



Inside the Brick Academy

Newsletter of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

September, 2002

Copy of Rare Document Reveals Area Involvement in Revolutionary War

A rare document from “Camp, Baskenridge, N.J. August 29, 1781” was listed this summer in a New Hampshire auction catalog. The 7” x 8” parchment noted the transfer of a huge supply (4,500 units) of flour from the Continental Army supplies to the Army of France of Comte de Rochambeau (Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur), en route to Yorktown, VA. Copies of this document were obtained and placed in the archives of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) and the Bernards Township Library.

On August 25, 1781, Rochembeau’s French army joined General George Washington’s troops and together left Dobbs Ferry, NY for movement southward to Yorktown. The French marched into New Jersey via Pompton Plains, Whippany, Morristown, Basking Ridge and Liberty Corner. On August 29, they camped overnight on the English farm in Liberty Corner. In their march through Bernards, the French were very impressed with the Somerset Hills area. One observer wrote: “At Liberty Corner, there were tolerable lodgings, and the best people in the world. The white servants here were well enough paid to acquire a piece of land in a short time.”

Somerset County had been crossed through, fought on and fought over so many times during the Revolution that the people of Bernards were acquainted with the traffic of soldiers, generals,

and patriots. But, they had never seen anything like the grand parade of the French Army on August 29, 1781. In 1981, on the 200th anniversary of the French march, there was a reenactment of the 1781 event. There was a mock battle, hospitality at the Liberty Corner School and Presbyterian Church and a 700 mile trek to Yorktown. There President Ronald Reagan witnessed the four day celebration of the last battle of the American Revolution.

Rev. Samuel Kennedy Relative Visits Parsonage Farm

On August 10, Katherine McCarthy Young of Richmond, Virginia, seventh great granddaughter of the Rev. Samuel Kennedy, fourth pastor of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, visited the former home of the Rev. Kennedy. Mrs. Young was given a guided tour of the homestead and its adjacent buildings by John Campbell, a member of the Rev. Kennedy Parsonage Farm Task Force. This Task Force has been working with the Bernards Township Committee and historic preservationists for the development of the homestead.

Mrs. Young was very impressed with the condition of the property and buildings along with the beauty of the area. She was very appreciative of the large amount of Rev. Kennedy file information located in the Brick Academy’s reference room. Mrs. Young presented the Task Force with a 35 page document, “The Kennedy Chronicle”, as told by Sarah Elizabeth Kennedy, written in 1891.

Facts/Figures About the Somerset Hills

- As early as 1791, Somerset County had no post office. The Basking Ridge post office began operation September 18, 1802. Mail was carried from Philadelphia to Morristown via Princeton. It came to Basking Ridge on horseback, sulky, or stage and was called “The Post”. Postage was fixed at 30 miles for 6 cents. After the arrival of the railroad from Summit to Basking Ridge in 1872, mail service over the road went into effect. Rural delivery service was launched in Basking Ridge on December 1, 1905. Other post office dates are: Bernardsville (April 30, 1872); Pluckemin (January 1, 1807); Somerville (October 1, 1807); and Lesser Crossroads (May 29, 1830), name change to Bedminster (April 11, 1876).
- In 1797 Bernardston Township in Somerset County had 2,377 inhabitants and 93 slaves, according to the records of the American Gazetteer. This area included today’s Warren Township, Bernardsville, Far Hills, and Bernards Township.
- Lord Sterling (William Alexander) who served as third in command of American forces during the Revolutionary War, led every brigade of the Continental Army except South Carolina and Georgia.
- “Grand Army is moving toward Baskenridge”, reported in an item in the NJ archives, dated November 24, 1779. Troops were en route to winter headquarters at Jockey Hollow, Morristown.
- The Dead River was so named because of its slow current.
- In 1880 the Federal Census listed Bernards with a population of 2,622 which included 218 farms. Today’s population is in excess of 27,000.

Annual Membership Drive

In September we will be launching our annual membership drive. We would very much appreciate it if those of you who are life members would consider making a donation to us at that time. As you know, we are in the process of restoring the main floor of the academy and the expenses are great. When the work is completed we will have an open house so that all may view what we have accomplished.

Brick Academy Helped Educate Four U.S. Senators

The Basking Ridge Classical School, conducted in the Brick Academy, was responsible for the secondary education of four men who became prominent and later became U.S. Senators representing New Jersey.

