



Volume 13, No. 1

Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance

Winter 2011

[www.raritanmillstone.org](http://www.raritanmillstone.org)

## JOIN US TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON THE DECAPITATION OF THE KING OF GREAT BRITAIN, KING GEORGE II, January 3, 1777

We are pleased to announce and invite our members and their guests to join us for our annual celebration of George Washington's birthday, this year to be held on Sunday, February 13, 2011 at a luncheon/lecture/tour between 1:00 and 3:00 pm in the Palmer Room of the historic Nassau Inn (circa 1756), 10 Palmer Square, Princeton, NJ. (Parking is available in the nearby the public parking garage and local parking lots.) The luncheon will be an Italian theme buffet at a cost of \$35.00 per person inclusive. **Reservations are required.** To reserve call Elyce Jennings at 732-463-0767 and mail your check payable to RMHA, c/o Mrs. Elyce M. Jennings, 852 River Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854.

Our featured speaker will be Mr. William Myers of Highland Park, NJ, writer and translator and 10th generation descendent of Henry Greenland, Princeton's first European settler. A devotee of Princeton history, Myers will speak about one of Princeton's oldest traditions: **"Did the cannon ball fired by Alexander Hamilton during the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777 really decapitate a portrait of King George II, truth or mystery."**

Following the lecture, guests will be invited to visit the nearby Faculty Room in Nassau Hall, Princeton University, where the Continental Congress meet from June through November of 1783 when Princeton was the de facto capital of the United States.

Nassau Inn, Princeton



## THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE RARITAN-MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

You are cordially invited to join us for the Annual Meeting to be held in the Lafayette Tavern Room of the historic Cranbury Inn, 21 South Main Street, Cranbury, NJ, on Thursday, April 14, 2011 between 1:00 and 3:00 pm. Following the luncheon, the order of business will be the Election of Directors for the Class of 2013. The luncheon will cost \$30.00 inclusive and **reservations are required.** To reserve call Elyce Jennings, at 732-463-0767 and mail your check payable to the RMHA c/o Mrs. Elyce M. Jennings, 852 River Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854; include your choice of either chicken marsala, tenderloin tips Diana, or seared salmon.

Our distinguished guest speaker will be Mr. John D. Katerba, Chair of the Monroe Township Preservation Commission and the restoration of The Dey Farm and the Prospect Plains School House. He will address us on the topic of **"The Cause of Preservation During These Challenging Times."**



The next scheduled meeting of the  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

will be held on March 17, 2010  
from 1:30—3:00 pm at the

**METLAR-BODINE HOUSE**

Representatives from all Alliance  
sites are encouraged to attend.

**DIRECTIONS TO THE METLAR-BODINE  
HOUSE**, 1281 River Road, Piscataway  
732-463-8363

**NJ TURNPIKE**

Exit 9 from New Brunswick from North or  
South. Follow Route 18 North past New  
Brunswick over J. Lynch Bridge and exit at  
River Road. At end of ramp, make left at traffic  
light onto River Road. Proceed one block. Turn  
left onto Hillcrest. At top of hill make a left onto  
Logan Lane. Follow the road to end, parking in  
designated spots or in circle (cul-de-sac)  
before the end of Logan Lane.

**GARDEN STATE PARKWAY:**

Exit 129 (NJ Turnpike) from North or South.  
Follow Turnpike South to Exit 9 and follow  
directions above.

**INTERSTATE 287:**

Exit 9 (Highland Park) from North or South.  
Follow River Road towards Highland Park.  
Pass through the traffic lights for Route 18  
and then turn left onto Hillcrest and follow  
directions above.

**YOUR LINK TO THE PUBLIC:** *The Link*, the newsletter  
of the Raritan–Millstone Heritage Alliance, is a quarterly  
publication.

News of major, upcoming events for possible inclusion  
in the winter issue must be mailed or emailed to the editor  
no later than March 15, 2011. Please send all items to:  
George Dawson, Editor, 12 Llewellyn Place, New  
Brunswick, NJ 08901; 732 249-2670 or to Ann Suydam,  
Associate Editor, 54 Skillman's Lane, Somerset, NJ 08873;  
732-846-7448.

Please send photos (in .jpeg or .tiff) to Linda Barth, 908-  
722-7428; [barths@att.net](mailto:barths@att.net). Material submitted electronically  
should be in WORD format. Photographs will be scanned  
and returned.

