South River Historical & Preservation News

Award Winning

Number 136, November 2026

Next Meeting: November 18

America 250 Trivia Challenge

The United States turned 250 this year. How well do you know the facts? This year's annual meeting will feature trivia fun to help us learn how we got here. Prizes will celebrate victory and honor effort.

Guests are invited to bring an item for show-and-tell. We'd love to see what you have to share whether it relates to the 250th anniversary or another aspect of history.

Join us at the South River Museum, 64-66 Main Street, at 7:00 pm. Refreshments will be served.

Museum Hours

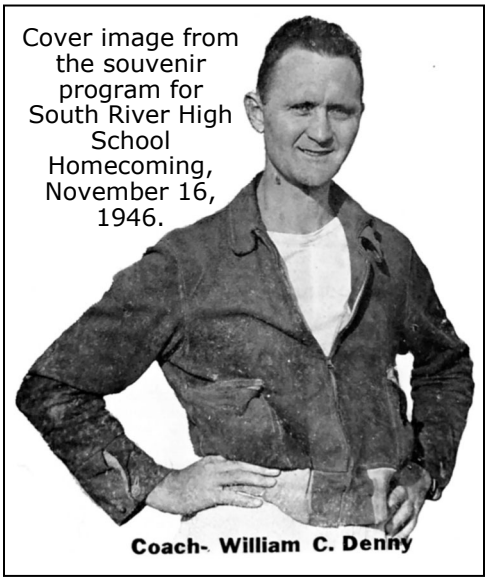
The South River Museum is open to the general public from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on designated Sundays.

November 1
December 6
January 3, 2027
February 7

President's Message — by Sara-Ann Goldman

If you've lived in South River for any length of time, you've probably heard of Coach Denny. William Clare Denny was born in Butler, Pennsylvania, in 1902. Butler was an industrial town and Denny probably had the same dreams as many kids today – to become a football star. He followed that path in his own way, becoming a successful and much-admired South River High School football coach.

In 1927, Denny started his teaching and coaching career in South River. In his first ten seasons, the team won 61 games, lost 24, and tied 9. With 10 wins, 1933 was Denny's first undefeated season. The nickname "the Booming Borough," as South River was sometimes called, could have applied to the football team. Maroons was the official team name.



Cover image from the souvenir program for South River High School Homecoming, November 16, 1946.

One of the notable things about South River's football players was that, with Denny's support, they put as much energy into studying as they did into practice and games. They were encouraged to get an education and aim for a college degree. Denny considered it to be one of his most significant contributions to the working-class community he'd made his home. Alexander Wojciechowicz and Elmer Stout, two well-known players from South River, are emblematic of that contribution.

Denny coached his final game on November 23, 1961, the same year the new high school on Montgomery Street opened. He finished his 35 years of coaching in triumph. The final score for the game was South River Rams, 41, New Brunswick Zebras, 0.

After his retirement from the high school, Denny continued serving his community in other ways. He became a self-employed general insurance salesman while serving multiple terms as a director at local banking institutions, among other roles. He founded the William C. Denny Chapter of the National Football Hall of Fame. In 1967, six years after his retirement from coaching, Campbell School Field, where Denny coached his home games, was renamed in his honor.

Coach Denny died on September 17, 1984, leaving his wife Ethel Lunepp Denny, three daughters and eight grandchildren. His football scrapbook is part of the collection at the South River Museum. It includes a year-by-year accounting of the South River High School football team's record from 1927 to 1961: 193 wins, 99 losses, and 25 ties.

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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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: southriverhistory@gmail.com.

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* Deceased

Membership Matters

It's Time to Renew!

Is your membership in the South River Historical & Preservation Society up to date? If you aren't yet a member, have yet to renew your membership for 2026, or would like to renew for 2027, please consider sending your dues in now.

The society and the South River Museum rely on your continued support to fulfill the mission of preserving and promoting South River's rich history. Dues and donations fund every aspect of our work from the cataloging and preservation of artifacts to the newsletter, programs, the scholarship, our website, and everything in between.

You can become a member, renew your membership, or purchase a gift membership using the form included with this newsletter. Membership forms can also be downloaded from our website.

www.southriverhistory.org/Join_Us.html

If you're already a member, you have our thanks.

To verify that your membership is up to date, please check the mailing label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter electronically, please email us to find out when your membership expires: southriverhistory@gmail.com

The society appreciates your continued support. As a registered 501(c)(3) organization, our non-profit status means that all dues and donations are tax deductible.

Thank you!

