

Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

May 2014



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NEW MUSEUM EXHIBIT

'What Put Somerset Hills on the Map'

A permanent exhibit that showcases the Somerset Hills and each of its five towns: Bedminster, Peapack-Gladstone, Far Hills, Bernardsville, and Bernards Township is currently being installed on the main floor of the Brick Academy.

Susan Zibelli, Museum Curator, states "the objective is to instill in visitors to the Brick Academy an interest, excitement, understanding, and appreciation for the uniqueness of the Somerset Hills."

Through art, artifacts, maps, photos, posters, memorabilia, and written details, a compelling story is told about the Somerset Hills and each town within it that spans from its beginnings to the present day. The exhibit is designed to appeal to a broad audience including local and prospective residents, school children, scholars, historians, preservationists, and antiquarians.

The scope of the new museum exhibit includes:

- Primary exhibit: What put each town on the map including major Historical References, Developments, Events, Buildings, Business, Structures, People, and Interests
- Secondary exhibit: Beautiful Country Estates, Notable Residents and Political Figures
- Small '*Did You Know?*' exhibit: Interesting Facts

The first museum exhibits of Bedminster and Peapack-Gladstone will be installed in time for our '*Blairsden*' speaker program scheduled for May 15. The remaining towns will be installed throughout 2014 in the following order: Far Hills, Bernardsville and Bernards Township.

We invite you to visit the Brick Academy and experience the rich intriguing history of the Somerset Hills!

Mark Your Calendar...



Craft Sunday

April 27

Join us to make a Mother's Day handcrafted gift!

Students ages 8 to 12 are invited to make canvass tote bags imprinted with designs made from cut vegetables, painted in bright colors with button trim.

The hands-on workshop, sponsored by the Education Committee, is free and will be held in the 1890s schoolroom at the Brick Academy between 2-3 PM. Register is required as space is limited. Please email us at brick1809@gmail.com with the student's name, age and a phone number.

Craft Sunday at the Brick Academy engages children in learning about history by creating early American crafts.

*The Brick Academy
15 W. Oak Street, Basking Ridge*

BLAIRSDEN SPEAKER PROGRAM

May 15

Blairsdén, the legendary Gilded Era country estate of C. Ledyard Blair, will be the topic of a free speaker program sponsored by the Historical Society at 7:30 PM on Thursday, May 15 at The Brick Academy.

Author and lecturer W. Barry Thomson will provide an informative presentation about the family of C. Ledyard Blair, the architectural design, and a visual tour. Mr. Thomson is the co-author of the two-volume "New Jersey Country Houses: The Somerset Hills."

The program coincides with the museum's new Peapack-Gladstone exhibit and *Mansion In May*, the preeminent Designer Showcase and Gardens event sponsored by the Women's Association of Morristown Medical Center. For tickets, visit mansioninmay.org.

Charter Day - May 17

Bernards Township's *Charter Day* will be held on Saturday, May 17 from 11 AM to 10 PM in Basking Ridge center. This year's festival commemorates the 254th anniversary of the granting of a Charter by King George II of England, establishing Bernardston Township. The annual event, coordinated by the Department of Parks & Recreation, includes a street fair, amusement rides, historical displays, and live entertainment.

In celebration, the Brick Academy at 15 West Oak Street will be open to the public from 11 AM to 5 PM. Highlights of the museum include Lord Stirling 18th C. manor house artifacts; 1752 Whitaker Deed; Indian Arrowheads; and a new developing Somerset Hills exhibit currently highlighting Bedminster and Peapack-Gladstone. There will also be a special one-day display of Bernards Township history boards. The building's top floor, restored to an 1890s schoolroom, includes period furniture, an antique pot-belly stove and activities for young visitors.

For more information about *Charter Day* visit the website: www.bernards.org.

The Blairsden Estate of Clinton Ledyard Blair

Excerpts from THSSH website article by Brooks Betz & W. Barry Thomson

Blairsden is the Peapack, New Jersey estate named after its original owner C. Ledyard Blair, a prominent investment banker and ambitious entrepreneur who recognized the uniqueness of the beautiful Somerset Hills area and decided to build one of the largest estates ever constructed in the region.

Clinton Ledyard Blair, in conjunction with his grandfather and father, founded the investment banking firm Blair & Company, erecting their corporate office at 24 Broad Street (on the Northwest corner of Exchange Place/Broad Street) in New York City. He was also governor of the New York Stock Exchange, a director of Lackawanna Steel, the Green Bay & Western Railroad, and many other corporations. Blair was both Commodore and Vice Commodore of the prestigious New York Yacht Club. He married Florence Osborne Jennings, and together they had four daughters: Marjory Bruce, Florence Ledyard, Edith Dodd, and Marie Louise.

