

# SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

Number 101, November 2019

## Annual Meeting: November 20

*The US Government  
Cover-up of the Death  
of Sgt. Joseph Pisinski*

Filmmaker and South River resident Jack Ballo will talk about his upcoming documentary and its connection to a local WWII soldier.

Sgt. Joseph Pisinski was killed in the first radio guided missile attack against the US. It sank the HMT Rohna, killing 1,015 US soldiers. The event was "classified" in a cover-up that left Gold Star families in the dark.

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

A light dinner 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

**November 3**  
**December 1**  
**January 5, 2020**

## President's Message by Nan Whitehead

South River has certainly had a progression of talented athletes. Some famous and some very accomplished in their sport of choice; Alexander Wojciechowicz, Pete Sivess, Joe Theismann, Drew Pearson, and Kenny Jackson to name a few.

I would like to take you back in South River history and tell you about my father, Charles "Charlie" Whitehead. His sport was golf, and he helped put South River on the map for producing great athletes.

Kay Whitehead Rothenberger, a cousin living in Nebraska, told me the story of how my father became interested in golf. It seems that he traveled to Nebraska by train in the late 1920s to visit his half-brother, Milton, who was 18 years older. During the visit, when almost everyone was away for the day, he was at loose ends. It was suggested that he go "down the road" to the golf course, try hitting some balls, and have some fun. Quite simply, that's how his passion for golf was born.

He came back home, practiced, took lessons, and focused on his dream. He did this at Laurence Brook Country Club, now a housing development just off Route 18. He progressed to winning tournaments both at the club and at Forsgate Country Club. The wall of the grill room at Forsgate still has plaques dating back to the 1930s. His name is engraved five times for winning the club championship. Most important of all, he won the NJ Amateur Golf Championship a record six times, winning five in a row from 1938 to 1942. He had numerous other accomplishments in golf and always drew attention to South River as his hometown.

My father met many star athletes and played in tournaments with Babe Ruth in his foursome. I have five scrapbooks that my grandmother kept of newspaper articles, programs, scorecards, and more of his adventures in golf.

Into the 1930s, there were many varieties of clubs available using both modern and traditional materials. Many golfers back then were using 20 to 30 (Charlie had 36) clubs of varying styles and uses. Finally in 1939, St. Andrews introduced its 14 club rule. Imagine having to pare down from 36 clubs to 14! That rule stands today.

I often wonder what it would be like to see golfers from that era play with the advanced clubs of today. Current day monetary prizes would certainly stun them.

I'm sure that South River will continue to turn out notable and amazing athletes.



Charlie Whitehead showing off some of his 36 golf clubs, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 24, 1937. From the collection of Nan Whitehead.

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](http://southriverhistory.org) or [www.facebook.com/southriverhistory](http://www.facebook.com/southriverhistory)

# South River Historical & Preservation News

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

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Stephanie Bartz          Ann Rafano  
Sherry Smith              Nan Whitehead  
Joann Smith-Goepfert

**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 January 10.

Please advise us if you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email by sending a message to [southernriverhistory@gmail.com](mailto:southernriverhistory@gmail.com).

## SRH&PS 2018 EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Woodis Booraem (2002)

Ann Rafano (2003)

Marilyn Anastasio (2005)

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Doris Miller (2008)

Robert Rafano (2008)

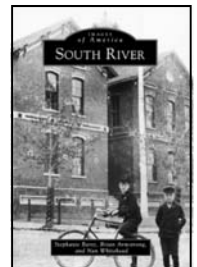
Brian Armstrong (2014)

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.*

## News of the Past

*Wichita Eagle*, (Wichita, Kansas), Wednesday, January 15, 1913, page 3.

Postmaster Samuel Gordon of South River, N.J., near New Brunswick, believes he has qualified for membership in the bricklayers' union. This idea was fostered by the fact that yesterday he handled 539 brick. Also he is looking up postal regulations to see if a regular bricklayer may qualify as an assistant postmaster.

Each brick was neatly wrapped in paper and tied with string. The load came from the American Enamelled Brick and Tile company of South River, to be transmitted to agents by parcel post, hence the wrapping and tying. When the wagon backed up and dumped the brick, Postmaster Gordon thought it was a mistake and told the men he had not ordered the "souvenirs." They convinced him that the joke was on him, and all the postal regulations had been complied with.

Each brick weighed 5 3/4 pounds and the charge for sending it by parcel post was 18 cents. Heretofore the company has been sending these sample brick by express at a cost of 25 cents each. There are many brick companies in South River and Gordon fears the worst.



The 1913 era Post Office was located in the Gordon building at what is now 30-34 Main Street. Postcard from the collection of Stephanie Bartz.

## Rolling Out the Welcome Mat

The South River Police Department's Cops n' Cruisers car show, held on Main Street on September 19, was a resounding success. Not only did it raise funds for some great community policing programs, it provided an extra opportunity



Board member Will Goepfert finishes rolling out the welcome mat on September 19. Photograph by Rich Alai.

for the museum to open its doors to both residents and visitors to the borough.

