

HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION

Number 19

NEWS

NEXT MEETING:

**June 26th
at 7 p.m.**

Our June program will focus on the lighthouses of New Jersey.

Ray Vliet, a board member of the NJ Lighthouse Society, will enlighten us on the amazing lighthouses found right here in our own garden state.

Please join us on the 26th. The program promises to be most interesting.

2002 Meeting Dates:

FEBRUARY 27
APRIL 24
JUNE 26
SEPTEMBER 25
NOVEMBER 20

SRH&PS Officers:

Marilyn Anastasio
President

Donna Rafano
Vice President

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President's Message*by Marilyn Anastasio*

Thank you, third graders and teachers for visiting the OSBC. The third graders from the South River Elementary School toured the museum on May 17. Donna Rafano and Pat Gawarkiewicz guided one hundred seventy students and their teachers on a tour of the museum and cemetery. The third grade teachers, Debbie Parsons, Jill Carlen, Rose Marie Cline, Maurcen McCallion, Jen Parker, Sandi Sendell, and Emily Troncone, planned the trip.

Thank you, South River Borough for your help. The Boro workers moved the furniture stored in the school on Thomas Street to the museum. George Lyons, Director of Public Works, Janet Martin, Rich Martin, Charlie Fenton, Adriano Soares, Tom Grekoski, Gar Schmidt, Greg Kolesnikov, Bill Janosko and Stanley Ruzicki made a smooth move with our belongings. Janet Martin and Stanley Ruzicki planted flowers with a "red, white, and blue" theme. The flowers added a special touch to the Memorial Day services

which were held in front of the museum.

Thank you, Chris Rafano and Hank Dziemian. The furniture had to be rearranged on the first floor. Chris and Hank made easy work (maybe not so easy) of it with the help of Donna Rafano.

Thank you, Stephanie Bartz, Ann Rafano. The tops of the filing cabinets are now clear of "papers to file."

If you have an interest or a skill and would like to share your talents with us, please let us know. If you would just like to help, fear not, we have something which you can do. The activities range from totally mental to totally physical. There is a place for you at our SRH&PS. We look forward to seeing you at our museum soon — whether it's to visit or to assist. Our displays are changed and/or enhanced as our collections and acquisitions grow. If you haven't visited in a while, come see how we've grown.

A quick lesson on the history of lighthouses

A national Lighthouse Service was established under the Treasury Department on August 7, 1789, when the first United States Congress passed the first public works act.

The first lighthouses were all located on the Eastern seaboard. They were as follows: Boston, MA (1716); Brant Point, MA (1746); Beavertail, RI (1749); New London Harbor, CT (1760); Sandy Hook, NJ (1764); Cape Henlopen, DE (1765); Morris Island, SC (1767); Plymouth, ME (1769) and Cape Ann, MA (1771.)

Over the next thirty-one years the management of the Lighthouse Service bounced around our new country's government. Finally in 1820 Congress returned the service to the Secretary of the Treasury, who was told to reestablish it under a new

service head. Auditor Stephen Pleasonton, a miserly bookkeeper without any maritime experience, was chosen. Although his management style was questioned, Pleasonton remained in office for 32 years.

The early lighthouses were simple structures, based on a form known as the "frustum of a cone." They were round or polygonal towers with thick masonry walls, few windows and ornamentation. Most were of moderate height and simple design, they were made by local craftspeople using local materials like wood, cut stone or rubble, brick or granite. There were few people in America with formal architectural or engineer training. From 1850 to 1880 West Point graduates provided most of the know-how in improved and varied lighthouse construction.

The Old School Baptist Church Museum will be closed July 7th and September 1st due to the holiday weekends. It will be open on September 8th.

April 24th Meeting — A Salute to Veterans

Young and old alike share their stories...

