

SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

Number 100, September 2019

Next Meeting: September 25

*History of the
Raritan Arsenal and
Camp Kilmer*

Camp Raritan, later Raritan Arsenal, was established in 1918 and abandoned in 1964.

Camp Kilmer was activated in 1942 and closed in 2009. Using slides and artifacts, Walter R. Stochel, of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, will present the history of both locations.

Please join us at 7:00 p.m. at the South River Museum, 64-66 Main Street, South River.

Light refreshments will be served.

Museum Hours

The South River Museum is open to the general public from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month (second Sunday if the first is a holiday)

September 1
October 6
November 3
December 1

President's Message by Nan Whitehead

I hope that everyone has had a fun summer. Now we are approaching fall with a lot to look forward to. We have programs scheduled to finish out the year, and we are only a few months away from celebrating South River's 300th Anniversary. Lots of plans are in the works. How exciting!

As a reminder... South River's roots date back to 1720 when the area was originally settled. The boundaries of the town of Washington, as it was then called, were officially set by state law on February 23, 1870. Washington was part of the township of East Brunswick and was governed by a Board of Commissioners at that time. South River was finally incorporated as an independent borough on February 28, 1898. It was named after the South River, which marks the boundary of the borough.

I was recently given several wooden nickels from South River's 250th anniversary celebration in 1970. They were given out by the First Charter National Bank. You could redeem them at the bank for a real nickel!

For those who are not familiar with First Charter National Bank, that's likely because it changed names so many times. It opened in 1902 as the First National Bank of South River. In 1960 the name was changed to First National Bank of Middlesex County. First Charter followed in 1969. Several mergers and name changes later it became PNC Bank, still housed in the building that was erected in 1915 at the corner of Main and Stephen Streets.



We are considering making a similar wooden nickel for the 300th anniversary. I am curious to know if anyone has any of the 1970 nickels in their "collection" or sitting in a drawer. If you do, please share your story. How many nickels do you have? Did you save them yourself or were they passed down to you? What do you remember about the celebration that brought about their creation? The wooden nickels are a unique remembrance of the anniversary celebration 49 years ago.

We have a full schedule of fall programs and preparations for next year's anniversary ahead. Planning for 2020 is still underway, so if you have suggestions for what you would like to see, please get in touch. Please also come and visit the museum. You will find us open on the first Sunday of each month. Share with us your remembrances of days gone by. The docents will be happy to hear your reminiscences and share some history in return.

The South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc. was established in 1988 to preserve South River's past for future generations while furthering interest in and knowledge of the history of the borough. For more information, visit us at: southriverhistory.org or www.facebook.com/southriverhistory

South River Historical & Preservation News

Published five times a year by the South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

Editor: Stephanie Bartz

Contributors:

Traci Alai Jennifer LaScala
Marilyn Anastasio Ann Rafano
Stephanie Bartz Nan Whitehead
Al Baumann

Mailings & Distribution:

Joann Smith-Goepfert
William 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 always welcomed. Submissions for the next issue must be received by October 10.

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

SRH&PS 2018 EXECUTIVE BOARD

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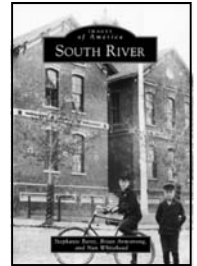
Brian Armstrong (2014)

Iris Schmitt (2014)

SRH&PS GIFT SHOP

South River (Images of America) Book – \$21.99

Includes seven chapters with more than 200 photographs and descriptive captions. Published June 2015.



Medallion Ornament

Commemorating the Old

School Baptist Church (now the South River Museum) – \$10.00



2019 Historical Calendars

\$8.00 (2017 & older, \$1.00)

Each calendar includes historical images with descriptive captions.

Postcards – Set of 3 postcards, \$1.00

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

Old School Baptist

Church Note Cards with

Envelopes – Set of 5 cards,

\$2.50; set of 10 cards,

\$4.00 Features an 1894

photo of the OSBC.



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 for additional items.

