



# The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Post Office Box 136, 15 West Oak Street, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920

[www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org](http://www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org)

## 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Marcella A. Miccolis, Chairperson

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The Board of Trustees comprises 16 members and convened ten times during 2009. General membership meetings, which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers, were conducted five times.

### Executive Summary

2009 commenced with a Bernards Township resolution in tribute to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brick Academy. A year-long celebration included an official bicentennial logo; a building banner; feature newspaper articles; 'The Brick Academy: Witness to History 1809-2009' timeline; guest speakers; historic preservation exhibits; Bicentennial Supplement to *Brick Academy* booklet; and a commemorative keepsake.

Other major programs, detailed in the following report, include Community Outreach; Speaker Series; Historic Preservation; Education; Online/Internet Communications; Brick Academy Utilization; Fundraising; Artifacts; Archives; Consultation & Clerical; and Memberships.

2009 concluded with the Board of Trustees establishing a special Historic Preservation fund in memory of Lorraine Passmore who passed away in October. Lorraine was a longtime resident of Bernards Township, a dedicated THSSH volunteer for 42 years, former Trustee and Committee Chair, avid supporter of historic preservation, and dear friend of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills.

## Community Outreach

In order to provide opportunities for the community to gain an understanding of the mission of THSSH, the non-profit organization participates in many Somerset County, Bernards Township and history associated programs:

### **Charter Day 5/16**

The Brick Academy was open and received many visitors interested in Bernards Township history, local artifacts and the newly restored 1895 period schoolroom. On the lower level, Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead exhibited a model of the property, site artifacts and historic preservation photographs.

### **Memorial Day 5/26**

A patriotic-themed wreath was presented during the annual remembrance ceremony.

### **Fall Fest 9/19**

THSSH premiered an information booth at *Fall Fest* in Bedminster. The annual event, attracting over 4,000 people, features family activities; exhibits by township businesses, community groups, schools, and service organizations; refreshments; and live entertainment.

### **Lord Stirling 1770s Festival 10/4**

The Historical Society exhibited a fair booth displaying history books, gift items and educational brochures.

### **Weekend Journey through the Past 10/10-10/11**

The Brick Academy was one of 25 historic properties to participate in the annual Somerset County history weekend. Special events included a self-guided walking tour of Basking Ridge village, educational activities for young visitors and museum exhibits.

### **Local Artifacts**

Collections are displayed at the Bernards Township municipal building, neighborhood libraries, local schools, and community events.

### **Tour Groups**

*Free* museum tours are provided to educators, scout troops, senior citizens, and other non-profit groups.

### **Basking Ridge Garden Club**

Volunteers assist with 'spring cleanup', planting the flower beds and holiday decorating at the Brick Academy.

## Speaker Series

Conducted at the General Membership Meetings, it comprises a professional group of notable speakers. The lectures are *free*, held at the Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public. Guest speakers in 2009 included:

- Architect George B. Post - *Barry Thomson*
- 'The Way of Improvement Leads Home' - *John Fea*
- The Codington Farmstead - *Doug Reeder*
- Early American Schoolhouse - *Meg Wastie*
- 'Ghosts of Central Jersey: Historic Haunts of the Somerset Hills' - *Gordon Ward*
- 'The Uncertain Revolution: Washington and the Continental Army at Morristown' - *John Cunningham*

