

**Nomination Report**  
For Historic Designation of  
**The MacBain House and Farm**

189 Hickory Lane  
Block 2102 Lot 37.07  
(mailing address 203 Hickory Lane)



**Closter Historic Preservation Commission**  
**December 2016**

Tim Adriance, Chair  
Jennifer Rothschild, Vice Chair  
Bobbie Bouton Goldberg  
Erik Lenander  
William J. Martin  
Susan McTigue

Orlando Tobia  
Jayne Rubenfeld-Waldron  
Joel Zelnik

Brian Stabile, Council Liaison  
Sophie Heymann, Planning Board Liaison

## **DESCRIPTION:**

Situated on a rise on a 6.79 acre plot in the east hill section of the Borough of Closter, this borough-owned property is now a community farm cultivated for farm produce that Closter residents can pick at designated times. An original farmhouse dating to approximately 1932 is located near the northeastern edge of the property.

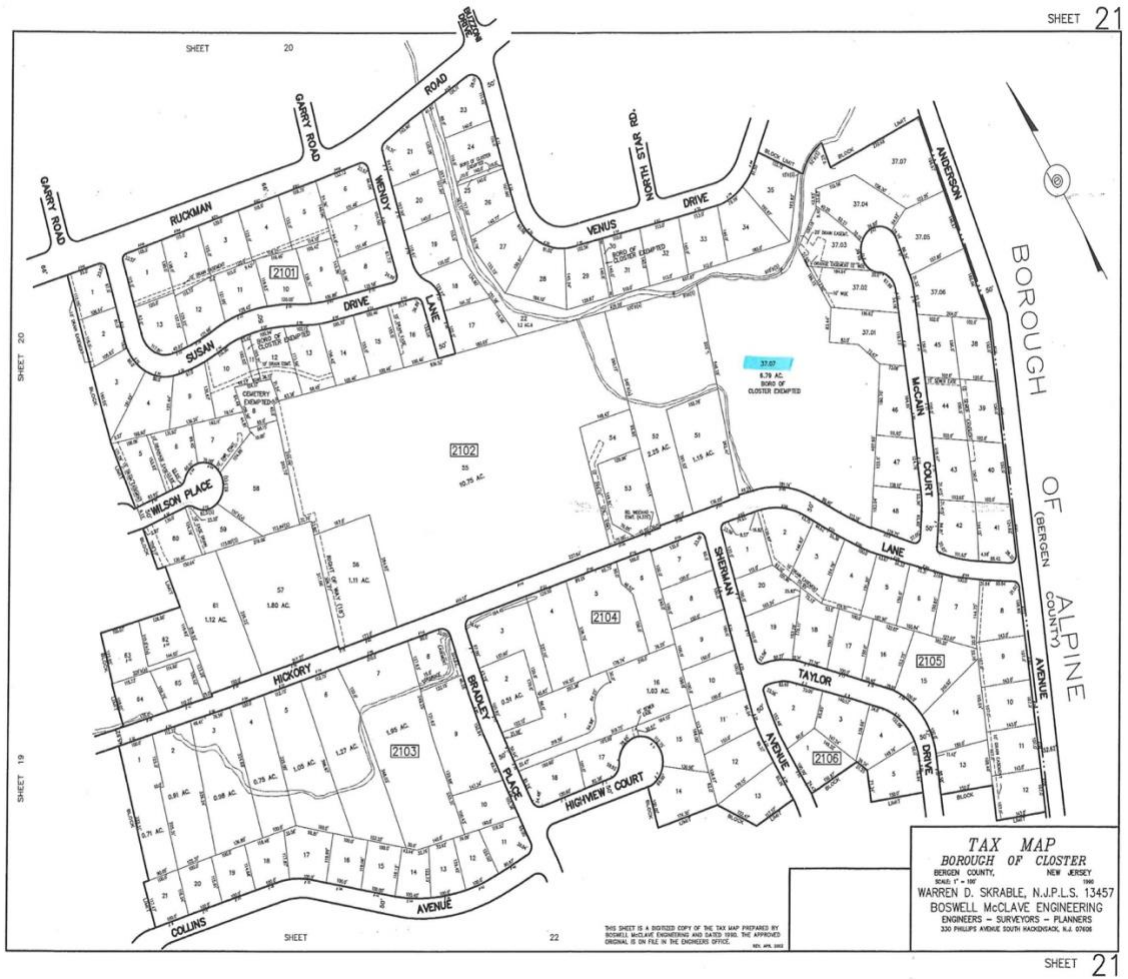
The house is a 2 ½ story 3-bay vernacular farmhouse with 3 gabled dormers on the south elevation. The house consists of a rectangular main block with a short ell to the north. Its construction is of ashlar sandstone block and cedar clapboard. There is a 2-story porch boasting six columns, on the front (southern-facing) façade of the house. On this main façade is a central entrance door flanked by two six-panel windows and side doors. The western-facing façade has a one-story porch and stone chimney. The roof is of a gambrel style which pays homage to the area's Dutch houses. There is an intersecting gambrel roof on the north façade of the house.