**Raritan-Millstone Heritage  
Alliance**

P.O. Box 5583  
Somerset, NJ 08875-5583  
[www.raritanmillstone.org](http://www.raritanmillstone.org)

*An organization of individuals,  
organizations, and sites working to promote  
preservation and understanding of the rich,  
eventful, and cultural heritage of significant  
historical, educational, and cultural sites  
located in Central New Jersey*

**OFFICERS**

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Vice President, Susan C. Keating  
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The Board of Directors meets on the third  
Thursday of March, May, September,  
October, and November at designated  
historic and museum member  
sites in the region.



## **THE METLAR-BODINE HOUSE MUSEUM A MODERN-DAY PHOENIX SLOWLY RISING FROM THE ASHES**

In its 282-year history, The Metlar-Bodine House has twice been brought back from near-extinction: in 1979, when it was saved from demolition by a group of concerned citizens, and in 2003, when it was ravaged by fire but now stands beautifully restored. If the achievements of a non-profit organization can be measured by the unwavering support of its members, friends and the community-at-large, then the Metlar-Bodine House can count itself extremely successful.

In the fall of 2009, museum members implemented a monthly schedule of programs and events and opened the museum's gift shop on a regular basis (monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, from 1-5pm). The museum's annual Holiday Tea, a much-loved Yuletide tradition, was also reinstated and has proven itself to be a noteworthy success, always bringing many new faces to the historic site. On April 2, 2011, The Fellowship for Metlar House (the museum's members group) will host its benefit dinner auction, a major annual fundraiser - always a financial success and a critical source of income. Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, The Fellowship's auction committee is gearing up to *Roar into our Twenties* with a Roaring Twenties theme, and with the goal of making this year's benefit even more successful. Costumes are optional, but Flappers, Keystone Kops, Flag Pole Sitters and the literati of the Algonquin Round Table are most welcome!

In 2010, a part-time archivist was hired and a committee formed to begin cataloguing the museum's extensive permanent collection. Museum staff is working again with student interns from the Rutgers University Public History Internship Program, a dynamic and valuable relationship that had been interrupted by the fire. The summer intern assisted staff with recreating the museum's map exhibit, and the fall intern chose fundraising as his project. Both young men so enjoyed their projects and experience at the museum they decided to become museum members. A wonderful bonus for The Fellowship!

Although progress at the site has been steady, The Fellowship is still faced with numerous projects for which funds need to be secured. The most monumental task is constructing a new museum entrance with accessibility for the handicapped and ground floor restrooms. Without the completion of this half-million dollar project, the museum cannot achieve permanent occupancy.

Other pressing endeavors include:

- building new indoor exhibits
- reconstructing an outdoor botanical display, *Four Centuries of Kitchen Gardens*
- developing new programs and events
- purchasing new artifacts for the collection to replace those lost in the fire, and
- continuing conservation of damaged pieces.

While these and many other challenges still lie ahead, The Fellowship's members are working diligently so that this National and State Registered Historic Site can, once again, be open to the public full-time.

Hara Durkin, Associate Director  
The Metlar-Bodine House Museum





## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CRANBURY

By John W. Chambers, Professor of History, Rutgers University

Over the town's long history, Cranbury's destiny has been influenced primarily by its rich farmland and by its location near primary travel routes across the state. Its physical form today is the result of these factors and of decisions about development and land use made by township officials, influenced by active citizens' organizations over the past half century. Cranbury is officially recognized by the State and National Registers of Historic Places as "the best preserved 19th-century village in Middlesex County," and one of the best preserved such villages in the state. Although recognizing the need for orderly, controlled growth, the town since the 1960s has been actively committed to preserving the integrity of the charming old village and its historic farmlands to the west.

As one of the oldest towns in New Jersey, Cranbury's record of European settlement dates from 1697 on land formerly home to the Lenape Indians, members of the Indian nation called the Delawares. Two main Indian trails converged at what is now the Village of Cranbury. These were expanded to become colonial highways, Lawrie's Road and George's Road, ultimately linking New York and Philadelphia. At the midway point, Cranbury became a convenient stopping place for food and overnight lodging for travelers. The site also had a freshwater stream, today called Cranbury Brook, and around 1736 or 1737, a gristmill was erected there to process the grains grown by local farmers. Around the mill, taverns and inns, a cluster of houses, stores, and workshops emerged. In 1740, a Presbyterian church was erected, and a few years later it was visited by a young minister, David Brainerd, whose missionary work among the Indians would become famous and who would become a local icon. In 1748, the Baptists built a meeting house in the expanding town, whose name on eighteenth-century maps was spelled "Cranberry" or "Cranberry Town." The cause for that spelling is unknown, although some have speculated that there may have been cranberries growing in the marshlands along what was then called "Cranberry Brook."

