

# *Inside* THE BRICK ACADEMY



The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills

February 2026

## **2025 Annual Report: *Executive Summary***

The primary objective of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH) in 2025 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 – Bernards Township and Bernardsville**

The popular Early American Schoolhouse education program for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students was provided to over 350 children from five Bernards Township schools. The educational program, “Connecting Through Time,” was provided to 100 - 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from Bernardsville Middle School in May. Two former teachers from the Education Committee resigned leaving the Education Program with a gap that needs to be filled. THSSH is exploring a youth program with the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts for first and second grade students.

Tours of the “Astor Mansion” were provided to a local Girl Scout troop, and also to Saint James 1<sup>st</sup> grade students, as well as to visitors during the Mayor’s Fall Festival where THSSH had a Welcome Table for the first time. A tour of the Brick Academy was provided by THSSH trustees to a Cornell fraternity group in April. Trustees provided a tour of the Brick Academy Museum to a team of 10 teachers from Ridge High School to discuss a collaboration on the state’s America 250 “History Happened Here” education initiative. THSSH developed a “History Happened Here” Education Program for local high school students to align with the state’s initiative.

### **- Research – Nationwide**

Close to 30 research requests were addressed by Trustees throughout 2025, with 11 in-person visits to THSSH’s Research Room in the Brick Academy. The Archive Committee, consisting of one Trustee and three volunteers, remained active during 2025. The Committee met regularly at the Brick Academy to develop and work on proper management of our archives and donated materials. The Online Collections Catalog contained close to 500 public access records as of December 2025.

### **- Museum – Somerset Hills**

For his Eagle Scout project, a local Scout filmed the 'Natirar Estate and Kate Macy Ladd Convalescent Home' exhibit at the Brick Academy Museum. The museum was open to the public the first Sunday of each month from 2-4 PM.

### **- Communications – Nationwide**

Members received three issues of “*Inside the Brick Academy*” newsletters, along with the annual report. Copies of the newsletter are also left at Bernards Township Town Hall. An email communication is sent at the same time as the newsletter to members, as well as non-members. The email highlights programs and events and includes a Volunteer Spotlight. The email leads readers to the current newsletter on our website, as well as our Blog and Facebook page. Copies of the 2025 Programs & Events brochure were left at Bernards Township Town Hall, and in local food and business establishments.

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***Catharine “Caty” Greene: Eyewitness to the American Revolution***

**Date: Thursday, February 26 Time: 7-9 PM**

Immerse yourself in history celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States as Carol Simon Levin portrays Catharine “Caty” Greene, the indomitable wife of Nathanael Greene, one of General George Washington’s most valued officers and good friend to many other revolutionary notables.



Caty spent much of the war joining her husband and other officers as they moved from one battlefield to another (many in New Jersey. She bunked locally with Lord Stirling for a while and attended fireworks festivities in Pluckemin.) Known as a witty raconteur, she enlivened the spirits of officers and troops alike as the war ranged from New Jersey to South Carolina, famously dancing for 3 hours straight with George Washington. Her wit, pluck and courage carried her through both victories and setbacks not only during the war but throughout a remarkable life full of resilience and reinvention.

**Speaker:** Carol Simon Levin is a professional storyteller and independent historian who specializes in telling the stories of “fascinating women history forgot” through first person portrayals.

**The Brick Academy, 15 West Oak Street, Basking Ridge**

Admission: \$15 current members, \$20 non-members. New members welcome! **Cash only** paid at the door.

