



## 2016 Annual Report

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Sue Zibelli, Chairman

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Education

The Board of Trustees comprises of 14 members, all volunteers, and convened 11 times during 2016. There were no general membership meetings in 2016.

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 2016 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.

### **Community Outreach:**

- **Charter Day** – Bernards Township

THSSH had a table along Finley Avenue where Trustees handed out information, displayed small local artifacts, and provided information regarding the history of Charter Day. The Brick Academy, headquarters of THSSH, was open all day to showcase the history of our Somerset Hills area.

- **Basking Ridge Historic Oak Go Fund Me Project** – Somerset Hills

In partnership with the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, THSSH developed an online GoFundMe campaign with the hopes the community will donate generously to help offset the expense the church will endure to dismantle, preserve, and honor the legacy of this historic community treasure. To date the Basking Ridge Historic Oak Go Fund Me Project has raised over \$2,500.

- **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.

### **Membership Social: Speakeasy**

Held at the historic Bernards Inn in Bernardsville, over 130 guests enjoyed a 1920s Prohibition-era event. Maps from the period and posters of newspaper stories related a period of unlawful activities in the Somerset Hills. The event generated a social atmosphere for everyone while meeting the mission of promoting the history of the area.

### **Local Organization Collaborations:**

**Jacobus Vanderveer House, Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate, Farmstead Arts Center, USGA** – THSSH worked with these organizations to jointly promote activities in the local newspaper.

**Rutgers University** – New Jersey Digital Highway (NJDH) project underway to catalogue, digitize and provide online access to THSSH museum and archives collections.

**Research** – 45 unique research requests were honored. The process of requesting research and scheduling appointments was automated.

**Museum** – Free museum tours were provided to educators, scout troops and other non-profit groups. The museum was open to the public first Sunday of each month (excluding holidays).

Historic artifacts from THSSH collections were on display at local municipal buildings, libraries and schools; at community events; and in other partner museums.

**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.

**Student Enrichment – Ridge H.S.**

High school junior worked with several trustees throughout 2016 on various projects including a museum exhibit to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, and the Rutgers NJDH.

**Historic Restoration and Preservation:**

Three major projects are underway: Peapack Lime Kilns; Lyons Railroad Station Building and Canopy, and Brick Academy roof.

**Website and Social Media** – 39,000 people visited the website from all age groups, with an almost even split of male and female, and over 32% connecting via mobile devices. Over 80% of our visitors were new visitors. The Brick Academy was a Pokemon Go site.

**Appointments**

Cynthia Crosson joined the Board of Trustees as Archivist, and Meg Wastie joined the Board of Trustees filling the position of interim Chair of the Education Committee.

THSSH members, Mike and Dana Reynolds assumed the role of Building Managers.

**Membership**

THSSH welcomed 55 new members in 2016.

**Donations**

A framed photo of John Forrest Dillon, great, great grandfather of Forrest Dillon of Far Hills, and a framed photo of the Dillon Far Hills home, Overleigh, built by John M. Dillon in 1904, were donated by a member of the Dillon family.

### 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** – THSSH had a table along Finley Avenue where Trustees handed out information, displayed small local artifacts, provided information regarding the history of Charter Day, and conversed with interested visitors about THSSH and the volunteer opportunities to support their communities.

A framed replica of the original Bernardston Charter was shown. Visitors to the table were encouraged to “touch the charter for good luck.” They also had their picture taken touching the charter. The images were immediately shared via online social media with the hashtag #BTCharterday.

The Brick Academy, headquarters of THSSH, was open all day to showcase the history of our Somerset Hills area.

THSSH plans to expand its efforts in 2017 supporting Charter Day with new ideas to enhance the ability to tell of the history of our founding.

### **Basking Ridge Historic Oak Go Fund Me Project** – Somerset Hills

In partnership with the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, THSSH developed the Basking Ridge Historic Oak Project Go Fund Me project ([www.baskingridgeoaktree.org](http://www.baskingridgeoaktree.org)) with the goal to help the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church preserve the history of the tree, as well as to provide community outreach and fundraising support. The online campaign encourages the community to donate generously to help offset the expense the church will endure to dismantle, preserve, and honor the legacy of this historic community treasure.

ALL donations to the GoFundMe campaign will be placed in a dedicated account for The Basking Ridge Historic Oak Project. The disbursement from this fund will be overseen by the Church Trustees responsible for executing this specific project. All donations are tax deductible and qualify for corporate matching. According to the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, they have been quoted the costs of the project to prune, dismantle, and store the limbs will be in excess of \$40,000. The reason for such a high cost is there is a Revolutionary War cemetery surrounding the tree that cannot be disturbed, so every limb needs to be carefully cut, tied, and craned off to the street, and then eventually trucked and placed in storage for future use. To date the Go Fund Me Basking Ridge Oak Tree Project has raised over \$2,500. More information can be found at [www.baskingridgeoaktree.org](http://www.baskingridgeoaktree.org) or on THSSH website at [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org) .

**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.

### **Membership Social: Speakeasy – A History Spirits Tasting Event**

This event was a first for THSSH. Held at the historic Bernards Inn in Bernardsville, over 130 guests had to enter the “secret, underground social club.” Many guests fell into step arriving in full 1920s Prohibition-era ensembles. The glamorous Silver Vault and Wine Pantry, and Millicent Fenwick Ballroom at the Bernards Inn were decorated with maps from the period, drawn by John C. Smith, Landscape Architect, and posters of newspaper stories that brought you back in time to a period of unlawful activities in the Somerset Hills. Stories of bootlegging and distilling in our area were relayed through speakers, posters and memorabilia.

