

Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY



The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

October 2022

Navigating Slavery in The Somerset Hills

By Cynthia Crosson

April 7, 1809 was a dark day at the Old Stone House in Lesser Crossroads, now Bedminster. Aaron Mellick, the family patriarch, died at the age of 84, seven years after his wife Charlotte had passed away. Daniel, one of several Mellick children, was the only one still living in the home with his family. He would carry on the family's farm and tanning operations.

While Aaron's death was sad for the family, it was catastrophic for the slaves who were part of the household. They had always been treated with great kindness and had become part of a happy family. Now they were reminded that they were in fact Aaron's property and would be sold at auction. The children would be separated from parents and from each other.

Aaron had always resisted buying slaves and did not do so until he was well into old age. He had acquiesced to Charlotte, who was descended from an abolitionist Quaker family. Daniel may have encouraged the slave purchase as he struggled to manage the farm with aging parents and a growing family of his own. After much discussion, Charlotte reluctantly agreed.

Aaron's first purchase was in 1786, when his brother-in-law, Jacob Kline, offered to sell him his man Yombo, "who was a master-hand at tanning, currying and finishing leather." The second purchase did not come for another 12 years. General John Taylor, a well-known resident of Hunterdon County, "had become financially embarrassed, and finding it necessary to sell some of his slaves, had offered Dick and his family to Aaron." Dick and Nance joined the Mellick household with their three children in 1798. A fourth would come along in 1800. "...they had playmates in Daniel's boys and girls, mutually kind feelings existed almost immediately, and white and black lived happily together."

Then came May 22, 1809. "The fateful day at last arrived and with it came a large assemblage of people, as at that time an auction sale of this character was always made a festive occasion." A great deal of applejack was consumed.

Aaron's will ordered that Dick and Nance's children be sold under indenture to serve until the boys reached the age of 28 and the girl 25, when they were to be manumitted. This was a compromise designed to ensure that the farm did not have to support the freed slaves, who would have been paupers. Daniel purchased Dick, Nance and their youngest child, who remained with the Mellick household. Yombo, now 70 years old, went to a tanner in Elizabethtown who may also have owned Yombo's wife. (*Auction Sign at right*)

One Negro girl till she is 25 years of age, Diana—to Esqr.	Jonathan Dayton	\$100
One negro boy, Sam, till he is 28 years of age—to Revd. John McDowell		225
One negro boy, Dick, till he is 28 yrs of age to William R. Smiley		225
One negro boy, Joe, till he is 28, to Jacob Kline		120
One Old Negro man, Dick, sold a slave to Daniel Mellick,		40
One Old Negro Wench, Nance, a slave, to Daniel Mellick,		40
One Negro girl named Ann, born under Manumission law—to Daniel Mellick,		35

As this auction was taking place in Lesser Crossroads, a few miles away in Basking Ridge, the Rev. Robert Finley, a prominent Presbyterian minister and pastor of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church, was wrestling with the very issue Aaron Mellick had faced in writing his will. Finley was looking more broadly at the national issue of slavery. *What would happen to slaves if they were suddenly set free? Would they become paupers in need of constant support? Would they be accepted in a white man's society? Would they cause trouble?*

Article continues on Page Two

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Finley and his fellow alumni from The College of New Jersey (now Princeton) knew that slavery was evil and should never have happened in the first place. But they had also benefited from it. The question now was how to deal with it without rocking the boat too much and ensuring the best outcome for all concerned. The solution he and his friends would come up with over the next several years would bring Finley national and international fame and a direct line to the African continent.

While his thoughts on slavery were evolving, Finley was completing the construction of the Brick Academy near his church. The academy would house his highly successful Basking Ridge Classical School, which prepared boys from prominent, wealthy families for higher education, primarily Princeton, and higher office. One of Finley's students was Robert F. Stockton, grandson of Richard Stockton who signed the Declaration of Independence. Stockton would become instrumental in carrying out Finley's plan for freed slaves.

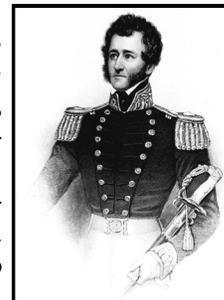
Finley's plan culminated in the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, also known as the American Colonization Society (ACS). Its goal was to establish a colony in Africa where freed U.S. slaves could be repatriated in the land of their ancestors. The British had already done something similar in Sierra Leone. ACS supporters believed this approach was a middle ground that would appeal to both slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike. Slaveholders would be more likely to free their slaves if they would not have to fund them and freed slaves would not be around to cause trouble with existing slaves. Anti-slavery supporters believed this was the best way to help the freed slaves and abolish slavery over time.

