



# *Inside the Brick Academy*

Newsletter of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

January, 2003

## **2002 - A GOOD YEAR Excerpts from the Chairman's Annual Report**

### **Community Outreach**

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) participated in two community events in 2002. Charter Day, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 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 6<sup>th</sup>, was a wonderful event devoted purely to history in one form or another and we were equally successful there. Participating in these community events gave 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.

Once again the Basking Ridge Garden Club planted wonderful flowers outside the Academy. We maintained these beds throughout the season.

Items from our archives are used throughout the year in display cases, particularly in libraries and the Bernards Township municipal building.

We nominated two buildings for historic preservation awards from the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. One nominee was the Mellick House in Bedminster, owned by Jeanne and Perry Hall, and the other was the Stone Dairy Barn in Gladstone, owned by Finn Caspersen.

Murals and photographs of historic Bernards Township, provided by THSSH, are on display at the new A&P in Dewy Meadow Village and at the Sunrise Assisted Living Facility.

We advised a number of local groups on grant application procedures and consulted with builders and the Township concerning structural changes to historic buildings, removal of such buildings, and the installation of bicycle paths.

### **Restoration**

The Historical Society's greatest efforts this year have been focused on the restoration of the main floor of the Brick Academy to the way it appeared in 1850. Completing the Academy's restoration has been a dream of ours for decades, and this is a large step in that direction.

### **Preservation**

The Historical Society has followed with great interest the progress of the Task Force working on the preservation and plans for the Kennedy Farmstead. The Task Force, appointed by the Township Committee, is made up of 13 members, five of whom belong to THSSH.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> the Task Force held a "Kennedy Farmstead Day". The Farm was open to the public who had signed up in advance for tours of and information on the main buildings. Many Historical Society members worked as guides for this event.

## **2002 Annual Report (Continued)**

### **Education**

THSSH published three newsletters this year. They were sent to our 295 members and given out at our open houses and public events. The newsletters are helpful in informing the public of our activities.

Due to the restoration work at the Academy, it was possible for our museum to be open only through March in 2002. However, our recently formed Museum Committee has been working hard to make our museum more interesting than ever when it reopens in 2003.

We provided a number of students with source material for use in high school reports, and provided local residents with information on the history of their houses and, in one case, with a number of area maps. We were helpful in providing information on history pertaining to the Raritan and Passaic Rivers to a gentleman writing a book on the subject.

In spite of the closing of our main floor, we managed to give five lectures at the Academy to school and Scout groups.

We had a historic marker made and installed on Lord Stirling Road describing the small airport that used to be located there.

On May 6<sup>th</sup> two of our members met with Brad Fennison, a representative of the Courier News. He scanned 71 pre-1900 pictures from our archives which have since been included in a wonderful book, Somerset County – Memories, The Early Years. The Courier News has kindly donated two of these completed books to our library.

We continued to provide information in response to requests for genealogical information from all over the country. Providing this information brings in a modest income.

### **Utilization of the Academy**

March – meetings: the Berkeley Circle Association; the Long Hill Historical Society in which George Helmke gave a lecture on the life of William Alexander, Lord Stirling.

June, November, December – meetings of the Herding Association of New Jersey

December – A Holiday party was held for members and guests in our newly restored, half-painted main floor. We had live music and a number of history related games.

### **Clerical and Museum Work**

In order to preserve our unique collection of paper archives, five of our members worked throughout the year to reproduce hundreds of fast-fading photos and newspaper articles and to change our files from regular to acid-free folders. This has been largely completed and we have now moved on to the recording and filing of many pertinent facts to be found in scrap books that were donated to us over the years. This work has made it much easier for us to help people doing various types of research on the history of the Somerset Hills.

### **Acquisitions**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Source</b>
Old split rail fence to be used at the Kennedy Farmstead	Lorraine & Warren Passmore
18 <sup>th</sup> Century banjo barometer	Mr. & Mrs. Christopher Riddleberger
19 <sup>th</sup> Century school desk and seat	Louis R. Matlach
<u>Somerset County - 250 Years</u>	Mrs. John Serafin
<u>Social List of the Somerset Hills – 1970</u> , edited by Mrs. P. Taylor	Purchase
<u>Tales and Towns of Northern New Jersey</u> by Henry Charlton Beck	Purchase
<u>Millstone Valley</u> , by Elizabeth G. C. Menzies	Purchase
<u>Henry Knox – General Washington’s General</u> , by North Callahan (two copies)	Purchase
<u>Somerset County – Memories, The Early Years</u>	Courier News

**2002 Annual Report (Continued)**  
**Outlook for 2003**

Completion of restoration of the main floor of the Brick Academy.

Moving the office and archive storage facilities from their current location on the third floor to the recently restored lowest level of the Academy. This is preparatory to the eventual restoration of the third floor for use as museum space.

Continue outreach in many areas of education.

Conduct fund raising activities including our bi-annual Christmas House Tour.

Participate in community events in order to raise community consciousness of the historical heritage of the Somerset Hills.

