

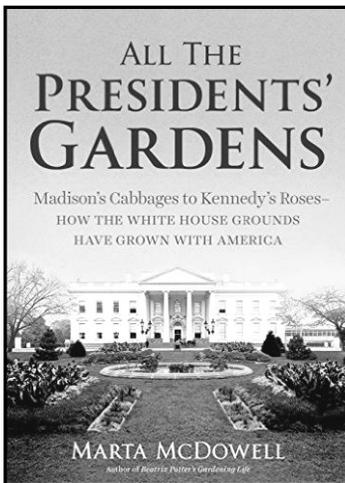
# *Inside* THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

February 2023

## *All The Presidents' Gardens Book Event*

*Sunday, March 26 · 11 AM - 2 PM*



The Historical Society will host a buffet brunch at The Grain House restaurant in Basking Ridge featuring Marta McDowell, the noted author about gardens, landscape history, and horticulture. The illustrated presentation will focus on her book, "All the Presidents' Gardens," an entertaining trip through America's garden history as seen through the changing landscape at the White House.

Marta, who teaches at the New York Botanical Garden, is also the recipient of the Garden Club of America's Sarah Chapman Francis Medal for literary achievement. Her other books include: "Unearthing the Secret Garden: The Plants and Places That Inspired Frances Hodgson Burnett," "Emily Dickinson's Gardening Life," "Beatrix Potter's Gardening Life," and "The World of Laura Ingalls Wilder." Set to debut in the fall is, "Gardening Can Be Murder," about garden themes in crime fiction. Signed copies of select books will be available for sale.

Further details and ticket sales are at [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org). Seating will be limited, so you are encouraged to purchase tickets as soon as possible.

---

## **Black Revolutionary War Soldier Reenactor Brings History to Life**

*Sunday, April 23 at 2 PM*

Meet Ned Hector, a former teamster (wagon driver) and artilleryist for Proctor's 3<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania Artillery in the Battle of Brandywine and Germantown. He brings to life the struggles and bravery of African-American soldiers fighting for the cause of American independence. Noah Lewis, his renowned costumed reenactor, is a black living history educator who creates a memorable learning experience through audience participation and laughter.

You will also have an opportunity to explore the Brick Academy's ongoing exhibit "*Slavery in Our Own Backyard*," which focuses on the history of slavery in the Somerset Hills. The exhibit features the story of an enslaved black Revolutionary War soldier, Samuel Sutphin, who fought bravely in some of the most famous battles of the Revolutionary War.

The living history program will be held at the Brick Academy, 15 West Oak Street in Basking Ridge. Please visit [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org) and register online.





***Congratulations!***  
**Basking Ridge Garden Club**

**Welcome New Members!**

Nick Anweiler	Chester
Laurie Broderick	Bernardsville
Leslie Brown-Witt	Bernardsville
Donna Carides	Bedminster
Joanne Cicala	Basking Ridge
Ken Dodd	Ontario, Canada
Michael Graham	Basking Ridge
Pamela Hull	Bernardsville
Etta Marshall	Basking Ridge
Robert & Patricia Riedel	Peapack
Liz Robinson	Bernardsville
Mary K. Van Cleef	Bernardsville

The Basking Ridge Garden Club invites residents to attend a luncheon celebrating their 100 year anniversary. Through the years THSSH has been privileged to partner with the Garden Club for the Brick Academy landscape project, Spring Garden Tour, and Holiday House Tour topiary sales.

The special event, featuring photographs and stories from 1923 through 2023, will be held Saturday, March 25, 11am - 3pm at The Olde Mill Inn, 225 Route 202, Basking Ridge.

Proceeds from the luncheon will benefit local civic beautification projects and scholarships.

Luncheon tickets may be purchased for \$75 by mailing a check, with your phone number, to The Basking Ridge Garden Club, Attn: Rose Salaki, PO Box 66, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920. For further information, please visit [www.brgcnj.com](http://www.brgcnj.com) or contact Rose Salaki at 908-221-1013.