Third Graders on the Move

On June 6, 2019, several hundred third graders from South River Elementary School walked over from Johnson Place to visit the museum as part of their Government Day field trip. The day happened to be the 75th anniversary of D-Day, which meant special attention was paid to some of the World War II era items in the collection as well as the memorial in front of the building.

Sara Ann Goldman gave an overview of the museum's history and its collections, then invited the children



Sara Ann Goldman starts off the Government Day program at the museum. Photograph by Traci Alai.

to explore the museum on their own. Ann Rafano and Marilyn Anastasio offered additional information to the students as they toured the museum.

Next, Walter Woronowicz and Will Goepfert took the children on a tour of the cemetery. After listening to a history of the Frazee Urn and other notable highlights, the kids were encouraged to pair up for a tombstone hunt. Each group was given a printed-out image of a tombstone to try to find. Some of the markers were particularly challenging to locate, even for the grown-ups, but it was a fun assignment for all!

In addition to the museum, the third graders also visited the fire house, the police station, and the municipal court room.



Will Goepfert tells the students about the Old School Baptist graveyard behind the museum. Photograph by Traci Alai.

South River's Night Out

Members of the society's executive board were once again ready to greet visitors at South River's National Night Out event. Held on August 6 at St. Mary Coptic School, the event was organized by the South River Police Department. 2019 marked the borough's 11th year of participation.

A stop at the society's table gave adults and children alike the opportunity to view mystery items from the



Jennifer LaScala, Ann Rafano, and Linda Grimm (left to right) ready for visitors at the start of National Night Out on August 6. Photograph by Al Baumann.

museum collections and guess at their use. Among the items on display were a bed warmer, a rug beater, a coffee grinder, and a cast iron clothes iron.

Board members Al Baumann, Linda Grimm, Jennifer LaScala, and Ann Rafano also shared information about South River history, answered questions, and offered visitors the chance to share their own memories about life in the borough.



A view of the crowd during the National Night Out event. Photograph by Jennifer LaScala.

Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTIONS

IN MEMORY OF:

The Obert Family, by Eileen White

New Acquisitions

- Seltzer bottle from the South River Bottling Company, circa 1930s. Donated by Stephanie & Ed Bartz.
- Framed poster commemorating the 1987 25th anniversary of the Ladies Auxiliary of the South River Lions Club, with signatures of every club president. Donated by Michele Senko.



- Ashtrays, Cost Liquor Store and W.W. Henry Co.; program, Gold Star Ranch Variety Show, 1955; 1965 zoning map; brick, South River Brick Co.; SRHS & Lincoln School pennants; 1965-1966 photographs from Willett School; 1967 *Eagle* SR junior high yearbook; "History of South River" booklet; booklets from the 20th and 25th reunions of the SRHS Class of 1972; DVD from the 30th reunion of the SRHS Class of 1972. Donated by Dawn Adams.
- "Touching the Moon: First Contact with Apollo 11," by Candy M. Torres. Donated by Candy M. Torres.
- Junior High Lite newsletters, Nov. 1974 & Feb. 1975; South River High School Student Handbook, 1979-80. Donated by Barbara Rushworth.

Time to Renew!

It's not too late to send in your membership dues for 2019, but it's also not too early to send in your 2020 dues. Please check the mailing label on this newsletter or contact us by email at southriverhistory@gmail.com to find out when your membership expires.

You can renew your membership, or submit a new membership for yourself or a friend, using the form included in this newsletter. Membership forms can also be downloaded from the website.

The SRH&PS appreciates your continued support of its efforts to preserve and promote South River history. All dues and donations are tax deductible.

Thank you!

Museum Haberdashers

You never know what kind of work you'll end up doing when you show up for one of the society's regular museum work nights. On Friday, July 19, the project was outfitting one of the mannequins in the American Legion uniform donated earlier this year by Jake Garbowski.

At right, Nick Bachar (left) and Paul Migut put the finishing touches on the new uniform display at the museum. The photograph was provided by Marilyn Anastasio.



