

HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

Number 37

Five Fifteen More Years!

Call it what you will- the Old School Baptist Church, the War Memorial Building, or the South River Museum- the five-year lease agreement between the owner (Borough of South River) and the tenant (South River Historical & Preservation Society) expires December 31, 2006.

In proposing an extension of the agreement, the Society requested a term not of five years, but of fifteen. Said one member of the SRH&PS Executive Board, "A fifteen-year agreement suggests stability and will help to draw supporters- some of whom might aid in funding the organization's activities."

The new agreement was voted upon at the public Borough Council Meeting of September 18, with Councilmen David Sliker and Richard Reichenbach voting in favor of the fifteen-year extension, and Councilmen John Krenzler and Raymond Eppinger voting against it, favoring instead another five-year term. Mayor Robert Szegeti then cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of the fifteen-year agreement.

The approval, said Reichenbach, was "in recognition of the (South River Historical & Preservation Society's) dedication and hard work...in preserving the History of the Borough of South River."



South River Councilmen Sliker (l.) and Reichenbach (r.) attending the SRH&PS- sponsored program at Moshe Aaron Yeshiva High School (see p.2 for program details).

President's Message by Dick Meyers

When the agreement discussed in the article to the left was sent to the Mayor and Council, it was accompanied by a list of the Society's accomplishments over the past five years. Surprised by how extensive it was, I began to wonder just how much the SRH&PS had accomplished over the course of its eighteen-year existence. Having been blessed (or cursed) with an insatiable curiosity, I decided to investigate, and this is what I found:

As part of its conservation efforts, the SRH&PS facilitated placement of the Old School Baptist Church on both the New Jersey Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places; it spearheaded renovation of that building and restoration of the War Memorials, the Frazee Memorial Urn, and an exceedingly rare 1851 map of South River.

The SRH&PS purchased *The Willett Sisters of South River* oil paintings and has catalogued nearly 5,000 historical artifacts in its possession; it has videotaped oral histories and moved into the 21st century with a website and an email address; it responds to historical and genealogical questions from around the world and has published South River's 275th Anniversary Book, picture calendars for every year since 1990, and thirty-nine issues of its newsletter.

Featured in those newsletters have been pieces on John F. Fitzpatrick, Earl Wenger, The Willett Family, and South River's Police and Fire Departments and Rescue Squad; articles have chronicled events such as *Capt. Willet Martin's Close Encounter with Abraham Lincoln*, *The Borough's Big Fire on July 10, 1908*, and *The Influenza Epidemic of 1918*; the borough and its citizens were celebrated in *A South River Soldier's Story*, *South River's Civil War Cannons*, *Homecoming Celebration for Veterans of WW II*, and *Memories of Growing Up in South River*.

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SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY CALENDAR

FINAL MEETING OF 2006 (ANNUAL MEETING): NOVEMBER 15

This meeting will convene Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., at the South River Museum (formerly known as the Old School Baptist Church/War Memorial Building), located at 64-66 Main Street, South River. The Museum is also open to the general public from 1:30 until 3:30 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month:

November 5 December 3 January 7 February 4

SuperSleuth Cracks Case

When no one responded to a query in the last newsletter for "Information on a murder/suicide in South River involving the name ZANDER," Webmaster Stephanie Bartz took it upon herself to solve the mystery.

Her starting point was a website where the emailer who had inquired first read about the crime, a report based on information from a man with the unlikely name of Alex Zander. Zander was supposedly in a South River-based band called *xex*, and the perpetrator was supposedly a relative.

That was all Stephanie needed; below is her reply to the writer:

*The story about the murder-suicide is at least partially true. And there really was a band called *xex* from South River.*

*I contacted the man who put up the web site you found, and he was able to give me the real names of the five *xex* band members. Alex Zander was really Alexander Miedzwiadok.*

On Wednesday, May 5, 1955, a 20 year old Polish immigrant named Alexander Miedzwiadok critically wounded his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law, and his wife, before shooting himself in the head. During a shoot out with the police, he apparently also used his 10 month old daughter as a shield.

The headline from the Daily Home News that day read "Berserk Gunman Shoots 3 Women." A secondary article, "Victims of Shooting Describe Terrorism," states that: "All victims of the tragedy are reported in good condition at Middlesex General Hospital after treatment of their wounds and X-Rays. The three women are resting comfortably, while baby Sonya, eyes swollen from the effects of tear gas, is in an oxygen tent."

So it sounds like it wasn't a murder-suicide, but an attempted murder-suicide. He'd been fired from his job three weeks previously, and the union considered it justified. He was also estranged from his wife, and had a history of troublemaking.

Hope this answers your question. Thanks for sending it in. It was an interesting journey through an unusual piece of local history.

Discussion, Tour Highlight September Program

Following the General Meeting at the South River Museum, Rabbi Dr. Bernhard H. Rosenberg hosted SRH&PS members at Moshe Aaron Yeshiva High School, formerly Willett School. "Yeshiva," he said, means "to sit and learn," and more than 200 students from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and as far away as Israel are doing just that at the school.

After a brief presentation on the school's history and operation, Rabbi Rosenberg fielded a wide range of questions from the audience and ended the evening with a tour of the school.



Rabbi Dr. Bernhard H. Rosenberg



On the tour, SRH&PS members Sandy Zajac (l.) and JoAnn Devlin (r.) react to the familiar: both had been secretaries at Willett School, and at least in this office, little had changed.

In addition to teaching Holocaust Studies at the high school, Rabbi Rosenberg is a Professor at Rutgers University, an author and lecturer, and spiritual leader of Congregation Beth El in Edison.