**THSSH GIFT PROGRAM**

The Board of Trustees extends its sincere gratitude to THSSH members and community friends who have contributed with donations and bequests to further our mission to *Study the Past, Record the Present, and Connect the Future*. The Historical Society's 2022 Gift Program includes donation levels to highlight some of the historical figures from the Brick Academy (Basking Ridge Classical School). To learn about their remarkable lives, please visit our website at [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org).

William Dayton - Up to \$100  
 Robert Stockton - Up to \$200  
 Samuel Southard - Up to \$300

Theodore Frelinghuysen - Up to \$400  
 Reverend Robert Finley - Up to \$500  
 Reverend Samuel Kennedy - Above \$500

**William Dayton** - Domenic & Nancy Alfano, Elizabeth Bagnato, Gil & Margaret Barno, Alex Bedrosian, MaryJane Canose, Roy Crego, Philip & Kerry Haselton, Neil & Jane Kazan, Connie Kearns-Doughty, Edwin Landis, Elizabeth & Lou Matlack, Patricia & Robert Riedel, Francis & Gail Smith; Paul & Stephanie St. Onge, and Jonathan & Mary K. Van Cleef

**Robert Stockton** - Marcella & Jerry Miccolis, Holly Ulmer (dedicated to her great great grandfather Julius Miller), and Jim Wooldridge

**Samuel Southard** - William W. Engel, James & Jill Gibson, Robin Marion, and Joseph Metelski

**Theodore Frelinghuysen** - Ronald & Susan Zibelli

**Reverend Robert Finley** - W. Barry Thomson

**Reverend Samuel Kennedy** - David Urbani

For those interested in contributing during the current year, your gift would be tax-deductible, as the Society is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Also, contributions to a charitable organization from retirement accounts, such as IRAs — as part of a required minimum distribution and/or by way of a will — are fully exempt from the otherwise applicable income tax on the amount distributed.

## THSSH Annual Report 2022

### Executive Summary

The primary objective of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) in 2022 was to create cultural opportunities and enrichment for the local community by providing programs and initiatives that inform, educate and foster interest in local history.

#### **Education Programs** – Bernards Township

The popular education program for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students was reinstated. Over 350 children from five Bernards Township elementary schools visited the Brick Academy to participate in the Early American Schoolhouse program administered by former school teachers. Additionally, three Ridge High School students provided volunteer hours as part of the Young Historians program.

#### **Research** – Nationwide

Over 20 research requests were addressed by Trustees via email. THSSH's Archivist marked and recorded donated items.

#### **Museum** – Somerset Hills

The museum was open to the public the first Sunday of each month. A special exhibit was installed on the main floor of the museum - Slavery in Our Own Backyard. Out-of-print books on the history of the area were acquired for the museum bookstore from the AAUW Book Sale.

#### **Communications** – Nationwide (Membership)

Members received three issues of "*Inside the Brick Academy*" newsletters, along with the 2021 Annual Report. Primary print pieces were updated and redesigned.

#### **Website and Social Media** – Nationwide

THSSH continued to communicate news and information through their website [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org). An eMail Letter was created and sent to 584 addresses. A new Facebook page was created that has 26 followers. An Instagram page was created that has 77 followers.

#### **Programs**

A documentary film on George B. Post's Grotesques, by Trustee W. Barry Thomson, was presented at the Brick Academy. A book talk and signing event for "*Finding Kate: The Unlikely Journey of 20th Century Healthcare Advocate Kate Macy Ladd*" by Meryl Carmel was held at the Brick Academy. THSSH sponsored a narrated hike of the historic New Jersey Brigade. A speaker program "*What Made the Somerset Hills the Somerset Hills*," was presented by Trustee, W. Barry Thomson, at the historic Upton Pyne Estate. A "Name the Mascot" contest was held during the Charter Day event. A dinner party honored retiring long-term Trustee (25 years), Florence Halgring, who celebrated her 100th birthday!