Newsletter Award

The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey ranked *South River Historical & Preservation News* second in their most recent statewide competition. The September 2018 issue of the publication was submitted for consideration in the newsletter category of the 2018 Kevin M. Hale Publication Awards. This was the third consecutive year that the society's newsletter was included among the winners.



Newsletter editor Stephanie Bartz (right) accepts the award from Linda Barth, the League's Executive Director.

The awards program took place at the Red Mill Museum Village in Clinton, New Jersey, during the June 15 meeting of the League. Society board members Marilyn Anastasio, Brian Armstrong, and Stephanie Bartz were all in attendance.

Dry Times (Except When They Weren't)

The National Prohibition Act, known informally as the Volstead Act, was enacted in 1919 as a means of enforcing the 18th Amendment to the Constitution which had been ratified earlier that year. The amendment prohibited the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" and ushered in the Prohibition Era when it took effect in January 1920.

Brian Armstrong, past president of the society, presented a program at the June meeting that covered the history of Prohibition from early proponents in the 1700s through the passage and repeal of the amendment and related laws. Organizations such as the Anti-Saloon League, the Prohibition Party, and the Woman's Christian Temperance League were all covered in his slideshow.

Armstrong explained that New Jersey didn't support Prohibition when it was first passed. Governor Edward Edwards, elected in 1919, campaigned on the promise that he would keep New Jersey "as wet as the Atlantic Ocean." It wasn't until 1922, two years after Prohibition took effect, that New Jersey became the last state to ratify the amendment.

Area newspapers indicate that when prohibition started, there were more than 20 locations in South River that were forced to stop selling and serving alcohol. The restrictions forced people to be creative and gave rise to bootleggers, rum-runners, speakeasies, and other methods of skirting the law. It was sometimes said that you could get a drink anywhere in South River except the bank.

In 1933, New Jersey was among the first states to ratify the 21st Amendment which repealed the 18th Amendment and ended Prohibition. On April 6, 1933, the day new regulations were set in South River, nineteen licenses to sell beer and wine were issued. Paul A. Schack received the first one. It allowed him to operate a distributing station in

his garage

at 28 Main Street. Other early licenses were issued to taverns, hotels, grocery and confectionery stores, and wholesalers. The number of establishments selling alcohol after Prohibition is thought to have been more than double the number before Prohibition.

Although the Prohibition amendment wasn't officially repealed until December 5, 1933, April 7 of that year was the first day that alcohol sales were once again permitted in South River. Harry Hage, the owner of a confectionery shop at 32 Main Street, stole a march on his competitors and sold seven cases of beer while others were still waiting to receive their shipments.

A video of the program is available on demand via South River's TV 35: <http://southrivernj.org/SR-TV.html>. Look for the "Playlists" section of the site and select "Local Events."

Warrants Out for Arrest of Several South River Men in Big Booze Scandal

FEDERAL AGENTS SEIZE STILL IN SOUTH RIVER RAID
SOUTH RIVER RESIDENT FACING FEDERAL JURY FOR STILL EXPLOSION

SLOT MACHINES AND RUM SEIZED AT SOUTH RIVER

Third Visit to Borough Nets Another Woman Violator, While Visit to Sayreville Yields Two Victims; Woman, Belligerent, Jailed Over Night

AGENT TO PROBE RAID SHOOTING

Special Investigator for Killing of South River Man at Still

SOUTH RIVER MAN IS CHARGED WITH MAKING LIQUOR

RAID GROCERY STORES YESTERDAY IN SOUTH RIVER

"KING OF THE BOOTLEGGERS" ADMITS GUILT

Enters Such a Plea in Connection With South River Still Arrest

Sheriff Raids Alcohol Plant In South River Valued at \$100,000

Headlines from the *Daily Home News*, 1921 to 1933, courtesy of Newspapers.com.

**Candy Store Owner
Outwits Rival
Beer Sellers**

**Old Timers Kept Waiting
For Supplies; Hage
Sells Seven Cases**

Headline from the *Daily Home News*, April 8, 1933, courtesy of Newspapers.com.

