



Historical Society News

Winter 2024

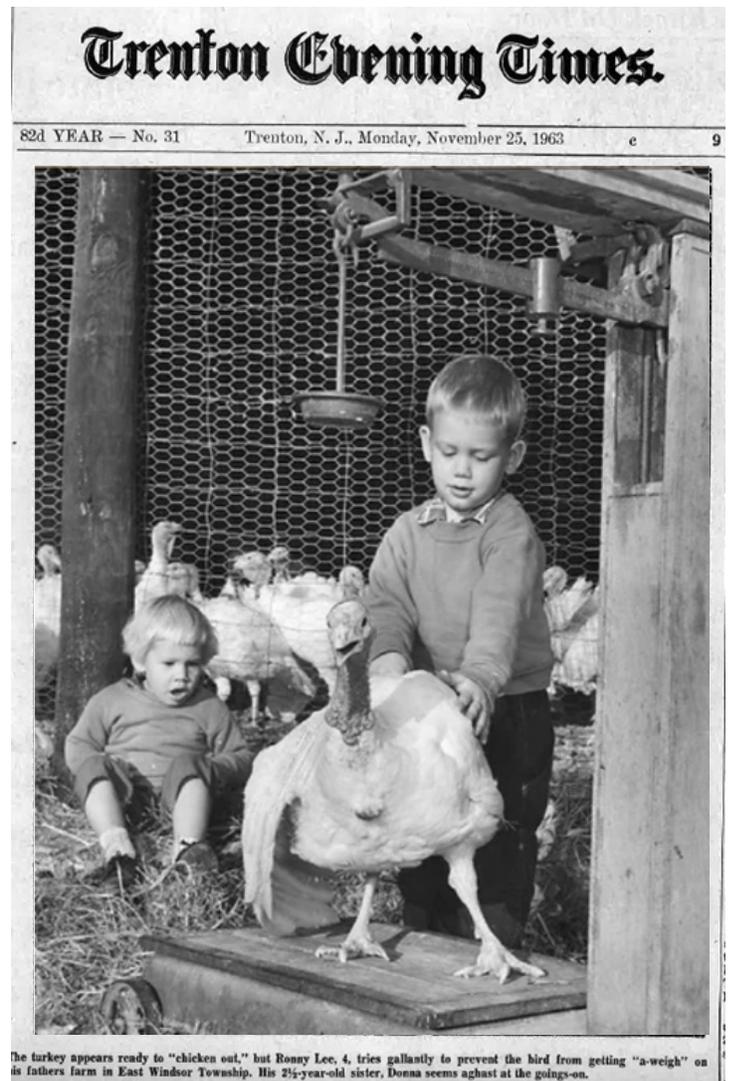
A Turkey Tale

by Charli Decker, as narrated by Ronny Lee

When we look back on our lives, there is usually one stand-out moment when we know we're getting old. My first such moment was several years ago, seeing Paul McCartney on the cover of AARP! This September, I had my second big moment when I received an email from Cappy Stults with a picture from the front page of the Trenton Times of my sister, myself, and a turkey, taken in November 1964. Cappy wanted to let me know that the picture would be in the November issue of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society Newsletter, and asked if I would like to add some words. I guess that makes me one of the lucky ones; I'll get to read about myself in the Historical Society Newsletter before I'm dead! Actually, the story is mostly about my dad. So, here it goes – the history of turkeys on the Lee Turkey Farm.

Our farm had no turkeys prior to 1938 (ed: Lee family bought the farm from Clement Updike in 1868). This was the year when an 11-year-old Richard (Dick Lee) got his first baby turkey to raise. It all started when Dick noticed that many of his friends were involved with the 4-H organization (ed: Head, Heart, Hands and Health), and he decided he wanted to join too. At that time, 4-H was a 100% agricultural youth group with many different clubs, such as dairy club, equine club, horticultural club, as so on. Our county was very rural back then, and 4-H was popular. By the time Dick signed up, the only club that had an opening left was the turkey club. Not long after, he received his first set of turkeys.

