

## *CELEBRATING 40 YEARS!*

In 2024, the Walpack Historical Society celebrated its fortieth year of preserving, sharing, and continuing the traditions of its namesake. Tucked away in the Upper Delaware Valley, the Township of Walpack has quietly withstood centuries of history and change. It has survived colonial warfare, devastating floods, and the infamous Tocks Island Dam Project, the latter of which threatened to destroy Walpack and its legacy forever. While this thankfully never came to pass, it left wounds on the community that for some would never heal. Residents of the valley were scattered to the wind, and historic homes, forts, and cemeteries were left to crumble. For over a decade, Walpack became nothing more than a sad and bitter reminder of a way of life lost to time. That depressing fate was shattered on a crisp autumn day in 1984, when the Walpack Historical Society was born. Inspired by the successful restoration of the Van Campen Inn, which its founders had so lovingly labored on and saved from ruin, the Society was established to continue this mission of reversing the neglect Walpack had suffered and hopefully bring its history back to life. Though Walpack Township’s borders and population have been whittled down over the years, a shared love of its land

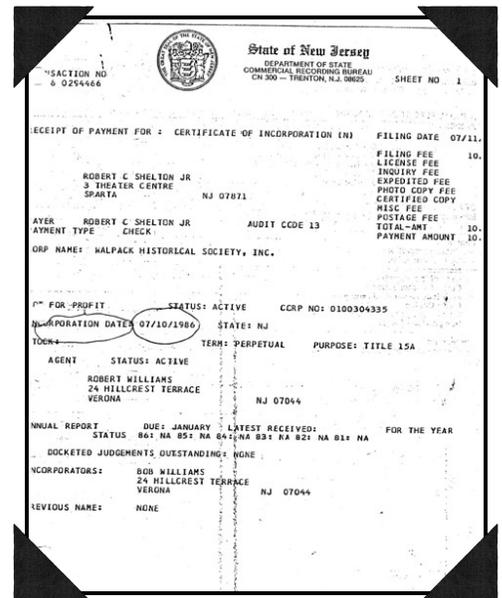


*Founders of the Walpack Historical Society signing the incorporation papers -1986*

and history has given rise to a new type of community. The Walpack Historical Society counts among its members former and new residents of the township, as well as those from neighboring towns, general history lovers, and even those who just happen to stumble upon the open church during a Sunday drive. With the Society’s membership currently over two-hundred strong and growing by the year, it could very well be said that the community of Walpack (albeit in a different form) is stronger than ever.

## *THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT*

The Walpack Historical Society’s founder and first president, Robert “Bob” Williams, was just ten years old when his parents’ home on Skyline Drive was seized as part of the Federal land grabs associated with the Tocks Island Dam Project. An abandoned and steadily decaying Van Campen Inn inspired him to begin an eight year long campaign of writing letters to government officials in the hope of saving a building that had seen so much history in over two centuries of existence. Generals and founding fathers had made it their temporary home between Revolutionary engagements. Its doors had been opened as a refuge during the Flood of 1955, and its walls held multiple generations’ worth of stories and experiences. Despite everything, the Van Campen Inn of Bob’s youth seemed doomed to become an undergrowth-covered pile of stones, indistinguishable from the surrounding lime kilns or nearby Fort Johns. A brief hope came with the United States’ bicentennial in 1976, when a new cedar roof was added. This, however, was soon followed by the removal of the Inn’s front porch and the boarding up of its windows. Its fate remained uncertain. Bob was in high school when a plan was finally prepared for the Van Campen Inn’s restoration. This involved, amongst other major renovations, the stone-by-stone removal and precise re-assembly of the building’s façade, which had been weakened by the Inn’s gradual shifting towards the river.



*The Walpack Historical Society was officially incorporated on July 10th, 1986*

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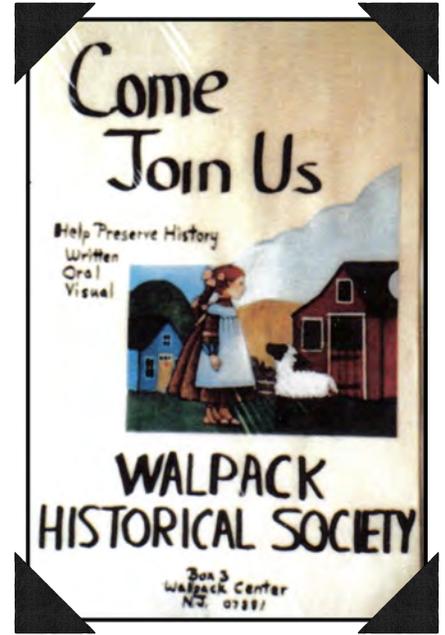
This edition of the Walpack Historical Society newsletter was written and designed by Scott Yashay. Photographs are provided by the author, unless otherwise noted.

**THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT**

*Continued from pg. 1*

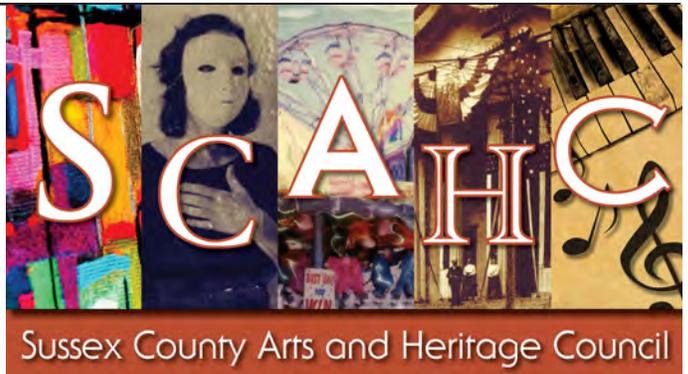
A retaining wall original to the house was reinforced as an added measure. Extensive work was done inside the house as well, which often found Bob working late into the night. After an immense labor of love on his and many other individuals' parts, the restoration was completed on a rainy afternoon in July of 1984. A celebration took place in the Inn itself to commemorate its completion. In attendance was John Bond of the National Park Service's regional office in Philadelphia. It was he whom Bob approached that day with the prospect of creating a historical society to continue the effort and preserve the history they had all worked so hard to save from obscurity.

The first meeting of the Walpack Historical Society was held on Sunday October 28th, 1984. A simple, hand-written poster invited all who were interested to come to the Walpack Center Church, which had been specially chosen to be the Society's official meeting place due to its communal and spiritual significance. It was lovingly cleaned by volunteers in preparation for hosting the Society's first ever event. The inaugural presentation was given by Verona Methodist Church pastor Bill Noll and centered on the history of Methodism in the United States as well as in Walpack Township specifically. The meeting was originally intended to conclude with the ringing of the church's bell, which during the cleaning was discovered to be missing from the tower. Instead, a recording of the Verona Church's bell sounded from the balcony.



The Walpack Historical Society held a second meeting just over a month later and continued to gain momentum from there. The first board of trustees was elected in July of 1985, and the first "official" meeting was held later that month. The church, originally built in 1872, would be rededicated that same year and again in 2019 following an arduous restoration. The Walpack Historical Society was officially incorporated on July 10th, 1986 and has been dedicated to preserving and sharing the history of Walpack ever since. The rather humble inception of the Society, born from a young man's empathy towards a neglected homestead, is proof that it only takes one person to make a tremendous difference. Supported by a small army of loyal and hardworking individuals, that difference has lasted and continued to grow over four decades later.

Funding has been made available in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, through the State/County Partnership Block Grant Program, as administered by the Sussex County Arts & Heritage Council.



## 2025 CALENDAR

April 12	Spring Hike - Blue Mountain Lakes
April 26	*Spring Dinner
May 3	Peony bed and Walpack Center Village clean-up
May 18	Presentation - Shapanack: A Locality in Walpack
May 26	VCI open 12 -3 pm
May 26	Walpack Church, Rosenkrans Museum, and Barn open 12- 3 pm
June 20	VCI open and tours to cemeteries 11am-2pm
June 22	Presentation – Inside the Walpack Archives
July 20	Road trip to Bethlehem, PA to explore Walpack's Moravian roots
August 17	Presentation - The Garden State: Where Ideas Grow
September 20	The Spirits of Lower Walpack Cemetery
October 12	Van Campen Day (Heritage Weekend)
November 8-9	Fall Hike - Details TBA
December 6	*Holiday Dinner
December 13 & 14	Walpack Christmas (museum open)

*\*Members and their guests.*

*All events are subject to change. Visit [WalpackHistory.org](http://WalpackHistory.org) and [Facebook.com/WalpackHistory](https://www.facebook.com/WalpackHistory) for calendar updates, changes and details.*

## NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIPS

The production of our newsletter is a time-consuming and costly ongoing project for the WHS. As our membership grows so do our expenses for printing and mailing the newsletter. To help, please consider becoming a sponsor. Simply make a donation and note that it is for “Newsletter Sponsor.”



## DUES ARE DUE

Members and friends of the WHS can fill out the membership form on page seven and mail it in with a payment to the address on the form. Also, payment can be made online with a credit card by visiting [WalpackHistory.org](http://WalpackHistory.org).