2019 First Place Scholarship Essay – by Evan E. Gartner

** Evan Gartner graduated from South River High School on June 19, 2019. What follows is his winning essay from the 2019 Richard K. Meyers Memorial South River History High School Essay Contest.**

My father joined the local fire department when he was around 17. The fire department he joined happened to be just around the corner from my house. My father soon made friends with the fellow firefighters and would bring my mother to go and talk with them. After I was born, they started bringing me around the corner to the firehouse. As soon as I could walk, I would roam the station, admiring the massive pieces of equipment the firefighters used. Later, these pieces of equipment would become my jungle gyms. My parents would often search for me, only to find me on top of one of the fire engines. Some of my earliest memories take me back to that station.

There was a rule that people could join the fire department as young as age 14 as Cadet Firefighters, but they could not do much. Children that young were only used for Honor Guard during ceremonies. Later on though, at the age of 16, they become Junior Firefighters. When I turned 17, I was fitted for my own turnout gear and was allowed to respond to any type of disaster, which was a big deal for me. I finally achieved my dream. For the next year, I was responding to mainly small fires, smoke alarms, and the occasional car accident. These were fun, and I thought the job of a firefighter was extremely easy.

I was so thrilled by the fact that I was finally a firefighter. Often times, I would go to any calls that I could, whether it was a simple gas leak, or someone over cooking their food; causing their smoke detectors to go off. There was no bigger thrill than sitting in the speeding fire trucks, not knowing what to expect when we would roll up on the scene. After alarms, all of the firefighters would wash the trucks that they went on, I saw this as important as the alarm itself. Keeping the equipment in good shape was very important to me.

A year later, I would find myself going to a small basement concert that my friends were throwing. I fell asleep at around 11:30. Fast asleep, I was awoken by the beeping of my pager, a device that 911 operators use to call in alarms. I was ready to turn it off when I heard through the static, “Working structure fire...all units...available...” I frantically jumped out of bed, and in a half-asleep stumble, made it to my station. After our small crew had arrived at the location, we were faced with live severed wires, panicked people, and a thirty-foot tall house fully engulfed in flames. I would later learn that firefighting would be one of the most difficult jobs that a person could do. I ran out of the truck grabbing hoses and equipment, and I was simply pointed towards the hydrant. I ran as hard as I could, the equipment I was carrying was made to be carried by two people. After setting up the hoses, I had to run back to the truck. The flames started to catch onto other houses, and I found myself stepping on the live wire that was on the ground. Luckily enough, I was not electrocuted. At this point I was organizing hoses from the trucks of the three towns that responded. This was easily the hardest I had ever worked in my life. Eventually, the heat from the house fire, caused cars parked in the driveway to burst into flames. I watched as the chief of the fire department left his position to put out the flaming vehicles, the amount of fire that I saw was tremendous. And as if all of this was not enough, eventually ammunition that the homeowner had stored in the house started to go off when the flames reached it. I was very thankful for even the civilians that were helping the effort of putting out the fires.



Evan Gartner (right) and his father, Eric Gartner (left), at the scene of the fire described in the essay.
Photograph from the collection of Evan Gartner.

2019 Essay — *continued from page 6*

Around 3:00 a.m., I was sitting on the truck, looking onto the smoldering house with my father. Realizing what day it was now, I simply turned to him and said, “Happy Father’s Day, Dad.” This caught him in disbelief, as he also forgot about the holiday. This was easily one of the most memorable moments of my life. My father was the one person who opened up this experience for me, if it were not for him, I most likely would have never been a firefighter, and I would not be able to have the opportunity to learn the respect and perfection that was shown to me from the fire department.

The best and worst part was seeing the sun come up that morning. The sun almost to me signified the end of the fire, that we had put it all out, and we could all go home and rest. Quickly, I realized that the sun coming up also meant that I lost an entire night’s sleep, which started taking its toll on me; eventually I shook this off and continued with the cleanup efforts. After all of the major flames were extinguished, I took my own tour of the structure that could barely be called a house anymore. It was amazing to see what happened to the house, and the sheer amount of fire that ripped through the house to cause all of the damage. I realized then that this person needed someone to put out these flames, and that we were able to be those people in his time of need. In the course of the fire, nearly four towns were called to aid, and about 200,000 gallons of water were poured onto the houses.

