

Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON
Riverton, N.J. 08077

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Program:

Monday, November 24

8 p.m.

Riverton School

"Toy Train Collecting"

.....Richard B. Clement

Who, growing up in a town where trains thundered through the middle of the town, will ever forget the trembling of the earth as the great steam locomotives went down the tracks? Or the sound of their whistles, carried for miles through a clear, cold, winter night? Trains became so much a part of life that the first word a baby would learn to say was often "choo-choo". Trains had individual names and personalities, and soon toy trains became a small boy's favorite plaything. Unlike other toys, they were not so often put aside as a child grew; increasingly better models were manufactured, and by the time the Chicago World's Fair exhibited model railroads in 1933-34, they had become a well known hobby.

Our speaker will bring a display of some of his own toy trains, and will talk about their history, compare distinctive features of various models and manufacture; he will tell us where they are made, and discuss restoration and reproduction of various models. He has many anecdotes to share, and says his own love affair with toy trains began at age four, when his father gave him his first one.

Mr. Clement retired from the USAF, with the rank of colonel, after 23½ years as a pilot and electronics engineer; he is now with RCA, Cherry Hill, in the same capacity. He lives, with his wife and two small sons, in Medford, where he is an active member of the Medford Historical Society, and other organizations. Members and friends would be well advised to read up on trains beforehand, as he has a habit of asking questions of the audience, and encourages participation.

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Program:

Monday, January 12, 1987

6:30 p.m.

Parish House, Christ Episcopal
4th, at Howard St.

Covered Dish Supper, followed by:

"Lure of the Pine Barrens"

.....Theodore Gordon

"Ted" Gordon is a naturalist who lectures at the Rancocas Nature Center, the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia, gives tours and canoe trips through the Pine Barrens, and also teaches German at the Burlington Regional High School. As a botanist, his special interest is in endangered species. He is active in many organizations, and is a charter member of the Southampton Historical Society.

You may have read something about Mr. Gordon in the "Neighbors" section of the Phila. Inquirer recently. In talking with him, it is quite evident that his love of the area and his knowledge about it is deep. His talk and slide presentation will show us things we have not seen before, from an area in our county that is very special.

Please note this program on your new calendar--time and place are different from our other meetings, and you won't want to miss this popular covered-dish meeting, with which we will begin the new year. Invite a friend or two to share an interesting and friendly evening with us.

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Update:

Our thanks to Ed and Joan Hartmann for making the attractive holders for our self-guided walking tour folders. You'll find them at the Riverton Library and at the

Victorian Thymes.

Thanks also to Sarah Guertler, who has accepted the appointment as Publicity Chairman.

Morgan Cemetery:

Preliminary approval has been given for the sale of a strip of land facing Parry Ave., with a few minor details remaining that should be settled without further delay. In anticipation of the long awaited change of ownership, Mr. Brewer has done some trimming-up and trash removal in the cemetery and adjoining field, and we look forward to the time when Morgan Cemetery will finally be restored and cared for. Anyone with even a smattering of knowledge about our local history can find many familiar names recorded on headstones there, as well as those of family members, and will be glad that the end of many years of neglect is in sight.

Clarification:

In the last issue of Gaslight News, an article about preservation and the historic district confused some of our readers when mention was made of the laws enacted this year that make regulations at local levels pertaining to them, binding. Riverton has an area designated locally as "historic", with rules pertaining to construction or alterations within the area (exterior) requiring a permit, and calling for a review, before work begins, by an Architectural Review Committee, appointed by the Planning Board, to approve work that is compatible with the structure/neighborhood, or to suggest more suitable alternatives. Riverton's ordinance is ADVISORY, not mandatory, and the final decision is made by the owner.

All too often, where a permissive ordinance is tried, a fine piece of architecture will be altered by a succession of owners who follow a trend of the moment, ultimately destroying its identity and value. Many communities have begun with an advisory, or permissive plan, and, one by one, are adopting mandatory plans, as they experience the loss of integrity of buildings/neighborhoods at an alarming rate. In March of this year legislation, enacted in this state in January, became effective: an amendment to the Municipal Land Use Law. This recognizes preservation as a vital part of a local community's planning, and backs up regulations established to carry it out.