The house had some cutting edge features at the time it was built, including a two septic water system (One for reusable grey water) and buried water pipes in the basement for a "poor man's" air conditioning. Later, the property included a 2 1/2 car garage with a large upstairs apartment, chicken coops, and kennels in the area that is now the end of McCain Court. The house was built by local stone mason, Tony Pellegrin, using stone quarried from the MacBain property. Mr. Pellegrin's nickname was "Split a Mountain." Sand used for the mortar was also taken from the land. The house is faced to catch the sun and overlook the fields.

On the northern side of the farm runs a major tributary of the Dwarskill brook and a section of wetlands. A minor tributary of the Dwarskill runs on the western side of the farm. There is a borough hiking trail that leads around the western and northern sections of the farmland, with an alternate route that goes through the farm and out the eastern gate. These sections of the trail hook up with a trail that continues along the Dwarskill brook and leads to Anderson Avenue. The trail passes the farmhouse, built in 1972 by Malcolm MacBain, at 70 Anderson Avenue. The trail traverses the wetlands area with a bridge and signage about the trail's environment. This trail was established along with the Farm Park and was part of the 1996 exchange agreement.

Surface discoveries of pre-historic artifacts, including tools, have been found on the property. These artifacts, which represent the Lenni Lenape Indians, date from the Early to Middle Archaic to the Late Woodland Period.

MAP



Closter Tax Map showing MacBain Farm land highlighted in upper right corner of the image

**PHOTOS OF THE MACBAIN HOUSE**



Front (south) façade of house. Photo taken by Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg. December 2016.



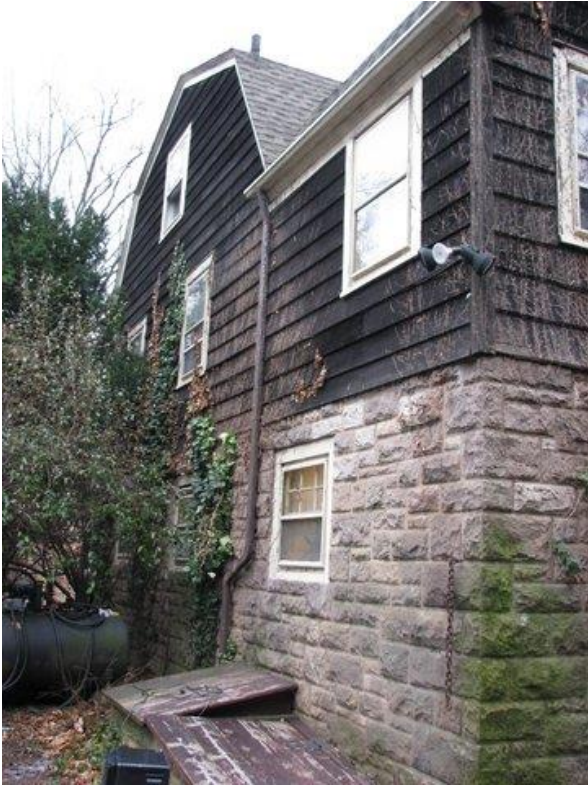
North and West façade of house. Bobbie Bouton Goldberg, 2016



West façade of house. Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, 2016



East façade of house. Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, 2016



East façade of house, detail. Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, 2016



North façade of house. Historical photo; date unknown.

## HISTORY:

In 1906, William MacBain of Tenafly, New Jersey, bought farmland from the Stillman family who lived at 119 Hickory Lane in Closter. At 119 Hickory stands the old Resolvert Nagel house. The tract that MacBain purchased, located on Hickory Lane, contained 18.26 acres. The 1912 Bromley Atlas Map #23 shows that the MacBain property includes 19.77 acres, and shows his eastern neighbor, Sarah Jones, owning 8.96 acres. Mr. MacBain bought the Jones property in 1922; he also bought other nearby land through the years. Sarah Jones, from New York City, paid \$7,000 for three tracts of property in 1867 from William and Maria Short. The first tract contained 36 acres, the second 5.39 acres and the third was a lot of meadowland on the west side of the public road and adjoining the swamp containing four acres, more or less.

The land (75 acres) on the northern side of the Jones and MacBain property is listed in the Bromley Atlas as owned by the W.W. Phelps Estate. William Walter Phelps (1839-1894) was a railroad owner who was elected to Congress in 1872. He was later U.S. Minister to Austria and to Germany. He served again in Congress before being appointed to the highest court in New Jersey. By 1891, he owned 4,000 acres of land stretching from the Hudson River to Hackensack. Mackay Park in Englewood was once part of Phelps's 1,500 acre "Englewood Farm" residence.

William MacBain, who served on the Closter Borough Council in the early 1920s, had a Wall Street financial office in New York, but he was also well known as a dog breeder and dog-show judge. His Closter kennels, where he specialized in raising Scotties, was named the "Diehard Kennels." These kennels were used as the setting of the *Kennel Murder Case* written by S.S. Dine, a popular mystery writer in 1933. The MacBains often traveled to Scotland to visit friends and family and to buy new dogs there.

William MacBain and his wife, Isabella, had seven children: Kathleen, Hugh, Isabel, Marjorie, Alastair, Gavin, and Kenneth. Kenneth, who was born in 1900, studied agriculture at Cornell University, graduating in 1924. He worked with his father running the dog kennels.

