

# 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

## The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Marcella A. Miccolis, Chairman

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The Board of Trustees presently comprises 12 members and convened nine times in 2014. There were six general membership meetings which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers. After many years of esteemed service Connie Smythe, June Kennedy and John Campbell retired from the Board of Trustees. June Campbell is currently on a leave of absence.

### Executive Summary

“Partnership” was the key emphasis for the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills this past year. We continued to growth our successful relationship with the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts in offering innovative educational programs. In the interest of working with other organizations THSSH also formed new partnerships:

- The Museum Committee assisted the Meadowlands Museum in Rutherford by providing one of our artifacts, a WWI flight suit, on short-term loan. In addition, a collection of kitchen tools was provided on short-term-loan to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Farmstead. Artifacts were identified, photographed, and inventoried by committee members.
- THSSH trustees met with ‘Mansion in May’ co-chairs to support their signature fundraiser. The Society published a feature article about Blairsden in our newsletter including an advertising insert, scheduled a speaker program, and included the estate in a permanent Somerset Hills exhibit at the Brick Academy.
- ARTsee, the KMS Farmstead and Basking Ridge Business Alliance partnered for an art show in the village. Paintings, ceramics and jewelry were displayed in participating offices and stores. The Brick Academy hosted a well-attended opening reception on September 16.
- The teacher mannequin in the 1890s period schoolroom was completely outfitted during the past year. The costume is generously on loan from Trilogy Repertory Company.
- THSSH continued to work on the Brick Academy roof project funded by a grant from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission’s 2013 Historic Preservation Award Program.

Community Outreach; Brick Academy Museum; Education; Speaker Programs; Membership; Historic Preservation; Online Communications; Fundraisers; Brick Academy Utilization; and Consultation & Clerical are detailed in the following report.

## **Community Outreach**

In order to provide opportunities for the community to gain an understanding of our mission and to raise consciousness of the historical heritage of the Somerset Hills, the organization participates in many Somerset County and Somerset Hills history-related events such as Charter Day; Memorial Day Parade; Lord Stirling 1770s Festival; and Weekend Journey through the Past. In addition:

- Historic artifacts from THSSH collections are displayed at municipal buildings, neighborhood libraries, local schools, community events, and other partner museums.
- *Free* lectures and tours are provided to educators, scout troops, senior citizens, and other non-profit groups.
- THSSH trustees met with ‘Mansion in May’ co-chairs to support their signature fundraiser. The Society published a feature article on Blairsden in our newsletter including an advertising insert, scheduled a speaker program, and included the estate in a permanent Somerset Hills exhibit at the Brick Academy.
- ARTsee, the KMS Farmstead and Basking Ridge Business Alliance partnered for an art show in the village. Paintings, ceramics and jewelry were displayed in participating offices and stores. The Brick Academy hosted a well-attended opening reception on September 16.

## **Brick Academy Museum**

The main floor of the Brick Academy serves as a museum of local artifacts, the only one of its kind in the Somerset Hills. The top floor restored to a 1890s period schoolroom with an authentic pot belly stove, period furniture and classroom objects, is used for education programs.

### **Museum**

‘Open House’ has been changed to the first Sunday of each month from 2 to 4 PM and by appointment. Trustees serve as docents on a rotating basis.

The installation of the permanent exhibit in the museum is mostly complete, with the Bernards Township displays being installed in spring 2015. Included in the exhibit are 8" x 10" color photographs of many of the magnificent homes on the Bernardsville Mountain. THSSH has been given the rights to these photos for this exhibit by the Turpin Real Estate Agency. In addition to building our library with these important photos, the Museum Committee has been building relationships with many organizations in the Somerset Hills, including Hamilton Farm, Trump National Golf Club, Natirar, Matheny, Meadowbrook Inventions and the USGA, to name a few.

In the interest of working with other history organizations, the Museum Committee has helped the Meadowlands Museum in Rutherford by providing one of our artifacts, a WWI flight suit, on short-term loan. In addition, for this same reason a collection of kitchen tools was provided on short-term-loan to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Farmstead.

The Museum Committee worked closely with the co-chairs of the Mansion in May event that is run by the Women's Association of Morristown Medical Center. We were also able to acquire rights to photography of the Blairsden Mansion, this year's Mansion in May, from historical consultant, Barry Thomson.

Along with the 1890's schoolroom display, the third floor of the Brick Academy now displays a timeline of the building, as well as over-sized images and biographies of important people who had once attended the Classical School of Basking Ridge, now known as the Brick Academy.

