

The Village of South Orange Historic Walking Tour


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“South Orange is a quaint residential community boasting authentic Tudor, Colonial, and Victorian homes, streets dotted with gaslights, beautiful parks, and a bustling Village center...South Orange was part of Newark until 1806, when what is now the Oranges and Maplewood were set off as “Orange Township” ...

The creation of the South Orange Township by an act of the New Jersey Legislature in 1861, led to the granting of the Village Charter in 1869.”

www.southorange.org

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 Cover Photo - South Orange Village Hall circa 1895, prior to any additions.
This view from South Orange Avenue shows the Fire Department equipment bay. A policeman stands next to the ladder truck. Today, South Orange Village Hall still has the insignia “SOVFD,” for South Orange Volunteer Fire Department.

Courtesy of Lt. Anthony Vecchio, SOFD

Many thanks to those who assisted in the making of this brochure, which served as
Cory Dahn's Eagle Project - Troop 60 South Orange



**A SELF-GUIDED TOUR
OF HISTORIC SITES IN THE
VILLAGE OF SOUTH ORANGE**



1. BAIRD COMMUNITY CENTER

In 1889 residents established the South Orange Field Club. This was a members-only organization that met in Edwin Mead's Barn. Seven years later, in January 1896, the barn burned to the ground and the club immediately began building a new clubhouse. It featured 14 clubrooms, a veteran's recreation room, pool tables, four bowling alleys, a craft shop and three kitchens. By 1929, more sports activities were available and the private club evolved into a community center. In 1930, 14 rooms were added and the South Orange Field Club was renamed the Baird Center. In addition to serving the welfare needs of the community, the Baird has since become the hub of both cultural affairs and recreation for the Village.



2. CAMERON FIELD

From about 1900 until the mid 1920s, Cameron Field was private property owned by the South Orange Field Club. A nine hole golf course named the Lone Oak Links was part of Cameron Field. The 9th hole was positioned where the baseball diamond is currently located. From about 1900 until 1935, baseball was one of the main attractions across the country. In the 1920s, baseball clubs often marketed the game by having professional players play baseball with local ball clubs in exhibition games. Typically, crowds gathered at the South Orange Field Club (as we now know, this was later known as the Baird Center) to watch the home team play semi-professional teams and numerous touring African-American Teams, including the Black Yankees, Pittsburgh Crawfords, Cuban Stars and the Washington Pilots. One game took place on October 29, 1929. Twelve thousand spectators, including 35 major-league ballplayers brought baseball fever to Cameron field to watch legendary players Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig play in an exhibition game for South Orange. Spectators each paid the \$1 admission to squeeze into the grandstands and crowd around the diamond that fall afternoon. Ruth hit a home run into the right field stands and Gehrig hit two homers. One of Gehrig's shots traveled 600 feet as it cleared the centerfield wall and the Lackawanna Railroad tracks to hit a house on Vose Avenue. Fourteen dozen baseballs were used that day when South Orange defeated New Brunswick 7 - 6. Today, the local Cal Ripkin League's motto is "South Orange Baseball: "Where Legends Played."



3. POST OFFICE

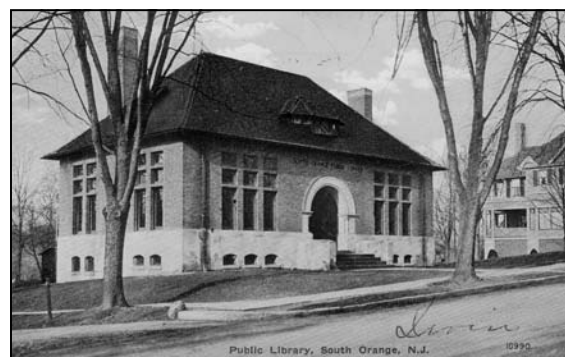


In 1937 the current South Orange Post Office opened its doors to the public. It was constructed during the 1933-1940 term of Postmaster General James A.

Farley. In 1939, the U.S. Department of the Treasury held a competition to commission painted murals for decoration inside post offices. The first prize winning artist got to paint a scene in the Bronx post office. The second prize winner was assigned to the South Orange post office. Bernard Perlin (who was then 21 years old) won the \$2,000 commission to paint the mural of this choice. He spent nine months on the painting, which shows recreational pursuits popular in South Orange at the time.

4. THE CONNETT LIBRARY

When the original library, located on the 2nd floor at what was 75 South Orange Avenue (now Dunkin' Donuts) became too small, Eugene Connett donated land at the corner of Scotland Road and Taylor Place for a library. He made this donation on the condition that subscribers raise \$7,500 to build the library. Five hundred families donated funds to build it and cover all of the expenses. The Village's second library



opened its doors on May 8, 1896. By 1960, a larger library was needed due to expanded circulation. The current library opened in 1968 and is located adjacent to the Connett Building.

