

CRANBURY HISTORICAL AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 42, Issue One, May 2025

<https://www.cranburyhistory.org/blog>

Private James Bodine (1755 - 1836)

By Karen Kelley

James Bodine was five years of age when his parents, Vincent and Ann, bought the 1713 East Jersey Cottage and farm in Cranbury. Along with his seven siblings, James spent his childhood and teenage years at the small cottage, located on Old Trenton Road. He helped his father work the two-hundred-acre farm, which became known as Bodine's Corner.

During the American Revolution, James was a Private in the Third Regiment of the Middlesex County Militia. He served under John Platt, David Chambers and Peter Perrine, all residents of Cranbury. Marching through New Jersey, Private James Bodine participated in the Battles of Springfield, Connecticut Farms and Bennett's Island, followed the British from Black Horse (now Columbus, N.J.) as they advanced to Monmouth Courthouse in June 1778 and witnessed the Revolt of the Pennsylvania A Line.



When James applied for a pension in 1832, it was his Cranbury neighbors and fellow veterans, Abram Gulick, Timothy Horner, Col. David Chambers, Jacob Wicoff, John Ervin, R. P. Lott and David Applegate, who testified to his accuracy and truthfulness. These officers and fellow soldiers swore that James was in active military service during the American Revolution and verified the list of tours provided by James. Symmes C. Henry, third pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, swore to his acquaintance with James and that he was a truthful man. Rescarrick Moore, born and raised on a Windsor farm located near the Bodine farm, testified that he and James were friends before the war and fought together for several years in the militia.

A few years after the war, James's father, Vincent died. In his will dated July 22, 1785, Vincent left his real estate and horses for his sons, James and young Vincent. His daughters received bed furnishings and money. Vincent also requested that the family keep the farm and remain together until the younger children became adults. James continued farming the property and kept it in the family until 1808. The property was then sold to another local soldier and Patriot, Joseph Story.

James married Gertrude (Gittee) Wyckoff on January 15, 1798, at the First Presbyterian Church of Cranbury. James and Gittee had three children: Vincent, Peter and Ann Eliza. The James Bodine Family later moved to Monroe Township. James died on June 8, 1835, and his wife, Gertrude died on February 7, 1846. Both are buried in Brainerd Cemetery, located in Cranbury. (Continued on Page 3).

In the heading above are Cranbury's four historical buildings under CHPS care. From left to right: the Elizabeth M. Wagner History Center, the 1713 East Jersey Cottage, the Cranbury Museum and the Parsonage Barn.

President's Message

Dear Members,

I hope you are enjoying this spring and looking forward to warm weather and the events that can be held outside, as well as the new exhibit at Cranbury Museum, "Hear Our Voices-Sharing Cranbury Stories." Please mark your calendar for May 22 at 7 p.m. to attend a program at Cranbury Library by John Chambers who will discuss his new booklet, "*Cranbury in the American Revolution: War Comes to the Village.*"



Volunteers worked on April 23rd at the 1713 East Jersey Cottage to remove contemporary materials in the interior before contractors can continue to complete more skilled work.

The Board approved a proposal from an Eagle Scout candidate to improve the Museum side garden. Plantings will be chosen under the guidance of the Museum Garden Committee.

Looking ahead, an American Revolution event is planned for early October.

Please renew your membership by using the form provided in this newsletter or on our website, cranburyhistory.org, and invite others to join CHPS.

With appreciation,

Audrey Smith

Fanny's Story

By Karen Kelley, Curator

Fanny (c.1793 - unknown year) is the first of seven profiles that have been researched and written by the Black History Committee at the Elizabeth M. Wagner History Center and part of the current Cranbury Museum exhibit, *Hear Our Voices - Sharing Cranbury Stories.*

In 1800 Middlesex County had a total population of 17,890, including 1,827 Black residents. The number of enslaved people was 1,564, accounting for 85.6% of the Black residents. A review of wills, manumission certificates, tax documents, census and church records reveal that several Cranbury households in Middlesex County had at least one or two enslaved people.