The music of the evening was also reminiscent of the wild Prohibition heyday with performances by soulful song writer and performer, Gordon Thomas Ward and banjo player Ken Salvo. The art of hand-rolled cigar making treated guests to a fine stogie.

Tastings included award-winning vodkas, moonshine, whiskey, peach and blueberry vodkas, and light and dark rums. Featured distillers – Claremont Distilled Spirits and Jersey Artisan Distillery – kept the drinks flowing all night with some of the nation's top craft spirits, hand-crafted spirit samples and signature cocktails.

THSSH is planning future fun, interactive events to bring neighbors together, and to impart some of the magical history of the Somerset Hills.

### **Local Organization Collaborations**

Two pilot projects were developed in conjunction with Rutgers University to catalogue, digitize and provide online access to museum and archives collections of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH). The two projects include tools from the late 1800's and early 1900's currently on loan from THSSH to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate; and records from the THSSH archives on the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church and its historic Oak Tree. These items will become part of Rutgers'

New Jersey Digital Highway (NJDH), a digital repository which preserves the state's cultural resources and artifacts for use by current and future generations of citizens, educators, researchers and students through rigorous digitization strategies and sophisticated storage and access technologies. Resources are available and maintained 24/7 and maintained in perpetuity.

THSSH joins 50 other New Jersey historical organizations participating in NJDH.

### **Archives & Research**

THSSH 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 45 requests to do research at the Brick Academy in 2016. The primary information requested was local family and house documents and pictures; historic maps; local historic figures and buildings.

The process of requesting research and scheduling appointments was automated in 2016.

### **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 Bouodinot-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.

## **Student Enrichment**

Museum Exhibit: Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church 300th Year Anniversary

To celebrate the 300th year anniversary of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, THSSH has on display at the Brick Academy an exhibit that includes a log from the Old Oak Tree, as well as artifacts and information about important people buried in the church's cemetery. The exhibit was designed by Ridge H.S. student Alexa Saylan. Alexa has been working with the Museum Committee on various projects throughout 2017.

## **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.

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.

## **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 2017.

**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 bidding process is close to finished. The construction work for this public project will begin early 2017.

**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.

**Rickey House** – THSSH contracted with Mr. James Rickey to purchase his property at 37 W. Oak St., Basking Ridge, directly adjacent to the Brick Academy, with grant funds from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. THSSH was not awarded a grant for this purchase and so the contract was terminated.

### **Online Communications**

2016 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our initial launch of THSSH on the Internet. With a combination of social media anchoring to thssh.org, there were almost 39,000 visitors that made a virtual visit to THSSH, serving up more than 31,000 pages. As THSSH leveraged social media in 2016, Internet traffic more than doubled, adding an additional 40,000 Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram views. In total, there were almost 80,000 views/visits in 2016 equaling over 6,700 visits a month.

Analytics indicated that over 80% of our visitors were new visitors to the THSSH site. There was also a noticeable uptick in mobile activity showing that our users are becoming more savvy to mobile devices. Over 32% of our visitors were connecting via mobile devices in 2016, up 5% from the previous year. Tablet users visiting were down slightly to just under 10%.

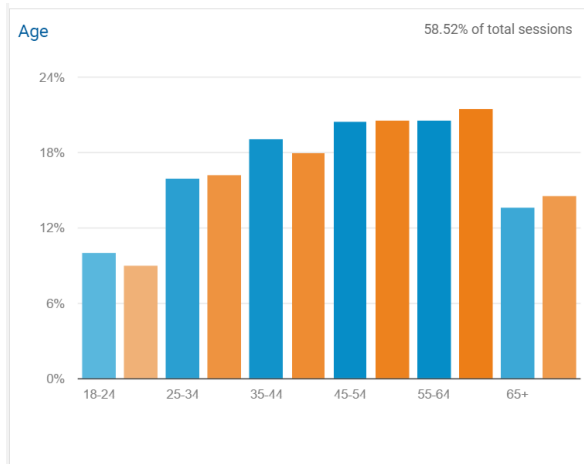
### **Most Visited Areas**

The most visited THSSH page was again led by our Blairsden Overview pages for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row with over 12% of the visitors (almost 5,000 visits in 2016). Next was our Charter day site (9%), followed by THSSH Archives sections (5%). The Basking Ridge Oak Tree page took 6<sup>th</sup> place, followed by the story of Betsy Ross in Basking Ridge.

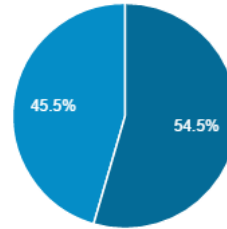
### **Demographic Viewership**



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:



■ female ■ male  
Jan 1, 2016 - Dec 5, 2016



*Demographics: 2016 (Blue) vs. 2015 (Orange)*

## Social Media

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. Instantaneous images were posted during Charter Day and the Speakeasy events in 2016. In addition, a new Facebook Series was launched in 2016 called "Dig in the Archives". Almost 4,000 views per month were logged starting in April 2016 (approx. 36,000 unique participants). A new YouTube channel with our organization's videos was also launched in 2016.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills online:

- Website: [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/somerset-hillshistory/>
- Twitter: THSSH - <https://twitter.com/thssh>
- Instagram: thehssh - <https://www.instagram.com/thehssh/>
- YouTube Channel - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCilqeKdShnoR9W2EXc2qt4Q>

## 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.

## **Donations**

- 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 Porsche 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

## 2017 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 increase our board.
- Trustees will be actively engaging current members to volunteer 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.
- Social Programs will be offered that appeal to our members and 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.

Respectively submitted: *Susan Zibelli*

Susan Zibelli, THSSH Chairman

February 9, 2017