

# HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

## President's Message by Brian Armstrong

As part of the development of a resource for South River residents wanting to learn about the history of their houses in South River, I had the opportunity to look at the Sanborn Maps for 1892, 1897, 1904, 1910, 1917, 1923, and 1930. Reviewing these maps was particularly relevant since I am working with the Preservation Subcommittee to develop a list of buildings to preserve as part of the South River Master Plan.

The Sanborn Map Company prepared these maps of South River for the exclusive use of fire insurance companies and underwriters in the state of New Jersey. The maps provide a detailed inventory of all existing residential and commercial structures in the borough at a particular time.

The first thing that I noticed as I reviewed the maps was the lost factories and businesses that once dominated the South River landscape. Firms like American Enameled Brick & Tile Company, Herrmann & Aukam Handkerchief Manufacturers, Lunep Embroidery Works, G. Luithardt Sausage Factory, George Allgeier Beer and Sodawater Bottling, and Clayton Lumber occupied huge parts of the town.

It is hard to imagine the industrial strength of the bor-

ough in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several large rooming houses existed on Ferry Street and other locations to house those who chose to live near their work. Residents also worked near their single family homes and people from other towns came to South River to work.

The other thing that stood out was the long establishment of the Main Street and Ferry Street area going back even before the first Sanborn map of 1892. This area is a critical part of our current work to preserve the buildings of South River. The survival of this area provides a potential magnet to attract tourists and day shoppers. Main Street with many of the larger homes in the borough and lower Main and Ferry with commercial structures is a portal to the past of South River. Although we will also work to preserve structures in other parts of the town, this area will continue to be the focus and continues the mission of the South River Historical & Preservation Society when it leased and initiated restoration of our museum building.

As an organization, we welcome all moves to create new attractive businesses in this preservation area to revitalize the downtown area as other towns in Middlesex County and New Jersey have achieved over the last 10 years.

## New Acquisitions, September-December 2009

1. **Mortar & pestle, tablet maker, capsule filler, herb grinders**, and other items from Duschock's Pharmacy; **photograph** of Mr. Duschock. Donated by Stephen M. Duschock.
2. **Booklet**, Official 1961 City Directory Preface Brochure, South River, New Jersey. Donated by William Neary.
3. **Map**, "Map of Washington Monumental Cemetery" including "New Section, Washington Monumental Cemetery situate in the Borough of South River, Middlesex County, New Jersey," June 3, 1971; **collection of materials** relating to the organization and activities of the South River Cultural & Heritage Commission. Donated by Barbara and Robert Jensen.
4. **Yearbook**, South River Middle School, 2007. Donated by Rafano & Wood P.C.
5. **Photo**, digital copy, Mrs. Fuller's Campbell School third grade class Indian play, circa 1968-69. Donated by Karen Grompone Clark.

*continued on page 4*

## SRH&PS 2010 EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Robert Rafano (2008)

## South River Historical & Preservation News

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**Editor:** Dick Meyers

### Associate Editors & Contributors:

Marilyn Anastasio

Stephanie Bartz

Candice Lewandoski

Ann Rafano

### Mailings & Distribution:

Paul & Joann Goepfert

Brian Armstrong

### To Our Readers:

The *South River Historical & Preservation News* willingly corrects its factual errors. If you believe we have made a mistake, please let us know.

Readers' contributions to the newsletter are welcomed. Submissions for the April 2010 issue must be received by March 15.

Please advise us if you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email.

**For contact information, please see page 6.**

## Whitehead Home Well on the Road to Recovery

By 2007, the historic Edward Whitehead homestead on Main St. had fallen into disrepair; that's when the current owner, the Tabernacle Baptist Church of South River, decided to do something about it. After two years of renovation costing more than \$360,000, the Church's pastor, Rev. Charles R. Johnson, moved his family into the house last February. Recently, Rev. Johnson offered to take SRH&PS members on a tour of the home, and on January 19, he did just that.

While outside work was unfinished due to the onset of winter, the inside was a delight to see. Rev. Johnson said he had tried to maintain the original style and as much of the original furnishings as possible, such as the living room fireplace, the stained glass window which faces the stairway, and the stairway itself, with all the original spindles, leading to the bedrooms. Upstairs, the master bathroom is graced by a stained glass window that had been found in the attic.