In 1898, workers began construction on Blair's opulent 38-room, Louis XIII style mansion. Blairsden, as he named the estate, was finally finished in 1903. In February 1949, CLB died at the age of 82. One year later, in 1950, the Sisters of St. John the Baptist purchased Blairsden for \$65,000 and renamed the estate St. Josephs Villa. The Sisters ran it as a religious retreat before selling to an entity called The Foundation for Classical Architecture for \$4.5 million in 2002. In 2012, Blairsden returned to private ownership. Interesting facts include:



- Blair actually flattened the highest point of his property to build Blairsden.
- Carrere and Hastings were the architect of Blairsden. The firm also designed the New York Public Library, the United States House and Senate Offices.
- The front reflecting pool was approximately 300 feet long and was the home to two notable swans, Elsa and Lohengrin.
- Busts of twelve Roman Caesars lined the driveway entrance.
- A funicular railway was constructed behind the house, complete with its own engine, to bring materials up the mountain.
- Blairsden had electrical service, elevators, a steel structure, concrete floors, and the latest heating and cooling systems.
- It was noted that every Thursday, a "Clock Man" would come from New York, just to wind all of the clocks.
- Landscape architect was James Leal Greenleaf, who along with the Olmstead Brothers firm, worked at the James B. Duke estate (Hillsborough), "Upton Pyne" (Bernardsville), "Pennbrook" (Far Hills), and "Wendover" (Mendham). Greenleaf, also worked on the design of the Lincoln Memorial landscape in Washington DC.
- Over 1,400 types of roses were said to be planted in the rose garden.
- Tennis courts, a boathouse, a squash court (basement), horse trails, a horse track, and trap shooting range with its own lodge, an indoor Turkish Bath/pool in the basement aka "The Plunge" (basement) were on the estate.
- More than 75 full grown trees with 20 inch trunks and up to 60 feet tall were moved by 16-horse teams up the hill.
- Members of the extended Blair family became major clients of the Carrere & Hastings architecture firm with office buildings, townhouses and estates built in the New York area.
- The main driveway off what is now Lake Road was over a mile long, built at the base of Ravine Lake, proceeded up the side of the estate and eventually ending in front of the 300 foot reflecting pool, thus providing a scenic tour of the estate.
- There were approximately 38 rooms when Blairsden was completed.
- The main entrance doors were bronze with 1 inch thick plate glass windows each weighing more than 1,000 pounds.
- There were 25 fireplaces each with a uniquely designed mantel.
- All four daughters of the Blair's celebrated their wedding receptions at Blairsden.
- Blairstown, NJ and the Blair Academy that he endowed, were named after Ledyard's grandfather John Insley Blair.
- The Matheny School now occupies what was the Blairsden coach barn and stables.
- A great majority of the Italian stonecutters remained in Peapack after the initial railroad project to Peapack was completed, worked on the Blairsden project, and settled in the area.
- The coach barn and stables were built by P. Vanderhoof & Sons of Newark, for \$30,000.
- The barn had an elevator to the second floor. Several carriages and sleighs were donated to the Shelburne Village and Museum in Burlington, VT. There is also a Blair carriage at the Staten Island Historical Society, NY.

New Jersey Celebrates 350th Anniversary



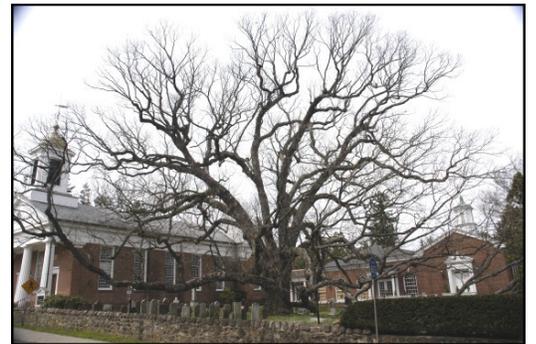
This year marks a notable milestone for New Jersey: its 350th birthday. New Jersey began in 1664 as a royal gift. Charles II of England granted a sizeable parcel of land on the east coast of North America to his brother James, Duke of York. James in turn gave a piece of this valuable real estate to two loyal noblemen, Sir George Carteret and John Lord Berkeley. The Duke spent much of his early life in exile with his brother following the English Civil War and execution of their father. This land grant enabled him to reward loyalty that was no doubt highly prized. The document that records this transaction, now housed at the New Jersey State Archives in Trenton, proclaims that “said Tract of Land is here-after to be called by the name or names of New Cesarea or New Jersey.” When the English arrived in 1664 they found a place that was already relatively diverse in its inhabitants. In addition to Native American populations, Swedish and Dutch settlers had already made the arduous journey to what would become the Garden State. Throughout its history New Jersey has played a pivotal role in the shaping of American life and culture.

