



Inside the Brick Academy

Newsletter of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

October, 2003

The Unhappy History of a Vanished Church

By Ann Parsekian

In the early part of the 18th Century, a German Lutheran church was established high in the Somerset Hills. In 1988, this long-vanished church, called "Raritan-in-the-Hills", came to light again completely by accident.

According to a recently published article appearing in the *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey*, archeologists from the firm of Richard Grubb & Associates were hastily called to the site of a Toll Brothers townhouse project in the Hills development in the summer of 1998. A Toll Brothers work crew had blasted to remove bedrock on the project site and as a result a bone fragment was unexpectedly revealed. The archeologists investigated the site and immediately began a five-month long salvage operation. During this time period, during which the developer agreed to halt all work at the site, the remains of up to 68 individuals were uncovered. It quickly became clear from the well-organized pattern of burials that the archeologists had uncovered a forgotten cemetery.

Investigation of the historic record was undertaken at the same time. There was nothing on the site to indicate the existence of a cemetery at the mountain top location and none of the property deeds reaching back to 1806 mentioned a cemetery. Researchers finally found their first substantial clues in three articles written by A. Van Doren Honeyman that were published in the *Somerset County Historical Quarterly* during 1913-1914.

The earliest record of the "Raritan-in-the-Hills" church was in 1714, when an itinerate minister

began to visit the northern Somerset County region each summer to lead religious services for German settlers. These settlers, called Palatinates, had been what Daniel Defoe called "victims of Popish Persecution". The Germans fled from southern Germany first to England, but soon encountered intolerance. The newly appointed Royal Governor of New York then proposed to transport the refugees to Hudson Valley in America where they were to produce Naval stores (such as tar and pitch). After arriving in America in 1710, the Germans resisted being forced to produce the Naval stores, wanting instead to become farmers. Before long, many Germans left the Hudson Valley and emigrated to Somerset and Hunterdon counties.

The earliest known pastor was Justus Falckner. He was head of the Lutheran Church in New York and New Jersey and he served a number of congregations in the area until his death in 1723. His brother, Daniel, then assumed the role of pastor, though Justus had warned the parish against him, calling him a drunkard. As pastor, Daniel Falckner was an embarrassment to the church. He "was constantly intoxicated, accosted women on the street, and even threatened to slit the throat of one of his parishioners". In addition, his wife, Anna Maria Schuchartin, was deemed to be a witch by members of the congregation. These two were only the first of several unpleasant characters connected to the hapless church.

Sometime during Daniel Falckner's shameful pastorate, which lasted from about 1724 to 1731, a church building made of logs was constructed in the mountains overlooking the Raritan River, in a location that is now part of the Hills development. The congregation finally convinced Falckner and his wife to leave but that was not the end of problems for the congregation. The next pastor,

Vanished Church (Continued)

Johann August Wolf, quickly outraged the congregation by choosing to read his sermons and to ignore other common practices, such as, refusing to lay hands upon a bride and groom during the marriage ceremony. Attempts were made to force the pastor to comply with standards demanded by the congregation, but Wolf resisted and the enmity increased.

The standoff lasted ten years and resulted in legal proceedings including a case before the NJ Supreme Court which, in 1739, ordered the congregation to pay all of the pastor's back salary and costs. An observer wrote at the time that during the miserable ten year period "the communion was not administered, the sick not visited; indeed there was such a desolation that it was made among the Germans a subject of street songs. . . . For eight years there was no confirmations, no sacraments, and everything was in decay."

Almost unbelievably, two more unpopular pastors followed Wolf. In 1748 the Reverend John Albert Weygand was assigned to the church but the congregation found him to be "odd", and he was replaced in 1753 by Reverend Ludolph Heinrich Schrenck who was also disliked. Schrenck lasted only three years and departed in 1756. He was the last pastor assigned to the "Mountain Church".

In the same year Schrenck departed, the congregation decided to erect a new church and the result was St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Pluckemin. The old cemetery was abandoned, and within fifty years the old log church on the mountain completely disappeared and was almost entirely forgotten.

