

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE  
SOMERSET HILLS

# Great Oak Art Celebration



MAY 6-7, 2017  
BRICK ACADEMY  
BASKING RIDGE, NJ

# WELCOME

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The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is proud to sponsor this celebration of Basking Ridge's Great Oak.

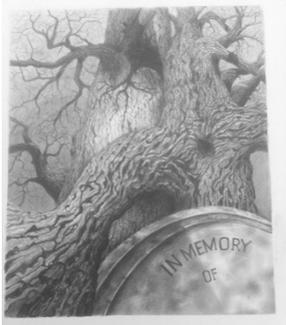
Although the tree is no longer presiding over downtown, our artists have captured elements of this natural wonder's majesty and power, through a variety of mediums.

The participating artists include painters, photographers, poets, and musicians. All from the towns of the Somerset Hills and all deeply connected to the Great Oak.

We hope that as each of you walk through our upper floor gallery and view the visual art, as well as listen to the poetry readings and song performances on the main floor, that you connect in new ways to the Great Oak, and perceive new elements of this natural landmark with such a rich legacy.

The tree is gone now, but it is through our artists that we can feel confident that future generations will be able to feel some of what we felt, see some of what we saw, and understand at least some of what we hold dear about our beloved tree.

# ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK



**Dave Clarke, "Spirit in the Sky", colored pencil**

Many times while rendering my interpretation of "the tree" my mind would wander. I could only think of the many, many joyous moments that took place under its branches. American Indian powwows, Pilgrims' weddings, Washington's troops resting, horse auctions, birthday parties, bake sales -- the list is endless.

**Linda Arnold, watercolor, 18" x 24"**

When I look at the Great Oak it brings to mind stability, friends, loved ones, family, unity, strength, love, peace, home.



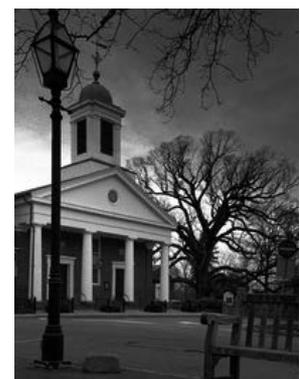
**Nancy Robinson, watercolor, 24" x 30"**

I love to think of the generations of families that walked under that tree, that worshipped nearby, and grieved at the grave sites. To think of people fighting for their freedom and soldiers camping nearby is just so amazing. When I bought my home here 32 years ago the first thing I said when I saw that tree in its setting is, "I want to live here".

**Allan Luisi, "Timeless", photograph**

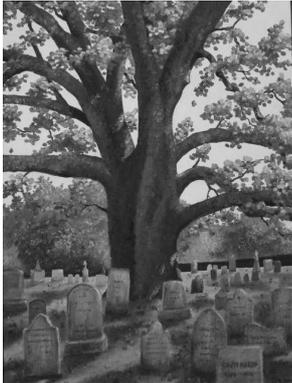
**(also exhibiting "Village Stillness" and "His Creation")**

It's a connection to the past, a witness to history, and a thing of beauty in my community.



**Edward Reineger, "Trusted Sentinel",  
photograph, 16"x 20"**

This photograph has captured the essence of the Great Oak's splendor and glory. The historic value of this magnificent oak tree that has spanned the centuries is incalculable!!!



**Eileen Barna, untitled, oil on canvas, 12" x 18"**

The story of how the town was built around this 600 year old oak is amazing. Our town is here because of that beautiful tree and it symbolizes the community that has flourished here, just like the Great Oak did for so long.

**Alex Bigatti, "Legacy", mixed media, 24" x 24"**

The painting represents the lifetime of the Great Oak. The circle represents the repetitive nature of the seasons and the passing of time in the figure of a clock. The colors and markings on the ground are the people that passed through its life, and finally the silver acorn is a highlight of its legacy. The tree exceeds the boundaries of the canvas in honor of its larger than life character.



**Martha Kelshaw, "Inspired by Basking Ridge Great Oak", gouache on arches w/c paper, 22" x 30"**

The Great Oak of Basking Ridge is a wonderful old friend. This beautiful force of nature has seen it all, including George Washington, and is an icon of our community. When visitors from out of town come for a visit - the Great Oak is the first stop on my tour of the area and everyone is amazed by this tree's outstretched branches - almost ready to scoop you up.

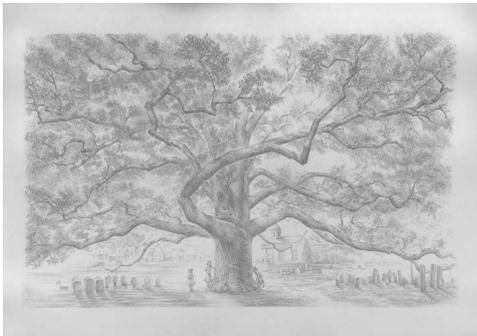
**Anne Lanphear, "Basking in the Ridge", photograph, 12" x 12"**

This photo was taken just as the sun was beginning to set on a very cold day in January. I was so moved by how the light was hitting the church and the tree and it reminded me of how the name of Basking Ridge was derived from the fact that "the wild animals of the adjacent lowlands were accustomed to bask in the warm sun of this beautiful ridge". I love this photo because I see our beloved Great White Oak tree "basking in the ridge" and it reminds me of our rich and robust history.