5. VILLAGE HALL

South Orange built Village Hall to accommodate more than offices – it was home for the Police and Fire Departments. The Fire Department used the tower to hang their long fire hoses out to dry. Atop the tower was a bell used to notify residents of local emergencies. Designed by architects



Rossiter & Wright of New York City, Village Hall is a half timber construction reminiscent of European architecture from the Elizabethan period. Construction of the building was completed circa 1895 (see front cover for early photo). In 1975 it was listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places and received national landmark status in 1976. Legend has it that the clock on Village Hall was the inspiration for Edward Stratemeyer's Nancy Drew Mystery, *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930).



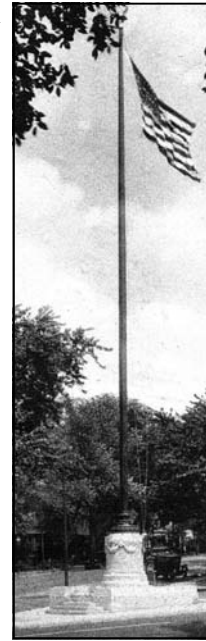
6. THE OLD STONE HOUSE

The original walls of what residents now call the Old Stone House predate 1680 when the property was named in a land grant made to Edward and Joseph Riggs, and Nathaniel Wheeler. Historians estimate that Dutch settlers built the farmhouse between 1666 and 1680 when they arrived in Newark. Renovations in 1877 and 1896 transformed the farmhouse into a Queen Anne, shingle-style mansion. In 1773, Dr. Bethuel Pierson brought the property and in 1867 William A. Brewer Jr. bought the home and named it "Aldworth." Brewer was president of Washington Life Insurance Company in New York City and lived in the house for 50 years, until 1916. Subsequently, Dr. George C. Albee purchased the house and lived there with his wife and children for several years.



7. MEMORIAL FLAGPOLE

This Memorial Flagpole is located on an island at the intersection of South Orange Avenue and Irvington Avenue. On its base are inscribed the names of the fallen heroes of World War I (1914-1918). Of the 116,708 U.S. soldiers who died during WWI, 6 were from South Orange. Cast in bronze and mounted on granite, the Memorial Flagpole cost \$20,000. It was constructed circa 1924.



8. MEMORIAL PARK

The Village Cemetery was located on this site from 1828 to 1926. When the cemetery fell into disrepair, many headstones were vandalized. As a result, this ten foot monument and park was created in 1926. The monument lists the names of villagers, citizens, and veterans who were originally buried in the cemetery. The names are listed alphabetically; there are no military designations or dates of death. Many of the names are members of old South Orange families.



9. THE TRAIN STATION

As early as 1837, the Morris & Essex Railroad brought passengers from New York and Newark to South Orange, where they arrived at the South Orange train station. The train station served as more than a rail passenger hub; it was used for communications. Mail trains dropped off bags of mail and rail line ticket sellers used Morse Code to send messages. Before the advent of telephones, whenever someone in town needed a doctor, a white flag was posted at the train station. The railroad line built the first station at ground level, but soon discovered that ground level tracks were a hazard for animals and pedestrians who were occasionally mowed down by oncoming trains. Eventually the railroad wanted to streamline the grades along the tracks, so in 1914, yearlong construction began on a train station with elevated tracks (ground level station pictured above). The current Train Station and elevated track were completed in 1915. It was listed on the NJ State and National Historic Registers in 1984.



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10. THE FIRE HOUSE

Built circa 1926, the new firehouse has three bays for fire trucks and includes a training tower designed with vented louvers in place of windows. Those louvers are used to circulate air to dry fire hoses. Twelve lengths of hoses can be hung and dried in the tower at one time. In addition to the fire trucks, which continually stand ready, a large kitchen accommodates the firemen, who grocery shop and cook for themselves. Upstairs, firemen sleep in twin beds and have use of a weight and exercise room. The Fire House was listed on the NJ State and National Historic Registers in 1998.



11. MEMORIAL ROCK

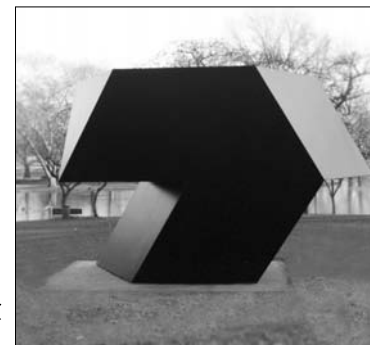


On Memorial Rock, located by the South Orange Duck Pond, three plaques honor 70 South Orange war heroes, who lost their lives during past military conflicts. The three plaques list those who died during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Of the 416,800 U.S. soldiers who died in WWII, 59 were from South

Orange. During the Korean War, 36,913 soldiers died; 6 were from South Orange. In the Vietnam War, of the 58,077 soldiers who lost their lives, 5 were from South Orange. Each Memorial Day, South Orange honors its fallen soldiers with a ceremony at the Memorial Rock.