Our April meeting was wonderful. We were honored to have Pauline Pisinski, George Klimcsak and Leo Surak as our special guests. Although their memories were from many years ago, all three veterans were happy to tell us their amazing tales of survival and duty. All three were happy to have returned home safely. Pauline Pisinski told us of her days as a nurse in WWII in evacuation hospitals overseas. George Klimcsak recounted his experiences having been stationed in Okinawa in 1945 shortly after the bomb was dropped in Japan. Leo Surak, currently Commander of American Legion Post 214, had been too young to serve in WWII, but spoke of the time he served in the Army Signal Corps from 1952-54. He had been stationed in occupied Germany during the Korean War.

Another highlight of the evening was a presentation by Girl Scout Cadet Troop No. 1169 of a scrapbook to the Society. The scrapbook entitled "Sharing Memories from Generation to Generation of Our Little Town" was created as part of the Girl Scout Silver Award project. Christy Fic explained the Silver Award activities while Alison Zemann and Maggie

Cseh read aloud various interviews compiled in the scrapbook. Hats off to all troop members for their achievement and their efforts in generating the memory book.



Veterans George Klimcsak, Leo Surak and Pauline Pisinski accept a "thank you" from the Society for their involvement in the evening's program.



Girl Scout Cadet Troop No. 1169 members presented the Society with a scrapbook filled with interviews of community members, historic newspaper clippings and old photographs.



Troop leader Debbie Zemann and Debbie Cseh enjoyed looking at the scrapbook created by the Scouts.

Recent Donations and Acquisitions

Monetary Donations:

Charles G. Benn in memory of lost relatives and friends
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Jensen
Mr. Louis Rezem
Barbara Lindsay.

Acquisitions:

• Thomas Dominiecki donated a 1954 calendar from Bogdan's Shoe Store "The Store With A Friendly Smile", 44 Main Street, South River; and three photographs from the South

River Waist & Dress Co.

- Dolores Stavish donated seven handkerchiefs produced by the Middlesex Lace Company, Martin Street, South River.
- Ann Smith donated a world globe (World War II era)
- Lynn Paul donated a round tray with picture of horse — stamped "F.C. Bissett, Bottler of Carbonated Drinks and Beers, Family Trade

Supplied, South River, NJ"

- JoAnn Devlin donated a South River Junior High School patch (undated - circa 1958-1977)
- South River Rescue Squad donated a Scoop stretcher
- Stephanie Bartz donated 15 pieces of Harker Bakerite dinnerware collected at the Capitol Theater by Emmy and Frank Ricci (circa 1944-1946.)

Captain Willett Martin

A close encounter with Abraham Lincoln

Below is an excerpt from the Jessie Selover "History of South River."

... South River is fortunate in being historically connected with the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States during the Civil War: 1861 - 1865.

Captain Willett Martin, a direct descendent of Samuel Willett, founder of South River in 1720, was the owner and master of the steamboat, "The City of Albany," prior to and for a number of years following the Civil War. He lived at 191 Whitehead Avenue. He was a brother of Samuel Julius Martin, famous Sandy Hook steamboat captain.

Shortly after Congress had declared war against the Confederate Union, "The City of Albany" was commandeered by the United States government for military transportation, operating out of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, Maryland.

Captain Willett Martin, honored by the reputation of being one of the best mariners along the eastern coast, was handed sealed orders one day in 1863 while his vessel was undergoing repairs at Philadelphia, Pa. The first part of the order directed him to sail to the three-mile limit, and the second part of the order was to be read at this point. To the famous captain's utter amazement, the War Department directed him to proceed under full steam to Washington, D.C., and at a secret hour in the night to take on board and convey President Lincoln and part to Fortress Monroe in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Only Captain Martin knew that President Lincoln and his party were passengers on the "City of Albany" until the steamer had sailed a few miles down the Potomac River.

The President then appeared on deck and for a brief period conversed freely with members of the crew. Captain Martin escorted President Lincoln and party to the pilothouse where they

remained until the steamer had arrived at the fort. Lincoln's chief guard was Allen Pinkerton, organizer of the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency in the United States. The party included members of the president's cabinet.

