

SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION NEWS

Number 102, February 2020

Next Meeting: February 26

The U.S. Women's Suffrage Movement

The suffrage movement which led to the 19th amendment giving women the vote will be the program focus. Brian Armstrong, past president of the society, will profile key players and organizations and provide a timeline of events leading up to the passage of the amendment and first vote in 1920. An overview of prominent female politicians will also be provided.

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

February 2
March 1
April 5

President's Message by Nan Whitehead

As we begin the year 2020, we have so much to look forward to and for which we can be thankful. I personally wish you all good health and may all your dreams come true this year. We are beginning our celebration of South River's 300th Anniversary with lots of events, celebrations, and historic memories. It will be exciting to learn even more about our special town's beginnings, growth, and current standings.

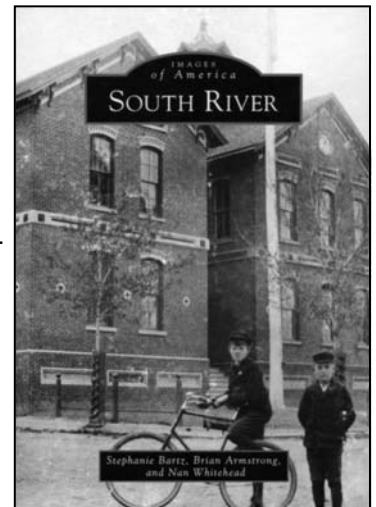
Five years ago, in 2015, our dream of writing a South River book came true. *South River* is now part of the well-known *Images of America* series. Authored by Stephanie Bartz, Brian Armstrong, and myself, the book highlights some of the amazing historical resources that are available to us through the historical society and the South River Museum.

In the end, we outlined a footprint of South River in the late 1800s and early 1900s. We created a chapter by chapter road map of photographs and information on different sections of the borough that our readers can follow as a walking trail. Again, I thank Ed Bartz for this great idea of how to open up our history to everyone in an interesting way. I'm sure that many will find photographs of relatives or recognize the names of families from the past. There are also photographs of homes, businesses, industry, churches, and the town itself.

If you haven't seen the book or taken its tour, the occasion of South River's 300th anniversary would be a wonderful time to do so. I felt it important to remind both those who are familiar with the book and those who were unaware of its availability. Copies can be purchased through the museum or from retailers such as Barnes and Noble or Amazon.

We once again express our gratitude to Richard Van Dyke Reid for his foresight in preserving South River history with his amazing collection of photographs and scrapbooks. His legacy provided the foundation for our book. The late Harold Armstrong was the gatekeeper for this priceless collection. Ensuring that the photographs and other items from Van Dyke Reid were returned to their home was a wonderful gift. Armstrong's valuable donation has provided one of the cornerstones of the collections at the South River Museum.

I look forward to our celebratory year with many thoughts of my family who helped to develop this town. I'm positive that many of you will also feel the connections, both long ago and more recent, that signify the contributions of your own families. South River's 300th Anniversary! 2020



The cover image of the *South River* book showing an 1896 view of the school on Thomas Street.

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.

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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 always welcomed. Submissions for the next issue must be received by March 10.

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

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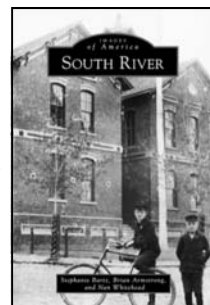
HONORARY TRUSTEES

Woodis Booraem (2002) Doris Miller (2008)
Ann Rafano (2003) Robert Rafano (2008)
Marilyn Anastasio (2005) Brian Armstrong (2014)
Stephanie Bartz (2007) 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.



Photographic Reproduction of an 1882 Edward Lange Painting of Klauser's South River Hotel and the Riverfront – \$15.00
[size – 11”x 17” unframed]

Medallion Ornament Commemorating the Old School Baptist Church (now the South River Museum) – \$10.00

Postcards – Set of 3 postcards, \$1.00
Old School Baptist Church (now the South River Museum), 1894; 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 photograph 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 contact us by email or visit our website for additional items and information.