The Pluckemin church building was used by the Lutherans until about 1809 and that building was demolished by about 1817 when a Methodist Episcopal Church was erected at the location. The Methodist church became a Presbyterian church, which remains today.

The remains uncovered during the archeological excavations were re-interred in a single grave at the Pluckemin Presbyterian Church and are marked with a monument provided by the developer.

Note: This article is based upon a paper by John W. Lawrence, Robert J. Lore, and Paul W. Schopp appearing in the *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey*, Vol. No. 56, 2001. A copy of the article is available in the Research Room at the Brick Academy.

Peapack and Gladstone

By Ruth Thomson

"Peapack and Gladstone are two of the neatest and most pleasant villages in the State. They have beautiful scenery which make them very popular for summer boarders. The surrounding country is thickly populated and has many residences built by rich New Yorkers who retire there in the summers to rest themselves and to enjoy cool healthful breezes of this vicinity." This quotation is from the *Peapack Exponent* dated May 18, 1903.

Now a hundred years later Peapack and Gladstone have grown some, but not too much, and are still unique villages in which to live.

What is now the Borough of Peapack and Gladstone originally was part of a large tract of land that Dr. John Johnston and George Willick purchased in 1701 from Dutch proprietors. This property was known as the "Peapack Patent". The tract took its name from the "Peapack Path", a native thoroughfare which ran from east to west through northern New Jersey crossing at the Lamington River at its falls. It was frequently mentioned as a boundary in early land grants. A village named "Peapack" is mentioned in a deed recording the sales by the Lenni-Lenape Indians of a large tract of land to new settlers.

The twin villages were part of Bedminster until 1912 when they were split off and combined into one Borough which is governed by six council members and a mayor. The Borough covers 5.9 square miles with a population of 2,411 people, a 15.3 increase since 1990 according to census 2000.

Quoting Mayor Vincent Girardy, "we have only 2,411 people in town but we have hundreds of volunteers". These volunteers "man" and carry out the duties of the Fire Company and First Aid Squad and Recreation Programs.

The Rockaway Valley Railroad came into the area from Whitehouse and Pottersville and then up toward Mendham but in 1890 the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad was extended to Gladstone from Bernardsville. The building of a good railroad was a benefit in two ways: it brought an influx of people who worked on the railroad; and, it made the area accessible to people wanting to live in the beautiful countryside and still be able to commute to the city. Large acreage was sold to estate owners which gave employment to many people of varied talents.

Peapack and Gladstone (Continued)

Until the automobile became common, residents used local livery service for transportation. Feed and grain businesses flourished for raising farm animals and in 1921 the Peapack Gladstone Trust Company was organized to care for residents' financial needs.

The Gravity Water Company was formed in 1910 to supply water for Peapack and Gladstone, Far Hills and Bedminster from a reservoir 3.5 miles north of Gladstone.

Liberty Park, created in 1919, is the "centerpiece" of the community with its famous pair of swans. The park was to honor those who served in the Great War. Since then the memorial plaques have been added for those serving in World War II, and the Korean and the Vietnam Conflicts.

Since 1980 the local school has been closed. Students attend Bernardsville schools and municipal offices are located in the original school building.

Legend of Mary Kinnan, Local Heroine (1763-1848) Recalled

By June O. Kennedy

Autumn brings thoughts of Mary Lewis Kinnan, local heroine, who returned to Basking Ridge October 11, 1794 after three years and five months as a captive of the Shawnee Indians.

In 1779 in Basking Ridge, Mary Elizabeth Lewis, at age 15, married Joseph Kinnan, a 29 year-old veteran of the American Revolution. The Kinnans after nine years wished for greater farmland and moved with their two sons to western Virginia, where two daughters were later born.

One early evening in 1791, as Mary was preparing dinner and as her husband and visiting brother Jacob Lewis of Basking Ridge were returning after a day's work on the farm, their cabin was invaded by Shawnee Indians. Jacob Lewis grabbed his two Kinnan nephews and fled; Joseph was killed as were his two young daughters. His wife Mary was taken captive.

