

Inside THE BRICK ACADEMY

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

October 2024

Gone But Not Forgotten — Pluckemin's Revolutionary War Houses The Fenner House

By Cynthia Crosson

The early days of the American Revolution brought much excitement to the small, sleepy village of Pluckemin, New Jersey. On January 4, 1777, Gen. George Washington and what was left of his Continental Army marched into the village with close to 250 British prisoners in tow. They were on their way north to Morristown but stopped for a two-day rest following Washington's surprise victories at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton. He had planned to go to New Brunswick from Princeton to capture much needed supplies the British had stored there. But in one of his more providential decisions of the war, Washington decided to let the British have their supplies. He diverted north to set up winter camp at Morristown. His troops were exhausted and ill-equipped, and he did not want to risk losing his advantage by pushing on to New Brunswick.

Washington's headquarters during his stay in Pluckemin was a house that later became known as the Fenner House (*photograph at right*). It was in this house that he is said to have written his report to Congress on the recent battles. It is also said that thirteen captured officers were placed under guard in this house. A story handed down over the years is that one of Washington's officers rode his horse up and down the broad staircase of the house to win a bet. One document in the Library of Congress notes that indentations, which could have been from horses' hooves, were visible on the steps.



It is not known who built the house. Estimates put the construction at around 1750. It was known variously as the Matthew Lane House and the Teeple House before it became "the Fenner House." In 1836, the property passed to William Teeple, the grandson of one of the original settlers in the area. Teeple had a tailor shop in the house.

The Fenner name stuck in part because of the special qualities of its owner. For more than twenty years, Mr. John Fenner Jr. never allowed the doors of the house to be locked either by day or night. He always kept a room, a meal, and a bed ready for any wayfarer; there was no distinction made as to color, country, or creed. Fenner bequeathed the house to the Pluckemin Presbyterian Church. The church Trustees then sold the house to Hugh Gaston of Somerville, with the understanding that it would be torn down. It was demolished in 1942. A DAR historical marker stands in front of where the house once stood.

The Fenner House was just one of the Pluckemin sites marked by history during that famous January 1777 rest stop. The whole village, in fact, got involved. Several homes housed the wounded and likely other notables who accompanied Washington, including Dr. Benjamin Rush and Generals Greene, Knox, and Sullivan.

Future newsletters will continue the series of Pluckemin historic houses.

Sources:

"The Story of An Old Farm", Andrew Mellick, pp. 383-386
The Somerset County Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, pp. 153-155
The Somerset Hills, Ludwig Schumacher, 1900, pp.41-62
Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey, Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer

Lord Stirling 1770s Festival

Sunday, October 6
 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 community event is held rain or shine at 96 Lord Stirling Road in Basking Ridge.

Suggested Donation: \$5 per person

Details at www.somersetcountyparks.org



Saturday, October 12
 10 AM - 5 PM
Sunday, October 13
 12 PM - 4 PM

Explore Somerset County’s quaint villages, learn about prominent residents, witness early colonial life, and discover Revolutionary War sites. Twenty-eight 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 permanent displays “*What Put Somerset Hills on the Map*” - a visual story of the area, Annin farmhouse model & oil painting, over-sized maps recreated from historical documents, and locally excavated Lenni Lenape artifacts.

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

Details at www.schistoryweekend.com

Welcome New Members!

Our membership grew substantially due to the exceptional events held this year, notably the Afternoon Tea (12 new members) and Architecture of the Gilded Age (8 new members).