After the fire, I realized how accomplished I felt, and what I wanted to do. I wanted to help people in their need in any way that I could. Putting out the fire was one of my biggest accomplishments and has truly shaped me. I was now welcomed into the huge family of people, who all respected each other, and all had each other’s back in their time of need. South River, and its fire department, opened up an amazing opportunity to me. The world of firefighting gave me the ability to be the best part of someone's worst day.



South River, Sayreville, and Milltown firefighters at the scene of the fire. Charles Matts, South River Fire Chief when the fire occurred, is in white. Directly behind Chief Matts is South River fireman Gerard Murphy. The remainder of those pictured are unidentified. Photograph from the collection of Evan Gartner.

2019 Scholarship Awards

2019 was year seven for the Richard K. Meyers Memorial South River History High School Essay Contest sponsored by the South River Historical & Preservation Society. Meyers was a graduate of South River High School, a professor of English, and a past president of the society. The scholarship is supported by contributions from the Meyers family and other donors.

The 2019 winners announced at the awards event at South River High School on the evening of June 4 were:

- 1st Place – Evan E. Gartner
- 2nd Place – Hannah Kurtz
- 3rd Place – Paige Edwards

All essays are added to the museum collections and are available for viewing at the South River Museum.

The awards are given to graduating high school seniors who are planning to continue their educations. Each entrant must live in South River and submit an essay about something that took place in the borough during their lifetime. Winners are selected by a judging panel composed of members of the executive board of the society.



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South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

Mailing address: See above
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Website: <http://southriverhistory.org>
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/southriverhistory>
Phone: 732-613-3078 [Messages only]

100 Issues and (Mis)counting

This issue of *South River Historical & Preservation News* marks a new milestone, number 100 in the series... Or does it? The number on page one argues that it does, but the history of the newsletter tells a different story.

The first of the society's newsletters, the *Washington Village Press*, was published in spring 1992. Although it was the first newsletter, numbering didn't begin until the second issue was published four years later. That September 1996 issue also came with a new title, *South River Historical & Preservation News*.

A case could be made that the publication gap and the change in title make this issue truly number 100 in the

series, unless, that is, the rest of the issues are examined. The current publication schedule was established in 2001, the first year that an issue was published to coincide with each of the society's public programs. The numbering hit a snag at that point when the September issue inadvertently repeated the numbering on the June issue. Both were published as number 15. The November issue picked up at number 16 and the numbering has continued from there.

However you count them, after 27 years and 102 issues, we hope you've enjoyed reading and will continue to do so in years to come. If you have story suggestions, please get in touch. We'd be happy to hear from you.

THE WASHINGTON VILLAGE PRESS
THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY, INC.
FEBRUARY 1992

THE OLD SCHOOL BAPTIST CHURCH MAKES ITS MARK ON THE HISTORIC REGISTER.

The Old School Baptist Church, the first church organized in what was then the village of Washington, is the oldest existing religious building in the Borough of South River. A small congregation of Baptists gathered in South River by about 1785, and by 1786, deacons of the Highstown Baptist Church were preaching since a month-lapsed 1804, the congregation joined the Philadelphia Baptist Association. In 1922, the remaining trustees of the congregation sold the building to the South River War Memorial Free Public Library Association, which established the first free public library in South River. In 1979, a new library building was built and the church was purchased by the Borough of South River for municipal offices. Although the building has been changed with the addition of the front porch, the alteration reflects the changing focus of the town, from its concentration on navigation and water related industries, to Main Street, the main thoroughfare in the surrounding communities and main artery for its newly developing dry industries. Plans in design and plan, the



The 200 year old War Memorial Building has been added to the New Jersey and the National Register of Historic Places.

an unadorned structure serves as a lasting reminder of the simplicity of the earlier Baptist congregation who built the meeting house. The building has been in continual public use, from at least 1805 to the present.

