

Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY



The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

October 2021



Hollywood Came to the Somerset Hills 60 Years Ago

By W. Barry Thomson

For several days in the summer of 1961 Peapack-Gladstone became Boston, Massachusetts, and Tuscumbia, Alabama, in 1887, as scenes for the Academy Award-winning movie, *The Miracle Worker*, were shot at the Gladstone railroad terminal.

Based on William Gibson's 1959 Tony Award-winning Broadway play of the same name, the movie, released in 1962, tells the story of Anne Sullivan, a young alumna from the Perkins School for the Blind and her struggle to teach the seven-year-old deaf and blind Helen Keller to communicate and be released from her closed world of silence and darkness. The two women remained lifelong friends.

Anne Bancroft, as Anne Sullivan, and Patty Duke, as Helen Keller, reprised their Broadway roles for the movie, in the process taking home Academy Awards for Best Actress (Bancroft) and Best Supporting Actress (Duke). In all, the film garnered a total of five Academy Award nominations.

The movie was directed by Arthur Penn, who had also directed the stage play. Penn, whose work on the film earned him a Best Director Academy Award nomination, went on to direct such other classic films as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Little Big Man*, and *Alice's Restaurant*.

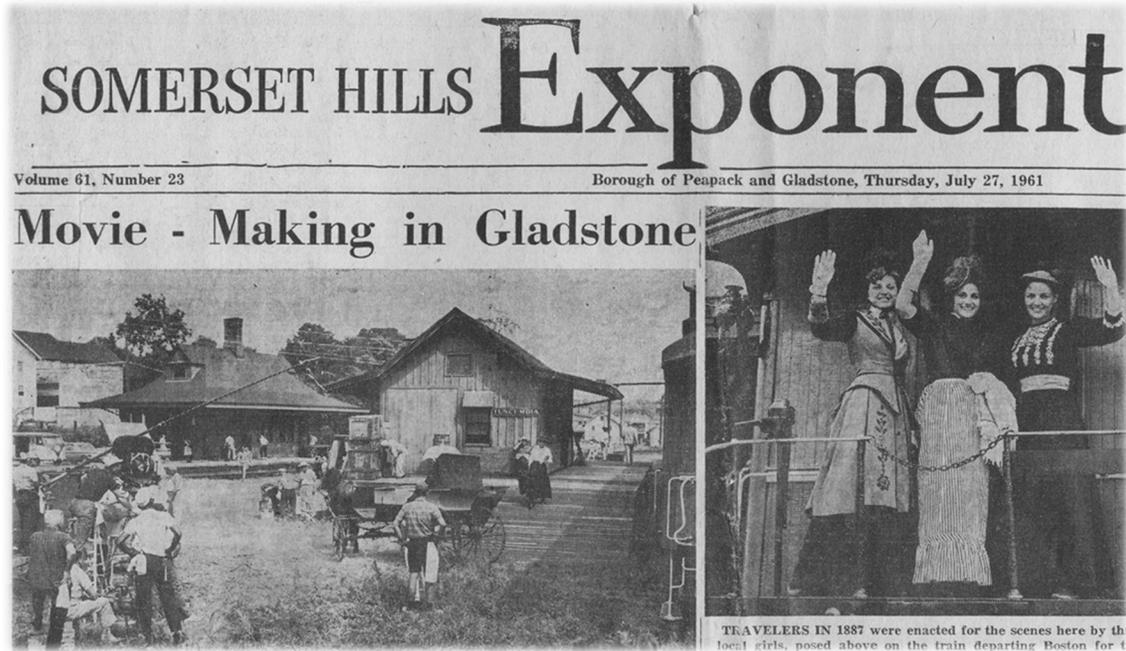
After shooting scenes at a farm in Middletown, New Jersey – to portray the Keller family's Alabama home – the film crew moved to Gladstone in July 1961 where the 1890 train terminal was transformed into the Boston station and the nearby freight house became the Tuscumbia, Alabama station. After rummaging through attic trunks looking for Victorian-era costumes, a number of area residents, many of whom were actors in local theater groups, worked as extras on the set. Some drove horse-drawn carriages while others rode as passengers in the old Black River & Western Railroad coaches that had been brought to Gladstone from Chester for the movie. After filming was completed in Gladstone, the stars and crew moved on to Long Valley for additional shooting.