Marjorie MacBain graduated from Closter High School in 1923 and gave the valedictory speech. On September 3, 1939, she and her father were aboard the ocean liner "Athenia," when it was torpedoed by a German submarine. They escaped in one of the last lifeboats an hour after being hit. A local newspaper carried an article titled, "Miss MacBain Gives a Vivid Account of Athenia Sinking." An Englewood Press article mentioned that Mr. MacBain was the father of Alastair MacBain, the crew coach at Columbia University, and that Marjorie, 29, was the president of the Cornell Woman's Club in Bergen County and captain of the Closter Girl Scouts.

Alastair MacBain (1908-1980) had an interesting life after his Closter farm beginnings. According to a 1939 issue of the "Columbia Spectator," he was "born and raised in a section where the classic pose of the bird dog pointing at a covey of quail with tail outstretched and paw uplifted in frozen silence is a commonplace scene." He became a noted authority on the rod and gun and co-wrote with Corey Ford many magazine articles for sportsmen. Alastair graduated from Columbia, where he rowed and later became a crew coach. During World War

II, Alastair served with the Office of Strategic Services, the “OSS,” a wartime intelligence agency of the United States during World War II and the predecessor to the CIA. He also served in the Air Force, holding the rank of Major at the end of the war. After his military service, he again teamed up with Mr. Ford to write Cloak and Dagger, the secret story of the OSS, which was made into a movie directed by Fritz Lang and starring Gary Cooper. The story was also made into a radio series. They wrote other books, including A Man on His Own and Other Dog Stories. Mr. MacBain became the chief information officer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1950.

Gavin K. MacBain (1911-1978) who starred in his senior play, graduated from Closter High School in 1928. The student newspaper, for which he was the business editor, mentioned that he looked like Charles Lindbergh. Gavin attended Columbia University, as did his older brother, Alistair, and was on the Crew Team there. Gavin married his childhood sweetheart, Margaret Gristede of the famous Gristede’s food chain company, and later became CEO of Bristol Myers. So, at least two brothers did not stay down on the farm, although Hugh (1902-1982) and his wife Emily MacBain of Closter were deeded family land by Kenneth in 1936 and 1953.

In 1932, his parents deeded to Kenneth the property that included 203 Hickory Lane (about 27 acres). The Dutch style farmhouse was built around this time. The house was designed by Kenneth’s wife, Elizabeth, who had a degree in Landscape Design. The two met when she was researching information about her Scottie dog’s breed and contacted the expert, Kenneth. The former Elizabeth Marjorie MacKay was from upstate New York and Oyster Bay.

Hugh (1902-1982) and his wife Emily MacBain of Closter were deeded family land by Kenneth in 1936 and 1953.

Kenneth and Elizabeth (known as Marsalie) ran the Cabrach Kennels and farm. Their grandson is not sure that Marsalie assisted in the kennels, although she did participate in the gardening, and Kenneth, like his father, was a dog breeder and dog show judge. Their grandson, also named Kenneth, remembers that they grew grapes along the dog runs, which gave the dogs shade in the summer. The MacBain’s often boarded up to 100 dogs. Only in August would the kennel have this number. In the winter months the number could be down to 10. When grandson Kenneth was young the only dogs around were Cairn terriers and Scotties. John McCaffrey, a neighbor, remembers willows being grown in the southwest corner of the farm. Mr. MacBain used the small branches of these trees to tie up his grapes.

The MacBain farm included an orchard of not only the common apple, peach, cherry, and pear trees, but apricot, nectarine, and Kenneth’s favorite, Stanley Plum. Their neighbor, Mary Mayer, also remembers quince trees. Mr. MacBain was a gentleman farmer, although he did some work for Mrs. Brooks who then owned the Nagel farmhouse and farm at 119 Hickory Lane. Corn was the main crop, along with blueberry, raspberry, and melon plants, a half a dozen bee hives, chicken, geese, and over 300 rose bushes. Because Mr. MacBain was one of the early naturalists in this area, the farm reflected his interest in growing things. However, the rose garden that was located by the Farm Park front gate was known as Mrs. MacBain’s. Mary Mayer notes that when the Congregational Church had strawberry socials in the 1970s and



1980s, Mr. MacBain would oversee the church ladies picking the berries they needed from his patch. Mike Pisano, who worked at the MacBain farm in the late 1970s, remembers Mrs. MacBain serving lemonade on the side porch at 10 a.m. and at 2 p.m., so that the workers would have their twenty minute breaks. He also remembers lots of Brussel sprouts being grown on the property.

Elizabeth and Kenneth had three children: Malcolm, Keith, and Gillian. For a time before he moved to Connecticut, Keith lived in the apartment above the garage. Then Malcolm (who helped out at the farm) and his family lived there, before he built a farmhouse on the northeastern section of the property (70 Anderson Avenue). Gillian became an expert in Bergen County textiles. Elizabeth MacBain (born in 1903) lived on the old farm for a long time. She died in 2000. Kenneth had died in 1990.

About seven years before Mrs. MacBain died, the ten acres of farmland and the home were sold to Temple Emanu-el. The congregation planned on building a temple, chapel, school, social hall, and parking garage. However, because of the size of the plans, wetland issues, and the neighborhood's concerns about traffic in this quiet bucolic area, battles before the Planning Board dragged on for months. Efforts were made to prevent the construction, even at the state level, and the problems seemed insurmountable. A scaled down version was approved, but the members wanted to build according to its original plans.

