

A Walking Tour of



Historic Basking Ridge Village

Sponsored by
The Historical Society of
the Somerset Hills

Founded in 1928
Headquartered in the Brick Academy

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Welcome to the village of Basking Ridge...

Introduction

Although the stately elms are gone and the broad main street is now paved, many of the beloved landmarks survive in the picturesque village center of Basking Ridge, New Jersey. Over the years Basking Ridge has embraced new buildings and changing styles, which is what in essence defines the character of the village. The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills cordially invites you to take a walking tour and discover - or rediscover - 250 years of history.

The buildings span a variety of periods and styles. The earliest structures date back to the 1700s and the newest ones were constructed in 2003. Many of the buildings were initially erected as private residences and are based on traditional “vernacular” architectural forms while others are impressive examples of formal architectural styles. Overall, the village reflects the stylistic changes in American architecture which took place over two centuries and which convey the feeling of a historic village particularly well.

Historic Context

Basking Ridge, along with Liberty Corner and Lyons, is part of Bernards Township. The origin of the township dates to 1717, when John Harrison, an agent of the King of England, purchased 3,000 acres from Chief Nowenoik of the Lenni Lenape Indians. The earliest settlers were mainly of Scottish and Irish origin, many emigrating from New England via Woodbridge, Elizabethtown and Piscataway.

The name Basking Ridge, initially written “Baskenridge”, first appeared in the records of the Presbyterian Church in 1733. According to local legend, the name originated with early settlers who watched wild animals come up from the swampland and bask in the sun on the side of the long ridge.

During the American Revolutionary War as many as 100 Bernards Township men joined the fight for freedom. Basking Ridge was at the center of the “Crossroads of the Revolution.” Elias Boudinot, president of the Continental Congress, lived just north of the village during the war. Major General William Alexander, better known by his title of Lord Stirling, lived east of the village in a Georgian manor house that has been described as the grandest in the colonies at the time.

George Washington’s Continental Army passed through Basking Ridge on several occasions, and one of the most notorious events in the war occurred several blocks south of the village: In December 1776, Major General Charles Lee, second in command to General Washington, was ignominiously captured in his nightshirt by British Dragoons at Widow White’s Tavern.

The first post office in Basking Ridge was established in 1802 and by 1827 there was stagecoach service to New York. In 1840, the village had forty dwellings, four stores, a church, an academy and several mechanics. In 1872, the railroad was completed, which greatly benefited the local peach growers and also brought summer visitors to the area.

Tour

The walking tour begins at the Brick Academy, home of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, but you may begin at any point. Site numbers correspond to street addresses along South Finley Avenue. The architectural style of each building is noted in *italic*.

We hope you enjoy your tour...

The Brick Academy

15 West Oak Street

In 1764, Reverend Dr. Samuel Kennedy established a classical school at a farmstead four miles south of the village. He soon moved back to town and continued the school there until his death in 1787.

The school prepared boys for college, with many going on to the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). In 1795, Reverend Robert Finley resumed the school, and in 1809 with enrollment rapidly increasing he built the Brick Academy. It continued as a private academy until the mid-19th Century. From 1853 to 1903 it served as Basking Ridge Public School District #12 for grades kindergarten through eighth.



The building was then acquired by two fraternal organizations: Ancient Order United Workmen (1904-1925) and the Junior Order United American Mechanics (1925-1948). Another fraternal organization associated with the Brick Academy during this period was the Patriot Order Sons of America.

Bernards Township rented the main floor for meetings and then purchased the Federal style schoolhouse in 1948. After the township offices were relocated in 1975, the Brick Academy became the headquarters of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills.

The main floor is now a museum and the lower level is a research center for local genealogy and historic preservation. The Brick Academy is listed on the National and New Jersey State Registers of Historic Places. *Style: Federal*



South Finley Avenue – West Side

Address

1 Erected in the mid-19th Century, the structure was rebuilt for a second time following the Great Fires of 1880 and 1881. At that time it was **Belden's Store and Bakery**. Later it was operated as the City Store, owned by Henry Tobleman. In 1919, the Cerino brothers bought the property and ran a general store until the 1960s when it was sold and remodeled. *Style: Greek Revival*



11 The present building, dating from 1882, was once the lifetime residence of **Postmaster William Scheuerman** and served as the town's post office from 1919 to 1952. It replaced an earlier one, the first home of the Basking Ridge Methodist Episcopal Church, that was also destroyed by the fires of 1880-1881. *Style: Vernacular*

