



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

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“History of the Riverton Country Club”

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday October 1st, 2007 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program in the Media Center of the Riverton School at Fifth and Howard Streets.

Bruce E. Beans and Craig Ammerman. will host a book talk on the history of the Riverton Country Club.

Join us to learn more about the fascinating history of the Riverton Country Club and it’s golf course designed by architect Donald J. Ross. Bruce and Craig will also share stories about how golfer Byron Nelson chose Riverton to qualify for a PGA championship and how two of the best regional women amateurs came to play at Riverton Country Club.

Bruce E. Beans is a free lance writer and award-winning journalist from Bucks County. He was the editor and author of two important wildlife preservation books including his 2003 title “*Endangered and Threatened Wildlife of New Jersey*” edited by Bruce Beans and Larry Niles. Mr. Beans is also the author of “*Eagle’s Plume: The Struggle to Preserve the Life and Haunts of America’s Bald Eagle*”. Mr. Ammerman recently retired as a member of the United States Golf Association’s executive committee, he is a member of Riverton Country Club and a resident of Cherry Hill, New Jersey.



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2007

BRUCE E. BEANS, WRITER;
CRAIG AMMERMAN, EDITOR
S. SHETH, ART DIRECTOR

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

A VIEW FROM THE TREE HOUSE

Welcome to our 2007-2008 program year. I write my first President's message while enjoying a leafy, third floor, bird's-eye-view that overlooks a lovely row of slate-tiled, mansard roofs. I can almost imagine how magnificent Riverton was when these homes were first built, and my view transports me to the 1800s. Writing from my "tree house," I am reminded of how many things in life come full circle. In late May, Preservation New Jersey, a nonprofit organization in Trenton, announced that the Charles Biddle Mansion, Bank and Lippincott Avenues, was selected to its list of the "10 Most Endangered Historic Sites" in New Jersey. The organization started this program thirteen years ago to attract attention to historic sites and buildings whose existence is threatened by "inappropriate public policy, demolition, or neglect." Preservation New Jersey offers resources to homeowners and historical commissions to find possible solutions for restoration and preservation. We are hopeful that the Biddle Mansion might be restored to its former full glory someday. Ironically and fortuitously, the Historical Society was contacted several weeks ago by a descendant of the Charles Biddle family, who generously donated the 1868 wedding dress that was worn by Hannah McIlvain Biddle, Charles Biddle's wife. In the Riverton Census of 1900, Hannah was still living in the home at 207 Bank Avenue with her 3 daughters and 2 sons. Our intentions to display the dress at a future HSR meeting are being planned.

In June, the Society had a very successful display during Victorian Day. Over 215 people visited our temporary home on Main Street. We were joined by a Civil War era re-enactment by several members of the 14th Regiment New Jersey Volunteers Company H. Many thanks to the Riverton Business and Civic Association, HSR Board member Phyllis Rodgers, and the Victorian Day Committee, for providing us with a perfect location. During the day's opening ceremonies, Riverton Mayor Bob Martin helped unveil the new History of Riverton plaque donated to the Borough by the HSR. The permanent sign is located on Broad Street in front of Zena's Patisserie.

At Riverton School's 8th grade graduation ceremony in June, I was very pleased to announce the inaugural winner of the *Historical Society of Riverton's* **BETTY B. HAHLE EXCELLENCE IN HISTORY AWARD**. Named for our esteemed historian, this annual award of a \$100 savings bond is given to the 8th grader who best completes an oral history project of a Riverton resident. Riverton School social studies teacher and HSR Board member, John McCormick, created the 8th grade history project to capture, via audio and video recordings, the stories of notable Rivertonians. Miss Jennifer Pacek, now a 9th grader at Palmyra High School, won the 2007 award for her videotaped interview with 100-year-old Mae Goodwin, who is believed to be the oldest living graduate of Riverton School. Please look for an article about Miss Pacek in the next Gaslight issue.

In other Society news, the Board extends its heartfelt thanks to Bob Bednarek, who has served as our President for the past four years. We are indebted to Bob for his many hours of dedicated service leading the Historical Society. Bob will continue on the board as Membership Chair.

Regarding membership, please review your Gaslight News address label. Your dues are paid through the year that is listed. Membership dues for 2008 should be paid by December 31, 2007. We appreciate the continuing support of all of our members.