The above photograph appeared in the July 20, 1961 edition of the Courier News with the caption: *YOUR HAND MADAM - Jack Stein of Pluckemin, a member of the Martinsville Players and an extra on the set of "The Miracle Worker," assists Anne Bancroft, star of the film, across the railroad tracks at the Gladstone Railroad Station.*



**To celebrate the 1961 filming of *The Miracle Worker* in the Somerset Hills,
the Historical Society is planning a movie screening!**

Movie photographs continue on page two...



ARRIVAL IN ALABAMA of Helen Keller’s new governess is filmed above at Gladstone Freight Station, converted for the make-believe occasion into the Tuscumbia Railroad Station. Anne Bancroft, who plays the governess in “The Miracle Worker”, descends the ramp toward the Keller carriage which awaits her in the foreground. Across the tracks, at left, is the Gladstone Passenger Station which became “Boston” for the 19th Century scene when Miss Bancroft leaves Massachusetts for the post with the Keller family in Alabama. *Left Photograph*

TRAVELERS IN 1887 were enacted for the scenes here by three local girls, posed above the train departing Boston for the South. Left to right: the young Footlight Guild members who played extras are: Miss Rosalind Baily of Peapack, Miss Carol Rossi of Millington and Miss Tommie Condrack of Peapack. *Right Photograph*

New Members!

The Historical Society
is pleased to welcome...

Scott Brown
Paige Gilberti
Winter Karl-Grustwitz
Andreia Lima*
John Maddox
Karen Marty
Katherine and Henry Padula
Jamie Ryan-Morais
Suzanne Scott*
Frank Smith
Mark Sheridan
David Urbani*

Pottersville
Basking Ridge
Basking Ridge
Gladstone
Basking Ridge
Basking Ridge
Bernardsville
Far Hills
Bernardsville
Basking Ridge
Bernardsville
Bernardsville

* *Life Member*

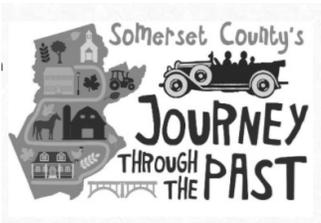
Test Yore Knowledge Crossword Puzzle

*The contest period has been
extended by popular request!*

Visit thssh.org/puzzle
or scan the QR code:



Winners will be announced
in the February newsletter.



Saturday, October 9
10am - 5pm

Sunday, October 10
12pm - 5pm

Explore Somerset County’s quaint villages, learn about prominent residents, witness early colonial life, and discover Revolutionary War sites. Twenty-four historic places will feature a variety of special exhibits, interactive demonstrations, guided tours, and music concerts...all open to the public and free!

The Brick Academy’s main gallery will highlight a documentary video and unique exhibit about George B. Post, his grotesque maquettes, and the design of the College of the City of New York. Displays also include “*What Put Somerset Hills on the Map*”, a visual narrative of the five neighboring towns, as well as a rare collection of Lenni Lenape artifacts excavated nearly 100 years ago at the present Verizon Communications property on North Maple Avenue in Basking Ridge.

The 1890s schoolroom, designed for education programs, features a pot belly stove, period furniture, student classwork, and teacher’s office. *A fun craft will be on hand for young tourists!*

Details at www.schistoryweekend.com

The Lord Stirling
1770s Festival

Sunday, October 3
11:30am - 4:00pm

Celebrate a local Revolutionary War hero at the former site of Lord Stirling’s 700-acre estate. The festival, promoting historical and environmental education, includes early crafts and trades, period reenactors, kids activities, colonial music, and 18th century wine cellar. The Historical Society will host a booth to promote membership benefits, volunteer opportunities and exclusive programs.