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***THSSH GIFT PROGRAM***

The Board of Trustees extends its sincere gratitude to THSSH members and community friends who have contributed with 2025 gifts (donations and bequests) to further our mission. The 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 (Below \$100)*** - Kristen Albarelli, Luba Blake, Leslie Brownwitt, Diane Cantano, Lois Clark, William Cronin, Cynthia Crosson, Patrice O. Cummings, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Dee, Constance Kearns Doughty, Joseph and Lucy Franceus, Sylvia Gambony, Michael Gianetti Jr., Bonnie Gould, Lorraine Heinen, Lauren Johnson, David E. Kane, Diane R. Karczynski, Martin Kendall, Steven Kramer, Jane MacNeil, Robin Marion, Janet Mavec, Mr. and Mrs. Jay Petrillo, John and Susan Samtak, John Smith, Susan Steuber, Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Suriano, Wendy Tabor, Muriel Thibaud, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Trinter, Betty Udelsman, John Vogt, Mr. and Mrs. Jess Watters, Geoff Yochum

***Robert Stockton (Below \$200)*** - Dominick and Nancy Alfano, Christian Babic, Laura L. Bahnatka, Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Bedrosian, William V. Engel, Stacey Errico, Jennifer Fischer, Emily Johnston, Jane Kazan, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lufkin, Karen Marty, Ana Duarte McCarthy, Catherine Rome, William Barry Thomson, Anya and Brian Tomko, Nancy Williams

***Samuel Southard (Below \$300)*** - Mr. and Mrs. Jim Gibson, Richard Macksoud

***Theodore Frelinghuysen (Below \$400)*** - VFW Bernardsville Memorial Post 7858

***Reverend Robert Finley (Below \$500)*** - Elizabeth Bagnato, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Melillo, Joseph Metelski, David Urbani

***Reverend Samuel Kennedy (\$500 Plus)*** - Clara Brown, Roy Crego, Judy Cunio-Quigley, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Hulke, Jamie Morais, Tiffani Potesta, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Zibelli

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.

## A Revolutionary American Family: The McDonalds of Somerset County\*

By Cynthia Crosson

The hanging at the Courthouse in Somerville in 1786 was cause for great excitement. Crowds gathered at “Gallows Hill” to watch as a prominent family was torn apart. Sibling rivalry between two sons of Col. William McDonald, Esq, a large landowner, businessman and High Sheriff of Somerset, had boiled over into murder and execution.

Col. William, as he came to be known, was the first McDonald to have settled in the place called Pluckemin (part of Bedminster Township). Little is known about his early life. It is likely he was born between 1712 and 1716, and his first son Richard was born about 1734. His first wife, who is unknown, likely died very young after only one child.

Things become a little clearer in the 1740’s when there are records showing he owned two different mills, a gristmill south of Pluckemin on Chambers Brook bordering Bridgewater, and a sawmill, known today as the McDonalds/Klines Mill, on the North Branch of the Raritan to the north of Pluckemin. The gristmill was in place by 1749.

“Below Pluckemin was a tract of four hundred and seventy acres belonging to William McDonald, who had recently built on the ravine of Chambers Brook a mill that ground the grists of Bedminster people until after the Revolution.” p.3

Col. William’s mill business would prove to be very profitable. He married his second wife, Margaret, probably in the 1750s. They had two children, William Jr. and Margaret. “Bill Jr. must have been a troublesome lad. He eloped with the (Lamington Presbyterian Church) preacher’s daughter, Catherine McCrea, much to the chagrin of her family. The McCrea’s...lived on the farm adjacent to the McDonalds/Klines Mill. No doubt the whole affair was quite scandalous at the time.” p.4

But it was Col. William’s fourth and last child, Samuel, who ended up on Gallows Hill. He was the illegitimate offspring of Col. William and his mistress, Ruth Leferty. Ruth and her father, Judge Bryan Leferty, were neighbors of the McDonalds in Pluckemin and also attended the Lamington Presbyterian Church. Ruth had a reputation as “one of the most beautiful and wayward girls in the county.”

Samuel was particularly prone to sibling rivalry. In the winter of 1786, he had a dispute with Richard, the eldest brother, and challenged him to what may have been a duel. William Jr. was acting as his second. Richard, a distinguished member of the community and Revolutionary War hero, never showed up for the duel. Samuel, in a rage, perhaps enhanced by alcohol, went to look for him. He was apparently accompanied by William Jr. He encountered Richard, who was on horseback. Samuel knocked him from his horse with a loaded horsewhip and beat him mercilessly. A tavernkeeper, Mr. John Connet, rushed to help Richard, but was in turn assaulted. Samuel took a penknife and slit the artery in Connet’s thigh. Then with another stroke, he slit open the man’s belly. Connet tried to escape, but Samuel stabbed him three more times, finally killing him.

