

SPOTLIGHT



THROUGH SPRING AND SUMMER



CELEBRATE AMERICA 250



SOMERSET COUNTY
Where History Comes Alive



Your COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ARE HERE TO SERVE YOU

The Somerset County Board of County Commissioners hold regular public meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in the County Administration Building located at 20 Grove Street in Somerville. Regular meetings start immediately following the 5 p.m. agenda session and are streamed live on the County website. Items discussed at each agenda session are voted on at the next regular meeting that occurs two or three weeks later.



To learn more about our elected officials, visit: SomersetCountyNJ.gov



Photographed from top: Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson, Deputy Director Paul M. Drake, Commissioners Sara Sooy, Melonie Marano, and Elizabeth Graner.

Your CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

Our County Clerk, our County Sheriff, and our County Surrogate perform essential governmental duties and play a crucial role in our County.



Photographed from left to right: **Bernice "Tina" Jalloh, Surrogate;** **Darrin J. Russo, Sheriff;** **Steve Peter, Clerk.**

SOMERSET COUNTY

Where History Comes Alive

Somerset County played a pivotal role during the Revolutionary War, acting as a strategic hub for both military operations and the lodging of high-ranking Continental Army officers.

We hope you enjoy this special edition. Because of its proximity to key battlefronts and its strategic location between Philadelphia and New York, Somerset County was a key corridor for troop movements and encampments. George Washington and his top Generals stayed in local homes and taverns throughout the region, turning these locations into important historical sites. The presence of these leaders not only influenced military strategies but also connected Somerset County to the broader struggle for American independence, cementing its place in the revolutionary narrative.

The Five Generals Houses hold significant historical importance as they served as the headquarters for Washington's top generals during the Revolutionary War.

Our Five Generals



GEORGE WASHINGTON



GENERAL BARON VON STEUBEN



GENERAL HENRY KNOX



GENERAL NATHANAEL GREENE



GENERAL WILLIAM ALEXANDER, LORD STIRLING

As the United States marks 250 years since the Declaration of Independence was signed, Somerset County is stepping forward with a simple message: **the American Revolution didn't just pass through here — it took shape here.**



The Heart of New Jersey!

EXPERIENCE THE EVENTS THAT SHAPED SOMERSET COUNTY

Explore events that bring the past 250 years to life or add your special event to the growing calendar. Somerset County is at the heart of it all:

visitsomersetnj.org/celebrate-250



EVENTS OF NOTE



JUNE 18



Juneteenth



Celebrate Juneteenth, "America at 250: Freedom Delayed, Justice Still Rising" on the Historic Courthouse Green in Somerville from 4 - 6:30 p.m.

JULY 3

Have a Blast!

View fireworks at North Branch Park in Bridgewater. Entertainment and live music 8:30 - 11 p.m. Gates open at 6 p.m. Fireworks to begin at 9:30 p.m.



JULY 8



Sharing the Spirit of America



Celebrate America with a nationwide reading of the Declaration of Independence. Hosted in the Historic Courthouse in Somerville from 5:30 - 7 p.m.

JULY 18

History on the Green

Step back into the past and visit Revolutionary-era New Jersey at Somerset County's free living history event for the whole family. Hosted on the Courthouse Green in Somerville from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

AUG 5-7



Somerset County 4-H Fair

With a rich history connected to the local community, the 4-H Fair has become an annual cornerstone of Somerset County. Hosted 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. at North Branch Park in Bridgewater.

Explore HISTORY right in your backyard



THE PHILIP VAN HORNE HOUSE

When Philip Van Horne built his house in 1754, he could not have imagined the many identities it would undertake in the three centuries it has stood proudly in Somerset County.

The residence was famous throughout the region as a lively gathering place for officers, travelers, and neighbors, and became known for entertaining both American and British soldiers.

Its most defining role came during the winter of 1778-79 when General William Alexander, better known as Lord Stirling, made it his headquarters during the Second Middlebrook Encampment. The house stood at the center of military planning, social activity, and the daily life of America's Army.

