

HIGHTSTOWN

NEW



EAST WINDSOR

JERSEY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2006

Underground Railroad "Station" Identified

By Richard S. Hutchinson

I have been asked many times, if I knew about the Underground Railroad Station in Hightstown that was located at an Ely House. However, my answer was always that I have never heard of it other than those asking where it was located in Hightstown. I even had a researcher of the "railroad" knock at the door of the Society's Ely House and ask if he could look through the Society's house. As it was in those early years, people used the main town or village nearest to them as their location for mail. Thus, one being "from Hightstown" could encompass a large area outward from the actual town in all directions, whether it was actually in Middlesex County or Monmouth Co.

In approximately 2003, I saw an albumen photo for sale on the internet. It was of a young girl, mounted in a Victorian wooden frame, and she was described as Mary Mount. The photographer was F. J. Harris, of Hightstown, New Jersey. Now, Frank John Harris (1853-1915) was a photographer in town ca. 1877, who also had a studio in Philadelphia. He was married in Hightstown, on 1 November 1877, to Ellen Carol Hutchinson (1858-1922), of Hightstown, who was the daughter of Clark S. & Elizabeth (Ford) Hutchinson. It was the purchase of this photograph that has finally led me to the identification and location of the real Ely House "station" on the Underground Railroad that was located not

in Hightstown, but in the area of Hightstown.

After purchasing the above photo, I asked the seller, who lived in central Pennsylvania, how she had acquired the photo. I was advised that she bought it at an auction house that was selling the contents of a local home. I asked if she knew who the owner of the photo was but she did not know. I thanked her and thought nothing more about it other than it was a nice find. After many months, I received an email from the lady who sold me the photo. She stated that she had decided to try to find the owner of it and went back to the auction house and asked them to go

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

- 11 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center

OCTOBER

- 2 Business Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Sara Hutchinson West Educational Center
- 15 Hightstown House Tour - "Town & Country", 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

2006 House Tour – "Town & Country"

The Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society is proud to announce the details of the 2006 House Tour, called "Town & Country," to be held on Sunday, October 15th, from 1-5 PM. There will be 6 private homes and two churches on the tour.

The locations on the tour will be the First Presbyterian Church, 320 N. Main St.; The Winrow House, 198 Stockton St.; The Fabian House, 326 Stockton St.; The Ely House, 317 Stockton St.; The Zito House, 123 Morrison Ave.; The First United Methodist Church, 187 Stockton St.; The Foley-Faxon House, 181 E. Ward St.; The Szychowski House, 676 Windsor Perrineville Road.



The Winrow House, 198 Stockton Street, Hightstown, New Jersey

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Underground Railroad

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through their records. The auction house went through the records and they were able to give her the name of the owner of the photograph. It was Harold Applegate! Well, that explained everything. Harold and his wife Alice, were my Sunday School teachers at the Presbyterian Church in Hightstown, his brother Ken lived across the street from me on Bennett Place, his other brother Robert married my aunt, and Harold, who now resides in the central Pennsylvania area, has been a member of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society for many years.

It didn't take me long to contact Harold, who has a vast knowledge of the old families in the area, including the Applegate and Ely families. The first thing I told him was that I had purchased the Mary Mount photograph, then explained how it had all come about and then how I was able to place it as having come from him. He explained that the photograph was one of several items that mistakenly went to the auction house when he was moving. He indicated that he was certainly attached to that photograph because it was of his grandmother, Mary (Mount) Ely. I told him he could have it back but he suggested that I give it to the Society. I promised him that I would see to it that it goes to the Society after I had finished using it for a story in the Society's newsletter. In the meantime, I made a copy of the photo and sent it to him. Since that time, Harold and I have talked together on the phone and exchanged a couple

of letters dealing with historical info. When Harold received the March-April 2006 issue of the Society's newsletter, which contained the article on the Underground Railroad Quilt and had mentioned a house in the Hightstown area being a "station" on the railroad, he contacted me. I told him that it had always been mentioned that there was a "station" in an Ely House in Hightstown. He then told me that he knew where it was and that it was an Ely House but it was just outside of East Windsor Township. He told me that his grandmother told him all about the house.