Born enslaved around 1793, Fanny was of African descent. Records indicate that Fanny was enslaved by Matthew Rue in her earlier years and later owned by Abraham Gulick, farmer and veteran of the American Revolution. Given only a first name at birth, Fanny remained enslaved until 1825.

On March 18, 1810, Reverend George S. Woodhull married Fanny and Horace Ditmars in the First Presbyterian Church of Cranbury. Through the years the family name was recorded as Ditmars or Ditmus. In 1810 both Fanny and Horace lived on the Rue Farm, which was located next to the Gulick Farm on Cranbury Neck Road.

Despite her marriage, Fanny and her future daughters remained enslaved to their owner. Abraham Gulick was listed as "other" on the birth certificate (February 14, 1815) of Fanny's first child, Emeline. She was baptized in the First Presbyterian Church of Cranbury on July 16, 1815. Fanny and Horace Ditmars were listed as Emeline's parents. In May 1820, Abraham Gulick entered Emeline's first name in the *Slaves Births* records for South Brunswick, 1804-1844.

New Jersey passed the *Slave Act of 1804*, a gradual emancipation law. While it did not free enslaved persons, it allowed for the children of slaves to be gradually freed; females at age 21 and males at age 25. Consequently, Middlesex County required the owners to register the names and birth dates of the enslaved children.

It is hoped that Emeline gained her freedom when she turned 21 in 1836. She never married. Emeline Ditmus died on April 4, 1860, and was buried in Brainerd Cemetery in Cranbury.

Fanny's second child, Caroline, was baptized in the First Presbyterian Church on July 20, 1817. Her parents were Horace Ditmars and Fanny. In May 1820, Abraham Gulick registered Caroline's first name and (Continued on Page 3).

Private James Bodine

(Continued from Page 1)

Through the decades, Mrs. Ann Eliza (Bodine) Dey, granddaughter of Vincent and Ann Bodine and daughter of James, shared significant family history. Recorded in several oral history accounts, Ann Eliza revealed that her father, James, frequently reminisced about General Lafayette visiting the Bodine farm during the Revolutionary War. Reportedly, a detachment of Lafayette's troops was quartered at the Bodine farm.

Documented by original letters found in the *Washington Papers*, Lafayette and his advanced troops marched into Cranbury on June 25, 1778, and quartered his troops. Lafayette established his headquarters at Dr. Stites house on Main Street, approximately 1.5 miles from Bodine's cottage. Vincent Bodine, a French speaking Huguenot who settled in Cranbury, could have entertained Lafayette at his house or welcomed Lafayette's troops on his farm. The Bodines were descendants of the famous sixteenth century French philosopher and political theorist, Jean Bodin, who was probably known to Lafayette.

Lafayette and his Advance Force left Cranbury in the early morning of June 26th, 1778, just before General George Washington and his 8,000 troops marched into Cranbury. Lafayette and his troops crossed the nearby Millstone River into Hightstown and marched to Robin's Tavern in Clarksburg, N.J. before moving onto the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778.

Fanny's Story

(Continued from Page 2)

birth date (May 13, 1817) in the *Slaves Births* records. Caroline was eligible for emancipation at age 21 in 1839. There is no record of a marriage in the Cranbury Presbyterian Church or Caroline's burial in the cemeteries in Cranbury. In Abraham Gulick's will, probated in 1842, Gulick left \$100 as "legacy" to Caroline.

By the time Fanny's third child was born on July 13, 1820, the birth of Lewis Freeman Ditmus was **not** entered in the *Slave Births* register. Acknowledging his surname, Lewis Freeman Ditmus was baptized in the First Presbyterian Church on November 26, 1820. Fanny and Horace Ditmus were listed as his parents.

In 1825, Abraham Gulick granted Fanny her freedom. A certificate of manumission was signed by the *Overseers of the Poor of South Brunswick*, Samuel Gulick and Daniel J. Barricklo, and *Justices of the Peace for Middlesex County*, John Bastedo and Joseph McChesney. Recorded in Middlesex County, the document stated that Fanny was examined in court and met the eligibility requirements for manumission in New Jersey. Fanny was 32 years old, falling within the age requirement of 21 to 40 years old and found to be "sound in mind and not under any bodily incapacity" to obtain a livelihood. Her owner, Abraham Gulick signed Fanny's manumission on April 11, 1825. Abraham Gulick also remembered Fanny in his will, dated February 12, 1834.