In April of 1995 a land swap was proposed. Steven Harz, who was mayor of Closter at that time, suggested a land swap of the Temple's Hickory Lane property for Borough-owned land off of Piermont Road next to Ruckman Park. Many details needed to be worked out, because the police shooting range was on the Piermont property and the area included acres of wetlands. After many months of negotiations, a deal was reached. Temple Emanu-el was built at the Piermont Road site, and the building features a beautiful stained glass ceiling that was moved from a Brooklyn synagogue. The congregation thanked Mayor Harz with a lifetime membership.

Because the acreage and assessed valuation of the swap wasn't even, the Temple was allowed to sell off six lots at the end of McCain Court, and they installed and funded the trail and signage along the Dwarskill Tributary. Unfortunately, the large garage that once stood at the MacBain farm property was demolished at this time, because it straddled the property line. Meanwhile the farmhouse stood empty until an effort was spearheaded to find a caretaker/farmer to live in the house and run the farm. Councilwoman, Sophie Heymann, Borough Administrator, Erik Lenander, and Environmental Commission member, Mary Mayer, spearheaded this effort and produced plans for what would become known as the "MacBain Farm Park." Dr. Arthur Goldberg, another Environmental Commission member, was also a great help. It was not an easy task, as some council members wanted to sell the land for development.

In 2000, three very qualified applicants for the job also suggested many good ideas including having an orchard, arboretum, educational center, flower gardens, as well as a working farm. Major improvements to the house were also discussed including the installation of water lines,

a natural gas line, a new furnace, electrical updates, painting, and other improvements. Mrs. Heymann encouraged that the repairs be executed with respect for the historical elements of the house.

John P. McCaffrey was awarded a ten-year contract to be the caretaker/farmer of the MacBain farm, and even before the signing the contract, he started saving some of the trees in the MacBain orchard by moving them to the Borough property. The 6.79 acres includes land along the stream all the way to Anderson Avenue. The farmland with the house is about five and a half acres.

John McCaffrey had lived next to the MacBain farm since 1961, when his family moved to a new house on McCain Court. He learned a great deal of farming knowledge from the MacBain family and had worked with Mrs. Brooks at the old Nagel farm.

The contract with Mr. McCaffrey is overseen by the Environmental Commission. For many years, Environmental Commission member and MacBain Farm neighbor, Mary Mayer, has been the point person. Mrs. Mayer, a Closter Nature Center leader and environmentalist, had also been friends with the MacBain family. Closter was very fortunate to have so many environmentally and historically aware and caring residents working on making this project a special place for the Borough.

Through the years, different plants have been grown at the farm with residents giving their input. Mrs. Mayer started a group of Farm Volunteers who help visitors find what is growing and urge them to follow the picking rules. The main goal is to provide a farm experience, not to feed a family. Visitors are given a small bucket to fill, and often the farm is so busy that all of the buckets are in use and parking has spilled over into the street. The volunteers also pick vegetables to donate to the Closter Food Bank.

Different flowers have been planted to beautify the area. Especially impressive are the rows of sunflowers often planted along the pathways. Mr. McCaffrey plants for the birds and the bees, as well as for patrons. For example, there are mulberry trees that he takes care of as well as the sunflowers. Many photographers and painters also enjoy his efforts.

In 2011, Mr. McCaffrey, along with Beth Ravit, (Environmental Commission chair) and Mary Mayer, oversaw an Eagle Scout project to build a bricked entrance plaza for the disabled. Patrick J. Dolan is the scout who undertook this project. The area includes raised beds and a brick contemplation patio, in the shape of a Celtic cross, near the main gate. Mr. McCaffrey also worked with the Girl Scouts on a project in which he roped off a special area for them to use. He works with senior volunteers from Northern Valley Regional High School almost every year, as well as with a group of students from Friendship House Adults with Autism, from Hackensack. In 2015, these students made large labels for garden plants and helped pull out the tomato stakes at the end of the year.



Northern Valley Regional High School Senior Service students pose with John McCaffrey (2012)

Every year near Halloween, the Environmental Commission holds a Farm Festival at the MacBain Farm Park. Local children are allowed to pick a pumpkin then paint it, to roast marshmallows, make s'mores, enjoy story-telling, music and cider. As many as 200 children, as well as their parents, attend the yearly celebration. It has become a very popular town tradition.



Photos taken at the Farm Festival. Susan McTigue, 2016.

There are plans to add a row of blueberry bushes to the farm. Adding back some of the originally-grown plants seems historically fitting. The Borough of Closter, by preserving this special piece of land as an unusual Farm Park, has kept the MacBain environmental legacy and a piece of Closter history alive for continuing generations.

Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture

## Closter Creates a Free Community Farm



By Sophie Heymann  
Mayor, Closter

Spring is at our doorstep, and many community groups are renewing, or establishing CSA's, or Community Supported Agriculture. These are the farm-based cooperatives that oblige members to pay for and then receive weekly allocations of various organically grown seasonal produce. The intent is to foster local farming and local consumption. But most CSA's have severe limitations. Not everyone can afford the \$500+ cost of a share, nor can everyone live with the uncertainty of the weekly distribution. The participants cannot choose the contents of the weekly allocation, which is governed by the season. Nor can they choose the amount they receive, since that is determined by individual conditions on each farm. The Borough of Closter has chosen a different approach with its publicly owned MacBain Farm Park.