Cranbury was ardently patriotic during the American Revolution with representatives of its leading old families of English Presbyterian, Dutch Calvinist, and French Huguenot descent being active at the county or state level in the struggle for Independence. In 1778, as the Continental Army pursued the British Army across New Jersey, Cranbury served as a temporary headquarters first for the Marquis de Lafayette and Alexander Hamilton in the Advance Force and then for General George Washington and the main body of the army on their way to the Battle of Monmouth. After the war, a map of the new United States, commissioned by President Washington in 1789, showed Cranbury Village with nearly two dozen structures, including two churches and one tavern-inn. A little over a decade later, Aaron Burr may have stayed at that inn, which still exists today, when he spent the night in Cranbury, fleeing south after the fatal duel with Alexander Hamilton.

Developments in transportation in the nineteenth century--the proliferation of turnpikes, canals, and then railroads--encouraged Cranbury's agriculturally-based economy. The colonial Lawrie's Road was improved into a paved turnpike with the village as a major stop, with several inns, later hotels, for stagecoaches and freight wagons. The Delaware and Raritan Canal, completed in 1834, ran just east of the town.\* In 1832, the Camden and Amboy Railroad became one of the first railroads operating in the nation, with its main line located only one mile west of the village. Such technological innovations linked Cranbury to a wider market for the fruits, grains, and vegetables of its many farmers. To serve the farm sector as well as the increasing traffic volume, the town grew and prospered with the addition of a sawmill, two tanneries, and several taverns. A second Presbyterian

Cranbury Museum





Cranbury History Center

church was established in 1838, a Methodist church constructed in 1848-1849, and an African Methodist Episcopal church erected in 1855. Like the whites, the town's black population, slave and free, included members of all of the town's churches. Cranbury's population was 621 in 1850. The number of houses along the town's Main Street proliferated. With the exception of a few eighteenth-century homes, the majority of the historic white clapboard houses that line Main Street today are Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian-style homes originally built in the nineteenth century.

On March 7, 1872, Cranbury became an independent township, as the State of New Jersey authorized its separation from South Brunswick and Monroe townships. At the time, the newly autonomous Cranbury Township had a population of 3,000 and included Plainsboro, which became an independent township in 1919. In accordance with the wishes of the townspeople, the Legislature in 1872 recognized the spelling of the town's name as "Cranbury" rather than "Cranberry."

The town's business sector expanded in the decades after the Civil War in both commerce and industry. In addition to a bank, the leading businesses included Chamberlin & Barclay, an agricultural business firm that marketed farm products and serviced the farmers' needs, and American Steam Coffee and Spice Mills, later S. Silvers Bros, which sold ground coffee as well as teas and spices and a range of grocery supplies to grocers and restaurants throughout the region. The town had its own weekly newspaper, the *Cranbury Press*, founded 1885, that continues to the present. Five public schools were combined into a single two-story, brick school building in the center of the village in 1896. A handsome structure, designated an historic landmark in 1971, the Old School building has served as the Town Hall since 2001. The new school buildings are located behind it, as is the public library, forming a complex which, together with the post office a block away, provides a center of town civic life.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Cranbury continued its historic connection between agriculture and transportation routes, although it experienced changes in both. In the 1930s, New Deal funds helped pay for a highway, ultimately designated U.S. Route 130, that shifted the main road from Main Street to a new thoroughfare just east of the village itself. In 1951, the New Jersey Turnpike was built through the extreme eastern part of the Township, with Exit 8 in nearby Hightstown. Cranbury remained primarily agricultural, but beginning in the 1920s, its farmers increasingly focused on potatoes as their cash crop. From the 1920s through the 1960s, Cranbury was the center of New Jersey's "potato belt." In the decades after World War II, however, falling potato prices and increased costs led many local farmers to switch to other crops or seek to sell their land.

Suburban housing and industrial development began to reach southern Middlesex County in the 1960s, pushing up land prices and leading to the spread of housing throughout surrounding areas. This accelerated after the opening of the New Jersey Turnpike's Exit 8-A, two miles north of the village, in 1966. Cranbury was confronted with the possibility of dramatic, irreversible changes in the nature of the 13-square-mile township, which still consisted primarily of a nineteenth- and early-twentieth century rural village surrounded by farmland. As a result of series of public meetings, the township adopted a master plan in 1967 that declared as its object "to preserve the township's present rural character and thereby preserve its chief asset: its reputation as a highly desirable place in which to live" and "to avoid a sudden influx of development of small houses and apartments which would upset the community both financially and socially." The recommendation was for continued strict zoning while anticipating increasing and carefully planned development in the following thirty years.