He started with 30 turkeys, raised them, and then dressed them out. Selling them to family members, friends and neighbors. It went so well that the next year he doubled the flock, and he did the same the following year. Not only was it a nice amount of spending money, but Dick enjoyed this new venture, and it continued to grow through his high school years.



The turkey appears ready to "chicken out," but Ronny Lee, 4, tries gallantly to prevent the bird from getting "a-weigh" on his father's farm in East Windsor Township. His 2½-year-old sister, Donna seems agast at the goings-on.

When Dick graduated high school in 1945, World War II was just beginning to wind down in Europe, but there was still a draft. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and was stationed in Italy as a radio man for nearly two years. The whole time he could not wait to get back home to his beloved farm.

When Dick did come home from his required service,
(cont. pg 3)

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

First, before I forget, it is DUES time again. You can mail your check to 164 North Main or go to the website and pay via qGiv. Click on "Become a Member" at the top. Click through the choices. You can even have it automatically done annually. There is a small fee that goes directly to the service provider.

Next, I need to thank everyone that has been so helpful this year. In no particular order, VP Greg Ciano, Shirley Olsen Secretary, Robert Szychowski Treasurer, Cookie Cummings Asst Treasurer, Bev Mann Grounds and Open House, Curtis Crowell Building, Joe Lauderback, Chris Gould, Bob Craig, and Eileen Couturier Library, Gary Stevens and Greg Ciano Website, Sue Dilger and Cookie Cummings Museum, Pat and Kevin Donahue Programs, Dale and Gary Grubb, Jane Cox, Nancy Laudenberger and Carol Johnson who have helped on so many occasions and all of the above who have volunteered to assist during the FAIR, Open Houses and Tours. Also, John Zoller for keeping an eye out on eBay for East Windsor Hightstown items, and Bob Von Riegen for doing some last-minute repairs and painting for us prior to the FAIR. I hope I didn't leave anyone out.

I remind everyone that we can always use additional help. Also, our monthly meetings are usually the first Tuesday of the month, unless moved due to a holiday or other conflict. All are welcome to attend. The calendar is on the website.

We have received many accession items this year from all over the country. The library committee is doing its best to keep up with the cataloging. With no exaggeration, a week does not pass without us getting one, and likely as many as 3 inquiries about Hightstown East Windsor history or families who lived in the area. We will do our best to respond promptly. We would love to have your help.

Again, thank you all. We have a bathroom project on the horizon so if you can help in your year-end giving, it would be greatly appreciated. The best of the holidays to you and your family.

Cappy Stults, President.

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The House is open to tour the first Sunday of each month from 1 - 3 pm.

DUES ARE DUE BY DECEMBER 31st.

We also have a bathroom repair project on the horizon.

Any additional donation would be greatly appreciated.

A Turkey Tale (cont.)

he found that life on the farm had been hard when he was away. His father, Levi, had continued his business of wholesaling apples, chicken eggs, honey, and a few vegetable items to the Mom and Pop markets and restaurants in Trenton and the surrounding communities, and also through the Tri-County Auction Market. There were several other farms in the area doing much the same thing, which kept the profit margins pretty low.



Richard "Dick" Lee

The farm was in debt following the Great Depression, and Levi still owed the bank \$5,000 (a considerable sum at that time), with no ability to pay it off in sight. Levi had also been helping his mother care for his father, Charles, who had been in poor health for quite some time, and who passed away while Dick was in Italy. Levi was just tired, worn out, and ready to quit farming.

Levi told Dick that he was planning to take a job opening as a bus driver for a route that ran from Hightstown to New Brunswick. The pay was good, and he'd even have weekends off! With the sale of the

farm, he could easily pay off the debt over him.

Dick was shocked. He had big plans for the farm and did not want to lose it. He had the idea to begin raising turkeys by the thousands and suggested this to his father. Levi, who really did enjoy farming, didn't want to dash his son's dreams, and he agreed to partner with him and give it a go.