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**Two New Trustees Seated**

Ann Parsekian and David Connolly, both of Basking Ridge, were seated as new trustees of THSSH in September, 2002. Parsekian has a Certificate in Historic Preservation from Drew University and is enrolled in related courses. Connolly is a retired attorney. They filled seats formerly occupied by Douglas Kollmar and Norman Nelsen. The Board of Trustees acknowledged and thanked Messrs. Kollmar and Nelsen for their contributions, time, and volunteerism on behalf of THSSH.

## **Thank You**

THSSH wishes to express special thanks to the following:

Jon Wurst, our contractor at the Brick Academy, for his hard work and the donation of several thousand dollars for the project;

The Wood brothers at Ludlow Heating & Cooling Co. for their gift of the air conditioning diffusers and installation, valued at \$715.00;

Bob Blacklidge for devoting countless hours to the project; and,

JCP&L for its gift of furniture: chair, tables, and a clothes tree (arranged by Larry Terricone).

## **The Brick Academy**

Starting in March of 2002, THSSH has made excellent progress rehabilitating the main level (meeting room) area of the Brick Academy. Its rehabilitation has been a major goal of the Society. This former classroom has been rejuvenated, utilizing a grant from Somerset County in the amount of \$40,000, together with monies from ongoing fund raising efforts by THSSH. The object has been to return the classroom to its appearance in the 1850's when the Brick Academy became the local school. The work included removal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century flooring, ceiling, and lights. A new plaster ceiling was installed. New wide plank pine flooring was installed over the 1850's flooring when it became clear that the original flooring was too worn.

These removals and other work exposed much of the public school's history and layout. For example, we found the locations of the original blackboards, the wood stove, and desks. After a professional paint analysis, it was discovered that the paint colors from the 1850's were much brighter than would have been expected.

The project is almost complete with only some final painting required. There is now a small kitchenette with running water which will be very helpful for entertaining and various other functions.

## **Members Provide Donkeys For "Walk to Bethlehem"**

Perry and Jeanne Hall of Bedminster, THSSH members, graciously loaned their two miniature donkeys, Sonata and her son, Cherokee, to participate in the December 22, 2002 "Walk to Bethlehem" in Basking Ridge. The animals are part of the Hall farm menagerie, which also includes sheep. This annual event, which attracted almost 800 spectators, involves four local churches: Church of St. James, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Bishop Janes United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church in Basking Ridge. There are readings and seasonal music sung along the route. For interested parties: Sonata is almost nine years old, her son is eight. It was very generous of the Halls to transport the animals for the event.

## **Meet The Real George Washington**

He was 57 years old, 6'3" tall, when in 1789 he borrowed £100 for his inaugural trip to New York. He received less formal education than probably any other President (not beyond what is now considered 8<sup>th</sup> grade). A good administrator and leader, courageous, he made slow but proper decisions. Thin-skinned with an explosive temper, he kept people at arm's length, not permitting a genuine friendship to develop. A social animal, he

enjoyed cards, dancing, hunting, horse racing, and backgammon. Driven to gain recognition, he realized fame was the ultimate goal of all. He died the richest man in America.

### **Welcome**

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills welcomes these new members who joined in 2002:

#### Basking Ridge

Esther Baker  
John and Nancy Bell  
Brendan and Carlene Calton  
Jonathan and Victoria Cloud  
David and Judy Connolly  
Michael Ferlise  
Michael and Carolyn Kelly  
Linda McTeague  
Nicholas Nyary and Mary Whelan  
Ken and Sandra Salvo

#### Gladstone

Scott Callahan

#### Randolph

Eric Silverman

We are delighted to have you!

### **In Memoriam**

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills regrets the loss of the following members:

Ronald Dreesen  
Hugh Fenwick  
Katherine Hosmer  
William O'Connor  
J. Layton Smith  
and a friend of THSSH, Dr. Gordon Vincent, an  
Abraham Lincoln presenter

### **Historical Society will be 75 Years Old**

September 23, 2003 will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Basking Ridge Historical Society, forerunner of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills. In 1928, a group of residents met in the Maple Avenue School (site of the present Bernards Township library) and decided to organize and foster local history. Programs were in the school, members' homes, the library at 2 North Finley Avenue and later in Town Hall, then in the Brick Academy. In 1975, municipal offices relocated to Collyer Lane. The Society leases the building from Bernards Township and preserves its history, provides factual information, and offers programs on history to all. In 1988, in an effort to broaden its horizon, the name of the organization was changed to The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills.

In 1990, a new 50 year lease was signed with the local government for the continuous use of the Brick Academy. The Society "shall have exclusive use of the premises and shall endeavor to restore, renovate, and preserve the building, in view of its historical significance".

### **Some Facts About New Jersey**

It is one of the original thirteen colonies to declare their independence from England.

More Revolutionary War battles (37) were fought in New Jersey than any other colony.

For a brief period, Princeton was the capital of the United States.

***Inside the Brick Academy***

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P. O. Box 136, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

Chairman, June Campbell  
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2<sup>nd</sup> V.P. Diane O'Connor  
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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE SOMERSET HILLS**

**Any donations of local history such as  
photos, books, post cards, newspapers, artifacts  
would be greatly appreciated.**