Lord Stirling (the Scottish earldom and title acquired by William Alexander in 1759) was one of George Washington’s top Major Generals during several critical battles of the Revolutionary War. Sponsored by the Somerset County Park Commission, the annual event is held rain or shine at the Environmental Education Center on Lord Stirling Road in Basking Ridge. *Suggested donation is \$5 per person.*

Details at www.somersetcountyparks.org

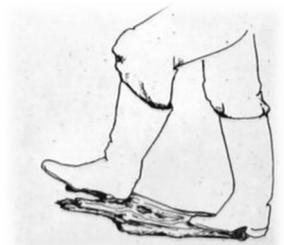
History Mystery...

What is this creature on display at the Brick Academy Museum?



Answer...A boot jack! Sometimes known as a boot pull, the small tool aids in the removal of boots. It consists of a U-shaped mouth that grips the heel of the boot, and a flat area to which weight can be applied with the opposite foot. Boot jacks can be made of cast iron, steel, plastic, or wood. There are many designs, and prices can range from a few dollars to several hundred. “Naughty Nellie” is one of the most famous boot jack designs (*too risqué for this publication!*) of the late Victorian era.

The textured, sloping back of our “cricket” boot jack, constructed of heavy cast iron with a black painted finish, creates a resting spot for one foot and the extended antenna shape helps pry off a variety of footwear.

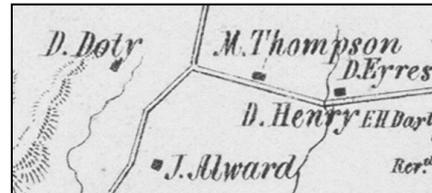


The history and origins of the boot jack are somewhat obscure though it is believed simple designs have been around since the late 1700s. “Jack” was a common name for boys who waited on their masters and would help with everything from cooking to pulling off their master’s boots. When a device came along that removed the boots without the help of the boy, it is thought the name “Jack” stuck and the term “boot jack” was born.

OAK STUMP CORNER

by Roy Crego

Most residents of the Somerset Hills pass through the intersection of Mount Airy Road and West Oak Street often. Whether it's a shopping trip to Bernardsville or a weekend getaway using Interstate 287, few notice Oak Stump Corner as they pass. Today the intersection sits astride the Bernards Township/Bernardsville border, the remnant of a neighborhood that never really formed. No historic village existed at the place. An 1850 map shows the intersection clear of houses (*photo right*).¹ The closest were those of Jonathan Alward, which is still standing off Chimney Ash Farm Road, and the home of Mary Alice Thompson, currently 189 W. Oak.² A house occupied by "D. Doty" appears to the west where Pill Hill Road would eventually run.



The Rev. E. P. Rankin, son of Rev. John C. Rankin of Basking Ridge, described visiting the Alward house in the 1850s near a road leading to "a great Oak Stump."³ That road was W. Oak and the intersection with Mt. Airy became known as Oak Stump Corner. There was a traffic triangle at the top of W. Oak, but it is unknown if the stump was in the triangle or on one of the corners.



In the early 20th century, a small house owned by Austin Wright stood on the west side of Mt. Airy in the front yard of the current 5 Mt. Airy, Basking Ridge. A circular well stood in the front yard near the intersection.⁴ In 1921, a house was built at 208 W. Oak near Oak Stump Corner for Police Sergeant Albert (Bert) Magee.⁵

Whatever sense of community was developing at Oak Stump, was disrupted by the creation of the Borough of Bernardsville, which broke off from Bernards Township in 1924. The border cut through the intersection, but most of it remained in Bernards Township. Local residents were divided between the two municipalities.

By the 1950s, Raymond C. Maronpot, M.D., moved into a new brick house and office at 2 Mt. Airy. He later moved to Bernardsville, possibly because of the dangerous parking close to the traffic triangle. A 1956 aerial photo (*left*) shows the traffic triangle and nearby streets.⁶

In 1966, Interstate 287 was extended north from Pluckemin and terminated at Mt. Airy Road. This increased the traffic volume on Mt. Airy and led to a long series of road improvements. In September 1966, an editorial in *The Bernardsville News* described W. Oak and Mt. Airy as an unpleasant traffic situation and called for elimination of the triangle.⁷ Later that year, the intersection was redesigned to remove the triangle and improve visibility. The parking spaces for the doctor's office were later moved further east along W. Oak Street. One side effect of the new design was the creation of a small piece of land on the northeast corner of the intersection.

