



Inside the Brick Academy

Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

January, 2002

2001 - A YEAR OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Excerpts from the Chairman's Annual Report

12th Holiday House Tour

The 2001 Holiday House Tour, featuring six architecturally significant homes in the Somerset Hills, was attended by 600 people. This wonderful community relations project involved the efforts of many member of the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, as well as 77 docents, 22 parkers, and of course, the home owners. All had a great time and we made a profit of \$15,574, which will be used in restoring the Brick Academy.

Historic Preservation

In September, 2000, Bill Allen from the Bernards Township Committee, asked representatives of the Historical Society to tour the Reverend Kennedy Parsonage Farm House. This house is located on the 36.5 acre Geier Tract purchased by the Township with Open Space funds. Since that time the Historical Society has been working with the Township Committee in an effort to assure preservation of the house.

In 2001 the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission approved \$23,000 to provide emergency repairs and \$52,900 to employ historical architects to develop a historic structures report for the two barns and farmhouse. The Township Committee has awarded a contract to Historic Building Architects of Trenton to develop the report.

The scheduled date of completion of the report is March 2002. The final stages of report preparation will require the Township Committee to decide what uses, if any, will be appropriate for the barns. Selection of appropriate uses for the barns and house can be the basis for the Township to request further grants money from the county and state to accomplish the necessary work.

This Historical Society looks forward to working with the Township Committee to optimize this property's historical value to the community.

Community Outreach

Throughout the year many activities were held to familiarize Somerset Hills residents of the historical nature of the area. These included:

- Participated in the Bernards Township Charter Day on May 19th and the Lord Stirling Festival on October 7th
- Provided lectures on local history and tours of the Brick Academy
- Loaned items from our archives to local libraries for their display
- Produced and sold 1,000 year 2002 calendars that feature historic pictures of the area

2001 (continued)

Education

There were many opportunities to provide education and guidance related to the history of the Somerset Hills. These included:

- Advised local groups on grant application procedures and consulted with builders and the governing committees concerning structural changes to historic buildings and the installation of bike paths.
- Provided source material to students and local residents with information on the history of their houses.
- Responded to genealogical requests.
- Assisted a newly formed archival group from the Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church.
- Provided information for a Fellowship Village lecture and maps to the Morris County historian regarding the encampments of General Rochambeau in 1781 and 1782.

Other Items of Interest

Preservation efforts have been enhanced through new funds. The sale of gift items at community events and at the museum and a modest income from genealogical requests will be utilized for restoration.

Two local residents have been nominated for awards from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. A history award went to George Helmk for writing Lord Stirling, William Alexander, and a preservation award went to Craig Johnson for the restoration of his 18th century home on Mt. Airy Rd.

Acquisitions

- 125 poster sized equestrian maps of the Somerset Hills including property boundaries and names of owners
- 5 different scenes of old Bernardsville (50 copies each)
- Memorabilia from the Koechlein Store, Liberty Corner
- Photograph of Basking Ridge Fire Dept. in the 1950's

Acquisitions (continued)

- Books - Northwestern New Jersey, A History, Vol. II by A. Van Doren, and New Jersey As A Colony and As A State, four volumes by Francis Bazley

New Exhibit



We have recently put together a new exhibit on Lord Stirling comprising letters, portraits, our recently published biography of his life, and a wonderful collection of artifacts from the Lord Stirling dig. These are on loan from the Somerset County Park Commission Environmental Education Center. Photos of the dig are also shown.

Utilization of the Brick Academy

- Rest and refreshment stop during the Holiday House Tour
- Meeting location for the Herding Association and the Berkeley Circle Association
- 4 public meetings with programs covering subjects such as antiques, wood carving, and restoration.
- 37 Sundays from September through June from 2:00 to 4:00 pm the Academy is open to the public

2002 Outlook

In 2002, we look forward to continuing the restoration of the Brick Academy made possible by the \$40,000 grant to be received from the Somerset County Historical Preservation Fund. The main focus of the work in 2002 will be on the main floor. The preliminary plans include: installation of a small kitchen; floor restoration; removal of the acoustical tile ceiling; and, installation of new lighting.

Reverend Kennedy Parsonage Farmstead Task Force Named

Twelve members of the Reverend Kennedy Parsonage Farmstead Task Force were appointed to one-year terms in January 2002 by the Bernards Township Committee. The task force includes: Linda Arnold, Annabelle Bissett, John Campbell, George Cunningham, Mary Ellen Goodwin, Barbara Iorizzo, June Kennedy, Andrea Lauricella, Daniel Lincoln as technical aid, Peter Messina, Anna Parsekian, and Patricia Whitehouse. This volunteer group will contribute knowledge in the areas of historic preservation, fine arts, architecture, American history, and fund raising.

The initial goal of the task force is to work with Historic Buildings Architects (HBA) in an advisory capacity to develop specific uses for the farmstead and conduct additional historical research. The task force is also charged with seeking new sources of funding for the project. HBA is the firm hired by Bernards Township to develop the Historic Structures Report; this report and repair work on the Dutch barn on the premises is being funded with a \$75,900 Historic Preservation Grant from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

The farmstead consists of a large 18th century Dutch barn, a farmhouse and a wagon barn. The property will also be nominated for listing on the New Jersey State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Rev. Samuel Kennedy was the fourth pastor of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, 1751-1787. He was the founder of the Basking Ridge Classical School, later housed in the Brick Academy on West Oak Street, Basking Ridge.

June Kennedy

Brick Academy Open Sunday Afternoons

The Brick Academy, home to the Historical Society, is open Sundays to the general public from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Member volunteers are there to welcome visitors.

Guests receive written instructions for a self-guided tour around the main floor and they are invited to view the lower level. The upper level is for research, which is by appointment only.

Visitors also have an opportunity to purchase items including books that have been written by our members. There is a table of complimentary information including a self-guided walking tour of downtown Basking Ridge.

If you would be willing to volunteer on a Sunday afternoon, please contact Joyce Allen, Coordinator of Museum Hours, at 908-766-2876.

Another Volunteer Opportunity

Our curator is looking for volunteers to work in the office, 9:30-12:00 the first and third Wednesday of each month (it is not necessary to come every time). We have many interesting items in our archives, which need sorting, labeling, organizing, etc. We also learn a lot and have fun in the process. If interested please call June Campbell at 908-647-2241.

Coming this Spring

Soon to come in your mailbox this spring will be an updated Historical Society of the Somerset Hills Membership Directory. Keep the Directory in a handy place for frequent use. All members, including life members, will be included plus other good Historical Society information.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills
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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE SOMERSET HILLS

Any donations of local history such as

photos
books
post cards
newspapers
artifacts

would be greatly appreciated.