ACS was launched at a meeting December 16, 1816 in Washington, D.C., where Finley met with Charles Fenton Mercer (Princeton class of 1797), his brother-in-law Elias B. Caldwell (1796) and John Randolph, another Princeton associate. While U.S. Attorney General Richard Rush (1797) also attended the founding meeting and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington was elected its first president, Finley is credited with being the true founder. Mercer was an advocate in the U.S. House of Representatives and Samuel Southard from New Jersey (1804) was an ardent supporter in the Senate. Southard was also a former student of Finley's at the Basking Ridge Classical School.

The first black colonists sailed from New York to Africa in 1820, settling on the marshes of Sherbro Island, which lacked potable drinking water. Within six months, 49 of the 86 colonists had died, forcing the remainder to flee to Sierra Leone. The managers of the ACS, however, were undeterred. They tasked Robert F. Stockton (*image at right*), a young lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, with finding a viable site for a new colony.

Stockton had good credentials. He had been active in suppressing the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade, which the federal government had banned in 1808. In addition, as a member of the prominent Stockton family of Princeton, New Jersey, he was well-known to all the ACS managers, especially those who had attended the college. And so, in 1821, Stockton sailed to Cape Mesurado, then populated by roughly 200,000 members of the Mamba and Dey peoples. As legend has it, he leveled a gun to the local king's head and forced him to sell the ACS a 130-mile long strip of coastline. This land would form the basis for the ACS's new colony, named Liberia in 1824. By 1830, Liberia had a population of 3,000 black colonists, who had built some 400 farms and six schools.

Finley died in 1817, but the ACS continued until after the Civil War. While about 10,500 freed slaves ultimately settled in Liberia, most decided to stay in the U.S., which they considered their homeland. This was particularly true once the Emancipation Proclamation passed in 1863. It is notable that Lincoln's Proclamation freed only the slaves in the "rebellious states" excluding slaves in the northern states. The 13th Amendment was required to ensure the abolition of slavery in all states. New Jersey was not among the first 27 states to ratify the amendment in 1865. It did so on January 23, 1866, when the final curtain came down on slavery in New Jersey.



A new related exhibit will debut at the Brick Academy Museum in October

1. "The Story of an Old Farm" by Andrew D. Mellick, pp. 602-612..

2. Craig Hollander, "Princeton and the Colonization Movement," Princeton & Slavery Project, accessed 12 June 2022, slavery.princeton.edu

3. Craig Hollander, "Navigating Slavery: Robert F. Stockton and the Limits of Antislavery Thought," Princeton & Slavery Project, accessed 12 June 2022, slavery.princeton.edu

4. "New Jersey, The Last Northern State to End Slavery," article by Noelle Lorraine Williams, Director, African American History Program, The New Jersey Historical Commission

Upton Pyne Carriage Barn and Stable



*Sunday • November 6
2 PM to 5 PM*

The elegant stone carriage barn and stable at the Upton Pyne estate, once a crown jewel of the Bernardsville Mountain Colony, will be the venue of an exclusive Historical Society of the Somerset Hills event.

W. Barry Thomson, THSSH Trustee and noted local historian, will present an illustrated talk: “*How The Somerset Hills Became The Somerset Hills*”. Mr. Thomson’s illustrated presentation will cover the cultural, economic, and social factors that set in motion the so-called Country House Era that began in the 1870s and how those factors played out in the Somerset Hills. His talk will illustrate the ‘when, why, how, and by whom’ the beautiful rolling hills of northern Somerset and nearby Morris counties became The Somerset Hills and the social cachet that came to be associated with that name.

The distinguished Upton Pyne owners, Percy Rivington Pyne and Maud Howland Pyne, and their exquisite estate, named for the Upton community in England from which they came, figure importantly in that story.

*Formal invitations will be mailed to
THSSH members at the end of September*

*Online registration for members and the public
will be available on October 3 at www.thssh.org*

Welcome New Members!

Doug & Meryl Carmel	<i>Chester</i>
Gilad & Olga Christie	<i>Far Hills</i>
John & Suzanne Chuhinko	<i>Bernardsville</i>
Becky & Jay Hoy	<i>Basking Ridge</i>
Brandy McCarty	<i>Basking Ridge</i>
Janet Sherlund	<i>New Vernon</i>

Poetic Path to the Past

Find the three missing words in this bit of poesy
[with helpful hints in brackets]:

I approached my best buddy, Tito,
With a plan that he did not ____.
[reject outright]

As part of our weekend’s activity,
We’d embark, with great ____, ...
[respectful awareness]

...On a hike! That’s what we’d be tackling,
As twigs underfoot would go ____.
[noisily snapping]

*Wondering where is this journey through history?
The instructions, below, solve the mystery...*

Go to the location-finding website:
what3words.com

Enter your three words in the search window
(in the form: word1.word2.word3)
to discover a local historic site
featured in our May newsletter

Answer on Page Six...