Special Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTIONS

In Memory of:

Daniel & Evelyn Golden
by Roger & Joanie Golden
Albert & Walter Krempecki
by Stella Gumino

General Fund:

Maria M. DeOliveira
Stella Gumino

In Kind Contributions:

Paul & Karyn Migut, computer and monitor

New Acquisitions

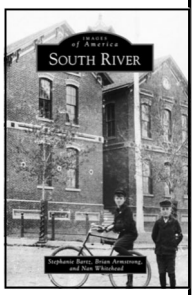
⇒ Essay, "9/11 and the Great Dash." Donated by Cheryl Ann Borne.
⇒ Letter from the principal of Corpus Christi School to parents, 1971. Donated by Joann Donatiello.
⇒ Spatula, Ralph A. Gonier Insurance, 45 Washington Street. Donated by Ken Roginski.
⇒ South River Turn Verein, organized 1895, ribbon; Scott Chapter No. 4, Royal Arch Masons, South River, NJ, chartered September 9, 1857, penny. Donated by Stephanie and Ed Bartz.

Upcoming Events

⇒ **November 14:** The **fall meeting** of the **League of Historical Societies of New Jersey**, hosted by the Morristown and Morris Township Library will take place in Morristown. To register, visit:
https://www.lhsnj.org/news-events
⇒ **November 18:** The **South River Historical & Preservation Society** will host its **November meeting and program**. For details, see page one of this newsletter.
⇒ **December 9:** An event to celebrate the "burial" of the long-delayed South River **Time Capsule** will take place at the South River Museum at 7:00 p.m. For more information about the event and the history of the time capsule, see page seven of this newsletter.
⇒ **Ongoing (through December 2028):** In honor of America's 250th birthday, Middlesex County hosts **"Caught in the Crossfire: Divided Loyalties in Middlesex County"** at the Cornelius Low House, Piscataway. For details visit the museum's Middlesex County Culture page:
https://bit.ly/cornelius-low-house

SOUTH RIVER HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY • America 250 1776–2026

Gift Shop



***South River* (*Images of America*)** [Book] — $21.99 Includes more than 200 photographs and descriptive captions. Pub. June 2015.

Cordova Elopement Scandal [Book], by Brian Armstrong — $10.00 — The story of the 1904 scandal in South River. Pub. 2025.

Victorian Housewife Rebellion [Book], by Brian Armstrong — $10.00 — Features incidents in South River history. Pub. 2023.

Limited Edition Print of the Old School Baptist Church, by Joseph Csatari — $25.00 [13" x 15 3/4" unframed]

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

Postcards — Set of 3, $1.00 — Old School Baptist Church, 1894; Main St., 1906; and Frazee Urn & Old School Baptist graveyard.

Tote Bag Celebrating South River's 300 Year History, 1720-2020 — $4.00 — Black with white print [12" x 9" x 4-1/2"].

Visit the Gift Shop at the South River Museum or on our website for additional items.

Note: Prices reflect minimum donations and do not include postage. Please contact us by email or visit our website for additional items and information.

Revolutionary Moments — Waste and Spoil

This is the fifth and final article in a series in honor of America's 2026 Semiquincentennial, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

On December 20, 1781, New Jersey passed "An act to procure an estimate of the damages sustained by the inhabitants of this state from the waste and spoil committed by the troops in the service of the enemy and their adherents, by the Continental Army, or by the militia of this or of the neighbouring states." Benjamin Manning, Joseph Olden, and Nathaniel Hunt were appointed appraisers for Middlesex County.

The law instructed that any person with a claim should submit an inventory containing "a list of the specific goods, chattels or property of what nature or kind soever, so damaged, wasted, spoiled, plundered, burned or destroyed." Also to be included were the time period in which the loss occurred and an identification of the troops responsible. The appraisers were directed to assess the value of the listed items based on 1775 prices, before the inflation caused by the Revolutionary War.

