

HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

President's Message by Brian Armstrong

On October 17 I conducted a tour of the Old School Baptist Church Cemetery for a group organized by Teresa Hutchison of the South River Cultural Arts & Heritage Commission. The tour provided an opportunity for people in the community to see the restoration work and learn about the inventory of surviving stones that was performed a few years ago. Although the cemetery is small it is a local treasure with a fascinating history.



Soon after the Old School Baptist Church was erected in the early 1800s, parishioners began to be buried in the cemetery. Over the years the stones became more elaborate and permanent. A 1941 survey identified the now missing 1813 stone of William Ryder as the oldest known marker. The earliest surviving stones that are still legible are dated from 1816 for Frances Manahan and Thomas P. Serviss. Most of the stones that have survived, and those that are listed in the missing list, were erected between the years 1826 and 1855. A handful of stones are included after that time. By the 1830s the stones showed a variety of styles which often included biblical verses. The names on these stones include many of the early family names associated with the borough. By the 1850s the church started to have competition from new churches established in the borough as well as from the new Washington Monumental Cemetery.

In the early twentieth century the church was closed due to lack of members. The building became the library in the 1920s. Property transactions conducted after the church became the library are the likely cause for the disappearance of some stones due to the reduced size of the cemetery grounds. From the inventory of the cemetery stones recorded in 1941, we realize that later property transactions and building contributed to the disappearance of the stones for at least 27 people. Most stones were probably disrupted when the rectangular building was built behind the old Ben Franklin building by the Levin Corporation in 1948.

The Frazee Urn, which was erected following the 1832 death of John Frazee's first wife, is the most prominent monument in the cemetery. Frazee brought his wife to South River from New York City to escape a cholera epidemic, however they went for a day at the beach and she got sick and died. This monument by "the first American born sculptor to execute a bust in marble" still retains its beauty and grace after 182 years.

Another interesting aspect of this cemetery is the large number of people buried in the cemetery that were under the age of 70. Disease, childbirth, and harsh working conditions contributed to the premature demise of those younger parishioners. The real tragedy is the large number of children under the age of 10 who were buried in the cemetery.

The Barkelew Monument, erected in the 1880s, was the last large monument built and the newest surviving grave in the cemetery. It also includes a tribute to the only known African-American buried in the cemetery, Judy Berdine, who was a servant to the Barkelew family. Although, Ella Petty and Elder Wilson Housell were the last two people to be buried in the cemetery in 1903, their grave markers, if any were erected, have not survived. We had at one time contemplated using new technology to scan the existing land for additional graves and missing stones, but it was very expensive, and we decided to focus more on restoration of the existing stones. Fortunately 53 stones remain in the cemetery for current and future generations to view and enjoy.

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South River Historical & Preservation News

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Co-Editors: Stephanie Bartz and Raja Waran

Contributors:

William Goepfert Ann Rafano
Brian Armstrong Stephanie Bartz

Mailings & Distribution:

Paul Goepfert Brian Armstrong
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 February 2015 issue must be received by January 15.

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

In Memory of...

The South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc. extends its sincere sympathies to the family and friends of Matthew Rein, a student member, and the first entrant in the Society's scholarship contest.

Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sheila & Joseph A. Mark

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In Memory of Marie Biernacki
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Marie Biernacki by Marilyn Anastasio
Daniel & Evelyn Golden by Roger M. Golden
Leon Litarowich by Elizabeth Litarowich
Our Parents by JoAnn & Anthony Razzano
Barbara Wyluda by Katherine Bitow

A Memorable Event – by Matthew Rein

** Matthew Rein graduated from St. Joseph High School on May 23, 2013. He went on to attend Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania, and died tragically in a fire on September 13, 2014. What follows is his essay from the 2013 Richard K. Meyers South River History Essay Contest.**

South River. The name may make someone think of a town right next to the shore or maybe even a town located way down South Jersey. For me, I only think of one thing: my home town. I was born in South River in 1995 and have spent my entire life here. What I really love about this town is that is small and very diverse. I enjoy having many different cultures residing side by side. It's also great to know most of the people in town. You can go into a typical American Dunkin Donuts on one side of the street and cross the street and go into a tiny Mexican convenience store and feel like you are in Mexico. So many things happen on a daily basis here in town. In my eighteen years of living here so many monumental and memorable things have happened; global events (Afghan War, Iraqi War), national events (Presidential elections, 9/11 tragedy), and local events (Hurricane Sandy, mayoral elections).

It's always easiest to think of the most far reaching event as being the most monumental event in someone's life. I think many people would agree that Hurricane Sandy was one of the most memorable things that happened in our town during my lifetime. I would almost agree with them. It isn't easy to erase the images of seeing my karate studio on Ferry Street closed and flooded out with a red sticker in the window prohibiting anyone from entering. Then there's my favorite Chinese restaurant at the corner of Prospect and Main Streets that would always deliver to my swim club where I lifeguarded all summer, flooded out and destroyed with another red sticker decorating its window, appearing to be out of business permanently. Then there was this awful mess, loads of water, dirt, and the rotten smell all along Water Street. It was almost too much to bear and it was certainly heartbreaking watching people pitching water out of their basements while trying to salvage what they could of their belongings. I could go on and on with all of these images, however, that is not the event that is the most significant to me during my lifetime here.

