



Inside the Brick Academy

Newsletter of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

February, 2004

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

By June Campbell, Chairman

Community Outreach

1) The Historical Society of The Somerset Hills (THSSH) participated in two community events this year. Charter Day, May 17th, was attended by huge crowds, and we were inundated by questions of all types related to our work. We sold many gift items and passed out much free information. The Lord Stirling Festival, October 5th, was a wonderful event devoted purely to history in one form or another and we were equally successful there. Participating in these community events gives us a good opportunity to reach new residents in the area who would not otherwise know of our work. The proceeds of all of the sales go to the Brick Academy Building Fund.

2) Once again the Basking Ridge Garden Club planted wonderful flowers outside the Academy. We maintained these beds throughout the season.

3) Items from our archives were used throughout the year in display cases, particularly in libraries and the Bernards Township municipal building.

4) We nominated one building for an historic preservation award from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. It went to the Scherman-Reynolds house, which was used as a commissary during the Revolutionary War. It is owned by Bea Dreesen of Bernardsville.

5) We advised a number of local groups on grant application procedures and a number of home owners concerning procedures for restoration and how to get their homes on the National Register.

Restoration

Restoration of the main floor of the Brick Academy was completed in March. The walls, ceiling and floor have been treated and colored to make them appear as they did when classes were held there in 1850. THSSH members performed careful research during the preservation process.

Exhaustive analysis of the old, previously-hidden floor yielded insights into the school life of that time:

- Screw holes in a lower layer of the early floor boards disclosed the location of 29 double desks that could accommodate 58 students.

- Wear patterns in the floor showed the position of the teacher's desk.

- Scorch marks and wear patterns in the center of the room showed the location of a wood-burning stove.

Blue ink stains remind us of the inkwells and steel tipped pens used at that time.

Careful removal of wall paint revealed black areas, probably coated with a mixture of egg white and carbon from charred potatoes, to be used as blackboards.

All this information has been meticulously photographed and diagrammed and is now on display in the room.

A small and unobtrusive kitchenette has been installed that provides hot and cold water, cabinets

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and a small refrigerator. These facilities will enable us to provide a broader range of refreshments for future assemblages.

Preservation

This year THSSH formed a seven member Historic Preservation Committee whose mission is to carry out education and informational and informal advisory functions to promote historic preservation in the Somerset Hills.

The Historical Society continues to follow with great interest the progress of the Township Committee appointed Kennedy Farmstead Task Force which is working toward the preservation of this unique historic property. The Task Force comprises 13 members. Of these, eight are members of THSSH.

Education

1) THSSH published three newsletters this year. They were sent to our 300 members and also given out at our open houses and public events. They are helpful in informing the public of our activities.

2) Because of the restoration work on the Academy in 2003, we were unable to open our museum to the public until September. Now that we are open we have several new and interesting displays on view, as well as three new antique display cases. We are open every Sunday afternoon from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.

3) We gave a number of lectures to Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, and Indian Princesses, and also gave local history lectures to first, third, and fourth grade students. We held a program for the Newcomers Club in February, in which we provided much information on local history.

4) In the spring, two of our members met with Brad Fennison. He scanned many of our photos for use in a book the Courier News is printing on Somerset County from 1920 to 1940.

5) In October our chairman met with representatives of the DAR to discuss where to place a marker to commemorate the march of Rochambeau through Bernards Township. This is a part of a national project of the DAR to place markers along the route of the Revolutionary War

march of French troops from Massachusetts to Yorktown.

6) THSSH has supplied information and pictures to the new Veterans' Museum at the VA Hospital.

7) We have a newly set up library and research center on the ground floor of the Brick Academy that we are very proud of. We are open the first and third Wednesday mornings of each month from 9:30 to 12:00 noon, and have already had many people take advantage of this facility.

In July, Lee Baird, a direct descendent of the Annin family, used this research center. We have also provided local residents with information on the history of their homes. There has been a great deal of interest in our map collection, and we continue to provide genealogical data in response to requests from all over the country. Providing this information brings in a modest income.

Utilization of the Academy

February - meeting of the Berkeley Circle Association

February, June, August and November meetings of the Herding Association of New Jersey.

March - We gave a party to celebrate the completion of the restoration of the first floor of the Brick Academy. Members of THSSH, Somerset County Freeholders, Bernards Township dignitaries, and members of the Cultural and Heritage Commission were invited. We had a wonderful turnout. A write up in the Bernardsville News reflected our festive mood.

March and October - The Board of Trustees of the Great Swamp Watershed Association met at The Brick Academy.