"The Van Horne House is one of Somerset County's most significant Revolutionary era landmarks," said Commissioner Melonie Marano. "With support from Somerset County, the Heritage Trail Association has transformed the house into a place where history comes to life through reenactments, interactive tours, period music, hands on workshops, and partnerships that reach far beyond the County. The programs held here help residents experience history in a meaningful and accessible way. The County is proud to support a site that brings people together and strengthens our understanding of the past."

Being headquartered at the Van Horne House gave Lord Stirling placement at the edge of the Watchung Mountains, a natural stronghold that provided the Continental Army a commanding view over British movements across Central New Jersey. Widely regarded as one of George Washington's most loyal and dependable commanders, Stirling used his surveying skills to map defensive positions. He also used

the surrounding heights to establish a network of signal beacons that could summon the New Jersey militia in times of need to maintain the encampment's security. Stirling's time here anchors the house firmly within the story of the Middlebrook Encampment and the broader Five Generals Houses narrative.

One of the most unique artifacts of the Van Horne House is an authentic merchant log from 1744-45, a rare surviving record of the family's daily purchases. The entries offer a glimpse into the routines of 18th century life, including a note that the family paid two pounds (equal to \$380 today) for a year of shaving.

A historical spirit continues throughout the year at the Philip Van Horne House. A full calendar of hands on programs invites you to experience history for yourself.

The Philip Van Horne House is located at 941 East Main Street in Bridgewater. It welcomes visitors during scheduled programs. If you are interested in exploring the history of the Philip Van Horne House, visit heritagetrail.org



THE JACOBUS VANDERVEER HOUSE

Long before the Jacobus Vanderveer House became a cornerstone of America's military history, it stood as a quiet Dutch home established by Jacobus Vanderveer. On the edge of a growing Bedminster settlement in

the mid 1700s, the house was the centerpiece of a prosperous Dutch farmstead and stood at the heart of a working landscape shaped by agriculture, trade, and the early settlers of Bedminster Township.

During the winter of 1778-79, the gentle pace at the farm took a drastic turn. General Henry Knox, commander of the Continental Army's artillery and George Washington's most trusted military advisor, selected the Jacobus Vanderveer House as his headquarters during the Second Middlebrook Encampment. From this home, Knox oversaw the training, supply, and organization of the artillery forces that would transform the Continental army at the Pluckemin Artillery Cantonment tucked in the Watchung mountains. Knox's supervision would prove to be essential to the America's success in defeating the British.

"Somerset County is home to the earliest foundations of American military education, and the Jacobus Vanderveer House stands at the center of that story," said Commissioner Elizabeth Graner. "On the same soil we can now walk, officers here

once studied engineering, mathematics, and artillery science."

Knox's presence placed the Jacobus Vanderveer House at the center of a transformative moment in American military development. His work here strengthened the professionalism of the artillery corps and helped shape the strategic decisions that guided the encampment.

The Jacobus Vanderveer House is a place where the story of early Bedminster, the leadership of General Knox, and the origins of American military education



intersect. Visitors are invited to explore the house, walk the grounds, and experience the history that helped shape Somerset County and the nation.

The Jacobus Vanderveer House is located at 3055 River Road in Bedminster. The house offers private group tours by appointment and a full calendar of living history events, educational programs, and seasonal activities that invite guests to explore the site's many layers of history. Whether visitors come to learn about Knox's artillery, early Dutch settlement, or the evolution of military training in America, the Jacobus Vanderveer House offers an experience rooted in authenticity and discovery: jvhbedminster.org



THE WALLACE HOUSE & OLD DUTCH PARSONAGE

Near the heart of downtown Somerville, tucked away from the bustling shops and restaurants of Main Street, exists the Wallace House - the famous home where General George Washington made his headquarters during the Second Middlebrook Encampment.

But, did you know that the adjacent Old Dutch Parsonage helped shape the future of Somerset County and establish higher-education in New Jersey?

"Somerset County is deeply connected to the people and places that contributed to the foundation of our Country and State," said Deputy Director Paul M. Drake. "As we celebrate the nation's anniversary, we can see how far we've progressed and remember the sacrifices it took to enjoy the freedoms and opportunities we have today. Two hundred and fifty years later, we still have the privilege to step through the doors of these historic sites."