A steady stream of people passed through those doors to view the exhibits, ask questions, and share a little history with us. Docents Rich Alai and Will Goepfert greeted more than 200 visitors, young and old, lifetime residents, longtime residents, former residents, new residents, and others.

## By the Numbers

2019 was another busy year for the society. From January to October, more than 600 people visited the South River Museum. An April tour of the Old School Baptist graveyard, behind the museum, drew more than 70 visitors.

Board members served as docents for events such as Government Day, Memorial Day, Cops n' Cruisers, and monthly museum hours. Others represented the society at events such as Middlesex County History Day, the June meeting of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, and National Night Out. Creative South River joined us for "Music at the Museum."

New exhibits on local dances, photographers, bars, and military life were created, and new lights were installed in some of the display cases. New donations were accepted, acknowledged, cataloged, and processed, while work on organizing previous donations continued.

The list goes on: scholarships, Facebook posts, replies to email queries, work nights, and more.

## New Acquisitions

- *The Van Deventer Family*, compiled by Christobelle Van Deventer, published 1943. Donated by Len Klekner.
- Two handmade peasant dolls from Belarus, circa 1969. Donated by Karoly and Pauline Terelmes.
- Program, Arlene Clementi School of Dance Annual Recital, June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974, South River High School; booklet, South River Knights of Columbus Pop Warner Football, 1977; 1979 calendar dishtowel, SR Rams; mug, SRHS 1979-1980 Group II Basketball Champions; booklet, SRHS Booster Club, Rams testimonial in honor of the South River High School basketball team, NJSIAA Group II State Champs, April, 27, 1980; booster pins, SR Rams (4); bandanna, SR Rams; key-chains, South River Rams (2); booster pin, South River Junior High School; t-shirt, South River Junior High School; "History of South River," 1970. Donated by Lisa Szabo Bryan.
- Barrel bank from the First National Bank of South River; 1912 promotional folder that came with "a complete set of Needles for all purposes" from "C.H. Rogers & Son, Dealers in Hardware and Tools..." Ferry Street, South River. Donated by Paula Kowzun.



A detail from the calendar donated by Lisa Szabo Bryan.

## Time to Renew for 2020!

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. The society relies on your continuing support in order to fulfill its mission of preserving and promoting South River's rich history.

Please check the mailing label on this newsletter or contact us by email at [southernriverhistory@gmail.com](mailto:southernriverhistory@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. All dues and donations are tax deductible.

Thank you!

## Special Acknowledgements

### CONTRIBUTIONS

#### IN MEMORY OF:

Caroline Boden by Caroline B. Devlin

#### GENERAL FUND:

Donald & Margaret Calnan  
Rosemary Erickson  
Elizabeth Litarowich  
Judith G. Smith with a matching gift from  
The Johnson & Johnson Family of  
Companies Matching Gifts Program

## In Memoriam

The South River Historical & Preservation Society extends its sympathies to the families of Edna Rice and Eileen Kozak Koltowich, both long-time supporters and members of the society.

## Lost and Found

Early in the summer, following the June meeting and program, a pair of glasses and a notebook were found at the museum. In spite of attempts to reunite them with their owners, they remain unclaimed.



The glasses are orange with a pattern on the arms. The notebook is black and embossed with information from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. If either item belongs to you, please let us know so we can get it back to its rightful home.

## Focus on Raritan Arsenal and Camp Kilmer

Edison Township and the military installations of Raritan Arsenal and Camp Kilmer were the subject of the society's September program. Walter Stochel, of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, displayed artifacts and presented a slideshow about the history of both locations.

Beginning his program with a short history of Edison, known as Raritan Township until 1954, Stochel described the events that led up to the World War I era decision to build Camp Raritan, which later became Raritan Arsenal. The onset of World War I left the United States unprepared, with a need not only for men, but for munitions, supplies, and transportation. Raritan was the ideal location for a camp with space away from populated areas, but easy access to railroad lines, and a waterway.

The 1918 era facility adapted to changing times during the more than 40 years that it was in use, expanding during World War II. It provided a home for soldiers as well as assembly plants, shipping facilities, and magazines to store munitions.

By 1964, the facility had been abandoned by the military. It was sold and redeveloped for civilian use.

Camp Kilmer opened in 1942 as a processing center and overseas embarkation point for soldiers. It was named after Joyce Kilmer, a World War I soldier and poet who died while serving in France. Like Camp Raritan, it too had a varied career. It was deactivated after World War II, reactivated during the Korean War, and was again deactivated in 1955. In the years that followed, it was used to process and house Hungarian refugees and served as headquarters for the US Army Corps (Reserve). From the 1960s into the 2000s parts of the facility were sold to the state, Rutgers University, and other entities. It finally closed in 2009.

Stochel ended by pointing out that while the military played a large role in Edison history, Edison also played a large role in military history. 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."



DETAIL ASSEMBLING FOR DRILL. CAMP KILMER, N. J.

Postcard from the collection of Stephanie Bartz.



Walter Stochel, of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, addresses the audience at the South River Museum on September 25. Photograph by Stephanie Bartz.

