

2012 ANNUAL REPORT

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

Submitted by Marcella A. Miccolis, Chairman

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The Board of Trustees presently comprises 15 members and convened ten times in 2012. There were three general membership meetings which include business updates, event announcements and guest speakers. A new Membership Committee Chair, Eva Frankenberger, was appointed in September.

Executive Summary

The primary objective of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills this past year was to strategically increase our visibility within the community by developing new initiatives in museum exhibits; education programs; art shows, music concerts and creative events; and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Highlights include:

- The Historical Society participated in Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission's *'Weekend Journey through the Past'*. The Brick Academy and twenty-six other historic sites opened its doors to welcome visitors throughout the two-day event. In partnership with Somerset County, THSSH set up a long term Tool and Farm Equipment exhibition at the Boudinot-Southard-Ross House.
- Three new historical and political themed exhibits were installed at the Brick Academy museum: *"The Home Front"* to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War; *'George Washington Bicentennial Celebration'*, a 1932 Bernardsville event to honor local servicemen who died in World War I; and *'Historical Politicians of the Somerset Hills'* to highlight prominent Somerset Hills political figures in this election year.
- For the first time, all five elementary schools in Bernards Township sent an entire grade level to the Brick Academy for an education program. This past year about 450 students visited the historic landmark.
- The weekend of June 23/24 was a celebration of local art and music at the Brick Academy. Farmstead Arts presented *'Art on the Ridge'* in the center of Basking Ridge and *'Strings in June'*, a music concert, was presented at the Brick Academy along with the art exhibit.

- An updated Membership Directory was published comprising pertinent information about the organization, Brick Academy headquarters, and individual members including email addresses.
- Three Somerset Hills historic properties received ‘*Somerset County Historic Preservation and History Recognition Awards*’ among the eleven honorees. The nominations were prepared by THSSH Trustees June Kennedy and Dan Lincoln.
- There were over 25,800 visitors to THSSH online. Facebook continues to drive new information to users and friends. THSSH “likes” on Facebook grew to 114 this past year.

Detailed in the following report are Community Outreach; Brick Academy Museum; Education; Speaker Programs; Membership; Historic Preservation; THSSH Online; Fund Raisers; Brick Academy Utilization; 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; Lord Stirling 1770s Festival; and Weekend Journey through the Past.

In addition:

- Historic artifacts from THSSH collections are displayed at municipal buildings, neighborhood libraries, local schools, and community events.
- *Free* lectures and tours are provided to educators, scout troops, senior citizens, and other non-profit groups.

Brick Academy Museum

The main floor of the Brick Academy serves as a museum of local artifacts, 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 furniture and classroom objects, is used for education programs.

Exhibits & Displays:

- ‘*The Home Front*’. Civil War display - 2nd installment
- George Washington Bicentennial Celebration - newspaper articles, military medals and memorial plaques to honor servicemen from the Somerset Hills area who died in World War I
- Native American artifact display cases installed on main floor and in coatroom on 3rd floor
- Exhibit: Historical Politicians of the Somerset Hills - includes, to name a few, Samuel Lewis Southard (1787-1842); Theodore Frelinghuysen (1787-1862); Robert Field Stockton (1795-1866) and William Lewis Dayton (1807-1864), all former students at the Brick Academy, and local resident, Elias Boudinot (1740-1821), along with contemporary politicians such as Millicent Fenwick (1910-1992) and Malcolm Forbes (1919-1990)
- Historic postcards placed on display at the Bernards Township Public Library
- Early 1900s bobsled originally donated by Scheurman family placed on display in the 3rd floor schoolroom
- Installed framed professional descriptions of permanent museum displays
- ‘Wall of Honor’ created in foyer on main floor of Brick Academy to recognize outstanding contributions to the Historical Society
- Enlarged, framed, historical photos placed on display: Post Office in bathroom; children on front stairs in coatroom on 3rd floor; people on sled in 3rd floor schoolroom
- Set up long-term display of tools and farming equipment at Boudinot-Southard-Ross House

- Set up a digital display of historic images at the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Property for ‘Weekend Journey through the Past’

Projects:

- Two college student summer interns and two high school volunteers join committee
- Transferring all acquisition data into computer
- Photographing and labeling all artifacts
- Recommendation to place a MUSEUM sign on building to showcase museum in the community and investigating regulations, restrictions, cost and logistics
- Safety glass and locks installed on some display cases
- Retrieved artifacts that had been stored off-site during renovation
- Set up long-term display of tools and farming equipment at Boudinot House
- Historical bridle maps offered to visitors during 'Weekend Journey Through the Past'
- Glass shelving installed in window wells of lower level
- To attract visitors to the Brick Academy, holiday wreath and garland, donated by *Flowers on the Ridge*, were placed on front door and stair railing with holiday candles in all windows