When Gulick's will was probated in 1842, Fanny's husband, Horace Ditmus was paid owed debts of \$15.00 and \$66.88. These debts suggest that Horace may have worked on the Gulick Farm, where Fanny was enslaved. During the probate it was revealed that Abraham Gulich left \$100 to Fanny as "legacy."

It is unknown when Fanny and Horace passed. A Federal Census suggests that they were both still living in the area in 1840. Their greatest legacy may have been the Ditmus family who flourished in Cranbury. A Cranbury resident, D.C. Lewis shared in his recollections of Cranbury in the early 1800s that the Ditmus Family was "quite prominent in the community." For generations, members of the Ditmus family lived in the neighborhoods of South Main Street, Old Cranbury Road, Old Trenton Road and Maplewood Avenue, contributing to the community, churches, local businesses, and service to their country.

CHPS Mission Statement:

Committed to the History and Future of Cranbury, we are a society of volunteers who support and encourage the preservation of Cranbury Township's land, historic buildings, sites and landmarks through education, stewardship, outreach, research and restoration.

Celebrating the Parsonage Plantation House Tour By Audrey Smith

The 2024 Historic Cranbury House Tour, *Celebrating the Parsonage Plantation*, was held on Saturday, September 28. The tour included two homes on South Main Street, three homes on Symmes Court and one home on Cranbury Neck Road, as well as the Parsonage Barn, Cranbury Museum, the Firehouse Museum and the First Presbyterian Church. The rainy day did not stop visitors from touring! There was an art show at the church and refreshments were available, as well as a concert featuring poems of Robert Louis Stevenson set to music and other music.

Later that evening, the homeowners were invited to attend a gathering given by the House Tour Committee at a home in Cranbury. They each received a small gift from the Society with thanks for opening their homes.

Despite the weather, the House Tour was well attended and enjoyed. The Society thanks all who volunteered and made it a success!

Tavern Tidbits



Photo by Purba Lahiri

Tavern Titbits in September 2024 at Cranbury Inn was the first event sponsored by the CHPS 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution Committee. The reenactments by Tim Brennan as Dr. Samuel Adams, Lynn Lakner as Mrs. Mary Stites and Earl Groendyke as a Revolutionary Soldier transported the guests back in time. Signature drinks and colonial-themed appetizers were served and the event included historical storyboards, a trivia contest and music by Terri Morrow, Ken Mayberg and Irv Fisher. Please see the website for additional photos: www.cranburyhistory.org/post/tavern-tidbits-at-the-cranbury-inn

Christmas Tea

The Christmas Tea was held on December 8. Over 100 guests enjoyed the festivities, Christmas exhibit, music and refreshments. We wish to thank the docents, who provided tours and the volunteers who decorated the tree, donated cookies and poured tea and punch. We thank the Girl Scouts for helping to host and the Cub Scouts, Brownies & Daisies, who sang carols. We also thank Ken & Terri for their beautiful music and Cloud Nine, an a Capello group from Princeton High School.



Photo by Karen Kelley

The Cranbury Wassail Returns in Joyful Style!

By Jennifer Suttmeier

After a multi-year hiatus, CHPS was delighted to bring back the beloved Cranbury Wassail—and what a spectacular return it was! Held in the picturesque Shadow Oaks neighborhood, the event quickly sold out and drew an enthusiastic crowd ready to celebrate the season.

Four beautifully decorated homes welcomed guests with warmth and cheer, each offering unique entertainment and holiday spirit. Historian Richard Moody shared the rich history of Wassailing, while Paul Venanzi brought it to life through a lively reenactment. The sounds of the season filled the air, thanks to vintage musicians and beautiful holiday music played on piano and violin.

The event's success would not have been possible without the dedication of the planning committee: Jennifer Suttmeier (Chair), Joan Weidner and Irene Drakapoulis (Food), Lisa Knierim (Donations), Audrey Smith and Jo D. Andrews (Advisors), and Linda Morgan (Homeowners). Special thanks go to our gracious hosts—the Harmon, Wade, Voitkevich-Vierbuchen, and Foglia families.