By early 1967, a stone monument was placed on this corner to remember the significance of the place. At that time, few residents, even those in the area, knew its name. "Oak Stump Corner" was painted on the stone face with black letters on a white background. Bernards Township officials then asked the Country Hills Garden Club of Somerset County to help with landscaping.⁸ The group enlisted its membership and Brownies from Liberty Corner Girl Scout Troop #265 to plant flowers around the memorial (*photo right*).⁹



Unfortunately, over the years the monument was neglected and became overgrown with weeds. Today, the area is clear, but the monument lays on its side and only the slightest traces of the lettering remain (*photo left*).



YOUNG PLANTERS - The Jolly Green Gardeners, who are members of the Country Hills Junior Garden Club, and Brownie members of the Liberty Corner Girl Scout Troop #265 joined forces last Friday in helping to Deck the Hills with Daffodils both at Oak Stump Corner off Mt. Airy Road in Basking Ridge and at the Liberty Corner School. Shown here kneeling are Siobhan Pascal on left and Michael Raushi. In back row from left to right are Ann Marie Matthews, Jane Frey, Tommy Dillion, Elizabeth Raushi, Peggy Hendershot, Diane Rossi and Todd Middleton.

¹ Map of Somerset County, Lloyd Van Derveer, Surveyor, Camden, NJ, 1850.

² 1850 U.S. Census, Somerset Co., NJ, Bernards Twp., p. 343.

³ *The Bernardsville News*, 28 Feb. 1935, p. 3.

⁴ Conversation between Douglas Sloss and author, 15 Nov. 2020.

⁵ *The Bernardsville News*, 3 Mar. 1921, p. 5.

⁷ *The Bernardsville News*, 22 Sep 1966, p. 1, second section.

⁶ Photo courtesy of historicaerials.com.

⁸ *Ibid*, 8 Jun. 1967, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibid*, 16 Nov. 1967, p. 3, second section. Photo reprinted with permission of The Bernardsville News/New Jersey Hills Media Group.

Officers Elected to the Board of Trustees

Cynthia Crosson - Recording Secretary



The Historical Society's trustees voted unanimously at the June meeting to reinstate Cynthia Crosson to the Board and elected her as Recording Secretary and an Executive Committee Officer. During her past tenure, Cynthia served as the nonprofit organization's Archivist and Co-Chair of the 2016 and 2018 Holiday House Tours. She has continued to be instrumental in preparing proposals for The Historic Preservation Grant Program administered by the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission.

Cynthia's professional experience includes over twenty-three years as a financial analyst and writer. She was employed as a Director in the Insurance Group at Fitch Ratings in New York City for eleven years before retiring in 2014. During her career, she has written and published numerous company reports, news articles and press releases. Cynthia is also a retired LTC with the U.S. Army Reserve. She has lived in New Jersey most of her life growing up in Westfield and has recently returned to Bedminster after spending the past several years in Washington, DC with her daughter and family.

David Urbani - Treasurer



THSSH is pleased to welcome David Urbani as a new lifetime member and recently-elected Board Treasurer and an Executive Committee Officer.

David has 4 decades professional experience that includes Treasury and Finance senior management positions with Air Products and Chemicals, Inc., Maytag Corporation, and Citrix Systems, Inc. He has also served as a part-time consultant for small companies in New England. David holds advanced degrees in both Engineering and Finance.

Today David is semi-retired and has contributed his financial expertise to two other nonprofit organizations besides THSSH: Maryland Citizens for the Arts and Oxford Community Center.

David resides in the Reynolds-Scherman House in Bernardsville, one of the earliest properties in the Somerset Hills. The stone dwelling, built in the late 18th or early 19th century, with a millpond in a small meadow across the road, is on the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places. As a personal pastime, he designs and crafts 18th century replica furniture in the property's bank barn.

