

HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

President's Message by Brian Armstrong

Last month we received an inquiry and a visit from a borough resident interested in the history of the Raritan River Railroad Hotel on Whitehead Avenue. She currently lives in an apartment in the surviving building. We made copies of pictures of the interior and exterior of the building from old calendars for her. We also sent her some articles about the hotel that were written a hundred years ago.



A review of Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1894 to 1930, shows the development of the property by Forman C. Bissett. The original part of the hotel was built in 1896 after the completion of the railroad link and depot in South River. Part of the building used for the restaurant/bar was completed after 1904 along with other buildings in the back that were dedicated to Bissett's beer and soda bottling business. The buildings were later owned by Frank Magiera (1930s), Mary Gurky (1940s), and Stanley Potyrola (1960s).

Over the years other owners maintained the bar and converted the hotel into apartments. Today the twenty rooms that existed in the hotel and the bar area have been converted to a half dozen larger apartments.

Our visitor told us that many of the fixtures from the hotel have survived in the apartments. We can only wonder if the patterned floor visible in the 1900 era photo of Forman Bissett standing next to the bar is covered by a modern floor or carpet. The buildings associated with the beer and soda company were converted to garages during Prohibition and also survive near the old railroad tracks. Today T&Z Auto Services sits on a piece of land next to the building that was known as Bissett's Park a hundred years ago, with its Summer Pavilion that was converted into a basketball court for the Laurels basketball team during the winter months. Bissett was an early automobile enthusiast and invited other members of auto clubs to stay at his hotel making it one of the first "motels" in New Jersey and possibly in the United States.

SRH&PS efforts in the News

Stephanie Bartz's work with photographing all the visible stones in the Washington Monumental Cemetery was recently featured in the Sentinel newspaper. Please stop by the museum to check out the photographs, which are linked to a database for easy inquiry processing!

<http://tinyurl.com/89trrg2>



Yates Stone at Washington Monumental Cemetery.

Museum Mysteries

This 21" by 48" wooden sign was found in the garage of a home on Old Bridge Turnpike. The age of the sign and the location of "Darrow" homes are unknown.



Was Darrow the builder? The architect? The location? The telephone exchange is South River, but are the homes located here? If you can provide any information, please contact us!

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South River Historical & Preservation News

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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 September
issue must be received by August 15.

Please advise us if you would prefer to receive
your newsletter via email by sending a
message to southernriverhistory@gmail.com.

Special Acknowledgements

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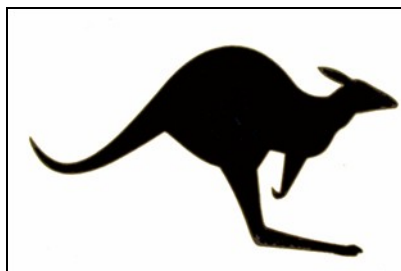
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Kangaroo Crossing

You may be wondering what a
kangaroo has to do with South
River, but it was big enough
news in 1913 to make it into

the April 21st edition of the *Boston Globe* newspaper. A mov-
ing picture company was filming on location in the borough
when the incident occurred. The plot of "When the Circus
Came to Town" involved a train wreck, four lions, three bears,
and three kangaroos. When more than 3,600 spectators showed
up to view the filming, "the moving picture company did not
dare free any of the animals except one of the kangaroos." Ap-
parently the kangaroo wanted to see more of South River and
the surrounding area; it was still at large after being chased by
"a locomotive along the Raritan River Railroad tracks, then in
an auto, then afoot and on horseback and by motorcycles."

Dr. Sarah Evans Selover, the “Lady Doctor” - By Brian Armstrong

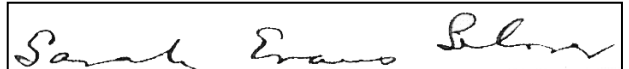
When Sarah Evans was born to English immigrant parents, Thomas and Ann Evans in Lincroft, New Jersey on March 8, 1863, no one could have imagined that this 7th child in a family of 8 children would go on to be an active suffragette and prominent New Jersey doctor. Her father came to America in 1851 and by 1870 was an established farmer. Her siblings followed in their father’s footsteps.

By 1880, sixteen year old Sarah was living with her older brothers on their farm in Middleton. Shortly thereafter, she began her academic journey. She attended Peddie Institute in Hightstown and then entered Bucknell University where she taught higher mathematics and chemistry. Then she “became interested in the medical profession” and entered the College Preparatory School of Newark, NJ and later the New York Medical College where she graduated in 1893.

