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THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

September 2008



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Speaker Series

'James Parker: A Printer on the Eve of Revolution' September 18 • 7:30 PM

Author **Gordon Bond** narrates how James Parker became the premiere New York printer in the mid-18th century before he established New Jersey's first permanent print shop in his native Woodbridge. Parker's career demonstrates the "liberty of the press" ideals and the personal price printers paid as they evolved into publishers and fledgling journalists.

'Historic Churches of Somerset County' October 16 • 7:30 PM

Frank Greenagel presents the facts and photographs of nearly 60 historic churches built in the county before 1900. The local author, who has written six books on religious architecture in NJ, explains their beginnings, identifies their architects and compares them with other historic churches throughout the state.

Songs & Stories of Old Railroad Days November 20 • 7:30 PM

Dressed in old-time railroader clothes, **Matthew Dodd** takes listeners on a journey through time, featuring railroad songs plus stories of famous trains, train wrecks, engineers, passengers and railroad builders; railroad legends, ghosts and lore; jokes and superstitions...and more! Matthew sings and plays acoustic guitar, harmonica, banjo and mandolin.

Free Admission • Refreshments

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The Brick Academy
15 West Oak Street • Basking Ridge NJ

Local Awards Celebrate National Historic Preservation Month



Winners of THSSH's Historic Preservation Awards presented May 28, 2008

From left, Aileen Pradham, Carolyn and Bill Knox; Tim Reilly; Bruce Lasko; Allison and Stephen Neumann; Tom and Bonnie Mahala; Craig Johnston (partially hidden in rear)

Details on the five award winning projects are posted online at www.brickacademy.org

Frederic Olcott's "Splendid Gift"

By Ann Parsekian

By 1900 the need for a new school in Bernardsville had become evident. In fact, the Board of Education was facing overcrowding in schools throughout Bernards Township. Discussions of the school problem continued until 1904, when Frederic P. Olcott, a wealthy financier and summer resident, made an offer to personally secure land and erect a school in Bernardsville. His offer was accepted. The handsome new Bernardsville schoolhouse, designed by renowned New York architect, Henry Janeway Hardenbergh, was comprised of two floors with four classrooms each and a third floor with a large hall and four small classrooms. It was erected at what was for the time and rural locale an extraordinary cost of over \$100,000 on land purchased for \$10,600. A Newark newspaper commented that the new schoolhouse would be "one of the most striking features of this part of the State." The building was equipped with "every modern appliance, and . . . made not only useful, but beautiful." The deed contained restrictions to assure that the property would be used in perpetuity for non-sectarian educational purposes, that the school would be free to all township school children, and that the property

should not be sold, mortgaged, or pledged for any reason. This "splendid gift," as it was still called years later, suddenly transformed the education opportunities in Bernards Township. By the time it was dedicated, the BOE had approved adding two grades for a new "high school department," and for the first time a public high school education was available in the Township.

In his School Report for 1904, County Superintendent H.C. Krebs specifically called out Olcott's gift to the township, remarking "This will, undoubtedly, be one of the finest public school buildings in the United States, as Mr. Olcott will spare no pains to construct and equip it according to the most modern ideas of school requirement." Unlike most other rural communities, Bernard's Township was clearly in the vanguard to provide a publicly financed higher education. A grateful population passed resolutions of appreciation in Olcott's honor and promptly elected him to the Board of Education. Wolfe Avenue was swiftly renamed in recognition of his gift, and the central square in Bernardsville was dedicated to him. An inscription beneath a portrait of Olcott that still hangs in the old school building reads: "Patron and Benefactor of Education." (*Excerpt from Olcott Avenue Historic District National Register Nomination*)

Weekend Journey



The Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission, in conjunction with 25 local organizations, has designated the weekend of October 11 (10 AM to 5 PM) and October 12 (Noon to 5 PM), “*Weekend Journey through the Past.*” Many of the historic sites will offer special exhibits, children’s activities and guided tours.

THSSH is proud to sponsor the Brick Academy, our headquarters, located at 15 West Oak Street in Basking Ridge. The museum will feature Bernards Township history displays, early education exhibits, artifacts from Lord Stirling’s 18th century grand manor house and a salute to area post offices. Two exclusive events are also planned throughout ‘History Weekend’:

Saturday • 1 PM

Guided Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village

Bernards Township Historian **June Kennedy** will conduct a walking tour that spans 250 years of Basking Ridge village history. The earliest structures date back to when the name “Baskenridge” first appeared in the records of the Presbyterian Church in 1733. Many of the buildings were initially erected as private residences and are based on “vernacular” architecture while others are impressive examples of formal architectural styles. Highlights include the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church; the hat shop of Aunt Carrie Cross assumed to be the oldest building in the village, the grand manor house of Dr. Horatio G. Whitnall who served as the Chief Surgeon of the Union Army and many other historic sites.



Sunday • 2:30 PM

“Forging Ahead in the Somerset Hills: Archaeological Investigations at the Leddell/Frost Forge Site, an 18th Century Ironworks in Bernardsville, New Jersey”

A very special event during History Weekend will be an illustrated talk by noted archaeologist **Dr. Richard Veit**, who will present findings from his study of the 18th century Leddell/Frost Forge in Bernardsville.