*All memberships must be made current in order to remain on our mailing list. Thank you!*

*The Walpack Historical Society would like to acknowledge and express its appreciation to our many Lifetime Members for their generosity.*



## THANK YOU!

*To everyone who becomes a member, makes a donation, sponsors the newsletter, attends a dinner, or buys a book, we sincerely appreciate your support.*

### New Members

The Campay Family  
Howard Passaro  
Kim Simonetti

### New Donations

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## BE A PART OF HISTORY - DOCENTS & VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



A docent is a person who acts as a guide, typically on a voluntary basis. We are always looking for new people to help us at our events and meetings throughout the year. Please call (973) 552-8880 to learn more about how you can help play a part in history.



# WALPACK HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S HALL OF PRESIDENTS

Hail to the Chief! In its forty-year history, the Walpack Historical Society has had seven Presidents. Meet the hard-working individuals responsible for leading the Society and its members through decades of commitment and progress...



1. **Robert "Bob" Williams (1984-1993):** Bob founded the Walpack Historical Society and subsequently served as its 1st President. Though only in his early twenties, Bob took on the enormous responsibility of creating and leading a large-scale organization, bringing a youthful energy and determination that guided the Society through its first uncertain years.
2. **Leonard "Len" Peck (1993-1997, 1999-2003):** Len served as the Society's 2nd and 4th Presidents, as well as a trustee. He was the lead editor of the Walpack newsletter for several years, which served as an outlet for him to share his wealth of historical research and knowledge. In 1996, Len's extensive volunteer efforts were recognized with an award by the National Park Service. Len passed away in 2014 at the ripe old age of 104.
3. **Roberta "Robby" Rodimer (1997-1999):** Robby was one of the original members of the Walpack Historical Society. In addition to serving as its 3rd President, she also devoted her time to other roles including Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Robby moved from Sussex County to Vermont, where she has expanded her volunteer efforts to a local historical society. She hopes to return to Walpack for Van Campen Day this coming fall.
4. **Esther Irwin (2003-2004):** Esther was involved only a short while with the WHS, though long enough to serve as its 5th President for a single year. During her time spent living in Dingmans Ferry, she counted the WHS and its history among several unique passions including traveling, theater, fashion, cooking, and various charity work. Esther passed away in 2018 at age 86.
5. **Arne Englund (2004-2009, 2012-2017):** Arne's combined tenures as the Society's 6th and 8th Presidents make him the longest serving thus far. He has a particular interest in postal history, occasionally writing articles for the NJ Postal History Journal. Arne currently lives in Florida pursuing his musical passions, though he continues to donate historic postcards to the WHS.
6. **Ruthann Whitesell (2009-2012):** A lifelong resident of Sussex County, Ruthann had familial ties dating back to the Revolutionary War. In addition to serving as the Society's 7th President, Ruthann counted among her volunteer efforts the Sussex County, Branchville Borough, and Dingman's Delaware Historical Societies as well as nearly a dozen other community ventures. She passed away in 2019 at the age of 75.
7. **Donald "Don" Stieh (2017-Present):** Don is the 9th and current President of the Walpack Historical Society. He has many fond memories of Walpack from his childhood and was among those who took shelter at the Van Campen Inn during the Flood of 1955. Today, Don's time away from the rigors of the Presidency usually finds him fishing in the Big Flatbrook.

# THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF MANY



*Len Peck is recognized by DEWA for his volunteer efforts - 2000*

Every town or city deserves to have its history preserved for future generations, though the Walpack of the mid-1980s was uniquely desperate to have its legacy saved. With the majority of its residents forced out over a decade prior, the monumental task of not only stopping but undoing the ravages of time and neglect to the area fell on the shoulders of the fledgling historical society, which was still finding its feet. The NPS-led restoration of the Van Campen Inn which led to the Society's inception had been an immense effort, but the members of the newly established Walpack Historical Society needed to be prepared to do much more. The Inn was only the beginning of a tremendous and ongoing mission that will continue as long as the WHS exists. The Society had been founded in part to continue fighting against the Tocks Island Dam Project which, though dormant since the mid-1970s, wasn't officially deauthorized until 2002. Much of the



*Walpack and Water Gap Volunteers unveil the historical marker along Old Mine Road - 2002*

Society's early efforts were focused on ensuring that the project stayed dead, both by fighting it directly and by rebuilding a Walpack community too strong for the Federal Government to defeat a second time. Though today the dam is no longer a threat, there are still plenty of other challenges the Society faces on a daily basis, from continued costly building maintenance and dealing with vandalism to keeping technologically up to date in a rapidly modernizing world. One unexpected setback came in the last days of 2023 when the Main Street bridge was damaged by a hit and run, cutting visitor access to and from Walpack Center in half. This falls to the Federal Highway Administration to resolve, adding another entity to the joint venture in which the Walpack Historical Society, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, and still-existent Township of Walpack already operate.