Lord Stirling 1770s Festival

Sunday, October 2
 11:30 AM - 4:00 PM

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 upcoming programs, membership benefits, and volunteer opportunities.

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 American Revolutionary War.



Sponsored annually by the Somerset County Park Commission, the event is held rain or shine at the Environmental Education Center on Lord Stirling Road in Basking Ridge.

Suggested Donation: \$5 per person

Details at www.somersetcountyparks.org



Saturday, October 8

10 AM - 5 PM

Sunday, October 9

12 PM - 5 PM

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 new 'Navigating Slavery in the Somerset Hills' exhibit. Displays also include 'What Put Somerset Hills on the Map' - a visual story of the five towns, and a rare collection of locally excavated Lenni Lenape arrowheads, hammer stones, and grinders.

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

Details at www.schistoryweekend.com

Reynard the Fox



Thank you to all participants for your interest in the Historical Society's Mascot Naming Contest. We were pleased to receive so many creative entries.

Congratulations Winners!

Hank and Jaye Barre
Mike and Dana Reynolds

As the ideal mascot, Reynard represents the long history of fox hunting in the Somerset Hills. On February 10, 1910 the first Farmers Day celebration was sponsored by Charles Pfizer, and hosted by his hunt club, the Essex Fox Hounds to thank local farmers for use of their land attracted three hundred men. The Farmers Day was the precursor to today's Far Hills Race Meeting.

And as a literary character Reynard certainly has a long, interesting history! The original fables were written in Old French in the second half of the 12th century. The story line is largely concerned with the main character Reynard, an anthropomorphic red fox, trickster figure. His adventures usually involve him deceiving other humanlike animals for his own advantage or trying to avoid their retaliatory efforts.



During the past many centuries Reynard fables have been translated into numerous languages however no matter where the story takes place, the narrative is always designed to satirize contemporary human society.

BACK TO SCHOOL AT THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is excited to resume our Education Programs this fall after a two-year (COVID-19) hiatus!

The education of youngsters is a cornerstone of THSSH's mission. Through programs aligned with the schools of the Somerset Hills, we aim to ensure that students and teachers enjoy meaningful educational experiences. With school curricula in mind, we have developed creative, interactive programs for elementary level students that focus on the history of the Brick Academy and show what life was like for students in early America. Our goal is to have each visitor return to the classroom with a greater understanding of local history.

We look forward to welcoming third graders and their teachers to experience a typical one-room schoolhouse in the mid-1800s. Visiting students role-play by arriving at the Brick Academy with such 'school supplies' as water buckets, fire logs for the potbelly stove in addition to study books and writing slates. Pupils, sitting at period wooden desks, learn the daily lessons taught in school and compare the classroom rules then and now. A hands-on educational activity is also offered that engages visiting students to learn about local history with additional fun activities including an American craft, museum scavenger hunt, and word search puzzles.



Left to Right

**Diane Cantano, Becky Creswell,
Sue Zibelli (THSSH Chair)
and Jean Garzillo**

The Board of Trustees is pleased to introduce our Education Committee leaders:

Diane Cantano

Diane and her family have been Basking Ridge residents since 1981. She was an educator who taught in the Bernards Township school system for twenty-one years and became a volunteer at the Historical Society upon retirement. Prior to resuming her professional career, Diane was PTO President at Oak Street Elementary School, President of the Interschool Council, and served on various district committees as one of the Parent Representatives (Middle States Evaluation, Planning Committee when Cedar Hill Elementary School was being reopened in 1989, various committees to hire administrative personnel, etc.).

Becky Creswell

Becky and her family have lived in Basking Ridge for the past 37 years. She has worked as a reading specialist and language arts teacher at the middle school level in Marshfield, MA and in Branchburg, NJ. Her organization of Liberty Corner School's first "Wizard of Words" visiting authors event, combined with her love of children's literature and reading, led her to pursue a school librarian certification. Becky began working as an elementary school librarian in 1993 and moved to the Bridgewater-Raritan School District in 1996 where she remained until her retirement in 2014.

Jean Garzillo

Jean and her family are longstanding residents of Bridgewater having moved to the Somerset area in 1961. She has been an avid history buff her entire life. During her academic pursuit of a Liberal Arts degree from Rider University, she concentrated her study courses in early American history. Upon her retirement from Hoechst Rousseau/AdventisSanofi where she served as an Executive Administrative Assistant, Jean continued to fuel her passion for history, including attending classes at Hillsdale College. This fall, she will be spending time in Washington, D.C. researching *The Federalist Papers* first published in 1788.

History Mystery...

