

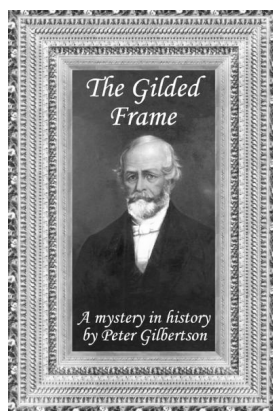
Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

May 2023

The Gilded Frame Book Reading

May 10 at 7 PM — Brick Academy



The Historical Society is hosting a book reading and signing by Peter Gilbertson, author of *The Gilded Frame*, the recently published “mystery in history” set in the Somerset Hills of 110 years ago.

Gilbertson grew up in the shadow of Bernardsville’s “Mine Mountain.” He and his friends often rode their bikes up and over the mountain to Mendham and back, oblivious to the magnificence that was hidden behind stone walls and vast lawns. It wasn’t until his college days, while volunteering as a docent for the first Mansion in May at the original Upton Pyne mansion, that he became enthralled, and over the succeeding decades tried to learn as much about the Bernardsville Mountain Colony.

The Gilded Frame—Gilbertson’s first book—is a historical mystery set in the area where wealthy, famous, and powerful New Yorkers established country estates around the turn of the twentieth century. The story opens at a 1985 elegant dinner party with Jackie Onassis, then reaches back in time to 1912 and a mysterious death.

The Gilded Frame not only resolves the mystery, but very effectively and believably transports the reader into the cultural landscape of the Somerset Hills of a century ago. Book reading details at www.thssh.org.

Sky Farm Nudist Resort - 90 Years au Naturel

June 1 at 7 PM — Brick Academy

In the 1930s, a group of pioneering nudist enthusiasts, under the guidance of Kurt Barthel, a German immigrant, purchased a 36 acre property in the remote Watchung Mountains of central New Jersey to set up a “summer camp” for families.

More than 90 years later, they are still there, tucked away in what is now the affluent suburban enclave of Bernards Township. Sky Farm is today the nation's oldest naturist community.



For the first time in the resort’s long history Sky Farm will conduct an exclusive off-site presentation for THSSH members at the Brick Academy. As a member benefit, you are welcome to bring a guest.

Please Note: The program will not be publicized, the newsletter serves as the only announcement, seating is limited, and registration is required. To register, call [908-221-1770](tel:908-221-1770), clearly spell your first and last name (as well as any guest's name) and include a contact phone number and email address.

New Members!

The Historical Society
welcomes...

Congdon-Overlook

Lodge #163

Donna Cratsenburg

Ryan Dawson

Judy Cunio-Quigley

Tim & Jennifer Harrington

Kevin Knight

Steven Kramer

Susan Manion

Mark & Ruth Melillo

William Murphy

Scott Praml

Matthew & Tracy Redling

John Reynolds*

Bernardsville

Cincinnati, OH

Mendham

Whitehouse Station

Bernardsville

Sandpoint, ID

Bernardsville

Bedminster

Far Hills

Basking Ridge

Millington

Basking Ridge

Basking Ridge

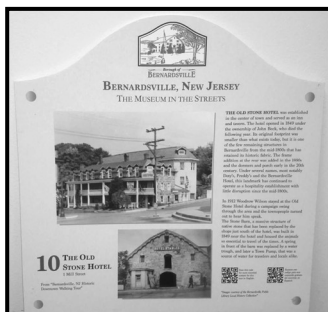
* *Lifetime Member*

Bernardsville 'Walking Museum'

A self-guided "Walking Museum" tour, proposed by Downtown Bernardsville, the non-profit organization that is working to revitalize the business district, is being developed.

Detailed signs or "panels" would be installed at ten or more historic locations highlighting the sites with pictures and information. A Quick Response Code (QR) will link to a website to provide digital audio and detailed interesting stories. The onsite program would include a larger "central marker" that includes a map of the participating sites.

Sites that are being considered include, the Train Station, the Olcott School Building, the Bernards Inn, The Station Restaurant, St. Bernard's Church, the Bernardsville Methodist Church, Ristorante, the Wells Fargo Bank clock and the Bernardsville Cinema 3 movie theater.