Photo left- Rev. Johnson and a dozen guests about to enter; center- his wife Linda holds flowers given her by Nan Whitehead; right- Mrs. Johnson reads the inscription on the photo presented to her husband.

In recognition of Rev. Johnson's efforts, Nan Whitehead, granddaughter of the original owner, presented him with a framed picture of the home in its 1915 prime and an inscription on the back thanking him "For bringing life and love to the Edward Whitehead Home once again."

# Personalities from the Past – Benjamin Randolph

by Stephanie Bartz

Despite his humble roots, one South River man can claim an association with two future presidents and the Declaration of Independence, as well as a familial connection to a third president.

Born in South River and named for his grandfather, Benjamin Fitz Randolph was the sixth child of Isaac Fitz Randolph and Rebecca Seabrook. Although accounts vary, it's generally held that two of Isaac and Rebecca's eight children were born in South River, a daughter in 1734 and Benjamin on January 30, 1738. Benjamin became more commonly known by the shortened version of his name when the "Fitz," which denoted "son of," was dropped.

Involved in a variety of enterprises throughout his lifetime, Benjamin's earliest known activities included buying and selling land and cutting and selling timber in the Jersey Pinelands. He erected a sawmill at Speedwell, where he would also build an iron furnace in later years. In the early 1760s he moved to Philadelphia, and using his knowledge of woods and woodworking, become a master joiner specializing in the more skilled aspects of finished woodworking. He married Anna Broomwick in 1762, and when his father-in-law died, the inheritance was used to establish his woodworking business on a larger scale.



*Chippendale chairs similar to the type made by Randolph.  
[Photo by R. Van Dyke Reid, December 20, 1897]*

Benjamin grew to become a well-known and accomplished furniture maker with a business at the "Sign of the Golden Eagle" on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Although he made frames, clock cases, and even coffins, he is best known for his Chippendale style furniture. He is also credited with being one of the earliest makers of wooden buttons.

In the late 1760s, Randolph expanded his business endeavors to include taking in paying guests. He rented rooms to Colonel George Washington during the First Continental Congress in 1774. Washington's diary indicates that he roomed with Randolph again in 1775, as did his wife Martha in 1777.

When Thomas Jefferson attended the Second Continental Congress, he also took rooms with Randolph. It was during that period that Jefferson designed a portable writing desk which he commissioned Randolph to build. The mahogany desk was used by Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The desk is now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

Randolph was a member of the First Mounted City Troop, the Philadelphia Light Horse, during the American Revolution. He was in battles at both Trenton and Princeton, and tradition has it that he served as a guide for General Washington and his army and played an important role in the events of the period.

In 1778, Benjamin sold his woodworking tools and got involved in other ventures. He died on December 21, 1791. His familial connection to President Woodrow Wilson came through his eldest brother James, who was the great great grandfather of Wilson's first wife, Ellen Louise Axson.