All three sons were arrested, although Richard’s name was never included in the accounts. Samuel was charged with murder, tried at the courthouse in Somerset County, found guilty and sentenced to be executed. Samuel was executed on Friday, February 24, 1786, “the only white man ever hanged in Somerset County under civil law.” p.23

These events overshadowed the many accomplishments of the McDonald family over the years. The book by Laurence Overmire tells the whole story of the McDonalds, including their service in the Revolutionary War and beyond. **The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills will include stories about the McDonald family in the Revolutionary War as part of a new museum exhibit scheduled to be unveiled Sunday, March 8 at 2 PM at the Brick Academy.**

\* This article is taken entirely from the book “A Revolutionary American Family; The McDonalds of Somerset County, New Jersey,” by Laurence Overmire, 2015, pp. 1-23. The book is available in the History Room at Clarence Dillon Library, Bedminster, NJ.

*THE COUNTRY'S FIRST CENTENNIAL FLAG RETURNS TO THE BRICK ACADEMY*

Mark your calendars for **Sunday, March 8 at 2 PM** as the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills unveils a new exhibit at the Brick Academy highlighting its 38-star American flag recently restored thanks to generous donations. The flag will be surrounded by a new special exhibit entitled "History Happened Here: America 250 in the Somerset Hills." Jon Booth, local historian and architect, will present stories about how the Revolutionary War affected people and places in the Somerset Hills.



The Historical Society extends a special message to members and friends who donated to our 'Save Our Flag' campaign: When THSSH faced the challenge to 'Save Our Flag,' you were the ones who stepped up. We are thrilled to announce that thanks to your overwhelming generosity, we have reached our \$8,000 goal! Because of you, this rare 1876 flag, a fragile emblem of our nation's centennial piece of history, will be preserved for future generations, and proudly rehung at the Brick Academy Museum for the America 250 celebrations. **Thank you for being the guardians of our local heritage!**

***WELCOME!***

**The Historical Society is pleased to welcome the following new memberships:**

Nancie Balun Boughton	<i>Bedminster, NJ</i>	Susan Marill	<i>Glen Rock, NJ</i>
Katherine de Koninck	<i>Landing, NJ</i>	Camille Palmese Family	<i>Downingtown, PA</i>
Jennifer Dean	<i>Bernardsville, NJ</i>	Norm Penney	
Terry Dragoumis & Peter Nicholson	<i>Monmouth Beach, NJ</i>	& Natalia Hrybowych	<i>Bedminster, NJ</i>
Nancy Ferreira	<i>Basking Ridge, NJ</i>	Katarina Perisic	<i>Gladstone, NJ</i>
Lauren Johnson	<i>Gladstone, NJ</i>	Alba Peterson Family	<i>Basking Ridge, NJ</i>
Dr. Paula Karabelas	<i>Bedminster, NJ</i>	Joan Ravasy	<i>Lebanon, NJ</i>
Stacy Limone	<i>Whitehouse Station, NJ</i>	Barbara Scillia	<i>Bernardsville, NJ</i>
Regina Loikits	<i>Bridgewater, NJ</i>	Vera Shakhov	<i>Basking Ridge, NJ</i>
Cathi Lyman-Onkka	<i>New Brighton, MN</i>	Mary Smith	<i>Whitehouse Station, NJ</i>
Jane MacNeil	<i>Brookside, NJ</i>	Carolyn Marie Tobin	<i>Basking Ridge, NJ</i>
		Mary Trezza	<i>Far Hills, NJ</i>



"A huge thank you to the Basking Ridge Garden Club for the holiday garland and beautiful wreath adorning the Brick Academy door. Your festive touch makes our museum look so cheerful and welcoming. We are so grateful for your continued partnership and support."

