



2015 Annual Report

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Sue Zibelli, Chairman

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Speaker Programming

The Board of Trustees comprises of 15 members, all volunteers, and convened 10 times during 2015. General membership meetings, which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers, were conducted four times during the year.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.

Executive Summary

The primary objective of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) in 2015 was to create cultural opportunities and enrichment for the local community by providing programs and initiatives that inform, educate and foster interest in local history. Highlights for 2015:

- **Charter Day** – Bernards Township

THSSH's table attracted a great number of local residents who were provided with information about our organization's mission, as well as a listing of volunteer opportunities to support the community.

- **1770's Lord Stirling Festival** – Somerset County Park Commission

Brick Academy artifacts and information on display encouraged visitors to inquire about the history of the town, and allowed our trustees to interact with people from our local community, as well as from various other New Jersey regions.

- **Weekend Journey through the Past** – Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission

The Brick Academy was opened to the public during this weekend. Close to 100 visitors from our local community, as well as from various other regions in New Jersey, including Essex, Morris and Union counties, were permitted to tour the museum and schoolroom, while interacting with our trustees, and learning about the unique history of our area.

- **Fundraisers** – Holiday House Tour

413 visitors from all over northern NJ toured six residences of historic significance and architectural distinction within the Somerset Hills.

- **Local Organization Collaborations**

USGA – THSSH reached out to the USGA to mutually share our facilities for meetings and programs

Jacobus Vanderveer House, Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate, Farmstead Arts Center, USGA – THSSH worked with these organizations to jointly promote activities in the local newspaper **Basking Ridge Garden Club (BRGC)** – The BRGC decorated the Brick Academy for the holiday season, and had their hand-made topiaries available during the Holiday House Tour

- **Education Programs** – **Bernards Township Elementary Schools** and the **Museum of Early Trades and Crafts (METC)** sent over 200 children, chaperones and teachers to visit the Brick Academy.

- **Speaker Programs** – Four professional speaker programs were offered to members and the general public.

- **Historic Restoration and Preservation** – Four major projects are underway: Brick Academy roofing; Peapack Lime Kilns; Lyons Railroad Station Building and Canopy; Dunster Squibb

- **Research** – Over 30 unique research requests were honored.

- **Website and Social Media** – 25,000 people visited the website, with an almost even split of male and female, and over 27% connecting via mobile devices.

Executive Committee

Sue Zibelli was elected to be the new Chairman of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills after the chairman for the past eight years, Marcella Miccolis, resigned her position.

Appointments

Margaret Skelly joined the Board of Trustees as Education Chairman.

The Archivist position, having been vacant for over four years, was filled by Cynthia Crosson.

Membership

THSSH welcomed fourteen new members in 2015.

Nearly 100 members and community friends volunteered their time and talent for the 2015 Holiday House Tour in the Somerset Hills as event planners, house docents, car parkers, and cookie bakers.

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, THSSH participated in many Somerset County and Somerset Hills history-related programs.

- **Charter Day** – A trustee dressed in period costume mingled with the crowd to help cultivate interest in our organization’s mission. To further encourage people to visit our table, local high school students volunteered to memorize the Charter, which was on display at our table, and to give a public recitation of it to the passing crowds. Trustees manning our tented table were able to converse with interested visitors about THSSH, and the volunteer opportunities that can enable them to support their communities. Visitors to our table were afforded the opportunity to get a picture of themselves touching the oversized replica of the Bernardston Charter. They were also encouraged to visit the Brick Academy, which was opened to the public for the day. A constant flow of traffic toured the Brick Academy 3rd floor schoolroom, as well as the main floor museum where we have a permanent exhibit of the history of each of the Somerset Hills hamlets.

In addition, real-time photos and videos were uploaded throughout the day to Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

- **1770’s Lord Stirling Festival** – While recreating a typical Sunday afternoon in the 1700’s, and demonstrating New Jersey’s colonial heritage, this event promotes historical and environmental education. THSSH had a prominent position at the event where several trustees manned our table throughout the day. Brick Academy artifacts and information on display encouraged visitors to inquire about the history of the town, and allowed our trustees to interact with people from our local community, as well as from various other New Jersey regions.

