

## Next Meeting: APRIL 25th

The program scheduled for April is an historic look at the **South River Police and Fire Departments.** It will feature interesting histories, old photos and maybe some the great stories never before told!

## Our 2001 Meeting Dates:

APRIL 25

JUNE 27

SEPTEMBER 26

NOVEMBER 28

## SRH&PS OFFICERS

**Donna Rafano**  
President

**Paul Goepfert**  
Vice President

**Edwin Roginski**  
Treasurer

**Stephanie Bartz**  
Secretary

## President's Message

by Donna Rafano

I want to begin by saying that this month's program is one that you shouldn't miss. In an effort to learn more about the history of our little town, we present a look back at two organizations that have always been there to make us feel safe, the South River Police and Fire Departments.

The research for this program began last November when I was lucky enough to tour the South River Police Station on Main Street. My intent was to tour the building before renovations began. Most of the inner workings of the building had already been removed to its temporary home, behind Lincoln School. Some officers were still coming in and out to complete the final move. Along with a few other Society members, I was honored to get a personal tour from sergeant Tom Karaniewsky, whose knowledge of the old building impressed us. Also with us that day was former Police Chief Paul Borak. I videotaped our adventure. Behind of the contemporary structure of drop ceilings and paneling we discovered original tin ceiling and beautiful wood molding.

As we went from room to room, two areas fascinated me. The first was the basement where we found the original holding cells and several storage rooms, one was marked "Tax Collectors Records" on a heavy black metal door. Even though it was daytime, I felt something eerie down there. It was probably the notion that so many lives had pasted through these cells. Mr. Borak shared a few interesting stories with us, two stories about suicides and one of a battle between a prisoner and an officer's tie. Needless to say, the officer won with a pair of scissors!

The second amazing area of the building was the attic. To get to this space, we had to climb up a ladder to a storage area, then step over heating duct work to discover a site that I'm sure many

have never seen. It was as if time had forgotten this space. Looking around we could see the original green walls worn with age, beautiful white tin ceilings, and magnificent windows. In the middle of the space we found a round recessed area surrounded by light bulbs. We looked up to find the most beautiful bronze circular rosette or grate. Behind this intricate piece of metal were two fans, used for ventilation at the time when the building housed a movie theater. The interesting part was that as I entered this secret area



*The South River Police Station, built in 1908, still continues to intrigue us with it's 93 years of history.*

my video camera went dead, and I could not tape this wonderful discovery. It was as if the building was saying "sorry this is a special place!" Afterwards, I was still talking about it and some the officers overheard me, they knew nothing of the rosette's existence and went up to take a look for themselves. I left that day with a sense that we were about to lose a great piece of South River history with the renovations soon to begin, but I was comforted to know that old photographs and stories will keep the memory of the building alive.

As follow up to this, Councilman Tele Koukourdelis, informed me that the bronze grate was saved during the construction, and with a little work it may be exhibited at the museum for everyone to see.

I hope you will join us on April 25th as we salute the South River Police and Fire Departments.

## Main Street New Jersey meeting planned for May 2

*Attention residents interested in improving our downtown...*

*Join us for special meeting Wednesday, May 2 at 7:30 pm at South River High School*

Great news... a representative from the State of New Jersey will give a presentation on the Redevelopment of Main Street and surrounding areas. This is a great opportunity for South River. Everyone is welcome to this public meeting. Please join us as we put the slogan "Proud past, bright future" to work. For more information contact Anita Hermstedt at 257-1999.

## Verizon Grant Update: *South River High School students' dedication inspires us*

The Community Problem Solving (CPS) students from South River High School are actively working on the web site and walking tour of South River. The students completed research on the pictures and map by R. Van Dyke Reid. After receiving the \$4500 grant in March, the students obtained help from the Educational Technology Training Resource Center in East Brunswick, purchased a digital still camera to take current pictures of South River, and purchased the com-

puter program FLASH, in order to develop the web site. You may see the students in town taking pictures of current landmarks.