By the late 1950s, the farm was out of debt and turning a profit! Turkeys really saved the farm, which is why they changed the name from



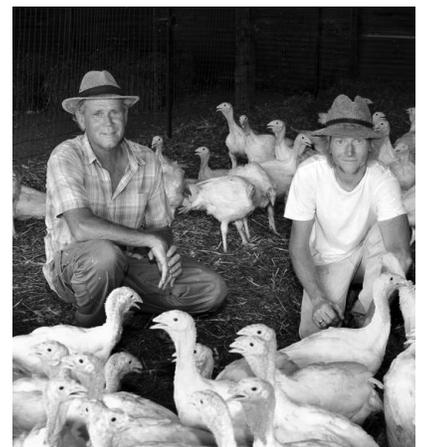
Dick Lee on tractor. His father Levi standing

Lee Orchards to Lee Turkey Farm, in honor of the birds. At this point, Dick and Levi were raising 7,000 turkeys a year. Most of them being sold live to markets and small butcher shops, with around a 1,000 of them being processed right on the farm and sold directly to customers, cleaned and oven-ready.

In the 1960s, supermarkets came into existence. The market for small scale butchers and Mom and Pop shops dried up. Lee Turkey Farm was too small of an operation to supply the supermarkets, but the demand for quality, oven ready turkeys continued to grow. Once again, Dick adapted, reducing the flock to 5,000, with all processing done on the farm, and all sold oven ready to individual consumers, as well as a few restaurants and smaller food markets.

Today, we raise 2,500 turkeys each year, selling only directly to the individual consumer. Not wanting to put all of our eggs in one basket, the remaining farm income comes from fruits and vegetables sold as U-pick and from our own farm market – but that's a story for another day.

I've been asked how old I was when I first started working on the farm. It was actually one year after that picture in the paper was taken. I was 5 years old and was paid a penny for each turkey box I folded and assembled. I've been employed ever since.