- **Weekend Journey through the Past** – Designed to be an outing where people of all ages can immerse themselves in the distant past and come away with a better appreciation of the history of Somerset County and the Somerset Hills, this annual event attracted nearly 100 visitors from our local community, as well as from various other regions in New Jersey, including Essex, Morris and Union counties, to the Brick Academy to tour the museum and schoolroom, which was opened to the public for the weekend.

THSSH worked with the appointed members of the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate, the Farmstead Arts Center, the Jacobus Vanderveer House, and the USGA to develop a joint press release to be published in the Bernardsville News.

- The USGA permitted THSSH to hold a Board of Trustees meeting in their museum, and provided the Trustees with a private tour. This collaboration has fostered a strong mutual relationship with this community organization.
- Two Board of Trustees meetings were held in local historic homes. The Trustees were allowed to tour the homes, and converse with the homeowners about the historical nature of the home's construction, while fostering with the homeowners an appreciation of THSSH's mission and value to the community.
- An increasing number of non-profit groups were permitted to use the Brick Academy for their regular meetings.
- Free museum tours are provided to educators, scout troops and other non-profit groups.
- THSSH has been working with the Basking Ridge Garden Club (BRGC) to improve the grounds around the Brick Academy, and to decorate the Brick Academy for the winter holiday season.
- A THSSH Trustee persuaded the Wells Fargo Bank in the center of Basking Ridge to repair the historic clock on the building.
- Historic artifacts from THSSH collections were on display at local municipal buildings, libraries and schools; at community events; and in other partner museums.

Historic Preservation and Restoration

Brick Academy Re-roofing – The Historical Society received a historic preservation award in 2013 from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission to replace the existing wood shake roofing which was installed around 1978. The new roofing will be hand split cedar shakes to be installed over the existing original hand split lath and hand hewn roofing rafters. The specifications and documents for this work are currently being prepared in anticipation of bidding and construction in the spring and summer of 2016.

Peapack Lime Kilns – Working with several preservation consultants and the Peapack-Gladstone HPC, THSSH received a grant from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission in October. The

grant award is for the restoration of the Peapack Lime Kilns which is located at 122 Main Street in Peapack-Gladstone, and owned by THSSH. The grant will be used to prepare and submit a NJ and National Register nomination application for the property, mortar analysis, archaeological monitoring, and design and construction administration services for the proposed construction work. It will also pay for the removal of invasive vegetation and trees; installation of clay/soil or plastic/gravel on top of kiln to prevent moisture intrusion; installation of safety barrier/fence and signs at the kiln, rust removal and repainting of exposed metal surfaces and reconstruction/stabilization and re-pointing of the historic stonework. The construction work for this public project is anticipated to start the summer of 2016.

Lyons Railroad Station Building and Canopy – The station building and canopy are owned by Bernard’s Township, and have been on the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places since 1984. The Township received a second grant from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission for the canopy restoration in October. The money is planned for repairs to the canopy roofing and flashing, exposed V-groove painted wood sheathing boards, and bracketed wood post repairs. The entire canopy will be scraped and repainted. A similar grant application to the 2014 SC C&H C HP Program for the Lyons Station was secured for restoration of the station building.

Dunster Squibb – The Bernardsville Historic Preservation Advisory Committee has continued to successfully apply for Somerset County Historic Preservation grants for the historic Dunster Squibb property on behalf of the Borough of Bernardsville. This property is owned by the Borough, and is located at 189 Mine Brook Road (Route 202) just south of Borough Hall. The Borough received an award from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission in 2015. This award, combined with the 2014 award, will be used to restore the Barn/Cottage/Stables, Smoke House exteriors, and selected roofs, and to rebuild a stone retaining wall by the Main House. It will also be used for chimney rebuilding and additional structural reinforcement in the Main House. Bidding and restoration work is anticipated to start in the summer of 2016.

