

# 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

## The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Marcella A. Miccolis, Chairman

### Board of Trustees

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The Board of Trustees comprises 16 members with several changes during the past year: new Trustee Paula Axt, resuming Trustee Martine White, and retiring Trustee Ken Salvo. The Board convened ten times and general membership meetings, which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers, were conducted twice. Newly appointed Committee Chairs include Susan Zibelli (Museum) and Martine White (Speaker Program).

### Executive Summary

This past year has been very rewarding for The Historical Society. The organization sponsored innovative education programs, conducted historic walking tours, announced a Historic Preservation scholarship, enjoyed gatherings at the Brick Academy, and welcomed the company of new members. Highlights include:

- A new HP scholarship program to honor the memory of Lorraine Passmore, a long-time THSSH member and founding member of the HPC was initiated.
- To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War, two sequential displays were installed at the Bernards Township Library: “*Off to War*” and “*The Home Front*”.
- At a special tea held in May at the Brick Academy, the Historical Society honored Trustee June Kennedy upon her retirement as Bernards Township Historian.
- A creative writing class, *Writing Rules!*, was conducted during the summer by a Long Hill Township teacher in the Brick Academy’s 1890s schoolroom.
- The Historical Society and the Basking Ridge Garden Club co-sponsored “*The Gardens of the Historic Somerset Hills*” on June 17.

- A new computer system was purchased and will be utilized for Artifact and Archives databases, education presentations, and administrative records.
- The Society participated in “*Wreaths across America*”, a nationwide program to honor veterans. A local ceremony was held on December 12 at the Presbyterian Church’s historic graveyard.
- A Christmas Party for THSSH members was held on December 14 at the Brick Academy.

Detailed in the following report are Community Outreach; Brick Academy Museum; Education; Historic Preservation; Speaker Program; THSSH Online; Archives; Brick Academy Utilization; Fund Raisers; Membership; and Consultation & Clerical.

### 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, the organization participates in many Somerset County and Somerset Hills history-related programs. This year’s events included Charter Day; Memorial Day Parade; Teen Volunteer Night; Bernardsville Unity Day; Lord Stirling 1770s Festival; Bedminster Fall Fest; and Wreaths-Across-America.

In addition:

- Historic artifacts from THSSH collections are displayed at municipal buildings, neighborhood libraries, local schools, and community events.
- *Free* museum and walking tours are provided to educators, scout troops, senior citizens, and other non-profit groups.
- The Historical Society continues to partner with the Basking Ridge Garden Club to improve the grounds around the Brick Academy.

### Brick Academy Museum

The main floor of the Brick Academy serves as a museum, the only one of its kind in the Somerset Hills, specializing in local artifacts. Visitors enjoyed permanent collections and special exhibits installed in 2011.

The top floor of the Brick Academy, restored to an 1890s period schoolroom with an authentic pot belly stove, period furniture and classroom objects, is used for education programs.

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

#### **Museum Committee**

Exhibits & Displays:

- Displayed Art Show for the Basking Ridge Garden Club (*The Gardens of the Historic Somerset Hills Tour*)
- Created and positioned on lower floor a Post Office display to include Far Hills sign; Basking Ridge sorting bin and window; and framed Basking Ridge post office collages
- Combined “*Kitchen Help*” exhibit into one display case
- Created a special exhibit: “*Hauntings in the Somerset Hill*” to coordinate with the October speaker program: “Ghost Tales of a Weary Traveler”
- 1<sup>st</sup> installment of the Civil War exhibit “*Off to War*” displayed in the Museum

#### Museum Projects:

- Reframed George Washington print
- Relocated display case from coatroom to main floor
- Relocated metal school sign & wooden easel from main floor
- Relocated period wash stand from lower floor to coatroom on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor

Acquisitions: Two pottery ink bottles (*Patricia Sanftner*); ‘Bernardsville Inn’ guest soap (*E. William Cummings*); and Currier & Ives - “The Washington Family”, Press Backed Chair for teacher’s desk, and Ogee Pine Mirror circa 1880 (*Lawrence Terricone*).

Memberships: *Small Museum Association*

## Education

### **Visits & Tours**

Our education programs brought nearly 500 visitors to the Brick Academy to learn about local history and the landmark building: Oak Street School (198); Mt. Prospect School (142); Ridgewood Seniors Group (43); Bridgewater Cub Scouts (17); and Brownie Troop – St. James School (15).

The Education Committee purchased a sidewalk sign to promote special events and welcome visitors to the Brick Academy. The committee also secured an email address, [brickacademy1809@gmail.com](mailto:brickacademy1809@gmail.com), for student registration.