In March, the CPS students presented their project to the Community Problem Solving committee and placed second in New Jersey. On March 30, the students used a power point presentation and skit presentation of their idea to over 300 finalists and parents at the Somerset Holiday Inn.

The unwavering determination, ability, and dedication of the South River High School students to this project is commendable. Their professional attitude, initiative, willingness to learn about South River's history, to utilize computer programs, and to use photography in order to develop an award winning web site and a functional walking tour of South River for everyone to use is praiseworthy.

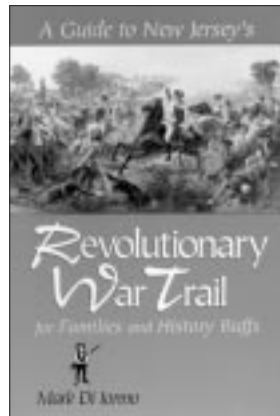
## Middlesex County Cultural & Heritage Commission Grant Update

The South River Historical & Preservation Society received a education grant from the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission this year for \$665. Currently, Candice Lewandoski and Marilyn Anastasio

are finalizing museum activities for both students and adults. Along with map and building activities, a "picture" activity will be included in the final project. The project is to be completed by June.

## February 21st Meeting Highlights

For those of you who missed our last meeting in February, we enjoyed meeting author Mark Di Ionna, whose love for New Jersey history inspired many of us to search for the 350 Revolutionary War sites featured in his book "A Guide to New Jersey's Revolutionary War Trail for Families and History Buffs." He enlightened us with great stories of his research and fascinated us with New Jersey's Revolutionary War history and the important role our state played in the war. Mark Di Ionno's book is available through Rutgers University Press.



## In Memorium

The Executive Board and Members of the Historical Society extends their sincere sympathy to the families of former members who have passed away since the publication of the last newsletter.

**GRACE M. AUER**, age 90  
East Brunswick - February 23, 2001

**JAMES H. DRUMRIGHT, JR.**,  
age 86 South River - April 11, 2001

## Welcome New Members

Paul Barszczewski  
Karen Bradford  
John Lenhart  
Andrea and Arthur Londensky  
Melvin W. Petersen  
Linda Szegeti

## Recent Donations

Mrs. Minnie Schenck - donated a Pictorial Family Bible that belonged to Mattie Tolson

Miss Judith G. Smith - donated various Girls Scout Badges and pins from her Troop #18. She also donated \$25 + matching donation from J&J

Mrs. Irene Buga - gave a rug beater  
Anne Sivess - donated an assortment of photographs

JoAnn Czapkowski - generously donated a War ration book

Michael Ondré - donated three South River Oriflamme year books from 1954-56, along with his SR Varsity letter sweater, and SR two reunion t-shirts.

### Financial Donations:

Mr. Louis E. Rezem Sr.  
Mr. & Mrs. Norman Triznadel  
Mrs. Charlotte P. Rice  
Mr. Gregory P. Paleski

Mrs. Barbara Lindsay -

Mr. & Mrs. Benjamin Konopacki -

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Jensen

Mr. & Mrs. Curtis Booraem

Mr. Kenneth Arianas

**Correction:** We apologize for misspelling Dick Ginman's name in our February newsletter.

**Donations Welcome** Please let us know if you have any "South River" items that you would like to donate or loan to the Historical Society.

## Borough's Big Fire on July 10, 1908

An excerpt from Jessie Selover's "History of South River"

A fire broke out in the Schroeder Building on Main Street, caused by the explosion of a gasoline iron. The Knapp Building and the residence of the late ex-Mayor James Bissett were completely destroyed. From the Knapp Building, the fire spread to Citizens' Hall, which was laid in ruins, besides a large portion of the bowling alley attached to the Washington Hotel. The damage amounted to approximately \$100,000. This serious loss greatly marred the business section of the town on Lower Main Street, and it was not until a few years later that these places were built up and more handsome buildings replaced those that had been destroyed. This loss of property was the means of stimulating the sentiment of the people in favor of a water system, which was installed two years later.