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:

Legends & Lore of Somerset County	Author Michael Haynes	February 19
Story-Songs of History	Gordon Thomas Ward	March 19
Phenomenal Gems	Daniel W. Campbell	April 16
The Power Game: Presidential Golf and Politics	Kim Gianetti	May 12

Online Communications

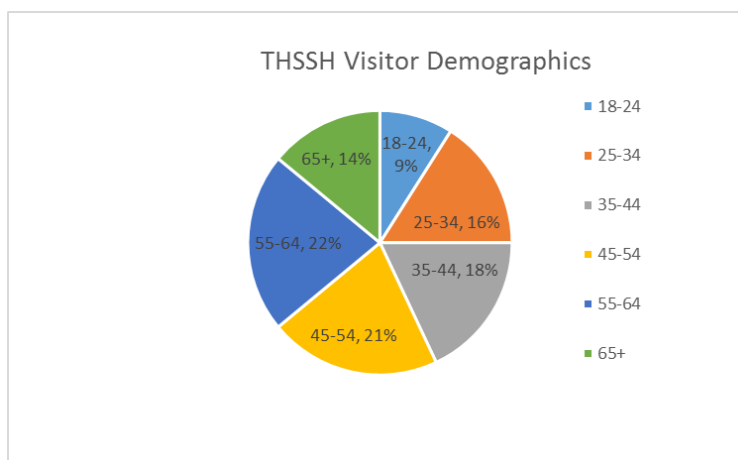
2015 was another great year for The Historical Society of Somerset Hills (THSSH) communicating online. With a combination of social media anchoring to thssh.org, there were almost 25,000 visitors that made a virtual visit to THSSH serving up more than 43,000 pages, a slight decrease from 2014.

THSSH viewership showed over 80% of our visitors were new to THSSH online. There was also a noticeable uptick in mobile activity showing that our users are becoming more savvy to mobile devices. Over 27% of our visitors were connecting via mobile devices in 2015 when they searched out content for THSSH.

The most visited THSSH pages was again led by our Blairsden overview page with over 14% of the visitors. Next was the Charter day overview, followed by THSSH Archives sections, and the Holiday House Tour. The Betsy Ross and Local Interest pages rounded out the top 10.

Online visitor demographics show that THSSH viewership is equally distributed and not just for the retirement generation. It's been great to see the visitors are from all age groups:

- 18-24 - 9%
- 25-34 - 16%
- 35-44 - 18%
- 45-54 - 21%
- 55-64 - 22%
- 65+ - 14%
- 43% Male – 57% female



Leveraging social media was an important part to communicating events, activities, and up to the minute news updates. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were leveraged and that will continue in the future.

For the first time, THSSH made use of online registration for the 2015 Holiday House tour. Over 50% of the ticket sales for the event were made online, demonstrating that the public wants this capability. We plan to make additional use of online registration for events, membership drives, and other key activities where there is a need to have advanced registration.

Find The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) online:

- Website: www.thssh.org
- Facebook: [somersethillshistory](https://www.facebook.com/somersethillshistory)
- Twitter: [THSSH](https://twitter.com/THSSH)
- Instagram: [thehssh](https://www.instagram.com/thehssh)

Education

The Education Committee continues to welcome the students from all Bernards Township Schools, either using reservations through The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts, or our own teaching staff, for an education program that has young visitors 'role play' what it is like to be a student in a 1890s schoolroom. We hosted over 200 students plus chaperones and teachers from Liberty Corner and Oak Street schools.

An outreach program was given to the teachers of St James School, who had visited us prior to 2015. An overview of the historic nature of our School Program was given to the faculty. Two teachers expressed great interest in taking a class trip to the Brick Academy, and expect to reserve a date in the spring of 2016.

Our committee welcomed a new member, Becky Creswell, who brings many years of teaching experience to our staff.

Other education-related programs include Museum Tours, Walking Tours, and the Lime Kilns in Peapack-Gladstone.

Print publications available free of charge at the Brick Academy and community events include:

- THSSH Pamphlet – Highlights the history of the Brick Academy, the mission of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, ongoing projects, fund raising events, museum hours, and membership information.
- Inside the Brick Academy Newsletter – Published three times a year and mailed to our membership, this newsletter comprises society news, event calendar, and local interest stories
- Volunteer Brochure – Describes the primary THSSH committees, which include Affiliate Organizations; Archives & Research; Bookstore; Building Maintenance; Clerical; Community Outreach; Education; Fund Raisers; Gardens & Grounds; Hospitality; Membership; Museum; Newsletter; Production; Public Relations; Publicity; Speaker Programs; Website/Social Media

On sale at the Brick Academy is the *Around and About Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons* picture book, as well as other history related books.

