

Honoring the historic homes

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Many of Upper Saddle River's historic structures, and the rich backgrounds that go with them, are being recognized with commemorative markers and plaques.



Bill and Kay Yeomans' Old Stone Church Road home is one of 10 houses in the borough that have received markers and plaques from the Upper Saddle River Historic Preservation Commission. The markers and plaques have been paid for through an anonymous donation and voluntary contributions from some of the owners.

The Upper Saddle River Historic Preservation Commission has offered the commemorative signs to the owners of 50 houses and sites in the borough that are on one of two historic lists. Seventeen structures are signed up as part of a pilot group, including Borough Hall, formerly the Little One Room Schoolhouse, and 10 already have received their markers or plaques. Commission members are now reaching out to the remaining owners, with another order of markers and plaques expected this spring.

The signs are a way to recognize the value of older structures in the borough while also informing people about Upper Saddle River's history, said commission member Bill Yeomans, whose Old Stone Church Road home, formerly a grist mill and saw mill, is adorned with a plaque.

"I'm really amazed at how many people pull up and read that thing," Yeomans said.

The 50 houses and sites are either on the Bergen County Survey of Historic Sites or the Upper Saddle River Inventory of Historic Homes, a listing the five-member commission developed from the county register that includes a few additional structures, Yeomans said.

The 12-inch-by-15-inch plaques have "Upper Saddle River Historic Home" inscribed on them, along with the house's historic name and the date it was built. The 2-foot-by-2-foot markers, available to structures built in 1800 or before, have the same inscriptions along with a small blurb about their history. The markers are attached on top of a post and stand about 6 feet tall.

The plaques and markers cost about \$300 and \$1,100, respectively, Yeomans said, but are provided free due to an anonymous donation and voluntary contributions from some of the owners.

Among the marker recipients is the Saddle River Reformed Church, which got ones for its sanctuary and parsonage that will be installed later this year. The church traces its beginnings back to 1784, when it was a collegiate congregation with the Old Paramus Reformed Church in Ridgewood. The congregations separated in 1811, and the New North Reformed Low Dutch Church of Saddle River was formed. The Rev. Stephen Goetschius became the congregation's pastor in 1814 and lived in the Hopper Homestead, now the Hopper-Goetschius House Museum at the intersection of Lake Street and East Saddle River Road. The church's current sanctuary was completed in 1819, replacing the original structure constructed in 1789.

Saddle River Reformed Church Pastor Bob Fretz said congregation members were honored that the sanctuary and parsonage received markers.

"The mission of the congregation to serve the community and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ has not changed since 1784," Fretz said via e-mail. "The construction of the sanctuary in 1819 was and continues to be part of that mission. The Old Stone Church is a reminder of the challenges and successes experienced by the congregation and community. The past 225 years have been exciting, and we look forward to continue serving the Saddle River Valley in the 21st century."

The process for offering the markers and plaques began prior to the commission's 2008 formation through an informal group of historic homeowners, Yeomans said. After the commission was created, members researched markers and plaques before launching the pilot offering. Most owners have greeted the offerings with enthusiasm, but some have been wary due to concerns about the effect it would have on their home's re-sale value or that they would be prohibited from making changes to the house.

In accepting the markers and plaques, the owners agree to coverage under Upper Saddle River's historic preservation ordinance, which allows the commission to work with developers to come up with alternatives to major alteration or demolition of historic sites.