21 Thought to be the oldest building on the block, as early as 1830. It was saved from the Great Fires by being covered with wet carpets and blankets. In the late 1880s, Robert Bishop had his home and harness shop here. Later Dr. Frederick C. Jones, a prominent physician in the community for nearly 30 years, made it his residence and medical office. *Style: Vernacular*

25 **Ira Pruden House.** This brick building was constructed in two sections (circa 1825 and circa 1850) and is one of the more ornate structures in town. From 1898 to 1908, it was home to the public library. A community room with a small stage and bowling alleys in the basement generated income to pay library expenses. *Style: Colonial Revival with a 19th Century core*

South Finley Avenue – West Side

Address

31 Christopher Barkalow House. Built as a private residence, circa 1868, this brick building served as the public library from 1893 to 1898, with sisters Mary and Elizabeth Barkalow as librarians. *Style: Vernacular with Italianate and Gothic details*

35-37 The P.C. Henry Co. Building, constructed around 1860, was a general store for many years. In the late 1960s, Howard Brush removed the ‘false front’ and restored it to the original appearance with the gable end facing the street. *Style: Vernacular*

39-47 The W.E. Tunis Building, one of the largest on the avenue, was originally erected as a double house circa 1860. During the early 1900s, Tunis ran a confectionery store on the first floor and the Junior Order United American Mechanics, a fraternal organization, occupied the second floor. *Style: Italianate Vernacular with later additions*



55 The Washington House Hotel was built circa 1871 for Augustus Moore by Crayton Space, a local builder. It was described as “a three story building with cupola...has 16 sleeping rooms, a dining room seating 25 persons and stabling accommodations for 18 horses.” The hotel was nearly lost in the winter of 1947 when the cupola burned. *Style: Second Empire*

The early 19th Century **William Cooper House** is located nearby at 57 Brownlee Place. During the Civil War, uniforms for Union soldiers were sewn here. *Style: Vernacular*

South Finley Avenue – West Side

Address

87 Built in the mid-18th Century, this is considered the oldest building in the village. It was once the shop of **Aunt Carrie Cross**, who sold hats, laces and trimmings. The “eye-brow” windows were added in the 19th Century and the saltbox style house, initially on Henry Street, was relocated to this site in the 20th Century. *Style: Vernacular with Greek Revival details*

93 Erected around 1845, the original half house was occupied by a **Mrs. Oscar McMurtry** according to an 1873 Bernards Township map. *Style: Vernacular*

101 This building has been altered considerably through the years. The main section was constructed circa 1845 and the center cross gable was added later in the 19th Century, along with the Queen Anne style windows. It has been a funeral home since the 1930s. *Style: Vernacular with Queen Anne details*

125 With the cast iron fence in front original, this was one of the grandest manors in Basking Ridge. The home was constructed in 1871 by builder Crayton Space for **Horatio G. Whitnall**, Chief Surgeon of the Union Army, whose vast estate once included land that today is the location of Oak Street School. *Style: Second Empire*



135 The **David McDermott House** was built circa 1860, most likely in two phases. The elaborate door surround was added in the 20th Century. *Style: Vernacular*

South Finley Avenue – East Side

Address

140 St. Mark's Episcopal Church

The original St. Mark's chapel, located at the south end of the complex, was built circa 1853 and is the oldest Episcopal house of worship in the Somerset Hills.

The chapel stands today as a fine example of simplified (carpenter's) Gothic Revival architecture.



The historic landmark features a steeply pitched roof, narrow lancet windows, shingled frame buttresses and red lancet-arched double

doors under a gabled entry porch on the south facade.

Dedicated in 1968, the Modern Gothic Revival sanctuary, located at the north end of the complex, harmonizes well with the original St. Mark's Chapel. *Style: Gothic Revival*

The **John Guerin House**, circa 1860, now the church rectory, was moved down the hill to 25 Lewis Street when the new sanctuary was constructed. *Style: Vernacular*

Three small workmen's cottages are located on the north side of **Lewis Street** (originally called Mud Street). Two of the cottages (#20 and #36) were built in the early 19th Century for local dairy and dirt farmers. Both remained in the same families for generations with minimal interior changes. About 1870, a shed (#30) was built between the cottages to store milk from the dairy well across the street. Over the years it was expanded to a home, and then converted to a business.