Museum

The Brick Academy serves as a museum of local artifacts and historical information about the towns in the Somerset Hills – Bedminster, Peapack-Gladstone, Far Hills, Bernardsville, and Bernards Township/Basking Ridge, 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 schoolroom furniture, and classroom objects, is used for education programs. Along with the 1890s schoolroom display, the top floor displays a timeline of the building; poster images and biographies of important people who had once attended the Classical School of Basking Ridge, the precursor to the

Brick Academy; a schoolwork display case that showcases students' work from the early 1900s; and a bobsled that was used in the township in the early 1900s.

The lower floor, which is mainly used for research and meetings, has on display late 1800/early 1900 maps of the Somerset Hills towns, artifacts from local post offices, and other notable artifacts.

The main floor displays a permanent exhibit: '*What Put Somerset Hills on the Map.*' 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 many of the 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 organization in the Somerset Hills, including Hamilton Farm, Trump National Golf Club, Natirar, Matheny, Meadowbrook Inventions, the USGA, the Jacobus Vanderveer House and Museum, the Farmstead Arts Center, and the Bouodiot-Southard-Ross Estate, to name a few.

In the interest of collaborating with other history organizations, the Museum Committee has provided on long-term loan to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate a collection of tools and kitchen utensils for their displays during Weekend Journey through the Past.

Archives & Research

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills archives is coveted by local and distant researchers who contact THSSH via our website, phone, and mail requesting appointments to conduct local research. We had 31 requests in 2015. The primary information requested was local family and house documents and pictures; historic maps; local historic figures and buildings.

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 archival files and library of rare and local books; and compose correspondences and publications.

Gifts & Acquisitions

The John Turpin Real Estate Agency donated coffee table picture books – *New Jersey Country Houses, The Somerset Hills*, Volume I and Volume II.

Fundraisers & Donations

- The *Holiday House Tour in the Somerset Hills*, conducted bi-annually, is THSSH's primary fundraiser event, with proceeds benefitting our museum exhibits, public lectures, educational programs, and operating expenses at the Brick Academy.
- Substantial revenue is generated through paid advertisements in the society's newsletter, as well as our bi-annual Holiday House Tour program guide.
- Donations and Bequests are received from current and past members, and their families.
- Gift items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events, as well as displayed on our website.
- Non-profit organizations that conduct meetings at the Brick Academy provide a contribution.
- School children visitations, area residents, and out-of-town visitors to our museum leave donations in our donation box the Brick Academy.
- Brick Academy notecards are sold at the Bernards Township Library.
- Donations are received through ShopforMuseums.com, a primary source of online fundraising for non-profits.

Brick Academy Utilization

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

THSSH Board of Trustees and Committees – monthly meetings

The Northern NJ Region Porche Club of America – monthly meetings

The Guard Pipes & Drums – monthly practice sessions and bi-monthly "Pipe School"

The Antiquing Group – monthly meetings

The Herding Group Association of New Jersey – quarterly meetings

The Berkeley Circle Homeowners Association – annual meeting

The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts – as scheduled

Friends of the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate – as scheduled (when BSR Estate isn't available)

Advocacy & Affiliations

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

2016 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 replace retiring Board members.
- The Trustees will launch an aggressive campaign to appoint a new Membership Committee Chair in order to recruit new memberships, as well as engage current members as active volunteers on THSSH committees, as well as for programs and events.
- A stronger emphasis will be placed on recruiting volunteers from our community to work on committees.
- Our website and social media strategy will be further developed to share information regarding local events and history in the Somerset Hills; increase social media communications with audiences; engage THSSH Board members to leverage social media and online participation for THSSH; and increase history posts to the *This Date in Somerset Hills History* calendar. Additional strategies will be implemented to attract more visitors to the Brick Academy, and to recruit volunteers.
- Enhanced Speaker Programs will be offered that better appeal to the community.
- The Museum Committee will continue to display artifacts currently in the Society's collection; organize and computerize acquisition records; photograph artifacts; properly re-label artifacts; and develop policies and procedures. They will also continue to build partnerships in an effort to showcase rotating exhibits from other museums and organizations; develop a strategy to encourage more museum visitors; and install a MUSEUM sign on the front of the Brick Academy so that passers-by realize the building has a museum inside.
- Education Committee will continue to develop the variety of interactive programs with Bernards Township elementary schools, as well as talks and tours with local community groups.

Respectfully submitted:

Susan Zibelli, THSSH Chairman

January 29, 2016