They were:

- Samuel Lewis Southard (1787-1842), a U.S. Senator who served 1818-1822 and 1839-1842. He was also Governor of New Jersey 1832-1833, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Secretary of the Navy, and Attorney General of New Jersey.
- Theodore Frelinghuysen (1787-1862), a U.S. Senator who served 1829-1835. In 1844 he was a Whig Party Vice-Presidential running mate. He was also President of Rutgers College, Chancellor of New York University, and Attorney General of New Jersey.
- William Lewis Dayton (1807-1864), a U.S. Senator who served 1842-1851. In 1856 he was a Republican Party Vice-Presidential running mate with John C. Fremont. He was also President Lincoln’s appointment as Ambassador to France.
- Robert Field Stockton (1795-1866) a U.S. Senator who served 1851-1853. He was also a naval officer, a hero of the Mexican War, and a Governor General of California. He was the only student expelled for bad behavior from the Basking Ridge Classical School. Robert Stockton completed his secondary education elsewhere and was graduated from the College of New Jersey (Princeton University) as did Samuel Southard, Theodore Frelinghuysen, and William Dayton.

Moguls, Millionaires, Statesmen, Captains of Industry, Financial Giants, Media People, Society Figures, Politicos ---

Throughout the year, distinguished residents who live/lived in the Somerset Hills will be listed. Then, as now, the area's serene beauty and wholesome life style have attracted the rich, famous, and outstanding people.

Bedminster

- Nicholas Brady, U.S. Senator, Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Regan and Bush
- Zebulon Pike, noted explorer
- John Honeyman, George Washington's super-spy
- Thomas Kean, former Governor of New Jersey, President of Drew University
- Steve Forbes, Publisher of Forbes Magazine and Chairman of the Board of Radio Free Europe
- D. Douglas Dillon, former Under Secretary of State, Ambassador to France and Treasury Secretary under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson
- Christine Todd Whitman, former Governor of New Jersey and current heads the U.S. EPA

Bernards Township

- Kienast Quints, born in 1970 in Liberty Corner. At that time only the third set to survive.
- Woodruff English, prominent attorney
- John Sloane, founder of W & J Sloane Furniture Company. Daughter married Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State under President Carter. They lived on his estate.
- Walter Reynolds, heir to Reynolds Tobacco Company. He sold the property to build the U.S. Veterans Administration Center at Lyons.
- George Ludlow Lee, Chairman of Red Devil Paint Company. He lived at Cedar Hill and donated 60 acres to build Ridge High School and Cedar Hill School.
- William Childs, with his brother Samuel Childs established the Childs Restaurant chain throughout the country.

Bernardsville

- John F. Dryden, U.S. Senator and founder of the Prudential Insurance Company.
- George B. Post, architect, designed the NY Stock Exchange and the NY Times buildings.
- Frederick P. Olcott, President of Central Trust Company
- Ogden Hammond, diplomat, former Ambassador to Spain and father of Millicent Fenwick.
- John A. Roebling planned and built the Brooklyn Bridge. Washington Roebling invented the cable that made suspension bridges possible.
- William O. Douglas, former member of the U.S. Supreme Court. He lived here while attending Columbia University School of Law.

Far Hills

- Charles Englehard, dealer in industrial metals and minerals. He was the model for Ian Fleming's "Goldfinger".
- Grant Schley, banker, broker, tycoon, building of Fro-Heim (Happy Home) estate of 400 farms and 4000 acres (1500 under cultivation). It is now the site of Moorland Farms.
- Phil Cook, comedian of stage and radio in the 1930s

Peapack-Gladstone

- Walter Ladd and Kate Macy Ladd, philanthropists, built Natirar (Raritan spelled backwards), 505 acres in three towns and a 47 room mansion. It is now owned by the estate of the King of Morocco. Proceeds of the sale were distributed to five universities.
- C. Ledyard Blair, financier, built 55 room villa in style of Louis XIII on 423 acres.
- Walter Matheny, established the Matheny School in 1946 to assist victims of cerebral palsy and related illnesses.

These are/were some of the Somerset Hills neighbors. Some of the residences lived in by these luminaries are no longer in existence. Others have been used for different purposes. Yet, everyone selected the Somerset Hills to enjoy daily living.

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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.**