Cranbury has followed that policy of careful planning, zoning and preservation ever since then. As a



result of efforts by local volunteer organizations and township officials, the village was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1979 and to the National Register in 1980. Increased pressures by developers, coupled with court-mandated quotas under the New Jersey Supreme Court's *Mount Laurel II* decision (1984) for affordable housing to be accomplished by commercial builders who would be allowed to erect four market-priced homes for every affordable-priced unit, led Cranbury citizens and officials to a major effort to preserve the township's unique character. The town was able to demonstrate that the preservation of the rural landscape, with its open lands and old farmsteads bordering the village on the west side of Route 130 was integral to maintaining the integrity of the nineteenth-century village and its historic relationship to its rural environment. The town's efforts and experience also helped to include historic preservation as a factor in the New Jersey Fair Housing Act of 1985.

As a result of land-policy decisions made by the township in the 1980s, after numerous public hearings, and affirmed and more strictly defined in the Master Plan of 1993, the present land development pattern was adopted in Cranbury. The primary decision was to maintain open land in an Agricultural Preservation (A-100) Zone composed of most of the approximately 3,500 acres on the west side of the village. Two-thirds of that area has been maintained as open space through six-acre, minimum lot zoning, cluster or lot averaging housing, and especially through the purchasing, in conjunction with the county and state, of development rights or of land itself through the farmland preservation program under the New Jersey Agriculture Retention and Development Act of 1983. In addition, land use regulations were introduced to reinforce a "hard" edge around the village center by maintaining an abrupt transition in land uses and density between residential development and farmland, and also by emphasizing the maintenance of rural roads and hedgerows.

Small retail and service establishments, many located in historic structures, form the core of the village. In the immediate post-World War II period, some small, more densely developed residential lots were built surrounding the commercial center. Some larger lot-size suburban development occurred on the edges of the village in the 1960s. In the 1980s, some suburban housing development occurred before tighter restrictions were established for the western agricultural area. Located along U.S. Route 130 are highway commercial usages, intended not to compete with the commercial establishments in the village itself.

The 1993 Master Plan, in an effort to increase the tax base and generate funds for acquiring development rights and purchasing land for permanent open space west of the village, encouraged development of office or light industry on the east side of Route 130. Although only a few office or office-research buildings were constructed, the area proved suitable for the development of warehouses, which proliferated in the townships adjacent to Exit 8-A after the widening of the New Jersey Turnpike to twelve-lanes north of that exit in the late 1980s. More than 35 million square feet of industrial warehouse space was built in Cran-

Parsonage Barn



bury, Monroe, and South Brunswick townships in the 1990s. Design standards for these warehouses as well as office and research buildings were adopted to ensure good quality development. Furthermore, some highway commercial uses along Route 130 were encouraged to serve passing traffic and meet regional needs. In Cranbury, tax revenues from the development in the light industry zone east of Route 130 helped subsidize the purchase of open space and the preservation of farmland west of Route 130.

As a result of such policies, the township, with a population of 3,227 in the 2000 Census, has successfully separated the preserved farmland, open space, and pedestrian-friendly mixed residential and commercial uses of

Cranbury Village, all of which lie west of Route 130, from its warehouse and distribution center developments east of Route 130, and the character and attractiveness of the historic nineteenth-century village and its bordering farmland has been preserved.

\*Editor's note: The Delaware and Raritan Canal is about nine miles west of Cranbury.

## CALENDAR OF CENTRAL JERSEY EVENTS

**Saturday, February 12**—A talk on the Delaware and Raritan Canal will be presented at 2:00 p.m. at the Blackwells Mills Canal House, corner of the Blackwells Mills Causeway and Canal Road, Franklin Township. Linda Barth, canal enthusiast, will introduce you to the people and structures that made the canal work. This waterway, now the centerpiece of the D&R Canal State Park, transported men and supplies between New York and Philadelphia during three wars. Many luxury yachts, like J.P. Morgan's *Tarantula*, cruised the waterway. Come learn more about this gem of central New Jersey. Questions? Contact the Blackwells Mills Canal House at 732-873-2133.