THE MOST INNOVATIVE RESULT OF THE EARLY DISCUSSIONS WAS THE DECISION TO LET CLOSTER RESIDENTS ENJOY THE FRUITS OF JOHN'S LABOR AT NO CHARGE.



The MacBain Farm's produce includes parsley and cilantro, leek, many varieties of eggplants, peppers and squashes, beans, spinach, many kinds of lettuce, broccoli and beets, celery, corn for the table and ornamental corn, arugula, collards and kale, tomatillos, carrots, radishes, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, ornamental gourds and, of course, many varieties of tomatoes. There are also perennials like asparagus, horseradish, and, gradually, the return of some fruit trees.

10 NEW JERSEY MUNICIPALITIES APRIL 2011

NJ League of Municipalities article, April 2011

## **RATIONALE FOR HISTORIC DESIGNATION:**

The MacBain farm and house are significant in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century agricultural history of Closter. The MacBain farm was a family run truck farm and now carries on the tradition in the form of a community picking garden. The 2 ½ story farm house has local ashlar sandstone blocks on the first story. Plowed fields still curve east of the house as the property grades and slopes downward in elevation. Some orchard trees still grow on the property.

Pre-historic surface finds of artifacts have been located throughout the property, including tools that were located around a spring. The collection includes points and tools which represent the Leni Lenape Indians and date from the Early to Middle Archaic to Late Woodland Periods. These objects were in the collection of Kenneth MacBain, who donated a collection of arrowheads that were discovered on the property to the Closter Nature Center.

The standards for designation of a historic property in Closter are set forth in Article 35 of the Borough Code as follows:

§ 35-54 Designation of buildings, structures, objects, sites and districts as historic.

A. Criteria for designation. The Commission shall consider as worthy of designation those buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts that have integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- (1) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the Borough of Closter by reflecting or exemplifying the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community;
- (2) That are associated with historic personages important in national, state, or local history;
- (3) That is the site of an historic event which had a significant effect on the development of the nation, state or community;
- (4) That embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; that represent the work of a master; that possess high artistic values; or that represent a significant distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- (5) That are otherwise of particular historic significance to the Borough of Closter by reflecting or exemplifying the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.

Looking at the above five criteria for designation, the MacBain Farm and house meet sections (1), (2) and (5).

The MacBain Farm and house are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the Borough of Closter by exemplifying the broad cultural history of farming in Closter, thus meeting Criteria (1).

The Mac Bain Farm and house are associated with historic personages that are important to Closter history, such as William MacBain, who served on Closter's Council in the early 1920's and who purchased the land and established the dog kennel business there. Alistair MacBain achieved fame even beyond Closter's borders with his distinguished military and intelligence career during World War II and subsequent contributions to the literary world along with author Corey Ford. Gavin MacBain achieved worldwide business success as CEO of Bristol Myers. Kenneth MacBain ran and expanded the dog kennel business and was significant in Closter for his contributions. For all of the above reasons, the MacBain Farm and house meet Criteria (2).

The MacBain Farm and house also meet Criteria (5), because they are of particular historic significance to the Borough of Closter by reflecting and exemplifying the broad cultural and social history of agriculture in this community during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as the site of archaeological artifacts dating relevant to the culture of indigenous peoples, specifically the Leni Lenape people, from the early to middle Archaic to the late Woodland Period.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Source materials used in researching the MacBain House and Farm are listed in the Resources Bibliography below. Title searches were performed at the Bergen County Records Vault. Old newspapers were searched. MacBain family members were contacted, as well as their friends and former farm workers. The Commission thanks MacBain family members for sharing their photographs. The Bergen County Sites Survey included information on the house and farm as well as the property, which is considered an archaeological site. Thanks to Sophie Heymann, Mary Mayer and Erik Lenander, the Commission had access to Borough documents related to the MacBain Farm Park. Thanks to Borough Historian, Orlando Tobia, for sharing Closter High School memorabilia (his sister was a classmate of Gavin MacBain). Thanks to Douglas Radick for sharing an old scrapbook with relevant materials.

## **RESOURCES BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

American Kennel Gazette and Stud Book, 1922

American Yorkshire Record, Vol. 5 1915

Beacon (Closter High School newspaper) various dates in 1927 and 1928

Bergen County Historic Sites Survey Report: Borough of Closter, N.J., Bergen County Office of Culture & Historic Affairs and the Bergen County Historic Sites Advisory Board Historic Sites Survey, 1981-1982, Revisions and Updates, March 1999

Bergen Record, July 17, 2009

Bergen Review (local newspaper) various dates in 1923 and 1924

Bouton-Goldberg et al, Englewood and Englewood Cliffs: Images of America, Arcadia Press, 1998

Closter High School Playbill, 1924

Columbia Spectator, October 1931 and 1939

County Life, 1937

Garbe-Morillo, Patricia, Closter and Alpine: Images of America, Arcadia Press, 2001

Gurnee, Jeanne ed., Historic Homes in Closter, Environmental Commission

Closter, N.J. 1979

Indiana Star, 1934

**Interviews** (phone, email, and in person): Erik Lenander, Sophie Heymann, Gay and Mary Mayer, Kenneth MacBain, Ophelia MacBain, John McCaffrey, Orlando Tobia, Mike Pisano