12. TAU

Sculptor, painter and architect Tony Smith was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. He began his career as an apprentice to well-known architect Frank Lloyd Wright. However, instead of becoming an architect, Smith evolved as an internationally known sculptor. Smith was born in South Orange. For most of his life, he lived and worked in his home on Stanley Road, located in the Montrose Park section of South Orange. Smith was friends with many prominent artists including Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Tennessee Williams, who often visited him at his Montrose Park home and studio. Tau is a black painted steel sculpture measuring 14 feet high, 21 feet wide, and 12 feet



deep. Smith created the original model in 1961-1962. As is common with many sculptors, Smith envisioned creating his works in limited editions of three. The first Tau sculpture is located in front of Hunter College in New York City. The second Tau is here in Meadowlands Park, on the slope between the Duck Pond and North Ridgewood Road. It was installed in

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Photo Courtesy of Judy Wukitsch	
Text by Naoma Welk and Hilda Silverman	

Welk, N. (2002). *Images of America South Orange*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia.

Welk, N. (2006). *Images of America South Orange Revisited*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Directions

Walking tour takes approximately 45 - 60 minutes.
Total distance: 2.27 miles (2.19 miles omitting Site 8)

Site 1: Begin at the Baird Community Center located on Mead Street.

Site 2: As you exit Baird Community Center, proceed left toward the driveway entrance. Take the crosswalk directly across Mead Street to Cameron Field. (0.05 miles)

Site 3: Turn so you are facing Baird. Turn right, and proceed up Mead Street and turn right on Vose Avenue. Continue on Vose until you reach the South Orange Post Office on the right. (0.22 miles)

Site 4: Exit the Post Office and turn right on Vose Avenue. Make an immediate left on Taylor Place. Walk one block to the corner of Taylor Place and Scotland Road. The Connett Library is on your left. (0.10 miles)

Site 5: South Orange Village Hall is across the street from the Connett Library at the corner of Scotland Road and South Orange Avenue (0.02 miles)

Site 6: From the corner of Scotland Road and South Orange Avenue, turn left and proceed up South Orange Avenue, traveling east. Continue past the Memorial Flagpole and Prospect Street until you reach the South Orange Police Station. Turn left into the driveway of the Police Station and you will see The Old Stone House at the end of the driveway. (0.22 miles)

Site 7: Return to South Orange Avenue and turn right, back towards the center of town. Proceed straight to the Memorial Flagpole which will be on your left on the island at the intersection of South Orange Avenue and Irvington Avenue. (0.04) miles.

Site 8 (Optional): From the Memorial Flagpole continue down South Orange Avenue (west) to the corner of Valley Street. Turn left on Valley Street and proceed approximately 0.4 miles (7 minutes) to Memorial Park (the former South Orange Cemetery) which will be on your right. Return to the corner of Valley Street and South Orange Avenue.

Site 9: At the corner of Valley Street and South Orange Avenue turn left (west) toward the train trestle. Continue on South Orange Avenue past Village Plaza and turn left on Sloan Street. The South Orange Train Station will be on your right. (0.2 miles)