Moved to its present location in 1913, the Old Dutch Parsonage was originally constructed in 1751 and was located at the end of what is today known as South Doughty Avenue in Somerville.

In 1754, over 20-years before the American Revolution, Reverend Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh moved



THERE IS MORE!

There are more historical locations beyond our Five Generals Houses. To explore the County's full suite of historical stops, immerse yourself in our NEW digital storymap: SomersetCountyNJ.gov/History250

LEARN MORE ON PAGE 8



Top: Commissioner Sara Sooy visits the genealogical records room at the Van Veghten House. Middle: Antique pottery on display from the Wallace House & Old Dutch Parsonage. Bottom: Deputy Director Paul M. Drake listens as a docent shares the story of the Philip Van Horne House.



ARE YOU LOOKING FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY FUN?

History isn't just found in textbooks—it's preserved in the records of the people who lived it. Explore SCLSNJ's archives, attend a historical program, and more: sclsnj.org/programs-and-events/americas-250th-birthday/





Top: Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson speaking with docents at the Abraham Staats House. Middle Top: Authentic Philip Van Horne merchant log, 1744-45. Middle Bottom: Commissioner Melonie Marano with volunteers at the Philip Van Horne House. Bottom: Commissioner Elizabeth Graner outside the Jacobus Vanderveer House.

into the Old Dutch Parsonage after the passing of his former mentor, Reverend John Frelinghuysen. He would reside in the home for the next 40 years and successfully charter Queen's College in 1766, which would become modern-day Rutgers University.

"Not many people are aware that the founder and first president of Queens College, now Rutgers University, lived and worked in Somerset County," said Historian, N.J. Department of Environmental Protection, Wallace House & Old Dutch Parsonage State Historic Sites Paul Soltis. "Not only did Hardenbergh help lay the foundation for higher education in the area, he also helped ease tensions between local settlers and the Continental Army."

Residents can access both houses by entering the parking lot located at 71 Somerset Street in Somerville. The Wallace House is undergoing renovations to improve its roof, chimney, and exterior walls to ensure its longevity for future generations. Once repairs are complete, it will be open to the public for tours, programs, and live reenactments. The Old Dutch Parsonage is open for special events and guided tours; call (908) 725-1015 to check availability. To learn more, visit: dep.nj.gov/parksandforests/state-park/wallace-house-old-dutch-parsonage



THE VAN VEGHTEN HOUSE

The oldest of our Five Generals Houses, quietly nestled behind modern-day warehouses and active trucking depots lies an unassuming, yet storied home that borders the Raritan River and Funderne Wetlands in Bridgewater. This home served as General Nathanael Greene's headquarters during the war.

For over 300 years, the Van Veghten House has resiliently stood the test of time by enduring pro-longed periods of war, surviving natural disasters, and adapting to the changes of urban development. This hidden gem of living history is not just a relic, but a functioning museum and genealogical archive that tells the story of Somerset County's role in American history.

"The Van Veghten House played an important role in securing the Country's independence," said Commissioner Sara

Sooy. "Today, it's an active museum and library that allows residents to get hands-on with exploring their own genealogical history through research. The archives are accessible and extensive, and the volunteer staff is knowledgeable, friendly, and excited to assist visitors."

During the war, General Washington, who had an affinity for dancing, graced the dance floor with Katie Greene, the wife of General Greene, during a 1779 house party. In a letter to Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth, dated March 17, 1779, Greene said "His Excellency and Mrs. Greene danced upwards of three hours without once sitting down. Upon the whole we had a pretty little frisk."

The "Frisk Room," where Washington danced, still exists today. Now, the home serves as the headquarters for the Somerset County Historical Society.

Many visitors are unaware that a trove of historic and genealogical records, which date back centuries, are in the upper room of the home. The library holds records that can connect family trees in Somerset County and boasts an inventory of microfilm, photographs, postcards, newspapers, pamphlets, and journals that tell the story of previous generations.