December - The Academy served as the rest stop during our Holiday House Tour, December 7th. Over the course of five hours 600 people came for refreshments and to view our exhibits. Some also purchased items from our gift shop.

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See "Community Outreach," "Education" and "Fund Raisers" sections of this report for details on other occasions in which the Brick Academy was used for working with members of the public.

Fund Raisers

1) Ongoing sale of gift shop items, both at the Academy and at Charter Day and the Lord Stirling Festival.

2) THSSH held its 13th Holiday House Tour on December 7th. Attended by 600 people, it featured six architecturally significant homes in Basking Ridge and Bernardsville. Spanning 278 years, it included a 1720 farm house, an 1805 farm house, an 1896 stone mansion, a 1930's Bucks County stone house, a 1978 Bernardsville estate that resembles a Mediterranean villa, and a 1998 neo classical revival home. This wonderful community relations project involved the efforts of a host of THSSH members, as well as 75 docents, 22 parkers, and of course, the homeowners. In spite of problems with a snowstorm, all had a great time and we made a profit of approximately \$16,500, which will be used in restoring the Brick Academy. THSSH expresses its appreciation to the six homeowners who generously offered their residences for the tour and warmly welcomed the public.

Clerical and Museum Work

The THSSH Museum Committee relocated all our archives to the bottom floor. Among these are paper-based materials which include:

- original photographs on photographic paper
- original documents, including letters and original manuscripts (wood based or cotton rag paper; vellum, parchment, etc.)
- books, ledgers
- postcards
- maps
- original artwork
- newspapers and newspaper clippings
- archival copies of original materials

Several new archival procedures are being introduced to enhance long-term preservation of

these fragile materials: new archival filing and storage materials will gradually be incorporated and will be marked as archival; and, non-archival materials will no longer be used for storage or display of paper-based archives.

In 2003 the five members of the Museum Committee spent over 250 hours on these efforts.

Acquisitions

Item	Source
Oil painting of the Sutro home at 322 S. Finley Ave. (This house was torn down in 2003)	Ruth & Louis Sutro
Early photograph Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church	Betty Sisto
D L & W Rail Road timetable - 1894	Betty Sisto
Booklet - 1894 Bernards Township financial report	Betty Sisto
1927 program from dedication of the flag pole on the Basking Ridge green	Betty Sisto
Small pump reed-organ (Civil War period)	Marion Meszar
1818 Philadelphia newspaper, "The Union" (This original document contains an ad to attract students to the Brick Academy A reproduction appears later in this Newsletter.)	George Kohl
First day cover commemorating the opening day of the Somerset Hills Airport, Oct. 23, 1932	George Kohl
Two Basking Ridge 1906 post cards.	George Kohl
19th C. bread dough trough and vegetable chopper from the Kennedy Farmstead	Alex Bedrosian and Sara Dearborn Bedrosian
Four boxes of 19th and 20th C. deeds, maps, and real estate listings from the estate of Arthur A. Palmer, Jr.	Peter & Kathy Palmer

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Three large, antique display Apogee(store) cases

THSSH takes this opportunity to publicly thank the donors.

Association Memberships

- 1) National Trust For Historic Preservation
- 2) Preservation New Jersey
- 3) League of Historical Societies of New Jersey
- 4) Somerset County Historical Society

Outlook for 2004

- 1) Restore the third floor of the Brick Academy. This will include drawing up plans, applying for grants, and the beginning of actual work as time permits.
- 2) Continue outreach in areas of education described above, and also provide information and guidance to people interested in restoring old buildings.
- 3) Explore new ideas for fund raising activities.
- 4) Participate in community events in order to raise community consciousness of the historical heritage of the Somerset Hills.

Churches of Peapack and Gladstone By Ruth Hill Thomson

One of the unique things about the small community of Peapack and Gladstone is that there are four churches in which people can worship. All four are well cared for beautiful sanctuaries. It's interesting that these four churches are located from north to south in the order in which they were built.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, the earliest organized church in Peapack-Gladstone, began as a result of the work of pioneer circuit riding preachers who rode horseback over rough roads searching out the rural villages far and wide.

About 150 years ago there were only six families living in the village of Peapack, and, for a time, church services were held in the homes of the people. As interest grew, Peapack was made a regular point on a large circuit called the Somerset Mission. Once every four weeks the saddlebag preachers came to visit this part of the circuit. The

meetings were held in the home of John Philhower. In the summertime the meetings were often held in the woods which belonged to Mr. Cushman.