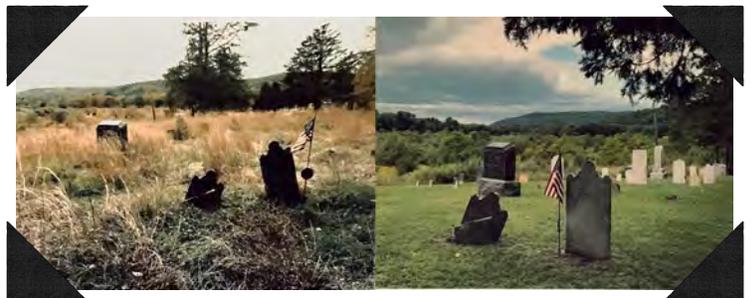
But while the Society eagerly awaits the bridge's reopening, the rest of Main Street is flourishing. Once seeming to make up a ghost town, its surviving buildings have one-by-one been revitalized by master carpenters in an ongoing crusade, from the restoration of the Rosenkrans House in 1989 to the current desire to help the schoolhouse. Though, some structures within the Water Gap have sadly deteriorated beyond repair, the Society has done its best to replace the losses by contributing elsewhere.

This can be as simple as planting an American flag to designate an unassuming rock as a long-dead veteran's grave or going through the extensive process of planting historical markers along the roads. The Lower Walpack Cemetery,



*The Van Campen Inn undergoing extensive renovation*

once completely overtaken by growth, was brought back to life and is lovingly tended to on a weekly basis. Other historic cemeteries and burial grounds, even those marked by mere field stones, are fully documented and regularly landscaped. A legacy peony bed in town, planted sometime in the early half of the previous century, has survived being accidentally mowed down twice by NPS workers and is continuously cleaned up by WHS volunteers. When they aren't getting their hands dirty, many of our members are hard at work writing for the newsletter, serving as docents, and maintaining the Society's online presence through the website and social media. In 2024, our social media outreach totaled nearly a quarter of a million people, a record for the Society. Because of that reach, Van Campen family descendants from Ohio, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Maine are inspired to visit their ancestral home, and the Inn's guest book boasts visitors from Wisconsin, Maryland, Illinois, Michigan, Washington State, and even Alaska. WHS volunteers and the time they dedicate are the ultimate life force that has allowed this organization to continue into the present and hopefully for many more years to come.



*An area of the Lower Walpack Cemetery before and after cleanup Photo courtesy of Sharon Spangenberg*

# TRADITIONS, OLD AND NEW

As with many successful institutions, the Walpack Historical Society owes its longevity in part to its ability to look to the future while embracing its past. An annual planning meeting in the fall decides the



*Walpack Day - 1987*

slate of events for the following year. Some of these are reserved for yearly staples, while the rest are encouraged to be filled with new program ideas. One such tradition is the sumptuous dinners at the Walpack Inn, which bring Society members together each spring and Christmas to both kick off and bring to a close the year's roster of events. 2024's Holiday dinner attracted the largest attendance to date: 111 people! This year's dinner was also significant in that New Jersey Assemblyman Michael Inganamort presented a Joint Legislative Resolution to the Walpack Historical Society. Mr. Inganamort and his family were also present at our 40th Anniversary celebration in June, where he spoke in honor of the occasion. These Walpack Inn dinners are something we hope to continue for as long as the beloved restaurant exists, and our friends there continue to invite us to dine with them.



*Spirits of Lower Walpack Event - 2024*

Walpack Day was a large-scale event held annually in Walpack Center beginning in 1987. It was briefly resurrected in 2018 when, after a massive effort on behalf of the Society and its friends, it drew a crowd of over 1,000 people. Nowadays, Van Campen Day is the Society's largest and most anticipated event of the year. Held each October since 1988, Van Campen Day brings to life the typically

sleepy village and puts all its buildings and treasures out for display. The titular homestead opens its doors for exhibits and docent-led historical discussions. A military band takes intrepid visitors on a hike through the surrounding ancient cemeteries, while those remaining near the Inn can try their hand at cider making and corn shelling. On the other side of the ridge, several buildings, including the Walpack Center Church and Rosenkrans Museum, are open to the public. The Rosenkrans museum also opens up each December

for our annual Walpack Christmas event. This past September, the Society held its first "Spirits of Lower Walpack" event, an atmospheric cemetery tour which invited guests to interact with docents representing the most interesting inhabitants of the Lower Walpack Cemetery. In response to enthusiasm following the event, the Society plans to organize it again this coming autumn. Though speaking presentations in the Walpack Center Church have always been the "bread and butter" of our yearly events, 2025 will see the Society venture somewhat outside of its comfort zone. The very first day of the year began with something new: A New Years Day hike down Old Mine Road attracted a surprising crowd of over sixty people despite the cold, gray weather. Another cold-weather hike was held in April around the Blue Mountain Lakes. These hikes helped bridge the usually quiet



