

Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY



The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

October 2023

YOUNG BOY APPARITION

The Historical Society recently received an inquiry from a technician who services the commercial building at 125 South Finley Avenue in Basking Ridge. He reported seeing an apparition of a young boy in Civil War-period clothing in the basement. The technician was aware that a physician, who had served in the Civil War, had once lived there and wanted to know more about the family.

The following research report was prepared by W. Barry Thomson in response and is quite intriguing!

The Second Empire-style house at 125 S. Finley Avenue (previously known as Main Street) was built circa 1871 by and for Dr. Horatio Goodell Whitnall (born 1839-40; died 1920), his wife, Amanda Elizabeth Minard (born ca. 1840; died 1921), and their children.

According to the brochure published in 2005 by the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, *A Walking Tour of Historic Basking Ridge Village*, the house was constructed for the Whitnalls by local builder Crayton Space, who is also credited with building the Washington House Hotel (now the Washington House Restaurant) the same year as the Whitnall house, 1871.

Amanda Minard Whitnall's father was Abel Minard (1814-1871), a wealthy Methodist philanthropist who, toward the end of his life, lived in Morristown where he founded and endowed the Minard Home for the education of female orphans of Methodist missionaries and clergymen. Upon his death, Mr. Minard also left a sizable sum to what was then the Drew Theological Seminary.

Amanda Elizabeth Minard and Horatio Goodell Whitnall (who was generally known by his middle name) were married in June 1867 by Methodist Bishop Edmund S. Janes. One might speculate that Amanda's likely inheritance from her well-to-do father in 1871 may have been the source of funds for the construction of the Whitnalls' house in Basking Ridge. The Whitnalls also accumulated a sizable amount of property in and nearby the village of Basking Ridge. The family's farm was, reportedly, a 250-acre tract to the south of West Oak Street and Evergreen Cemetery. In 1924, the Whitnall farm was the site of a large gathering of the Ku Klux Klan, with newspaper reports estimating the number of attendees at several thousand people.

"Image courtesy of liveauctioneers.com and (the auction house)"

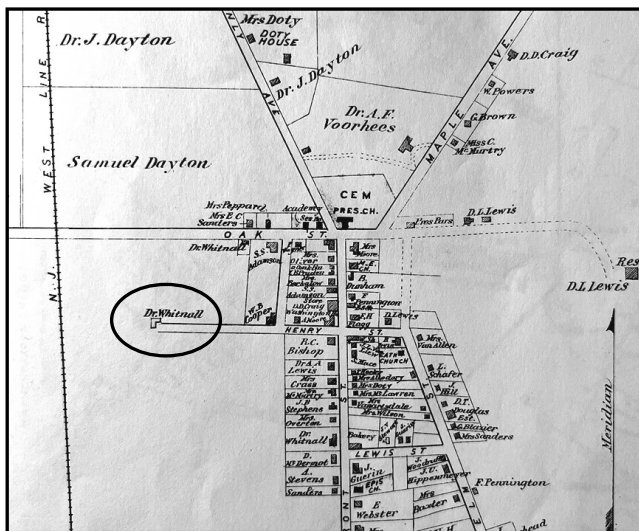
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Young Boy Apparition

Continued From Cover Page



125 South Finley Avenue in 1948



Basking Ridge map from the 1873
"Atlas of Somerset Co. New Jersey"

| Number of Inhabitants | Age | Sex | Occupation | Place of Birth | Place of Death | Names of Parents | Cause of Death |
|-----------------------|------|---------|------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. John Bullman | Male | Single | 7 | England | England | Henry & Mary Bullman | Consumption |
| 2. William Rogers | Male | Married | 21 | England | England | Michael & Mary Rogers | Consumption |
| 3. David King | Male | Single | 27 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 4. John King | Male | Single | 22 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 5. David King | Male | Single | 16 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 6. David King | Male | Single | 14 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 7. David King | Male | Single | 12 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 8. David King | Male | Single | 10 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 9. David King | Male | Single | 8 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 10. David King | Male | Single | 6 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 11. David King | Male | Single | 4 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 12. David King | Male | Single | 2 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 13. David King | Male | Single | 1 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 14. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 15. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 16. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 17. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 18. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 19. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |
| 20. David King | Male | Single | 0 | England | England | William & Mary King | Old age |

The Whitnalls, who lived in Morristown after their 1867 marriage, acquired the 125 South Finley Avenue property in Basking Ridge by deed dated April 1, 1871, from Rosa J. Doty (the widow of Daniel W. Doty) and her two sons, Daniel S. and Samuel S. Doty. The price paid was \$2,750. Daniel W. Doty had acquired the property in 1837 from David and Esther Sanderson. The 125 South Finley Avenue property remained in the Whitnall family until 1939.