The bloomery forge site, uncovered in 2006, is an archaeological treasure, containing exceptionally well-preserved wooden remains. The free presentation will examine the forge and what it and similar sites can tell us about early American industries, the entrepreneurs who owned them, and the people who labored in them. *Photograph shows the foundation of the forge.*

A noted archeologist, Dr. Veit is the author of the award-winning book *Digging New Jersey's Past: Historical Archaeology in the Garden State* (Rutgers University Press 2002), which will be available for purchase during the program.

*Two additional Bernards Township landmarks will be participating in History Weekend: The **Boudinot-Southard-Ross** property on North Maple Avenue and the **Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead** on King George Road. For further information call the SCCHC at 908-231-7110 or visit the website www.schistoryweekend.com.*

Restoration Project ‘Heats Up’

Historical Society members Warren and Lorraine Passmore have kindly donated an antique potbelly stove for the top floor restoration project of the Brick Academy.



The 53” high, 274 pound cast iron stove is a “Magnum” brand and was made by the former Armstrong Stove & Manufacturing Company (1881-1953) of Perryville, Maryland.

As illustrated in the photograph below, the door slides around the belly on a track. The potbelly stove is designed to burn either wood or coal.



Potbelly stoves were an effective way to heat large public spaces such as schoolhouses, general stores, and railroad depots.

Upon completion of the top floor restoration project, the potbelly stove will serve as the grand centerpiece of the recreated late 19th century schoolroom with exhibits on early schools and education.

The Board of Trustees extends its most sincere thanks to Warren and Lorraine for their generous gift.

Historic October Events

By June Kennedy

*** October 19, 1781

British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, formally ending the American Revolution. French troops commanded by Comte de Rochambeau had camped overnight in Liberty Corner, Bernards Township on August 30 en route to the march south and final victory!

*** October 11, 1794

Mary Lewis Kinnan (1764-1848) returned to Basking Ridge, after three years and five months as captive of Shawnee Indians. She was rescued by her brother, Jacob Lewis, who traced her location from Ohio to Detroit, Michigan. The Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church congregation provided funds for the rescue mission.

*** October 13, 1974

When the new Bernards Township Library was completed in Basking Ridge, residents, friends and organizations formed a human book brigade, moving all the books on a Sunday afternoon from the old library at 2 North Finley Avenue to the new library at 32 South Maple Avenue. *The New York Times* reported on the event!

“History Day” at English Farm

The English Family of Liberty Corner again will host a History Day at their Valley Road farm on **Saturday, September 20** from 11 AM to 5 PM. Visitors are welcome to view the various buildings, live-stock and vintage agricultural equipment.

Lord Stirling 1770s Festival

October 5

Colonial history lives at the Somerset County Park Commission's 1770s Festival at Lord Stirling's grand manor house in Lord Stirling Park in Bernards Township.

The Historical Society will once more operate a fair booth, displaying educational materials, local artifacts and historic maps.

During the annual event, regional crafts-people ply their trades, and a Revolutionary War military detachment conducts maneuvers on the lawn of the former estate. The day promotes historical and environmental education by highlighting this unsung Revolutionary War hero, demonstrating the colonial heritage of New Jersey, and recreating a typical autumn afternoon in 1770.

Nearly 50 people attired in period dress demonstrate their trades and crafts (*none are for sale*). Children of all ages enjoy the hayrides, clay crafts, stenciling, and toy making.

10 AM to 4 PM

Flying Down The Church Hill...

By Ruth Hill Thomson

Back in the 1920's and early 30's young people in Peapack & Gladstone had fun roller skating. Our sidewalks were in good shape then.

Our skates were 4 wheel ones that clipped onto our shoes. We had a metal "key" to adjust the tightness and length of the skates. Usually the key was on a heavy ribbon or cord that we had around our necks. The ankle strap was leather.

One of my favorite "rides" on skates started on the sidewalk adjacent to Mendham Road by the Peapack Reformed Church. We would "push off" to get a fast start then coast all the way down the sidewalk. As we got near to the end of the sidewalk we would "roll" against the Ellis Tiger Hardware Store Building – now "The Red Toad" – to stop. Then we would turn around and "pump" our way back up the hill to do it again!

Do any young people roller skate anymore?

PAST PRESIDENTIAL EVENTS

By June Kennedy

James Linn of present-day Bernardsville served in the NJ Legislature from 1793-97 and in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1799-1801. There he met a deadlock of 35 ballots as the states were tied between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr for president. A confirmed Jeffersonian, Linn refused to alter his vote and put NJ behind Burr. His stubbornness was rewarded, not only by seeing his man win, but also with an appointment to be Supervisor of Revenue of NJ after his term in Washington ended.

Theodore Frelinghuysen (1787-1861), who attended Dr. Finley's Classical School, was the VP running mate with Henry Clay for president on the Whig party in 1844. Then chancellor of the University of the City of New York, he had been a U.S. Senator from 1829-1835, and was called the "Christian Statesman" for his integrity and support of social re-form. The men failed in their White House bid.

