



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

MARCH - APRIL 2007

Hightstown's Early Railroading Family

by Richard S. Hutchinson

THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF THE STORY PRINTED IN THE JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2007 ISSUE

Cedar Hill Cemetery - Old Section Albert S. Riggs - 1879 - 1944

Capt. John W. P. West owned a plot in the Old Section of Cedar Hill Cemetery and the following persons were buried in that plot:

John W. P. West - b. 18 Oct 1823- d. 5 Sept 1909

Lydia Applegate, wife of John W. P. West - b. 19 May 1825 - d. 21 Aug 1914

Lydia West - 1857 - 1941

Lydia C., dau. of George H. & Emily A. West - d. 21 May 1887, aged 5 months, 24 days.

Taylor Applegate - d. 11 Aug 1890, aged 40 yrs.

Elizabeth A. Schuyler - 1852-1938

Richie Wesley, son of Taylor & Lizzie Applegate, aged 4 yrs.

Anna P. West, wife of Marsena Riggs - d. 23 Oct 1884 - aged 31 yrs.

Joseph L., son of John W.P. & Lydia West - d. 13 Aug 1895 - aged 46 yrs.

Cedar Hill Cemetery - New Section

James G. West - 13 Apr 1848 - 10 Feb 1921, with 2nd wife Charlotte A. Hagerman and two children's stones unreadable.

James T. West - 1877 - 1953

Josephine C. West - 1883 - 1956

John W. P. West [Jr.] - 1862-1930

Rosa J. West, no dates but wife of John W. P. West [Jr.]

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH

- 5 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 7 Program on George Washington, by Robert Gibby, 4:00 p.m., Meadow Lakes Meeting Room
- 25 Open House featuring a Studebaker Wagon, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Ely House

APRIL

- 2 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 21 Program and Tea - Antique Clothing, Maryanna Reeves Collection, 1:00 p.m., Ely House
- 22 Display of antique clothing, Maryanna Reeves Collection, 2:00-4:00p.m., Ely House

Turmoil In Hightstown, or, the Origins of a Fire Department

Since the founding of Hightstown, there have been few sections of the downtown area that have not been previously touched by fire. Fires in the past destroyed most of the early structures in the business area. There was even an explosion in the downtown area near the Baptist Church, which was caused by the ignition of a barrel of black powder stored in a garret of a business. On a hot summer day, it was no more! That explosion leveled a section of the town including both businesses and some residences. Yet, the town has survived.

Up into the mid-1860's, all fires were fought by any able-bodied man, woman or child who heard the alarm and could carry a bucket of water. To aid those who responded, there was an antiquated hand pumper that was traded for in Princeton, in 1835, by Hightstown resident Mr. Benjamin H. Reed for one of his mules. However, this hand pumper was not always very reliable in putting out fires due to its numerous mechanical failures. In the cold weather, the hand pumper was virtually useless due to it freezing up, and it was during the coldest winter months

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Announcements

Carole Nelson, member of the Hightstown Woman's Club and Friday Club, and member of the Historical Society, will be presenting a program to the public about the underground railroad quilt the Club women made for the Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society on Wednesday, February 28 at 7 p.m. at the Mercer County Hickory Corner Branch Library, 138 Hickory Corner Road, East Windsor Township.

Carole will also be presenting the program at the Allentown Public Library, 16 South Main St., Allentown, N.J. on Saturday, February 24 at 12:30 p.m. If your organization is looking for a program, Carole is willing to present one if you call 609-448-8388.

Harriet Tubman: The Chosen One

The Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society invites you to attend "Harriet Tubman: The Chosen One" on March 9 at 7:30P.M., in the First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. Stage, film and TV actor Gwendolyn Briley-Strand will portray Harriet Tubman in one of her journeys through the Underground Railroad. The 45 minute program, followed by a question and answer period, is most suitable for ages 8 to adult. Tickets are \$5.00 and may be purchased at Patina Home, 1st Constitution Bank, Cranbury History Center and Cranbury Museum. For information call 409-9307 or 655-5361.

World War II Program

All WWII vets who would like to participate in a program by the Society, similar to the one during the 50th Anniversary year, contact Christian Kirkpatrick (448-3138) or any officer.

Fire Department , continued from page 1

that many fires in businesses originated due to the use of oil lamps and wood burning stoves. Many times, Hightstown had to rely on other fire companies, with some of them brought in by train from Bordentown or Trenton, in order to save the town. On March 3, 1866, there was a just such as fire. It destroyed a major part of the town center and threatened the rest of the village. It was this fire that served as the impetus for the town to consider forming a fire department. The *Hightstown Gazette* reported the following on 8 March 1866 :

THE FIRE - Our borough has had exemption from fire for many years, which has been the wonder of many, considering our exposure, owing to the passage of the Railroad through the place, and the proximity of much combustible matter.