Any program, to be successful, needs some basics: first, good communication and cooperation within a municipal government; second, continuing education for residents, since even though a population may be stable, in numbers, the individual owners tend to change more often than in the past; and third, a review committee trained and experienced in architectural preservation and restoration, in the styles and periods related to the structure being reviewed, in local area development, in materials, methods, and colors of the period and area, and something of where compatible materials and experienced workmen can be found today. They need also to have that charisma that results in successful persuasion. It's a big order, takes time and dedication--but without these things, chances for success are slim.

One thing that would be helpful, here, would be to have a paragraph included in the borough Directory identifying the historic area and extended coverage; regulations that determine when a permit is needed and whose responsibility it is to get it, as well as fees involved; and a statement that proposed work is to be reviewed BEFORE any work is begun.

Riverton's heritage is worth preserving, but until more of our residents know what it is that is valuable, and how to go about keeping it--without ignoring those aspects of progress that are both inevitable and reasonable--misunderstandings will crop up.

Reminders:

According to our by-laws, dues are to be paid on or before November 1st, each year. If you have not yet renewed your membership, or wish to become a member, please do so now. For only \$2 (\$1 for "seniors") you have 5 good programs and receive quarterly newsletters each year--a real bargain. To help meet rising costs (printing, postage, insurance) we have asked each family to add \$1 in addition to membership of individuals, and remind our members to include it; the alternative is to raise dues for everyone.

Saturday, Dec. 13: Riverton Library's House Tour, 5-10 p.m. Tickets, \$5
Dec. 15-23: Smithville Mansion Tours: theme, the Music of Christmas. \$2.50
Hourly tours weekdays, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; evenings by reservation. Call
(265-5068) for reservations and additional information.
Burlington County Historical Society, in Burlington on High Street, has a special
Christmas display--call for hours, or see newspapers.
Watch newspapers for notices of many house tours, during the Christmas season, both
in our own general area and in Philadelphia. They are always beautiful, and have be-
come a traditional part of the Season's festivities.

Yesterday....

In 1848 the governor of New Jersey issued the following proclamation: Whereas, the
citizens of this State during another year, have been placed under renewed obligations
to Almighty God, for the health which they have enjoyed, for the prosperity which has
prevailed, for the peace to which they have been restored, and for all the bounties of
His Providence the richer (blessings) of His Grace;

I do therefore set apart and appoint Thursday the 23rd day of November next, as a day
of Public Thanksgiving and Praise.

And I do hereby respectfully, yet earnestly, recommend that my fellow citizens, on that
day, to abstain from secular pursuits and to assemble in their several places of public
worship; there to render unto God a tribute of united and grateful praise, and humbly
to supplicate Him to continue His mercies to us, and to extend the blessings of civil
and religious liberty to all the nations of the world; Given under my hand and privy
seal, at the city of Trenton, the 17th of October in the year of 1848, and of the inde-
pendence of the United States the 73rd. Dan'l Haines

In 1851, the year Riverton was founded, there was an active group seeking prison reform.
They proposed starting a Library in the Burlington county prison, paid for by private
subscription and under the care of the Keeper. The Library would contain books on
religion, science, history, etc.--subjects "conducive to the elevation of morals and
mentality of the convicts". Five executives of reform signed the proposal: one was
Dr. Joseph Parrish, father of two of Riverton's founders--Dillwyn and Wm. D. Parrish .

Around the same time, one Mr. Bettie was boring for water on his farm near Haddonfield,
and brought up particles of gold and silver ores, which were analyzed and found to be
quite pure. Currency, in those days, included a half-dime, which was small and not
popular, especially in the South. It was replaced with a 3¢ piece which, although even
smaller, was acceptable--possibly because it lowered the prices of some things.

Postage was free for newspapers printed and sent to customers within the same county,
and rates for letters were 2¢ extra if not prepaid. The Dead-Letter office accumulated
5 bushel bags of dead letters in just 3 months' time, and emptied them into a ravine
and "gave them to the flames". Godey's Lady Book, for January 1851, was described
as "a superb number, beautifully embellished with engravings of great excellence and
finish, and containing, as it always does, a large variety of superior reading--Godey
will not or cannot be excelled. Ladies will of course send their subscription money
at once."