As the South River Fire Department was unable to cope with the conflagration, the New Brunswick Fire Department was called upon for assistance. Two engines arrived

within a short time after the call was sent in, and with their timely assistance, the fire was extinguished before reaching the corner of Main and Ferry Streets.

## Announcements

### The Underground Railroad in New Jersey

The New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State, is researching the operation of the Underground Railroad in New Jersey. It seeks, for example, to identify the routes of the state's Underground Railroad, its sites ("stations"), and its operatives ("conductors" and "station masters"). If you have any information about the Underground Railroad in New Jersey, please contact: **Edward Wonkeryor** at (609) 292-6062; FAX (609)633-8168 or e-mail him at [gwright@admin.sos.state.nj.us](mailto:gwright@admin.sos.state.nj.us)

### Freehold Vintage Homeowners Association

Next meeting Sunday April 29, at 7 p.m. at the Grace Lutheran Church, Freehold (corner of W. Main and Rt. 33). OPEN TO ALL! For homeowners who love the charm of preserved old houses and those who would like to learn more about properly restoring their home or like to share experiences with others.

### Accessible Archives, Inc..

A publisher of electronic full-text search-

able historical databases, announces plans to publish: "AMERICAN COUNTY HISTORIES TO 1900." Part I will be available on-line in September 2001, and will contain over 10,000 pages of text and plates, from all 21 counties in the state of New Jersey.

These books included chapters which covered in great detail: local history, geology, geography, weather, transportation, lists of all local participants in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, government, medical and legal professions, churches and ministers, industry and manufacturing, banking and insurance, schools and teachers, noted celebrations, fire departments and associations, cemeteries, family history, health and vital statistics, roads and bridges, public officials and legislators, and many others.

The full text searchability, will permit the student/researcher to instantly explore all the publications of a particular county by using a single query. In addition, those wishing to read the text on a page by page basis, may do so in the original format by merely scrolling down the screen and then

continuing to the next chapter. For more information, contact: Rob Nagy at (610) 296-7441, or [rnagy@accessible.com](mailto:rnagy@accessible.com), or [www.accessible.com](http://www.accessible.com)

### Historical Assoc of Central NJ Spring 2001 Meeting

Will be held Sunday, May 20 at 1:30 pm at the Schenck House, 50 Southfield Road, West Windsor, NJ. Those attending please RSVP to Joan Parry at (609) 452-8598 or e-mail [jparry@erols.com](mailto:jparry@erols.com).

### Visit the Old School Baptist Church Museum

The museum is open on the first Sunday of every month from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm. Volunteers are need. If you are interested in becoming a docent at the museum, please contact Donna Rafano at 254-7322 or call the Museum at 613-3078.

For more information about the South River Historical & Preservation Society visit our website at:

[www.rootsweb.com/~njsrhps/](http://www.rootsweb.com/~njsrhps/)

For more information about becoming a member of the SRH&PS please call **Woodis Boraem** at 257-0365.

## The South River Police Department

A police department was not in the Borough until 1917.

Charles Eberwein II was the first chief of police and served in that capacity for 19 years until he was shot to death in his office by a disgruntled hotel proprietor in 1936.

At that time, the department consisted of 12 men and one automobile. The policemen were assigned to walking beats on three shifts and had to make reports every half hour from call boxes. The boxes were at the intersections of Hillside Avenue and Main Street, Whitehead and Prentice Avenues, and June and Prospect Streets. There was no radio communication so a green light on the front of the Borough Hall was used as a signal. If the green light was lit, it was the signal for the policemen on the walking beats to report to headquarters.

In 1947, the detective and identification bureaus were formed and in 1969 a traffic safety bureau was organized.