## *A Founding Family in the Somerset Hills: The Boudinots*

By W. Barry Thomson

Elias Boudinot IV (1740–1821) (pronounced “boo-DIN-oh”) was an American Founding Father: a lawyer, statesman, legislator, officer in the Continental Army, director of the United States Mint, a trustee of what is now Princeton University, and a founder and first president of the American Bible Society.

In November 1776, with the occupation of New York City by the British and the increased threat that posed to nearby areas of New Jersey, Boudinot and his wife, Hannah Stockton, a sister of Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence (whose wife was Elias’s elder sister, Annis), moved from “Boxwood Hall” (extant), their elegant home in what is now Elizabeth, New Jersey, to the relative safety of Basking Ridge. Except for the British capture of General Charles Lee at Widow White’s Tavern in Basking Ridge in December 1776, the Somerset Hills was generally free of any serious military incursions by the British during the rest of the war.

The Boudinot family resided on their country farm until the end of the war in 1783. The property, owned by the Boudinots from 1771 to 1785, was listed in 2009 on the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places as The Boudinot/Southard Farmstead. It is now owned by the Somerset County Park Commission.

Elias Boudinot served as a member of New Jersey’s Provincial Congress in 1775. With the start of the war, he was commissioned a colonel in the Continental Army and was appointed by General Washington to be Commissary-General of Prisoners. Boudinot resigned that position to serve as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in 1778. From 1781 to 1783 he was a delegate to, and for one year was president of, the United States in Congress Assembled, better known as the Confederation Congress that was established under the Articles of Confederation, the nation’s governing law from 1781 to 1789. With the adoption of the Constitution, Boudinot served in the House of Representatives from 1789 to 1795. In the latter year, Boudinot was appointed to be Director of the Mint, a position he held for ten years under the presidencies of George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson.

Elias’s great-niece, Jane Johnson Boudinot (1833–1914), also was a resident of the Somerset Hills, where she owned a charming country cottage in Bernardsville from 1885 to 1902. Named “By-the-Way” by Jane, her extant home (*image at the right*) on Mountaintop Road was later called “Honeyfield,” the name carved into the stone pillars at the entrance drive by a later owner, John Fairfield Dryden, founder and long-time president of the Prudential Insurance Company and a United States senator.



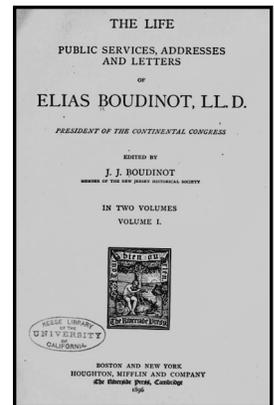
(continued on page 6)

## *A Founding Family in the Somerset Hills: The Boudinots*

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Jane's illustrious ancestors also included her grandfather, Elisha Boudinot, Elias's younger brother, who was a justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. Jane's great-aunt, Annis Boudinot Stockton, elder sister of Elias and Elisha, was the wife of Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. A published poet in her lifetime, Annis was known as the Duchess of Morven, the Stockton family's Princeton estate that later became the first governor's mansion.

Understandably proud of her family's role in the founding and early history of the nation, Jane Boudinot was an officer of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America and a member of the New Jersey Historical Society. In 1896, while a resident of Bernardsville, Jane edited and published the two-volume work "The Life, Public Services, Addresses and Letters of Elias Boudinot, LL.D., President of the Continental Congress" (*image at the right*).