An Introduction to Oral History by Traci Alai

On December 15, 2019, I attended an “Oral History for Beginners Workshop” at the Historic Wicoff House Museum in Plainsboro, NJ. Conducted by Melissa Ziobro, specialist professor of history at Monmouth University and president of OHMAR - Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region, the workshop covered the basics of setting up an oral history project. Some handouts were shared at the workshop, which will be passed along to the SRH&PS for anyone who is interested. Ziobro also recommended a book called *Doing Oral History*, by Donald Ritchie.

Here are some takeaways:

- An oral history starts with a one-on-one recorded conversation, usually 1-2 hours long. The goal is to capture stories of historical significance and to ensure recordings are transcribed, summarized, or indexed for posterity. “Historical significance” can be interpreted broadly and may include life histories and remembrances of important events, even recent ones.
- Ziobro prefers audio recordings as she finds subjects to be more relaxed than when in front of a video camera.
- Oral histories don’t need to be full of specifics. Subjects sometimes fret over remembering dates. That’s OK. It’s more important to see if the subject can recall the emotions they felt.
- Oral history projects are inexpensive. All you need are willing interviewers and subjects, and a quiet, distraction-free space. Ziobro simply uses her smartphone and a \$1.99 app called RecUp to record her oral histories. She noted she always uses a backup recording device as well (her son’s tablet).
- Transcribing recordings is the most challenging and time-consuming part. Rev.com offers transcription starting at \$1/minute. If you do it yourself, expect it to take 6-8 hours to transcribe a 1-hour recording.
- Interviewers should always identify themselves, their subject, the date, and the location at the beginning of the recording. Asking the subject to fill out a pre-interview list of biographical questions can be helpful. It’s also important to have the subject sign a release form.
- Ask open-ended, rather than yes/no questions. Try to ask just one question at a time. A two-sentence format is helpful: “Jane, you attended South River High School in the 1940s. Tell me what that was like.”

Share Your Stories

With South River’s 300th anniversary year underway, this is a great time to collect some oral histories. Do you have a South River story to tell? Or do you know someone who would make a good subject for an oral history project? Please email us at southriverhistory@gmail.com.

A New Year and New Trustees

The close of the society’s November Annual Meeting signals the beginning of new terms for the officers and trustees of the organization. The 2019 officers, Nan Whitehead (president), Sara-Ann Goldman (vice president), Rich Alai (secretary), and Marilyn Anastasio (treasurer) were re-elected for the 2020 term.

Trustees John Costello, William Goepfert, Paul Migut, and Ken Roginski completed their three-year terms and four new trustees took their places on the executive board. Migut continues as a member of the board in his role as chair of the Contingency Planning Committee while the others cycle off.

New to the board is Joanne Dembinski who is now in her first term as a trustee. Other new trustees include Hank Dziemian, a previous treasurer and trustee, who returned to the group after a hiatus, and Linda Grimm, a board member since 2013, who resumes an earlier role. Long-time board member Stephanie Bartz rounds out the slate.

Congratulations to all of the newly elected and re-elected! 2020 should be an eventful year for everyone.



Trustees for the 2020 to 2022 term. Left to right: Hank Dziemian, Joanne Dembinski, Stephanie Bartz, and Linda Grimm. Photograph by Marilyn Anastasio.