From the 1960's to the 1990's, the following police officers were promot-



**The South River Police Force of 1920**

Standing from left to right: Paul Genecki, Frank Meade, Joseph Schwartz, John Hotkevitch. Seated from left to right: Charles Van De Vento and Chief Charles Eberwein.

ed to the rank of Chief of Police: Matthew Zaleski, Michael Szoke,

Paul Borak, George Cerekwas, Francis X. Eib and currently Wesley Bomba.

## The South River Rescue Squad

Since 1936, the South River Rescue Squad has been operating efficiently in handling accident cases and other humanitarian calls for first aid service, both in and throughout the area near and adjacent to the borough.

George Bardol was instrumental in creating the initial interest in organizing a Rescue Squad. He had a long and commendable record for assisting friends in time of trouble or when a neighbor's help was needed.

The asphyxiation of two children in 1936 stirred Mr. Bardol to organize a Rescue Squad that was badly needed in the borough, believing that had one been in South River at the time of the children's accident, their lives would have been saved.

The organization was completed by

the election of the following officers:  
President - Charles Angsbach  
Vice President - Stanley Stillwell  
Recording Secretary - Stephen Hodkiewicz,  
Treasurer - John Wenzel

They had no equipment until the Mayor and Council permitted them to use the old police wagon which had to be equipped with instruments, bandages, and medicines for first aid work.

This crude outfit did not meet all the requirements of the Rescue Squad so plans were formulated to raise funds with which to purchase a modern ambulance.

A house to house canvass was conducted and during the collection period, many private donations

were made to the fund, the Borough Council appropriating \$1,000. The total collections amounted to \$2,300. As the ambulance cost \$2,100, a sum of \$200 was left in the treasury for the purchase of other equipment.

The ambulance, made by the Meteor Motor Company of Piqua, Ohio, was driven to South River by Captain George Bedroll and Victor Lunski. It was parked in a garage at the rear of Borough Hall. However, in 1937, a one story addition was built on the upper side of the firehouse on George Street in which to house the ambulance and for the squad meeting headquarters.

A new building was first built in Spring of 1946.

## The South River Fire Department

The South River Fire Department was officially organized in 1898 during the administration of Mayor Joseph Mark.

Cities and large boroughs had paid fire departments but in boroughs and towns the size of South River, the fire departments are volunteer organization, the members rendering their hazardous duties with no expectation of being paid.

South River was without a fire organization prior to 1870, except for a bucket brigade that would organize at each fire. Someone assumed leadership and direction the firemen activities.

firemen went out on practice runs. As the shed in which the truck was housed was seldom locked, the boatmen and businessmen near the river used the buckets and ladders for private use and forgot to return the equipment. For this reason, the truck was never fully equipped when taken to a fire.

The shed in which the truck was housed had a clay floor. Following a heavy rain, the truck wheels mired deeply in the soft mud. A dry spell hardened the mud, and when the firemen went out for the truck at the next alarm, they lose a half hour releasing the truck

The chemical engine was drawn by manpower, but occasionally a team of horses would pull the engine to a fire. Whenever the engine was drawn a distance by hand, the firemen would be too exhausted to do efficient work until they had "caught their breath." These quarters became too small. In 1934, a new firehouse was erected on George Street at the rear of Borough Hall. A large room was provided on the second floor where firemen could hold meetings and entertain their friends.

In 1936, the department notified the Mayor and Council that Washington Engine Company and its hook and ladder pumper could not handle all borough fires. They petitioned the officials to purchase a new auto fire engine to augment the present equipment.

Edwin Reichenbach, the present chief (1947) followed Chief Michael Balabas. John Wolak is first assistant chief and James Madalino is a second assistant chief.