South Finley Avenue – East Side

Address

- 134 Hattie Whitnall House.** The initial building at this location, Fehn’s Bake Shop, gave the name “Bake Shop Hill” to Lewis Street. The bakery was destroyed by fire in 1895 and the present residence was built on the site. *Style: Vernacular*
- 130** The rear building began as blacksmith shop about 1875, became a gas station in the 1920s, and then a garage after WWII. The home in front (#126) is also circa 1875. *Style: Vernacular*
- 118** This two and one-half story, gable end structure is 20th Century in origin, most likely around 1930. *Style: Vernacular*
- 108 Mrs. Van Arsdale House.** Basking Ridge Historical Society records dating from 1871 refer to the initial core of this dwelling as one of the oldest in the village; it reportedly dates to 1775. *Style: Colonial with later alterations*
- 102 Mrs. MacLaren House** was erected circa 1850. The exterior was restored in the 1980s when the building was renovated for professional offices. *Style: Vernacular*
- 96 Mrs. Doty House** dates to the 19th Century and has been altered for commercial use by adding the picture windows adjacent to the front entrance. *Style: Vernacular*
- 94 Mrs. Allodory House.** This early 19th Century residence was originally a three-bay side hall plan that was modified for a business by adding a fourth bay, presumably by a shoemaker named Isaac Keeler. A Dutch beehive oven is located in the rear of the building. *Style: Colonial*



South Finley Avenue – East Side

Address

66 This two and one-half story, frame, gable end house takes its name from **Layton Van Liew**, a carriage builder and wheelwright. It is another early village residence, dating to circa 1830, that has been altered over time. During the mid-20th Century, the house was the property of Saint James Catholic Church which used it as a rectory. The flared eaves of the roof may suggest some Dutch architecture influence.
Style: Federal Vernacular

Please turn right for a slight detour down Henry Street...

At the corner of Henry Street and South Maple Avenue is the earlier firehouse of **Basking Ridge Fire Company Number 1**, organized in 1904. The red brick building with clay tile roof was constructed in 1915 for the cost of \$10,000. Although small, it achieves an impression of importance with careful detailing and quality materials. The arched vehicle bays were converted into shop windows when the structure was sensitively adapted for commercial use in the 1990s.
Style: Mission/Eclectic Revival



The new construction next to the old firehouse has been caringly designed to compliment the architecture style of the original building (shown to the left in the photograph above).

The walking tour resumes at the top of Henry Street.

South Finley Avenue – East Side

Address

60 The **F.H. Flagg House** circa 1850 has been altered substantially over time. In 1923, W.E. Tunis remodeled the front of the building and moved his confectionery store from across the street. The earliest section, located at 4 Henry Street, can be established by the highest roofline. *Style: Vernacular*

22 Bishop Janes United Methodist Church

The 1900 church building, as shown in the photograph below, is located at the north end of what today is a large complex.

The stone edifice replaced a frame church built in 1853. The minister and members of the congregation hauled stones from the fields east of South Maple Avenue to form the outer walls of the sanctuary.

The Gothic inspired building retains a prominent front-facing gable that is dramatically marked by three lancet arches containing stained glass windows.

A matching gable and the stone bell tower were removed in 1964 when the church building was expanded to the south.

The bell from the church of 1900 hangs in the current bell tower that was constructed and dedicated in 1975. Other enlargements to the church were completed in 1953 and 2003. *Style: Gothic*



Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church

1 East Oak Street

With its majestic gold leaf dome and grand pediment facade the brick church is the dominant focal point of the village center. Built in 1839 by William Kirk and Thomas Kirkpatrick, it is an outstanding example of Greek Revival church architecture. The present building rests on the site of two former edifices: a small log meeting house circa 1717 in which the congregation first worshipped and later a larger frame structure, built around 1749. A 1907 addition designed by George B. Post, renowned architect of the New York Stock Exchange, is located at the northwest corner of the church. The Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church is listed on the National and New Jersey State Registers of Historic Places. Style: *Greek Revival*

The “Old Yard” cemetery surrounds the church. The earliest burial is Henry Haines in 1736. Thirty-five veterans of the Revolution are interred here. Over the tombstones broods the ancient White Oak (*Quercus alba*), more than 600 years old. It stands tall at 97', with a spread of 156' and a circumference of 18'. According to local lore, George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette picnicked under its shade and colonial soldiers stopped here to rest.



Across the street from the Presbyterian Church at 2 North Finley Avenue is the original Sunday School built in 1887. It was converted to a library in the early 1900s, and was later sheathed in brick veneer.

We hope you enjoyed your walking tour of historic Basking Ridge.

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**The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills
welcomes new members.**

To obtain information, please write
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