

HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

President's Message by Brian Armstrong

When I became President of the South River Historical & Preservation Society in 2008, I made a short speech outlining things I wanted to accomplish as president. Although several items still remain on the list, some items, such as collecting business/commerce history and creating profiles of famous citizens, have been achieved. Hopefully, this newsletter and my presentation on the South River High School football team of 1968 at the upcoming September General Meeting will fulfill the goals of providing more South River sports history, South River High School history, and late 20th century history.



Early this year, we provided some sports history with an article in the April newsletter on the South River Sterlings basketball team. This newsletter includes a short item about the Buck O'Brien baseball bat from the James B. Armstrong Collection and an article about the Joe Theismann Day events in South River in 1970 and 1971.

For over a hundred years, South River has had a rich history of sports which has included local triumphs and residents going on to achieve greater goals. The London Olympics reminded us that sports are a great way for communities, states, countries, and the world to compete in a civilized contest based on rules that reward talent, preparation, and luck. Tomorrow's Olympic or professional sports hero could currently be attending one of the South River schools and may be the subject of a newsletter article or presentation in the future. We salute these South River athletes and will continue to include sports history as part of the history of the borough.

Museum Mysteries

This shield shaped red and white wooden sign was donated anonymously in 2011. Lodge No. 241 is believed to represent the Sayreville-based lodge of the Danish Brotherhood of America, chartered on May 25, 1906.

What is the significance of the sign and of Blaavands Huk (a town in Denmark)? What does the symbol represent? If you can provide any information, please contact us!



Update on April and June Mysteries

In April we featured a 1961 photograph of a group of students at Willett School. We now know that the students were part of the future South River High School Class of 1970. Not all of the faces have been matched with names yet, but we're much closer than we were before!

The June mystery was another wooden sign, this one advertising "Darrow Homes" for sale. Several readers contacted us to say that the Darrow homes were a group of 16 houses built on Darrow Street between Virginia and Ferris Streets, 8 on each side of the street. They were built in the early 1950s by Sam Richland. The sidewalks and streets were done by Charlie Roselli and the phone number on the sign was his.

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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 November
issue must be received by October 15.

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

June Meeting Makes Connections

On June 20, Jason Slesinski, Vice President of the Sayreville Historical Society and author of *A Cultural History of Sayreville*, addressed a full house at the South River Museum. The program focused on the history of Sayreville and its many connections to South River.

The Fishers, a prominent family in Sayreville's history, also have a prominent plot in South River's Washington Monumental Cemetery. Rebecca Fisher (1822-1857) is said to have been the first person buried there. Mr. Slesinski provided a firsthand account of early 20th century life with the Fishers as he read from documents penned by his ancestor, Apolonya Kulakowski Slesinski, who worked as a maid for the family.

Part of South Amboy until 1876, Sayreville became known for its industry. Sayre and Fisher purchased land in 1850 and companies such as Crossman's, DuPont, Hercules, T.A. Gillespie, and others followed. People from South River and other area towns travelled to Sayreville to work and, as in South River, immigrants augmented the population and the workforce. So too did people from Sayreville travel to South River to contribute to the production of handkerchiefs, clothing, cigars, and other items produced here by area laborers.



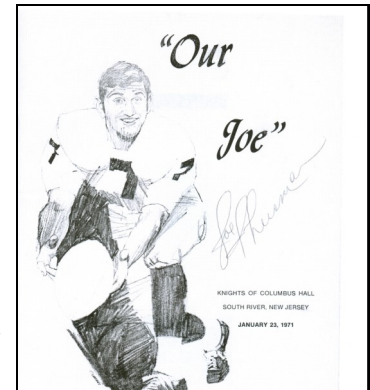
Jason Slesinski addresses the audience during the June program.

continued on page 4

Joe Theismann Parade and Dinner, 1971- By Brian Armstrong

On a winter day, January 23, 1971, South River paid tribute to their successful native son, Joe Theismann, with a parade and dinner at the Knights of Columbus on Jackson Street. Although the tribute had been planned for six months, Theismann's huge success during the Notre Dame season, his Cotton Bowl appearance, and the multiple awards he received, including second place in the Heisman trophy contest and College Player of Year by the New Jersey Sports Writers Association, added excitement to the event.

During his South River High School career, Joe was the key player in his senior year after his successful shoulder surgery and recovery. South River "steamrolled foe after foe that 1966 season and the hero was the free throwing scrambling quarterback." Theismann tossed 23 touchdown passes and scored eight touchdowns himself as the Rams, led by Ron Wojcicki, went unbeaten and untied in nine games. A Mid-November newspaper account said that "senior sensation Joe Theismann threw three touchdown passes and scored another while South River's alert defenders intercepted seven passes converting four of them as the undefeated and untied Rams romped over Perth Amboy 39-21."