*Note: A write-up about Jane Boudinot's Bernardsville cottage appears on page 38 of volume 1 of "New Jersey Country Houses: The Somerset Hills," by John K. Turpin and W. Barry Thomson.*

### MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

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

- **Van Dorn Family Papers** (1800s)  
*Barbara Taft O'Neil, Alexandria VA*
- **Tambourine Used in Basking Ridge Fire Department Parades** (1898)  
*Mary Chipparullo, Bernardsville NJ*
- **Geier Farm Artifacts and Photos (Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead)** (20th Century)  
*Meg Geier Costello, Flanders NJ*
- **Book: Some Reminiscences by Clarence Blair Mitchell** (1939)  
*W. Barry Thomson, Williamsburg MA*
- **Clarence Blair Mitchell Photo Album from Far Hills** (1910-1930)  
*(THSSH Purchase)*

## **2025 Annual Report: *Executive Summary***

*(Continued from Front Page)*

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

THSSH continued to communicate news and information through our website [www.thssh.org](http://www.thssh.org), and through eMail. Our Facebook page has 549 followers; our Instagram page has 375 followers.

### **- Programs and Events – Somerset Hills, surrounding area**

In February at Pendry Natirar in Peapack, THSSH hosted an event “Natirar – A Journey Through Time”. A New Members Meet and Greet was held at Café Azzurro in Peapack. This was the first time THSSH offered this event to new members as an opportunity to meet other new members, as well as to learn how to help THSSH cultivate interest in local history. A Wasp Takes Wing: The Story of Ann Baumgartner Carl speaker program was held at the Brick Academy in April. The March to Yorktown Day Panel Discussion and Exhibit program was held at the Brick Academy in July, kicking off THSSH’s first America 250 celebration. Over 40 people attended. A YouTube video of the program was created that garnered 110 views. An Afternoon Tea at Blairsden event was held in September. A Volunteer Appreciation Gathering was held in October at Café Azzurro in Peapack as a way for all THSSH volunteers to get to meet each other. The Prohibition 2025 program, combined with the THSSH Annual Membership Meeting, was held at the Gladstone Tavern in November. The year ended with a Holiday Party in December at St Bernard’s Parish Hall and Church in Bernardsville.

### **- Advocacy**

THSSH participated in Bernards Township’s Charter Day Festival and Somerset County’s Weekend Journey through the Past where over 60 people visited the Brick Academy. Trustees worked with a Bernards Township Committee member to develop Bernards Township merchandise to be sold at Charter Day, and other township events, as well as THSSH events. A tumbler was created with a THSSH logo on one side and Bernards Township logo on the opposite side.

Trustees attended the Somerset County Historical Society Membership Drive Party at Raritan Valley Community College in August. The About Us page on our website was revised to include logos of affiliated organizations.

Two Trustees were appointed to Bedminster Township’s new Jacobus Vanderveer House (JVH) Commission. THSSH Trustees were appointed to the Bernards Township Patriotic Subcommittee, a committee formed to coordinate the efforts of THSSH, the Ross Farm, the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead, and other non-profit organizations in Bernards Township that are planning America 250 programs and events. THSSH appointed a Trustee to sit on the Bernardsville America 250 Committee.

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

THSSH continues to work with parties to advise on the historic importance of properties. THSSH took action to inform Bernards Township on the historic dating of the former Lord Stirling School that is being considered for demolition. Two Trustees gave a tour of the Brick Academy to two archaeologists from the Lord Stirling team.

The 38-star centennial flag that hung on the wall of the Brick Academy Museum was sent to a textile conservation workshop for restoration. A “Save the Flag” donation campaign was launched on Flag Day.

### **- Membership – Nationwide**

Total membership in 2025 was 241 with 56 new members. A new “Member Meet and Greet” reception was held in March at Café Azzurro in Gladstone where 25 members attended and 18 signed up to be volunteers.

### **- Donations – Nationwide**

THSSH received \$16,500 in donations. Artifacts were donated to the museum including books and photographs relating to Blairsden and the Blair family; photographs of St. Bernards Episcopal Parish House in Bernardsville; McMurtry, Child, Drake photo albums and letters; Tiger family photographs and papers; Van Dorn family papers; Tambourine used by the Basking Ridge Fire Department; framed Frederick C. Olcott portrait.

**The full 2025 Annual Report can be viewed on our website in the About Us section**  
<https://somersethillshistoricalsociety.org/about-us/>



**THSSH**

P.O. Box 136

Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

[www.thssh.org](http://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*

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