

# THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

The Mount Amwell Project, Inc., P.O. Box 226, Lebanon, NJ 08833, [www.mtamwell.org](http://www.mtamwell.org), [info@mtamwell.org](mailto:info@mtamwell.org), 908-801-3125

## Haypress Cemetery cleanup

On April 30, ten members of the Hunterdon Central Regional High School's Interact Club with their advisor Tracy Axmann, spent 2 ½ hours cleaning Haypress Cemetery in Whitehouse Station and which is located at the very end of High Street. The high school students picked up fallen branches and raked leaves, preparing the half acre site for mowing in the coming weeks.

The Haypress Cemetery is also known as the "old Whitehouse cemetery". Among those interred are members of the Ramsey family, and veterans of the Revolutionary War. Many families buried here were related -- the Covenhovens, Wyckoffs, Strykers and Voorhees. Most were members of the Reformed Dutch Church.

"The name Haypress comes from the fact it's next to a site that long ago was used by farmers to press hay, and the oldest burial is Captain

Cornelius Van Horne, who died 12 Feb 1744," said David Reading, director of the Mt Amwell Project. "The cemetery was originally cleared by the Mount Amwell Project in 2015 under a maintenance agreement with Readington Twp."

Interact Club is a Rotary-sponsored community service club that organizes various events towards meeting community needs and improving the local high school. Interact volunteers have the opportunity of performing many charitable projects. Projects might be hands-on or they could be projects that are supported by the group through fundraising for non-profit and charitable organizations.

Students who participated were: Julianna Coutros, Kellie Rice, Dhyana Abeysinghe, Madelyn Brown, Jason Gertzman, Mehek Ragoowansi, Katie Spangler, Haley Fitzgerald, Elle Bischoff and Brandon Bischoff

They were assisted by Executive Director, Beverly Kirby-McDonough, and Chief Steward David Voorhees.



## The Return of Bonnell Tavern and the Last Man Standing

*By David DeGiralamo, MD DMD, Mayor Union Township, originally printed in the Quarterly Newsletter for Union Township, The People's Press, Spring 2022. Reprinted by permission of the author.*

You've likely whizzed past this monumental piece of history thousands of times and never even known it existed. But it's there. Stationed on its own island sits Bonnell Tavern, a nearly 300-year-old three-story colonial. Its footprint straddles two towns - the structure itself lies in Union Township, while its parking lot belongs to Clinton. It is neighbored, embarrassingly, by the Exit 15 off ramp, a Shammy Shine car wash and a multi-unit apartment building, the sound of tires, trucks and technology whirling past, overwhelming it. It is our region's most obvious anachronism - the once-prominent centerpiece has been made small by the passage of time and rendered forgotten by the inexorable path of progress and the asphalt river that is Route 78. Recent years have not been kind to it: water seepage and neglect nearly destroyed its foundation not too long ago. But its potential revitalization rests entirely in the hands of one Bonnell family member, who has taken sole ownership of the house and has made it his personal life's work to preserve it.

61-year-old Hank Bonnell is the last of his family line with the passion to save the house. He just has that look of a descendant: tall, lanky frame, angular features, nostalgic smile. Through the numerous windows, he can see your approach instantly as you make the precarious turn in off the main thoroughfare, will greet you affably at the top of the hill like a benign beacon and beckon you in through the side door of the township's most historically compelling landmark. Once in, you have entered his galaxy: a solar system that remains very much a work in progress. Construction dust is everywhere,

vibrating with the sounds of an on-again, off-again Spotify, amid temperatures in which hoodies seem requisite (and you regret you're not wearing one). There are multiple iterations – spanning decades – of architectural drawings, strewn over walls and across tables, as if documenting the early brushstrokes of an important, but slightly mad, scientific experiment. And hovering over all of it are Hank's ancestors – prints of faded, forlorn faces of days gone by, tacked on to cardboard in a hall-of-fame row, resting on a 250-year-old mantle for all to see. They are like Hank's VIP section bleachers, overseeing the arena of the one-man show keeping their family name, and legacies, alive. There is importance and pressure here in this galaxy, and you feel it all.



Spend some time with Hank, and he'll show you his lair. He's done it so many times before, including for those curious townsfolk who yell up to him from his perch on the ladder as he paints, wondering what in the world he's up to. He jumps up and down on the new center room floorboards that he's laid down, with a pride in completion and youthful exuberance that makes

you wonder, in this hallowed hall of history, if he's overestimated their support. The place has been around for a while. Its age is estimated, not by circumferential rings on a transected tree, but by pennies – counterfeit pennies to be exact – that were uncovered at the threshold. 1738 is the faded inscription. He's found other pennies that date back to 1694 on premises, but he'll stick with the former estimate for safe keeping.

This much is known with certainty: eight generations before him, Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Bonnell, a licensed tavern owner, bought the property in 1767. It says so on the calligraphic deed that sits on the mantle next to his ancestors. Colonel Abe (as he was known) spearheaded the 2nd Hunterdon County Militia Regiment, alongside Commissary General Charles Stewart. He and others moved the Sons of Liberty (the Provincial Congress predecessor) and the Safety Committee from Van Syckels Tavern to Bonnell's property, after David Reynolds, the owner of Van Syckels, was hanged for counterfeiting. In August 1775, the Provincial Congress ratified the Militia Act, which formed the renowned minutemen. Bonnell's Tavern became one of the first, and one of the most prominent, recruiting stations for militia and Continental army units, as well as the headquarters and recruiting hub for the minutemen in the region.