CHPS extends heartfelt gratitude to the many volunteers from both CHPS and the Cranbury community, as well as our generous corporate sponsors. With a successful silent auction and strong community support, the event raised thousands of dollars for the Society.

The Cranbury Wassail is truly back—and brighter than ever!

Silent Auction Donations

AE2 Learning
Princeton Soup & Sandwich
Gwen Toma, Artist
L'Oreal
Salon 43
Galleria Nail Spa
McCarter Theater
Samantha Andrews, Yoga Instructor
Wanderlust at Home

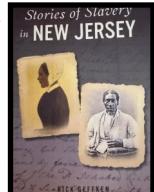
Food and Beverage Donations

Americana Kitchen and Bar
Cranbury Inn
Cranbury Pizza
Teddy's Restaurant
The Market on Main
McCaffrey's (West Windsor)
Costco
(Lawrence Township)
Trader Joe's (Princeton)
Whole Foods (Princeton)

Stories of Slavery In New Jersey



On February 27, 2025, author Rick Geffkin presented a lecture on his latest book, *Stories on Slavery in New Jersey* at the Cranbury Public Library. Many attended and an interesting question and answer session followed the lecture.



Middlesex County Roundtable Meeting

By Karen Kelley

On Thursday evening, March 27th, the Cranbury Museum hosted the Middlesex County Roundtable Meeting, led by County Historian, Mark Nonestied and Michael Moran, History Services Coordinator. Approximately twenty-five people attended, representing seventeen towns in Middlesex County. Karen Kelley, Linda Schilling and Syra Bhatt, who hosted the event, also represented the Society.

Mark and Michael shared the County plans for the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution, which focused on events at the East Jersey Old Town Village in Piscataway. The attendees then shared their organization's plans for the 250th celebration which was in the discussion/planning stages



Photo by Karen Kelley

CHPS could share that the Society already had a successful 250th event in 2024 (*Tavern Tidbits*,) are soon publishing the new American Revolution booklet by Dr. John Chambers and planning the Society's next event-*Whispers from the Grave* in October.

The next Roundtable Meeting is scheduled in June at the Middlesex County Archives Building.

Two Lights for Tomorrow



CHPS participated in the Two Lights for Tomorrow event on April 18, 2025. Two lights were displayed on the front porch of the Cranbury Museum and our History Center to remind us of the importance of coming together to form a more perfect union. This was a nationwide initiative to commence the celebration of the 250th birthday of the United States of America. The famous ride of Paul Revere (and the two lights placed in the North Church Steeple as a warning) occurred overnight on April 18 - 19, 1775.



In Memoriam

The Society notes with sadness the passing of the following members:

Jo D. Sechler Andrews

The Society lost a dedicated member and Co-President on February 19, 2025, when Jo D. Andrews passed away. Jo D. was active in CHPS for several years as President and then Co-President. She was on the Society's Finance Committee and worked on several House Tours and Wassail fundraisers. Jo D. was a talented musician and writer. She taught many children to sing and instilled the love of music in them. She loved Cranbury and was happy to return to the town in which she grew up, after having spent many years with her family in New York City. Jo D. loved her family, her church and her friends and we loved her! We are so fortunate to have had Jo D. in our lives and will miss her.



Normadelle Swale

Norma Swale, who passed away on February 17, 2025, was a longtime contributing member of our society. For many years, as part of the CHPS Executive Board, she was responsible for taking care of the museum's gardens. Norma also will be remembered for making numerous beautiful bouquets over the years for homes on the CHPS house tours. In the past she was known as the lady happily wearing an apron in order to collect money for the 50/50 raffle at our CHPS Pot Luck Supper yearly membership meetings. Norma planted crocuses in the grass area between South Main Street and the sidewalk bordering Heritage Park, sharing her love of flowers with all who passed by. Norma will be missed and remembered with great fondness and gratitude.



