

2007 ANNUAL REPORT

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

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The mission of the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is “*to acquire, conserve and share local artifacts and information on matters of local historic interest; cultivate interest in local history; encourage the preservation of local historic resources; facilitate historic research; and preserve, operate, and interpret the Brick Academy.*”

Executive Summary

The past year was exceedingly productive and rewarding for the Historical Society. Two major programs included restoration of the Brick Academy and the Holiday House Tour. Other activities, detailed in the following report, include the fourth annual Historic Preservation Awards; an enlightening lecture series; a ‘Welcome’ brochure for new residents; participation in Somerset County’s *Weekend Journey through the Past*; enhancement of educational and research programs; appointment of an archivist; and continual community utilization of the Brick Academy.

The Board of Trustees convenes monthly in addition to meetings for special events. Resigning board members in 2007 included Larry Schwenk and Constance Smyth – their valuable service is sincerely appreciated. The Board is pleased to welcome new Trustee Brooks Betz.

Community Outreach

In order to provide opportunities for members of the community to gain an understanding of the activities of the Historical Society, we participate in many Somerset County, Bernards Township and history associated programs:

- **Charter Day** *May 19*
Volunteers distributed literature and sold gift items at our street booth. The Brick Academy was open and received many visitors interested in the historic landmark.
- **Memorial Day** *May 28*
Participated in the annual commemoration and placed a wreath on the Town green.
- **Somerset County 4-H Fair** *August 16 - 18*
Provided equestrian maps, bookmarks and informational flyers on THSSH, the Brick Academy and the history of Bernards Township.
- **Weekend Journey through the Past** *October 13 - 14*
The Brick Academy was one of 25 Somerset County historic sites. The Society also loaned artifacts to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross mansion and created an exhibit on its history.
- **Lord Stirling 1770's Festival** *October 7*
The event, which promotes historical and environmental education, continues to be an excellent venue to increase public awareness of THSSH programs.
- **YMCA Volunteer Recognition Award** *November 15*
THSSH honored Daniel W. Lincoln, President, at the 20th anniversary.
The event recognizes outstanding volunteers of non-profit organizations.
- **Artifacts** *Ongoing*
Local artifacts from the Society's collection are displayed at the Bernards Township municipal building, libraries, schools and community events.
- **Tour Groups** *Ongoing*
Museum tours are provided *free of charge* to educators, scout troops, senior citizen groups and other community organizations.
- **Basking Ridge Garden Club** *Ongoing*
Volunteers assist in the spring and at Christmas with our landscaping program of perennial plants, seasonal flowers and holiday greens.

Brick Academy Restoration

There was significant development in the third floor restoration project at the Brick Academy. Phase One – design, demolition, insulation and major electrical, plaster and priming work – was completed with a prior \$74,000 grant from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission, Historical Society funds and generous member donations.

In December 2007, THSSH was awarded an additional \$41,850 from the county to complete Phase Two – the floor work, final painting, electrical and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning work, as well as carpentry, lighting and potential structural repairs.

When finished, the third floor will focus on children and include the re-creation of a late 19th century schoolroom with exhibits on early schools and education in the Somerset Hills.

Speaker Program

Conducted at the General Meetings, it comprises an expert group of distinguished speakers. The programs are *free*, held at the Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public.

Date	Topic	Speaker
3/15	<i>Patriots, Tories, Inebriates, and Hussies: Archaeology at the Abraham Staats House</i>	Richard Veit
4/19	<i>Folk Grave Marker Survey</i>	Gordon Bond & Stephanie Hoagland
5/17	<i>Historic Preservation Awards</i>	(No Speaker)
9/20	<i>Fiddlesticks: Period Music</i>	Nancy Shill & Charlie Pell
10/18	<i>A Bit of Earth: Preserving Childhood, History and a Sense of Place</i>	Gordon Ward
11/15	<i>Quilts in American History</i>	Julie Neu

Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation Committee, one of the Society's most interactive working groups, increases public awareness of historic preservation, promotes excellence in historic preservation and recognizes commendable historic preservation projects throughout the community.