Please join us at our first program of the year on Monday, October 1, 7:30 PM at Riverton School on the history of the Riverton Country Club.

ARTICLE BY PRISCILLA TAYLOR
PRESIDENT OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

THINGS GONE BY...



HANNAH MCILVAIN BIDDLE

Hannah McIlvain Biddle's wedding dress circa 1868 was donated to the Historical Society of Riverton by Betsy Rendall and other members of the Biddle family last summer. The dress was worn by nine generations of the family. Hannah McIlvain was born in 1848 and married Charles Miller Biddle in 1868. The family lived in the green stone house, popularly known in Riverton as the "Biddle Mansion", located at the corner of Lippincott and Bank Avenues. Hannah and Charles had six children: Anna, born 11/24/1869; Martha McIlvain, born



3/28/1871; Helen, born 5/16/1875; Hannah McIlvain and her twin brother Charles Miller, born 8/14/1878; and Robert, Jr. born 2/19/1880. Hannah died on March 31, 1905 at *Marlborough House* in Atlantic City after a long illness, three months of it away from her home in Riverton. The wedding dress was passed down to Robert Biddle Jr., the youngest son, who died in 1918, the same year as his daughter Laura was born. Laura Biddle Rendall passed the dress to her daughter-in-law, Betsy, who, with family approval, as the dress was too fragile to be worn again, donated Hannah Biddle's wedding dress to the Historical Society of Riverton.

Betsy Rendall offered the dress originally to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The museum was unable to accept the donation as the dress had been altered. Betsy then offered the dress to Andalusia, the 19th century manor house in Bucks County that was the home for generations of the Biddles. The curator at Andalusia, Connie Houchins, realized that the dress was not from the Nicholas Biddle family of Andalusia, one of Philadelphia's first families, and therefore they were

also unable to accept the gift. As it turned out, Connie had also worked as an archivist for the Historical Society in 2000-2001 and she realized that Hannah's wedding dress was attributed to the Biddle family of Riverton. Connie contacted Daniel Campbell who introduced her and Betsy Rendall to the Historical Society of Riverton. We were thrilled to accept Betsy Rendall's generous gift of Hannah's wedding dress to be kept for posterity in Riverton.



ARTICLE BY PAT BRUNKER
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

The wedding dress is made from silk satin and has a fitted bodice, cap sleeves and a full skirt with a train. A waist sash forms a bow in the back. A lace ruffle adorns the wide neckline. It has a lace-up bodice. Photographs of the dress and a picture of Hannah McIlvain Biddle was obtained from the *Friends Historical Library*, which is the official depository for the archives of *Swarthmore College*.

Gaslight News



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON
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Priscilla Taylor, President
Pat Bruner, Vice President
Nancy Washington, Secretary
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Membership; Gerald Weaber Jr. and
John McCormick, *Editors*

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF RIVERTON**

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON



The Board of the Historical Society consists of twelve dedicated volunteers who share an interest in the history and preservation of Riverton. You are familiar with the saying, "*it takes a village*". The Historical Society needs many hands to help keep us running. If you have the time and interest, please check below and return this form either in person to Priscilla Taylor or by mail to PO Box 112, Riverton, NJ, 08077. We welcome any time you are able to volunteer!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

E-MAIL & TELEPHONE _____

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| <input type="checkbox"/> MEETINGS: HELP HOST, SET UP, & DONATE REFRESHMENTS & SNACKS. | <input type="checkbox"/> PROGRAMS: SELECT INTERESTING LOCAL HISTORY SPEAKERS. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL EVENTS: HELP PLAN, ORGANIZE AND STAFF HSR EVENTS. | <input type="checkbox"/> PHOTOGRAPHY: TAKE PICTURES/ VIDEO OF MEETINGS & EVENTS. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISPLAYS: CREATE VISUAL DISPLAYS FOR PUBLIC EVENTS WORKING WITH OUR ARCHIVIST. | <input type="checkbox"/> RESEARCH & WRITING: CONTRIBUTE ARTICLES TO THE NEWSLETTER & HSR WEB SITE. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NEWSLETTER: HELP WITH GASLIGHT NEWS PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION. | |