#### **Advocacy**

THSSH participated in the 1770's Lord Stirling Festival and Somerset County's Weekend Journey through the Past. Trustee David Urbani was appointed lead for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of America's Independence July 4, 2026 initiative. THSSH provided print pieces to be offered at the Somerset County 4-H Fair.

THSSH received a County History Partnership Program (CHPP) grant in the amount of \$5,000 for operating expenses from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission.

#### **Historic Restoration/Preservation and Brick Academy Maintenance**

The Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC) for Bernards Township worked with Bernards Township Department of Public Works on replacing exterior window sills at the Brick Academy. Room darkening window shades were installed on the main floor to protect museum collections and improve program conditions.

**Membership** – Nationwide. THSSH membership totaled 165 as we welcomed 33 new members.

**Donations** – Nationwide. In addition to membership dues paid, THSSH received nearly \$8,000 in cash donations. Several artifacts were donated to the museum including an extensive, and important collection from a local family dating into the 1700s.

*Continued on Page 6*

## **Burnt Mills in Colonial and Revolutionary Times**

by Roy Crego

Burnt Mills is a small unincorporated hamlet on the border of Bedminster and Branchburg townships. Two major rivers: the Lamington and the North Branch of the Raritan meet at Burnt Mills, and these waterways made the area an important industrial and transportation center beginning in colonial times.

### **Colonial History**

On January 7, 1754, a “Compleat MILL, the House 60 by 40 Feet with two Pair of Stones” was advertised for rent by William Axtell of New York City. The mill was located in Somerset County near the North Branch of the Raritan, on a large stream [the Lamington].<sup>1</sup> Andrew Leake of Bedminster rented the mills for a time before buying them along with extensive lands from Axtell in 1758.<sup>2</sup> A small settlement, which Leake named Bromley soon developed near the mills. He also owned a store there whose ledger shows retail sales from 1756 to 1766.<sup>3</sup>

Andrew Leake and his wife Susanna lived at the northern end of Cowperthwaite Road near the village of Lamington. They were members of the Lamington Presbyterian Church and leading members of Bedminster society, but their wealth was short-lived. As early as 1758, Leake borrowed extensively from New York City merchant Nathaniel Marston<sup>4</sup> and by the early 1760s, Leake’s business was floundering. In 1763, he advertised the land and mills for sale:

The Mills at Bromley, where he now lives, with fifteen hundred Acres of Land adjoining, either together or in smaller Tracts, as may suit the Purchaser. The Mills have been lately repaired, and are in excellent Order: As are the Dwelling House, Store Houses, Cooperage, and all the Conveniences whatsoever; the Situation as good as any in the Province, a great deal of Business having been carried on there ever since the first Settlement of the Place, in the Midst of a fine Wheat Country, with the Conveniency of Bridges over the Lamaton [sic] and the North-Branch near the Mills; in short attended with all the Advantages one can desire in a Place of such Business in the Country, and about the Distance of sixteen Miles from the Landing.<sup>5</sup> The Lands (of which 800 Acres are cleared, with Barns; Dwelling Houses, Orchards, &c.) are inferior to none, there being some Hundreds of Acres of choice Low Lands and Meadows, rich Swamps, great Plenty of Timber, the Upland clear of Stones, and extraordinary either for Grain, or Pasture. There are on the Premises some excellent Negroes, a large Stock of Cattle, Horses and Sheep, and all Manner of Utensils and Implements both in the trading and farming Way.<sup>6</sup>

The mills were located on the south side of the Lamington in what was then Bridgewater Township (now Branchburg). Two distinct bridges are mentioned, one over the Lamington and the other over the Raritan. The reference to “excellent Negroes” shows Leake was a slave owner and documents the early presence of African Americans in Bedminster.<sup>7</sup> Four years later, the land was again advertised for sale by Leake’s creditors:

Bromley, 30 December, 1767

To BE SOLD, by the Subscriber,

A Tract of Land, containing several Hundred Acres, situate in the Township of Bedminster, and County of Somerset, in New-Jersey, adjoining the Mills, late Andrew Leake’s...<sup>8</sup>