## Historic Preservation

1. Several development and variance applications were discussed and comments were forwarded to the appropriate board: Davis subdivision; Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church expansion; Orthmann subdivision; Pentlicki application; Bramel/Bruno application; Craig application; Gibson subdivision.
2. In connection with Section 106 reviews, comments were submitted on several area cell tower proposals: 460 Mine Brook Rd, Bernardsville; 25 Stonehouse Road, Basking Ridge; Route 287, Far Hills; Basking Ridge Train Station.
3. Committee members documented demolitions: Early 1800s Richardt house on Bernards Township Sons of Liberty property; late 1900s Placko house on Colonial Drive; the Kiwanis House at Bonnie Brae; and the Albrook School caretaker's cottage.
4. Committee participated in update of Historic Preservation Element of the Bernards Township Master Plan, and urged expedited action to create a Bernards Township Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, as recommended in the Historic Preservation Plan Element adopted April 4, 2006.
5. The Olcott Avenue Historic District in Bernardsville, a project cosponsored by THSSH, was listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in May, and added to the National Register in November.
6. In November, the Committee notified the Bernards Twp. Planning and Zoning Boards that it will no longer provide written comments to board members in connection with Planning Board or Board of Adjustment applications. This necessary action was taken with reluctance, since the Committee believes that informed input about Township historic resources has been helpful to board members and has resulted in better projects. The Committee will continue to be available to meet as a group with residents concerning proposed projects and will provide general guidance in accordance with Committee's previously adopted standards and guidelines, the Bernards Twp Master Plan, Rehab Subcode, etc., and may make specific design suggestions. In the future, members of the Committee may attend hearings to provide testimony in support of or in opposition to a specific proposed project.

## Education

### **METC**

The Historical Society instituted a new 'hands on' education program by establishing a partnership with the *Museum of Early Trades & Crafts*. The alliance with METC provides an exceptional opportunity to align our local history program to the NJ Core Content and Standards.

### **Historic Schoolhouse Summit and Symposium**

THSSH sponsored the first statewide Historic Schoolhouse Summit and Symposium. Over forty participants, representing seventeen schoolhouses and organizations from nine New Jersey counties, met at the Brick Academy to network and share ideas on the challenges facing programming, exhibits and financial stability.

### **History VolunTEENs Program**

An initiative to encourage teens from the Somerset Hills area to volunteer their time and talent by assisting with THSSH programs while increasing their knowledge of local history.

### **Museum**

The main floor of the Brick Academy, features exhibits of local historic artifacts, the Lord Stirling Manor House, building restoration objects and the Annin Homestead of Liberty Corner; a 15-foot timeline of the schoolhouse's history; and gift shop. The top floor has been restored to an 1895 period schoolroom with an authentic pot belly stove, period furniture, student desks, early education displays, and antique textbooks.

## **Research Room**

The lower level of the Academy contains community photographs, historic preservation information, genealogy records, rare books, news articles, property deeds, and local maps.

## **Talks & Tours**

During the past year, over 200 students, scouts and teachers visited the Academy for a local history talk, METC program and/or walking tour of Basking Ridge village.

## **Newsletter**

'*Inside the Brick Academy*' comprises Society news, event calendar and local interest stories. It is accessible to the public at our 'open houses', community events and at [www.brickacademy.org](http://www.brickacademy.org).

## **THSSH History**

The history of the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, observing its 81<sup>st</sup> year, has been compiled and is on record in the Research Room of the Brick Academy.

## **Newcomer Brochure**

New residents receive local history and THSSH organization information. The brochure is also offered at the Bernards Township library and municipal building.

## **Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village**

The popular guide is available at the Brick Academy, at the Old Mill Inn, on the Bernards Township Library website, and on the Historical Society website.

## **Lime Kilns**

The public area in Peapack-Gladstone, dedicated in 1999, provides a storyboard about the preserved kilns and the agricultural heritage of the Somerset Hills.

## Online/Internet Communications

2009 was yet another building year for a consistent communications approach towards presenting The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) information and the history of the Somerset Hills communities online. The internet remains an important tool for the overall communication efforts to provide information and virtual capabilities for visitors wanting to learn more about historic personalities, digital artifacts, family genealogy, house backgrounds, and the rich history of the Somerset Hills area. Countless hours have been dedicated to creating an ever changing and broadening experience for visitors to [www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org](http://www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org). From a pure construction standpoint, the website now contains over one hundred individual web pages (117), over 1,000 digital images, over 100 digital documents, and plenty of interactive flash video and slideshows. One of the most dynamic parts of the site is the new introduction page, where the page loads alongside two new historic facts and one new historic image every time the guest visits the site. Called the "historic tidbits", when the viewer visits any page, two new tidbits are always loaded at the top of each page.