The Ely house that was a "station" on the Underground Railroad was "near Hightstown", but actually in Monmouth Co. The house no longer exists as it was torn down ca. 1960. If you go through Etra past the lake and continue straight onto Disbrow Hill Road, you would then take the first road to the right, which I believe is called the Battle Ground Road. The house once stood about a third of the way down the road on the left side just past a little creek. It was originally the farm and home of Aaron Ely (1786-1863). Apparently, it later was later known as the Joseph Holman Ely (1806-1873) residence because in the 1873 map of Millstone, the location of the home is shown as the home of "J.H. Ely." Joseph was the oldest son of Aaron. There were also barns located opposite the house on the other side of the road. Joseph Ely had a son named John V.

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Mary Mount at the studio of Frank J. Harris, Hightstown, NJ, ca. 1878

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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A Sign of the Times

On 16 June 1898, a new sign was posted for the public at the south end of Main Street, after many complaints were received from the residents of South Main street area about bicycle riding. It read: "Borrough Limets - Bickle riding on side wakes postivly for biden under penelty of law."

The *Hightstown Gazette* responded to the new sign by stating, "That's pretty rough on bicyclists and Webster."



Memorials

Milton Hart Cunningham, 89, a lifelong resident of Hightstown & Mantoloking, died on June 10th, 2006, at the University Medical Center at Princeton after a brief illness. One of the founding members of the Society, his family asked that in lieu of flowers, contributions to his memory could be made to the Hightstown-East Windsor Township Historical Society, 164 N. Main St., Hightstown, NJ, 08520.

Mary Anna Reeves (nee Jacobs), 78, the widow of Richard Reeves, passed away at Princeton hospital Center on August 2, 2006. She and her husband were long time members of the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society.

House Tour

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Advance ticket sales will be available after Labor Day, at locations in Hightstown, for \$17 at Perennial Homes, 119 West Ward St.; Old Hights Print Shop, 177 Mercer St.; the Reed House, 200 N. Main St.; and Hair by Sharon, 128 Stockton St.; or by calling 609-443-3906. Tickets will be available on the day of the tour at Ely House, 164 N. Main St., Hightstown, NJ, after 12:30PM for \$20. The Rocky Brook Garden Club will be arranging all the floral designs for the homes on the tour.

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

Railroad

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Ely (1836-1926), who married Mary Bennett, and they had a son named George Bennett Ely (1866-1933), who married our girl in the photograph, Mary Mount (1868-1962), who was Harold Applegate's grandmother.

According to Harold, Aaron Ely was involved with the Underground Railroad and his house was a stop or "station." He stated that, "like many houses of the era, it had two stairways to the second floor (a front one and a back one). One stairway had a stairway under [it] which went down to the cellar. The other stairway enclosed a room under it. In this room, without any windows, was where the slaves were hidden while they waited for transportation north." Harold stated that he went through the vacant house between 1955-1958 with his "grandma" giving him a tour of the old house and showing him the interior of the house and the hiding place. He described the old

farmhouse as it was at that time as "a clapboard affair and not in pristine shape from being vacant for some time." According to Harold, "The [Ely] family purchased the freedom for two slaves. One of the names I've forgotten. The other one was Patience Track who was a fine person who stayed with the family..."

John Orr in his book, "Reflections from the Shrine: An Anecdotal History of Hightstown and East Windsor," writes: "Early in the 1800s, there were some local white families who were willing to help runaway slaves, and not without some risk to themselves. One of these persons was Aaron Ely Some say that Patience was a slave in the household of Aaron Ely, a well-to-do landowner near Etra. The real story, according to descendants of this family, is that she came to the Aaron Ely house, a waystation on the early Underground Railroad, as a refugee. The Underground

Railroad network was in operation as early as 1826, and operated up until the Civil War to help runaway slaves escape to freedom in Canada. If they were caught in the United States, the law required their return to the slave-owner. Apparently Patience was discovered, and in order to prevent her from being forcibly returned to her southern master, Aaron Ely paid the price demanded to obtain her freedom. Patience, now a free woman, decided to stay with the Ely family as a domestic. When Aaron died in 1863, he left a substantial sum of money to assure her support for the remainder of her life. She was living in the household of John V. Ely, a grandson of Aaron, when she died." When Patience Track died in 1879, at the age of 92, she was buried in the old Ely Burying Ground in the East Windsor Cemetery where the Ely family members rest.

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