### **Writing Rules Camp**

The Education Committee hosted a two-week creative writing class in the 1890s school room. The academic course, *Writing Rules!*, was developed, structured, and conducted by Maura Aimette, a 13-year educator who currently teaches in the Long Hill Township school district. The education program brought 10-12 students as well as supervisors and parents to the Brick Academy each day.

### **Walking Tours**

In May, Trustee Paul Axt, dressed in period clothing, guided 38 guests down Finley Avenue sharing human interest stories about the historic buildings. Refreshments were available near ‘Bake Shop Hill’ as the tour continued back to the Brick Academy where the 1890s classroom was open for visitors.

A printed self-guided *Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village* is available at the Brick Academy, at the Old Mill Inn, and on the Bernards Township Library and Historical Society websites.

### **History VolunTEENS**

An initiative to encourage teens from the Somerset Hills to volunteer their time and talent by assisting with THSSH programs while increasing their knowledge of local history. This year, a group of local students served as docents at the Lord Stirling 1770s Festival.

### **Newsletter**

‘*Inside the Brick Academy*’ comprises Society news, event calendar and local interest stories. Published three times per year, it is available to the general public at the Brick Academy, community events and [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org).

### **‘Around and About Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons’**

The pictorial history book, by Trustee June O. Kennedy, reissued with a 15-year update as a limited Bernards 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, continues to sell at the Brick Academy and community events.

### **THSSH Brochure**

The tri-fold pamphlet, available at the Brick Academy and community events, includes the Society’s mission, history of the landmark building, Board of Trustees, meeting schedules, special events, and membership form.

### **Lime Kilns**

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

## Historic Preservation

- A new HP scholarship program to honor the memory of Lorraine Passmore, a long-time THSSH member and founding member of the HPC, was introduced. The first recipient, THSSH member Barbara Rossi, completed “*Exterior Paint for Historic Houses, From Period Colors to Proper Prep*”, a Historic Preservation course at Drew University.
- The Trilogy Repertory Theater Company and Somerset County reached a tentative agreement in which the theater group would renovate a barn at the county-owned Ross property on North Maple Avenue into a theater, and convert a stable/cottage into offices. The Boudinot-Southard house on the property would remain as a historic site.
- In June, THSSH President Dan Lincoln attended the 2011 NJ Historic Preservation Conference at Monmouth University in West Long Branch. More than 300 participants attended the plenary session, educational presentations, and field tours.
- Through a well-organized effort by local residents, a proposal by the Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church to raze and replace a 19th century manse in the historic village of Liberty Corner was denied by the Board of Adjustment.
- Three projects in the Somerset Hills area were awarded historic preservation grants by the Somerset County Freeholders: *The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead* (\$118,524) for upgrades to the farmhouse; the *Dunster/Squibb House* (\$70,000) to prepare a historic structures report and preservation plan; and *The Somerset Hills Board of Education* in Bernardsville (\$7,600) for the development of preservation plans for the Olcott School, built in 1905.
- After much consideration, HPC members decided to disband the present committee. The decision was based on the delaying of an ordinance that would create a Bernards Township Historic Preservation Committee and the demolition of several historic structures. In 2012, the Board of Trustees will thoroughly review Historic Preservation programs as they relate to the organization’s mission and the advancement of local historic preservation initiatives.

## Speaker Program

Conducted at General Membership Meetings, it comprises professional speakers on historical subjects. The programs are *free*, held at the Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public. This past year included: “*19<sup>th</sup> C. ‘Alternative’ Medicine in the Garden State*” by Dr. Sandra Moss and “*Ghost Tales of a Weary Traveler*” by Beverly Costa.

## THSSH.org Online

2011 was another great year for THSSH online. In addition to the normal websites, additional social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, and dedicated history blogs were created to share information regarding history in the Somerset Hills.

Mobile Devices showed a strong presence visiting THSSH. These mobile devices sent 2,273 visits via 12 operating systems with the iPad usage increasing over 650% from 2010 to 2011 with 786 visitors. The iPhone was a close second with 772 visitors in 2011. The Android phones were 3<sup>rd</sup> with over 500 visitors in 2011.

The lore and mystery of the Blairsden estate in Peapack continued to dominate the search that brought guests to THSSH to view historic stories, pictures, postcards, and images. Six of the top 15 keyword searches involved the use of the word “Blairsden” in their search. There was also a 41% increase in viewing of the Blairsden article on THSSH serving the story over 9,228 times in 2011.

While over 19,000 visitors came to THSSH were from the United States, there were over 350 visitors from the United Kingdom, 290 from Canada and over 140 from Australia. The Philippines rounded out the top 5 countries with 86 visitors to THSSH.