An illustration panel (*image left*) with historical photos and facts about The Old Stone Hotel on Mill Street, today Ristorante MV, was prepared by the tour firm 'The Museum in the Streets'.

Roy Crego ***Appointed Trustee***

Roy Crego has been writing feature articles for the Historical Society's *Inside the Brick Academy* newsletter for the past year. He has also provided many interesting Somerset Hills "blurbs" for our Facebook page. His love of history and technical writing skills stood out. It didn't take long for the Board of Trustees to elect Roy to join their ranks.



Having been employed in the database publishing field, and a writer for several publications and websites, Roy has learned to be a true problem solver.

As a Trustee of the nonprofit organization, he will assist with content management - the proper handling of Historical Society content from creation to publication, to archiving and updating.

THSSH is pleased to have Roy on the team!

CHARTER DAY

Saturday - May 20

This year's street fair, along South Finley Avenue in Basking Ridge on Saturday, May 20 from 12PM to 6PM, commemorates the 263rd anniversary of the granting of a Charter by King George II of England, establishing Bernardston Township. The charter was in appreciation for the services of Sir Francis Bernard, who was Royal Governor of New Jersey from 1758 -1760.

Today, the township comprises the four communities of Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner, Lyons, and West Millington.

The Historical Society will have a prominent presence by the Blue Café and will also welcome visitors to the Brick Academy on West Oak Street from Noon to 4PM. Both locations will highlight the nonprofit organization's mission, upcoming events, membership benefits, and volunteer opportunities.

*Make history with us and post
your images on our Instagram page:*
<https://www.instagram.com/historicalsocietynj/>

The Far Hills 4-H Fair

by Roy Crego

Beginning in 1947, Far Hills became a center for the area's thriving agricultural community when it hosted the Somerset County 4-H Fair.

The 4-H movement in the United States began in the early 20th century as a youth development program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension System. By the early 1940s, local 4-H clubs were well established in Somerset County and held annual shows to showcase the work of participating boys and girls. For instance, in Bernards Township, the Willing Workers 4-H Club held a one-day fair on August 17, 1946 at the corner of Henry Street and Maple Avenue in Basking Ridge. Judges awarded prizes for livestock and garden products.¹ The next year, the Somerset County 4-H Council sponsored a county-wide show and chose Far Hills Fair Grounds as the location.

The 1947 show on August 15-16 featured livestock such as cattle, sheep, and goats, as well as displays for flower and vegetable growing, canning, and sewing. Bob Senkbeil and his Jersey cow from Liberty Corner won the grand championship.²

The next year, 36 Somerset County 4-H clubs participated in the fair which hosted a donkey ball game between county farmers and the county 4-H council.³ Other staples at the fair over the years were exhibits of farm machinery and the selection of a "4-H Fair Queen."

On its first day, about 3,000 persons visited the 1952 fair, which featured a five-breed, 80-animal dairy show.⁴ In 1955, the second day of the fair was disrupted by Hurricane Connie, which downed tents and flooded the fair grounds.⁵

The last 4-H fair held in Far Hills was August 23-24, 1961. That year the county bought the larger Dunn farm on Milltown Road in Bridgewater as parkland and subsequent fairs have been held there. In 2022, the fair resumed in Bridgewater after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19. An estimated 60,000 people attended.⁶



Jim McAvoy (top) and Tom McAvoy of Driftway Farm, Warren Twp., with sheep "Drifty" at Far Hills 4-H Fair (c.1957). Drifty won the fat lamb competition. Photo by Francis T. Crego.



Charles McAvoy, Jr. and tractor Far Hills 4-H Fair, 1959. Photo by Charles McAvoy, Sr. Courtesy Theresa McAvoy.

¹ Bernardsville News, Aug. 15, 1946, p. 1.

² Ibid., Aug. 21, 1947, p. 10.

³ Ibid., August 19, 1948, p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., August 28, 1952, p. 5.

⁵ Ibid., August 18, 1955, p. 2.

⁶ Somerset County Spotlight, September 2022, p.2.

SUMMER ARRANGEMENT

Union Line: 'Baskingridge to N. York'

As the summer season approaches today's travelers have various transportation options including land, water, and air.