The only child of Holocaust survivors, Rabbi Rosenberg served for six years on the New Jersey Holocaust Commission and is editor of the state mandated curriculum, Holocaust and Genocide. He has assembled the world's largest collection of Holocaust and genocide films.

SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

Commemorative 200th Anniversary Old School Baptist Church Ornament (South River Museum) - \$10.00

Commemorative Book in Celebration of South River's 275th Anniversary, 1720-1995 (90+ pages of text & photos)- \$10.00

Wooden Plaque of the Old School Baptist Church (made from timber from the original portico columns) - \$10.00

Old School Baptist Church Note Cards with Envelopes (features an early photo of the OSBC) Set of 5 cards - \$2.50; Set of 10 cards - \$4.00

2007 SRH&PS Calendar (previous years also available) - \$7.00

Old School Baptist Church print by Joseph Csatari (numbered limited edition print 13" x 15 3/4", unframed, includes brief biography of the artist and history of the Old School Baptist Church building) - \$25.00

2006 Members of the South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

“The loftier the building, the deeper its foundation must be laid.” Thomas Kempis

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* Deceased

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* Deceased

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South River Moose #165
South River Women's Club
SS Peter & Paul Russian
Orthodox Church
Union Baptist Church
Witty's Discount Liquors Inc.

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Beyond the printed word, the SRH&PS has served the community by taking South River Seniors, the Women's Club, Boy Scouts, Tiger Cubs, and students on tours of the Museum; by including Girl Scouts, Brownies, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and students in various projects; by hosting a display of Lenape Indian artifacts, an antiques appraisal, a meeting of the Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance, the Appleby family's afternoon of reminiscing, and an open discussion on *Memories of WW II*; by having exhibits at the Craft Fair and Car Rally and the Cultural Heritage Festivals; by opening the Museum for Cruise Nights; and by participating in South River's Tour of Churches and Memorial Day Parades.

And finally, the organization has followed its general meetings with programs so diverse that virtually every South River resident would be able to find something of interest:

Antique Glassware
Discussing America's 1st Ladies
through "Historical Fiction"
George, Richard & Olive Brasno
Ghosts & Hauntings in New Jersey
Graves of Civil War Vets in the
South River Area
Historic Costumes
Historic Hunt- Answering Questions
about Museum Exhibits
History & Demolition of Campbell
School
History & Tour of Congregation
Anshe Emeth
History & Tour of Darul Arqam School
History & Tour of Moshe Aaron
Yeshiva High School
History of Main Street Florist
History of South River Police & Fire
Departments
History of St. Mary of Ostrabrama Church
History of the Armstrong Family
in South River
History of The Imperial Band, Chorus,
& Music Center
Indians of Lenapehoking

John Frazee, Sculptor (sketch)
Life & Works of John Frazee
Lighthouses of New Jersey
Lindbergh Family & Its Ties to
East Brunswick, The
Memories of South River
New Jersey's Revolutionary War Trails
People from the 1999 Calendar Speak
& Reflect
Prohibition Era in South River
Quilting in South River
Remembering John FitzPatrick
Restoration of the South River Mayors'
Pictures
Searching for Lost Treasures
Sept. 11 Memorial at Dailey's Pond
Shipwrecks off the New Jersey Coast
Show & Tell (South Riverites & Their
Artifacts)
South River Life in the First Half
of the 20th Century
Tales of the Liberty Ballroom
Thomas Edison
Tracing Your Immigrant Ancestors
Virtual Tour of South River
(SRHS students)

What the foregoing makes clear is that the organization begun by Florence Clayton and Ann Rafano in 1988 has done its very best to serve you, to inform you, and to entertain you. With the recent Borough Council decision, we've been allowed to plan beyond a five-year window in continuing our mission. During the next fifteen years, we intend to build upon the past and will do our best to ensure that the next agreement, whether for fifteen years or fifty, is approved wholeheartedly and unanimously.

This & That

- An emailer "found a soda bottle from the Allgeier's Beverage Co. of South River, NJ" and requests information on the company.
- Set of keys found in the Museum; includes a Notre Dame key and a Bell key.

To respond to either of the above items, please contact the SRH&PS directly (see p. 6).

SRH&PS 2006 Executive Board

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Newsletter - Dick Meyers

Program - Elaine O'Neill and

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Publicity - Iris Schmitt

Web Site - Stephanie Bartz



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

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Email us: **SouthRiverHistory@gmail.com**
Visit our Website: **www.rootsweb.com/~njshrps/**

2007 SRH&PS Membership Application Form

Date _____

Please check one: New Renewal Gift (from _____)

Please print your name clearly as it should appear on membership listing:

Name (Mr., Mrs., Ms.): _____
First Initial Last

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

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Annual Dues Categories

- Adults* \$10.00
- Students \$5.00
- Family* \$15.00
- Business/Corporate \$25.00
- Lifetime (Individual) \$250.00

*For multiple memberships, please attach list of additional names to this form.

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____ Cash Check (Please make check payable to "SRH&PS, Inc.")

Send your application and dues payment to: **SRH&PS Membership**
P.O. Box 446 (All dues and contributions are tax-deductible)
South River, NJ 08882

My company has a matching gift program. Company Name: _____
 Company's address: _____

As a tax-exempt corporation, the SRH&PS, Inc. is eligible to receive matching gifts. If your employer participates in such a program, please send matching gift forms with your membership donation. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

I would like to donate an additional amount of \$ _____
 This gift is in honor of in memory of _____
 Gifts will be recognized in our newsletter.