**Saturday, February 19**—Celebrate George Washington's Birthday with "the cup that cheers." Stacy Roth's unusual costumed presentation of tea lore, history, songs, poetry on "*REVOLUTIONARY TEA*," sponsored by the Wallace House & Old Dutch Parsonage Association, will be held in the hall of the Reformed Church at Finderne, 581 Wharton Avenue, Bridgewater at 4pm. Reservations and teacup and saucer required. Tickets are \$25 per person and must be purchased in advance. Make checks payable to the WHODP Association, P. O. Box 225, Somerville, NJ 08876. Include email or phone so that we may confirm your reservation. For more information, please email [wallacehousefriends@gmail.com](mailto:wallacehousefriends@gmail.com).

**Saturday, February 26**—The Freedom Quilt and the Underground Railroad at the Hageman Farm, 209 South Middlebush Road, Somerset 08873; 732-748-7657. 2:00 pm. \$10 per person.

**Saturday, February 26**—Walk the D&R Canal towpath to Landing Lane. Enjoy a brisk winter afternoon walk along the towpath in Franklin Township with the park naturalist and historian. Meet at the Demott Lane parking area (off Easton Avenue in Franklin Township) at 1:00 pm. We will head north toward Landing Lane for a 4-mile round trip tour along the historic towpath. Registration IS required. Call the park office at 609-924-5705.

**Saturday, March 19**—League of Historical Societies of NJ tour of sites in Union County: Woodruff Store, Boxwood Hall, Liberty Hall, and Old First Presbyterian Church. \$50 cost supports the League and the NJ Historical Society. For details, contact Linda Barth, 908-240-0488 or [barths@att.net](mailto:barths@att.net).

**Saturday, April 2 – Sign up now!** The Fellowship for Metlar House, the members group for the Metlar-Bodine House will host its twentieth anniversary Auction Dinner to benefit the historic site. To honor its twentieth year, the event's theme is "We're ROARING Into Our TWENTIES," and will take place on Saturday, April 2, 2011 at the Radisson Hotel, 21 Kingsbridge Road, Piscataway. **Reservations for the event must be received no later than March 19, 2011.**

The auction preview will be from 5:00 to 6 pm. Activities will include live and silent auctions, cocktails, dinner and live entertainment. Tickets are \$80, with all proceeds going directly to the museum. A commemorative ad journal will provide an additional chance to participate in the museum's major fundraising event of the year.

"For this special occasion, we encourage everyone to dress up in Roaring Twenties period costumes. We're expecting flappers, flagpole sitters and keystone cops," enthused Junelynn Sadlowski, the museum's executive director. "Many exciting items will be up for bid, and the evening will be full of fun and surprises."

The Metlar-Bodine House, circa 1728, is located at 1281 River Road in Piscataway, NJ. For reservations, call 732-463-8363. For additional information, visit the museum at [www.facebook.com/MetlarBodineHouseMuseum](http://www.facebook.com/MetlarBodineHouseMuseum).

**Saturday, April 16**—"Ma, Ma, Where's My Pa?" Pre-1900 Presidential Scandals. Van Wickle House, 1289 Easton Avenue, Somerset 08873; 732-748-7657. 2:00 pm. \$10 per person

**Saturday, April 16**—League of Historical Societies of NJ bus tour of sites in Newark at cherry blossom time. \$45 cost supports the League and the NJ Historical Society. For details, contact Linda Barth, 908-240-0488 or [barths@att.net](mailto:barths@att.net).

**Saturday, April 30**—Join the Meadows Foundation for its Springtime Tea. Bring Mom for an early Mother's Day treat. The menu will feature a variety of teas, scones with clotted cream, finger sandwiches, preserves, and dessert. Learn about the various modes of Victorian dress. 3:00-5:00 pm at the Van Liew-Suydam House, 280 South Middlebush Road, Somerset 08873. \$25 for food, entertainment, and prizes. Contact Chris Retz at [chrisflp@aol.com](mailto:chrisflp@aol.com) or 732-748-7657.

# RARITAN MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

## Membership Contribution

- Membership Fees
- Individual \$35
- Site \$35
- Household \$50

### Additional Support Levels

- Benefactor \$1,000
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Please return this form with your check

To: Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance  
PO Box 5583  
Somerset, NJ 08875-5583

Thank you!  
Visit our website: [raritanmillstone.org](http://raritanmillstone.org)

*The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance consists of committed individuals and organizations representing sites within the region of Raritan and Millstone systems. In an area that has continually contributed to the strength of the United States, we seek through our programs to promote, protect and preserve an understanding of our rich historical, cultural and educational heritage as we work to be a model for current and future generations by promoting the rich heritage of our American society.*



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