Now it gets interesting in light of the recent experience in the 125 South Finley building. According to the 1910 United States Census, Amanda Whitnall had given birth to six children, of which only four were then living: daughters Harriet and Gertrude, who never married; Alice Christine, who married William N. Flynt, and son Charles. The other two children died young and were buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Basking Ridge: Mary C. Whitnall, who was born in 1872 and died only five months later in January 1873; and son Abbot M. Whitnall, who was born in 1871 and died August 23, 1875 at the age of 4.

The Whitnall plot (#80) at Evergreen Cemetery in Basking Ridge contains the remains of six family members: Horatio Goodell Whitnall, wife Amanda Elizabeth Whitnall, daughter Mary C. Whitnall (1872-1873), son Abbot M. Whitnall (1871-1875), daughter Christine Whitnall Flynt (1879-1951), and Christine's husband, William N. Flynt (1880-1946). The only plot markers are for Christine and William Flynt.

The New Jersey State Archives has the death certificate of young Abbot (*different spelling at bottom left*). It was more of a chart listing many people including date of death, name of person, age at death, occupation, place of death, names of parents, and cause of death. His cause of death was listed as "cong of the Brain." The term congestion of the brain appears to have covered various ailments (e.g. meningitis, swelling of the brain, stroke or excessive blood or other fluid around the brain), not all of which could be accurately diagnosed given the state of medicine in the 1870s. Thus it appears impossible to be more exacting as to the true cause of Abbot's premature death.

*Hmmm...could the young boy apparition
have been Abbot M. Whitnall?*



Lord Stirling 1770s Festival

Sunday, October 1
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 Welcome Table 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



Saturday, October 7
10 AM - 5 PM

Sunday, October 8
12 PM - 4 PM

Explore Somerset County's quaint villages, learn about prominent residents, witness early colonial life, and discover Revolutionary War sites. Twenty-seven 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 museum will feature a new multi-generational family collection. Permanent displays include 'What Put Somerset Hills on the Map' - a visual story of the five towns, Annin farmhouse model & oil painting, and locally excavated Lenni Lenape artifacts.

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

Hauntings in the Hills

October 13 at 7 PM

Join us for a frightfully
fun Friday night!



Guests are invited to bring their flashlights and enjoy the spooky Halloween atmosphere of the historic Brick Academy.

Legends from the Somerset Hills will include witches, ghosts, Big Foot, and the headless horseman to entertain and enchant the group.

Children 12+

Moms and Dads are welcome!

RSVP at 908.221.1770 or Programs@THSSH.org
15 West Oak Street • Basking Ridge

Rush Family Exhibit

A new rotating exhibit is at the Brick Academy! The multigenerational display features a rare collection of 18th & 19th C. personal artifacts, household items, and business documents. A highlight is an exquisite pressed flower album.

Rotating exhibits feature local area collections of Society members, friends, and historic sites.

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

Welcome New Members!

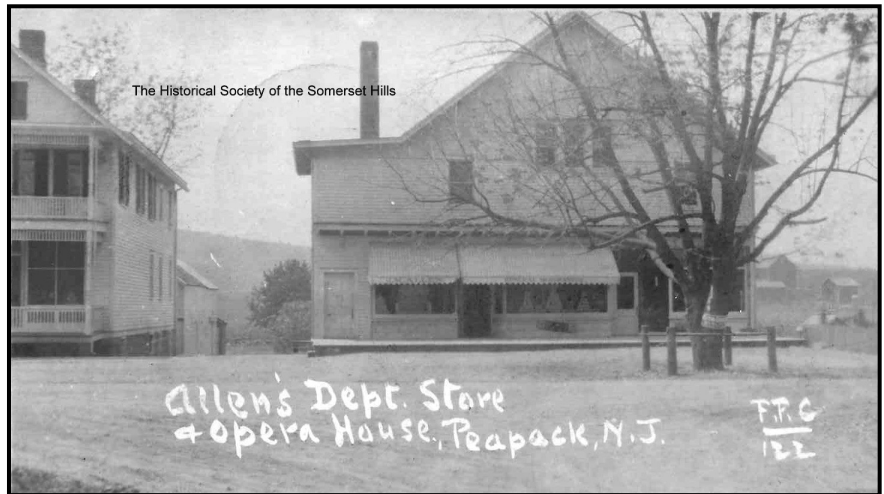
Maryann Bieksza
Mark A. Corigliano
Catherine Forbes
Neil A. Klingenburg
Daniel Schachter
Joan Umholtz

