The Link

joining the sites along the rivers

Volume 14, No. 1 **Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance** Winter 2012

www.raritanmillstone.org

JOIN US FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE 280TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance is pleased to invite you to a luncheon buffet birthday celebration to honor President George Washington with the distinguished guest lecturer, Joseph G. Bilby. It will take place at Forsgate Country Club, 375 Forsgate Drive, Monroe Township, NJ 08831 (732-521-0070) on Sunday, February 12 from 1 to 3 PM. The cost inclusive is $35.00 per person. By February 3, please send your check, marked GW Luncheon and payable to RMHA, to Mrs. Elyce M. Jennings, 851 River Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854-5550. All checks must be received by February 7 in order for you to be included in this event. You may also call Mrs. Jennings to reserve at 732-463-0767. Frederick Frintrup, RMHA Director, is chair of this event.

Joseph Bilby received his BA and MA degrees from Seton Hall University and is the author of many books, including his latest, *Monmouth Court House – the Battle That Made the American Army.* Bilby will speak about the Battle of Monmouth, the hardest fought and fiercest artillery engagement of the American Revolution. It was also the largest major land offensive and the longest one-day engagement of the war.

In a nation that no longer celebrates George Washington's birthday, that no longer hangs his portrait in every classroom, the Alliance annually honors George Washington, "first in the hearts of his countrymen." We honor the general who visited New Brunswick on his way to take command of the Continental Army in Massachusetts and again after his victory at Monmouth; at Trenton and Princeton, his first most incredible victories; at Washington Rock deterring the British in the spring of 1777 and again in at the Second Middlebrook Encampment of 1778–1779; and his triumphant march with Rochambeau in 1781. Without the leadership, unrelenting perseverance, and character of George Washington here in central New Jersey, the revolution certainly would have failed.

Directions: **From Princeton—**Route 1 to Scudders Mill Road East. Continue on Scudders Mill Road and make a left at the 5th traffic light onto Dey Road. Continue on Dey Road to the end (South River Road) and make a left onto South River Road. At the 2nd traffic light (Route 32) make a right. Continue straight for 1¼ miles through 2nd traffic light. Forsgate Country Club in on your left. Use the Clubhouse entrance, which will be the second left after the traffic light.

From the Garden State Parkway or NJ Turnpike—Garden State Parkway to Exit 129 (I-95 New Jersey Turnpike) South to Exit 8A. At Exit 8A, turn left onto ramp towards Jamesburg/Cranbury. Keep straight to stay on ramp towards Route 32 East/Jamesburg/Monroe. Continue straight for 1¼ miles through 2 traffic lights. Forsgate Country Club is on your left. Use the Clubhouse entrance which will be the second left after the traffic light.

Forsgate Country Club, Monroe Township

The next scheduled meeting of the BOARD OF DIRECTORS will be held on March 15, 2012 from 1:30—3:00 pm at

MORVEN MUSEUM

Representatives from all Alliance sites are encouraged to attend.

Directions to Morven Museum,
55 Stockton Street, Princeton
609-924-8144

From Route 1—Take the Washington Road (Route 571) exit (traffic circle) west towards Princeton. Continue on Washington Road through Princeton University campus to Nassau Street. Turn left onto Nassau Street and continue approximately half a mile. Nassau Street ends at Bayard Road (206 North) becomes Stockton Street (206 South). Continue straight onto Stockton Street. Morven's driveway is the second on the right, just after the entrance to Princeton Borough Hall and Police Station.

From the north via Route 206—Take Route 206 South to its intersection with Nassau Street (Route 27) in Princeton. Turn right onto Stockton Street. Morven's driveway is the second on the right, just after the entrance to Princeton Borough Hall and Police Station.

From the north via Route 27—Route 27 becomes Nassau Street as you enter the town of Princeton. Continue through town, past Princeton University. Nassau Street ends at Bayard Road (206 North) becomes Stockton Street (206 South). Continue straight onto Stockton Street. Morven's driveway is the second on the right, just after the entrance to Princeton Borough Hall and Police Station.

To be excused, contact Donald Peck at 732-738-5522 or clausenco@aol.com in advance.