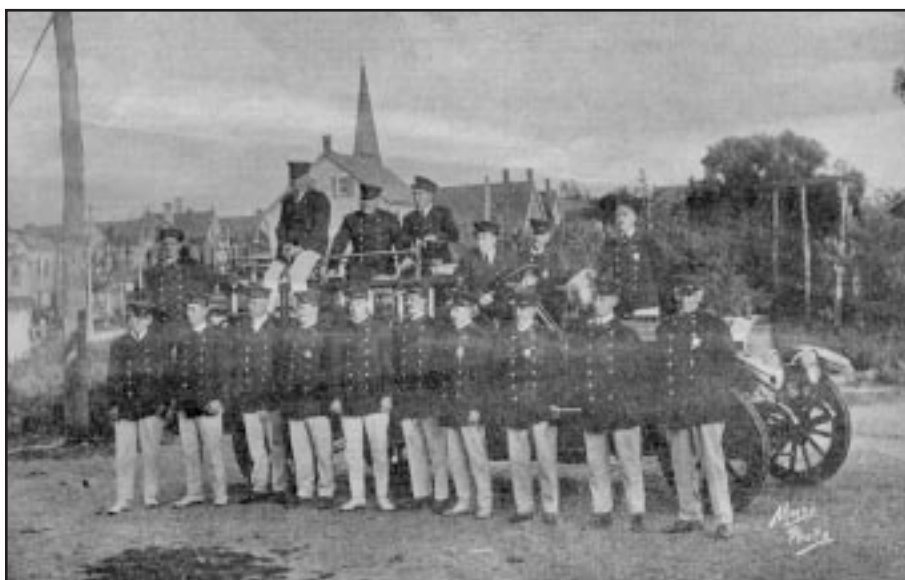
John Spreng is foreman and Authur Reichenbach is assistant foreman of Engine Company Number 1, formerly Washington Engine Company.

John Schone is foreman and Walter Bogdon is assistant foreman of Reliable Engine Company. (1947)

The year, 1959, marked the formation of Summit Engine Company to provide protection for the citizens of "the Hill" area. Ten men were picked from Engine Company and Reliable Company to form this new company.

All three companies operated out of the George Street Fire House until 1967, when the present quarters for Summit Engine Company were constructed on Appleby Avenue.

Today, the South River Fire Department has over 100 men and women serving the Borough.



**The South River Fire Department of 1920**

Water was carried in buckets, tin pails, pans, and bottles which residents had brought with them. Ladders, too, were furnished by nearby property owners. In fact, the whole community was a veritable fire department.

The Washington Engine Company was organized immediately after the Mayor and Council adopted a new organization "set-up" for the department. The company was equipped with a La France auto engine and a Mack Hook and Ladder pumper truck. The hook and ladder was kept in a shed at the foot of Main Street. For a time, the

wheels from the hardened clay.

Later, a chemical engine was purchased and was housed in a firehouse on Ferry Street. The fire department occupied the first floor, and the Mayor and Council occupied the second floor. The Council and fire department remained in this building until 1908, when the present Borough Hall was erected with an engine room on the left side with a street level entrance. A fireman's meeting room was provided at the rear of the engine room.



*“History is a ship carrying living memories to the future.”*

*—Stephen Spender*

## Life in the 1500's

- Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and were still smelling pretty good by June. If they were starting to smell, the brides would carry a bouquet of flowers to hide the b.o.
- Baths equalled a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other men and sons, followed by the women, and finally the children. The babies were always last. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, “Don't throw the baby out with the bath water”.
- Houses had thatched roofs. Thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals, mice, rats, bugs lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, “It's raining cats and dogs.”
- There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings would mess up a nice clean bed. So, they found if they made beds with big posts and hung a sheet over the top, it addressed that problem. Hence those beautiful big four poster beds with canopies.
- The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying “dirt poor”. The wealthy had slate floors which would get slippery in the winter when wet. So they spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed at the entry way, hence a “thresh hold”.
- They cooked in the kitchen in a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They mostly ate vegetables and didn't get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been in there for a month. Hence the rhyme: peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old.
- Sometimes they obtained pork and would feel really special when that happened. When company came over, they would bring out some bacon and hang it to show it off. It was a sign of wealth and that a man “could really bring home the bacon.” They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and “chew the fat.”