### **Maps, Websites, Local Plans, Papers, & Letters**

Bromley, George W. and Walter S., Atlas of Bergen County 1912

Genealogy.com

NorthJersey.com (Aug. 14, 2009)

Various census sites

Farm proposals 2000

Farm contracts 2000, 2010

Master Plan for Closter MacBain Park & Garden (includes map)

Deer Fence & Walkways Phase #1 Map

Letters and records – relating to the Temple, 1990s

Various Deeds from 1867 to 1974

Submitted by Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, with Jennifer Rothschild

**APPENDICES:**

SECTION, 109 WEST STATE STREET, TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625 (609) 292-2023

NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
 HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION  
 INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURE SURVEY FORM

HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY NO. 21

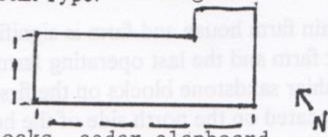
HISTORIC NAME: McBain Farm House & Farm  
 LOCATION: 203 Hickory Lane  
 MUNICIPALITY: Closter  
 USGS QUAD: Yonkers  
 OWNER/ADDRESS: Borough of CLOSTER

COMMON NAME: McBain Farm  
 BLOCK/LOT: 2102/7  
 COUNTY: Bergen  
 UTM REFERENCES: Zone/Northing/Easting

DESCRIPTION

Construction Date: c1920  
 Architect:  
 Style: Vernacular/farmhouse  
 Number of Stories: 2 1/2  
 Foundation: sandstone  
 Exterior Wall Fabric: 1st floor: Ashlar sandstone blocks, cedar clapboard  
 Fenestration: 2nd story and dormers  
 Roof/Chimneys: 3 bays, 3 gable dormers in attic  
 Gambrel - sandstone exterior wall chimney on west side

Source of Date:  
 Builder:  
 Form/Plan Type: rectangular  
 w/2 story wing on rear northeast side of building



Additional Architectural Description:  
 2 story porch on 6 tall columns on main facade.  
 1 story porch on west side  
 Main facade - central entrance door flanked by two, 6-panel windows and side doors.

PHOTO Negative File No. Map (Indicate North)



Bergen County Sites Survey report on MacBain Farm House and Property – 1<sup>st</sup> page



SITING, BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION, AND RELATED STRUCTURES:

Situated upon a rise on an acre plot on the east hill section of the borough. Some of the land is still cultivated for farm produce. Fresh spring runs through the site. Three detached out buildings are located on the north side of the house. Adjacent to the property is open park land which is used as a boy scout camp.

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: Urban  Suburban  Scattered Buildings   
Open Space  Woodland  Residential  Agricultural  Village   
Industrial  Downtown Commercial  Highway Commercial  Other

SIGNIFICANCE:

The McBain farm house and farm is significant in the early 20th century agricultural history of Closter as a family run truck farm and the last operating farmstead site in Closter history. The two-and-a-half story farm house has local ashlar sandstone blocks on the first story and clapboard on the upper stories. Several farm outbuildings are located on the north side of the house. Plowed fields still curve east of the house as the property grades and slopes downward in elevation. Some orchard trees still grow on the property.

Pre-historic surface finds of artifacts including tools were found around a spring area of the present property. In addition to its sensitivity as an archaeological resource, the McBain Farm is an important remnant of Closter's farming history and merits preservation since it was the last family owned operating truck farm in the Borough.

ORIGINAL USE: residence  
PHYSICAL CONDITION: Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor   
REGISTER ELIGIBILITY: Yes  Possible  No  Part of District   
THREATS TO SITE: Roads  Development  Zoning  Deterioration   
No Threat  Other

PRESENT USE: residence/abandoned

COMMENTS:

Located on a 5 acre site on the east hill of the Closter/Alpine border, this is a valuable piece of land, and the farmstead site is vulnerable to demolition and subdivision. Archaeological prehistoric surface finds have been found on this property.

REFERENCES:

"Preliminary Observations and Site Registration Report: The McBain Farm Prehistoric Site, Closter, Bergen County, New Jersey." NJ State Museum Site Registration Form (28-Be-170), Submitted by Unami Chapter--Archaeological Society of New Jersey, December 1986.

RECORDED BY: Pat Garbe Morillo DATE: 2/23/99  
ORGANIZATION: Closter Historic Preservation Commission

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
CN 404, TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0404 (609) 292-2023

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FORM

SMITHSONIAN # 28-BE-170  
HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY NO. 35

SITE NAME: McBain Farm  
ALIASES:  
TYPE OF CLASS: Prehistoric: surface finds  
CHRONOLOGY: Early-Middle Archaic to late Woodland  
OWNER/ADDRESS: Borough of Closter  
PHONE:  
LOCATION: 203 Hickory Lane  
Block 2102 Lot 7  
MUNICIPALITY: Closter  
COUNTY: Bergen  
U.S.G.S. QUAD: Yonkers #  
UTM REFERENCES: Zone/Easting/Northing

DESCRIPTION including type and period(s) of site, significant dates and recoveries, cultural affiliation(s), stratification (if known):

These are surface finds concentrated in the spring area located on the farm. The land has gentle slopes and an elevation of 150-200' A.S.L. Artifacts were found throughout the property. The collection includes points and tools which represent the Lenni Lenape Indians and date from the Early to Middle Archaic to Late Woodland Periods. These finds were recorded on December 3, 1986, but the McBain Family had been collecting for 25 years before that.