New Acquisitions

- Photograph, 23-25 Ferry Street, circa 1960s; framed commemorative from L. Brodsky & Son for the retirement of Pauline Bara, employed 1932-1981; copies of correspondence and pages related to Raymond M. Bara from *The Fruitful Bough*, by Edward M. Kennedy (1965). Donated by Patricia Bara.
- Digital images of the South River Brick Company office, circa 1935 and “Map of 72 lots belonging to C.M. & Q. Holding Co., Inc., situated in South River, Middlesex County, NJ,” May 1937. Donated by James Cropsey.
- Internal Revenue certificate for tax paid on thirty gallons of “rectified spirits” by John Fee Jr., 1910; broadside advertising the Hofford-Fee Co., Paints – Wall Paper – Industrial Finishes, 50 Main St.; handwritten story about the first South River High School football game in 1919, “South River Football: Its beginning,” by Kathryn Fee; envelope with return address “Fee’s Men’s Shop, 43 Ferry Street”; 3 photographs of the display windows at Fee’s Men’s Shop, 32 Ferry Street, circa 1939; envelope with return address “Jim Fee’s for whiskies, wines, liquors, beers, 32 Main Street”; postcard of Jim Fee behind the bar at his tavern, circa 1944; letter from Paul Schack to James Fee regarding the 51st anniversary of the “South River High School Athletic Pioneers,” 1971; cardstock print of a drawing of a 1920 era football player passing a football to a 1972 era football player; letter to chapter members of the Bill Denny – Central Jersey Chapter of the National Football Foundation, 1972; South River High School football schedule, 1972; assorted newspaper clippings. Donated by Fran Fee.
- Photograph of the 1990-1991 South River High School Junior Varsity Cheerleaders. Donated by Carol A. DeVoe.
- Photograph of the Goldman family taken at Moore’s Studio, 45 Obert Street, circa 1920s. Donated by Sara-Ann Goldman.
- Stationery from Langfeld’s Bowling Center, 165 Whitehead Avenue, 1952-1962. Donated by Robert Langfeld.
- Hand-forged pewter plate engraved “1778 – MOC”; samplers completed by Mary Louise Smith in 1837 and 1838; quilt started by Ann Smith in 1851 and completed by Ann Smith and Stephen Smith in 1854; photographic portrait of Marie Christensen, mother of Anna Christensen Barkelew; picture album created for Orville Barkelew by his mother, Anna Barkelew, Christmas 1877; 15 nineteenth century photographic portraits thought to be of members of the Smith and/or Barkelew families. Donated by Susan Adubato on behalf of Dorothy M. Barkelew.



Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTIONS

IN HONOR OF:

Ann & Bob Rafano
by Tom & Marilyn Anastasio
Ann & Bob Rafano
by Stephanie & Ed Bartz

IN MEMORY OF:

Daniel & Evelyn Golden
by Roger & Joanie Golden
Michael Razzano, Jr.
by Anthony & JoAnn Razzano
Mildred Stults & Beatrice Stults
by Myles “Scotty” Garrigan

SCHOLARSHIP FUND:

In memory of Joseph A. Michalowski
by John & Marley O’Neill

GENERAL FUND:

Fran Fee
Donna Green
Joanne Senko
Michele Senko
Judith G. Smith with a matching gift from
The Johnson & Johnson Family of
Companies Matching Gifts Program
Ken & Gloria Smutko
Alexis & John Stashkevetch
Gina M. Washington

Time to Join or Renew!

With South River celebrating its 300th anniversary in 2020, it’s the perfect time to join or to renew your membership in the South River Historical & Preservation Society. We rely on your support to fulfill our mission of preserving and promoting South River’s rich history.

You can renew, 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.

If you’re renewing, please check the mailing label on this newsletter or contact us by email at southernriverhistory@gmail.com to find out when your membership expires.

We appreciate your continued support. All dues and donations are tax deductible. Thank you!

The Fate of the *Rohna*

When Jack Ballo and his family were cleaning out the attic of their South River home they had no idea where it would lead. Previously owned by Pauline “Nursie” Pisinski, a member of Ballo’s wife’s family, the house turned out to hold a treasure trove of memorabilia that sent them on a search that has since turned into an avocation. Ballo spoke about the project at the November 20 annual meeting of the society.

“Nursie,” well-known to many students who attended South River schools, was the sister of Joseph Pisinski, a World War II soldier assigned to the Army’s 31st Signal Construction Battalion. He was reported missing less than a year after the United States officially entered the conflict. Although a memorial service was held for Pisinski in 1944, Pauline and the rest of Joseph’s immediate family never learned of his fate. It wasn’t until the recent discovery of his letters in the attic, and subsequent research, that a later generation uncovered the long-hidden story of his death.

On November 26, 1943, a radio-guided missile, the first ever launched against the United States, struck the HMT *Rohna*, a British owned troop transport carrying Sgt. Joseph Pisinski and almost 2,000 others. 1,015 United States soldiers, including more than 75 from New Jersey, lost their lives in the attack. More than 960 were rescued by other ships in the convoy. It was the greatest loss of troops at sea by enemy action in the history of United States war.