- In May, the fourth annual Historic Preservation Awards recognized six Somerset Hills property owners for preservation projects.
- Liberty Corner planning was discussed with several Bernards Township Committee members. Preservation NJ is willing to conduct a roundtable/informal meeting on local preservation/planning.
- Several development and variance applications were discussed and comments sent to the appropriate board: Ridge Custom Homes (East Craig Street); Fin Pro (Lyons Road); Van Dyke (South Finley Avenue); Curcio Plumbing (Lyons Road); Blauvelt (Lewis Street); Gerhard (Whitenack Road); and Gombar (Lyons Road).
- The committee selected Pat Gray to work with the Bernardsville Historic Preservation Advisory Committee on the Olcott Avenue Historic District Study, which is being supported by the Historical Society.
- The committee provided an exhibit on the history of the Boudinot-Southard Mansion for Somerset County's *Weekend Journey through the Past*.
- The committee made a site visit to the Gerhard property and prepared a report to submit to the Bernards Township Committee.
- The committee submitted recommendations to the Bernards Township Committee regarding protecting historic resources that are on properties being considered for open space purchase.
- The committee initiated plans for a landmark study to identify and update the highest priority historic buildings outside of established historic districts, which number approximately three dozen.
- The committee identified "neighborhoods of special interest" as a subject to focus on, and discussed a variety of approaches to preserve the character of these older neighborhoods. These ideas will be submitted to the Planning Board.
- A National Trust PowerPoint program, "What Every Board Member Needs to Know," was purchased for the committee.

Education

- **Museum**

Located on the main floor of the Academy, it features a self-guided tour of early education displays, local history exhibits, artifacts from Lord Stirling's estate and a small gift shop. Open to the public Sundays from 2 to 4 p.m. and by appointment.
- **Research Room**

The lower level of the Academy serves as a research room and contains photographs, historic preservation information, genealogical records, rare local books, news articles, deeds and maps. Open to the public the first and third Wednesday of the month from 9:30 a.m. to Noon and by appointment.
- **Lectures and Tours**

During the past year, 750 students and scouts of all ages visited the Academy for a lecture and/or walking tour by June Kennedy about local history and early Township schools.
- **Newsletter**

'*Inside the Brick Academy*' is published three times per year (February, May and October) and is mailed to 300 members. It comprises organization news, a calendar of events, local interest stories and project updates. The newsletter is made available to the general public at our open houses, community events and on THSSH's website.
- **Newcomer Brochure**

A brochure has been published to welcome newcomers to the community and provide pertinent THSSH information. It is personally distributed to new residents and is also available at the Bernards Township library and municipal building.
- **Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village**

The popular guide has been included at the Visitor's Desk at The Old Mill Inn and on the Bernards Township Library and Historical Society websites as a *free* PDF file.
- **Lime Kilns**

The public area in Peapack-Gladstone, dedicated in 1999, provides a learning story board about the preserved kilns and is an important reminder of the agricultural heritage of the Somerset Hills.

Website

The site, www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org, continues to evolve providing a wealth of information on the five Somerset Hills communities: Bernards Township, Bernardsville, Bedminster, Far Hills and Peapack-Gladstone; facts about the organization, activities and programs; a history of the Brick Academy; the Society's newsletters; research assistance; and records from the local history archives. It offers visitors an opportunity to join THSSH, and become involved through volunteer opportunities.

Utilization of the Brick Academy

In addition to our museum, research room, educational programs and open houses, the Brick Academy is utilized for:

- The Board of Trustees convenes at the Academy the second Wednesday of each month in addition to meetings for special events.
- General Meetings of the Historical Society were held on 3/15, 4/19, 5/17, 9/20, 10/18 and 11/15. *Free* speaker programs were open to members and the general public.
- February 6 - The Berkeley Circle Homeowners Association held its annual meeting.
- The Herding Group Association of New Jersey, a non-profit canine organization, meets four times per year.
- The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead:
 - January 6 – Trustee Meeting
 - March 2 – Annual Meeting
 - May 19 – Charter DayAn exhibit featured a diorama scale-model, recovered artifacts and digitized picture show of past uses and stages of preservation. A shared art exhibit by local seniors reinforced the relationship between the Farmstead and its future as a center for the arts.