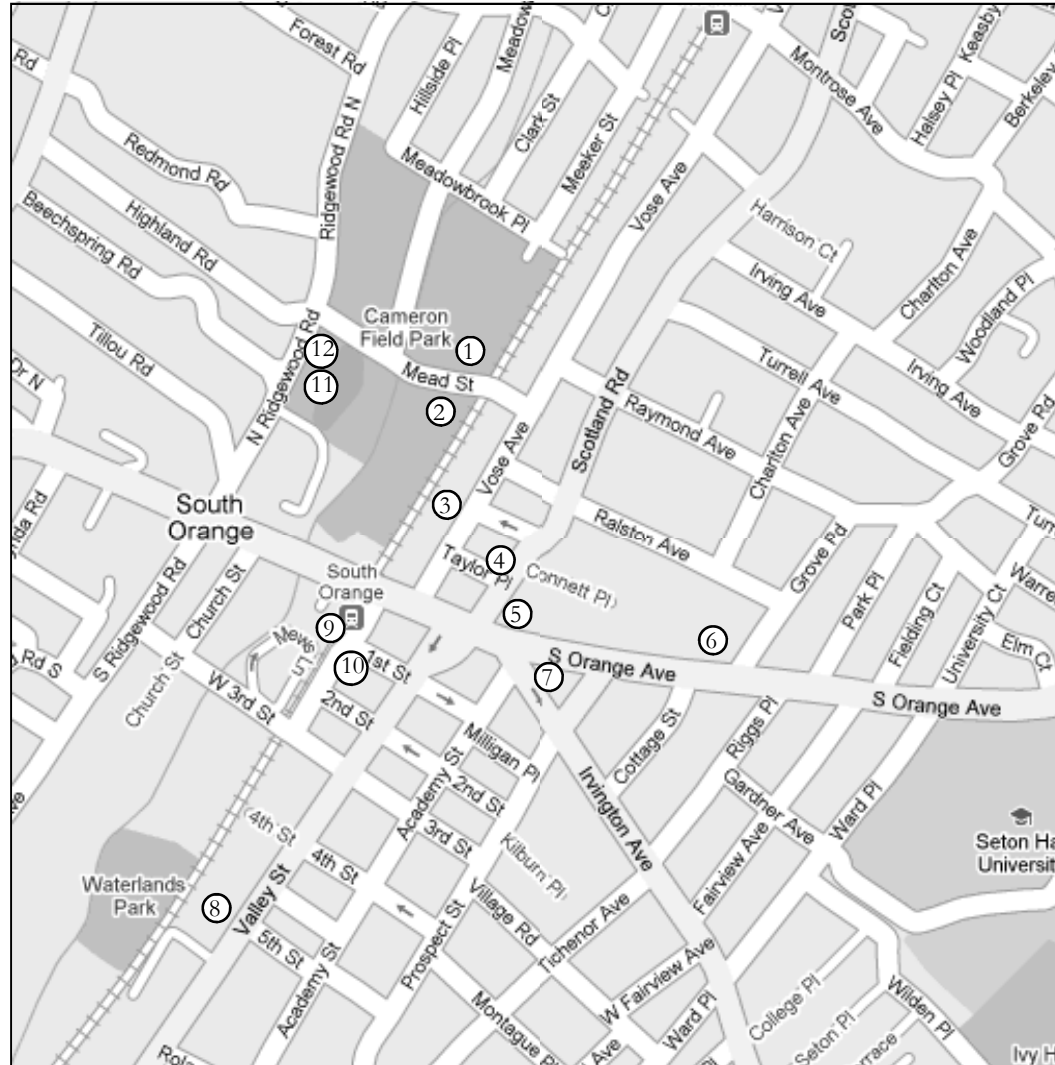
Site 10: The South Orange Fire Station is across the street from the Train Station located at the Sloan Street circle.

Site 11: From the Fire House, take Sloan Street to South Orange Avenue. Turn left under the train trestle and continue to the crosswalk at SOPAC Way. Cross South Orange Avenue and continue west until you reach the Rahway River. Turn right and follow the river walk to the footbridge. Cross the footbridge to reach the Duck Pond. Memorial Rock is on the far side of the pond near North Ridgewood Road. (0.61 miles)

Site 12: Continue on the Duck Pond path toward Mead Street until you reach Ta••
To return to the Baird Community Center, turn right on Mead Street

The Village of South Orange Historic Walking Tour

1. Baird Center
5 Mead Street
40° 45' 00.17" N
74° 15' 29.34" W
2. Cameron Field
Mead Street
40° 44' 54.84" N
74° 15' 30.37" W
3. Post Office
31 Vose Avenue
40° 40' 38.49" N
74° 15' 24.89" W
4. Connett Building
59 Scotland Road
40° 44' 48.08" N
74° 15' 25.93" W
5. Village Hall
101 South Orange Avenue
40° 44' 44.50" N
74° 15' 27.45" W
6. Old Stone House
209 South Orange Avenue
40° 44' 44.88" N
74° 15' 10.62" W



7. Memorial Flagpole
South Orange Avenue
40° 44' 43.63" N
74° 15' 25.98" W
8. Memorial Park
Valley Street
40° 44' 29.30" N
74° 15' 47.91" W
9. Train Station
19 Sloan Street
40° 44' 45.52" N
74° 15' 36.78" W
10. Fire House
56 Sloan Street
40° 44' 42.93" N
74° 15' 39.11" W
11. Memorial Rock
Duck Pond
40° 44' 59.08" N
74° 15' 40.95" W
12. Tau
North Ridgewood Avenue
40° 45' 01.21" N
74° 15' 40.27" W

Google Maps

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF HISTORIC SITES IN THE VILLAGE OF SOUTH ORANGE