Survivors and rescuers alike were sworn to secrecy regarding the disaster. The War Department, predecessor to the Defense Department, designated the event “classified” so neither Gold Star families nor the families of those who came home knew the story. It wasn’t until 1993 that John Fievet, one of the survivors, broke the silence.

Ballo is producing a documentary about the sinking of the *Rohna*. Part of the project also includes an effort “to gather information about every person who was on the *Rohna* the day of the attack including casualties, survivors, Red Cross and crew.”

His program showcased wartime letters from Sgt. Pisinski, family photographs, official documents, and other materials that have come to light in the course of the project. In addition to a slideshow, the audience was treated to a viewing of the film trailer for the documentary.

SOUTH RIVER MAN REPORTED MISSING

Page one headline from the December 31, 1943 *Daily Home News* reporting Sgt. Joseph Pisinski missing in action.
Courtesy of Newspapers.com.

In an interesting coincidence, the program took place on what would have been Joseph Pisinski’s 99th birthday. He was born on November 20, 1920. As a tribute, Ballo and his family shared a bottle of wine with those in attendance.

Additional information is available from the *Rohna* Classified website (rohnaclassified.com) and Facebook (#TheRohnaMovie) page. A video of Ballo’s November 20 presentation 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.”



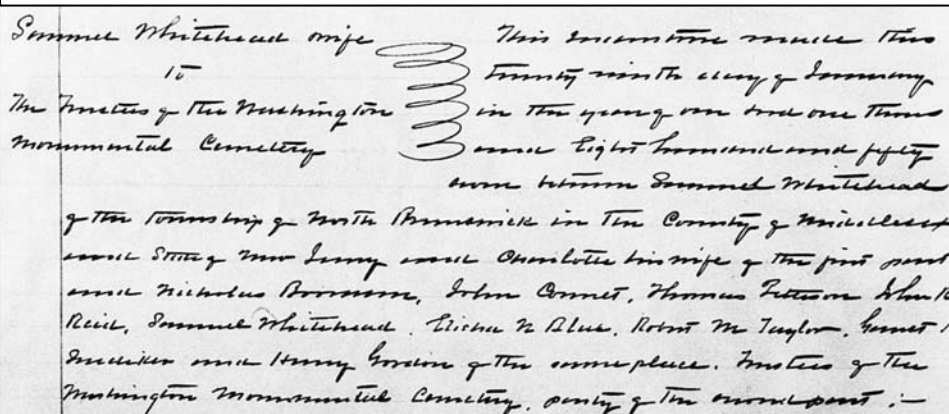
Jack Ballo addresses the audience during his November 20 presentation at the South River Museum. Photograph by Stephanie Bartz.

Early History of Washington Monumental Cemetery by Robert C. Rafano

With all the notoriety regarding South River during the 1918 influenza epidemic, and the ensuing national television coverage and interviews by prominent news reporters, a look at where and how the Washington Monumental Cemetery came into existence seemed in order.

The Washington Monumental Cemetery was formed as a corporation on December 6, 1856. The original members were appointed with staggered terms covering a three-year period. The one-year term trustees were Nicholas Booraem, John S. Connet, and Thomas Peterson. Those with two-year terms were John R. Reid, Samuel Whitehead, and Elisha N. Blew. Robert M. Taylor, Henry Gordon, and Garret I. Snediker had three-year terms.

Research into the ownership of the property required the cooperation and help of two entities. The Middlesex County Clerk records and maintains all the documents transferring land ownership from one person to another. Vintage Title was able to access those archives to obtain copies of the deeds from the 1800s. They are interesting to look at, but almost impossible to read. Current records are created in digital format, but in the 1800s, records were handwritten.



Samuel Whitehead wife
10
The Trustees of the Washington
Monumental Cemetery
This instrument shall be
Twenty with the city of Washington
in the year of our Lord one thousand
eight hundred and fifty
seven between Samuel Whitehead
of the Township of North Brunswick in the County of Middlesex
and State of New Jersey and Charlotte his wife of the first part
and Nicholas Booraem, John Connet, Thomas Peterson John R
Reid, Samuel Whitehead, Elisha N. Blew, Robert M. Taylor, Garret I
Snediker and Henry Gordon of the second part. Trustees of the
Washington Monumental Cemetery, County of the second part :-

The opening sentences of the handwritten 1857 deed transferring property from Samuel and Charlotte Whitehead to the trustees of the Washington Monumental Cemetery.