The Indians forced Mary to march with them to Ohio. Along the way, one brave was bitten by a snake and the party waited for his recovery. In Ohio, Mary was able to send a letter to her brother telling of her location. However, the courier became ill and, to avoid contamination, his mail pouch and clothes were buried.

Six months later, the clothing was retrieved and the letter arrived in Basking Ridge where Jacob Lewis

read it to the congregation of the Presbyterian Church at Sunday services. A generous collection was given for his rescue mission. When Lewis reached Ohio, Mary was no longer there. Fur traders reported she was now in the Detroit area, where he did find her.

Lewis stealthily crept into the Indians' camp wearing animal skins and made sounds to attract her attention. They made plans for her escape. Her brother obtained men's clothing for Mary and they walked away from the camp and onto a river raft which took them on their journey back to Basking Ridge.

Mary Lewis Kinnan returned after three years and five months in captivity. She was fondly called "Aunt Polly" by the villagers. On each anniversary of the tragedy she would go into the woods to mourn the loss of her husband and daughters. She died in her 85th year and her tombstone can be seen from the North Finley Avenue side of the Presbyterian Church, next to her son, Joseph.

Jacob Lewis relocated to Illinois. The Lewis family is related to Samuel Lewis Southard, NJ Governor and US Senator and William Lewis Dayton, US Senator and Ambassador to France during the Civil War. Lewis Street and Kinnan Way in Bernards Township are named for Mary's family.

Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead Signed Onto NJ Historic Register

By June O. Kennedy

The Bernards Township Committee was notified recently that the application of the Kennedy-Martin-Steel Farmstead at 450 King George Road, Basking Ridge was favorably received by the State Review Board of Historic Sites and on June 9, 2003 was signed onto the NJ Register by the State Preservation Officer. It will now be sent to the National Park Service to be considered for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Bernards now has eight listings.

The Homestead was part of the 300 acre plantation of the Rev. Samuel Kennedy, fourth pastor of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, who established a classical school there in 1762 and later relocated it closer to the church. (This school was the Basking Ridge Classical School, for which the Brick Academy was built in 1809.) The property, at the joining of the Passaic and Dead Rivers, includes a 1752 farm house, English style barn and other vintage agricultural buildings. Col. Ephraim Martin, Revolutionary War patriot and NJ legislative Council member 1778-1795, resided there. In the 19th Century, the Stelle family,

NJ Historic Register (Continued)

distant relatives of the Martins, acquired the property and lived and farmed there until the 1940s. The Stelles were prominent in local and County government.

Other properties on both the State and National Registers are: Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, Franklin Corners Historic District, The Academy, Lord Stirling Manor Site, The Coffee House, the Alward House, and Liberty Corner Historic District.

The State Preservation Office includes the Lyons Railroad Station as a thematic nomination of Operating Passenger Railroad Stations. The Keeper of the National Register has listed for eligibility; US Veterans Administration Complex and the Basking Ridge Historic District, the proposal of which was defeated by property owners in 1994.

Sunday "Open House" Hours Resume

Sunday, September 14 began "Open House" visiting hours from 2-4 P.M. at the Brick Academy. Visitors are now treated to a completely restored main meeting room level with new and changing exhibits.

On view presently are displays on the early school days and former students of the Brick Academy; the life of Lord Stirling; a salute to area post offices—all with accompanying artifacts and photographs.

The Academy's Research Center has been relocated to the lower level and is open every first and third Wednesday of the month from 9:30 A.M. to 12 Noon.

Holiday House Tour Set for Dec. 7; Six Homes Prepare to Receive Guests

Six homes of varied architectural styles in the Somerset Hills will be decorated and ready to welcome visitors on Sunday, December 7 during the bi-annual Holiday House Tour, sponsored by The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills.

