

HIGHTSTOWN

NEW



JERSEY

EAST WINDSOR

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2004

There Is Nothing Like Coming Home To Your Hometown

by Richard S. Hutchinson

The following is part of a letter sent to the the *Hightstown Gazette* in 1912 from a former Hightstown resident, Lue Reed Middlebrook, who was then living in San Diego, California. In the letter, she sees her hometown as it was in her memory of past experiences.

She was the daughter of Olmsted H. and Eva (Shotwell) Reed and was born 4 May 1867 and died 7 October 1955.

"... Let me shut my eyes and picture a visit to the hometown as I have so often pictured it. I shall come in on the old Camden & Amboy Railroad that used to wobble along in the afternoon. Tom Scroggy will look after my

trunk, while I walk down towards Stockton street with a wave of my hand across to Wm. Measuroll and a glance out my eye to see if Hannah Smith recognizes me. Now down past Perrine & Skillman's, Robbin's, with a bowing acquaintance across the street to the Fire Dept, and calaboose. We have reached Cunningham's drug store. From there will call up some old acquaintances and notify them of our arrival, thus giving them a chance to take to the tall timber or develop some highly contagious disease which will necessitate quarantining, during our stay. No— can't do that. Had no phones then. A little bird carried the news and made good time too. The next move will be to reconnoiter around and see if our old antipathy is any where in the vicinity, still acting as understudy for the devil. If the coast is clear, then for a walk down Main Street to Fountain Square ... stopping by Anderson's meat shop, admiring Weller's wooden Indian, Moore's choice clothing, Smock's stoves, Mason's dry goods, Rue's patent medicines, Forman's hardware, Ashton's shoes, Stout's Waterbury's, Robins' cinnamon bun's, Early's ice cream, Dalrymple's pictures and Toby Zhender's cream puffs (Did any one ever eat such cream puffs as Toby made?). Now, across Fountain Square to big Charley Cole's undertaking rooms. He was called this to distinguish him from his namesake. To see Big Charley going down the street with a coffin board over his shoulder and a smile on his face, made me think him about the bravest man I ever knew, to thus defy Death. I

never quite out grew my awe of him even if he did sing tenor in my choir and acted as human as all singers do.

Speaking of the Coles (and they were the salt of the earth from Jonah, with his cheery "Up today and down tomorrow" unto the 3rd and 4th generation) do you remember that red hot Sunday when one of the girls fainted in the choir and the men carried her out? No, I take that back — dragged her out, for I distinctly remember how loud her heels sounded as they struck every separate and individual one of the uncarpeted organ loft steps in her downward progress. Every breath was apparently suspended until the last awesome thump had reverberated thru the silence. Were you there? — Well, here we are still standing in front of the Baptist Church and it's almost time for Uncle Dan to ring for prayer meeting. The home folks are waiting too, and we must hurry, but the longest way round is the shortest way home this one time, so we'll just return Lawyer Schenck's courtly bow, look in the old brick building to see if Martin is still trimming whiskers, and coaxing two hairs to grow where only one grew before, glance at the glories of Blauvelt's windows, and then down past Pullen's grocery store and the old "Independent Office." In those days public opinion was largely moulded (sic) by our two papers, the *Gazette* and *Independent*, and we were all Republicans or Democrats according to which paper had the honor of carrying our valuable names on its dead head or

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER

- 1 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 7 Ely House open, 2-4:00 p.m.
- 18 The Revolutionary-era mystery of the murder of Isaac Pearson in Hightstown, by Bob Craig, 7:30 p.m. Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

DECEMBER

- 5 Christmas Tea, Ely House, 2-4:00 p.m.
- 6 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

otherwise list. A good Democrat would be ashamed to be found dead with a *Gazette* in the same room while a good Republican would feel eternally disgraced to be caught with an *Independent* in his hands. Mighty nice men editing both of them, too - Richard Smith and Thos. Appleget - but that's the way we played politics in those days. Pretty honest lot of town officials and a God fearing community in general. The papers had to have some excuse for existence, and as presidential possibilities was about the only bone of contention, aside from the "postmastership," it got considerably mangled during several Presidential campaigns I remember.

Those were exciting times. With their torchlight parades, brass bands and fervid oratory. The Reed family was particularly fortunate in being a house divided against itself. The man of the house was ardent Republican while the lady was a strong Democrat, and gifted with unique ideas calculated to circumvent the enemy and bring his plans to naught; such as the careful and stealthy closing of the shutters on a brilliantly illuminated house in honor of a monster Republican parade. The man of the house too modest to come out for applause as the parade passed and in vain listening for it within his doors, only to find upon investigation the outside as dark as black cats, while within the candles merrily blazing away their brief existence.