Program from January 23, 1971 event at the Knights of Columbus

Joe's next stop was Notre Dame, where he got his break during his sophomore year. Quarterback Terry Hanratty was injured and Coach Ara Parseghian selected Theismann to replace him over two senior quarterbacks. He led the "Fighting Irish" to 21 victories, losing only three games and tying one during his tenure as quarterback. As a senior, Theismann completed 155 of 268 passes (57.8%) for 2,429 yards with 16 touchdowns. He was told that his "slim, almost frail-looking 165 lbs body" was not strong enough for Notre Dame. He remarked that he didn't consider it a "handicap" and that it provided him "more agility." He said that "it makes you more of a runner, and I think that a quarterback has to run and pass with almost equal ability."

Before the excitement of the January parade and dinner, South River gave a preview of Theismann-mania when the Knights of Columbus organized Joe Theismann Day on October 31, 1970 for the Notre-Dame-Navy game at JFK Memorial Stadium in Philadelphia. South River Council 3001 - Knights of Columbus sponsored the day long trip, under the chairmanship of Ray Bara. Five hundred game tickets mushroomed to a final 1,708 tickets. Thirty-six buses carried the "rootin-tootin South River crowd" to the game where they were seated around the 10 or 15 yard line on the visitor's side. Notre Dame won, 56 to 7.

The 1971 tribute came at an important point in Joe Theismann's life. Although his achievements in high school and college were great, he would go on to much larger success as a pro football player, Super Bowl champion, businessman, and broadcaster. This moment was the last blast of home town innocence before he embarked on his new journey. His parents, family, and many friends still lived in South River which provided a reminder of his childhood. The parade began at Tanner's Corner and included bands, floats and marching units from the borough and some neighboring communities. Youth and fraternal groups, as well as the borough police, the fire department, and the rescue squad were featured. The parade was sponsored by the South River Booster Club, and Julius Mate was the chairman of the event. After riding in a car with his new wife Sherie, Joe was presented with the keys to the borough by Mayor Walter C. Kulik.

After a cocktail hour at the Ramada Inn, six hundred friends, relatives, and fans, including the South River Rams football team, cheerleaders and other teens, attended the dinner at the Knights of Columbus on Jackson Street. In front of a "large and colorful mural depicting a football field," which was assembled by the Knights of Columbus and a group of ninth grade girls, Joe received many "praises and plaudits" from Master of Ceremonies Ray Bara, superintendent of schools Anthony Agnone, high school principal Theodore Sivess, former football coaches Ron Wojcicki and Joseph Dudra, and others. The main speaker was Jerry Molloy of St. Peter's College, who provided "jokes and friendly jibes, many of them aimed at his long-time friend, John Fitzpatrick, another dinner co-chairman."

continued on page 4

Joe Theismann Parade and Dinner, *Continued from page 3*

Although the NFL college player draft was scheduled to open in a few weeks, Joe said that he would also accept a pro-baseball offer. Joe also announced to the audience that night that he and his wife were expecting their first child in September. No one that day could have imagined that his career would reach such heights and include a Super Bowl victory and a name that was known by most Americans who lived in the later part of the 20th century.

Buck O'Brien Bat from the James B. Armstrong Collection of South River part of Fenway 100th Anniversary Celebration.

A baseball bat owned by spitball pitcher Buck O'Brien and used during the 1912 World Series was lent to the Boston Red Sox for the 100th Anniversary of Fenway Park this year by South River Historical & Preservation Society President, Brian Armstrong. O'Brien was a 20 game winner for the Red Sox in 1912 and threw out the first pitch ever at Fenway Park. The bat is one of a few items from the James B. Armstrong Collection still owned by members of the Armstrong family. The collection once included over 4,000 autographed balls, bats, uniforms and other baseball memorabilia from the early 20th century to 1970.

Most of the items were on display at the former South River mayor's home museum at 172 Main Street in South River from the late 1920s until 1957 when he moved to Flemington, New Jersey. Harold Armstrong Jr. tried to donate the collection to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, however, most of the items were sold to collectors by Jim's children after his death in February, 1971. Jim Armstrong's relationships with players and ball club staff gave him access to amazing items that are still referenced as part of the "James B. Armstrong Collection" when sold by sports auction houses today. Hunt Auctions sold a lot of 2,600 autographed balls from his collection for \$69,000 in 2003.



Jim Armstrong pictured with his collection.

June Meeting Makes Connections, *Continued from page 2*

Prior to the construction of the many churches in South River, parishioners from some congregations travelled to Sayreville to worship. Until the 1893 establishment of South River's German Presbyterian Church (now the home of Union Baptist Church), for example, communicants crossed the river to the German Presbyterian Church on Main Street in Sayreville. The Holy Trinity Episcopal church building, built in Sayreville in 1861, was moved to South River in 1867.



German Presbyterian Church of Sayreville (at left) – German Presbyterian Church of South River (above)

Alternatively, South River High School classes included students from Sayreville until a suitable school could be built there. In later years a friendly rivalry was established at the first game between the Sayreville War Memorial High School football team and the South River High School football team. South River, with its many years of football history, won the day on September 20, 1944.