It was a cold November day and the air was damp and penetrating. While President Lincoln was flapping his arms about his huge body to warm his hands, he told Captain Martin that he had left his gloves at the White House. In his usual vein of humor Lincoln, said "Captain Martin, if you will stop the steamer, I'll walk back to the White House and get my gloves."

"No", remarked Allen Pinkerton, "I'll walk back to the White House. I'll do that little favor for you, Mr. President, and will return with the gloves within a few minutes." The pilothouse group enjoyed a good laugh.

Captain Martin noticed that President Lincoln's hands (of unusual size) were about as large as his hands.

"President Lincoln, can I trust you to steer the boat for a few minutes if I set a compass course for you to follow?" asked Captain Martin. "Yes, you can," replied Lincoln, "because I have done a lot of boat steering in my life, especially on the Mississippi River and without compass or chart. Our rudders, and cumbersome oars, were manipulated by hand."

Captain Martin on leaving the pilothouse left President Lincoln in charge of the steamer's course down the Potomac. Within a few minutes Captain Martin returned with a pair of gloves which he presented to Mr. Lincoln to keep his hands warm. The president accepted the gloves and wore them. He was thankful to Captain Martin for his kindness and thoughtfulness.

Captain Martin and President Lincoln corresponded for a while about the trip

and the gloves. Unsuccessful efforts have been made to find the Lincoln letters. However, the story has been authenticated by a member of the Martin family who had heard Captain Martin tell of his interesting experience with President Lincoln and the gloves.

... Later, Captain Martin was appointed engineer-in-chief of the United States Navy and served for four years.

... During the war between the States, Mr. Martin was appointed by the Secretary of War to visit England to examine ironclad steamers and to report upon their merits and adaptability to the needs of the government. He was also commissioned to inspect certain types of river steamers and report upon their availability for government service.

... Captain Martin lived in Washington (South River), New Jersey from 1842 until the time of his death on August 24, 1867. He was retired at the close of the Civil War. He took a keen interest in religious and educational activities.

Museum Information

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 p.m. Come and share your past with us.

Volunteers are need. If you are interested in becoming a docent at the museum contact Donna Rafano at (732) 254-7322 or call the museum at (732)613-3078.

For more information about the South River Historical & Preservation Society visit our website at: www.rootsweb.com/~njsrhps/ To become a member contact Candice Lewandoski at 60 Hillside Avenue, South River, NJ 08882. For more information call 732-613-3078.



**South River
Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.**

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NEW JERSEY LIGHTHOUSE FIRSTS...

- 1823** The Sandy Hook Lightship — the first outside lightship in the United States.
- 1841** Navesink Twin Lights — the first lighthouse in the New World to be equipped with a Fresnel lens.
- 1850** The Brandywine Shoal Lighthouse — the first completed lighthouse in the country built on a "screw pile" foundation.
- 1868** Sandy Hook East Beacon — the first lighthouse in the country to be equipped with a steam driven fog siren.
- 1883** Navesink Twin Lights — the initial first-order lighthouse to use mineral oil (kerosene) for fuel.
- 1889** The Sandy Hook Lighthouse — the first lighthouse in the U.S. to use the incandescent lamp.
- 1898** Navesink Twin Lights — the first lighthouse in the nation to be equipped with a hyper-radial lens. It was also the most powerful lighthouse in the nation at this time.
- 1899** The first wireless messages to be sent and received in the U.S. were exchanged between operators aboard the S.S. Ponce and Twin Lights.
- 1903** Compressed acetylene dissolved in acetone was first used as fuel at the Sandy Hook South Beacon and Jones Rock Beacon, Connecticut.
- 1921** The Sea Girt Lighthouse and Ambrose Lightship became the first stations to use a radio fog beacon. A device was also installed aboard the Fire Island Lightship.
- 1934** The first lighthouse in the country to be illuminated by a sodium vapor lamp is the Cape May Lightship.

To learn more about New Jersey Lighthouses contact
the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, Inc. at P.O. Box 332, Navesink, NJ 07752-0332
or njlhs@burlco.org.