By 1890 there had been much progress within local towns, as with the rest of the country.
There were still no taxes to bite into fortunes that could be made by astuteness and by
hard work, and an increasing number of families were able to enjoy "luxuries" that until
very recently, were unheard of. Bathrooms with huge (by today's standards) stationery
bathtubs were appearing, some even with the new white porcelain lining, instead of the
customary zinc lining. Tubs were often raised on large feet, or else boxed in with
dark, narrow wainscot. Since travelling had become "easier", trips were taken to
England--still a favorite place, since Anglo-Saxons still made up the largest group of
Americans--the Continent, the Orient, the Holy-Lands. Speed was now possible: in
New York a daring lady reporter embarked on a trip to beat the 80-day around-the-world-
record of Jules Verne's fiction. Her travels were reported in the papers, bets were made,
and to everyone's astonishment, she did it! Nellie Bly circled the world in 73 days!
The crack train named for this record-breaking reporter, passed through Riverton at about
noon each weekday, for many years after that.

The 1890-91 directory printed by the New Era noted that Bell and Frank had succeeded Samuel Leeds as proprietors of his grocery store in Cinnaminson--and added that a member of the firm gave special attention to "the Riverton trade". Jos. M. Roberts, on the point, had just reopened in the brick store that replaced the old frame one lost to a fire, and advertised groceries, provisions, fresh meats, hardware, woodenware, crockery, glassware, flour, feed, hay, paints, oils & brushes, boy's, ladies and childrens boots, shoes, slippers, rubbers, hats, caps, dry goods, notions, trimmings, ribbons, trunks, lamps, and stationery. !!!!! And Wolfschmidt's "new tonsorial parlor", adjoining it on the Main St. side, offered the latest brands of cigars and all kinds of chewing and smoking tobacco, and snuff. C. T. Woolston said he was beginning to make a new shelvin (shelving) wagon, long wanted by local farmers. And a few years later he would offer portable lights, when a law was passed requiring moving vehicles to carry one after sunset. There were 4 fire alarm boxes in Riverton, located in private homes--one at Bank/Howard, one on Thomas, and two on Main St. The Columbia and Twilight made regular stops at the pier, twice daily, and there were 21 scheduled train stops at Riverton and Palmyra stations daily, bound for Philadelphia, between 5:50 am and 12:07 am. (Mail and other trains that did not stop not included in this count)

Only a few years before this, notions of what a young lady could, or could not do, were very strict. Men could enjoy skating on the ice, but it was frowned on for a lady. One reporter apparently saw a young woman skating by herself on a pond in the moonlight, enjoying the freedom of gliding over the ice and believing herself to be safe from disapproving eyes. He painted a picture with his words as he described her grace as she circled, skirts flowing about her, and her rosy cheeks and expression of delight and she enjoyed the moment. He added that it would be so much better for young ladies to get out in the fresh air and enjoy the exercise in this sport than to follow the practice of huddling, wrapped up, near the stove and trying to read away the winter's weather. Bicycle riding, so popular by 1890, was also taboo for the ladies at first, but they persisted and were soon enjoying both activities.

By 1908 the number of automobiles around town was increasing, and it was noted that "even the farmers are buying them." They were used only in good weather, though. Snowfalls were heavier, then: on Christmas day in 1909 there was a 21-inch snowfall. For many years Collins' supplied the horses used to pull the wooden wedge that opened a path on Riverton's streets. Day or night, if the snow reached 6" depth the wedges were out, because people had to get to the trains to get to work. (No such thing as a "snow day", then!) Later on, John Denneler cleared the county roads with a huge plow that required 8 horses to pull it. There was a smaller one, drawn by 4 horses, for widening passageways made in the middle of the town streets. Fireplugs froze in the cold, and firemen worked long hours to thaw them, using hot water or by building fires if that didn't work. In 1917 the river froze over in February, for the first time in several years, and the youngsters enjoyed skating on the river, in large numbers. The cold had wrecked the heating system of Palmyra High School and had burst pipes in both Riverton and Palmyra schools, and the children took advantage of their holiday.

And on that note, we extend a wish to our members and friends for a blessed and happy Holiday season, and a reminder to make note of the January meeting now--the next Newsletter doesn't fall due until February.

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