

2008 ANNUAL REPORT

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Marcella A. Miccolis, Chairman

Board of Trustees

Brooks Betz	Communications
John Campbell	
June Campbell	Museum Curator
David Connolly	Newsletter Editor
Sylvia Gambony	
Patricia Gray	
Florence Hallgring	Newsletter Advertising
June Kennedy	Publicity, Education
Daniel Lincoln	President
Donald Lorenz	
Robin Marion	Recording Secretary
Marcella Miccolis	Chairman
Ann Parsekian	Historic Preservation, Archives, Grants
Joseph Ryder	Treasurer, Building Manager
Ken Salvo	
Lawrence Terricone	Landscaping
Mildred Van Dyke	Honorary Historian

Executive Summary

This past year was indeed a ‘landmark’ one! In 1976, the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills began to restore the Brick Academy, the organization’s headquarters, to its earliest 19th century appearance. On November 9, 2008 a public ‘open house’ of the Top Floor was held to celebrate the completion of the historic building’s final phase of restoration work. The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission, which provided grant funding for the restoration work, were honored at the reception.

Other major programs, detailed in the following report, include the Brick Academy Bicentennial planning; historic preservation initiatives; guest speaker lectures; a cooperative website venture with *www.shopformuseums.com*; Somerset County’s *Weekend Journey through the Past*; exploration of a partnership with the *Museum of Early Trades & Crafts* for education programming; involvement in community events; and public utilization of the Brick Academy.

The Board of Trustees comprises 17 members and convened eleven times during 2008. General membership meetings, which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers, were conducted five times. A special assembly was held at the Bernardsville Library in May for the fifth annual *Historic Preservation Awards*.

Our sincere gratitude is extended to retiring Trustee Diane O’Connor for her long-standing service, personal dedication and valuable contribution to The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills for the past twenty years.

Community Outreach

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

Cross Estate Gardens March

The Historical Society donated funds for the placement of an informational sign for the historic property.

Charter Day 5/17

The Brick Academy was open and received many visitors interested in Bernards Township history, local artifacts and the landmark building. On the lower level, The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead displayed a model of the complex, photographs and literature.

Memorial Day 5/26

A patriotic-themed wreath was placed at the War Memorial Monument in Basking Ridge.

History Camp 7/17

Several trustees conducted the craft program at the 18th century Jacobus Vanderveer House in Bedminster.

4-H Fair 8/16-18

THSSH provided literature on the non-profit organization, the Brick Academy and the history of Bernards Township.

Lord Stirling 1770s Festival 10/5

The Historical Society exhibited a fair booth displaying history books, gift items and educational brochures.

History Weekend 10/11-12

The Brick Academy was one of 25 Somerset County historic sites. Special events included a walking tour of Basking Ridge village and an informative lecture on a newly discovered local forge. The Historical Society also co-sponsored a play on the life of Elias Boudinot at the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Farmstead.

YMCA Volunteer Award 11/20

Lorraine Passmore, THSSH Membership Chair, was honored at the 21st annual Volunteer Recognition Night for her forty years of dedicated service to the Historical Society.

Local Artifacts

Collections are displayed at the Bernards Township municipal building, area libraries, local schools and community events.

Tour Groups

Free museum tours are provided to educators, scout troops, senior citizens and other non-profit groups.

Basking Ridge Garden Club

Volunteers assist with 'spring cleanup' and planting the flower beds at the Brick Academy.

Brick Academy Restoration

Restoration work of the Top Floor was totally completed including walls, floors, electrical and painting. An ad-hoc committee of Trustees was formed for post-construction activity:

- Allocation of floor space (1895 era schoolroom, museum display cases, storage area)
- Furnishings plan (period education related furniture and schoolroom items)
- Education programming (research, audience, partnerships, enhancements, exhibits, events, publicity)

Speaker Series

Conducted at the General Membership Meetings, it comprises an expert group of notable speakers. The programs are *free*, held at the Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public. Guest speakers in 2008 included Mark Pilipski, Phil Jaeger, Gordon Bond and Frank Greenagel. Matthew Dodd presented 'Old Railroad Days' songs and stories.

Historic Preservation

1. In May, the fifth annual *Historic Preservation Awards* recognized five Somerset Hills property owners for preservation projects.
2. Several development and variance applications were discussed and comments were forwarded to the appropriate board: Ridge Custom Homes; Van Dyke; English Farm; Kearns; and Knox. The resolutions of approval of Ridge Custom Homes and English Farm subdivision applications require

review by HPC of their architectural designs.

3. Two books on compatible construction were purchased: *Celebrating Compatible Design: Creating New Spaces in Historic Homes* and *New Rooms for Old Houses: Beautiful Additions for the Traditional Home*.

4. Bernards Township Open Space Acquisitions: Committee members continued to express dismay about the planned demolition of the McCollum dwelling and helped arrange removal of the 19th century barn from the McCollum property to the Knox property; committee members visited the Sons of Liberty property and inspected the exterior of the Irwin Richardt dwelling.

5. Committee members submitted comments to Somerset County on the Boudinot-Southard-Ross feasibility study for reuse of the historic buildings.

6. Committee members participated in the Olcott Avenue Historic District public information meetings in Bernardsville.

7. Committee members worked with Bank of America to revise plans for an incompatible ramp design; the committee wrote to Verizon to offer assistance with the renovation of the Corbett House; the committee submitted comments to Bela Gombar regarding his proposal to subdivide property on Lyons Road; the committee submitted comments regarding materials and plan revisions on Don Musso's Liberty Corner project.