**Cranbury Museum
Honoring Cranbury's Black History
By Karen Kelley, Curator**

Visit the latest museum exhibit, ***Hear Our Voices-Sharing Cranbury Stories*** and learn about some of our past Cranbury families. Based on research for the Black History Project conducted at the Elizabeth M. Wagner History Center, this new exhibit features the profiles of seven Cranburians.

Starting in the late eighteenth century through the 1990s, the exhibit tells the stories of an enslaved person, a veteran of the Civil War, a Vietnam War veteran, one of the founders of the Cranbury A.M.E. Church and activists during the 1960s and 70s. Read their stories, see some of the artifacts depicting their stories and learn about the rich history of these Cranbury residents.

The Cranbury residents featured in the exhibit:

Fanny (c.1793-?)

Sergeant Edward A. Ditmus (1841-1910)

Samuel Nixon (c.1800-1887)

John Owens (1897-1983)

Marina Agnes Hall Wilson (1921-2006)

Myra Wilson Doggett (1939-2002)

Private James P. Robinson (1948-1968)

We thank the following volunteers for their support in creating this exhibit: Linda Schilling, Alex Leonard, Karen Kelley, Joyce Rittenhouse and Eileen McGillan.

The Cranbury Museum (4 Park Place East) is open on Sundays, 1-4 pm. This exhibit will be open through September. (Closed for holiday weekends.)



**Museum Exhibit
Photos by
Karen Kelley**



**Doggett/Wilson Family visiting
the opening of the Museum
Exhibit.**

Photo by Linda Schilling



Cranbury in the American Revolution:

War Comes to the Village

Dr. John Chambers is writing a new illustrated booklet, ***Cranbury in the American Revolution: War Comes to the Village***, as part of CHPS's celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution. The booklet contains exciting new findings about Cranbury's involvement in the Revolution and the impact of the Revolution on Cranbury. Plans are to publish and make the booklet available this summer.

Museum Acquisitions

January - March 2025

CHPS thanks the following donors:

Leigh Ann Barnes - Cranbury Calendar, Framed Apple Crewel Work

James Searing - A History of Cranbury Colonial Times to the Present Manuscript, 1988 Cranbury Landmarks

Glenn & Phyllis Johnson - Antique Tin from Davison & Silver Company

Dorothy Pavloff - 18 Christmas Card Covers illustrated by Jane Zingg Huff

John & Laurie Shimer - Two spinning wheels, five cookie jars, antique desk and chair

Dagney Ernst - 1970's Cranbury mugs and Cranbury suncatcher

Ed Belding - Research papers from South Brunswick Historical Society

**VOLUNTEER DOCENTS
FOR THE CRANBURY MUSEUM**

Share your love of History and Cranbury!

Volunteer docents are needed at the Cranbury Museum!

The Cranbury Museum, located at 4 Park Place East, Cranbury, is open on Sundays from 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

Help share our historic gem, the Cranbury Museum, with our weekly visitors. Be a docent! Training is available. We need volunteers to serve as a monthly docent or substitute.

For information, contact Sue Saravelli or Karen Kelley at historycenter@comcast.net

1713 East Jersey Cottage Update By Steven Golisano



Photos by Karen Kelley

On April 23rd, a group of volunteers, including Linda Schilling, Jim Golubieski, George Wright, Steve Golisano, Elizabeth Silverman, Steve Silverman, and Karen Kelley were able to remove most of the remaining modern materials from the interior of the 1713 cottage. Volunteers also dug an approved area behind the cottage to start on the new rain garden. The next step will be engaging a plasterer to start refinishing the inside walls. Many thanks to the volunteers for their hard work and to Cranbury DPW for their continued support of the project!



Presentation by Mark Berkowsky Preservation in Cranbury: Past, Present & Future By Karen Kelley

On Sunday, March 9th, on behalf of the Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society, Mark Berkowsky presented a lecture titled Preservation in Cranbury, Past, Present & Future at the Cranbury Library. Mark, the CHPS Preservation Chairperson, reviewed the efforts by many people and organizations since the 1960s to preserve the historic village of Cranbury.

Mark reviewed the historic buildings that were saved from demolition and restored. He shared some of the threats to the village, such as a proposed County dump or a highway that would have completely changed the town. He explained how the Cranbury Housing Associates helped answer the Mt. Laurel affordable housing mandate.