After completing her degree, she spent a year as an intern in the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston Massachusetts. The hospital was founded in 1862 in “an effort to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of women entering medical practice” by providing them a “competitive advantage” with clinical training in “cutting edge of contemporary medical pedagogy.”

She came to South River in 1894 on the “advice of friends” and opened an office. The development of Sayreville and South River industrial factories may have increased the population and the need for additional doctors in the area. Two years after her arrival, on April 20, 1896, she married Charles H. Selover, a successful “boatsman” from the borough who was 22 years her senior.

Even before her marriage, Dr. Selover began to distinguish herself and develop a trust with the community due to her professionalism and experience. She had a “kindly disposition; tenacity of purpose and promptness in caring for her patients.”



She treated many patients in their homes and made house calls until they were well. Newspapers noted her treatment of children with dog bites, injuries from falls, burns from bathwater, throat burns from carbolic acid, and sprained wrists from roller skating. Adult injuries included cuts from being buried under clay, broken ribs from falling off a ladder, stabbing wounds, and a steam roller burn to the face. In all cases, she quickly served the patient by dressing the wound, performing small medical procedures and finally sending the patient to a hospital, if required. Some cases put her in the position of only being able to help people in their final moments of life.

Charlotte Dow Barber recalled “Old Doc Selover’s” “rambling gray house” at 115 Main Street which included her “somewhat gloomy, sparsely-furnished office.” During office visits, “her long, billowing, woolen skirt reached down to the tips of her high-buttoned shoes and under the skirt she wore two flannel petticoats in one of which was sewed a large pocket. When a patient would reimburse her, she would lift up her skirt and deposit the money in her petticoat.”

Barber also recalled that for most house calls someone was sent to get Dr. Selover because of the lack of telephones in the town. She would arrive driving her horse and buggy and later a Model-T Ford with solid, perforated rubber tires. She endured the rough ride to ensure that she would always be able to reach her patients quickly.

Dr. Selover would first inquire about the health of the family and then administer castor oil, before any other medications were prescribed. For minor injuries such as black eyes, a leech was prescribed from a local pharmacy. Although Selover was compassionate, she also had a stoic, no nonsense demeanor with little tolerance for children and vocal pregnant woman who did not “suffer in silence.” Her aim was to keep her patients alive, free of pain, and help them heal as soon as possible.

continued on page 4

Dr. Sarah Evans Selover, the “Lady Doctor” *Continued from page 3*

Her practice reached far beyond the borough with patients in Milltown, Spotswood, Old Bridge, Sayreville, and Jamesburg. Patients that moved often traveled great distances to return to her for treatment from Asbury Park to Reading PA, and Northern New Jersey.

Joseph Karcher noted that Dr. Selover appeared in court as a medical expert to help patients who had been in auto accidents obtain damages. She was also asked to testify in other court cases. Newspapers noted her ability to endure a court session with “one of the best cross-examiners at the bar”, former Judge C.T. Cowenhaven. The case involved an assault where Selover’s testimony was necessary to convict the accused of stabbing the victim in the back rather than injuring him with a defensive frontal wound. She was “equal in quick thinking and ready answers” and “retired from the witness stand triumphant.”



Dr. Selover was active in the Tabernacle Baptist Church and was a supporter of women’s suffrage. She was the Master of Ceremonies when a noted suffragette speaker came to speak at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in 1915. She was interested in intellectual pursuits and supported the Chautauqua when it came to Sayreville in 1916. Newspapers called her “an ardent suffragette” and a “leading suff.”

She worked heroically for the citizens of South River and Sayreville during the Influenza Epidemic of 1918. She put her own safety at risk and alone handled more than 450 cases, “beginning early in the morning and working until midnight, taking no thought of her own comfort with regard to meals or sleep.” To give people a sense of security, she wore “a long oil skin raincoat” while out on these calls, and quickly removed it and stored it in her stable/garage before entering her house and office.

Selover was a “born diplomat and had friends of all political, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.” She was also “interested in civic affairs and knew every phase of government of the town.” She expanded her knowledge of the world by traveling to Europe in July 1924.

During a sleet storm in the early 1930s, she received a midnight call from “a sick patient near death” that had been passed over by other doctors. Dr. Selover “shoveled and dug her way to the home” of the sick person arriving in time to save their life. Soon after, she became very ill and went to the home of her niece, Mrs. E. Thurston Blaisdell of Long Branch. She died on April 5, 1932 after a long illness.