My most memorable event is something so simple, something so unspectacular that most people would never give it a second thought, but for me it was a truly amazing experience. For as long as I could remember, I have always been running or walking with my mother. Even before I could walk, she would take me in my running stroller and we would run or walk all over town, looking at everything and making comments on things we saw along the way. One day my mother and I were out running as usual when we wound up running around Dailey's Pond by Prospect Street. It was one of my favorite places to run through because there was always so much activity going on there and I always liked watching the geese, ducks and the occasional turtle swimming in the pond. On this particular day, it was your typical day at the pond. The sun was shining, it was a little breezy, and the temperature was a little cool as this was in the middle of May. There were a few children playing on the swings, a middle-aged man walking his dog, and a few men fishing with hand-made fishing poles on the far side right next to the glass company. There were ducks and geese swimming in the middle of the pond, however it was too early in the season for the turtles. As we ran around the perimeter of the pond, we came upon a bunch of ducks. We slowed down because I always liked to see them. However, this time I watched one of the ducks get up and as she arose I saw that underneath her were six of the tiniest baby ducks I have ever seen. It was a moment I would never forget. I had never seen baby ducks before. I couldn't believe my eyes. They were all yellow and very fuzzy and all I wanted to do was to pick one up.



Continued on Page 4

A Memorable Event – Continued from page 3

My mother told me we couldn't because it would upset the mother duck. As it was she was becoming agitated as we stood close to her babies. While we were standing there and watching them, the mother turned and started walking toward the water. Immediately all of the babies got up and followed in single file behind her into the water. They were so tiny and vulnerable and the most fascinating things I have ever seen. It was an event I won't ever forget and by far was my most memorable moment in South River.

Ever since that day, my mother and I go back to the pond every year at that time so I can see the new ducklings. It never gets old for me. It still holds the same fascination for me that it did that first time when I was a small child. As I got older I began to reflect more while I watched them. Seeing the way the mother interacted with her children and realizing how dependent they are on how man treats their environment made me think that someday I could make a difference for them. I've seen so much trash and waste in the pond it made me sad that we so carelessly have such little regard for what could be valuable resources for us at some point in time. While trying to pick a field of study for college, I reflected back on the ducks in the pond. It made me think that maybe I could do something so I have decided to pursue a degree in Environmental Science. I want to be able to make a difference some day, maybe for the world, my country, and my town. I want to work for solutions so that those little ducklings will have a place to nest, live, swim and have no concerns that their environment will be destroyed because of negligence or poor utilization of natural resources.

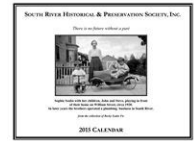
New Acquisitions, Sept. – Oct. 2014

- Two South River High School football helmets. Donated by David Rinkens.
- "South River Fire Alarm Boxes & Doctor Calls" card from Zuppa Brothers Service Station. Donated by Michael T. Szkodny.
- Bank book from the First National Bank of South River along with other documents relating to Andrew Belski at 1 Reid Street. Donated by Mark Humphrey.
- South River High School megaphone; thermometer from the South River Trust Company; SRHS football programs, 1997-2000, 2002-2007, 2009; posters of 1999 and 2006 SRHS championship football teams, published by the *Star Ledger*. Donated by Virgil Blake.
- Program from SRHS Class of 1951 reunion gathering, September 24, 2014; poster boards of a "Walking Tour of South River" created for the SRHS classes of 1950 and 1951, entry blank used with "Walking Tour," and extra photos omitted from tour. Donated by John and Marley O'Neill.
- Three feed sacks from Middlesex Farm Supplies, South River, NJ. Donated by Fred Puchala.

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 Medal- lion Ornament (South River Mu- seum) - \$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.

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South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

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Then and Now — The September program was a well-attended presentation entitled “South River Houses from the Van Dyke Reid Collection, Main Street, 1894-1906” given by Brian Armstrong, President of the Society. Photographs from the collection were contrasted with present-day photographs to provide an overview of the houses on Main Street from Thomas Street to the Raritan River Railroad bridge. Information on each of the houses and the people that lived in them during the past 100 years was included.

Although some houses have been replaced and others significantly altered, some continue to maintain the same look they had 100 years ago. Parsonages were converted into private homes or businesses, and houses were converted into businesses and doctor’s offices over the years. The grand homes located between Thomas and Gordon Streets were replaced by commercial buildings.

A lively question and answer session followed the presentation. Audience members contributed comments and stories about the houses.



238 Main Street, 1898 and 2001.

It’s time to renew your membership for 2015!

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

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Thank you!

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Send your application and dues payment to: **SRH&PS Membership** [All dues and contributions are tax-deductible.]
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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.

Old School Baptist Church Cemetery Conservation Program Donation Form

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Phone (Optional): _____ Email (Optional): _____

Amount of donation: _____

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South River Historical & Preservation Society Calendar

2014 Meetings: November 19 2015 Meetings: February 25 April 22

November 19 Program: 100 years ago, 50 years ago, 10 years ago, or yesterday... It's all history now. The Annual Meeting will feature show-and-tell from the audience. Please bring a piece of history or a memory to share. Light refreshments will be served.

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): **December 7 January 4 February 1**