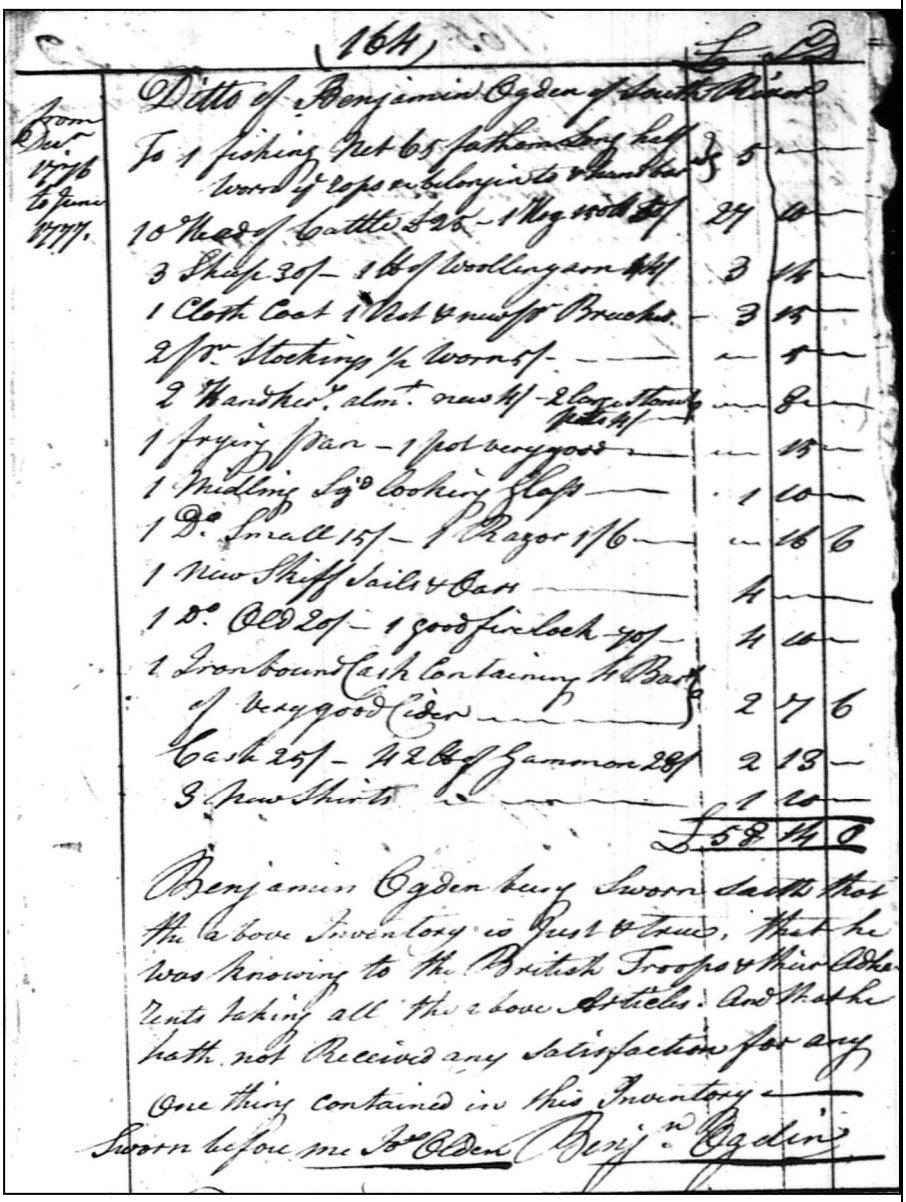
The inventories submitted in all but five New Jersey counties are available in the "Revolutionary War Damage Claims, 1776-1783" collection at the New Jersey State Archives. With the exception of a single inventory, the records for Monmouth County are also missing.

Among the Middlesex County inventories are several identified as being from residents of South River. These include claims made by Abraham Akerman, Peter Letts, Peter Obert, and Benjamin Ogden. All four claims were for losses incurred during the period between December 1, 1776, and June 20, 1777, when the British occupied New Brunswick and foraged for supplies in surrounding areas.

Sadly for those who submitted claims, the exercise was about documenting and estimating the cost of the losses incurred by colonists rather than paying compensation for them. No payments were ever authorized.

The inventories can be a challenge to read. Handwriting is often difficult to decipher, but 18th century documents have added complications. The long "s," often mistaken for the letter "f," is just one. The lists also make fairly extensive use of abbreviated words and terms that, while common to the time in which the documents were written, are no longer familiar to most.

The inventories remain a fascinating reflection of the time. Thanks to the assistance of Clay Jackson, Resident Historian at Virginia's Historic Michie Tavern and 1784 Pub, the text of Benjamin Ogden's damage claim inventory has been



(16½)

Ditto of Benjamin Ogden of South River

From Dec. 1776 to June 1777.

