

# SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Thursday, March 7th, 2024

## Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

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### I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Commission President Rory Britt in compliance with the Open Public Meeting Notice Act, Chapter 231, PL 1975.

### II. Pledge of Allegiance

### III. Roll Call

**Commissioners:** Rory Britt, Kathy Faulks, Natalie Pineiro, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Maritza Martinez, Marge Sullivan

**Excused:** Donnetta Bishop-Johnson

**Absent:** Edwin Scannell

**Staff:** Kaitlin Bundy, Robert Meyer, Matthew Loper, Tom Boccino, Josephine Taranto

**Advisory Members:** Aldo Adiazola, Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Margareta Warlick, Leslie Workman

**Members of the Public:** Don Esposito, Jessie Havens

### IV. Approval of February 1st, 2024, Minutes

**Motion** to accept the minutes made by Robert Grundfest and seconded by Marge Sullivan. Passed.

### V. Correspondence

1. Kaitlin Bundy received postcards from Raritan Valley Community College's Arts & Design Department announcing that the annual Student Art Exhibition will be held in two installments again this year. Part I of the exhibition will be on display from February 26th to March 22nd, in the Art Gallery at the College's Branchburg campus. Part II of the exhibition will run from April 1st to 26th. The reception for Part I was held on Friday, March 1st, from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. The reception for Part II will be held on Friday, April 5th, from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. The event is free of charge and open to the public. <https://www.raritanval.edu/arts>
2. Kaitlin received a postcard from the Barron Arts Center in Woodbridge, announcing their exhibit: "Woodbridge Treasures: A Snapshot of Recreation, Leisure Activities, and Student Life from the Woodbridge Public Library Archives." The exhibit will be on view from March 11th to April 5th. <https://www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us/150/Barron-Arts-Center>
3. Kaitlin received the Van Harlingen Historian newsletter, from the Van Harlingen Historical Society, explaining the need for an Emergency Grant for the Dirk Gulick House. <http://vanharlingen.org>
4. Kaitlin also reported on a departmental change. The County created the new Department of Engineering and Planning headed by Matthew Loper. All the previous functions of Cultural & Heritage are part of the new Department. Manager Kaitlin Bundy now reports directly to Matthew Loper. The Historic Preservation section will remain under the Planning Division with Walter Lane. Matthew Loper, County Engineer and Director of the Office of Engineering and Planning, was in attendance and introduced himself to the Commission.
5. Josephine Taranto reported that staff received and responded to a number of letters:
  - I. The first was regarding the demolition of a residence located on an Open Space parcel acquired by Bernardsville Borough.

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- II. The second letter was regarding facility improvements to the Essex Hunt Club in Peapack-Gladstone, which required an intensive level architectural survey by Richard Grubb & Associates.
- III. The third letter was regarding the replacement of Somerset County Bridge G1404 (Structure No. 18G1404) carrying Lloyd Road over Indian Grove Brook in Bernardsville, which required an intensive level architectural survey by Richard Grubb & Associates.
- IV. The fourth letter was regarding the proposed residential development in Montgomery Township, which requires a Phase IA Archaeological Survey and an Intensive Level Historic Architectural Survey by Richard Grubb & Associates.

**VI. Staff Reports/Old Business**

**The following reports were made by Kaitlin Bundy:**

**Local Arts Program Grant.** The Local Arts Program Grant (LAP) are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to primarily re-grant out to local non-profits and municipalities.

**2023 Grant.** Final payments have been released to thirteen of the fifteen 2023 regrant organizations. Staff are working with the remaining two organizations to finalize their final reports to close out the 2023 grant year. Staff has submitted the Commission's final report to the State Arts Council which has been reviewed and accepted for close out by the State.

**2024 Grant.** 2024 Local Arts Program grant funds have been awarded to sixteen organizations. Contracts have been sent out to all 2024 re-grantees and are due back March 15th, 2024. Staff are finalizing details to schedule the presentation of ceremonial checks at the March 26th, 2024, County Commissioners meeting. The Borough of South Bound Brook has formally declined their award and staff will be moving to rescind the grant in our system. The funding will be moved to the Cultural & Heritage operating line to be used for Cultural & Heritage programming.

**National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Sub-granting for Local Arts Agencies Grant.** Funds from the National Endowment for the Arts are intended to help support jobs in the arts sector, keep the doors open to arts organizations, and assist the field in its response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Final payments have been released to five of the six regrant organizations. Staff are working with the remaining organization to finalize their final report to close out this grant round with the NEA.