Acquisitions:

- 19th C. ‘double school desk’ acquired and placed in 3rd floor schoolroom
- School books issued 1888/89 used by William Scheuerman as a student at the Brick Academy were donated by Richard Blauvelt
- 1873 Atlas of Somerset County donated by Richard Blauvelt
- Various books dated 1818-1955 donated by John and Isabel Donelik
- Received on long-term loan from the Somerset County Environmental Education Center additional glass and pottery from the Lord Stirling dig
- Copy of Mary Lewis Kinnan's will and other documents, as well as personal chalkboards used by students at Brick Academy were donated by the Ramsey family
- Received old deeds and other documents related to the Brick Academy that had been in the municipal safe
- School pointer donated by Warren Passmore

Memberships: *Small Museum Association*

Education

The Education Committee comprises three retired certified NJ teachers and a former Girl Scout Leader with guidance from the Society’s Historian.

As of 2012, all five elementary schools in Bernards Township send an entire grade level to the Brick Academy for an education program. This past year about 450 students visited the historic landmark.

Cedar Hill School	105 students
Oak Street School	100 students
Mt Prospect School	100 students
Liberty Corner School	100 students
St. James School	45 students

Students participate in programs staffed either by Brick Academy volunteers or by *Museum of Early Trades and Crafts* teachers. Our education programs have young visitors ‘role play’ what it is like to be a student in 1850 at the Brick Academy. Some classes also take a walking tour around the center of Basking Ridge given by their teachers who we have trained in local stories of historic interest.

Two Walking Tours were conducted this year, one in the spring and a ‘Haunted Stories Tour’ in late October.

'Craft Sunday' was established to engage local children in creating an early American craft. Antique foot warmers were crafted in the spring with plans to expand the education program throughout the New Year.

On Charter Day, the Education Committee provided two costumed teachers in the top floor classroom to create an authentic 1890's experience for visitors.

June Kennedy, the Society's Historian, conducted a narrated bus tour for new residents of Fellowship Village and was a guest speaker at the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church on the topic 'A Town Built around a Church'.

Other educated-related programs include:

Walking Tours

A printed self-guided *Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village* is available at the Brick Academy and as a free download 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, two Ridge High students volunteered to assist the Museum Committee.

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.

'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 250th anniversary edition, continues to sell at the Brick Academy and community events.

THSSH Brochure

Available at the Brick Academy and community events, a free brochure includes the Society's mission, history of the Brick Academy, projects and fundraisers, and membership information.

Lime Kilns

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

Speaker Programs

Conducted at General Membership Meetings, it comprises professional speakers on historical subjects. The programs are *free*, held at the Brick Academy and are advertised to THSSH members and the general public. This past year included: '*The Mystery & History of Some of the World's Most Famous Diamonds*' by Daniel Campbell, '*Tell Me of Lincoln*' by William B. Style, and '*The History of Peapack-Gladstone*' by John C. Smith.

In addition, the weekend of June 23/24 was a celebration of local art and music at the Brick Academy. On Saturday, Farmstead Arts presented '*Art on the Ridge*' in the center of Basking Ridge and the Brick Academy. On Sunday, '*Strings in June*', a music concert of The Ridge String Quartet was presented at the Brick Academy along with the art exhibit. The two cultural events introduced a new diverse group of visitors to the historic building and was the first partnership project of the Historical Society and Farmstead Arts.

Membership

- A new Membership Chairman, Eva Frankenberger, was appointed by the Board of Trustees in September 2012.
- The Historical Society welcomed nine new individual members and The Guard Pipes and Drums as a life member.
- An updated Membership Directory was published comprising pertinent information about the non-profit organization, Brick Academy headquarters, and individual members including email addresses.
- 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*

Historic Preservation

- Three Somerset Hills historic properties received ‘*Somerset County Historic Preservation and History Recognition Awards*’ among the eleven honorees: 475 South Maple Avenue (*Preservation/Restoration of an 1870 Second Empire Residence*) in Basking Ridge, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church (*Preservation of a 1900 Gothic Revival Church*) in Bernardsville, and 18 Olcott Avenue (*Preservation/Restoration of a 1909 Colonial Revival dwelling*) in Bernardsville. The nominations were prepared by THSSH Trustees June Kennedy and Daniel Lincoln.
- THSSH Executive Committee members met with the Peapack-Glastone Historic Preservation Committee to review ownership and preservation of the local lime kilns.
- The Historic Society presented The Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead with a Historic Preservation grant.
- Recipient of the 2012 Lorraine Passmore Historic Preservation Scholarship was Daniel Lincoln, who completed ‘*Historic Building Analysis: Historic Structure Reports & Preservation Plans*’, a Historic Preservation course at Drew University.