To 1 fishing Net 6s 1 Feather bed & Bolster 3l 5

10 Head Cattle £26 - 1 Rug 1l 27 10

3 Sheep 30s - 1 Do Woollen yarn 4s 3 14

1 Cloth Coat 1 Vest & pair Breeches 3 15

2 pr. Stockings ½ worn 5s - 5

2 Handkf. & Shirt 4s - 2 Razors 4s 8

1 frying Pan - 1 pot very good 15

1 Midling Sized looking Glass 1 10

1 Do. Small 15s - 1 Razor 1/6 16 6

1 New Skiff Sails & Oars 4

1 Do. Old 20s - 1 good fire lock 40s 4 10

1 Iron bound Cask containing 11 Gall. very good Cider 2 7 6

Cash 25s - 12 lb Gunpowder 28s 2 13

3 pair Shirts 1 10

£58 14 0

Benjamin Ogden being Sworn saith that the above Inventory is Just & true, that he was knowing to the British Troops & their Adherents taking all the above Articles: and that he hath not Received any Satisfaction for any One thing contained in this Inventory

Sworn before me Jo. Olden Benj. Ogden

The Revolutionary War damage claim made by Benjamin Ogden. From "Revolutionary War Damages, 1776-1783," courtesy of the New Jersey State Archives, Department of State.

Continued on page 5

Waste and Spoil — *continued from page 4*

fully transcribed. Below is that transcription complete with abbreviations, capitalizations, and colloquial terms of the time.

164
Ditto of Benjamin Ogden of South River

From Dec. 1776 to June 1777		£	s	d
	To 1 fishing net 65 fathoms long half worn y^{e} rops &c belongin to a hand bar^{w}	5		
	10 Head of Cattle £25 - 1 Hog 150 lb 50/	27	10	
	3 Sheep 30/ - 1 lb of woolling arn 44/	3	14	
	1 Cloth Coat 1 Vest & new p^{r} Breeches	3	15	
	2 p^{r} Stockings 1/2 worn 5/		5	
	2 Handker^{s} alm^{t} new 4/ - 2 large stonew pots 4/		8	
	1 frying pan - 1 pot very good		15	
	1 Midling Siz'^{d} looking glass	1	10	
	1 D^{o} Small 15/ - 1 Razor 1/6		16	6
	1 New Skiff Sails & Oars	4		
	1. D^{o} Old 20/ - 1 good firelock 70/	4	10	
	1 Ironbound Cask containing 4 Bar^{ls} of very good Cider	2	7	6
	Cash 25/ - 42 lb of gammon 28/	2	13	
	3 New Shirts	1	10	
	£	58	14	0

Benjamin Ogden being sworn saith that the above inventory is just & true, that he was knowing to the British Troops & their Adherents taking all the above Articles. And that he hath not Received any satisfaction for any one thing contained in this Inventory.
Sworn before me Jo^{s} Olden Benj^{n} Ogden

The key to deciphering the transcribed text is interpreting the abbreviations and colloquial English of the period along with a little added research. Here are some things to know.

- £ = Pound. The symbol comes from the letter L in libra, meaning a pound of money.
- s = Shilling. The s is taken from the Roman coin solidus, and is often written as a slash.
- d = Pence. The d is taken from the Roman coin denarius.
- Numbers followed by slashes indicate the value of the item in shillings. A number after the slash indicates pence (for example, 1 shilling and 6 pence for the razor).
- There were 12 pence (d) to a shilling (s) and 20 shillings to a pound (£).
- y^{e} rops &c belongin to a hand bar^{w} = the ropes, etc. belonging to a hand barrow
- woolling arn = wool yarn
- p^{r} = pair
- Handker^{s} alm^{t} new = handkerchiefs almost new
- stonew = stoneware
- Siz'^{d} = sized
- D^{o} = ditto
- firelock = firearm
- Bar^{ls} = barrels
- Gammon = cured pork

Estimates vary, but Mr. Ogden's 58 pounds and 14 shillings would be worth thousands of dollars today. One wonders what the items themselves, now classified as

Continued on page 7

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Peter M. Zawadsky, MD

We Get Email

In 2026, we heard from several former South River residents about their creative efforts. Each has moved elsewhere but maintains an interest in and connection with South River.

- C. Edwin (Trzeciak) Tracy published a memoir and history, *AHNSAD: South River NJ Home Town Story*.
- Greg Bito's poems, written more than 50 years ago, have been set to music and can be streamed on YouTube and Spotify.
- Cheryl Ann Floystrop Borne published an essay for the 25th anniversary of 9/11.

Keep writing! We're always happy to hear from you.

Waste and Spoil — *continued from page 5*

antiques, would be worth today.

In case you still have questions, here are some other observations. The number at the top of Ogden's claim is the page number in the book where the inventories were recorded, "A Book of Register & Copy of Inventorys of the Damages done by the Enemy and their Adherents to the Inhabitants of the County of Middlesex." The register is dated 1782.