Fund Raising

- Gift Shop items are sold at the Academy and at community events. THSSH website displays a selection of gifts and invites shoppers to visit the Academy for purchases.
- Paid advertisements from local merchants and professional services in our newsletter, '*Inside the Brick Academy*', continue to generate substantial revenue.
- Josephine M. Waltz, author of *Schoolhouses of Early Bernards Township*, presented THSSH with a \$1,050 check in appreciation of nearly two years of research assistance.
- Local school children, area residents and out-of-town visitors made generous contributions to the Brick Academy Restoration Project while touring the Museum.
- The 15th Holiday House Tour was held on December 2 with record-breaking ticket sales! Six distinctive homes in the Somerset Hills were open for touring at the bi-annual event. The properties range in age from the 1820s through the mid-20th Century with a variety of architectural styles. The Brick Academy, THSSH headquarters, served as the Hospitality Center. Proceeds from the tour are a major source of income and will be used to fund restoration projects as well as educational programs, community events and organization expenses.

Acquisitions

Artifacts:

Framed newspaper print of poem by Lydia R. Babbott of Bernardsville commemorating the Normandy invasion.

Pre-1900 office pencil sharpener

Milk bottle, half pint, "Fairview Acres, Choice Milk, Basking Ridge, N. J."

Eighth grade graduation book from the Maple Avenue school

Bicycle license plate, Bernards Twp. bicentennial 1760-1960.

Michael Falkner, a metal detectionist, donated local 18th century artifacts: harness buckle, horse's bit, many coins (some English) ranging from 1817-1937, and a musket ball with impact damage.

Archives:

Group of early account books pertaining to John Stelle's farming operations (1839-1902) and letters written during the 19th century by members of the related Runyon family

Collection of his father's Bernardsville High School memorabilia, and a copy of a 1914 Farm and Business directory of Somerset and Hunterdon counties

1905 Bernards Township map; 1937 Bernards Township zoning map

1930 handbill from P.C. Henry General Store, Basking Ridge

Collection of photographs

Our Great State Papers, 1935 book presented to Bernards Township 8th grade graduates

Schoolhouses of Early Bernards Township, by Josephine M. Waltz

Report on the Leddel Forge Site in Bernardsville (Study funded by THSSH)

Donor:

Janice Wurfel

Henry Cox

George Kohn

George Kohn

George Kohn

Donor:

Robert Stelle

James Allen

Herb Hillman

Mary Pavlini

Millie Van Dyke

George Kohl

(THSSH purchase)

Richard Veit

Archive Activities

- Attended archives workshop in Plainfield, NJ
- Inspected early Bernards Township tax records at the municipal building and made recommendations regarding preserving and archiving.
- Met with Greg Guderian and assisted him with research on two local inscriptions for the New Jersey Latin Inscriptions Project.

Consultation & Clerical Work

As in previous years, we spent over 300 hours providing telephone and face-to-face consultation to the public on genealogy and guidance in historic preservation; reviewing and cataloguing acquisitions; photographing privately held old documents; cataloging our library of rare local books and archival files; and composing pamphlets and publications; and maintaining the building.

Association Memberships

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is a member of the following organizations:

- *Somerset County Historical Society*
- *League of Historical Societies of New Jersey*
- *National Trust for Historic Preservation*
- *Preservation New Jersey*

2008 Outlook

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills will continue 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. Major programs for 2008 include:

- **Third Floor Project**
 - Complete Phase Two of the construction work.
 - Develop a floor diagram and furnishings strategy to include a circa 1900 school room, museum exhibits and storage area.
- **200th Anniversary of the Brick Academy**
 - Initiate plans to celebrate the anniversary of the historic landmark (1809-2009) with an updated Brick Academy booklet, media campaign and a series of public events.
- **Fifth Annual Historic Preservation Awards**
- **THSSH Membership**
 - Continue to explore options to substantially increase membership in order to provide the community with a valuable selection of programs and services.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcella A. Miccolis
Chairman – Board of Trustees