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

News of upcoming events for possible inclusion in the next issue must be mailed or emailed to the editor no later than April 15, 2012. Pease send all items to: Ann Suydam, Associate Editor, 54 Skillman Lane, Somerset, NJ 08873; 732-846-7448.

Please send photos (in .jpeg or .tiff) to Linda Barth, 908-722-7428; 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.com

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

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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.

IN MEMORIAM

It is with great sadness that we notify you of the passing in December of three valued members of the central New Jersey history community.

Montgomery historian and author **Ursula Brecknell**, a long-time member of the Van Harlingen Historical Society, was the author of *Montgomery Township: an Historic Community, 1702-1972* and *Hillsborough: An Architectural History*. Since the organization of the society in the 1960s, Ursula had always been involved, and she is best known for her research on the history and architecture of Montgomery Township and the genealogy of the founding families.

She was honored by the township council for her countless years of service to the community as a member of the Landmarks Commission, Bicentennial Committee, Environmental Commission, Environmental Protection Commission, and Planning Board Advisory Commission. Ursula was the primary author of the historic district nominations to the State for the Blawenburg, Bridgepoint, and River Road historic districts in Montgomery and for the River Road District in Piscataway.

Dorothy Agans Stratford, a registered nurse for twenty-five years, was one of the leading genealogists in the state and published many genealogical studies. She was the author of *Bound Brook* (Images of America) and a fifty-year member of Camp Middlebrook D.A.R. For many years Dorothy served as the corresponding secretary of the Somerset County Historical Society.

The great-great-great-granddaughter of Johannes Gulick, who served in the first battalion of Somerset County during the Revolutionary War, Dottie worked for many years recording the graves in the Bound Brook Cemetery and the Old Presbyterian Graveyard. She was a trustee and long-time member of the Genealogical Society of New Jersey, heading the tombstone hunts for many years and serving as corresponding secretary. She was a member of two DAR chapters (New Brunswick and Bound Brook) and was a treasured volunteer in Rutgers Special Collections for over a decade. Staff and patrons consulted with Dottie for both genealogical questions and information relating to the history of Somerset County and its inhabitants. Dottie and her late husband collected clocks and antiques. She was an avid lover of cats and dogs and a supporter of rescue and wildlife groups at the national, state and local levels. Her death marks the end of an era.

Jack Chance spent a lifetime preserving the history of our state. A founding member of Montclair Historical Society, he served as president and trustee. He was active in the North Jersey Highlands Historical Society, which helped to preserve Ringwood Manor. Jack also inventoried the historic public sculpture within our state and shared his knowledge with us through many talks and slide shows. He helped organize the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey and served on the board as historian. Jack was a charter member of the Canal Society of New Jersey and served on the board for many years.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING, THURSDAY, APRIL 19!

Raritan Yacht Club, 160 Water Street, Perth Amboy, 732-826-2277.

Next board meeting: March 15, Morven Museum, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton (see page 2)

THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS END-OF-YEAR DONORS

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THE ABRAHAM STAATS HOUSE **Compiled by Marilyn Rautio**

The Abraham Staats House is located in South Bound Brook, New Jersey, on the bend of the Raritan River just east of the confluence of the Millstone River with the Raritan. The borough is below the First Watchung Ridge where the plain flattens out just upriver from New Brunswick.

This land was originally occupied by the Lenape, an Algonquin tribe later known as the Delaware. By royal decree, land titles were purchased from the Indians, and by the time of the Revolution almost all Indian title to the land was gone. In 1681, John Inian purchased 1280 acres of land on the southern bank of the Raritan River, called *Ahanderhamock* by the Lenape. Most of Inian's land, including most of the area of today's South Bound Brook, was purchased by William Dockra, who subdivided his land into rectangular plantations, each with valuable river frontage.

The Indians living in the area used pottery, spearheads, arrowheads, knives, blades, choppers, grinding and abrading stones, and hammer stones. They raised maize, squash, pumpkins, beans, and tobacco. These early inhabitants carved out the Great Indian Trail, which led to the shore where they traded furs and hides for salt water wampum. They were not pleased with the low meadowland of South Bound Brook, calling the banks of the Bound Brook stream *Sacunk*, meaning "place of mud."