Now we are passing the Railroad Hotel, the porch of which used to be the stamping ground of several long distance tobacco shooters, balanced on the hind legs of a row of armchairs. At the remembrance, we hasten our pace, and step high to avoid a possible deluge, all to the evident discomfiture of those early and late settlers and the imminent danger of their swallowing their ammunition. The old Post Office came next and why the walls of that packing case never fell out during mail hours is a

marvel to me— they did bulge. Let's wade across the street now for it rained last [night/week?] and Main street is always the last to [drain]. Past Davison's, C.M. Norton's, the Bank, Blackwell's, the old bargain shop, with a gay greeting to Joshua Allen or Roger's furniture store and a whistled refrain for the benefit of one of the *Gazette* staff as we pass their door— a nod to Jed Brandt and Ogborn of oyster fame, and over the creek and under the iron bridge with a glimpse of Albert Norton doing the Sandy Claws act across at the flour mills. There's Captain West and Lydia out in their front yard, but we haven't time to stop now. Mother Lantz shouts after us and we catch a fleeting glimpse of Hart Bodine, Marsh Allen. Elmer Goldy, Charlie Ayers, John Riggs and James Cubberly. We're almost home, and our walk quickens to a run as we near Bank street, sprint around the Episcopal Chapel and see Mother across the road [Reed house] by the side gate, waiting for us, framed by the honeysuckle and roses that are no sweeter than her dear face. Home at last. All that Hightstown means of childhood joy and precious memories concentrated in the mother look of her eyes....

Old friends and neighbors, I send greetings to you all and someday expect to see you all in the place where dreams come true. Signed - Lue Reed Middlebrook.

House Tour a Success

Once again, the Society's House Tour was another success with 286 tickets sold to the event. It involves much planning, research and work months in advance of the event, and then there are those working the day of the event. With so many people involved in making the project a success, it is impossible to say thank to each person individually for fear of missing someone. Therefore, the Society says a big "THANK YOU" to all.

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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**Genealogical queries pertaining to
the Hightstown-East Windsor Town-
ship area are accepted, but will be
printed as space allows.**

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President's Message

As you prepare for the holidays, please keep a place in your heart and some spots on the calendar for the Historical Society.

On Sunday, November 7th, Ely house will be open from 2 to 4:00 p.m. We would like to set regular dates for showing the house, but we don't want to be there alone! If you've ever wanted to tour the house or to take some friends there, stop by on the 7th to show us that you'd like to see Ely house open on a regular basis.

At 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 18th, Bob Craig will speak on

a Revolutionary - era murder mystery, the death of Isaac Pearson in Hightstown. Bob has written on this subject for the newsletter and has more to report on the death of this important local political figure.

On Sunday, December 5th from 2 to 4:00 p.m., we'll hold our annual Christmas Tea. Please stop by, see some friends, hear some entertainment and have a bite to eat. This is a great way to start the holiday season.

As I think of the end of 2004, I think of all the Society volunteers who deserve our thanks for their hard work. As you all know, Hutch is an invaluable

member of the Society, writing and lecturing on local history, keeping up the membership files, and producing a newsletter that is always fun and informative. Thank you, Hutch, for all your hard work. And a special thanks to your daughter, Cori Hutchinson Quinlan, for typesetting our newsletter.

Cappy Stults, our recording secretary; Anna Szewczyk, our corresponding secretary; and Frank Brennan, treasurer, all do yeoman service for the Society, as do our committee chairs - Fran Cook, Shirley and Warren Olsen, and Skip Cox -

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The Holiday Greeting Card



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these dedicated members make our Society not only run, but hum. Julie Ely has resigned as museum chair, but not before bringing a level of professionalism to the museum that most local historical societies would envy. Thank you, Julie, for your years of work in the museum. Vice-president Frances Pane is new to our Board this year, but she has already given much to the Society, having served on several house tour committees and hosting end-of-tour parties that are always a delight.

Finally, let me thank Skip, for leading us last year and for sharing his knowledge, wisdom, and good humor. With people like these working hard for our Society, 2004-2005 is bound to be an interesting and productive year.

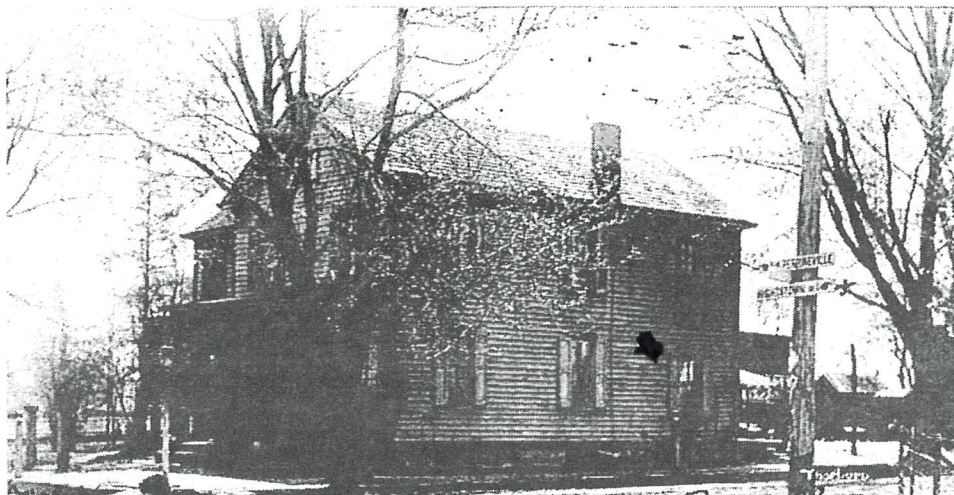


Photo by Thorburn of the Shinn Hotel, Etra, New Jersey. When I grew up in the 50's, it was known as Penny's Tavern, corner of Etra Road and Cedarville Road. [Image from Editor's Collection].

*Come celebrate the season and have tea
at the Society's Christmas Tea
December 5th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.*

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