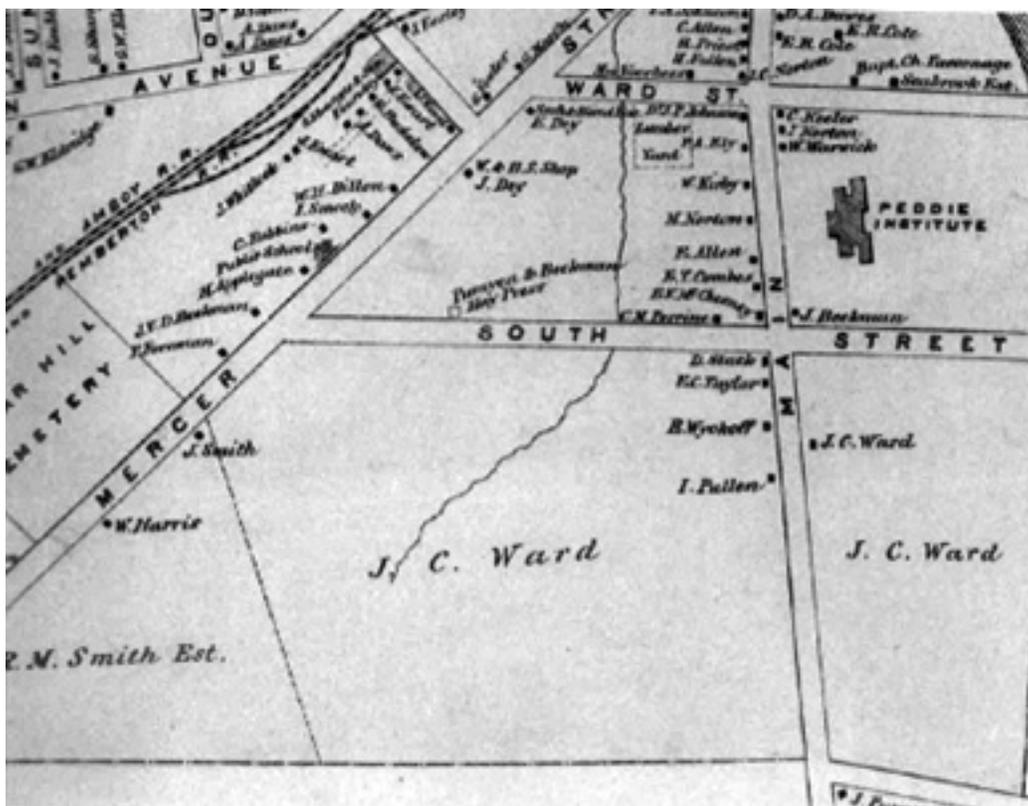


Ron and Dylan Lee

Taylor Avenue, South Street, & Pershing Avenue

by Cappy Stults

Over the years many have asked me about the history of various streets in Hightstown and who built the homes. Dear to me, and a number of our members, are Taylor Avenue, South Street and Pershing Avenue. The history of Taylor and Pershing development starts on South Street. It was first developed in 1916 when a nearly 13 acre tract was purchased by Elmer and Melville Chamberlin from Blanche Rue. She was the daughter of Rebecca Ward Johnes. Rebecca was the daughter of John C. Ward who owned much of the south end of Hightstown, including where Peddie School is now. Kalomathia, the old colonial house on South Main was his residence. Ward Street bears his name and the part from South Main to the lake was formerly known as "Lovers Lane". He gave ground for the original public school, the Academy, and sold 8 acres for Peddie's first owned grounds, then known as the New Jersey Classical & Scientific Institute. The school's name became Peddie in 1872. Mr. Ward was an Assemblyman in 1851. John died in May 1876 and is buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery although a number of his ancestors are buried on Peddie campus in a family burial ground next to the current Arts Center.



1876 Map

Now back to the Chamberlins. Melville had purchased the lumber business of Dey & Beekman which was off of Mercer and the current Ward Street. He had been in the business of hay press, coal, stock, seeds and agricultural supplies, under

the name Chamberlin, Field and Company. We old timers remember the Fields who lived behind the South Main Street Dawes House, now the headmasters House. A number of the houses on South Main between South and Ward were built by Chamberlin. A few had been bought over the years by Peddie and one is still

known as the Beekman House, although now privately owned. The stepping stone "Beekman" still remains.

But next came Taylor and Pershing Avenues. Chamberlin bought this 16 acre parcel and laid out lots of a 50 x 150 feet. They fronted on what became known as Taylor Avenue and Pershing. In the rear of these lots was Grape Run. The "head waters" of Grape Run are actually where the Hightstown High School is today and was from runoff of the corn fields. But

Grape Run, as many area property owners will tell you, is also fed by freshwater springs; thus where Springcrest Drive got its name.

The 1916 Gazette article explains that this Chamberlin tract has a "stream thru a portion of it... A section is partially swampy, another section is hilly and another covered with brush and small trees. H.N. Scott of Cranbury, the contractor, began by clearing the ground and bringing in dirt to fill the swampy sections. The larger trees will remain and much of the stream will be piped. Curbs and sidewalks will be installed as well as street trees." Note

that only in the last two years have curbs been installed on the streets! Lots could be purchased vacant or with a house to be built by Chamberlin and Scott. The Gazette espouses Chamberlin's ability to

develop, with five houses having been successfully built on South Street.

When I was a boy, Grape Run (the stream) was loaded with wild grape vines growing in the trees. It was an open stream up to the piping. The stream provided many hours of pleasure for kids on Taylor, South and South Main streets; the Beckers, Fields, Stultses, Perrines,



Dubells, Thompsons, Deckers, Shaws, Walters, Turps, Hendersons, Parker and Kamens just to name a few.