## **Acquisitions:**

THSSH has acquired five over-sized maps depicting several of the Somerset Hills towns as they were in early 1900's. These remarkable maps were donated by John Smith, who created the maps using many historical records. The maps have been handsomely framed and can be viewed on both the main floor and the lower level of the Brick Academy.

**Membership:** *Small Museum Association*

## **Education**

The Education Committee comprises three retired certified New Jersey teachers and a former Girl Scout Leader with guidance from the Society's Historian.

- In May, students from Mt. Prospect School visited the Brick Academy for an education program that has young visitors 'role play' what it is like to be a student in a 1890s schoolroom.
- 'Craft Sunday' has proven to be an enriching THSSH education program to engage local children in learning about history by creating early American crafts. For Mother's Day, students made a gift of canvas tote bags imprinted with designs made from cut vegetables, painted in bright colors with button trim.
- Scout troops from the Somerset area continue to visit the Brick Academy as part of their merit badge programs.
- In the autumn, The Education Committee was active hosting school visits. In September, The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts held programs for Liberty Corner School students and our educators assisted where needed. In October, we hosted students from Oak Street School in four sessions across three days which were staffed by different members of our Committee with good results.
- In November, the Committee invited June Kennedy to join us for a luncheon in the resource room. June continues to provide props to be used with the children, from her supplies. We are grateful for her continued assistance. One of future plans includes setting up the "Photo Puzzle".

## **Other educated-related programs include:**

### **Walking Tours**

A printed self-guided *Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village* is available at the Brick Academy and as a free download on the Bernards Township Library and Historical Society websites. In addition to our education programs, some class trips also take a walking tour of Basking Ridge village given by their teachers who we have trained in local stories of historic interest.

### **Newsletter**

'*Inside the Brick Academy*' comprises Society news, event calendar and local interest stories. Published three times per year, it is available to the general public at the Brick Academy, community events and [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org).

### **'Around and About Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons'**

The pictorial history book, by Trustee June O. Kennedy, reissued with a 15-year update as a limited Bernards 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, continues to sell at the Brick Academy and community events.

### **THSSH Brochure**

Available at the Brick Academy and community events, a free brochure includes the Society's mission, history of the Brick Academy, programs, fundraisers, and membership information.

### **Lime Kilns**

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

## Speaker Programs

Conducted at General Membership Meetings, professional speakers lecture on a broad range of historical subjects. The programs are *free*, held at the Brick Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public. This past year included:

February	Rod B. Leith	Revolutionary War Signal Beacons
April	Christian McBurney	Capture of James Lee at Basking Ridge
May	Barry Thomson	Blairsdon Mansion
September	Dr. David Sterling	18 <sup>th</sup> C. Clock Making in West New Jersey
October	Martine White	Oktoberfest: History of Steins
November	Judith Krall Russo	The New Jersey Cranberry

## Membership

- The Historical Society welcomed six new memberships in 2014.
- 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*

## Historic Preservation

### BRICK ACADEMY RENOVATION STATUS

The Historical Society received an historic preservation award of \$38,000, in 2013, from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission to replace the existing wood shake roofing which was installed around 1978. During this past year, a selection of historically qualified bidders has been prepared. The specifications and documents for this work are almost complete, and will be submitted for a review by the NJ Historic Preservation Office as required. Our trustees, president, Dan Lincoln, and Building and Grounds Chair, Paula Axt will spearhead the project.

### LIBERTY CORNER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church requested a review by the Historical Society Preservation Committee related to the demolition of a 1960's dwelling on Lyons Road. The dwelling is adjacent to the Liberty Corner Historic District, and the demolition requires a review by the Planning Board. The Church plans to have a modular home constructed on the site for their pastor. Dan Lincoln, our president, met with the Church representative, Mr. Jeff Fette, on October 26, 2014, to review the existing conditions. Mr. Lincoln sent an email to Mr. Fette on November 15, 2014, after a meeting with the Historical Society Board of Trustees indicating that the Historical Society has no Historic Preservation Committee and was no longer formally reviewing Planning and Zoning projects due to liability concerns.

### DUNSTER SQUIBB PROPERTY: BERNARDSVILLE, NJ

The Dunster Squibb property restoration located at 89 Mine Brook Road in Bernardsville is actually organized and monitored by the Bernardsville HPAC, but regular progress reports are made by our president, Dan Lincoln, who is also Chair of the Bernardsville HPAC. This Committee has applied and received five grants from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission Historic Preservation grant (SCC&HHP) program since 2010, totaling in almost \$600,000. The grants paid for a preservation plan, nomination applications for Historic Status, and major repair work to the buildings on the property. Several buildings including the barn, smokehouse, and main house are currently being reroofed and structurally repaired. The HPAC will apply for another grant in April of 2015 for additional structural work and repairs to the buildings. The property is owned by the Borough of Bernardsville.