6. **Bottle, soda**, Allgeier's Beverages, South River, NJ (7oz.). Donated by Mark Daldos.
7. **Filebox** containing photos and memorabilia relating to Bill Denny and South River High School football; **photograph**, Nonpareil Club, B&W, framed [n.d.]; **photograph**, football team, 1928, B&W on cardboard; **photograph**, football team in front of Thomas St. school, B&W, framed [n.d.]; **photograph**, dinner honoring Bill Denny's 20 years at SRHS, Jan. 22, 1946, B&W, framed; **photograph**, SRHS football team in front of Thomas St. school, B&W, 8"x10" [n.d.]; **photograph**, 1960 SRHS football team, B&W, framed 8"x10"; **photograph**, 1961 SRHS football team, B&W, framed 8"x10"; **photograph**, dinner for unidentified event, B&W, 18 ½"x8", loose in frame [n.d.]; **photograph**, testimonial dinner for Alexander Wojciechowicz, Feb. 10, 1938, Hotel Pines, Metuchen, NJ; **photograph**, backdrop for dinner honoring Bill Denny's 20 years at SRHS, Jan. 22, 1946, B&W, unframed; **photograph**, Admiral Bernhard presenting D.F.C. to Lt. A.Y. Parunak, Aug. 22, 1942, inscribed "in appreciation to Bill Denny"; photograph, 1959 SRHS football team, B&W, framed 8"x10"; **decoupage newspaper clipping**, "Hall of Fame is Dream Come True: Wojie," Asbury Park Evening Press, Wed. Feb. 21, 1968; **photograph**, Nonpareil Club, B&W, framed [n.d.]; **photograph**, football team, 1928; **photograph**, football team in front of Thomas St. school, B&W, framed [n.d.]; **photograph**, dinner honoring Bill Denny's 20 years at SRHS, Jan. 22, 1946; **photograph**, SRHS football team in front of Thomas St. school, B&W, 8"x10" [n.d.]; **photograph**, 1960 SRHS football team; **photograph**, 1961 SRHS football team. Donated by Tom Bara, President, Bill Denny Chapter, National Football Foundation on behalf of the Denny family.
8. **Bottles, soda** (set of 16), Baird Beverage Co., 101 Main St., South River, NJ (7oz.); **case**, Baird Beverage Co., 101 Main St., South River, NJ (cardboard case for 24 7oz. bottles). Donated by Rose & Gerald McAtee.
9. **Certificate**, Baptismal certificate for Charles Whitehead from the Church of the Holy Trinity, South River, NJ, April 11, 1914; **doorknob set, glass doorknobs and lock mechanism** set in wood, cut from one of the original doors of the Edward Whitehead house (Main St., South River). Donated by Nan Whitehead.
10. **Photo album**, containing portraits of Martha, Elizabeth, Roselle, and May Smith and other photos of the Smith family, assorted classes and groups, and individual photos. Donated by Betty Wagner.
11. **Newsletter**, "News and Views," South River Public Schools, January 1976; **map**, Map of South River, New Jersey, published by C. Buyofsky, Jr., 1961. Donated by Debbie Parsons.
12. **Booklet**, "History of South River," 1970. Donated by Mary Ann Hoffman.
13. **Thermometer**, Clayton Lumber Co.; **calendar**, Clayton Lumber Yard, 1960; **calendar**, Thomas & Chadwick Inc. and Riverside Supply Co., 1961. Donated by Judy Olcsvay.
14. **2 Candles**, Lit from Olympic Torch Run through South River, February 4, 1980. Donated by Iris Schmitt.
15. **Handbook**, 1956 South River High School Handbook. Donated by Judith Smith.
16. **Matchbook**, First National Bank of South River; **matchbook**, M. Eskin & Son; **can opener**, Wittys'; **2 postcards**, South River Post Office. Donated by Nan Whitehead.

## Before You Throw "IT" Out...

Whenever you find something which has a South River connection, please let us know at the Museum. We can photograph, scan, and make copies of the items. If you don't want them anymore, you can donate them to the Museum. If you are not sure what to do, please contact us. (See p. 6 for contact information.)

# Annual Meeting, 2009

On November 18, last year's Annual Meeting of the SRH&PS featured the traditional "Show and Tell" journey into South River's past. Among the highlights were presentations on historic items by Judy Olcsvay, Iris Schmitt, Judith Smith, and Nan Whitehead, all of whom then donated their materials to the South River Museum.

The Museum, site of the meeting, also benefitted from the labors of John Karczmit, a South River resident and owner of Always Video. John transferred the contents of many 8mm and 16mm movies in the Museum's collection to DVDs, which he then donated to the Museum.

The SRH&PS offers a sincere "Thank you" to all who have contributed to the Museum's holdings.



*Above, Judy Olcsvay shares with the audience a mid-20th century SR calendar. Below, John Karczmit (left) presents DVDs of movies filmed around and about the borough to President Brian Armstrong (right) as Treasurer Hank Dziemian looks on.*



## Special Acknowledgements (11/09 – 1/10)

### CONTRIBUTORS:

JoAnn Devlin	Nina Silwanowicz
Anita & William Hermstedt	Alexis & John Stashkevetch
Elizabeth Litarowich	

### CONTRIBUTIONS IN MEMORY OF:

Joseph Aschettino by Ann & Anthony Aschettino  
 Bill Bruhn by Louise Bruhn  
 Phyllis Sicknick Barszcz by Charles Sicknick Family

### CONTRIBUTORS, CEMETERY CONSERVATION PROGRAM:

Doug Heine

## SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

### New! Old School Baptist Church

**Postcard** – Set of 3 postcards, \$1.00  
 Features an 1894 photo of the OSBC (now the South River Museum).



### 2010 SRH&PS

**Calendar** - \$8.00  
 Previous years also available - \$6.00



### Old School Baptist Church print by Joseph Csatari - \$25.00

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.