At South Street the stream went under the road and later was piped from there through the lumber yard, across Mercer then behind and under the businesses on Mercer and Main Streets. The piped stream then crosses under Stockton, paralleled the old railroad tracks, and now goes under the CCL parking lot and empties into Rocky Brook across from the Fire House. Brave boys (not me) used to get in the pipe near South Street and see how far they could crawl towards town. Not sure if any made it all of the way to Rocky Brook from Taylor Avenue, but I suspect some say they did!

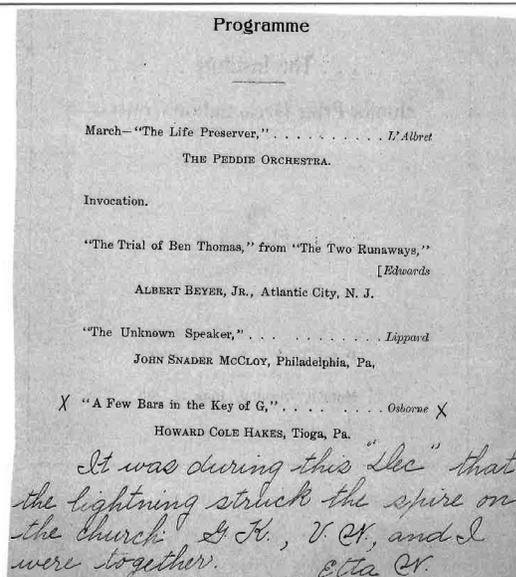
Many years after the last house had been completed, Calvin Chamberlin, Elmer's son, had one large lot remaining at the end of Taylor. It had become landlocked when Westerlea Apartments were built. I purchased this lot from Calvin in 1975 and built our first house, which backed up to our childhood house at 408 South Main Street. Taylor was and is a great street for young children to be raised on. Pershing is too, albeit a through street to Grape Run Road which leads to Westerlea and the High School. 

Lightning Strike: June 12, 1911

by Cappy Stults

Prior to Peddie having a large chapel and the high schools being built, most programs of any size in town were held in the churches. Predominantly in the Baptist Church which was the largest in town. Smaller programs were held in one of the two opera houses in town, one of which was on Church Street across from the current Methodist Church, and the other on the second floor of 100 North Main Street, above J.V. Davison store, now Allen & Stults Co and OGP Architects.

On Monday evening, June 12, 1911, the "Institute" (Peddie) held a Junior Prize Declamation Contest. These were contests where speakers memorized parts of speeches given by others. Between the speeches were orchestral interludes by the Peddie Orchestra. About halfway through the program, and during the playing of "A Few Bars in the Key of G", by Howard Cole Hakes of Tioga, Pa., lightning struck the "spire" and started a massive fire. Etta Wright made a note in the "programme" from that evening. It has recently been received and placed in the Society's archives. Although other churches in the area have had fires over the years, this is the only major fire at the Baptist Church. Many old pictures show various Baptist steeples or spires, but they were from changes due to prior construction issues or just to



improve its appearance. As noted in the article, the town clock was destroyed. For years the Borough owned and paid for the maintenance of the "town clock". Recently, however, the town advised the church that they would no longer subsidize or assist the church with the clock maintenance. The "hands" from the 1911 damaged clock had been saved and were in storage at the Society but will soon be on display in the museum.

We look forward to working with you in the future.

Matt White, Celia Dumbra, Mariellen Bradley, and Dana Ponti

ESL Teachers HHS

Hightstown High School English as Second Language Class by Cappy Stults

About 60 HHS ESL freshman and sophomores toured Hightstown and with the assistance of HEWHS members Carol Johnson, Sue Dilger, Bev Mann, Cookie Cummings, Norm Billings and Paulette Delgato of Cappy's office, were given tours of the Ely House and



Freight Station. Teachers and Paulette interpreted and Cappy tried to, but Mi Espanol

no es muy bueno.

After the tours, teacher Matt White sent us the following:

To Cappy and the Hightstown Historical Society,

I want to express our sincere appreciation for the time, information, and generosity you shared with our students during the recent tour of Hightstown and the Ely House and Freight Station Museum. Many of our students, who recently immigrated to the United States, call Hightstown their home. The tour provided them with much more than a history lesson; it offered them a deeper connection to the town and a sense of belonging in their new community.