In 1738, Peter Staats of Brooklyn purchased the land as a 305-acre parcel and granted it to his son Hendrick in 1740 for five shillings. It is believed that Hendrick and his wife Maghtal built the first structure. This house consisted of the central section of the present house: one large front room facing south (as was the custom in those times) and two smaller rooms facing north, plus a stairway rising from the northwestern room to an unfinished garret. We know they resided here because Hendrick is listed on the Franklin tax records as a landowner with 250 acres and ten cattle. Hendrick conveyed the property and house to his brother John, a successful farmer in Hillsborough.

John turned the property over to his son Abraham Staats, probably in anticipation of Abraham's upcoming marriage to Margaret DuBois of Hillsborough in 1770. In this house they raised a family of five daughters and a son. Also living in the house were slaves, including Jack, a slave who gained the name "Tory Jack" because it was said that he was

often sent to New Brunswick to spy on the British troops.

Abraham made some immediate improvements: the Georgian-style raised paneling, the cornices of the back-to-back fireplaces, and the corner cupboard with its arched doors and butterfly shelving. In addition, he added the small cupboards on either side of the fireplace, as was favored by Dutch builders. The original hall, with staircase, was expanded to about six feet in width. The prominent feature of the hall is the six-paneled Dutch door, split horizontally so the top half allowed in light and air but the bottom kept livestock out. The door still contains the bull's eye glass windows, and the door has its original strap hinges.

This is the entrance through which General Washington would have been welcomed to visit General Baron Fredrick Wilhem von Steuben, who used the Staats' home as headquarters from March to June during the 2nd Middlebrook Cantonment in 1779. Von Steuben was a Prussian officer appointed by Washington as inspector-general and drill instructor to organize the ragtag army into an efficient fighting force. The author of the manual, "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States," which provided explicit instructions for drilling of the soldiers, von Steuben began visiting brigades to make sure that they were conforming to the regulations he had written. Von Steuben trained and drilled the troops for a "Grand Review" around May 1, 1779 at which George and Martha Washington and visiting generals, foreign dignitaries and Native American leaders of the area were entertained. He remained at the Staats House until after the army departed in late May.

Von Steuben hosted the visit of Conrad Girard, the French minister to America, and Don Juan de Miralles, the Spanish minister. Afterward, dinner was served in a large tent or marquee in a grove near the Staats House where about sixty generals and colonels joined von Steuben for dinner. Among those present were Washington, Henry Knox, quartermaster Nathaniel Green, Lord Stirling, Alexander Hamilton and Tench Tilghman; the latter two were aides to General Washington.

It is likely that Abraham Staats enlarged the house by adding the southwest and northwest bedrooms when he became owner in 1781. The southwest bedroom was originally used as a parlor. The oval frieze in the center of the fireplace over the mantle and the pilasters were added between 1790-1815. The northwest room was used as both a bedroom and a dining area.

The old kitchen is thought to have been built c. 1740, as a freestanding building before the southwest and northwest rooms next to it were built. There is some speculation as to whether the kitchen was the first building constructed on the property. The corner staircase leads to a small garret, or attic, located above the kitchen, which served as the slave quarters of the household. The hand-wrought strap hinges on the door have leather pads under the nails in the round nailing plate. A Suffolk latch, with bean pod nailing plates, was used on the door.

The east wing was expanded between 1821-1825 with a 2½-story addition consisting of a rear hall, kitchen and servant areas, dining room, central hall, and bedrooms on the second floor. The central hall has delicate leaded glass sidelights and a transom that surround the Federal-style door. The door features attenuated Tuscany columns backed by blocks beveled to simulate rusticated stone. The staircase has a beautifully carved newel post also dating to this period. Today, the Abraham Staats House has grown from its original two-room/upper garret home to its current multi-roomed structure, while the 305-acre property has diminished to a four-acre plot.