The fire on Monday originated in the stable of Esquire Hutchinson, in the rear of the angle made by the union of Main and Stockton streets. The presumption is that a spark from an engine (attached to the 4 P.M. line) [Camden & Amboy Railroad - Ed.] in passing must have lighted upon the roof. When first seen the fire had made but little headway, and it was supposed that a few buckets of water would extinguish it. The wind, however, was high, and the flames spread with surprising rapidity. When it was found impossible to save any portion of the buildings within the area of the triangle bounded by the Railroad, and Stockton and Main streets, attention was immediately directed to the Hotel of E. Hughes [Ezekiel Hughes - located on the south side of the intersection at the corner location we know as

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HIGHTSTOWN EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Hightstown, New Jersey
founded 1971*

609-371-9580

**To educate, while preserving for
future generations, our people
and our community's history.**

Editor, Richard S. Hutchinson

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Fire Department , continued from page 1

Cunningham's Corner -Ed.), and other buildings on the south side of Stockton street, and to the Hotel and out-buildings of J. B. Richardson [James B. Richardson, proprietor of the The Railroad Hotel - Ed.] — The most imminent danger was at Hughes' hotel, where the heat was so intense that it was almost impossible for men to work. Carpets were placed upon the roof and saturated with water. Had this building caught, hardly a building between Main street and the Railroad south of Morrison street [now known as Rogers Avenue - Ed.] could have been saved. Much credit is due a few men who worked persistently on the Stockton St. side of the house. The hotel occupied by Mr. Richardson, nearly opposite the burning block, was also in great danger. At one time the stables adjoining this hotel were on fire, and with considerable difficulty protected. Some of those on the hotel roof were injured by the heat and flying sparks. Major Smith [owner of the hotel - Ed.] and John Ford, Jr. [Probably the John Ford, who was stage coach driver at Hotel for Smith - Ed.], each had their eyes quite badly burned.

The only building burned outside the block mentioned, was that opposite the Odd Fellow's Hall building, and occupied by A.S. Stoneberger.[Alonzo S. Stoneberger - a painter by trade - Ed.] The parties thrown out of home and business by this conflagration, certainly will receive the sympathy of those who might very easily have shared their fate. The losses sustained, so far as ascertained, are about as follows: Geo. D. Hutchinson, [George Downs Hutchinson - Ed.] owner of all the property in the triangle designated, is insured for \$3,000. His loss will be heavy, probably not less than \$12,000. T.J. Pullen [Thomas Jefferson Pullen - Ed.], dealer in dry goods and groceries, who occupied the corner store, had in stock over \$4,000 — insurance \$3200. J. Woolley, (Wall Paper and Book Store, adjoining Mr. P's) [John Wooley, book dealer - Ed.] saved his stock by timely removal. John T. Hutchinson, who occupied the residence adjoining the Book Store, and the buildings in rear, in which the fire originated, loses personal property to the amount of \$300. Jos. D. Chamberlain, dealer in dry goods and grocer-

ies, who occupied the lower floor of Odd Fellows and Masonic Hall building, had stock valued at \$2,000. Insured for \$1,000. The Masonic Fraternity lose \$250— The Odd Fellows, who occupied same room, lose their all — books, papers, etc. The Widow Ford [Maria Ford, confentionary store - Ed.], who occupied the next building, saved a good portion of her stock and furniture. The last building in this Main St. row was occupied by Messrs. Perrine, Carriage makers [John & William Perrine - Ed.]. They lose heavily in stock and unfinished work. The building occupied by A.S. Stoneberger belonged to the estate of R.M. Smith, dec'd. [Rescarrick Moore Smith - Ed.] The lose we have not heard estimated. Mr. Stoneberger's stock of Paints, Oils and Lamps was insured for \$1,000 which he states does not cover his loss. Benjamin Rice, Tobaccoconist, in Stockton street, loss stock valued at \$5,000. Insured for \$1,800. The barber saved all his property. The entire loss will reach about \$25,000 ... It might have been far worse. There is no loss of life. The portion of property consumed is probably the most suscep-

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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

Annual Membership Application (January - December)

- ☐ Individual ☐ Family ☐ Booster/Patron
☐ Sustaining ☐ Life (individual) ☐ Life (married)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

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

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

Railroading Family, continued from page 1

John W. West - 1881 - 1965 [Orphan son of Joseph L. West, Engineer]

Ella K. West - 1876 - 1953 [First wife]

John W. West - 30 May 1923 - 30 Mar 1988 - US Coast Guard, GM3 - WW II

A Surprise Ending To This Story

When I began the research for this story of a local engineer of the "John Bull" and his Hightstown railroading family, I had no idea that it would connect back to me. However, as I continued to put the pieces of Capt. John and Lydia's family together, I began to see that the orphaned child of their deceased son, Engineer Joseph L. West, who was named John West, and who because of his being orphaned came to live in Hightstown with his grandfather, might be my great uncle by marriage.

To my recollection, I never met or knew of my great uncle, named John West, who was involved in banking in Hightstown and later retired as a bank examiner. He died in E. Stroudsburg, PA in 1965 and I never heard any talk of him or anyone having connections to railroading in any way within the family. As I continued working on this project, his connection to the railroading family of this story, began to emerge and it was finally proven that he was the orphaned child of Joseph L. West, the son of Capt. John W. P. West. The proof of my "hunch" came through my great uncle John's birth certificate which stated that his full name was John Wesley West, born in Jersey City on 30 Dec 1881, the son of Joseph L. West, age 32, an Engineer, and his wife Catherine E. Brock, age 31. Uncle John Wesley West lived at 150 Stockton Street, Hightstown. He was a widower and became the 2nd husband (on 26 Aug

1957) of my great aunt, Sara Gordon Hutchinson, for whom the (Hightstown - East Windsor Historical Society's) Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center is named. Adding even more irony to this story is that the Society's educational center is Hightstown's old P.R.R. freight station. It is truly a small world but especially so in the Hightstown area amongst the older families and many surprises are still waiting to be found.

Fire Department

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tible of any of future improvement, now that the entire space is open for rebuilding. So that out of a partial disadvantage we may have something to recompense for this in future.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE MAY-JUNE ISSUE

Mrs. Maribelle Taylor
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Hightstown NJ 08520

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

