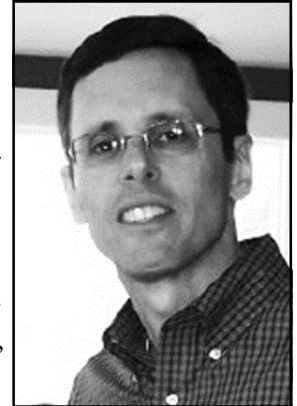


HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

President's Message by Brian Armstrong

The South River Historical & Preservation Society is sad to say goodbye to Spitaleri Furniture, the oldest family owned furniture business in New Jersey, and a landmark on Ferry Street for many years. Anthony "Tony" Joseph Spitaleri, who immigrated from Campo Fiorito, Italy, near Palermo, Sicily, was a pioneer in the Italian community of South River, being the first Italian-American merchant in the borough to own his own building. At first the business involved selling used furniture, appliances, and fruit. Over the years they developed into a first-tier furniture store featuring a full line of name-brand living room, dining room and bedroom furnishings and accessories displayed in room-like settings. Key suppliers include Vaughan, Vaughan-Bassett, Webb, Berkline, American Drew, Philip Reinisch, Best Home Furnishings and, in bedding, Spring Air.



Located at 18-20 Ferry Street, the first phase of the building filled half a block and was only two stories high. Tony Spitaleri Sr. further expanded it to stretch the entire block between Ferry Street and Marks Place. This is the same 12,000 square foot structure with four floors that survives today.

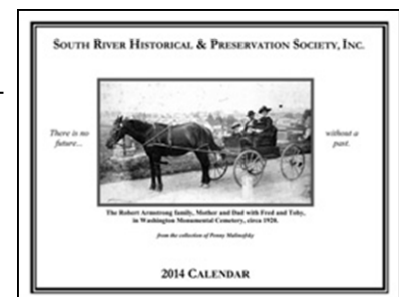
Four generations of the family would manage the store. Tony Sr. managed the business until the 1950s when his son, Tony Jr., took over. He would run the business until the 1980s when he turned it over to his son, Tony III ("Skeeter"). A fourth Tony Spitaleri, Skeeter's son, was active in the business until it closed in early August.

During Spitaleri Furniture's long history, women also played an important role in the business. These included Helen Ringle, Josephine Ciccio Spitaleri, Rose Fiegenbaum, Lena Alongi, and Carmela "Melia" Gendlek. Skeeter's wife, Jill, and daughters, Jennifer Spitaleri and Justina Raimondo, were key contributors to the success of the business during the last decades.

The Spitaleri family assisted the community through their involvement with the South River Planning Board, South River Parking Authority, South River Knights of Columbus, and the South River Economic Development Commission. Skeeter organized many activities to stimulate local business over the years, Cruise Nights being just one example. The closing of the store is the end of an era for South River and leaves a hole on Ferry Street that will be hard to fill.

Historical Calendar Wins Award

The Society's 2014 calendar, featuring historical images of South River, was awarded 1st place "In Recognition of Distinguished Achievement" in the Kevin M. Hale Publication Award competition sponsored by the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey. Richard Alai, Society Secretary, accepted the award from J.B. Vogt, Chair of the League's Publication Awards Committee, at the June 7th League meeting in Monmouth County. Congratulations to Doris Miller, Chair of the Calendar Committee, and to everyone who worked on the project!



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South River Historical & Preservation News

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Brian Armstrong Stephanie Bartz

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Joann Smith-Goepfert

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 2014 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.

New Acquisitions, June – August 2014

- 32 programs/bulletins from Community Thanksgiving Services held at various South River churches from 1979 to 2012. Donated by Gary Petrie.
- Copies of photographs of an ILGWU War Bond drive and a small group of garment workers, 1944; unidentified groups at a home on Jeffrey Ave, circa 1906; the Sts. Peter & Paul Easter Women's Society, circa 1955; and copies of photographs and newspaper clippings relating to South River's 1964 JFK Youth Program baseball team. Donated by John Kulakovich.

Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTORS:

Dorothy Clark
Judith Smith

IN MEMORY OF:

Katie Dey by JoAnn Devlin

John & Paraska Kulakovich,
my Grandparents, by John Kulakovich

- Pieces from a rifle thought to be from the Civil War era. Donated by Claudia Serra.
- Scrapbook covering the high school, professional, and public life of Stanley S. Dickerson circa 1923 to 1950, collected by his mother, Mrs. Albert Smith. Donated by Julian A. Dickerson.