The church's history begins with its organization in 1838, when a meeting was held, trustees elected, and a gift given for a site for the church building. This gift was one-half acre of land in the village of Peapack between the blacksmith shop of Ferdinand Van Doren and the road leading from Peapack to Mendham, half the frame of the building, and \$100 from John Philhower. He also provided free board for the masons and carpenters while they were building the church. The building was finished and dedicated on November 1, 1839.

This church building proved how well it was built when, in 1859-1860, it was turned from facing south to face west and raised so that a basement might be built underneath. Despite these changes, the original frame is still strong and whole. A balcony and steeple was added at this time. This church has five memorial stained-glass windows.

In 1853, John S. Coit was appointed to this Peapack church - his first charge. He went on to become a doctor and, after the death of his small son, he became a leader in the fight to provide milk that was free from contamination, making medical history and becoming an international figure.

The official name of the church has changed a couple of times, from the Methodist Episcopal Church of Peapack to Gladstone Methodist Church, and in later years changed again to its present name, the United Church of Gladstone.

A little south of the Methodist church is the white steeple of the Peapack Reformed Church. Over the years there has been much discussion about the name "Reformed." It developed from the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500's, and this branch came down through Dutch ancestry, parallel to the Presbyterian church, which came down through Scottish ancestry.

In the early 1700's many people from Peapack who had been going to the church in Bedminster began to attend services at the Peapack Reformed. The Lamington pastor "was accustomed to preach at Peapack." The desire to have a place to worship right in Peapack continued, and in 1848 a Lecture Room was erected, a small building which

Churches of Peapack and Gladstone Continued

unfortunately was torn down during the 1970's. It was this at little "Lecture Room" that the congregation of the Peapack Reformed church was organized on October 31, 1848. It was incorporated November 6, 1848 as the Peapack Protestant Reformed Dutch Church. Soon there was enough response and enthusiasm to build a full-sized church, and the cornerstone for the first church was laid in 1849.

A little farther south on Main Street is the third church, St. Luke's Episcopal, a beautiful stone edifice built in the early 1900's. The church was started by a mission of St. Bernards Episcopal Church in Bernardsville by that church's rector, Reverend Thomas Conover. Originally, services were held in a grove of trees owned by the Apgar family. During inclement weather the homes of parishioners or an old school house served as meeting places. A lot was purchased from the Misses Apgar, and the church cornerstone was laid in July 1904. It was originally called St. Luke's Hall and was a multipurpose building at first. Reverend John Mitchell Harper from Indiana was the first curate. Mr. Harper was also very active in community affairs such as the development of the park, fire company, library, and Boy Scout troop.

Still farther south along Main Street is another fine stone church, St. Brigid Catholic Church. This church began as a mission church of St. Elizabeth Parish, which had been established in Far Hills in 1906 through the generosity of Grant B. Schley. With the number of large estates growing in this area, and more people of the Catholic faith employed on them, and very few automobiles available, there was a growing need for a place of worship close by for the parishioners.

In 1923, a Sunday mass was initiated at Amermans Hall in Peapack, presently the Amerman Dodge Agency. Father Thomas Maher was pastor then at St. Elizabeth's, so he would travel to and from Peapack in his convertible, carrying all articles necessary to say mass - vestments, linens, chalice, and communion hosts. He was often accompanied by two altar boys who assisted him.

In 1936, Mrs. Charles Suydam Cutting wanted to build a church to honor the memory of her late first husband, James Cox Brady, who had been a generous contributor to many other Catholic

churches and schools. Property was bought in Peapack on Main Street, and the cornerstone for the fieldstone church was laid in December 1936. Plans for this church were copied after a 16th Century church in Ireland.

From "The Union" 1818

Basking Ridge Academy

New Jersey,

Under the direction of the Rev. W. C. Brownlee

A.M. Principal

The winter session will commence on Nov. 2. Branches taught: English grammar and composition, Latin, Greek, French, Italian, mathematicks, &c. - Terms: Tuition \$25 per annum, and \$5 entrance: Board, \$50 per session, or \$100 per annum - The Basking Ridge Academy has been long well known. The present Principal is a graduate of the University of Glasgow: and he has taught with a reputation in Britain and in this country. He has engaged, as his assistant, the late Principal of Flemington Academy, a teacher of high literary standing. A French gentleman is also engaged to give lessons to those who wish to learn to read and speak the French language. For further particulars gentlemen are referred to President Green, and Vice President Lindeley, Princeton; to Mr. James Ross and James Houston, Esq. Philadelphia; and to Dr. Wilson, Columbia College, and the Revd. Dr. Romeyn, New York. Gentlemen who intend to send on their sons, will be pleased to apply soon, as not a great number can be received.