The "Ditto" below the page number replaces text that appears on some of the earliest entries in the ledger. For example, an entry on page four begins, "Inventory of sundries taken, burned & destroyed by the enemy and their adherents, between the 1st Dec. 1776 and the 20th June 1777, the property of Thomas Lawrence in Middlesex County." Since there are more than 300 pages with inventories, it is understandable that those responsible for entering the records in the ledger used shortcuts where possible.

Some of the items included in the inventory may also need explanation. Anything "half worn" was essentially used rather than new. The fishing net with its rope and other accessories were likely listed as "belongin to" the hand barrow because they were stored in it or with it. The barrow would have been a flat frame used to carry items across sandy and muddy areas where something with wheels would not work.

Finally, given the high value placed on the yarn, it was more likely dyed worsted wool, rather than just plain woolen yarn, a much finer wool for high quality cloth. The single pound of wool was valued at 44 shillings, or 2 pounds and 4 shillings, almost as much as the value of the cask holding the four barrels of very good cider.

News of the Past — Snippets

"Women Sign Saloon Petition"
New York Times, November 27, 1901, page 1.

For the first time in the history of Middlesex County an application has been made to the court for a saloon license with women exclusively as the signers.

The applicant is Charles Willett of South River, who wants to keep a saloon there as successor of his brother, Theodore Willett, deceased.

South River has a great many saloons now, and in order to overcome the opposition to another, Willett's mother, Mrs. S.J. Willett, and Mrs. Cora Baird, a widow, themselves canvassed the town for signers. They did not ask any men, but after a little work, secured the necessary dozen women signers, who are also freeholders. The application will come up before Judge Woodbridge Strong early in December.

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"It's Different in South River"
Daily Home News, July 16, 1935, page 4.

"Go straight on red," reads a sign at the start of the Causeway in South River. It is probably one of the few places in the nation that permit traffic to proceed straight ahead on a red light, although right turns are allowed on red lights in some municipalities.

Motorists not familiar with the unusual regulation frequently come to a stop at the red light, and are surprised to see a line of cars pass by.

The 2026 Time Capsule

Planning for a new South River time capsule is underway. While it won't exactly be buried, it will be sealed with the hope that it will survive to be opened during the celebration of South River's 350th anniversary in 2070.

The previous time capsule was buried in front of the borough hall in 1970, at the culmination of the 6-day celebration of the borough's 250th anniversary. The capsule was scheduled to be opened in April 2020, for the 300th anniversary, but that event was delayed more than a year, until September 2021, due to restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic. Having missed South River's anniversary year, the decision was made to delay a new time capsule until 2026, America's Semiquincentennial.

The location for the new time capsule was also discussed. The items in the 1970 capsule suffered extensive water damage, and many of those, after being photographed, were discarded. With ongoing concerns over the potential for flooding, it was decided that the new capsule would be housed inside the South River Museum. The 1970 capsule, which is currently on display at the museum, will be repurposed as the 2026 time capsule. Visitors will be able to see it and speculate on what might be inside.

The society will host a public event celebrating the "burial" of the time capsule on December 9th at 7:00 p.m. at the museum.
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P.O. Box 446
South River, New Jersey 08882

South River Historical & Preservation Society, Inc.

Check the date on your mailing label. Is it time to renew your membership?

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Phone: 732-613-3078 [Messages only]

Courthouse Tales

The society's September program was a feast of information about the Middlesex County Courthouse from its earliest days to the present. Josephine Marchetta, the current assignment clerk for the courthouse, regaled the audience with anecdotes about the building and some of the trials that have taken place there. She also spoke about the artifacts on display in and around the building.

Although the first Middlesex County Courthouse was located in Perth Amboy, the modern courthouse is located between Bayard Street and Paterson Street in New Brunswick. It boasts a collection of historic artifacts from a 1797 lintel from the county's first jail to the bell once used to usher in the court year and announce incoming verdicts, sentencings, and hangings.

Josephine Marchetta addresses the audience during the September 23rd program at the South River Museum. Photograph by Stephanie Bartz.

Marchetta spoke about events that took place both before her arrival in 1990 and after. One was the story of Bridget Durgan. Executed for murder in 1867, she was the last woman hanged in Middlesex County. The last hanging in New Jersey also took place in New Brunswick. Frederick Lang, also convicted of murder, was hanged in 1909. More recent headline trials such as those of George Jenewicz of South River, Melanie McGuire, and Michelle Lodzinski all took place at the New Brunswick courthouse during Marchetta's tenure.

For those interested in seeing the items on exhibit, much of the building is open to the public. The second floor provides space for the artifacts.

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$_____ ☐ in honor of ☐ in memory of: _____

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$_____ 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.")**

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