One of the Jeffrey Avenue images
donated by John Kulakovich.

A 1914 Retrospective

Brian Armstrong, President of the South River Historical & Preservation Society, addressed a large audience during his June 25, 2014 presentation entitled "1914: The Year that Changed the World, the United States, and New Jersey."

Armstrong began by using photographs and diagrams to present an overview of the June 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the first year of World War I. His talk included recommendations for further reading about the topic and the period. Armstrong also displayed a WWI helmet that his father rescued from the trash during a World War II metal donation drive.

Next he discussed the early years of the Woodrow Wilson Administration including the U.S. conflict with Mexico, and the introduction of the Federal Reserve System, federal taxation, and the direct election of U.S. Senators. This was followed with a series of entertainment stories about Charlie Chaplin, the filming of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, the *Perils of Pauline* and the Fort Lee movie industry, and the publication of *Tarzan the Ape Man*. Sports stories included Babe Ruth's debut as a Red Sox pitcher, Walter Hagen's golf championship, and the first professional football player's death from injury on the field.

Armstrong concluded the presentation with some New Jersey and South River history. New Jersey stories included the Standard Oil Trust controversy and the fire at Thomas Edison's Lab in West Orange. Photos were shown of the devastating blizzard of 1914, called the "Most Demoralizing Storm in History," which crippled the state for three days, stranding Governor Fielder on a train. Statistics about South River showing the ethnic mix of the population, value of property, car ownership, successful businesses, and other data were also part of the presentation.

The slideshow and talk were followed with a question and answer session, comments, and stories from the audience.



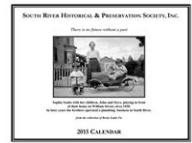
A view from the balcony during the June 25th program.

SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

2015 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

Postcards - Set of 3 postcards, \$1.00

1894 photo of the OSBC (now the South River Museum); Frazee Urn & OSBC graveyard; Main St, 1906



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 reflect minimum donations and do not include postage. Please visit our website (see back page) for additional items.

A Day to Remember – by Lily Marach

** Liliya Marach graduated from South River High School on June 25, 2014. What follows is her winning essay from the 2014 Richard K. Meyers South River History Essay Contest.**

Most parents, if not all, dream of giving their children a better life than the life that they had grown up living. My parents were no different. Growing up in the poor regions of Ukraine, my mother and father worked their hardest to make enough money to one day move to a more prosperous country, a country where their children had every right and opportunity to develop into successful individuals. After moving to the United States in 2001, they settled in the quiet town of South River and began their mission of establishing a better life for their children. My parents spent many years, finances, and energy into creating a home and an environment where my siblings and I could grow and feel safe. South River was the perfect town for a family like ours. The town was close-knit, everyone knew each other, and it was always quiet, besides the occasional police sirens on Main Street. This environment was always a peaceful one, one that made us, children, feel as if nothing could ever go wrong. But that sense of security was destroyed on October 29, 2012. That was the day that reality hit me hard, and taught me that life is unexpected and can change completely in an instant.

When the clouds first turned dark and the rain began to fall, we thought nothing of it. We heard the many warnings off a hurricane coming our way but we paid no attention and carried on as usual. Around ten o'clock in the evening, we finally began to worry. The whole family was gathered in my parent's bedroom, huddled together on the bed. Looking out into the street, the view was like something out of a movie. The whole street was flooded, the parking meters completely covered. It seemed as if the ocean was right outside our door. Never have we seen such a sight. Sitting there, altogether in one room, no one knew what to say or what to think. With candles being our only source of light, we sat, waiting, for what—we didn't know. As if things outside weren't bad enough, a situation inside the house was brewing also. It was I who



Washington Street looking toward Ferry Street early on the morning of October 30, 2012. Photograph by Vasiliy Marach.

decided that I wanted a snack downstairs, and as I stepped off of the stairs unto the floor of the first level of our home, I was hit with confusion. Why did I feel water around my ankles? I quickly ran up the stairs to tell my father. That was when we realized that our home was flooding—fast. We didn't know what to do, so we continued sitting, waiting for some sort of miracle. That night, my family and I were evacuated from our house by the town's rescue squad. Never did I imagine my street being an area where jet skis could easily be ridden, even straight into my house. That night was the night that had my feelings running wild, the night that I last slept in my home, and the night that I lost all sense of security and comfort that I once had.