## 2019 Members of the South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

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Brian Armstrong (2014)  
Iris Schmitt (2014)

## Planning Ahead for 2020

South River will celebrate its tercentennial next year. 2020 marks the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of the area known as Willettstown. Renamed Washington in the late 1700s, it was finally incorporated as the Borough of South River in 1898.

Planning is already underway for the celebration. The South River Historical & Preservation Society and the South River Cultural Arts & Heritage Commission are collaborating on plans to host a variety of events throughout the year. Programs, a parade, tours, and other public activities are all being considered. The time capsule, buried fifty years ago to commemorate South River's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will be opened.

The society is also working on a South River coloring book featuring local images, as well as a detailed timeline of South River history. A snippet from the draft version of the timeline is included below.



The plaque covering the time capsule buried in front of the South River Museum. Photograph by Stephanie Bartz.

### 1822

*Canal* – "An act to incorporate the Washington

Canal Company" was signed into state law on November 22 authorizing the construction of a canal connecting the South River to the Raritan River.

### 1823

*Development* – The village of Washington had no more than 10 houses and a single store. The store was run by Vincent Barkelew and was located on the south side of Main Street near the dock.

### 1824

*Shipyards* – Booraem's shipyard, located near the bend in Reid Street, was established when Jonathan Booraem began building sloops and schooners for river navigation. The family business continued into the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Transportation* – The Citizen's Steam Boat Line established "a new and pleasant route, being the shortest land carriage between New York and Philadelphia." The new route started from New York in the steamboat Aetna, under Captain Robinson, for Washington, New Jersey. From Washington, Citizen's Post Coaches continued on to Bordentown, and from there to a second steamboat bound for Philadelphia. The route was superseded in 1832 when the Camden and Amboy Railroad opened for passenger service.

*Schools* – The first school known to have been within the limits of the village of Washington was located near what is now the corner of Main and DeVoe Streets. Said to have been built in the 1700s, the earliest specific information regarding the building is that Frederick Stults taught there in 1824 and 1825.

*Post Office* – South River's first Postmaster, Frederick A. Kleine, was appointed on August 16. He held the position until his death in August 1829. William W. Conover was appointed to replace him. The first post office was located on DeHart's Lane (now called Pottery Lane).

### 1825

*Development* – Samuel Gordon Jr. reportedly built the first brick house in the town about this time. The first tavern, kept for many years by Henry Obert, is said to have occupied the site previously.

*Shipping* – The peach trade, introduced by Samuel Whitehead, dates to this period. It became an industry with sloops, schooners, and later steamboats leaving daily to transport peach crops to New York. According to an 1843 newspaper item, "a steamboat of large size, which runs every night during the peach season from the village of Washington on South River, a few miles east of New Brunswick, is not sufficient to transport the whole produce sent to the New York market alone." The steamboat carried 4,000 baskets each trip with a shipping charge of 6 cents a basket. The trade continued until about 1855.

Planning for the year is ongoing, so please get in touch if you have suggestions for events, or would like to participate. We hope to include local organizations, churches, schools, businesses, and our ethnic communities in the celebration.

We look forward to engaging with the community in 2020 as we celebrate South River's proud past.



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

## A Year of New Exhibits

The museum hosted a series of new exhibits in 2019, each installed prior to one of the society's public meetings and programs.

*February:* The year started with a display of posters, programs, and tickets from dances and similar events held in South River over the years.

*April:* Spring brought photographs from 19th century South River photographers, a complement to the April program on the same topic.

*June:* The summer exhibit showcased memorabilia from some of South River's bars, including a Prohibition era search warrant.



A portion of the military exhibit.  
Photograph by Stephanie Bartz.

*September:* The fall exhibit was once again a complement to a program. It featured "Pieces and Pictures of Military Life" from the museum collections, with postcards of Camp Raritan and Camp Kilmer on loan from a society member.

The final exhibit of 2019 will be installed prior to the November Annual Meeting. It will highlight donations that were received during the year.

## Fall Memories

by Joann Smith-Goepfert and Sherry Smith

In the "good old days" we would walk to and from Lincoln School and even home for lunch. Walking home was much less hurried and would include stops at the local candy/grocery stores. These included buying school supplies, but most importantly, a treat.

There were 5 and 10 cent bags of potato chips, fudge pops, a 25 cent pomegranate to share, and penny candy. Besides candy dots on paper rolls, cherry flavored Bazooka gum, and this time of the year brought wax candy. Some of the wax items included witch finger nails, big red lips, tongues, and an orange harmonica, a toy and treat in one!



Our stores were Joe's on the corner of Prospect & William Streets, Bob's across from St. Stephen's Church, Geresy's at Maple & Watt Streets, and Kegies at Maple & Henry Streets. At the end of the day when we cleaned out our pockets and bags at home, besides the candy would be beautiful large acorns and shiny horse chestnut treasures!



# 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.

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- Student \$5.00
- Family/Couple \$15.00  
(please enter number in family) \_\_\_\_\_
- Business/Corporate \$25.00
- Lifetime - Individual \$250.00
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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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All dues and donations are tax-deductible.  
Donations will be recognized in our newsletter.

My company has a matching gift program.

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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 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_  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  
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All donations are tax-deductible and will be  
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