At Abraham's death in 1821, an inventory showed that he had prospered. He had surveying instruments worth $48 (among his most valuable possessions) and a light carriage worth $50. He loaned money at interest and had stock in the New Jersey Turnpike. Tax records show that Abraham owned approximately 260 acres, four to seven horses, and eleven cattle. The inventory also revealed that he owned five African American slaves: two men (Harry listed at $75 and Jack, worth $0 because he was in ill health), two women (Deyan,

listed at $20 and Hannah at $75), and a boy (Frank, valued at $125, who would become free in eleven years under New Jersey's Emancipation Act). Abraham's will left the house and property to his wife, who died one year later. Then the property was divided: half to the son, Isaac, and the other half divided in equal shares to the five daughters, three of whom were unmarried. Over the years the Staats siblings lived in the house—some for all their lives and others leaving but then returning. The last of the Staats siblings died in 1871. Abraham Staats was one of the most prosperous and respected citizens of Somerset County. He was a farmer, taught mathematics, surveying, and navigation, and was important locally as an ardent supporter of the American cause during the Revolution. After the war, he served as tax collector for Somerset County.

When the British occupied New Brunswick, there was the threat of looting, so Staats and his wife hid some valuables in the floor of his barn. He was considered an arch traitor by the British. In 1776 British General William Howe offered full pardon to those who would give up allegiance to the American cause. But the order excluded the outspoken Staats, his neighbor Hendrick Fisher, and two others who were branded outlaws and enemies of the Crown, to be hanged on sight. They were never caught.

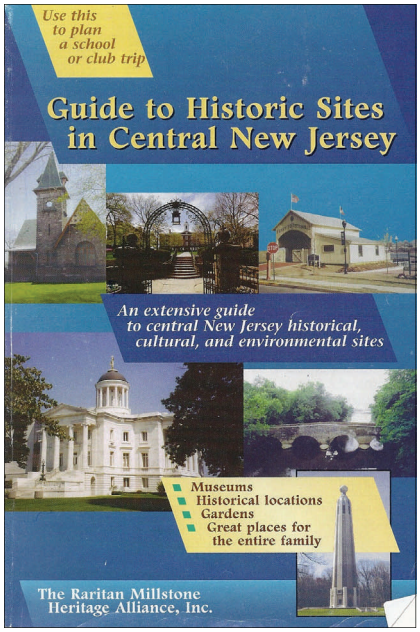
The Staats House is on the National and State Registers of Historic Places and was acquired by the Borough of South Bound Brook in 1999 with grant assistance provided by Somerset County. The Friends of Abraham Staats House has been established to support the ongoing restoration and preservation of properties directly related to the history of South Bound Brook. The primary focus is on preservation of the historic Abraham Staats House located on Von Steuben Lane, South Bound Brook. For further information, visit www.staatshouse.org.

References:

1. *Historic Somerset*, compiled by J. H. Van Horn
2. *Historical Geography of NJ to the Civil War*, Professor Peter O. Wacker, Drew University, Madison, NJ
3. *Geographic Features Affected South Bound Brook, NJ*, Kathy Faulks
4. Bound Brook Library, archival library staff.
5. Friends of Abraham Staats House

RARITAN-MILLSTONE GUIDEBOOK TO HISTORIC SITES

We are pleased to announce that the latest edition of the Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance's *Guide to Historic Sites in Central New Jersey* will be published later this winter.



The guidebook lists approximately 150 sites, including museums, historic homes, libraries, parks, churches, bridges, graveyards, theaters, and other sites in the Raritan and Millstone valleys. There is also informational text about many of the towns in which the sites are located.

This will be the last published issue of the guidebook. From now on, the sites will be posted on our website, www.raritanmillstone.org, where additions and changes can be made to update the guide as needed.

The guidebook committee has worked long and hard to add more information to this new version. Committee members are John Allen, Linda Barth, Ursula Brecknell*, Ellen Dawson, George Dawson (editor), Sarah Israel, Elyce Jennings, Carol Natarelli, Constance O'Grady, Marilyn Rautio, Christine Retz, Stephen Russell, Ann Suydam, Kathryn Stryker*, Jan tenBroeke, and Barbara Westergaard.

