

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003
The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Bob Blacklidge, Bldg. Mgr. & 1st V. P.
Joseph Callahan
June Campbell, Chairman, Curator
David Connolly
Sylvia Gambony
Florence Hallgring
George Helmke
June Kennedy, Publicity, Education
Dan Lincoln, President, Grants
Donald Lorenz
Richard Macksoud, Treasurer

Diane O'Connor, 2nd V. P.,
Community Relations,
Corresponding Secretary
Ann Parsekian
Ken Salvo
Larry Schwenk
Constance Smythe
David Stone, Programs
Lawrence Terricone, Recording Sec.
Mildred Van Dyke, Genealogy

The Board meets twelve times a year in addition to meetings for special events. As always, the past year has been very interesting and challenging for all of us. Some of its highlights are outlined below:

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 are 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 here 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 ink wells 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 black boards.

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 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 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 turn out. 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.

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, and 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 home owners. In spite of problems with a snow storm, all had a great time and we made a profit of approximately \$16,500, which will be used in restoring the Brick Academy.

May - "Rock-A-By Baby Railroad," by William Wilkie.

September - "Applejack, A Principal Local Commodity," by William Wilkie.

October - "Analysis of American Antique Furniture," by John Nye.

November - "Hats and Hair Dressing," by Stacey W. Miller.

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; 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 spend over 250 hours on these efforts.

Acquisitions

<u>Item</u>	<u>Source</u>
Oil painting of the Sutro home at 322 S. Finley Ave. (This house was torn down in 2003)	Ruth & Louis Sutro

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)	George Kohl
First day cover commemorating the opening day of the Somerset Hills Airport, Oct. 23, 1932	George Kohl
19 th C. bread dough trough and vegetable chopper from the Kennedy Farmstead	Alex Bedrosian
Four boxes of 19 th and 20 th C. deeds, maps, and real estate listings from the estate of A. A. Palmer, Jr.	Peter and Kathy Palmer
Three large, antique display cases	Apogee (store)

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.

Respectfully submitted,

June S. Campbell
Chairman - Board of Trustees