Exploring Hightstown's historical significance has helped them better understand the value and pride of being a part of such a storied place. It has given them insight into their town's rich history and a greater appreciation for the place they can now call their own.

We cannot thank you enough for making this trip such a success. Your knowledge, enthusiasm, and warmth made it a truly memorable day.

We are already looking forward to making this tour a yearly tradition, as it is clear how impactful it has been for the students. Once again, thank you for your time and dedication.

One Room Schoolhouses for Sale by Cappy Stults

To Sell Schools in East Windsor.

The Board of Education of East Windsor Township will offer at public sale Monday night, August 31, in the Grammar School building on Mercer Street, Hightstown four schoolhouses in the country districts. The sale is authorized by action of the voters of the township, the election held July 28 resulting in the voters deciding in favor of the sale of the properties. The schoolhouses are located at Etra, Cedarville, Hickory Corner and Locust Corner.

The Board of Education has had the high school grounds graded and walks placed in excellent condition, the work being done under the direction of Elmer Vandenberg. New fire escapes are being placed in position on the grammar school building on Mercer Street in conformance with the State law regarding school buildings.

The contract for furnishing coal for the next term at the high and grammar schools has been awarded to D. B. Dey.

From Cranbury Press - August 1914

The "high school ground" referred to in this article was on the south side of Stockton Street (where Walter C. Black Elementary now sits), within the front arched drive and parking lot. Within 10 years a new high school was built across the street, now known as Grace Rogers School. The "new school" started in 1914 was razed in 1967. Prior to that school students went by train to Trenton High School. The sale of these one-room schoolhouses in 1914 was the end of an era in Hightstown East Windsor.

Railroad "Link and Pins" by Cappy Stults

In October, we were contacted by David Markunas of Perrineville. When dam work and dredging were being done in Manalapan Lake in Jamesburg, Dave found this "link" and five "pins" in the mud of the lake. They are very heavy solid iron. The link is approximately 6" by 14" and the pins vary in breadth and length, but are mostly 14" inches long and 1.5" in diameter.



Link and Pin aka Lincoln

I had to wire brush them to remove the years of oxidation and have since sprayed them with a clear coat to prevent further oxidation. They are quite heavy probably ranging from 10 to 15 pounds or more each. They were used in the 1800s to "couple" rail cars together. The iron "link" was fitted horizontally into each car and a "pin" was inserted vertically through a socket at the end each car and through the "link". They were called "link and pin couplers" but also became known as "Lincoln pin", a word play. This type of coupler



Janney aka Knuckle

became illegal on mainline railroads with the passage of the Railway Safety Appliance Act in 1893. It is likely, however, that some remained in use on secondary or spur lines.

The Janney Coupler, also known as "Knuckle Couplers", replaced link and pin couplers which were manual, heavy and quite dangerous for the trainmen as they had to stand in between the cars to insert the pins! The Janney was automatic upon contact. Toy train sets mimic the knuckle couplers.

I did a little research to try to determine whether these link and pins were in Manalapan Lake as refuse or due to an accident where car(s) fell off the tracks and into the lake. Knowing approximately when they were no longer in active use, I did searches of the Gazette and Cranbury Press issues from 1880s and 1890s. I found a number of injuries and deaths in Jamesburg related to the railroad at crossings and to employees, but I did not yet find any reference to cars falling into the lake. Still looking.

Thank you Dave. 

Volunteers Needed to Help Clean Up Historic Gravesite

The William and Ann Hutchinson grave site sits nearly equidistant between Etra/Feldsher Rds and Cedarville Rd in the eastern part of East Windsor. It is in the middle of farm fields without any access lane so it is only accessible by foot and during limited times of year. If you are able to serve on this committee, please let me know and I will arrange access with the property owner and farmer. Ann lived in three centuries. She was born in 1699 and died in 1801. 