Mark's lecture was well-received as he reminded the audience that preservation requires continuous effort and vigilance in order to preserve our historic town.

CRANBURY HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY

2023 EXECUTIVE BOARD AND TRUSTEES

OFFICERS

President	Audrey Smith
VP/Program Chairperson	Linda Morgan
Recording Secretary	Open Position
Corresponding Secretary	Eileen McGillan
Treasurer	Bob Dreyling
Museum Curator	Karen Kelley

TRUSTEES

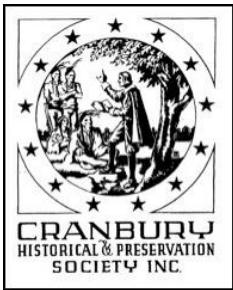
2023-2025	2024-2026	2025-2027
Kathy Jani	Anupurba Lahiri	Steven Golisano
Michaele Kehrt	Eileen McGillan	Karen Kelley
Linda Schilling	Tim Brennan	Bobbie Marlowe
George Smith	Jay Taylor	Cheryl Clarke
Bonnie Wagman	Heather Keltz Scott	Joan Weidner

HONORARY TRUSTEES

Jan Wagner	John Chambers
Jerry Pevahouse	Ginny Swanagan

COMMITTEES & CHAIRPERSONS

Acquisitions	Karen Kelley, Eileen McGillan, Michaele Kehrt, Linda Schilling
Buildings and Grounds	
Museum:	Ed Kelley
History Center:	Open Position
1713 East Jersey Cottage:	John Chambers, Bob Dreyling, Steven Golisano, Karen Kelley, Bobbie Marlowe, Audrey Smith
Docents	Sue Saravelli
Education	Delpha Georges
Exhibits	Karen Kelley
Finance	Bob Dreyling, Kathy Jani, Jay Taylor, George Smith, Steve Silverman, Audrey Smith, Linda Schilling, Karen Kelley
Fundraising	Committee
Gardens	Cheryl Clarke, Karen Kelley
History Center Director	Linda Schilling
Historic Preservation	Mark Berkowsky
Membership	Audrey Smith, Michaele Kehrt
Museum Inspectors	George Smith
Nominating Committee	Karen Kelley
Parsonage Barn	Audrey Smith
Publicity/Media	Open Position
Newsletter Editors	Kathy Jani, Anupurba Lahiri, Jean Golisano
Website/Social Media	Heather Keltz Scott



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Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society 6 South Main Street

Cranbury Museum
4 Park Place East
Open Sundays 1 pm to 4 pm & by appt.
Tel: 609-655-2611

Cranbury History Center
6 South Main Street
Open Thursdays 10 am to 12:30 pm & by appt.
Tel: 609-860-1889

Email: history_center@comcast.net
Website: www.cranburyhistory.org
X: [@cranburyhistory](https://twitter.com/cranburyhistory)
Facebook: Cranbury Historical and Preservation Society.
Instagram: [@Cranbury_1700s_house](https://www.instagram.com/cranbury_1700s_house)

UPCOMING CHPS EVENTS

April to September - *Hear our Voices - Sharing Cranbury Stories* Exhibit at Cranbury Museum Sundays 1 - 4 pm

May 22 - Dr. John Chamber's Presentation of his new booklet, *Cranbury in the American Revolution: War Comes to the Village* (7 pm at the Cranbury Library, hosted by 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution Committee of CHPS

September 20 - Preservation NJ returns to Cranbury

October - *Whispers from the Grave* (date/time TBD)

December 7 - Annual Christmas Tea at the Cranbury Museum, 1- 4 pm

2025 Museum Closing Dates

Mother's Day—May 11
Memorial Day—May 25
Father's Day—June 15
July 4th Weekend—July 6
Labor Day Weekend—August 31
Thanksgiving Weekend—November 30
Christmas Weekend—December 28
New Year's Day—January 1, 2026

Other Dates to Remember:
Closed Sunday after Cranbury Day,
September 7
Open for Christmas Tea on Sunday,
December 7