The report states, "that the Twombly Landing Site reported by Brennan (1967, 1968) is located approximately 7,000' east of the McBain site."

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP PORTION:

SKETCH MAP: (Indicate North)



RECORDER: Pat Garbe Morillo  
ORGANIZATION: Closter Historical Preservation Commission  
DATE: 3/7/99

SETTING:

Landform: old  
Vegetation: fields, trees

Soil Type(s): undetermined  
Hydrography:

Nearest water source and distance: fresh water spring  
Roads: Hickory Lane

Settlement/Environs: east hill

Current Land use: formerly truck farm

REPOSITORIES for collections, including private collections:

Collection of Kenneth McBain

OWNERS (Historic): McBain Family

SIGNIFICANCE



REGISTER ELIGIBILITY:  Yes  Possible  Indeterminate  No  Part of a District  
THREATS TO SITE:  Roads  Development  Zoning  Deterioration  No Threat  
 Other

COMMENTS:

REFERENCES including previous work at site, dates, and individuals knowledgeable about site:

*See inventory form # 21*



Rear (north) side of the house showing gambrel roof. Porch faces west. Historical photo; date unknown.



Visitors to the MacBain rose garden. Mary Mayer is pictured in the middle of the group. Photo taken in 1989.



Marsalie and Kenneth MacBain in the rose garden, 1989. Photo courtesy of Mary Mayer.



View westward from rear of the house, showing one-story side porch



Farmland at the MacBain farm



Wedding photo of Kenneth and Elisabeth MacBain



Ken MacBain



Interior of MacBain Farmhouse. 2016





Interior of MacBain Farmhouse. 2016

# Come Visit



**The MacBain Farm Park**  
*And the Anderson Avenue  
Nature Trail*

*Provided for the  
Enjoyment  
of the People of Closter*



*Pick a few of the many  
kinds of vegetables*



*Or help yourself to some  
luscious tomatoes*



*See how the bees  
make honey*



*And enjoy all the flowers*



*Or just stroll down the paths  
and enjoy the majestic views*



*The Mac Bain Farm Park is  
located on Hickory Avenue,  
between Piermont Road and  
Anderson Avenue, just east  
of McCain Court. It is open  
Tuesday through Sunday,  
during daytime hours.*





ED HILL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The farmhouse on the MacBain tract in Closter. Acquired in a land swap, the site will be revived as a farm and community garden.

## Saving open space, Closter leases farm to eager resident

By **RICHARD COWEN**

Staff Writer

**CLOSTER** — In an effort to preserve one of the borough's last agricultural landmarks, a local landscaper is set to move onto the MacBain Farm on Hickory Lane and till the soil once again.

John P. McCaffrey, a Closter resident who owns Alpine Garden, a landscaping company, has agreed to lease the farm from the borough for 10 years. McCaffrey plans to move his wife, Ruth, and four children to the farm, replant the now-fallow fields, and fix up the dilapidated farmhouse.

The plan is to create a working farm — part of which will be a community garden open to Closter residents — and to stop development along Hickory Lane, where million-dollar homes have been sprouting from the ground that once yielded Jersey corn and tomatoes.

McCaffrey, 42, grew up in Closter near the Hickory Lane area and worked on the farm as a boy. He says it was his experience there that made him want to be a landscaper in the first place.

"It was on the MacBain Farm that I got my green thumb, so

the place has always been in my heart," McCaffrey said. "I hope we can save a chunk of Closter that no longer exists."

Closter obtained the property in a land swap involving Temple Emanu-El of Englewood. In 1995, Temple Emanu-El received approval to build a temple on the MacBain tract, but neighbors raised loud protests. After a long court battle, Closter agreed to swap 14 acres of land on Piermont Road for the seven-acre MacBain Farm. The temple is under construction on Piermont Road.

For Closter, the problem then became what to do with the farm. The Borough Council has selected McCaffrey from among the three applicants who had wanted to become caretakers. Officials said McCaffrey was chosen because, unlike the others, he was willing to pay to fix up the run-down farmhouse himself, and to replant the fields at no cost to taxpayers.

McCaffrey expects to have a signed lease in hand by Monday. Under the deal, he will lease the property rent-free for 10 years, in exchange for his promise to spend \$25,000 a year fixing up the farm: Councilwoman Sophie Heymann said the money can be spent on la-

bor, equipment, or both.

McCaffrey also has agreed to operate a farm on the seven-acre site, which will be open to the public. The deal allows McCaffrey to consume any of the crops he grows, but he cannot operate the farm for profit. He will run his landscaping business from its present Alpine location.

McCaffrey said he's not going back to the farm to make money. He loves the farm and what it represents to him about his life growing up in Closter.

"The road that the farm sits on is the most unchanged road in all of Closter," McCaffrey said. "I'd like to keep it that way. And I'd like to teach my kids something about the value of putting a seed in the ground and growing it."

Change is looming just beyond the property line of the MacBain Farm, where bulldozers are tearing at the earth and to make way for custom homes.

Saving the MacBain Farm is part of Closter's plan to protect as much property from development as possible.