On May 26, 1774, Somerset County approved construction of a bridge over the “Lametonk” River, below the Mills at a place of Allum Trees.<sup>9</sup> This replaced the bridge described in 1763 and indicates the colonial mills were upstream of the bridge. A stone monument with the inscription “Bromley BRIDGE, Built at ye x of ye County Somerset 1774” was placed at the southeast corner of the bridge.<sup>10</sup>

A few days later, on May 31, 1774, the county freeholders “voted that there shall be one Hundred pounds raised toward Repairing the Bridge between Colonel McDonalds Farm and Bromley Mills and that John Gaston and Rowland Chambers be managers to Employ Hands to Repair the Said Bridge.”<sup>11</sup> This entry relates to the second bridge, which crossed the Raritan south of the junction with the Lamington.

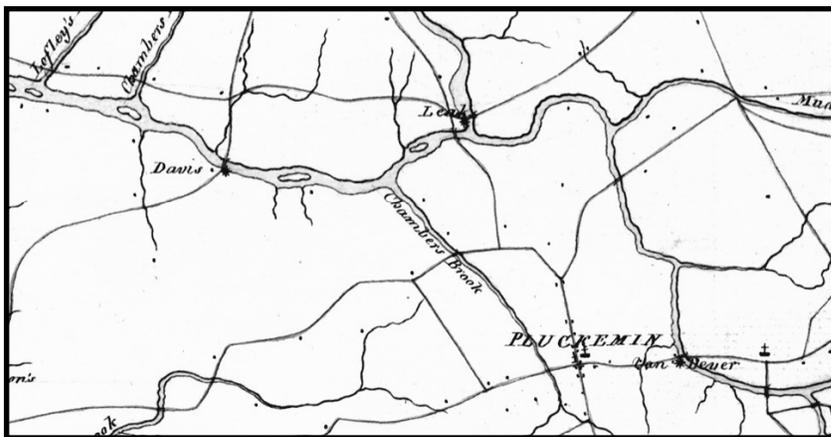
*Continued on Next Page*

## Burnt Mills in Colonial and Revolutionary Times

### The Revolution

In 1780 during the Revolutionary War, Robert Erskine and his staff, working for General Washington, created a map of northern New Jersey which shows the Bromley area with a building labelled “Chambers,” perhaps a reference to Rowland Chambers mentioned on the previous page.<sup>12</sup>

The same year, Bromley served as a “halfway House” for storing ground corn shipped from Philadelphia to the Continental Army at Morristown. Shipments traveled from Trenton via Flemington, Bromley Mills, and Basking Ridge to Morristown.<sup>13</sup> A map dating to 1781 (at right), oriented north to right, still identifies the area as “Leak’s” and shows the two bridges: one crossing the Lamington and heading north along the route of Cowperthwaite Road, the second bridge crossing the Raritan and heading east toward Pluckemin.<sup>14</sup>



According to local legend, the Bromley Mills were burned by the British during the war, but no primary documents have been found to verify the event or date. The British would likely have destroyed the bridges as well as the mills if they wanted to disrupt Colonial supply lines. Yet the 1781 map seems to show the bridges intact, and no mention appears in the County Freeholder records of any unusual damage to the bridges (which were maintained at county expense).

The first mention of “burnt mills” is found in an 1807 deed, which refers to the Burnt Mill farm.<sup>15</sup> Another mention is found in the Freeholder minutes from May 11, 1808: “Whereas it hath been represented to this board that the bridge at the burnt mills, called Bromley Bridge, wants considerable repairs to the stone work...”<sup>16</sup> From these references, it appears the early mills burned, cause unknown, sometime between 1781 and 1807.

<sup>1</sup> *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Vol. 19, Extracts from American Newspapers Relating to New Jersey*, Vol. 3, 1751-1755 (1897), pp. 328-329.