Dr. Selover’s funeral was held at the Tabernacle Baptist Church on April 8, 1932 and “over 50 percent of South River’s population passed by her casket and viewed the remains of their friend who had relieved the suffering of men, women and children alike.” Mayor Armstrong requested all business houses to halt for two minutes during the funeral and flags were at half mast on all public buildings and borough streets. An obituary in the *New York Times* memorialized her remarkable life



Footstone from Dr. Selover’s grave at Washington Monumental

Although she died during the worst part of the Great Depression, she left behind an estate of \$300,000, the equivalent of millions of dollars today. Joseph Karcher, who had the responsibility for auditing the accounts of her estate, said that “it would appear that although her fees for house calls were extremely low and she showed great dedication to her patients they were always apparently willing and able to pay her fees and thus enable her to build up such an impressive estate.”

Sources: Jesse Selover, *History of South River*; Charlotte Dow Barber, *A Homespun Heritage*; newspaper clippings from the Paul Schack Collection; *New Brunswick Daily Times* newspaper archive; Joseph Karcher, *Letter to editor* in response to Charlotte Dow Barber; *New York Times* obituary; and Ancestry.com (US Federal Census Records, passport record)

3rd Graders learn at the South River Museum on Government Day

The third graders from the South River Elementary School visited the South River Museum on Friday, May 18. The museum was part of their Government Day trip. Seven groups of children with their teachers and chaperons were given a tour of the site. Information about the monuments, artifacts in the museum, and the cemetery were given by Kathy Bitow, Ann Rafano, Father Michael Psenechnuk, Charles Sicknick, and Marilyn Anastasio.



The Old House Corner - By Ken Roginski

Shutters were once a very practical feature on a building. Solid panel shutters were used on the ground floor for privacy and louvered shutters on the 2nd floor for ventilation. During the heat of the day in the summer, these shutters would be closed, protecting furniture and fabric from sun damage,



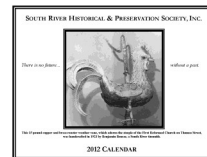
yet allowing fresh air to flow into the room. Shutters also added to the beauty of a building by providing crisp shadow lines enhancing the windows. Unfortunately today, shutters are totally misunderstood. They are the wrong size and are almost always mounted incorrectly off to the side of the window. Shutters today detract from the overall appearance of a house. So if you have shutters on your home, there is a lot of important information you need know about shutters to avoid the many mistakes. Visit The Old House Guy's website at www.OldHouseGuy/shutters and you will see shutters in a totally different way.

SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

2012 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 200th Anniversary Old School Baptist Church Medalion Ornament (South River Museum) - \$10.00

Old School Baptist Church

Postcard - Set of

postcards, \$1.00

Features an 1894

photo of the

OSBC

(now the South River Museum).



Commemorative Book Celebrating South River's 275th 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.



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Website: **<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njsrhps/>**
Visit our Museum: **See Calendar (insert)**

School Days

The April 25th program brought home the fact that school days aren't like they used to be. Alicia Rihacek, President of the Madison Township Historical Society, gave a presentation on the early history of New Jersey elementary schools prior to the modernization of schools in the late 20th century. She used the Cedar Grove School, now the Thomas Warne Museum, to illustrate her topic.

The Cedar Grove School was a one room schoolhouse located in Madison Township, now part of Matawan. It saw more than 125 years of service as a school. Opened in 1821, classes were held for students from the first through the eighth grades.

For most schools in the 19th century, it was common for students to walk to school and carry their own lunch each day. There was generally only one teacher for the entire school, all grade levels. Children did their lessons in chalk on small blackboards rather than using paper and pencil. During the cold winter months the school was heated with a single cast iron coal burning stove.

One wonders what the children of yesteryear would have thought if they could have exchanged places with the students of today, or, for that matter, how the students of today would fare if transplanted into the one room schoolhouse of the past.



Alicia Rihacek during her presentation at the April SRH&PS meeting.

Old School Baptist Church Cemetery Conservation Program Donation Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP Code: _____

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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.

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(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

2012 Meetings: June 20 September 26 November 28 (Annual Meeting)

June 20 -- Jason Slesinski, Vice President of the Sayreville Historical Society and author of *A Cultural History of Sayreville*, will be presenting a program discussing the shared industrial, immigration, and community histories of Sayreville and South River.

The meeting will convene at 7:00 p.m. at the South River Museum — Old School Baptist Church, 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):

July 1 August 5 September 2 October 7 November 4

2012 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): _____

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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
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[All dues and contributions are tax-deductible.]

My company has a matching gift program.

Company name: _____

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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:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Couple | \$15.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business/Corporate | \$25.00 |
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