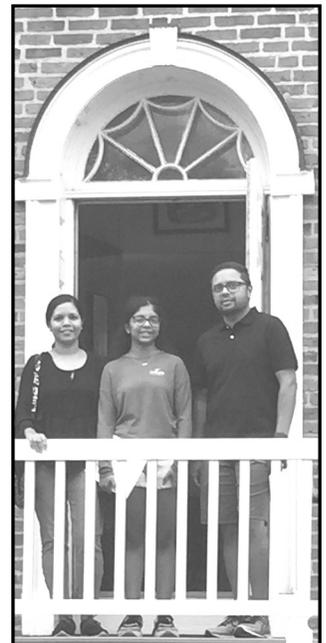
Students Making History...

Thirty years ago, June Kennedy, late Historical Society Trustee and Education Committee Chair, introduced a summer History Camp for 4-6 grade students at the Brick Academy. The new program became such an overwhelming first year success she began to recruit Ridge High School students in American Studies to assist and earn community service credits.

The Society is honored to continue the tradition as we reopen the Brick Academy to our education initiatives and welcome Sumedha Maddali, a sophomore at Ridge High School. Sumedha will begin her community service by representing THSSH, with a team of member volunteers, at the upcoming Lord Stirling 1770s Festival and Somerset County's Journey Thru the Past.

President Dan Lincoln recently provided a personal tour of the Brick Academy for Sumedha and her parents (*photo right*). "Student volunteers have become an integral part of our organization. They participate in a broad variety of interesting projects including serving as museum docents, digitizing archives, organizing collections, and coordinating events, all while gaining a deep appreciation for local history," commented Lincoln.

Students interested in THSSH's community service program, may contact us by calling 908.221.1770





The Porcupine

The Porcupine was published during 1861 and 1862 by the Basking Ridge Literary Society, which comprised Basking Ridge High School students who were taught by young Professor Walter Rankin on the top floor of the Brick Academy.

Its mission states “As a living Porcupine discharges his quills at pleasure in any direction, so we shall endeavor to make our Porcupine throw out quills of knowledge: and that animal shoots its quills at persons approaching it, so our following the dictates of his own nature may wound any that excite him; if such a thing should accidentally happen we hope that those injured will not take offense...”(August 7, 1861).

Note: Minor editing corrections have been made for clarity in the selected excerpts:

Current Events and Opinion

If the Southerners had elected a president opposed to the interests of the North I think that there would have been a greater row than there has been at the South. What states created this civil war? The very states that were on the point of seceding a few years ago, the New England states, the mother of all this trouble and civil war. (August 7, 1861)

Humor and Miscellaneous

When you are arguing with a fool, he is pretty sure to be similarly employed.

.....

Will the young man who advertised in the last number of the Porcupine for a situation as son in law in some respectable and wealthy family please address Box 126 Liberty Corner, stating how tall, his age, if he is good looking, if he chews tobacco or smokes, and if he has any objections to his wife being boss. (March 25, 1862)

MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

The Board of Trustees extends its sincere gratitude to the following patrons for their generous gifts to the Brick Academy Museum:

- Peapack-Gladstone Bank 1921-2021 Commemorative Book.
Gift of Jim Stadtmueller, Senior Managing Director, Peapack-Gladstone, NJ
- A collection of Far Hills Race photographs taken in the early 1980s.
Gift of John Oakley Higgins, Mount Tabor, NJ
- A section of the white oak tree (#619) and Certificate of Authenticity from the Presbyterian Church in Basking Ridge.
Gift of Karen Marty, Basking Ridge, NJ



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New Jersey Historical Commission

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

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founded in 1928*

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THSSH
P.O. Box 136
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
www.thssh.org

Museum Hours:

First Sunday of the Month · 2 to 4 PM

Research Library: By Appointment

THSSH MEMBERSHIP

To join or renew...

please go to www.thssh.org/membership-form

or complete below, make check payable to THSSH and mail to P.O. Box 136, Basking Ridge NJ 07920

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** Membership Dues and Donations are tax deductible **