<sup>2</sup> William Axtell to Andrew Leake, East Jersey Deeds, Vol. K-2, p. 410, New Jersey Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Leake, *Merchant Account Book*, New Jersey Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Leake to Nathaniel Marston, East Jersey Deeds, Vol. K-2, p. 99, New Jersey Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Raritan Landing, a historic port on the Raritan River. The site, now in Piscataway, was the furthest point ocean-going vessels could travel upstream on the Raritan.

<sup>6</sup> *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Vol. 24, Extracts from American Newspapers relating to New Jersey*, Vol. 5, 1762-1765 (1902), pp. 238-239.

<sup>7</sup> The African American community continued in the area as evidenced by Lamington Black Cemetery on Cowperthwaite Road (established 1857).

<sup>8</sup> *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Vol. 26, Extracts from American Newspapers relating to New Jersey*, Vol. 5, 1768-1769 (1904), p. 19. Leake is thought to have died in the late 1760s, perhaps in the West Indies.

<sup>9</sup> Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, *Minutes of the meetings...*, May 13, 1772 to September 2, 1822 (1977), p. 5, accessed on FamilySearch.org.

<sup>10</sup> The “x” in the inscription apparently stands for expense. The stone monument is mentioned as a boundary in an 1812 deed (Somerset Co. Deed Book G, p. 536). The stone was then discarded and rediscovered in the mill race around 1915 (*Somerset County Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 4, 1915, p. 318).

<sup>11</sup> Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Erskine Military Topographic Map 106A, Erskine-DeWitt Map Collection, New-York Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*: Vol. V: 1 November 1779-31 May 1780, UNC Press Books (2015), pp. 253-254.

<sup>14</sup> John Hills and Benjamin Morgan, *A survey of Somerset [sic] County*, Library of Congress.

<sup>15</sup> Somerset Co. Deed Book E, p. 146-147.

<sup>16</sup> Somerset Co. Board of Chosen Freeholders, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

## THSSH Annual Report 2022

*Continued from Page 3*

### Education

Print publications available free of charge at the Brick Academy:

- THSSH Pamphlet – Highlights the history of the Brick Academy, the mission of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, ongoing projects, fund raising events, museum hours, and membership information.
- *Inside the Brick Academy* Newsletter – Published three times a year and mailed to our membership, this newsletter comprises society news, event calendar, and local interest stories.
- Volunteer Brochure – Describes THSSH primary committees: Affiliate Organizations; Archives/Research; Bookstore; Building Maintenance; Clerical; Community Outreach; Education; Fund Raisers; Gardens/ Grounds; Hospitality; Membership; Museum; Newsletter; Public Relations; Speaker Programs; and Website/Social Media

On sale at the Brick Academy is the *Around and About Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons* picture book, as well as other history related books.

### Archives & Research

THSSH archives is coveted by local and distant researchers who contact THSSH via our website, phone, and mail to request local research assistance. The primary information requested is local family and house documents and pictures; historic maps; local historic figures; and buildings. The Society received over 20 research requests that were addressed remotely by Trustees.

*NOTE:* Allowing the use of materials or supplying a “fair use” copy is not an authorization to publish.

Fees for use normally apply to corporations, partnerships, private businesses, and individuals when images are to be used in books, periodicals, films, video productions, advertising, projection, or for direct sales. This includes displays in public areas of commercial buildings, restaurants, galleries, the Internet, and retail spaces.

### Museum

The Brick Academy serves as a museum of local artifacts and historical information about Bedminster, Peapack-Gladstone, Far Hills, Bernardsville, and Bernards Township, the only one of its kind in the Somerset Hills. The top floor, restored to an 1890s period schoolroom with a potbelly stove, period furniture, and classroom objects, is used for education programs. The top floor also displays a timeline of the building; poster images and biographies of prominent people who had once attended the Classical School of Basking Ridge, the precursor to the Brick Academy; students’ schoolwork from the early 1900s; and an early 20th century bobsled that was used in the township. The lower floor, which is mainly used for research and meetings, has on display late 1800/early 1900 maps of the Somerset Hills towns, artifacts from local post offices, and other notable items.

