



Historical Society of West Windsor

Annual Report to West Windsor Township

February 2025

The Historical Society of West Windsor (HSWW) is pleased to submit this report outlining our use of the Schenck Farmstead in 2024 and other efforts to preserve West Windsor's history and engage the community.

1. Use of Schenck Farmstead Premises

Museum Open Houses and Special Programs

In 2024, the Schenck Farmstead served as a vibrant hub for history, culture, and community. We hosted museum open houses throughout the year, welcoming hundreds of visitors and providing opportunities to explore West Windsor's rich heritage. Special Open Houses included:

- **Farm Day (June 2):** This new event attracted hundreds of visitors to the Farmstead, offering a variety of family-friendly activities such as a petting zoo, scavenger hunts, arts and crafts, and a farm-themed story time. We partnered with local organizations, including the Wicoff House Museum, Monmouth County 4-H, Baird Homestead, Appelget Farm, and Howell Living History Farm, to make this day a success.
- **Classic Movie Night (July 20):** Our first outdoor movie screening featured the sci-fi cult classic *Plan 9 from Outer Space* on a 25-foot screen. Society President Paul Ligeti delivered a pre-screening talk on the film's production and legacy, as well as its connection to West Windsor's own "alien invasion"—the infamous 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast.
- **History and Music Festival (August 10):** Our third annual festival drew several hundred attendees to enjoy international music and dance, delicious food, and opportunities to connect with neighbors while learning about local history.

- **Bike Fest (September 8):** The West Windsor History Museum served as a rest stop for the 20th annual West Windsor Bike Fest. Participants learned about local history while enjoying this beloved community bike ride.
- **Apple Day (September 8):** Our September open house featured apple-themed crafts, games, scavenger hunts, read-alouds for children, and museum tours, all organized by our new Youth Engagement Committee.
- **Fall Festival (October 6):** This harvest-themed event offered free pumpkin picking, museum tours, a petting zoo, kids’ activities, and craft vendors, attracting a large and enthusiastic crowd.
- **Holiday Open House (December 7-8):** We welcomed nearly 100 guests to this festive annual event. Surabhi, a student choral and musical group, performed winter holiday songs from many cultures.

Regular Open House days also took place on March 3, April 7, May 5, and November 10.

Youth Engagement Committee

This year we launched the **Youth Engagement Committee (YEC)**, providing local students with hands-on opportunities to catalog artifacts, conduct research, and organize educational activities. The YEC — now with more than a dozen student members — is advised by Regina Honore and meets monthly in the Environmental Education Center.

Board Meetings and Volunteer Events

In 2024, we invited all of our volunteers and members of the public to attend monthly meetings of our Board of Directors at the Farmstead. We also hosted two potluck dinners at the Farmstead this year to build community among our volunteers and celebrate our accomplishments.

Historical Markers

We worked with West Windsor Township to install a historical marker at the entrance of the Farmstead which details the history of the property. This is part of our ongoing Signage Project, aimed at installing permanent, cast-aluminum markers in/near historic communities and sites around West Windsor. Four other markers have been installed in Dutch Neck, Penn’s Neck, Edinburg and Grovers Mill.

We are currently collaborating with other neighborhoods and residents to conceptualize several other markers. One of them – “Berrien City” – has been approved by the Township and we are coordinating with the Berrien City Neighborhood Association and West Windsor Arts on fundraising.

Restoration and Preservation

Significant restoration and maintenance projects were completed at the Schenck Farmstead in 2024:

- Restoring one of the sashes in the northeasternmost parlor room window.
- Painting and repairing the double-seat outhouse.
- Re-plastering the northern parlor room fireplace and upstairs hallway ceiling.
- Re-painting stairwells to remove scuff marks.
- Installing room-darkening shades in the schoolhouse to protect artifacts from sunlight and improve comfort for visitors.
- The Youth Engagement Committee cleaned and reorganized the Environmental Education Center, establishing it as a workspace for youth programming.
- Local Scout troops finished or are in the process of completing essential repairs including: 1) repainting the garage (to be completed this spring), 2) scraping and repainting the porch of the “old kitchen” and replacing rotted porch posts and trim on the awning (rotted railings will be replaced in 2025), 3) repainting the porch off the “working kitchen”, 4) scraping/repainting the cellar door and decking on both front porches.
- Girl Scout Suri Patel created a Lenni Lenape Garden showcasing the medicinal plants used for centuries by West Windsor’s Indigenous Lenni Lenape people.

More repairs are planned for 2025 as part of Eagle Scout projects, Girl Scout Gold Award projects, and other HSWW volunteer efforts.

We are grateful for West Windsor Township’s crucial participation in the maintenance of the Schenck Farmstead last year, including replacing the barn roof, installing new lightbulbs in the barn, and repairing the cracked rear siding and corner trim on the 19th-century schoolhouse building.

Architectural Assessment

With the generous support of West Windsor Township, architecture firm Clarke Caton Hintz performed a Conditions Assessment and assessed the viability of placing the Schenck Farmstead on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. We received a draft of the architect’s report and are awaiting the final version.

2. Additional Public Programming & Fundraising

Educational Programs and Lectures

Our lecture series drew diverse audiences through both in-person and virtual programs. Topics included:

- A “crash course” in West Windsor's overall history.
- The villages of Edinburg and Penn’s Neck.
- The history of education in West Windsor and Plainsboro.
- Widow Bergen’s Tavern in Dutch Neck.
- The American Revolution in West Windsor.

Virtual Tour

We offered two virtual museum tours to residents of Bear Creek Assisted Living Facility on January 21, 2024. We are grateful that Historical Society co-founder Mary Schenck, who passed away in August, was able to attend this event and share her memories of growing up at the Farmstead in the 1930s.

Community Events

The Society actively participated in community events, staffing a monthly booth at the West Windsor Farmers Market as well as the West Windsor Arts Council’s ArtWalk on June 1.

Scholarships

In June, the Historical Society awarded two \$500 scholarships to graduating seniors at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School North and High School South who demonstrated a commitment to community service and/or historical research.

Revolutionary Committee

In preparation for America’s 250th anniversary in 2026, the Historical Society convened the **Revolutionary West Windsor Committee** to plan a township-wide celebration of this milestone. This coalition of local organizations will organize a full calendar of activities highlighting West Windsor’s role in the nation’s founding. In addition to the Historical Society, organizations represented on the Revolutionary West Windsor Committee include Princeton Junction Volunteer Fire Co., West Windsor Volunteer Fire Co., West Windsor Community Farmers’ Market, West Windsor Arts, West Windsor Lions Club, West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance, and the West Windsor Division of Recreation and Parks.

Fundraising

The Historical Society completed two successful online fundraising campaigns in 2024 — at mid-year and year-end — that collectively raised over \$7,000. In December, the Historical Society was awarded its first grant from the Mercer County Culture and Heritage Commission. The \$3,000 grant will support new interpretive signage around the Farmstead and archival storage materials.

3. Conclusion

The Historical Society of West Windsor made tremendous strides in 2024, using the Schenck Farmstead as a cornerstone for education, community engagement, and historic preservation. Our activities not only celebrated West Windsor’s rich history but also helped foster a stronger, more connected community. We are grateful for the Township’s continued support and look forward to collaborating on future initiatives to preserve and share our local heritage.

Respectfully submitted,

The Historical Society of West Windsor

Paul Ligeti - President
Gay Huber - Vice President & Treasurer
Josh Mandell - Recording Secretary
Regina Honore - Corresponding Secretary
Peter Ligeti - Director
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