### **Notable Facts:**

January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011

- 21,636 Visitors went to THSSH online in 2011 (+5% vs 2010)
- Averaged 59.28 Visits / Day
- Largest One Day Visit: Saturday, May 21, 2011 (450 visits)
- 39,546 Pages were viewed by our guests (-11% vs 2010)
- The average user spent 1:32 minutes at the site
- 17,791 or 82.18% of the visitors were new visitors to THSSH (+6% vs 2010)
- 3,845 or 17.72% of the visitors were returning visitors

### **Top Ten Pages Viewed:**

1. blairsden.php
2. homepage
3. archives.php
4. event-charterday.php
5. localinterest.php
6. index2.php
7. brick\_academy.php
8. events\_speakerseries.php
9. events.php
10. preservation\_awards.php

### **How did Visitors Find Us?**

All traffic sources sent a total of 21,636 visits to THSSH in 2011

- 9.30% Direct Traffic (knew the web address) 2,013 visits came directly to this site
- 20.55% Referring Sites
- 70.15% Search Engines

**Top 5 Referring Sites:** google.com, wikipedia, homesoftherich.net, facebook.com, and wikimapia.org

## Archives

- In observance of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, THSSH sponsored two exhibits outside the Local History Room at the Bernards Township Library: “*Off to War*” provided glimpses of the war from a volunteer soldier’s perspective and “*The Home Front*” currently shows how the rebellion affected everyday life in the Somerset Hills.
- A record book of “*The Basking Ridge Literary Society*”, a group organized in 1861 by local high school students under the guidance of their teacher, Walter L. Rankin was transcribed. The early book documents a series of student debates and publications that reveal war through the eyes of the young scholars.
- Christopher Winter, an Eagle Scout candidate from Basking Ridge, developed a plan and managed a team to digitize and catalog a group of nearly 500 images in the THSSH Archives.
- All library books and historic ledgers have been organized and given a catalog number. The cataloging of photos and other archival documents will continue with the new computer system.
- Archives volunteers continued to assist with special requests including: NJ Postal History Society about the Liberty Corner Post Office; summertime images for the Star Ledger; Blairsden photographs; and community images for the 100 Year Celebration of Peapack-Gladstone scheduled for June 2012.
- Acquisitions: Five postcards of Bernardsville buildings (*Peter Olin*); a copy of Warren History, Volume Four (*Alan Siegel*); three CDs with digital images of Bernards Township’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration (*Hilary Klimek*); 1929 Bernardsville High School diploma (*Jean Hill*); and five group photographs of the Amaranth Lodge of Bernardsville circa 1930s & Bernardsville High School Class of 1929 Photograph (*Elizabeth Hicken*).

## Brick Academy Utilization

In addition to our museum, research room, education programs, and community events, the Brick Academy is utilized for:

- The Historical Society conducts regular Board of Trustees, Membership and Committee meetings
- *The Friends of the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead* –annual Membership meeting
- *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 Raisers

- In June, The Historical Society and the Basking Ridge Garden Club co-sponsored “*The Gardens of the Historic Somerset Hill*”. The event included nine private gardens, the Wandering Garden at the VNA, a Garden Gift Boutique, Floral Art Show, and “Around and About...” book signing at the Brick Academy.
- Gift items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events as well as displayed on the Historical Society’s website: [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org).
- 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.

- School children, area residents and out-of-town visitors make individual contributions at the Brick Academy.
- Donations are received through *ShopforMuseums.com*, a primary source of online fundraising for museums and related non-profit organizations through three hundred participating retail stores.

## Membership

- The Historical Society welcomed 14 new members in 2011.
- 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*

## 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.

## 2012 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.

### **Education Program**

The Society will continue to expand and enhance the education program: Local history talks with area school children and scout troops; ‘role-play’ Colonial school days with the *Museum of Early Trades & Craft*; guided walking tours; and History VolunTEENS. A promotional brochure with Education Program information and registration forms will be circulated to additional school districts.

*Sunday Crafts*, a new education program, will be launched on January 29. The program is designed to teach young children a traditional craft. The first program will highlight ‘foot warmers’ – attendees will learn about the history, see a collection of antique foot warmers and make one of their own! The Museum will be open to visiting parents.

### **Speaker Program**

A new Director will revamp the program with a spring/fall schedule of professional speakers and coordinate the historical subjects with special museum exhibits and education programs.

### **Databases**

The new computer system will be utilized to build Artifact and Archives databases, create education and speaker presentations and maintain administrative records.

### **Membership**

A membership drive is being explored to expand the non-profit organization and increase name recognition. Plans are being considered for an ‘open house’ or themed-event at the Brick Academy. Social media opportunities will be further developed to improve communications with our members and the community.

### **Holiday House Tour**

The 17<sup>th</sup> Holiday House Tour is scheduled for Sunday, December 2. Attended by an expected 500 visitors, the biennial fundraiser will feature 5-6 diverse and architecturally significant homes within the Somerset Hills. The Brick Academy will serve as the hospitality center with special exhibits, holiday boutique and refreshments.