**New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant.** The Cultural & Heritage Commission received a Project Grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission to fund the design and development of a Docent Training Program. This program is being piloted with the Five Generals Houses. Staff met with Ahali Consulting LLC in February to begin project activities. To help guide project direction, staff also formed a Docent Training Program Advisory Committee including representatives from each of the Five Generals Houses and County staff. The Committee's project kickoff meeting occurred on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Ahali Consulting was able to visit all five sites in-person in February and have begun their

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---

---

research into best practices in the field of docentry in historic sites. Staff and the Committee will be meeting with Ahali Consulting regularly as the project develops.

**Long Range Plan.** A public hearing of the Cultural & Heritage Commission's Long Range Plan for consideration of adoption into the County Master Plan was held during the Somerset County Planning Board's February 20th, 2024, meeting. Notice was sent out to all Somerset County municipal clerks and planning board secretaries. The public hearing was also advertised, and staff sent out additional notice about the hearing to all local arts, history and cultural organizations. Public comment will remain open until March 21st, 2024. The Somerset County Planning Board will vote on the adoption at their April 16th, 2024, meeting.

**2024 Teen Arts Festival.** The Somerset County 2024 Teen Arts Festival will be held on Thursday, May 16th, 2024, at Raritan Valley Community College. This is the Commission's annual arts education opportunity for middle school and high school students throughout the County to come together and celebrate their accomplishments in the arts. Staff have been working to acquire a roster of 30+ diverse and talented artists in the various creative disciplines to critique student work and performances, as well as offer a variety of workshops and masterclasses. Staff member Katie Himics will be reaching out to the Commission and Advisory Board in the near future about volunteer opportunities at the festival.

**2024 Technical Assistance Workshops.** Throughout 2024, a selection of professionally-led technical assistance workshops will be offered to benefit our local non-profit organizations. The first of the Commission's 2024 technical assistance workshops, "The ADA and Removing Access Barriers" will be held in-person on Tuesday, March 19th, 2024, from 10:00am to 12:00pm. Registration for this workshop will close on March 13th, 2024. This workshop will be led by Jennifer Perry, Access Specialist with the Northeast ADA Center at Cornell University. Ms. Perry will provide organizations with an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act and discuss achievable ways for an organization to remove access barriers and develop accessible programs and policies.

### **The following reports were made by Robert Meyer:**

**CHPP Grant.** The County History Partnership Program Grant (CHPP) are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Historical Commission to primarily re-grant out to local non-profits and municipalities.

**2023 Grant.** Staff has received all 2023 final reports and payment has been released for seven of the eight re-grantees. Staff are working with the remaining organizations to finalize their final reports to close out the 2023 grant year. Staff also submitted the final report to the New Jersey State Historical Commission on January 30th, 2024, which has been reviewed and accepted for closeout by the State.

**2024 Grant.** 2024 CHPP grant funds have been awarded to 7 organizations. Contracts have been sent out to all 2024 re-grantees and are due back on March 15th, 2024. Staff are finalizing details to schedule the presentation of ceremonial checks at the March 26th, 2024, County Commissioners meeting.

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---

---

**Cooperative Marketing Grant.** The Cooperative Marketing Grant are funds the Commission receives from the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism to market and promote the Commission's Heritage Tourism event, Journey Through the Past.

**2023 Grant.** Staff submitted the final report to the Division of Travel and Tourism on February 13th, 2024.

**2024 Grant.** Our 2024 grant was approved in the amount of \$12,450. The first ad has been submitted to the Hook Magazine and will run in their April/May/June issue. Additional print ads will follow in Bucks County Magazine and Edible Jersey. Digital ads will run with Edible Jersey and Hudson Valley Magazine as the date of this year's Journey gets closer.

**Gallery.** On March 8th, 2024, the "Art Access Program at Matheny" exhibit will officially open. This exhibit features 43 pieces from Matheny Medical and Educational Center's Arts Access Program. The Matheny Medical and Educational Center is a special hospital for individuals of all ages with medically complex developmental disabilities. Their Arts Access Program is designed specifically to inspire, uplift, and encourage the aspirations of artists with disabilities. The program allows these artists to explore a variety of disciplines, including dance, creative writing, drama, and visual art, and create works that are distinctly their own. This gallery also coincides with Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which is observed annually each March.

**Historic Preservation and History Awards.** Nominations are open for the 2024 Historic Preservation and History Awards and are due by March 15th, 2024. Awardees will be notified in April and a ceremony will be held in May. This year, nominations can be submitted online or through the traditional paper method. If you know any individuals or organizations that you think would be worthy of an award, please pass the information along to them. If you are unsure if they have already received an award, a list of all previous winners can be found on our website.

### **The following reports were made by Josephine Taranto:**

**Historic Preservation Grant Program.** The 2023 Somerset County Historic Preservation Grant Program contracts have been reviewed by County Counsel, revised, and are being mailed out to the grantees. The signed documents are due on or before April 5th, 2024. Staff also contacted the recipients of the 2022 grant awards to ask for progress reports on their ongoing projects. Each 2022 grantee has provided a progress report.