Madhu & Ram Agrawal	Bernardsville
Jennifer Asay	Basking Ridge
Rebecca Casey	Far Hills
Katherine & Henry Chao	Bernardsville
Jamie Chesson	Califon
Jeanne Clements	Bernardsville
Gerry-Jo Cranmer	Bernardsville
Dave & Beth Crosson	Morristown
Todd & Kirsten Ehmann	Pottersville
Melissa Ehmann	Pottersville
Lorraine Heinen	Basking Ridge
Karen Ifert	Ridgefield, CT
Janet Mavec	Califon
Jeff McCarthy	Basking Ridge
Jessica Melillo	Far Hills
Betty Michinard	Basking Ridge
Andrew & Tracey Michinard	Basking Ridge
Victoria Rocco	Peapack
Nolan & Eve Russo	Far Hills
Margery St. John	Mendham
Nicole & Paul Saphier	Far Hills
Judith Sutton	Mendham
Kimberly Turiansky	Bedminster
Michael Vaccaro	Liberty Corner
Grant Wagner	Princeton
Jesse & Emma Watters	Far Hills
Robert & Georgia Zaiser	Far Hills

George D. Cross

by Roy Crego



As Bernardsville's 2024 centennial celebration winds down, it's fitting to remember George D. Cross, the town's first mayor (1924-1931). George Dillwyn Cross was born on August 7, 1869 in Bagdad, FL, to John Hobart Cross and Sarah Williams.¹ By 1880, the Crosses had moved to Westerly, RI, where 10-year-old George attended school.²

By 1900, George Cross was working as a broker in Manhattan.³ On November 14, 1901, he married Leonie de Bary at Calvary Episcopal Church in Summit, NJ. Leonie was born August 6, 1873 in New York City to Adolphe de Bary, a prominent wine importer, and Augusta R. Cecil.⁴

George D. Cross, photo courtesy Bernardsville Library Local History Room

After their marriage, the Crosses settled in New York City. George Cross was employed for a time by his father-in-law, but worked principally as an insurance and investment broker with offices at 50 Church St. and later 45 John St.⁵ He was treasurer and director of the Power Development Co. and on the executive committee and a director of the Raritan Valley Insurance Company (Raritan, NJ).⁶

In 1904, Leonie de Bary Cross bought two parcels of land in Bernards Township (now Bernardsville) off Douglass Avenue totaling 480 acres.⁷ There the Crosses employed architect Grosvenor Atterbury to design a home, which they called Baricross, a fusion of their surnames. The Crosses used Baricross, which was completed in 1905, as their principal home,⁸ but during the winter months, they resided in New York City at 5 West 52nd Street with Leonie's parents.^{9,10}

As a New Jersey landowner, George Cross became increasingly involved in local affairs. In September 1918, he became vice president of the Bernards Protective Association, an organization that worked with police to protect private property. That November he won election to the Bernards Township Committee as a Republican. In January 1920, at the township reorganization meeting, he was named chairman of the township committee.¹¹

Cross was also a supporter of an independent Bernardsville. On November 26, 1920, he attended a gathering to endorse a plan for an independent borough. After the referendum for independence was approved on April 29, 1924, George D. Cross was elected mayor in a special election held May 27. He defeated Frank B. Allen, 742 to 89. George went on to be re-elected to full terms as mayor in November 1924, 1926, and 1928.¹²

George's wife Leonie Cross died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage on January 11, 1928 at Benson Springs, FL, while visiting her father.¹³ She was 54 years old. Cross finished his third full term as mayor but spent less time in town after his wife's death. In her memory, George sponsored the Leonie de Bary Cross prizes in English, which were awarded to graduating Bernards High seniors.¹⁴

George D. Cross died of a heart attack on November 4, 1936 in Pensacola, FL, where he had travelled to visit his ill brother.¹⁵ Funeral services were held at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Manhattan. The burial was at the de Bary mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY.

¹ George Cross Death Certificate, Florida State Board of Health.

² 1880 Census, Westerly R. I., ED 162, p. 480].

³ 1900 Census, Manhattan, NY, ED 684, Sheet 3.

⁴ Leonie Cross Death Certificate, Florida State Board of Health.

⁵ Obituary of George D. Cross, *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1936, p. 17.

⁶ Poor's Register of Directors (1932), p. 149 & 463.

⁷ Somerset Co., NJ, Deed Book D-10, p. 242 & 247. Thomas and Maggie Douglass were previous owners.

⁸ Pennoyer, Walker, and Wallen, *The Architecture of Grosvenor Atterbury* (2009), p. 102. The mansion was later renamed Green Gables.