Mr. Slesinski's well received presentation included a slide show with photos, maps, and documents that were used in his book, as well as a display of items from the Sayreville Historical Museum. For information on where to purchase *A Cultural History of Sayreville*, visit the Sayreville Historical Society website at <http://www.sayhistory.com/>.

Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTORS:

Mary Ann & Walter Boyler
Margaret & Donald Calnan
Judith Smith with matching gift from Johnson & Johnson

New Acquisitions, April - August 2012

- Photograph of Olive and George Brasno with Wallace Beery in "The Mighty Barnum." Descriptive text on reverse. From the Newspaper Division of Field Enterprises, 1934. Donated by Stephanie and Ed Bartz.
- South River High School pin owned by Phyllis Sicknick Barszcz, Class of 1947. Donated by Charles Sicknick.
- Plaque showcasing a newspaper article from the September 19, 1979 Home News, "South River 'mayor' aids Portugese." In memory of Albert N. Ferro, 9/14/1909-8/23/1983. Donated by his daughter, Manuela Ferro Mendes.
- SR High School, SR Junior High School, Campbell, and Willett School yearbooks ranging from 1952 to 1978; *Agreement between the Board of Education, South River, New Jersey and the South River Education Association* (1969-1981); *South River High School Handbook* (1953 and 1956); *1962-63 Public School Directory of Middlesex County, New Jersey*; "Hospitality Week News" Volume 1, SR, NJ (*Sentinel-Spokesman Supplement*); 3 SR street maps with local ads; Road map of the Borough of SR, January 1, 1965. Donated by the family of Anthony Agnone.
- Collection of glasses, mugs, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other items from South River High School proms and other school-related events. Donated by Stephanie Scime.
- Framed panoramic photograph of the South River High class of 1936. Donated by Eliane Verloove.
- Cigar box containing documents, letters, and other items from the late 1920s including: a Search Warrant for the saloon and dwelling at 13 Jackson Street, September 16, 1928; ink blotters from A.W. Bissett, Commercial Union Assurance Company Limited - Price & Petrie Agents, and Eugene Canal, South River, NJ; and reports on collections and general finances for St. Mary of Ostrabrama Parish, 1927 and 1928. Donated by Mark Humphrey.
- Banner from the 250th anniversary of South River. Donated by George and Lorraine Alexander.
- Digital photo from the 2012 Memorial Day parade. Donated by Lisa Judge.
- Commemorative plates from St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church, 1907-1957 and St. Mary's C.Y.O. Donated by Diane Cea.

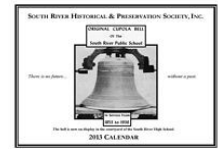


SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

2013 SRH&PS

Calendar - \$8.00

Previous years also available - \$6.00



Old School Baptist Church print by Joseph Csatar - \$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 3 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. Please visit our website (see back page) for additional items.



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

The Old House Corner - By Ken Roginski

Most of the best and well known masons out there may do a great job building a brick wall, but you should use extreme caution when hiring them if you own an old home. Masonry repair work can be responsible not only for damage but for destruction of old homes unless you are an informed consumer and know what to ask.

Your home may have wood shingles, but don't forget about chimneys and foundation walls constructed with brick or stone. The mortar will eventually deteriorate and it will need to be repointed. This is a very common practice and all masons do this. The problem lies in their knowledge of what type of mortar to use. Using the wrong type will cause irreversible damage. Mortar used today is very strong and hard because it contains a large amount of Portland Cement. Portland Cement is good for certain applications, but it is not a fix all as masons and building supply stores believe. Portland Cement is not bad, it just must be used in the mortar mixture in a lower percentage when working with certain materials.

The important thing to know is the mortar **MUST** be softer (in compression strength) than the brick or stone it surrounds and have greater vapor permeability. It must also be softer than the mortar it is replacing when repointing. This is accomplished by using less Portland Cement, and more lime and sand. Moisture within a wall needs to escape and evaporate. Mortar that is too hard will force the moisture to escape through the softer brick or stone. This will result in permanent damage such as cracking and spalling.

Read the full article at: oldehouseguy.blogspot.com/2012/08/the-mason-you-hire-can-destroy-your.html.
To better understand your old home go to www.OldHouseGuy.com.

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

2012 Meetings: September 26 November 28 (Annual Meeting)

September 26 -- Brian Armstrong, South River Historical & Preservation Society President, will provide a presentation about the 1968 South River High School Football Season. He will discuss how Coach Bellissimo, Drew Pearson and the Super Fraternity beat the odds with their winning season during the turbulent year of 1968.

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): **October 7 November 4 December 2**

2013 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:

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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
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

(please enter number in family) _____

Business/Corporate \$25.00

Lifetime - Individual \$250.00