### **County Historic Preservation Projects:**

**Van Horne House.** The Van Horne House will be undergoing its third and final phase of restoration. This includes window restoration, exterior siding, and the roof on the west side's addition, existing ramp replacement. Marge Sullivan asked when the bid went out for this project, as there was some confusion on if or when the bid had gone out yet. Matthew Loper checked the bid schedule and was able to confirm that the project had not yet gone out to bid but was moving through the necessary steps to go for bid in the coming months.

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Thursday, March 7th, 2024

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---

---

**First Dutch Reformed Church, Stained Glass Window Project.** Engineering Staff and Preservation Planning Staff are waiting to receive an updated quote to complete this restoration project. Staff are hoping to complete the last remaining vertical panels, as well as the large rosette window.

**County Owned Historic Sites Assessment.** Staff are expecting a final draft of the assessment shortly.

**Lord Stirling Park.** Staff are waiting on the consultant for the report on this project.

**The Old Stone Arch Bridge.** There are no updates to report on the Old Stone Arch Bridge acquisition project. Projected closing date is July 15th, 2024.

### Other:

Marge Sullivan thanked the Commission for writing a letter of support for the nomination of Somerville's St. Thomas AME Church to the newly proposed New Jersey Black Heritage Trail. The nomination was submitted to the New Jersey Historical Commission on March 6th, 2024.

## VII. New Business/Action Items

**Travels with Darley Preview.** On Tuesday, March 19th, 2024, from 5:00pm to 6:30pm, a special watch party event will be held at Flounder Brewing Co. with a preview screening of *Travels with Darley: Revolutionary Road Trip New Jersey*, a special episode of the PBS series that features Somerset County. The event is free, but registration is required to attend.

<https://members.scbp.org/events-calendar/details/somerset-county-watch-party-1073946>

**Letter of Support – Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead.** Motion to write a letter of support for the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead made by Marge Wolan-Sullivan and seconded by Natalie Pineiro. Passed.

**Division of Travel and Tourism 2025 Cooperative Marketing Grant.** Motion to support the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission in applying for a 2025 Cooperative Marketing Grant made by Kathy Faulks and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

## VIII. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Jonathan Hress attended “We Were Here ~ The Enslaved People of Colonial America,” and congratulated the organizations involved, the Witness Stone Projects Inc., South Bound Brook School, and the Friends of Abraham Staats House, for a well-run and well attended event. This collaborative project commemorated Henry “Harry” Staats, an enslaved person of the Staats Farmstead at the Abraham Staats House. Johnathan also attended the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at Rockingham State Historic Site and went on the second-floor porch which normally is not open to visitors. He noted that this event was also well attended.
2. Marge Sullivan announced upcoming events offered online from the Wallace House & Old Dutch Parsonage State Historic Site. The kickoff was a celebration of Civil War veteran Arabella Griffith

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Thursday, March 7th, 2024

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---

---

Barlow's 200th Birthday, which featured a series of interpretive programs uncovering Somerville's Civil War heroine made possible by the Wallace House & Old Dutch Parsonage Association with the sponsorship of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. Author Andrea Quinn follows the life of Arabella Griffith Barlow in this year's first issue of Gettysburg Magazine.

Marge encouraged all to attend the "Middlebrook Symposium - Why Washington Chose Middlebrook: Geography and Logistics" on Saturday, March 16th, 2024, from 9:00am to 3:30pm. The Symposium will be held at the Raritan Valley Community College Conference Center. Tickets are available online. <http://www.htanj.org>

Marge also announced that the Somerset County Library System has encouraged its branches to hold "Throwback Thursday" programs to focus on presenting their archival information to the public. She noted that not all branches are holding these programs yet and suggested patrons request them if they would like their local branch to have them. <https://sclsnj.org/>