Bernardsville
Peapack
Bedminster
Basking Ridge
Basking Ridge
Lebanon

Peapack's Opera House

By Roy Crego

In the early years of the 20th century, John M. Allen (1874-1942) came up with an interesting business plan to open a small department store with an “opera house.” In 1901, he bought a half acre on Main Street in Peapack¹ and erected a two-story building. The department store opened in 1903 and occupied the ground floor alongside a second retail space. An auditorium/dance hall, fancifully called an opera house, occupied the second floor where Allen hosted local concerts and dances (*postcard at right*).²



On Sunday December 5, 1909, a fire broke out and destroyed the building which then also housed Joseph F. Schefcik's pharmacy. The building, which was insured to 75% of value, was a total loss with only the chimneys left standing. These were dynamited to prevent them from later collapsing.³ Allen rebuilt the popular hall, which reopened in 1912 and by that time featured “moving pictures” (*postcard at left*). In 1927, he sold the property to Clayton Amerman (1897-1961), a garage operator.⁴

Amerman moved into the new location where he sold appliances and trucks. Amerman also continued to operate the auditorium, which became known as Amerman's Auditorium. He continued to host local events and show movies until January 15, 1940, when another fire severely damaged the building.⁵ Amerman then remodeled the structure as an auto dealership—he had acquired a Dodge-Plymouth franchise in 1935.⁶ Today, Robb Francis Sports Cars occupies the historic site.

¹ Somerset County Deed Book Q9, p. 249.

² Jacqueline Tutton, *A Journey through Peapack and Gladstone*, Friends of the Peapack-Gladstone Library (1993), p. 168.

³ *The Bernardsville News*, Dec. 10, 1909, p. 1.

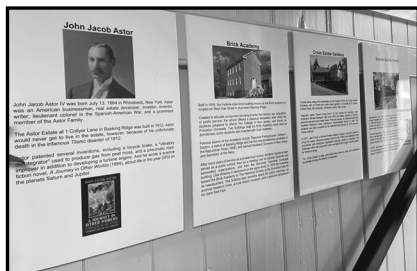
⁴ Somerset Co. Deed Book R20, p. 112. Allen continued to reside in Peapack-Gladstone where he became tax collector and superintendent of the borough water department.

⁵ *The Bernardsville News*, Jan. 18, 1940, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Mar. 12, 1936, 2nd section, p. 10.

Young Historian - The ABCs of the Somerset Hills

Grace Peoples, a Ridge H.S. Junior, worked with THSSH this year as a **Young Historian**. In addition to helping at events onsite and offsite, she assisted in creating posters for the “ABC’s of the Somerset Hills” series (*photo below*). These posters are on display in the entrance to the Brick Academy. Grace’s posters focused on the Environmental Education Center in the Great Swamp, and Franklin Corners Historic District, both in Basking Ridge. Grace will present her poster on the Environmental Education Center at the upcoming Members Get Together on Thursday, September 28 at 7 PM.



The Society’s Young Historian program encourages students to take an interest in local history while they explore and practice historical thinking skills. Students work on dynamic projects that help them develop skills by researching and documenting historical moments. They also get to engage with historical minded people in the field, expand their interest in history, and learn how history can inform their way of life. Visit www.thssh.org to learn more about the Young Historian Program.



**Grace with Noah Lewis,
American Revolutionary
War reenactor**

MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

Thank You to the following patrons for their generous gifts!