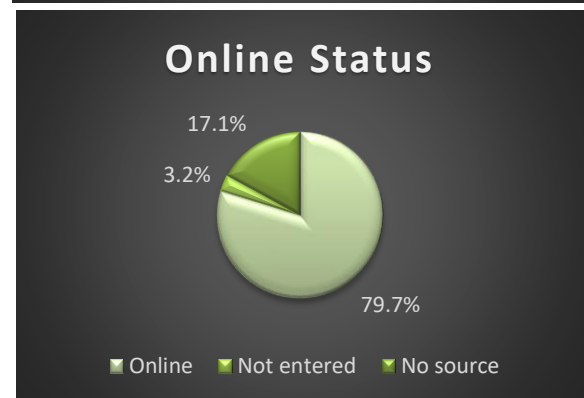
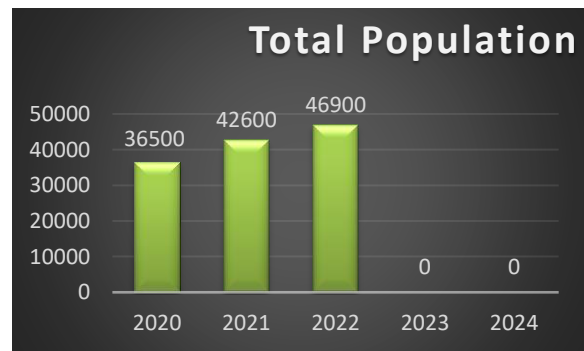
250 years later, Hank Bonnell shoulders the burden of its survival: militia replaced by site plans; muskets replaced by hammers. The very last of the minutemen, at the standing ready, prepares for the revolution of its resurrection.

This is the first of a three-part series on Hank Bonnell and the ongoing story of Bonnell Tavern.

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## Online Burial Database Statistics

The Mount Amwell Project's online cemetery and burial database was put online in 2009 in cooperation with Dr. Fred Lathrop. Dr. Lathrop's data was mapped to a new indexing scheme using municipality codes and sequence numbers that uniquely identified each cemetery. Over the years cemetery information and burial list data has been corrected and expanded. However, not all cemetery burial lists are fully populated. Efforts are underway to complete the lists, but the task is challenging. When searches for existing sources provide no data, field work is required to manually document the burials. This is, of course, time consuming, but progress is being made. Currently there are 158 cemeteries in the database. As the charts below show, approximately 80% of the cemeteries have a complete burial list and the total population has increased 22% in the last 2 years. The lack of sources at 17 % remains a formable challenge. The newsletter will re-publish these statistics annually to document our progress.



## Cemeteries listed PNJ 10Most

*Preservation New Jersey, a historic preservation state wide advocacy group, has included cemeteries in this year's 10 most endangered sites. Their web site press release is below.*

TRENTON, NJ – In recognition of National Preservation Month, Preservation New Jersey (PNJ) announced its annual list of the [10 Most Endangered Historic Places](#) in New Jersey at a press conference at the State House Annex at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, May 17th 2022. PNJ was joined by the advocates for this year's endangered historic places to support New Jersey's threatened cultural and architectural heritage. **Endangered cemeteries are on this year's list.**

Cemeteries are important repositories of history and culture, in addition to memorializing the deaths of individual people. Cemeteries associated with historic events such as the Civil War can be pathways into historic records. Sometimes cemeteries contain genealogical records otherwise not available prior to routinization of vital records reporting in the early 20th century. Lack of maintenance and the abandonment of cemeteries threaten these important historic resources. In New Jersey, major causes of cemetery decline include ethnic population movement, dissolution of congregations associated with religious cemeteries, government policies that explicitly promote cemetery desecration, and prioritization of development. The impact of decline and abandonment on New Jersey cemeteries can be significantly reduced by changes in the New Jersey cemetery laws as follows:

It has been twenty-five years since Preservation New Jersey first declared cemeteries were one of the 10 Most Endangered Historic Places in New Jersey. Now with 10 Most nominations in 2022 of cemeteries including Johnsons Cemetery (Camden), Dutch Reformed Church Graveyard (Belleville), Reton Cemetery (Fort Lee) and Doremus Cedar Grove Farm Burial Ground/

Canfield Cemetery (Cedar Grove) – Preservation New Jersey reiterates the urgency with which New Jersey state law must be changed to save these keys to our individual and statewide histories.

<https://www.preservationnj.org/ten-most-endangered/10most-2022/>

## Lecture at Readington Farms

Dave Reading will present a lecture on Saving Hunterdon Abandoned Cemeteries on Friday, June 24, 7 - 8 PM at the historic Wade-Wyckoff Barn located at the Bouman-Stickney Farmstead in the Stanton section of Readington Township, 114 Dreahook Road, Lebanon, NJ. If you wish to attend you may register online at:

<https://forms.gle/LGgNxLcar3YzpVRv9>



The Mount Amwell News  
The newsletter of the Mount Amwell Project  
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## Thank You, Donors

If you have not made a contribution yet, please make a donation of an amount that you consider generous.

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