In the days following the storm, my family had no choice but to stay at my uncle's house, which was too small for our family of eight plus my uncle's family. We lived there for about a month and when things got too hectic, we moved to a motel one town over. We were given two rooms that had to be shared between eight people. It was crowded and felt nothing like home. With the few belongings we managed to salvage from our home, we lived, trying to make the best out of our situation. Each time I came back to the motel, I was reminded that the house I grew up in was ruined, most of our belongings lost in the wreck, and that my life was forever changed. I began to miss my own room, my own comfortable bed, even the gas stove that

Continued on Page 5

A Day to Remember – Continued from page 4

we once had. Meals were barely homemade, because there were no ovens in the motel, and we were stuck inside day after day. Eventually none of us could go on pretending that everything was fine. We began to complain and groan. Our only wish was to get a place that we could call home.

With the help of many kind people, and a few charitable organizations, we were able to move into a beautiful house not too far from our old home. It was a good size for our family and was located in a quiet, forested area with a park nearby and many neighbors our age. Even though there were still ongoing problems due to the flood, our family began to fall back into its regular routine.

Sometimes, I look back at the night of the flood and wonder “Why?”, “Why us?” “Why our home?” But then I look at my life now, and see how Hurricane Sandy brought our family together and how strong this disaster caused us to be. It also taught me that I do not live in a bubble, a bubble that protects me from all sorts of harm. No, I live in the real world, where troubles can hit at any time, and all you can do is be prepared. Lastly, it taught me to be thankful for everything I have. Like the saying goes: “You don’t know what you have till it’s gone.” I learned to appreciate even the smallest possessions I have, because you never know when they might be taken from you.

This event, Hurricane Sandy, which happened to me in South River, New Jersey on October 29, 2012, will forever be sketched into my mind. The feelings, the memories, and all that I have witnessed that night still haunt me to this day. Driving down Main Street today, I see how the homes and shops have been restored and how everything seems normal again. For some people, October 29, 2012 holds no significance. But for me, that day changed the way I view the world, and caused me to live life cautiously. Indeed, October 29, 2012 is a day to remember, a day that changed my life, and made me into who I am today.

Membership Renewal Reminder

Please consider sending in your membership dues for 2015 now.

Check the mailing label on this newsletter to find out when your current membership expires. If you’re receiving your newsletter in electronic format, email us at southriverhistory@gmail.com and we’ll check our records.

You can renew or submit a new membership for yourself or a friend using the form supplied in this newsletter or you can print a form from the website.

The SRH&PS appreciates your continued support.



All dues and donations are tax deductible.

Thank you!

Special at the Star Theatre Tonight

One of our own pictures, so to speak, will be shown at the Star Theatre tonight entitled: “Shadows of the Past.” This picture is a Vitagraph feature and was taken on the Raritan River railroad. It is one of the best pictures on the market. It is thrilling, showing an automobile party sent to their doom by a big locomotive at a crossing. This picture was witnessed by a large number of the local people when taken and some of our own people participated in it. Don’t miss it tonight. See program below.

[Excerpt from the “South River” column of the *New Brunswick Times*, Monday Afternoon, September 14, 1914, page 6 (above) and page 5 (at right).

STAR THEATRE

Ferry St. South River

THE HOME OF GOOD PICTURES

“SHADOWS OF THE PAST”
A Vitagraph, Broadway Star
Feature

This picture was taken on the Raritan River Railroad at Parlin, and is considered among the best that the Vitagraph Co. ever made. Features Anita Stewart and Harry Marey.

The Harlan Handicap (Thrauser, 2 parts), a racing picture with a cracking good story and thrilling climax.

THE COWBOY’S CHICKEN
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Admission, 10 cents.

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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

2014 Meetings: September 17 November 19

September 17 Program: Then and Now: Society President Brian Armstrong will present a history of some of the South River homes that have passed the century mark and provide the audience with a visual map so that they can seek out homes that are of personal interest. The concentration will be primarily on residences located on Main Street and Washington Street.

The meeting will convene at 7:00 p.m. at the South River Museum — Old School Baptist Church, 64-66 Main Street, South River. Refreshments will be served.

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 5 November 2 December 7**

2015 SRH&PS Membership Application Form

Please check one: New Renewal Gift (from _____)

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