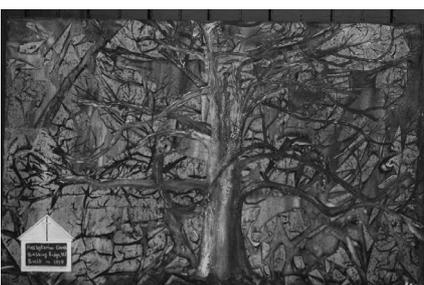
**Tom Schneider, "The Greak Oak", pastel pencil drawing, 38" x 26"**

Much of the artwork I have done has been inspired by trees, the landscape, and the natural world. Trees have a beauty and presence that I cannot ignore. The Great Oak is a majestic tree that should not be ignored. The history it carries and the presence it has provided so many for so long is remarkable. There are so few old growth trees left and it is a great loss to lose yet another. A great tree of this stature should be memorialized by artists and everyone so we may honor the gifts it has brought in its magnificent life.



**Barbara Jolie, "Full Moon", photograph**

I've always loved the huge and generous branches of this tree, protecting the deceased, while spreading generosity to the living. One night I noticed the full moon and wanted to capture the relationship.



**Meeta Garg, "Great White Oak Tree", mixed media, 24" x 36"**

It's a great feeling to be able to see the magnificent Great Oak, which has seen a long history of almost 600 years. At the same time it's sad to know that it is dying in front of us and nothing much can be done. As an artist I would love to preserve its memories through my artwork.



**Tammy Davoe, "Grounded Great White Oak Tree", acrylic, 24" x 18"**  
The history and significance of this Great Oak Tree stands as the town of Basking Ridge grew around it for centuries. A 600 year old tree is a marvel and good people have done wonders to take care of it to this age. I grew up in Basking Ridge knowing the tree is a symbol of community, respect, and strength. This Great Oak Tree will be dearly missed in the center of town and deserves the honor the Historical Society has planned to celebrate its life.

**Dana Reynolds, "American Icon",  
mixed media collage**

My piece is dedicated to the Great Oak. I loved that tree and have many fond memories of it. The presence of its extending, welcoming limbs will be sorely missed by this town and throughout time...



**Mary Ann Torcivia, "Querqus Alba", watercolor, 25" x 15"**  
I grew up going to Treehouse daycare and that tree is one of my fondest earliest memories. This painting is part of my high school senior art project where I did a series of tree paintings, and of course I had to include Querqus, waypoint of my town and childhood. The face in the tree is my environmental science teacher, who inspired my major at college.

**Kathi Paton, "Genesis, Exodus", poem**

I like to sit in the the church balcony on Sunday mornings, where I had a good view of the old oak tree. One day it was raining hard, and the dead, dark, brown leaves on the lower limbs looked like the wet hair of a supernatural giant. That image, coupled with the notion that the tree must have absorbed a lot of scripture over 300 years, is what inspired "Genesis, Exodus."

**Jack Donahue, "The Basking Ridge Oak", poem**

I wrote this poem about six months ago.

**Robert M. Simon, "The Tale of the Tree", poem**

Robert had a love for American History and was an avid reader. Prior to his auto accident, he wrote this poem because he was intrigued that George Washington might have sat under, walked by, or looked at this oak tree in our town, Basking Ridge. That made him wonder what else the Old Oak might have lived through. Unfortunately, Robert passed away October 4, 2016, but I know he would have been honored that his poem was being included at this gala.

**Madeline Polidor-LaBouef, "If I could speak ... The stories I could tell", poem**

When I wrote this poem, I tried to imagine the many footsteps, the important people that passed on by, and the conversations that the tree must have heard, I just tried to think of what the tree would have said if it could speak to us...Just wanted to say, "Thank You."

**Gordon Thomas Ward, "Trees", song**

My song "Trees" looks at the Basking Ridge Oak from a holistic perspective, commemorates the cycle of life, and explores how we are all interconnected. The result is a musical portrait that plumbs the depths of our shared history and brings the past to life while pointing to a hope-filled future.

**Jonathan Torgrimsen, "The Road and the Holy Oak", song**

Like an older friend or mentor, one who's been there since the beginning, the oak stood as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Whether acknowledged or taken for granted, there it stood in all its dignity and strength. My song attempts to ask, "What if we could distill the knowledge and experience from such a being? What if it were reaching out to us?"

# STUDY THE PAST... RECORD THE PRESENT... CONNECT THE FUTURE...

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As our country rapidly changes due to the transformed demographic characteristic of the population, residents of an area might feel little connection to their local community. Local historical societies can help to ensure the historical records of the area are protected and preserved so the past can be interpreted to the public, and thus a connection to the community can be maintained.

In 1928, a group of area residents dedicated to the preservation of history established a local historical society, then known as the Basking Ridge Historical Society, not The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills (THSSH). The 501c3 nonprofit organization includes the neighboring communities of:

Bedminster Township  
Bernards Township: Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner, and Lyons  
Bernardsville  
Far Hills  
Peapack-Gladstone

The mission of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills is to acquire, conserve and share historic artifacts and information; cultivate interest in local history; encourage preservation; facilitate research; operate the local history museum; and interpret the Brick Academy, headquarters of THSSH.



<http://www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org>

We thank Shop Rite of Bernardsville for supporting THSSH by providing platters of food for the Artists' Gala Reception