- Collection of the Rush family personal letters, heirloom quilts, small artifacts, handcrafted chairs, detailed maps, antiquarian books, and business ledgers from the 18th and 19th centuries.
Gift of Constance Doughty and Todd Cooper, Basking Ridge NJ
- Handwritten ledger from 1776 with a list of wagons, some from Basking Ridge, that were returned from service in the Revolutionary War. *Gift of Jeffrey Rinscheid, Beford PA*
- “Tenth Annual Essex Fox Hounds Race Meeting” Program. Far Hills, October 1925
Gift of Joelle Buzby, Bernardsville NJ
- N Magazine (The Magazine of Naturist Living), Spring 2023
Gift of Sky Farm Nudist Resort, Basking Ridge NJ
- Vallacchi’s Garage Advertisement Poster, Bernards Builders Supply Company and Others 1946 Newspaper Ads, Somerset County Victory Dinner February 27, 1954 Autographed Programs, Collection of Marionettes by Florence V. Wilcox, *In Service* 1941-44 books (2) by St. Bernard’s Parish House, 1975-1976 Bicentennial Road Map of Bernards Township, and Envelope of Various Photographic Negatives.
Gift of Carl and Casey Pfitzenmayer, Selingsgrove PA
- 1900 Souvenir School District No. 5 Mine Brook, Somerset County, NJ Card
*Gift of the “grandchildren of Edmund Lawrence D’Epagnier’s two children”:
Virginia M. D’Epagnier (1918-2014) and U.S. Naval Cmdr. William S. D’Epagnier (1921-2015)*

SKY FARM

On June 1, the Historical Society hosted an exclusive program about the ninety-year history of Sky Farm Nudist Resort in Basking Ridge. Highlights of the informative presentation included:

- Founded as the American League for Physical Culture, today's Sky Farm began in 1929 at a meeting in the Café Michelob on 28th Street in New York City.
- The first brochure issued by the League proclaimed on the cover: "An Invitation to Come Into the Sunlight."
- Organized events of indoor exercising and swimming first took place in a rented gymnasium in New York City, leading to the arrest and subsequent acquittal of the founding members in 1931.
- While continuing to rent the gymnasium during the winter, the founders also rented properties in Spring Valley, NY, and later in Ironia, NJ, before purchasing the Liberty Corner property for Sky Farm in 1932 for \$3,440.
- Since acquiring the property, Sky Farm has functioned as a member-owned cooperative with approximately 60 residential cabins. A dormitory (Sky Farm Lodge) provides overnight accommodations.
- Sky Farm operates 365 days a year. Recreational activities include a variety of outdoor sports and a clubhouse, open 24/7 to members.
- The Sky Farm Historical Society was formed in the mid-1990s to preserve various documents, photographs, and memorabilia of the organization.
- Today Sky Farm is the oldest landed nudist club continuously operated in the Western Hemisphere.

For more about the past and present visit...

www.skyfarm.com



Join our Writing Team!

The Society publishes a variety of newsletter articles and social media posts about the history of the five Somerset Hills towns including Bedminster Township, Bernards Township (Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner and Lyons), Bernardsville, Far Hills, and Peapack-Gladstone.

If you would like to share "a bit of local history," please consider the following before submitting your article or post:

- Review recent postings on THSSH website, social media, and *Inside the Brick Academy* newsletter (past issues are archived on www.thssh.org) to become familiar with our style and content.
- Consult with our Editor if any material in your article or post has been or will be published elsewhere.
- Submit text in electronic form (MS Word preferred). Photos or illustrations should be included as attachments with wording for the credits/permissions.
- Provide sources for statements of fact other than those that are common knowledge and footnotes for longer newsletter articles.

Please note, submissions may undergo revisions and authors will be consulted during the writing process.

**If you have any questions,
please contact our Editor at**
research@somersethillshistoricalsociety.org

A Good Read...



The Story of an Old Farm

by Andrew D. Mellick

An unassuming title for one of the best history books ever written about New Jersey in colonial and Revolutionary times. The story centers on a farm and modest farmhouse built in 1751 in the heart of Bedminster.

Originally published in 1889

As a valued member you receive free access to the Society's extensive collection of books, archives, maps, and images.

Visit the Brick Academy the first Sunday of the month 2-4 PM
or call 908.221.1770 to make an appointment.



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 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*

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David Urbani - *Treasurer*

Cynthia Crosson - *Recording Secretary*

Jon Booth

Roy Crego

Marcella Miccolis



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

Museum Hours:

First Sunday of the Month 2-4 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

Name _____

Street _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Select a Membership Level:

Annual

___ Individual \$20

___ Family \$35

___ Senior Citizen Individual \$10

___ Senior Citizen Family \$15

___ Student (*under 21*) \$10

___ Business \$50

___ **Life** \$500

Donation \$ _____

Thank you for your support!

** Membership Dues and Donations are tax deductible **