A poster exhibited at the Brick Academy, dated July 20, 1841, details a horse drawn coach line leaving 'Baskingridge' at 6 AM, arriving in Elizabethport in time for the 11 AM steamboat to dock in New York at 12 Noon. A quick six hour trip! Inbound travel was scheduled for Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with out-bound travel on Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays.

The poster notes David Ayres as the coach driver. The Ayes family is documented as one of the founding families of our area. The history of the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church notes: *Shortly after the first Scotch-Irish farmers settled in Basking Ridge – about 1717 – they erected a log house of worship on the site of our present church. In 1731, John Ayers deeded to the trustees of this church one and a half acres "on or near the middle of which now stands a house built and intended for the exercising of religious worship in."*

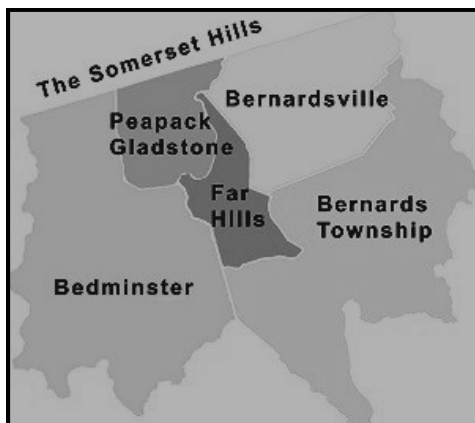
When steamboats were introduced on the nation's rivers, Robert Fulton's first steamboat launched on August 17, 1807, they were used primarily for passenger travel rather than the transportation of goods. Steam-powered ferries carried passengers up and across the Hudson faster and less costly than prior flatboats, rafts, and keelboats. Once the interstate railroad system came along in the mid-19th century, steamboats became less utilitarian and more leisurely.



*The Union Line poster is one of many Somerset Hills artifacts.
Museum is open the first Sunday of the month.*

Meeting with the Mayors

The Board of Trustees has been meeting with the mayors of the Somerset Hills to establish an open dialog and build relationships. Conversing with the mayors gives the Historical Society insight about the nuances of each community, which will help when developing future offerings that deliver on our organization's mission.



Showcasing the Brick Academy Museum, and sharing with the mayors the many diverse public programs THSSH is developing to promote history, is strengthening our relationship with the municipalities by recognizing the Society as an asset to be utilized to the benefit of the five neighboring communities.

Working collaboratively with local government to encourage openness and transparency empowers the Historical Society to remain relevant, delivering value that furthers the historical journey for all residents of the Somerset Hills.

A HISTORIC SCHOOL YEAR!

The popular Education Program for 3rd Grade students was reinstated after a two-year (COVID-19) hiatus. Over 350 children from five Bernards Township elementary schools visited the Brick Academy to participate in the Early American Schoolhouse program administered by a team of former school teachers.

Additionally, three Ridge High School students provided volunteer hours and contributed to the Society's mission as valued members of our Young Historians Program.

With the school curricula in mind, visiting students role-play by arriving at the Brick Academy with provided 'school supplies' such as water buckets, fire logs for the potbelly stove, study books, and writing slates. (*right photo*)



A hands-on session also engages visiting students to learn about local history with fun activities including an American craft, museum scavenger hunt, and word search puzzles. (*right photo*)



Pupils, sitting at period wooden desks, learn the daily lessons taught in school and compare classroom rules then and now. (*left photo*)



FOLLOW US...

For Society news and Somerset Hills history,
please follow and like our Facebook page...

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





THSSH
P.O. Box 136
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920



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

Museum Hours:
First Sunday of the Month

Inside the Brick Academy
is a membership benefit posted online and
printed editions mailed in Winter, Spring & Fall

Website: www.thssh.org
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/historicalsocietynj>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/historicalsocietynj/>

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

*A 501c3 nonprofit organization
founded in 1928*

Board of Trustees:

Sue Zibelli - *Chairman*
Pat Gray - *President*
W. Barry Thomson - *Vice President*
David Urbani - *Treasurer*
Cynthia Crosson - *Recording Secretary*

Jon Booth
Roy Crego
Marcella Miccolis