The County Clerk would receive a deed and record it, designating the date, book, and page so that it could be located again once it was filed. A scribe who wrote by hand transcribed the document using pen and ink. There were no typewriters, electric or manual; no photocopy machines; and no computers. Thanks to the efforts of Stephanie Bartz, of our society, we were able to get the relatively incomprehensible script transcribed into a typed document. I thank both Vintage Title and her for it.

The original deed establishing the cemetery transferred property from “Samuel Whitehead and wife,” later identified as Charlotte, to “The Trustees of the Washington Monumental Cemetery.” It was recorded on February 2, 1857 in Deed Book 72, page 285. The consideration for the transaction was \$300 and the land was conveyed in trust for the Washington Monumental Cemetery Association.

The deed describes the property as “a certain tract of land or parcel of land situate lying and being near the Village of Washington, Township County and State aforesaid” “containing six 40/100 acres more or less. Together with all and singular the woods water ways privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging or in any way appertaining.” It was designated “for the use and purpose of a cemetery or place for the interment of the Dead subject to the rules and discipline of the association aforesaid.” Interestingly, there was a reservation in the deed. “Excepting and reserving the wood standing and growing on said land other than cedar.” Apparently nobody wanted the cedar.

Although one might expect the first burial to follow the property transfer, the earliest burial is said to have taken place a month before the date on the deed. Rebecca J. Fisher, wife of Peter Fisher of Sayreville, was buried on January 3, 1857. The Fisher plot is adjacent to the central monument where the date of incorporation, original contributors, and first managers of the cemetery are recorded.



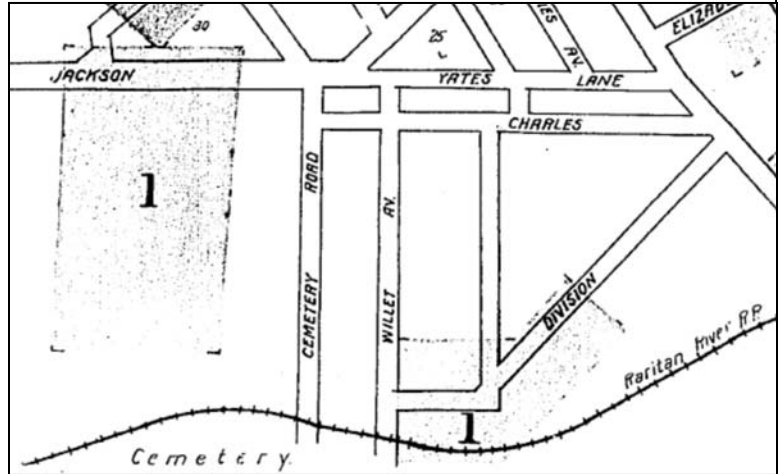
The earliest known image of the central monument at Washington Monumental Cemetery, November 22, 1891. Photograph by R. Van Dyke Reid.

Continued on Page 7

Washington Monumental — *continued from page 6*

The second and third property transfers were both dated June 16, 1893. For a consideration of \$400, Anna M. Yates deeded property adjacent to the Raritan River Railroad to the cemetery. Included was “that part thereof upon which the said Anna M. Yates has built a road for the cemetery which is hereby conveyed.” The road was later renamed Raritan Avenue. The deed is recorded in Deed Book 259, page 583.

On the same day, Samuel J. Yates and William T. Yates transferred a second parcel. The transaction was recorded in Deed Book 259 at Page 586. Like the Anna Yates deed, it provided that the conveyance was to “The Washington Monumental Cemetery a corporation,” but the consideration in this case was a mere \$50. The deed describes, “All that certain strip or lot tract or parcel of land ... lying and being in the county Town of Washington in the County of Middlesex and State of New Jersey, within the enclosure or fence of the Cemetery of the party of the second part.”