*deceased

CALENDAR OF CENTRAL JERSEY EVENTS

Saturday, January 21—"Murder Most Malicious." Noted popular NJ historian Tom Ainsworth talks about Ernest Ingenito, Robert Redlin, Carl Cuppolino, Robert Zarinsky, Joseph Kallinger, John List, Howard Unruh, Thomas Tarantino. Is this a baseball roster? Or a real "Murderer's Row"? Relive the stories and crimes of eight of New Jersey's most famous killers. Were these guys from your county? Town? Down the block? What did they do? Where? Why? What happened to them? Learn all the answers – and be prepared to sleep with one eye open in our "Garden State." Van Liew-Suydam House, 280 South Middlebush Road, Somerset, NJ 08873.2-4 p.m. Tix are $10. 732-748-7657.

Sunday, January 29—The Ferry Slip Museum proudly presents noted historian and author Gordon Bond with a fascinating program on Thomas Mundy Peterson. Please join us as we celebrate Black History Month by the telling of the story of the first black man to vote under the 15th Amendment. How ironic that he voted in Perth Amboy City Hall, a building that had witnessed the selling of black slaves in the circle in front of it! 2:00 PM. The Ferry Slip Museum, 300 Front Street, Perth Amboy 08861. For information: Kathleen Manning DePow, 732-442-5425.

Sunday, February 12—Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance: **George Washington's Birthday Party**, Forsgate Country Club, Monroe Township (see page one).

Sunday, February 12—Five Generals Bus Tour: Times: 10:00 am, 11:00 am, 12:00 am, 1:00 pm, and 2:00 pm. Discover the five original historic houses that served as headquarters during the Second Middlebrook Encampment, 1778–1789: Van Horne House, Bridgewater; Van Veghten House, Finderne; Abraham Staats House, South Bound Brook; Jacobus Vanderveer House, Bedminster; and Wallace House, Somerville. A visit to these historic sites offers a unique educational experience for young and old alike to learn about these unique places and the generals who made them their homes and offices during the American Revolution. Tours start at the Van Horne House , 941 East Main Street, Bridgewater (across from Patriots Ballpark) and take approx. two hours. FREE, but space is limited and reservations are required. Call 732-356-8856 for reservations, or sign up online: at www.heritagetrail.org.

Saturday, February 18—"True Freedom Fighters." The Meadows marks Black History month with a fascinating program on black soldiers in the Civil War. Van Liew-Suydam House, 280 South Middlebush Road, Somerset, NJ 08873; 732-748-7657. 2-4 p.m. Tix are $10.

Thursday, March 15—Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance **board meeting**: Historic Morven, Stockton Street (Route 206), Princeton, 1:30-3:00 pm. (See page two.)

Saturday, March 17 – "The Legend of the Freedom Quilt." Meadows perennial favorite Trish Chambers will do a presentation, performed in period costume, that discusses the history, legends and personal stories that make up the rich heritage associated with the Underground Railroad. Explore how African traditions and the use of story cloths documented the history of the tribes and set the stage for the slaves to learn the lessons needed for survival during the arduous journey to freedom. African slave songs and the lessons contained in them are also discussed. Van Liew Suydam House, 280 South Middlebush Road, Somerset, NJ 08873; 732-748-7657.2-4 p.m. Tix are $10.

Saturday, April 14 – Living history event at the Wyckoff-Garretson House, 215 South Middlebush Road, Somerset 08873. Details TBA. 732-748-7657.

Thursday, April 19—Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance Annual Meeting, Raritan Yacht Club, 160 Water Street, Perth Amboy 08861.

Saturday, April 21 – "The Richard Stockton/Morven Story," presented by NJ historian Don Peck. The Meadows Foundation. Van Liew-Suydam House, 280 S. Middlebush Road, Somerset 08873. 2-4 p.m. Tix are $10. 732-748-7657.

Saturday, April 28—"Springtime Tea" - 2-4 p. m. The Meadows Foundation, Van Liew Suydam House, 280 South Middlebush Road, Somerset, NJ 08873; 732-748-7657.

Thursday, May 17—Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance **board meeting**, 1:30-3:00. Place to be announced.

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

RARITAN MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

Membership Contribution

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☐ Individual $35
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Thank you!
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