3. Natalie Pineiro stated that the Downtown Somerville Alliance has a goal of having at least one major art installation per year. This year they are considering expanding the Paul Robeson sculpture project to include murals of his life. The Downtown Somerville Alliance is also looking for help with protecting the many murals which are on privately owned buildings. Any advice, examples of similar projects or samples of agreements would be appreciated. Kaitlin Bundy stated that she would connect Natalie with Danielle Bursk, Director of Community Partnerships & Artist Services at the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.
4. Kathy Faulks thanked everyone who attended "We Were Here ~ The Enslaved People of Colonial America." Somerset County Commissioner Melanie Marano spoke at the special introduction held at South Bound Brook Robert Morris School and Somerset County Commissioner Director Shanel Robinson made an address at the Abraham Staats House. Also attending were Brad Fay, Surrogate Tina Jollah, Kaitlin Bundy, Jonathan Hress, and Donetta-Bishop Johnson. She praised the partnership between the Friends of the Abraham Staats House, South Bound Brook Robert Morris School and Witness Stone Project Inc., who provided a curriculum to the school. She also noted that the students were the ones to place the Witness Stone in honor of Henry "Harry" Staats.  
Kathy also announced upcoming programs at the Abraham Staats House: On Saturday, March 9th, 2024, at 3:00pm, the Friends of Abraham Staats House will host "A Nest of American Hornets: New Jersey's Forage War of 1777," a fascinating look at local history during the American Revolution presented by historian Ryan Radice. Tickets are \$10 with advance reservations and \$15 at the door. On Saturday, March 23rd, 2024, at 3:00pm, "18th Century Dutch Music in America" will be presented by The Practitioners of Musick. Enjoy this unique live performance of music enjoyed and played in Colonial America. The program reflects late 17th & 18th century Dutch and English popular music heard in New Netherlands and New Amsterdam, and includes a march composed in honor of General von Steuben. Tickets are \$20 with advance reservations and \$25 at the door. [www.staatshouse.org](http://www.staatshouse.org)
5. Rory Britt announced that on Saturday, March 9th, 2024, from 11:00am to 4:00pm the Kirch-Ford-Terril House will be open to the public and that the Warren Township School District will be there to teach the 6th to 8th grade members of their History Club to be docents. Later in the year the students will lead the 4th graders on tours of four historic sites in the township.

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**Thursday, March 7th, 2024**

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---

---

**IX. Advisory Committee Comments**

1. Margareta Warlick announced that the Warren Township Historic Sites Committee elected new officers.
2. Leslie Workman thanked the Commission for the letter of support for the Kennedy-Martin-Stelle Farmstead. The letter will be submitted along with an application for a New Jersey Historic Trust Capital Grant to be used for restoring the Wagon House. The vision for the project is to use the Wagon House as a visitor's center that is more centrally located.  
Leslie noted that attendance at Farmstead Arts Center events has been increasing and that the upcoming traditional Irish music event for St. Patrick's Day is sold out.  
[www.farmsteadartscenter.org](http://www.farmsteadartscenter.org)  
Leslie also announced that there has been big excitement at the Farmstead, as a Warner Brothers location scout came to view the property. Jonathan Hress suggested liability insurance may be needed to ensure that the site is protected should it be chosen as a filming location.
3. Rikki Massand received a letter from Robert Von Zumbusch, President of the Millstone Valley Preservation Coalition, which noted the audio tour of the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway. The tour is different from the one offered previously, includes geocache markers and was funded in part by a County History Partnership Program Grant. <https://www.millstonevalley.org/index.html>  
Rikki noted that the Montgomery News featured a wonderful article by Linda Barth about the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the D&R Canal State Park. <https://www.themontynews.org/single-post/celebrating-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-d-r-canal-state-park>  
Rikki also wished everyone a happy International Women's Day for March 8th. <https://www.internationalwomensday.com>
4. Brian Faulks noted that he and Kathy Faulks attended the Northern Slave Collective's annual conference, which was held on Monday, February 5th, 2024. One of the projects discussed concerned identification of "Freedom Seekers." Rather than use artificial intelligence (ai) or technology to create visual renditions of "runaways," artists were employed to create likenesses. Brian suggested that the same could be done using the descriptions of "runaways" found in the Somerset Quarterly, published in the early 1900's, and have artists do an interpretation of them. Jessie Havens commented that "runaways" may have been indentured servants and suggested looking carefully at the records.

**X. Public Comments**

1. Don Esposito announced The Lesser Séamus Quartet will be performing traditional Irish songs at the Bridgewater Library on Friday, March 8th, 2024, at 7:00 PM. Don also congratulated Matthew Loper on his new position.
2. Jessie Havens discussed the Rock Brook Bridge on Long Hill and Dutchtown-Zion Roads, in Hillsborough Township.

**Announcements/Other News:**

**The next SCC&HC meeting will be hybrid, in person and virtual, on Thursday, April 4th, 2024.**

**XI. Closed Session Meeting**

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**Thursday, March 7th, 2024**

**Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting**

---

---

**Motion** to close the meeting to the public made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Maritza Martinez.

Passed.

1. Emergency Grant Request – Dirck Gulick House
2. Historic Preservation Grant Policy Discussion

**XII. Reopen Meeting**

**Motion** to exit closed session meeting and reopen the meeting to the public made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

**XIII. Adjournment**

**Motion** to adjourn made by Natalie Pineiro and seconded by Maritza Martinez. Passed.

Adjournment 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

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