The section of the 1904 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing Cemetery Road as mentioned in the 1893 deed between Anna Yates and cemetery.

Five years later yet another deed was recorded. On April 2, 1898 property was transferred from Sarah Jane Willet and Theodore Willet, her husband, and here is an interesting change, “of the Borough of South River.” The conveyance was to “The Washington Monumental Cemetery Association” and the consideration was \$1,500. All of the deeds prior to this one described the property in terms of chains and links. Years ago, surveyors did not use a tape measure or a measuring device like we would use today, but they used chains and links. Each chain had a certain length, and each link had a certain length, so the description might provide for five chains and three links or ten chains and one link. A chain was 66 feet long and a link .66 of an inch. There are conversion charts that exist today to convert chain and link measurements to current day dimensions. The 1898 deed describes the property in feet and inches.

Over the course of time the Association also filed maps with the County Clerk’s Office. An 1857 map provides measurements. “Lots are twelve feet North and South by seventeen feet East and West. The two main avenues are thirty-three feet wide and the walk around the whole grounds is sixteen feet in width; the walks between the ranges are eight feet.”



A view from the cemetery looking north, September 26, 1901. Photograph by R. Van Dyke Reid.

A map filed on April 11, 1900 repeated the measurements but specified “regular sized lots” and instead of describing the “two main avenues” provided that “Whitehead Avenue is twenty feet wide.” None of which makes much sense unless you have a copy of the map in front of you. The Whitehead Avenue mentioned on the 1900 map is the road within the cemetery that runs closest to the railroad tracks. It starts at the Willett Avenue end of the property and runs the length of the cemetery.

The trustees for 1900, the end date for this brief history, were Charles Whitehead, President; Samuel W. Booraem, Vice President; David Serviss, Secretary; and Seaman T. Christian, Treasurer; also J.M. Blew, James Bissett, Charles W. Fisher, Benjamin E. Walker, and George Gordon. Several of them were related to or directly descended from the founding members.

The history of the formation of the Washington Monumental Cemetery is an interesting and important piece of information for our archives.



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Phone: 732-613-3078 [Messages only]

Celebrating 300 Years

South River's 300th anniversary celebration was launched at the January 1 reorganization meeting of the borough's governing body. Following the swearing in of Mayor John Krenzel and two new members of the borough council, Donna Balazs and Anthony Ciulla, Mayor Krenzel unveiled the official logo for the anniversary as the inaugural event of the year-long celebration.

Designed by Kevin LaScala, a trustee of the South River Historical & Preservation Society, the logo combines the official borough seal with a banner commemorating the 300 year history of South River. The logo will be used throughout the year for events, publications, and publicity officially associated with the anniversary.

During his introduction of the logo, the mayor acknowledged some of those involved in the planning for the anniversary celebration. Four members of the society's executive board were named: Ann Rafano, Bob Rafano, Stephanie Bartz, and Kevin LaScala. Cindy Wilk and Teresa Hutchison, both from the South River Cultural Arts & Heritage Commission, were also recognized. The borough administrator, Art Londensky, was included in the acknowledgements for his invaluable support in the planning process.

Planning for the year's events is well underway. A website, an events calendar, and a Facebook page are being developed. Additional information will be made public as it becomes available.



The South River Historical & Preservation Society needs your support for South River's 300th Anniversary celebration

The South River Historical & Preservation Society is a non-profit funded solely by dues, donations, and grants. Please help us in our efforts to make South River's 300th Anniversary a memorable one. If you would like to contribute toward the programs, events, and publications being planned for the celebration, please complete the form below and mail it with your check payable to the South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc. All donations are tax deductible.

Donation Form to Support 300th Anniversary Events

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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 mail 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 include the information on the form.

If you own a business and would like to become a corporate sponsor, please contact us via email at southriverhistory@gmail.com.



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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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Please check one:

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- Student \$5.00
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(please enter number in family) _____
- Business/Corporate \$25.00
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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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Donations will be recognized in our newsletter.

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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

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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.**
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All donations are tax-deductible and will be
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My company has a matching gift program.

Company name/address _____

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