The communication effort seems to be paying some rich dividends for 2009. Over 1,029 visitors per month visit THSSH online. On an annualized basis, that means over 14,500 visitors came to THSSH online! (*this figure is estimated based on a transition to a new analytics tool in late August 2009*). Guests stay on the site for almost two minutes and view on average more than two pages each time they visit, which is a marked improvement over 2009. This means visitors are looking at more and staying longer! Additionally, over 80 people felt compelled to write directly to THSSH with questions or comments as a result of visiting the website. Since less than 2% of online guests are using dialup connections, we can continue to build out richer content including video and larger digital documents. While only 8% of all visitors knew exactly how to find us online, almost 60% of all visitors found THSSH via search engines such as Google and Yahoo. So maximizing our placement with search engines will be critical. Also adding [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org) will help improve the direct find metrics. One note - over 85% of all visitors to THSSH were classified as "new" visitors since we converted to a new analytics tool in late August 2009. A more detailed measurement capability will be available for 2010.

## Brick Academy Utilization

In addition to our museum, research room, education programs, and community events, the Brick Academy is utilized for:

- The Historical Society conducts Board of Trustees, Membership and Committee meetings
- *The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead* – monthly Board and annual Membership meetings
- *The Herding Group Association of New Jersey* - quarterly meetings
- *The Northern NJ Region Porsche Club of America* - monthly meetings
- *The Berkeley Circle Homeowners Association* - annual meeting

## Fundraising

- Gift items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events as well as displayed on the Historical Society website.
- Substantial revenue is generated through paid advertisements from local merchants and professional services in our newsletter, *'Inside the Brick Academy'*.
- Non-profit organizations that conduct meetings at the Brick Academy provide generous donations.
- Local school children, area residents and out-of-town visitors make individual contributions while touring the Brick Academy.
- Donations are received through *ShopforMuseums.com*, a primary source of online fundraising for museums and related non-profit organizations through three hundred popular retail stores.
- Revenue generated from the 2010 Holiday House Tour will be used for ongoing restoration projects, community programs and the annual THSSH operating budget.

## Artifacts

### **Gifts and Acquisitions:**

- Two glass kerosene lamps *Gift of June Kennedy*
- N. Currier print of Gen: George Washington 'Father of Our Country'; Framed engraving: bust of George Washington (American Historical Bureau) *Gifts of Lawrence Terricone*
- White pottery foot warmer *Gift of Elaine Getz*
- 19<sup>th</sup> C. young child's school desk *Purchase*
- 19<sup>th</sup> C. wrought iron kitchen match holder; circa 1900 punched tin lantern; leather book carrying straps; 1854 math book of Elizabeth Rush *Gifts of Connie Doughty née Kearns*
- Schoolhouse clock with antique case and modern works *Purchase*
- Book, The Way of Improvement Leads Home by John Fea *Purchase*
- Small wooden sled with wood runners; Austin Spencer Basking Ridge Air Trophy 1946-7 *Gifts of William L. Scheuerman III*
- School desk, combination, Kundtz model Eclipse, #1 size, cast iron *Gift of Catherine Cotter*
- School desks (2), combination, pat. 1884 Columbia model, #5 size *Purchase*
- School desk, combination, AS Company, #5 size, steel *Purchase*
- School desk, single, HW Eclipse, #1 size, 20<sup>th</sup> century, steel *Donated by Community Service*
- **School desk and chair Donated by Pat & Glen Cunningham**

## Archives

**Gifts and Acquisitions:**

Original 1752 deed for 400 acres conveyed by agents for Penn brothers, heirs of Wm. Penn, to Jonathan Whitaker of Basking Ridge. Gift of Richard Stevenson.