To celebrate New Jersey’s 350th Anniversary an official website highlights scheduled events across the state, NJ Register of Historic Places, special museum exhibits, and feature articles. For further information, visit the website: www.officialnj350.com.

HISTORIC WHITE OAK TREE

One of the most popular sites on the Historical Society’s walking tour is the white oak tree at the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church.

The tree, estimated to be over 600 years old, is one of the oldest white oaks (*Quercus alba*) in the Western Hemisphere. It was a mere sapling when Columbus discovered the Americas and already a full grown adult when Jamestown was settled in 1607. Famous evangelist George Whitefield preached to over 3,000 people while standing under its branches during the Great Awakening of 1740. According to local lore, General George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette picnicked under its protective shade and Revolutionary War soldiers stopped here to rest. Washington established a military hospital a short distance from the tree, in the vicinity of today’s North Maple Avenue.



The present church, built in 1839, rests on the site of two former edifices: a small log meeting house circa 1717 in which the congregation first worshipped and later a larger frame structure, built around 1749. The white oak is located in the church yard which has been a community “burying ground” since the early 18th century with the oldest stone dating to 1736 (Henry Haines, 1687-1736). Over the tombstones broods the ancient tree which stands tall at 97', with a spread of 156' and a circumference of 18'.

In the 1930s in an effort to save the tree, a large cavity was filled with 3 tons of concrete and the local water company installed 260 feet of steel rods and 1,500 feet of steel cables to support the weight of the tree's branches. Today, it remains the centerpiece of the historic village.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

By Daniel W. Lincoln

LYONS TRAIN STATION GRANT APPLICATION

The Township of Bernards has hired Historical Society president, Dan Lincoln, to prepare a grant application to the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission 2014 Historic Preservation Grant Program. The application is being prepared to try to secure funds for the restoration of the Lyons Train Station. This station is owned by Bernard's Township and it has been on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places since 1984. These facts qualify it for the grant program. The funding is planned for repairs to the copper roof flashing, slate roofing, brick and stucco finish as well as doors and windows.

The building was constructed in 1931 to assist with increased traffic to the Lyons VA Hospital, and to coincide with the electrification program of the Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad Company also completed in 1931. It was built in the Tudor Revival style, and designed by D.T. Mack with help from his staff who all worked for the railroad company. This building was the last one built on the line, and replaced an earlier Victorian structure which burned down in 1912.

Mr. Lincoln has been successful in getting recent grants for projects in the Somerset Hills area. He prepared two SCC&H applications in 2013 which received awards totaling almost \$300,000. (See the Dunster Squibb and Brick Academy articles on this page). Mr. Lincoln is the Chair of the Bernardsville HP Advisory Committee, and has personally prepared many County grant applications over the years. About \$500,000 has been raised through this method for various historic restoration projects in the Somerset Hills.

DUNSTER SQUIBB RESTORATION UPDATE

The Bernardsville Historic Preservation Advisory Committee applied for a grant in 2013, on behalf of the Borough of Bernardsville with the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission for the historic Dunster Squibb property. 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 of almost \$250,000, last fall. The project consultant, historic preservation architect Michael Calafati, is currently preparing architectural and engineering construction documents for the project.

The award will be used to make structural repairs to the roof framing of the main house, to restore the chimneys and to install new roofs at the main house, the smoke house, the original barn and the stable. The Borough Council recently authorized the preparation and advertising of a public notice for interested parties to become pre-qualified to bid on this project. The notice has not yet been advertised at the time of this article.

Any contractors wanting to bid will need to demonstrate that they have recent experience in historic preservation projects, and will need to meet the requirements for bidding on a project paid for with public funds. Bidding and restoration work is anticipated to start this spring and summer respectively.

In the meantime, the Bernardsville HPAC will apply for the next round of grants available for the 2014 Somerset County C&H Historic Preservation Grants. The application is due at the end of April.

BRICK ACADEMY REROOFING STATUS

The Historical Society also received an historic preservation award last fall from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. THSSH received approximately \$38,000 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 this summer and autumn. THSSH president, Dan Lincoln, and Building and Grounds Chair, Paula Axt will spearhead the project.

*Museum Hours:
Sundays 2 to 4 PM*

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