In addition, the cemetery behind the building exhibits a marble urn created by nationally recognized 19th century sculptor John Frazer, who is credited as the first American sculptor to incorporate from rough marble.

1992 MEETING CALENDAR

The South River Historical and Preservation Society will meet on the following dates:

February 26, 1992
April 22, 1992
June 24, 1992
September 23, 1992
November 18, 1992

Our meetings are open to the public and are held at the South River Library on Aqueduct Ave. at 7:30 PM. All are Welcome!

The society's first newsletter, published spring 1992.

South River Historical & Preservation News
Number 1 South River, New Jersey 08882 September 1996

War Memorial Building Renovation Gets Underway

Work on the renovation of the War Memorial Building or the Old School Baptist Church got underway the week of June 1st. The initial work consisted of an archaeological investigation of the foundation by a number of probes and the digging of test pits. This was necessary as the Borough was required by the terms of the grant approval to determine the absence or presence of cultural materials to areas to be demolished or excavated.

In a preliminary report, Edward Rutsch, S.O.P.A. (Society of Professional Archaeologists) who led the investigation, said no cultural resources of potential significance were found.

Concurrently, investigations to document the underpinnings and to evaluate the location of the Frazer Memorial in the cemetery located behind the building were conducted.

1997 CALENDARS READY

With the advent of three schools (Campbell, Willett and the Middle School) closing by the fall of 1997, when completion of a new K through 4 school is expected, the 1997 calendar will be dedicated to the schools of South River. This will be the Society's seventh consecutive year calendar. The six previous issues featured pictures of manufacturing plants, businesses, streets, churches and residences, all born of the century vintage. Many of the photos came from what is known as the Armstrong Collection. Others came from private sources so recognized and credited in the calendars.

Buy a 1997 calendar to see a photo of a building downtown which was the public school from 1835 to 1885 and to town which were now occupies the lot where the school was located.

275 Anniversary Book Publication for September

It's bigger and better than we ever imagined!

The activities of the Anniversary year include the Mayor's proclamation, the tree planting, the tour of the houses of worship, the garden tour, and the parade.

Other features include an adaptation of Paul Schack's "History of South River" commemorating the 250th Anniversary, 1730, with revision of paragraphs pertaining to its founding by Earl Wenger, a complete history of schools, both public and private, histories of each of the 16 churches, and an up to date listing of businesses, and fraternal and social organizations.

Of additional interest will be sections about the river names, and South River accomplishments. The most exciting part will be the many pictures of South River remembered. The many photos will enhance the memorabilia value of the book.

Publication of the book was scheduled after the anniversary so as to include photos of events during the year.

Special mention is made here to the advertisers and the sponsors which will be listed, as they helped to support the project financially.

**HERITAGE DAY
SEPTEMBER 7
12 - 5 P.M.
MONTGOMERY ST.**

Newsletter number 1, published September 1996.

2020 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: _____

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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 to receive your newsletter via email.

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I would like to make an additional donation:

\$ _____ in honor of in memory of: _____
\$ _____ Scholarship Fund
\$ _____ Old School Baptist Church Cemetery Conservation Program
\$ _____ Doughboy/Monument Maintenance Fund
\$ _____ General Fund

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____ Cash Check (Please make checks payable to "SRH&PS, Inc.")

Send your application and payment to: **SRH&PS Membership**
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South River, NJ 08882

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Donations will be recognized in our newsletter.

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Company name/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 a matching gift form with your membership donation and form. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

SRH&PS Donation Form

Name(s): _____

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\$ _____ in honor of in memory of: _____
\$ _____ Scholarship Fund
\$ _____ Old School Baptist Church Cemetery Conservation Program
\$ _____ Doughboy/Monument Maintenance Fund
\$ _____ General Fund

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____ Cash Check (Please make checks payable to "SRH&PS, Inc.")

Send your donation form and payment to: **SRH&PS, Inc.**
P.O. Box 446
South River, NJ 08882

All donations are tax-deductible and will be
recognized in our newsletter.

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