William L. Scheuerman II Collection: Framed engraved portrait of Abraham Lincoln published in 1865 that hung in Maple Avenue School (and, based on its age, possibly previously hung in the Brick Academy); group of antique textbooks used mainly by Scheuerman's relatives in local schools including an 1808 leather-bound textbook signed by John Meeker; notebook of school work; corporate ledger for The Wheeler Corporation, which developed Oak Ridge and Decker Streets; memorabilia from the 1960 Bernards Bicentennial. Gift of William L. Scheuerman III, July 2009.

Robert W. Moore Collection: Bernards Twp. Police Dept photos. Gift of Mrs. Robert W. Moore, August 2009.

*One Upon A Time: The Way America Was* by Eric Sloane. Gift of June Kennedy, July 2009.

*Youths Bright Years: An American High School – Morristown New Jersey* by John Cunningham. Gift of June Kennedy, April 2009

Term paper by Jennifer McWhorter: "How Humans have altered the landscape of Bernards Township", donated May 2009.

*Central Jersey Caver, CNJG Bulletin #1, "Peapack Quarry"* by Paul Steward. Gift of author, June 2009.

**Exhibits:**

- "Basking Ridge in Historic Postcards," at Bernards Township Library
- "50 Years Ago: Bernards Township's Grand Bicentennial Celebration," at Bernards Township Library
- "The Brick Academy: Witness to History 1809-2009," at the Brick Academy

**Miscellaneous:**

- Members of the Ridge History Club and their advisors met at the Brick Academy four afternoons in November and December to research several projects in connection with Bernards 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- 2009 Bicentennial Supplement to *Brick Academy* booklet
- Local historical photos provided to the *Star Ledger*
- Eleven website inquiries

### Consultation & Clerical

Hundreds of volunteered hours were spent providing telephone and face-to-face consultation on guidance in historic preservation; reviewing and cataloguing acquisitions; photographing and digitizing old documents; cataloging our library of rare local books and archival files; and composing correspondences and publications.

### Memberships

- The Historical Society gratefully received eleven new memberships (individual and family) in 2009.
- The Historical Society is a member of *The Somerset County Historical Society, League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Preservation New Jersey*

### 2010 Outlook

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills will continue to pursue its mission to acquire, conserve and share artifacts and information on matters of local historic interest; cultivate interest in local history; partake in community events; encourage the preservation of local historic resources; facilitate historic research; and preserve, operate and interpret the Brick Academy. Major 2010 programs include:

### **Bernards Township 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

THSSH will serve an essential role in the year-long celebration with event announcements in *Inside the Brick Academy* newsletter; artifact displays at the Bernards Township library; reprints of the photography book *'Around and About Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons'*; research assistance for local school projects; a commemorative garden at the Brick Academy; a local history-theme production for a membership meeting; a street booth on Charter Day; 'Open House' at the Brick Academy with exclusive Bernards Township history exhibits for Charter Day, Weekend Journey Through the Past and the Holiday House Tour.

### **Education Program**

The Historical Society will continue to enhance its respected youth education program at the Brick Academy:

1. Local history talks with area school children
2. Student reenactment in the 1895 period schoolroom by *Museum of Early Trades & Crafts*
3. Boy Scout & Girl Scout Troop visits
4. History VolunTeens

### **Online/Internet**

Plans are in place to continue to build out the web capabilities. Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, along with the new [www.bernards250.com](http://www.bernards250.com) website will expand the cooperative online dialogue for our visitors. We will continue to provide information on the efforts of THSSH as well as the Bernards Township 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration as requests continue to come in for additional information. There will also be a concerted effort to synchronize efforts across the various communication channels to broaden the coverage of the website.

### **Holiday House Tour**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Holiday House Tour is scheduled for Sunday, December 5. Attended by an expected 500 visitors, the biennial fundraiser features 5-6 diverse and architecturally significant homes within the Somerset Hills. This year's event will coincide with Bernards Township's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. The Brick Academy will serve as the hospitality center with exclusive Bernards Township history storyboards, tours of the 1895 period schoolroom, local artifact displays, and a graphic timeline of the landmark building's history.