The editors of Richmond Inquirer, and the Courier, Charleston, S.C. are requested to insert this once a week, for eight weeks, and send on their accounts to the office of the Union.

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French Encampment 1781 Sign

Placed on English Farm Site

A blue sign with white letters titled "French Encampment 1781" has been installed on Valley Road, Liberty Corner, adjacent to the English family farmstead, commemorating the historic event of 223 years ago.

French Encampment 1781 Sign Continued

The sign's message reads: "Rochambeau' French troops camped overnight on the English family farm in Liberty Corner in August, 1781. They continued onto Princeton en route to Yorktown and the last major battle of the American Revolution."

The sign is consistent with the four historic ones throughout the Township and was made with the cooperation of the Somerset County Traffic Safety Services. It was included in Historian June Kennedy's program for 2003 and represents Bernards Township's recognition of this local historic event.

Unique Military Museum Located at Veterans Center

A military museum, featuring artifacts of America's conflicts has been opened at the U. S. Veterans Medical Center at Lyons. Located in Building 57, The Domicillary, the second floor museum, the first of its kind in the area, contains a wealth of memorabilia for visitors to view.

Enclosed in lighted showcases are life-size mannequins in authentic military garb, shelves filled with books related to American wars and showcases with medals, G.I. dishes, battlefield telephone, photographs, and Christmas cards sewn in Vietnam.

One of the highlights is a very large wooden propeller blade, from an early plane which operated from the Somerset Hills Airport. That site was very active during World War II.

Uniforms and other military memorabilia have been donated by veterans residing at Lyons and also from the general public who heard about the museum. Michael Quant, a physician's assistant at Lyons, is museum director. He initially purchased the propeller blade in Meyersville. Anyone wishing to donate to the museum can contact Mr. Quant at 1-908-647-0180, Extension 4218.

There are items from the Civil War, Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War. One can see Trench Art, propaganda posters, uniforms of American and enemy forces. An entire wall, "Reflections of War" displays veteran's art.

A vertical 1930s radio has been rewired to play music from various war eras. Perhaps one of the most impressive displays is a World War II navigator's bubble from a B-17 bomber, bombing maps, and bugles from Japanese and American soldiers.

Examples of the Lyons veteran's craftsmanship include a hand-carved American eagle, bookcases, display cases and picture frames, made on site.

What is Bonnie Brae? ? ? ?

Bonnie Brae is a fully licensed, non-profit, year-round residential treatment and special education center for emotionally disturbed New Jersey boys ages 11 to 18. Eighty percent of the boys have been abandoned, abused, or neglected, often by people they love and trust.

Bonnie Brae (Scottish for "beautiful hillside") is located in Bernards Township on 100 pastoral acres with a large fishing pond, playing fields, gymnasium, school building, and residential and administrative buildings.

In 1916, Juvenile Court Judge Harry V. Osborne was alarmed by the lack of resources in New Jersey to care for boys with social and emotional problems. Instead of receiving the care they needed, many of these boys were treated as delinquents and committed to orphanages and detention centers.

In response to this need, Judge Osborne and a group of his friends leased the 124-acre Bonnie Brae Farm in Livingston, New Jersey for 14 boys. However, it was not long before an increased demand for Bonnie Brae's services necessitated a search for new and larger quarters. In 1920, Judge Osborne and his friends raised \$29,000 and purchased the present site on Valley Road in the Liberty Corner section of Bernards Township. The initial site consisted of 360 rolling country acres and farm buildings. Boys and house parents lived in quaint Tudor style buildings. Boys attended school in town and completed farm chores on the farm.

Over time, boys arrived at Bonnie Brae with increasingly complex problems. The house parent

Bonnie Brae Continued

system was replaced with a professional staff of college educated childcare workers, social workers and clinicians. Some of the farm buildings were converted to school and residential use. In the early 1980s, about 250 acres of land were sold to Hovnanian for a housing development and the proceeds of the sale became the basis for the Bonnie Brae endowment.

Throughout the years, buildings were added, others demolished and replaced. The costs of capital improvement were funded by generous contributions from philanthropic organizations, foundations, individuals, and corporations. In the past three years, an extensive development program has added a new Vocational/Technical Education building, a new Health Center and a new Recreation Building to the campus.

Today, the 64 residents live in the multi-use McNally Center. In addition, 14 boys commute from their homes to Bonnie Brae each day.

Bonnie Brae's fund raising and endowment efforts augment funds supplied by the Division of Youth and Family Services of the State of New Jersey.

If anyone is interested in touring the facility or learning more about Bonnie Brae, please call the Development Office at (908) 647-4700.

Inside the Brick Academy

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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.**