*WHS Halloween Party - 1990*

months between the Holiday dinner and the first program in the spring. The Society is happy to meet the demand of its members to keep the momentum of activities going all twelve months of the year. There are a number of new and

unique events planned for 2025, including hikes to new locations, a field trip to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to explore Walpack's Moravian roots, and an exclusive look into the Society's extensive archive of historical objects that have been collected and donated over the years. Additional presentations in the church are also planned throughout the spring and summer. We hope you'll work Walpack's 2025 calendar into your own and join us in kicking off the next forty years with a bang!



*WHS President Don Stieh accepts a joint resolution from Assemblyman Inganamort - 2024*

# Membership/Donation Form

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 The Walpack Historical Society, Inc. is a non-profit, tax exempt organization under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.  
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## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Each passing year carries Walpack Township further away from the glory of its heyday. Fewer and fewer people remain with firsthand experience of its quaint daily life, its notable citizens, and its unique traditions. The task has fallen to future generations to promote the information that has been painstakingly documented in books, and to continue sharing the individual stories that aren't. In an age that seems to be increasingly apathetic towards history, the responsibility imposed on so few people to carry the enormous weight of Walpack's history is certainly daunting. However, while there may be precious few left who call Walpack their home in the literal sense, a growing number of people have fallen in love with the area and made it their adoptive home. Those who are no longer with us have passed their stories on to us. In time, it will be our duty to tell them to the next generation. Considering how close Walpack came to losing its legacy entirely and how so few were able to save it, it seems fair to say that the Walpack Historical Society with its current numbers is a solid foundation to continue for decades more what only a handful were able to make last forty years. Against all odds, both the township and historical society have withstood the challenges of time. The story of Walpack has been passed down through the ages, from Native Americans, to Dutch miners, to frontiersmen and farmers, and finally to us. Like these predecessors, we are stewards of Walpack's land and legacy. The Walpack Historical Society invites anyone with a passion for either to join us in keeping them alive. With your continued interest and support, we will be able to justify the optimism we have for our future. Here's to the next forty years!



*Some of the Walpack Historical Society's past and present Trustees - December, 2024  
 From left to right: Chris Cunningham, Bill Schwab, Joanne Wirths, Audrey Schwab, Sharon Spangenberg, Bob Williams, Ally Schwab, Don Stieh, Dan Tassej, Ruth Stieh, Sonya Hulbert, Scott Yashay, Ken Bechtold, Dave Hayes*

www.walpackhistory.org

## REMEMBERING SONYA HULBERT

We regret to share news of the recent passing of Sonya Hulbert on February 1st, 2025 at the age of 95. In addition to being a long-time resident of Branchville and member of the Walpack Historical Society, Sonya was involved with the Branchville Borough Historical Society, the Lusscroft Farm Preservation Effort, and was a volunteer at the Manna House in Newton. She also dedicated her time to various



other non-historical community and charity efforts. Sonya joined us for our annual Holiday Dinner this past December, and we're happy she was with us to celebrate forty years of the Society. Her spirit and dedication will be greatly missed.

*Photo courtesy of the Wood  
Funeral Home, Branchville*

## WE'RE LOOKING FOR WRITERS



As we continue to keep Walpack's history alive, we are requesting our members consider writing an article for possible inclusion in our quarterly newsletter. Please know in advance that any article submitted must be

approved by our trustees and must go through our editing process. If you have an interesting story to tell or have photos of Walpack that you would be willing to share, please submit them to us by visiting [walpackhistory.org/newsletter/](http://walpackhistory.org/newsletter/)

### ~MISSION STATEMENT~

The Society actively stimulates an awareness and interest in the Walpack area through lectures, tours, publications and special events, such as Van Campen Day, hikes, and exhibits at county-wide events.

It promotes collection, preservation and dissemination of Walpack area history and acts as a repository for artifacts of the Walpack area, and also maintains a small museum and book store and provides tours of Walpack Center and VCI.