⁹ *Bernardsville News*, Nov. 11, 1926, p. 5.

¹⁰ Dau's Blue Book 1907, p. 30; 1927, p. 513.

¹¹ *Bernardsville News*, Sep. 26, 1918, p. 1; Nov. 7, 1918, p. 1; Jan. 8, 1920, p. 1.

¹² *Bernardsville News*, Jun. 2, 1921, p.4; May 29, 1924, p. 1; Nov. 6, 1926, p. 1; Nov. 8, 1928, p. 1.

¹³ Leonie Cross Death certificate.

¹⁴ *Program for Graduation Exercises*, Bernards High, 1936.

¹⁵ George D. Cross Death Certificate.



*Do you like to
plan events?*

We Need You!

Professional lectures and entertainment performances on local historical subjects are held at the Brick Academy two to three times a year.

The Historical Society is currently forming the **2025 Programs Committee**.

If you are interested in joining a fun social group that works together to promote history in our Somerset Hills community please contact us at info@THSSH.org.

Collectors Exhibits

Collecting has been defined as “the selecting, gathering, and keeping of objects of subjective value.” In the 16th and 17th century, avid Dutch and Flemish collectors sought to surround themselves with items representing their mental outlook, their thirst for self-discovery, and the world around them.

THSSH continues to feature local area visitors’ collections, with exhibits changing about every 2-3 months. Collectors are welcome to assist our museum staff in arranging the exhibit, and may provide an “opening reception” and brief talk for friends and visitors.



Collectors who would like to create a display in the main room of the Brick Academy Museum in Basking Ridge are encouraged to contact us at 908.221.1770 or info@THSSH.org.

THSSH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Early American Schoolhouse

In October and November, over 500 third and fourth grade students from **Saint James, Cedar Hill, Liberty Corner, Mount Prospect, and Oak Street Elementary Schools** will discover what it was like to attend a typical one-room schoolhouse in the mid-1800s. Students will role-play at the Brick Academy with such “school supplies” as water buckets, fire logs for the potbelly stove, study books, and writing slates. Pupils sitting at period desks will learn the lessons taught in school and compare the classroom rules for students then and now. Additional fun, hands-on activities will include an American craft, museum scavenger hunt, and word search puzzles, engaging visiting students to learn even more about local history. *Photo: Teacher’s Room on Brick Academy top floor*



Bernardsville Middle School Field Trip to Brick Academy

On May 30th, over 95 students from Bernardsville Middle School’s fifth grade visited the Brick Academy on a field trip. Volunteers delivered an entertaining 45-minute informational program to help supplement the students’ history course on transitions in Bernardsville and the surrounding Somerset Hills. This was the first year for this field trip to the Brick Academy. THSSH is looking forward to welcoming the Bernardsville Middle School back in the spring of 2025.

MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

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

- Two wood chairs handcrafted by Ira Austin Sanders from trees on the Rush/Sanders farm, circa 1860 (the chairs are featured in THSSH EDUCATION PROGRAMS article on page 4)
Gift of Connie Kearns Doughty, Basking Ridge, NJ
- Engelhard Corporation Dinner 1941, photograph
Gift of Edward J. Sholander, Point Pleasant Boro, NJ
- Child's porcelain teacup (*pictured at right*), c.1820, found on Lyons farm
Gift of Mrs. Betty B. Michinard, Basking Ridge, NJ
- Bernards High Yearbooks 1911 & 1913
Gift of Boisen Family, Ava, NY



Correction: February 2024 Newsletter - 'Liberty Corner Presbyterian on Reuben Freeman' article on page 4: the correct marriage date of Reuben and Eliz is February 23, 1854.



THSSH Headquarters:

15 West Oak Street, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
908.221.1770 · www.thssh.org

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*

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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

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Select a Membership Level:

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___ Family \$35

___ Senior Citizen Individual \$10

___ Senior Citizen Family \$15

___ Student (*under 21*) \$10

___ Business \$50

___ **Life:** \$500

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Thank you for your support!

** Membership Dues and Donations are tax deductible **