## LYONS TRAIN STATION RESTORATION

The Township of Bernards hired Dan Lincoln, our president, to apply for a 2014 SCC&CHHP grant to restore the Lyons Train Station which the Township owns. The Lyons train Station is on the New Jersey and National Register of Historic places. The grant application was successful and the Somerset County agreement and contract for the project will be delivered to the Township for review and signature this Thursday, 1/15/15, by Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln has also been hired to prepare the construction documents and to monitor the restoration process.

## GENERAL NOTES

Several other historic preservation issues have taken place in the Somerset Hills area which involves the notice of the Historical Society.

- a. The Historical Society has assisted the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee of Peapack Gladstone with guidelines to get the Lime Kilns on Main Street deemed eligible as a Historical resource. The HPAC of P&G has recently applied for a Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Grant to provide funding for the hiring of an historic preservation consultant to prepare and application for a certificate of eligibility to be listed on the NJ and National Register of Historic Places. The Lime kilns property is owned by THSSH
- b. Members of the THSSH Board have been informally approached by numerous members of the public expressing concern about the development trend of certain residential properties in the village of Basking Ridge. Specifically mentioned are the large homes recently built opposite Saint James Church, on the corner of Cedar Street, and the Shingle Style Home just past and opposite the Episcopal Church, Saint Mark's. The Township committee may want to know that these discussions are a more recent development. Past demolitions and constructions have not caused much concern.
- c. THSSH has been notified of several private sales which involve local historic properties. The Squire Reynolds House located on Hardscrabble road in Bernardsville is for sale. Interest in the purchase of this Historic property has been expressed by the Morris County Parks Commission, the Audubon Society and the Borough of Bernardsville. None of these entities appears to have done more than express initial interest and the property may be temporarily off the market.

## **Online Communications**

In addition to our primary website ([www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org)), social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, and dedicated history blogs continue to provide information and guidance regarding history in the Somerset Hills and THSSH organization.

## **Fundraisers**

- Gift items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events as well as displayed on the Historical Society's website: [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org).
- Non-profit organizations that conduct meetings at the Brick Academy provide a contribution.
- School children, area residents and out-of-town visitors make donations at the Brick Academy.
- Brick Academy notecards are sold at the Bernards Township Library.
- Bequests are received from former THSSH members.
- Revenue is generated through *ShopforMuseums.com*, a primary source of online fundraising for museums and related non-profit organizations through three hundred participating retail stores.
- *Holiday House Tour in the Somerset Hills* is conducted biennially with proceeds benefitting our museum exhibits, public lectures, educational programs, and operating expenses at the Brick Academy.

## **Brick Academy Utilization**

In addition to our museum, research room, education programs, and community events, the Brick Academy is utilized for THSSH Board of Trustees, Committee and Membership meetings as well as for select non-profit organizations.

## **Consultation & Clerical**

THSSH volunteers provide telephone and face-to-face consultation on local history subjects; review and catalogue acquisitions; photograph and digitize old documents; manage our library of rare local books and archival files; and compose correspondences and publications.

## **2015 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.

- There will be an active campaign to recruit new Trustees to fulfill the positions of retiring Board members.
- The Museum Committee plans to complete the last installment of the Somerset Hills permanent exhibit; install a "MUSEUM" sign for the front of the Brick Academy; continue to build partnerships in an effort to showcase rotating exhibits from other museums and organizations; and develop a strategy to encourage more museum visitors.
- Speaker programs will continue with a varied selection of quality lectures and entertainment including 'Legends and Lore of Somerset County', 'Story-Songs of History', 'Phenomenal Gems', and 'Presidential Golf & Politics.'
- The Education Committee is planning a 'Craft Sunday' in late winter, a 'Photo Puzzle' of six historic landmarks to be enjoyed in the 1890s period schoolroom; and a Scout Troop visit/history lesson.
- In the spring, grant funding from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission's 2013 Historic Preservation award program will be applied to install a new wood shake roof on the Brick Academy.
- The 18<sup>th</sup> *Holiday House Tour in the Somerset Hills* is scheduled for early December. Attended by 500 visitors, the biennial fundraiser will feature 5-6 private residences of historic significance and/or architectural distinction. The Brick Academy will serve as the hospitality center with exhibits, gifts and refreshments.