Always a sell-out event, tickets will be available after November 1 by sending a check for \$25.00 per person and a self-addressed stamped envelope to: THSSH, P.O. Box 136, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920.

"Tourists" will be able to visit the houses from 12 Noon to 5 P.M. in whatever order they choose. A program with tour map and directions will be distributed at the first house they visit.

Refreshments will be served at the Brick Academy throughout the day, where facilities will be available. Since this event is a rapid sell-out, guests are

encouraged to purchase their tickets early. For further information, call (908) 647-2241.

Academy Receives Three Display Cases

Three mahogany display cases, with glass counters, reminiscent of the BeauX/Art Nouveau periods (1870-1920) were given to the Brick Academy recently. Donors were Michael and Rose Bergamo, proprietors of Apogee, a clothing and accessory shop at 11 South Finley Avenue, Basking Ridge, who were redecorating their establishment.

The Bergamos had purchased the exhibit cases more than a decade ago at an auction and learned that Arthur's, a former jewelry store in the Green Brook area, had been the previous owner. That explained slight scratches on the cases' glass counters, caused perhaps by anxious women trying on engagement and wedding rings.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is most appreciative of the generosity of Michael and Rose Bergamo.

Membership

We hope all members will renew their membership by October 31. Life members do not have to renew their membership but we suggest that they consider a contribution at this time. Letters have been sent as a reminder to all regular members.

Brick Academy Gift List Impressive

Hunting for a special gift or memento of Bernards? The Brick Academy has tee shirts with local scenes, notepaper, prints, postcards, book, maps, and commemorative matted pictorials of Basking Ridge and Liberty Corner ready to be framed. Gift-givers and history buffs are invited to visit the Academy during Sunday Open House hours, 2-4 P.M.

Inside the Brick Academy

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Newsletter: David Connolly, Tom & Karen Fitzsimons

Acquisitions

We are very pleased to report the following contributions and we thank the donors for their generosity.

Betty Sisto donated:

A photograph of the Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church

An 1894 Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad timetable

An 1894 booklet concerning Bernards Township finances

A 1927 program concerning village green exercises to dedicate a new flagpole at Basking Ridge

The following books have been added to our library.

“Among the Blue Hills, Bernards a History” published by Bernardsville History Book Committee

“Warren Township” by Alan Siegel

“Long Hill Township” by Mary Lou Weller

THSSH Creates Historic Preservation Committee

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills has created a new Historic Preservation Committee within the Society. The mission of the committee will be to carry out educational, informational, and informal advisory functions to promote local historic preservation.

Plans include local historic preservation topics for future historical society meetings and exhibits at the Brick Academy to highlight historic preservation in the Somerset Hills.

Members of the committee are John Campbell, David Connolly, George Helmke, Dan Lincoln, Ann Parsekian, Lorraine Passmore, and Ken Salvo.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills archives contain files on many local historic building and the public is invited to research their favorites for their own historic preservation projects. The Research Room, located on the bottom floor of the Brick Academy, at 15 West Oak Street in Basking Ridge is open from 9:30 A.M. on the first and third Wednesdays, and by appointment. For further information, please call 647-2241.

School Seats Revisited !!!

Oak double and triple seater chairs in the Brick Academy have been distributed throughout Bernards Township's various building. Originally assembly room furniture at the Maple Avenue School, which was demolished in 1973 for construction of the Bernards Township Library, the chairs were used in the Academy for municipal public meetings and court when the building served at Town Hall, and until the Historical Society obtained its Windsor chairs.

There are several double and triple seaters at the library, providing additional seating in several areas. The municipal clerk's office has a double seater, with three triple seaters in the Town Hall, for public seating during Court sessions or governmental meetings. The Health Department has a double seater, and two three seaters now are in the Department of Engineering Services on South Maple Avenue.

Brushed brass plaques, stating “Maple Avenue School, Basking Ridge, 1903-1973” have been placed on the front of each chair, a project of Trustee George Helmke.

Eight double seaters will remain in the Academy.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE SOMERSET HILLS

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