The main floor displays a permanent exhibit: ‘*What Put Somerset Hills on the Map*’ including 8” x 10” color photographs of many of the magnificent homes on the Bernardsville Mountain. THSSH has been given the rights for this exhibit by the Turpin Real Estate Agency. The Museum Committee has been building relationships with many other organizations in the Somerset Hills, including Hamilton Farm, Trump National Golf Club, Natirar, Matheny, Meadowbrook Inventions, the USGA, the Jacobus Vanderveer House and Museum, the Farmstead Arts Center, and the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate, to name a few.

A temporary exhibit was installed on the museum’s main floor - *Slavery in Our Own Backyard*. A video documentary on the Grotesques at George B. Post’s City College Campus, New York is available on our website.

In the interest of collaborating with other local history organizations, the Museum Committee has provided on long-term loan to the Boudinot-Southard-Ross Estate a collection of tools and kitchen utensils.

THSSH museum and archives collections are catalogued, digitized and entered into Rutgers' New Jersey Digital Highway (NJDH), a digital repository that preserves the state's cultural resources and artifacts for use by current and future generations of citizens, educators, researchers, and students. Resources are available and maintained 24/7 and in perpetuity. THSSH joins 50 other New Jersey historical organizations participating in NJDH.

*Continued on Next Page*

## THSSH Annual Report 2022

*Continued from Page 6*

### **Website and Social Media**

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) online:

Website: [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/historicalsocietynj>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/historicalsocietynj/>

### **Donations**

- Several artifacts were donated to the Museum.
- In addition to dues paid, THSSH received nearly \$8,000 in donations. Donations and Bequests are received from our school programs, current and past members, and their families.
- Membership dues paid were \$2,200.
- Revenue is generated through paid advertisements in the society's newsletter, as well as program and event ticket sales. THSSH netted \$4,600 in event ticket sales.
- Gift items sold through our website, and at the Brick Academy and community events, amounted to \$550.
- Non-profit organizations that conduct meetings at the Brick Academy provide a contribution.
- Schoolchildren visitation, area residents, and out-of-town visitors to our museum leave donations in our donation box at the Brick Academy.

### **Brick Academy Utilization**

In addition to our museum, research room, education programs, speaker programs, and community events, the Brick Academy is normally utilized by select nonprofits for their meetings and programs.

### **Advocacy & Affiliations**

- The Historical Society is a member of The Somerset County Historical Society, League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, Small Museum Association, and National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- THSSH participated in the Lord Stirling 1770s Festival and Somerset County's Weekend Journey through the Past.
- THSSH received a County History Partnership Program (CHPP) grant in the amount of \$5,000 for operating expenses from the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission.

### **2023 Outlook**

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills will continue to pursue its mission to acquire, conserve and share artifacts and information on matters of local historic interest; cultivate interest in local history; partake in community events; encourage the preservation of local historic resources; facilitate historic research; and preserve, operate and interpret the Brick Academy.

- To strengthen and grow the organizational structure of THSSH's Board of Trustees.
- Trustees will be actively engaging current members to volunteer on THSSH committees, as well as for programs and events.
- THSSH will maintain its image as a premier historical society through committee work.
- Programs will be offered that appeal to our members and to the community.
- Our website and social media strategy will continue to share information regarding local events and history in the Somerset Hills.
- THSSH will work toward growing sources of income to achieve financial independence.

## THSSH

P.O. Box 136

Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

www.thssh.org



**THSSH Headquarters:**  
15 West Oak Street,  
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920  
908.221.1770

**Museum Hours:**  
First Sunday of the Month  
2 - 4 PM

*Inside the Brick Academy*  
is a membership benefit.

Newsletters are posted online and printed editions  
mailed in February, May and October

*Editor: Marcella Miccolis*

## **The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills**

*A 501c3 nonprofit organization  
founded in 1928*

### **Board of Trustees:**

Sue Zibelli - *Chairman*  
Pat Gray - *President*  
David Urbani - *Treasurer*  
Cynthia Crosson - *Recording Secretary*

Jon Booth  
Marcella Miccolis  
W. Barry Thomson