8. Committee members submitted suggestions for updating the goals and objectives of the Bernards Twp. Master Plan, focusing on preserving historic villages/hamlets and the character of older neighborhoods.

9. In October, Dr. Richard Veit presented findings from his archaeological investigations of the Ledell-Frost Forge (funded through the Historical Society) in a public talk entitled *Forging Ahead in the Somerset Hills*.

Education

Museum

Located on the main floor of the Academy, it features early education displays, local history exhibitions, 18th century Lord Stirling artifacts and a small gift shop.

Research Room & Library

The lower level of the Academy contains community photographs, historic preservation information, genealogy records, rare local books, news articles, deeds and maps.

Lectures & Tours

During the past year, 500 students and scouts visited the Academy for a local history lecture and/or walking tour of Basking Ridge by Township Historian June Kennedy.

Newsletter

'*Inside the Brick Academy*' comprises Society news, a calendar of events, local interest stories and announcements. It is available to the public at our 'open houses', community events and at www.brickacademy.org.

Newcomer Brochure

New residents receive local history and THSSH organization information. The brochure is also offered at the Bernards Township library and municipal building.

Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village

The popular guide is available at the Academy, at the Old Mill Inn and on the Bernards Township Library and THSSH websites.

Lime Kilns

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

Communications

"News Archive" tracks press releases and new additions to the site; Profile section highlights Somerset Hills historic buildings and businesses; 72 historic "tidbits of information" have been loaded; *Inside the Brick Academy* newsletters (2002-2008) and meeting documents (1957-1976) were digitized; fourteen community events were posted; new Online Donation

capability makes contributions to THSSH; Online Calendar is available; New gift items added; Online Discussion group continues to grow; Somerset County History Weekend - a web based map shares online travel capabilities; HP Awards photos and winners are online; Mansion in May was added to promote cross historical events; new Wikipedia section for the Brick Academy is posted; and *Shop for Museums Campaign* was created online for sharing portions of retail purchases.

Brick Academy Utilization

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

- The Historical Society conducts Board of Trustees, Membership and Committee meetings
- *The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead* – monthly Trustees and annual Membership meetings
- *The Herding Group Association of New Jersey* - quarterly meetings
- *The Northern NJ Region Porsche Club of America* - monthly meetings
- *The Berkeley Circle Homeowners Association* - annual meeting

Fund Raising

- Gift shop items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events as well as displayed on the Historical Society's website.
- Substantial revenue is generated through paid advertisements from local merchants and professional services in our newsletter, '*Inside the Brick Academy*'.
- Non-profit organizations that conduct meetings at the Brick Academy provide generous donations.
- Local school children, area residents and out-of-town visitors make individual contributions while touring the Brick Academy.

Gifts & Acquisitions

Artifacts:

- Antique potbelly stove *Gift of Lorraine and Warren Passmore*

- Three museum display cases *Gift of The Bonafides of Somerset Hills*
- A replica 45-star United States flag *Gift of June and Robert Kennedy*
- 19th century child's school desk with chair *Gift of Sue and Kevin Davis*
- Leather handled strap for sharpening razors; 19th century ornate greeting card; leather shot pouch; bicentennial American Revolution pewter 6" dish 'Township of Bernards, NJ'; and 19th century gold-plated pocket watch *Gift of Etta Crane*

Archives:

- Ransford Crane books and school notebooks *Gift of Etta Crane*
- Odd Fellows memorabilia collection *Gift of Haas Galloway*
- *New Jersey As A Colony and a State* by Francis Bazley Lee *Gift of Kathy Garland*
- *New Rooms for Old Houses* by Frank Shirley *Purchase*
- *Celebrating Compatible Design* by Utah Heritage Foundation *Purchase*
- Diocese Book *Gift of June Kennedy*
- Cox Map & Notes on old Basking Ridge Deeds (CDs) *Gift of Rick Axt*

Archives

Website inquiries from Emily Joy Jones (historic sites), Alan B. Clapp (family genealogy), Anne Wingate (Compton House), Malena Gordon (Bedminster), William Craig (Washington House), Sue Giuliano (house histories), Karen Ifert (Annin and Boyle families).

Image requests from Magazines of North Jersey Media Group (1960 Parade) and Color Reflections (B.R. Fire Company).

Consultation & Clerical

Hundreds of volunteered hours were spent providing telephone and face-to-face consultation on guidance in historic preservation; reviewing and cataloguing acquisitions; photographing and digitizing old documents; cataloging our library of rare local books and archival files; and composing correspondences and publications.

Memberships

- The Historical Society received 18 new memberships (individual and family) during the past year.
- 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*

2009 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. Key programs include:

• **Top Floor Project**

Institute a floor plan and furnishings strategy to include a recreated 1895 era schoolroom, local artifact exhibitions and storage space.

In April, hold an inaugural *Historic Schoolhouse Summit & Symposium*, a gathering of NJ historic schoolhouse curators and operators, to exchange ideas and information.

Institute new education programming aimed at area school children by establishing a partnership with the *Museum of Early Trades & Crafts*.

• **Brick Academy Bicentennial**

Celebrate with a Bernards Township resolution, bicentennial logo, building banner, public events, newspaper articles, updated booklet, promotional gifts, and education programming.

• **Holiday House Tour**

The 16th Holiday House Tour is scheduled for Sunday, December 6. Attended by an expected 500 visitors, it features 5-6 diverse and architecturally significant homes within the Somerset Hills. Revenue generated from the biannual fundraiser will be used for restoration projects, community programs and the 2010 Historical Society operating budget.