THSSH.org Online

2012 was another great year for THSSH online. In addition to the normal websites, social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, and dedicated history blogs were created to share information regarding history in the Somerset Hills. Sites that were added to the current traditional ones (www.thssh.org, www.brickacademy.org and www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org) included www.charterday.com and www.historyvolunteers.org. All sites now bring visitors directly to the Historical Society’s homepage.

In all over 25,800 visitors visited THSSH online in 2012 searching for everything from Blairsden, Charter Day, and local historic events and images. Facebook continues to drive new information to users and friends and the “likes” continues to grow. In 2012 there were 114 likes to THSSH on Facebook.

The lore and mystery of the Blairsden estate in Peapack continued to dominate keyword searches that brought guests to THSSH to view historic stories, pictures, postcards, and images in 2012. Five of the top 15 keyword searches involved the use of the word “Blairsden” in their search.

Mobile Devices showed a strong presence in 2012 for those visiting THSSH. Mobile devices made 4,488 visits (a 120% increase vs. 2011) with the Apple iPhone beating out the Apple iPad for the first time in three years. The Sony Ericsson, the iPod Touch, and HTC devices also were represented in 2012. While over 22,977 THSSH visitors were from the United States, over 700 visitors clicked from Canada, 518 from the United Kingdom, and 175 visited from Australia. India rounded out the top 5 with 130 visitors to THSSH online.

Notable Factoids 2012:

- 25,800 visitors visited THSSH online in 2012 (+19% vs. 2011)
- Averaged 70.68 visits per day (vs. 59.28 in 2011)
- Largest One Day Visit: Saturday, May 19, 2012 (367 visits)
- 45,105 pages were viewed by our guests (+15% vs. 2011)
- The average user spent 1.20 minutes at the site (-13% vs. 2011)
- 21,256 or 81% of the visitors were new visitors to THSSH (-2% vs. 2011)
- 4,816 or 18% of the visitors were returning visitors to the THSSH site

Top Ten Pages Viewed 2012:

1. blairsdn.php
2. homepage
3. archives.php
4. localinterest.php
5. event-charterday.php
6. index2.php
7. brick_academy.php
8. events_speakerseries.php
9. archive/news_2008_12_digital_archives_rules.php
10. events.php

How Visitors Found THSSH: google.com, Wikipedia, homesoftherich.net, blog.t3consortium.com, and facebook.com

“**Traffic**” represents how users made their way to THSSH’s website. Traffic sources sent 25,800 visits in 2012:

- 72% used search engines
- 16% used referring Sites (sites that mentioned THSSH)
- 11% knew the web address and entered it directly (called Direct Traffic)

Top 15 Keywords used in Searches to find THSSH: (Search sent 15,177 total visits via 7,431 keywords)

1. blairsdn mansion
2. blairsdn
3. blairsdn estate
4. pictures of castles
5. betsy ross
6. somerset hills historical society
7. charter day basking ridge
8. blairsdn nj
9. basking ridge charter day
10. charter day basking ridge 2012
11. brick academy basking ridge
12. charter
13. charter day
14. american castles
15. blairsdn mansion nj

Fund Raisers

- Gift items are sold at the Brick Academy and community events as well as displayed on the Historical Society's website: *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 a contribution.
- School children, area residents and out-of-town visitors make generous donations at 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 museums and related non-profit organizations through three hundred participating retail stores.

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 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
- *The Guard Pipes and Drums* - weekly meeting

Consultation & Clerical

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

2013 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.

- Museum Committee will propose a MUSEUM sign on the Brick Academy; display artifacts currently in the Society's collection; organize and computerize acquisition records & photograph artifacts; properly re-label artifacts; actively recruit an Archivist; and develop policies & procedures.
- 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. *Craft Sunday*, a new education initiative launched last year, will be expanded to several sessions in 2013.

- Speaker Programs will be increased to five times this year with a music concert likely in June.
- A new Membership Committee Chair will collaborate with the Trustees to increase overall membership in the Historic Society as well as engage current members as involved participants and/or volunteers in our programs and events.
- THSSH websites, social media sites including Facebook and Twitter, and dedicated history blogs will further be developed to share information regarding history in the Somerset Hills and attract visitors to the Brick Academy.
- The 17th Holiday House Tour has been rescheduled for early December. Attended by a traditional 500 visitors, the biennial fundraiser will feature six private residences of historic significance or architectural distinction within the Somerset Hills. The Brick Academy will serve as the hospitality center with special exhibits, holiday gifts and refreshments.