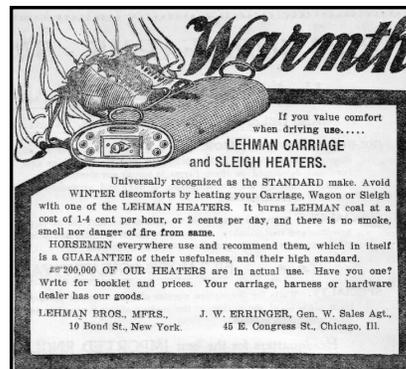
What is the carpet covered canister at the Brick Academy?



One of the ways early travelers mitigated the cold weather was through a foot warmer for an unheated carriage, buggy or sleigh. The simplest styles were punched tin in a wooden frame with an earthenware or iron pot containing hot coals, wood embers, or rocks.

The showcased foot warmer, about 14" long x 8" wide x 3.5" high, is more elaborate and consists of a metal oblong canister covered in wool decorative carpet to keep feet warm and protect against burns.

Both ends of the foot warmer are nickel-plated with holes as a direct heat source. One end is designed with a pull-out drawer to hold the preferred heating material, which was often a brick of carbon or loose coal. A number of companies manufactured foot warmers including Chicago Flexible Shaft Company, Pana Carriage Heater, and Lehman Brothers (*advertisement at right*).



The foot warmer, on displayed in the main gallery of the Brick Academy Museum, was the personal property of Dr. Frederick Child Jones, a prominent physician in Basking Ridge from 1882 to 1918.

MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

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

- Finding Kate: The Unlikely Journey of 20th Century Healthcare Advocate Kate Macy Ladd. Book
Gift of W. Barry Thomson, Williamsburg MA
- Collection of brochures and newspaper articles regarding Somerset County and Somerset Hills.
Gift of Washington Township Historical Society
- Collection of twenty vintage beverage, medicine and unmarked glass bottles.
Gift of Suzanne Johnson, Bernardsville NJ
- 'The Game of Basking Ridge' Monopoly-style.
Gift of Karla Tramutola, Basking Ridge NJ

Poetic Path to the Past

what3words.com

Veto.Sensitivity.Crackling



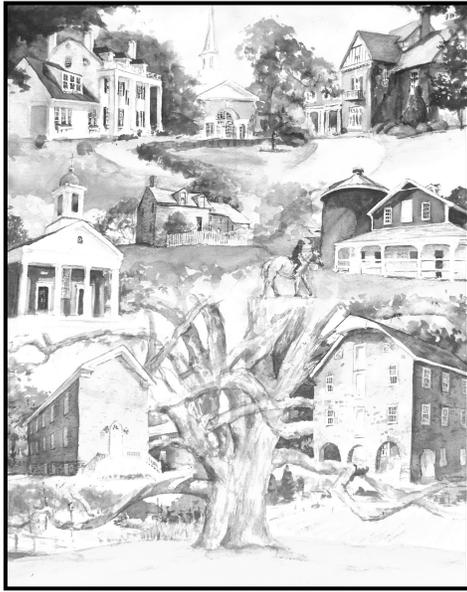
Saturday, September 24 at 10 AM

Join Society members for a 1.4 mile hike (60 minutes round trip) to the site of the **New Jersey Brigade Encampment**.

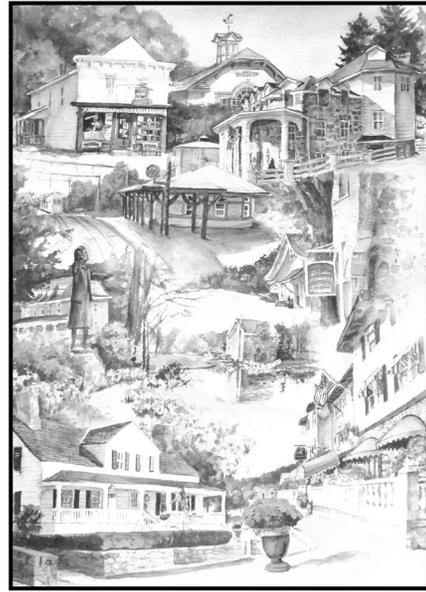
Note, the trail is steep in several places and hikers are advised to wear proper shoes.

Trail head parking is available at Morris-town National Historical Park located on Jockey Hollow Road (off Hardscrabble) in Bernardsville.

Email roycrego@gmail.com
to reserve a spot or ask questions



Basking Ridge by Mark de Mos, Watercolor, 21" x 15"



Bernardsville by Mark de Mos, Watercolor, 21" x 15"

Giclee' Prints Available



5 Morristown Rd, Bernardsville, NJ 07924 www.studio7fineartgallery.com (908) 963-0365




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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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Thank you for your support!

** Membership Dues and Donations are tax deductible **