

BOROUGH OF HIGHTSTOWN
MAYOR ROBERT F. PATTEN'S ADDRESS
JANUARY 1, 2010

Happy New Year to all of you! I wish you much peace, good health and success in 2010.

People say that history has a way of repeating itself. That occurred to me when responding to a request from nine year old Taylor Bell, a Hightstown resident, who spoke at a recent council meeting asking if she could form a group to raise funds to replace the walking bridge over the Peddie Lake dam, which Taylor misses dearly since its recent removal due to its unsafe condition.

In order to help Taylor with her request, we met at the library and found some interesting research on the bridge...in fact, it was in the Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society's Newsletter issue of March-April, 1998 under the headline, "Hightstown Re-Builds," written by former Hightstonian and life-long local historian, Richard Hutchinson (a familiar name).

Here is a bit of history for you: according to Hutch, the Gross Brothers' Feed Mill and other mills located at the intersection of Franklin and Main Streets were the first things people entering town from the east saw and in that period of time, the wooden dam which formed Peddie Lake was covered by the mill structures and an enclosed wooden walk-way--the pre-cursor to our current walking bridge. On the right side of the dam, stood the old saw mill, and several buildings housed businesses – a blacksmith shop, a barber shop, a movie theatre and a garage; but that all changed in 1920, when a fire began in the mills. The mill dust spread the fire, burning the entire mill area including all the wooden buildings from Franklin Street up to the Railroad Hotel, now the Tavern on the Lake.

Immediately, a massive clean-up began, spurred on by the fact that the Hightstown's 200th birthday was approaching and plans for the Bicentennial Celebration in 1921 were underway. The owners of the properties decided not to rebuild the mills and the empty lots were bought by a group of local businessmen with the property deeded to the town as a site for a Memorial Park in honor of the local soldiers who served our country in World War I. Thus the town acquired the property almost up to Stockton Street and began the rebuilding of Hightstown. The dirt covered Main Street was paved and sidewalks were put in place. A huge flag pole (one hundred feet tall), for what was later to become the site of the opening ceremonies of the Bicentennial, was set into place in what would later become known as Memorial Park.

Completing the renewal of the mill area was the removal of the wooden dam and the retaining walls which were replaced with the present rock wall and concrete dam that we see today; all of the rebuilding was done through a community effort guided by the local businessmen involved in the Hightstown Board of Trade. The whole project was to cost an estimated \$25,000 and all of it had to be raised by contributions.

The fundraising drive lasted all of three weeks with the entire amount being raised in that period of time!! Through this effort by the people of our community, Hightstown's downtown area was rebuilt. A compelling letter sent to all households stated, "The estimated cost of the whole enterprise is \$25,000 and every man, woman and child of our community will be urged to make some contribution to the fund. A certificate will be issued to each subscriber. Pledge buttons, window cards, with small American flag stickers for each member of the family contributing will also be furnished"...it ended with "Yours for the good of Hightstown and the glory of her sons." It was signed by C. Herbert Davison, Pres.; and Wm. H. Franklin, Sec.

The editor of the newsletter, Richard "Hutch" Hutchinson, noted, "I often wonder that if such a disaster befell the community today, would we have that same community spirit? Would we be able to pull together and accomplish what our forefathers did?" And, now, history is repeating itself with Taylor Bell's initiative to help make our town better.

My answer to Hutch's questions is a loud and familiar..., "**Yes, we can!**" No matter what form the disasters and downturns take, we can survive and continue the town's healthy heartbeat of New Jersey. Evidence of this community spirit is seen everywhere from our beautiful, holiday-decorated downtown to the exciting preparations being made for our all volunteer Hightstown Engine Company #1 Fire Department's 175th Anniversary to be celebrated throughout 2010. While other towns have had to cancel or reduce their holiday decorations, ours were spectacular....and while other towns cancelled their community fairs, ours grew larger...all due to community volunteers' spirit and generosity. Our town's diverse population of 5,300 has hundreds of residents who unselfishly give of their time, energy and resources to the continuing success of the Borough of Hightstown.

We are SMALL and BEAUTIFUL ... and that means, everyone feels a part of this special place and that he or she can make a positive difference, whether you're nine or ninety, you are a part of the town, our Hightstown!

In conclusion, for the year 2010, let us all make resolutions for the good of Hightstown. Our town needs unity in the community. Here is what we all can do to help make Hightstown a better place in which to live, worship, visit, and do business. With much pride, I am able to offer the names of many townspeople, and civic organizations and houses of worship and municipal boards, commissions and committees and youth groups and businesses and ... more and more outstanding names who help give the Borough of Hightstown a positive image in New Jersey. I thank everyone who has been part of this continuing effort since the founding of our town.

Now, with the start of a new decade, let's resolve to answer the question, "Why can't we all get along together?" Let's say, "We are capable and we will!" Politics should not divide us, it must unite us! Let's truly work together to make Hightstown a better community each and every day. It is our town! Having unified goals for it will bring about positive changes much more quickly. Let us all make that commitment!

Please resolve, as a community, that we will provide the support and assistance to the services offered to many of our community members and families through our community action service center called RISE and the Better Beginnings Child Development Center.

Let's decide to discover the many "points of pride" in our community and share them with your friends, relatives and associates wherever they may live. We have a wonderful town! Establish your own plan to add a point or two or more.

We all understand that freedom of speech is a special right for each of us. Let's practice behaviors of dignity and respect when we interact with others. Whether you are a mayor or councilperson, a member of the public, a media reporter, or a borough employee--we need to practice civility. Treat people the way you would want to be treated.

In 1721, Mary and John Hight had a dream for their newly settled land—one of prosperity. They accomplished that with their brook side mill and home. Now, with this town's journey through nearly 290 years, the Hights and former mayors and councils left a legacy that today in the 21st century needs the "power of the people" to focus on a vision of a vibrant town with the synergy of modern diversity of population. Let's focus on having suitable housing, community services, schooling, employment, economics, transportation, and a worthy life-style for all. And equal opportunities for all without bias, prejudice, harassment, or any violation of human rights. So, let us all promise, right now, that Hightstown will be the place of opportunity for all its residents and the model for all other towns in this great country of the U. S. of A.

Please agree today that your hearts, with all the excitement and spirit that our town's founders had, will beat in unison for Hightstown's success. Together, we can make a positive difference. Yes, we most certainly can! Hightstown's mayor and council cannot do it alone. Let us recognize that Hightstown's unity in the community only becomes a reality with volunteering, sharing ideas and energy, being benevolent, joining civic organizations, and being a good neighbor across this wonderful 1.2 square miles of "Our Town."

Yes, our property taxes are too high; but, let's unite to urge our state legislators to amend the state constitution so property owners are not the only contributors to funding our public schools. We have been carrying that burden for too long; but, at the same time, let's promise to support our public schools which are the solid foundation of our democratic society.

So, let us be united to support this Mayor and Council in its deliberations to improve our town. Agree to understand the actions of the Council when it makes the tough decisions which may not be what you want;but, it will be what the town needs.

Lastly, whether you are a resident, business owner, visitor or consumer, or just passing through, let's all resolve to exemplify the spirit of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They are our guardians for equality and freedom for all, not just a few.

God bless you all, God bless Hightstown and enjoy a wonderful New Year!