Annual Meeting Dey Farm Monroe Township October 19, 2024

Although the turnout was low, all who attended were very impressed with the buildings, exhibits, and grounds of the Monroe Township Dey Farm. They have 30 or more acres of township preserved ground and six buildings including the old one-room schoolhouse from Prospect Plains, two dwellings, a barn, a shed and a large machinery building containing tractors, farm equipment, and carriages.



now has many over 55 communities, single-family homes, office buildings and shopping parks, Monroe Township had the foresight to set aside this ground and these buildings. Unlike our Society which is 100% privately funded, the Dey Farm is 100% funded by the



Monroe Township taxpayers. They are managed by a commission.

Special thanks to Pat and Kevin Donahue for arranging the venue and luncheon at Fernandos, Earl Groendyke for bringing his old Dodge, and especially Warren Barnes, Lisa Macyda, and the other capable docents. For those who missed

Their docents, led by Warren Barnes, were knowledgeable and enthusiastic. The weather was perfect. Hightstown and East Windsor have very close historic relationships with Monroe Township, including many of our members' ancestors. My great-great grandfather, Cornelius B. Stults lived in Prospect Plains and was a Middlesex County freeholder. Although the area

it, visit their website or Facebook. They are generally open the first Sunday of each month, May through October. It is just off of Federal Road, not far from Applegarth Road.



Hightstown Family Fair – 2024

We hosted the fair this year and it was a smashing success! Great vendors, amazing food, awesome musical entertainment and performances. It all happened at the fair.



The fair was moved to Bank Street this year and it created what one attended called “the ultimate block party.” So many fantastic vendors with a wide variety of crafts and products on display. As you can see from the photos there was a large crowd of people from the moment the fair was opened (10 am) to the moment the fair was closed (4 pm).

Reverend Sammy of the Methodist Church



put together quite an amazing line-up of entertainment for the day. Many local bands provided entertainment plus the School of Rock, Princeton performed a few numbers that showed off their students’ abilities. A Place to Dance came out and

performed two numbers right in the middle of Bank Street. To round out the day, the students of CMB Karate performed a Martial Arts/Dance hybrid followed up by CMB owner, Master Christo-

pher Brooks, breaking boards and cinder blocks with his fist, elbow, chin, and foot.



Moving the fair to Bank Street was a huge boon for the Historical Society. We had roughly 250 people touring the house and museum with some mentioning it was their first time in the building. We also received some donations plus sales from items like books and images. All in all, a great day for the Society.

We would like to thank all the Ely House volunteers, the Hightstown Police Force, and Hightstown Public Works for all of their help and assistance. Your efforts helped to create a successful fair. In fact, it was so successful that we plan on doing it again on October 4, 2025 so mark your calendars. We promise a bigger fair with more vendors, more entertainment, and more local involvement.

We’re looking for more people to join the Fair Committee. Be in on the conversation of which vendors make the cut, what kind of entertainment we’re providing, and what activities we will provide. If this sounds like something you’d like to be a part of contact Gregory Ciano at hightstownfamilyfair@gmail.com. We meet once a month starting in January.





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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- Asst. Treasurer: Cookie Cummings
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Society Trustees

Curtis Crowell, Nancy Laudenberger, Bonnie Lou Field, Irene Schubert, Bev Mann and Gary Grubb

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Membership Application

Support us this year at the following rates:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual\$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Booster\$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life (Individual)\$200 |
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Where did you hear about membership?

Two Ways To Donate!

By Mail

Mail the completed application along with a check made payable to:

HEW Historical Society
Membership Committee
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

Online

Go to our website hewhs.com and click "Become a Member Today" or scan this QR code.



Thank you for your donation!

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

Volunteer Opportunities

I would like to volunteer to help out with the following committee(s):

- | | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Property & Grounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity |
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**WE NEED YOUR OLD COPIES OF THE
HIGHTSTOWN HIGH TIMES**

Please reach out to Cappy Stults if you can help.

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