column 9) of New Jersey.

For these inhabitants, the Color column is blank, which was to indicate these household members were white. On the following page of the census, it continues for the same household, listing Margaret Nixon, 20, is listed as Black, and unlike the other residents of the dwelling there is a mark in column 12 indicating “Persons over 20 years of age who cannot read & write”.

Directly below Margaret Nixon’s entry is an entry for Peter Nixon, age 4. In the Color column (column 6) there is a ‘c’ instead of “B” which is interpreted by Ancestry.com as indicating he was Black, but which could also indicate that Peter was a child of Margaret Nixon, and therefore was also Black. Both Margaret and Peter are listed as having New Jersey as their place of birth.

The last of the Taylor farm-dwelling inhabitants appears to read “John McKahan”, age 21, a farm laborer, with a place of birth listed as “Ireland”.

Here is the image from Ancestry.com:

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate	Place of Birth	Mental and Physical Defects			Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
								Deaf and dumb	Blind	Insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict	
26	Joseph N. Taylor	M	58		Farmer	2000	N. J.				
27	Sarah	F	58								
28	Augustus	M	21		Farmer						
29	Sarah	F	18								
30	Elisabeth	F	15								
31	Margaret Nixon	F	21		Servant		N. J.				
32	Peter	M	4	c	Servant		N. J.				
33	John McKahan	M	21		Laborer		Ireland				

### The 1860 United States Census

In the 1860 Census, Margaret Nixon is again listed as a member of the Taylor farm household, age 30, this time listed as a “servant” (line 39 in the image below). This time the Color box is blank, and Peter is not listed. Margaret Nixon is not listed as black in this census (no entry in the Color Column 6 is treated as white). There are page totals of each gender for blacks and whites, and Margaret Nixon is not included in the page total for black females (the total of black females corresponds to the two black females listed on the page but are not shown in this image).

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate	Place of Birth	Mental and Physical Defects			Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
								Deaf and dumb	Blind	Insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict	
24	Joseph N. Taylor	M	59		Farmer	2000	N. J.				
25	Sarah	F	59								
26	Augustus	M	22		Farmer						
27	Sarah	F	19								
28	Elisabeth	F	16								
29	Margaret Nixon	F	30		Servant		N. J.				
30	William Washington	M	8		Servant						

### Two Other Stones with Last Initial “N”

There are two other stones in the row with the last letter “N”, each of them crudely carved. One is marked “H N 1861” with the carvings

cut deeply into the stone, while the second is more crudely carved with the letters "JN 1870" traced with individual strikes of a chisel in the stone. A search on Ancestry.com of area deaths didn't yield any possible links to these initials.



### Added Note

Margaret Nixon's residence on the Taylor farm reminded me of Vinton ("Snoop") Taylor, whom I interviewed for Kathryn Dennis back in 1997 when as a World War II veteran he was chosen to be the Grand Marshall of the Hightstown East Windsor Memorial Day Parade. Vinton Taylor passed away in 2006, but his obituary indicated that he had grown up on the Taylor Farm. His father was James Taylor.


The Nixon Burial ground is within a short hike from the Taylor farm where Vinton "Snoop" grew up. Augustus Taylor, his grandfather, was 31 in the 1860 census, while Margaret Nixon was 30. James Taylor, Vinton's father, was born about 1878, and also grew up on the farm, close to the Nixon burial ground. Augustus died in 1906 when James was 28. It's quite possible that James would have learned the circumstances of Margaret Nixon's burial from Augustus, and possibly passed that on to Vinton. Vinton was born about 1918, while James lived until 1960.

Since Vinton "Snoop" Taylor passed away in 2006, we may never know more about Margaret Nixon, except for the fact that the stone burial market suggests her passing meant some time to those who knew her and were responsible for her gravestone.

[1] Raser, Edward J., *New Jersey Graveyard and Gravestone Inscription Locators Mercer County, New Brunswick*, Genealogical Society of New Jersey, 2000, 26.

[2] Orr, John W., Jr., *Reflections from the Shrine—An Anecdotal History of Hightstown and East Windsor*, Hightstown, Longstreet House, 1998, 89

[3] Ancestry.com. *New Jersey, U.S., Birth, Marriage and Death Records, 1711-1878* [database online]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2022. Original data: Birth, Marriage, and Death Records. New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, New Jersey.

Cappy Stults and Bob Craig provided a lot of additional background to this article, and I'm indebted to fellow beekeeper Rebecca Sage who was willing to help me find the burial ground I'd come upon years earlier, and who spotted the row of gravestones after two unsuccessful attempts to locate it and assisted in taking the images used in this article (and who, like me, is allergic to poison ivy). 


## Remembering Lewis Bellardo

by Bob Craig

Fifty years ago this December, a most remarkable yet unsung resident of East Windsor, Lewis Bellardo, Sr. (1895-1973), passed away. He was born in a village near Naples, Italy, and came as a boy with his family to America, where they settled in Trenton. He worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad for a time before World War One, when he joined the U.S. Army and fought in France. It shaped his ideas about war and peace.

He moved to Bucks County after the war, working as both a farmer and builder. He and his wife Elizabeth raised a family there, with three sons and a daughter. In 1952, when he retired, he and Elizabeth bought the farm in East Windsor on Whitcomb Road south of Windsor-Perrineville Road. With the acreage rented out to a local farmer, he lived the life of a gentleman farmer. Their two youngest children, Sam and Lewis, Jr., graduated from Hightstown High School.

He was a man who was remembered fondly by all who knew him, including children of the neighborhood. Extremely creative, he was a skilled gardener who grew the largest pumpkins around, a grafter of fruit trees, and a lover of dogs. He kept a horse and drove a sleigh in the winters when there was enough snow. He collected carriages and parts of old wagons, which he repaired, doing the carpentry, upholstery, and even the blacksmithing himself. He enjoyed making art with a paintbrush and building architectural models of a primitive sort.

Sitting in the backyard of their house, one of East Windsor's oldest, on wooden lawn chairs that Lewis, himself, constructed, and looking south past the garden to the wheatfields beyond was a respite, however brief, from all the cares of the moment. These were the years of the 1960s when so many things seemed to be going in the wrong direction. Spending time with him, though, skilled in so many ways that even then were disappearing from one's common experience, made one think that he was stepping back into the past, and finding he had a friend there. 

## Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society

Founded 1971 to educate while preserving for future generations, our people and our community's history.



### Officers

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Please mail the completed application along with a check made payable to:

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*Thank you for your donation!*



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- I would not like to be part of the New Member Spotlight.

## Volunteer Opportunities

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