### Commemorative 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Old School Baptist Church Medalion Ornament (South River Museum) - \$10.00

### Commemorative Book in Celebration of South River's 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1720-1995 - \$10.00

Over 90 pages of text & photos.

### Wooden Plaque of the Old School Baptist Church - \$10.00

Made from timber from the original portico columns.

### Old School Baptist Church Note Cards with Envelopes - Set of 5 cards, \$2.50; set of 10 cards, \$4.00

Features an early photo of the OSBC.

### SRH&PS Hat - \$5.00

Blue with white lettering and a picture of the Old School Baptist Church.

### Lapel Pin - \$5.00

Collectible pin commemorating the South River Museum - Old School Baptist Church [size- 7/8 inch]



*Note: Prices do not include postage. Please visit our website (see back page) for additional items.*



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South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

Phone us: **732-613-3078**  
Email us: **SouthRiverHistory@gmail.com**  
Visit our Website: **<http://www.rootsweb.com/~njsrhps/>**  
Visit our Museum: **See Calendar (insert)**  
Write to us: **See mailing address, above**

## A Tale of Two (Almost Three) Washingtons

It wasn't until 1898 that the sleepy village of Washington officially became the booming Borough of South River, a move due in part to being confused with the town of Washington in Sussex County. A quarter-century earlier, though, a report in the *New Brunswick Daily Times* suggested that whatever confusion the names then caused might soon be compounded.

According to the "Washington" column in the January 7, 1873 issue, a movement was gathering steam in Metuchen to change that town's name and become New Jersey's third Washington, a change the columnist strongly opposed. While the argument focused primarily on problems with misdirected mail already faced by the two extant Washingtons, it did observe that the "drawback does not seem to particularly worry our South River friends- like the eels being skinned, 'they are used to it.'"

Going a step further, the columnist advocated having just one Washington in New Jersey and offered this rationale for our own town to change its name: "A place that possesses so many independent men and good-looking girls as reside in Washington (South River) ought to be resolved to 'play second fiddle' to no other locality."

While the columnist's reasoning may not have played a role, the name change did eventually go through the state legislature, and with a stroke of the Governor's pen on February 28, 1898, the Borough of South River was officially born.

# Old School Baptist Church Cemetery Conservation Program Donation Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Email (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of donation: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc. and send them with the form to: SRH&PS, Inc.

P.O. Box 446

South River, NJ 08882

(If you would like to make a memorial donation, please add the information to the back of the form.)

## South River Historical & Preservation Society Calendar

**2010 Meetings: February 24 April 28 June 23**

**February 24 Program:** Mary Anne Ross, a member of Intertribal American Indians of New Jersey, will talk about her experiences living on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota and will also share some of what she learned about the indigenous people living in our area when the Europeans first arrived.

This, as with all Wednesday meetings, will convene at 7:00 p.m. at the South River Museum (formerly the Old School Baptist Church/War Memorial Building), 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 (second Sunday if the first is a holiday):

**February 7 March 7 April 11**

## 2010 SRH&PS Membership Application Form

Please check one:  New  Renewal  Gift (from \_\_\_\_\_)

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

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Check here and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope to receive a membership card.

Check here and include your email above if you would like to receive your newsletter via email.

I would like to donate an additional amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Gifts will be recognized in our newsletter)

The gift is:  in honor of  in memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

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  
South River, NJ 08882

[All dues and contributions are tax-deductible.]

My company has a matching gift program.

Company name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company 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.

### ANNUAL DUES CATEGORIES

Please check one:

Adult \$10.00

Student \$5.00

Family/Couple \$15.00

Business/Corporate \$25.00

Lifetime - Individual 250.00