The MacBain Farm is contiguous to the Boy Scout camp in Alpine — where Bergen County is considering constructing a

golf course — and near the Closter Nature Center. In addition, Closter wants to preserve the Brooks Farm, also on Hickory Lane, and has asked the state and county for \$2 million in funding.

Pat Garbe-Morillo, Closter's borough historian, said the MacBain Farm is a crucial piece of open space that is worth preserving. There isn't much left in Closter or anywhere else.

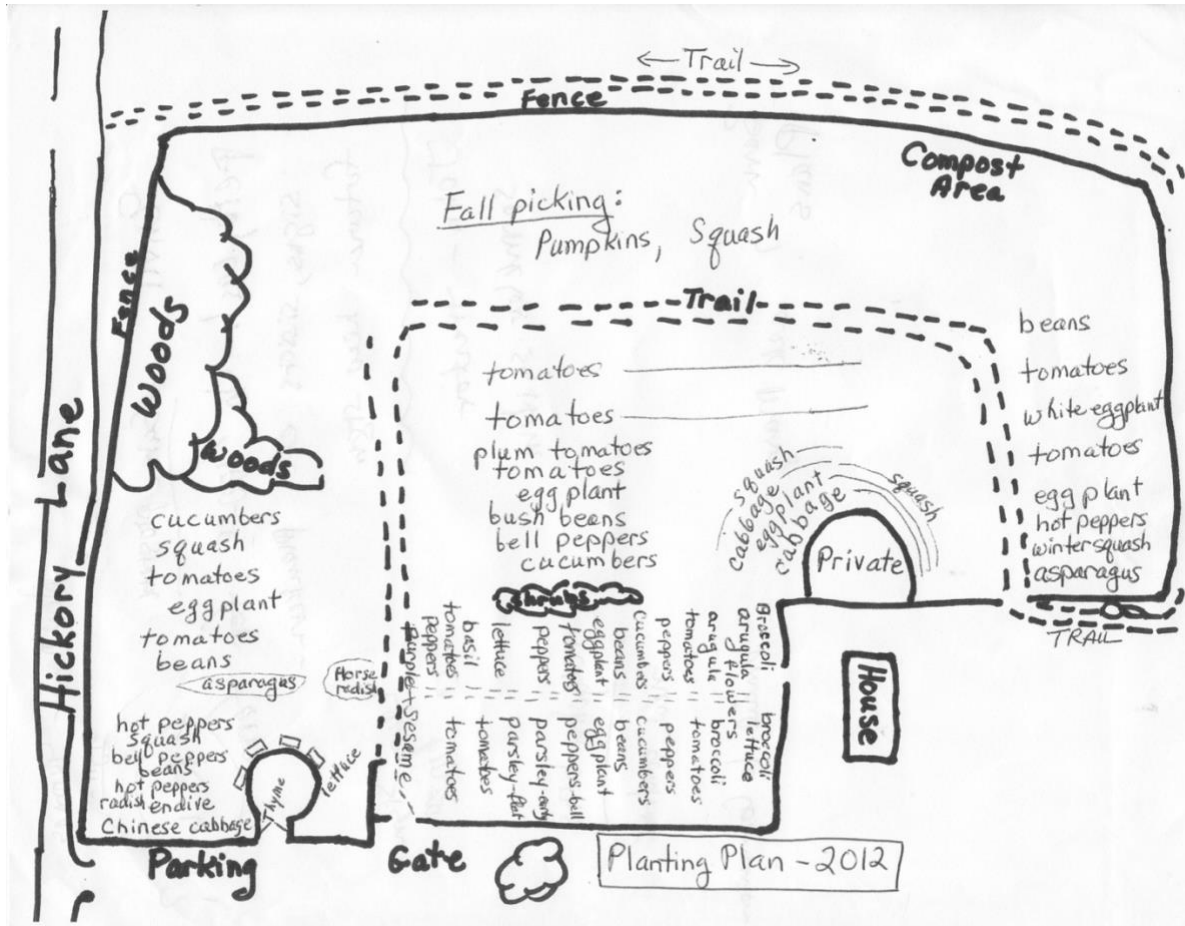
"This is a very forward-looking plan," Garbe-Morillo said.

McCaffrey said he expects to move his family into the farmhouse by summer. His first priority will be to make the farmhouse livable; then he'll set his sights on putting crops in the field.

His long-range goals are to create the Closter Gardening Club, which will use the farm as a base and plant flowers and shrubs all around town. McCaffrey promises that the MacBain Farm will be a thing of beauty.

"They're giving me 10 years, and I'm going to give them 10 years of my life," McCaffrey said.

Staff Writer Richard Cowen's e-mail address is [cowen@bergen.com](mailto:cowen@bergen.com)



Planting Plan for the MacBain Farm Park. 2012

## Open House at MacBain Farm

RESIDENTS ARE INVITED to view a "Work in Progress" at the Borough owned former MacBain farm, 203 Hickory Lane, on Saturday May 5, from 1:00 - 5:00 PM, co-hosted by the Environmental and Historic Preservation Commissions.

This 5.5 acre piece of property was acquired as part of the Temple Emanuel land swap and is being improved and preserved through a lease arrangement. Come see these pristine grounds and farmhouse and witness displays of historic farm and kitchen equipment.

Parking is available along McCain Court and Anderson Ave.

Excerpt from "Closter Newsletter" dated April, 2001