William Lewis Dayton, a Basking Ridge native, was chosen by the newly reformed Republican Party as the VP candidate with John C. Fremont for president in 1856. They were not successful. In 1864, Lincoln sought out Dayton who he had previously appointed Ambassador to France, as his running mate in his re-election bid. The Republican National Committee felt this could not be a winning ticket geographically;

Andrew Johnson of Tennessee was chosen and he succeeded Lincoln after his assassination in 1865.

Historical Society Celebrates 80 Years

By June Kennedy

On September 23, 1928, some Bernards Township residents, dedicated to the preservation of local history, met in the Maple Avenue School (site of the present library) for the annual gathering of Brick Academy alumni. This association of alumni was an inspiration for the founding of the Historical Society.



Programs were held in the school, members' homes, the library at 2 North Finley Avenue and later Town Hall, which then was located in the Brick Academy.

The Society had storage space for artifacts and a file cabinet in the library; the Society was quite scholarly, producing

intellectual research papers, now in the files of the Society, all previously read at meetings. Some papers were printed in the NJ Archives and the Somerset County Quarterly.

The Society wrote three publications, two about the Academy and one on the Van Dorn Mill. It also collaborated with The Historical Booklet Committee in 1960 for Bernards' 200th Anniversary brochure, reprinted in 1976 for America's bicentennial.

In 1975, the municipal offices were relocated to Collyer Lane and the Academy became the headquarters of the Society, which leases the landmark building from the Township.

In 1988, in an effort to broaden its horizon, the organization's name was changed to The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills. In 1990, a new 50-year lease between the Society and Bernards Township was written. The Historical Society "shall have exclusive use of the premises and shall endeavor to restore, renovate and preserve the building, in view of its historical significance."

Throughout the years, major restoration has occurred. The lower level serves as a research center and library; the main floor is a public meeting room and museum; and the top floor is being replicated to a late 19th century schoolroom. (*Photo: Members of The Basking Ridge Historical Society dress in fashions of the Civil War period for a special historic program, 1940*)

“Open House”

Sunday Hours Resume

Sunday, September 7 begins “Open House” visiting hours from 2-4 PM at the Brick Academy. Residents of Bernards Township and neighboring communities are invited to visit the 1809 Federal schoolhouse.

On view presently are displays on the early school days and former students of the Brick Academy and School District #12; the life of Lord Stirling; a salute to area post offices – all with accompanying artifacts and photographs.

The Academy’s research room and library are located in the lower level and are open every first and third Wednesday of the month from 9:30 AM to 12 Noon and by appointment.



TRUSTEES ASSIST AT HISTORY CAMP

June Kennedy, Dan Lincoln and Marcella Miccolis conducted the craft program of the

Bedminster History Camp held at the Jacobus Vanderveer House on July 17. Ten children participated in the one-week camp and wore 18th century clothing. The period crafts, selected from THSSH’s nine-year history camp program at the Brick Academy, included a tin punch lantern and a parchment paper ‘family coat of arms’. The Vanderveer House, built in the 1770s, played a pivotal role in the American Revolutionary War. The site is located in the Pluckemin section of Bedminster Township at the River Road Park.

GENERAL ELECTION BRIEFS

Tuesday, 10/28 is the last day to apply for an Absentee Ballot for the General Election on Tuesday, 11/4. Municipal clerk’s offices have applications. Deadline for Somerset County to receive the returned ballot is Tuesday, 11/4 by 8 PM. Polling places will be open from 7 AM to 8 PM and are noted on the front of sample ballots. For voting information: 908-231-7084.

2009 MEMBERSHIP DUES

It is that

time of year again, and we are kicking off our 2009 Membership Renewal Drive.

Annual dues provide revenue for our speaker programs, restoration of the Brick Academy and publications. THSSH Members enjoy exclusive privileges, including invitations to special events, *Inside the Brick Academy* newsletter, museum exhibits, research and library facilities and a Membership Directory.

The Board of Trustees would appreciate your prompt payment of dues by **October 31, 2008**. We also ask Life Members to kindly consider making a contribution as well. *Thank You!*

Welcome

New Members...

Lee Delitzscher, *Basking Ridge*
Laura Doeringer, *Basking Ridge*
Richard Porter, *Hopewell*

Matthew & Tracy Redling, *Basking Ridge*
John & Mary Kay Strangfeld, *Bernardsville*
Meg Wastie, *Basking Ridge*
Stephen Yautz, *Stirling*

Acquisitions

- 19th century child’s school desk with chair attached to back. *Gift of Kevin & Sue Davis*
- Book, Curtis Design of Architectural Woodwork No. 504, 1938; two grade 8 school notebooks of Ransford Crane; Leather handled strap (for sharpening razors); Book, Holmes Complete Poems, 1904 – Edna Crane; Books, Pictures from Italy & American Notes Vol. I & II; 19th century ornate greeting card – Crane Family; leather shot pouch – Ransford Crane family; bicentennial American Revolution pewter 6” dish “Township of Bernards, NJ”; and 19th century gold plated pocket watch – Ransford Crane family. *Gifts of Etta Crane*