"A lot of people don't realize how far their families go back," said President of the Somerset County Historical Society Frank McGonigle, who started volunteering 30 years ago after searching for his family records. "A lot of people also don't realize that in Somerset County, during the Revolution, there were a lot of African Americans involved in the militia. By coming here, you get to realize the sacrifices that were made. It gives you a greater appreciation for what people went through to form this country."

The Van Veghten House is located at 9 Van Veghten Drive in Bridgewater. Guided tours of the museum, access to archives, and a rotation of interesting exhibits, including a new Revolutionary War exhibit, are open to the public from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays and 12 to 3 p.m. on the second and fourth Saturday of each month. Starting in May 2026, the house will also be open on the first Sunday of each month in celebration of America's 250th anniversary. To learn more, visit somersethistorynj.org



THE ABRAHAM STAATS HOUSE

Tucked next to the Delaware River and Raritan Canal, the Abraham Staats House sits peacefully on what used to be a working Dutch farming estate.

The house's quaint domestic life gave way to the urgent matters of war in the winter of 1778 to 1779. General Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Von Steuben was a Prussian born general and celebrated drill master of the Continental Army. The Abraham Staats House served as his headquarters during the Second Middlebrook Encampment.

Today, visitors stand under the same roof where Von Steuben devised disciplined drills, introduced standardized military maneuvers, and developed a model troop company that helped turn American militia into a more effective fighting force to defeat British fleets.

"The Friends of the Abraham Staats House work with the Borough of South Bound Brook and the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission to preserve the building, support archaeological study, and develop programs that bring the house's layered history to life," said Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson. "Thanks to their care and oversight, residents can experience living-history events like the Battle of Bound Brook Weekend, learn about the enslaved men and women that once lived here, and explore the rooms where General Von Steuben shaped the discipline of the Continental Army. These programs bring our history to life in ways that resonate with families across Somerset County."

The Abraham Staats House tells the stories of not just the home's immediate family and military figures, but also the many others who were part of its history. Documents such as wills, inventories, and census records reveal a complex household that included enslaved men, women, and children. Their presence, though often recorded



only in fragments, is an important part of the home's history and the broader understanding of early Dutch settlements in Somerset County.

Visitors might also be interested to learn that among the Abraham Staats House's most intimate and surprising features are the small objects hidden inside its walls. At this site, visitors can view a child's shoe hidden and preserved within the wall of the old kitchen, which is one of the oldest structures on the property. Worn shoes tucked into walls, hearths, and floorboards reflect a practice that traveled from early modern Europe into colonial America. Scholars interpret them as good luck charms meant to protect a home and its occupants.

The Abraham Staats House is located at 17 Von Steuben Lane in South Bound Brook. The site is open for scheduled programs, special events, and tours by appointment. Visitors are encouraged to check the calendar for living history weekends, guided talks, paranormal tours, and demonstrations of period crafts that invite visitors to step into the world of the Staats family and the soldiers who trained under General Von Steuben. To request a tour or view the event calendar, visit staatshouse.org



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Somerset County 250: Where History Comes Alive

Somerset County is bringing our revolutionary history to life in an exciting new way. The Somerset County Board of County Commissioners are proud to announce the launch of a dynamic, immersive digital storymap showcasing our community's unique role in America's founding story.

This isn't your typical history lesson. This experience is designed for all ages and is packed with interactive maps, engaging videos, striking images, and uniquely Somerset stories bringing the past to life in an engaging and fun new way – all with ease from your favorite device.

Have you ever wondered what happened right in your own backyard during the American Revolution? Take a virtual trip around Somerset County and see for yourself. Step into George Washington's time and discover how his top Generals shaped the future of the Continental Army and developed game-changing strategies for winning the war while staying in houses right around the corner from you. From the nation's first formal artillery training academy to innovative hilltop signal beacons, Somerset County played a vital role in shaping America's earliest days.

Developed by the County's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team, in collaboration with the County's Cultural and Heritage and Planning offices, every scroll through history reveals something interesting, educational, and astonishing. Uncover fun facts, find geocaching spots at local historic sites, watch key battles unfold, and more as history comes alive at your fingertips.



Immerse yourself in Somerset County:
SomersetCountyNJ.gov/History250

