



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

November—December 2007

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## A History of the Welsbach Streetlighting Company



The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday November 19th, 2007 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program in the Media Center of the Riverton School at Fifth and Howard Streets.

Our program features a talk by HSR members Jeff Cole and John McCormick

about the Welsbach Gas Streetlighting Company.

The lecture will include information about Auer von Welsbach, the Austrian scientist who invented the incandescent gas mantle, the Welsbach Streetlighting Company, and our original and reproduction gas streetlamps which line Riverton streets. A fascinating slide presentation will highlight images taken from various primary source materials and current photographs of streetlamps.

The first gas streetlamp in Riverton was installed in 1908, on Lippincott Avenue near Broad Street as a test piece. Shortly after Riverton installed 51 of the new automated lighting system and Palmyra installed 60.

After some decades, many lamps had fallen into disrepair, many had peeling paint, some would not burn, and all were dirty and neglected. As a result of letters sent to Public Service gas and Electric Company by residents who complained, a Mr. Cook of PSE&G was appointed gaslight maintenance man. Apparently a dedicated em-

ployee, who said to Betty Hahle in the 1970s that he loved that job, he kept a detailed notebook in which he made entries regarding the condition of each streetlamp and the care that it received.

In 1978 the US Congress passed legislation which threatened to literally shut off the gas for Riverton's streetlamps in the name of energy conservation. Many opposed the move, feeling that it would destroy the image of the Victorian town. The state Board of Public Utilities was petitioned for an exemption by the Historical Society of Riverton championed by President Betty Hahle, which was granted.

Later, around 1999, a number of residents, organizations, and businesses purchased an additional 44 (continued p. 5)



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PART TWO OF BETTY HAHLE'S FEATURE ARTICLE ON

# Remembering Frances Ruppert

The *Millrose Games* celebrated its 100th anniversary this year at the February 2007 meet at the Madison Square Garden in New York City. Ed Bagley, in an article found on the internet at <http://ezinearticles.com> said that the *Millrose Games* is the most prestigious indoor invitational track and field meet in the world. He quoted sportswriter Dick Patrick's article in *USA Today* on February 2nd, 2007, saying that although that sport has fallen on hard times in the United States lately, it still is the only survivor of a once vibrant indoor circuit that the USA monopolized. Bagley continued that it is able to continue because of the famous Wanamaker Mile competition and enough world-class athletes to merit live coverage on both Friday and Saturday.

The *Wanamaker Mile* is difficult and different because *Madison Square Garden* has a 160 yard banked-board track compared to normal tracks of 200 meters. Because it is shorter, the turns are more difficult and it takes eleven laps rather than eight to complete the distance.

The games first gained prominence in the 1920s, then in 1934 Herb Schmertz, a Wanamaker em-

ployee, became the *Millrose Meet* director, followed by his son Howard in 1975. Howard continued until 2003, and was meet director emeritus for the 100th running of the *Millrose Games*. The new meet director is Mark Wetmore of Global Athletics Management. The 2007 winner was Bernard Lagat, who finished in 3:54:81. He is a Kenyan born American citizen who won the Wanamaker Mile in 2005 in 3:52:87, a *Madison Square Garden* record.

ARTICLE BY BETTY B. HAHLE  
RIVERTON TOWN HISTORIAN

PAST PRESIDENT, HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

In 1908 Rodman Wanamaker initiated the Wanamaker-Millrose games, which became widely known as perhaps the most prestigious indoor track-and-field event in the world. Millrose was Mr. Wanamaker's country estate near Jenkintown, Pa. He also inaugurated the Wanamaker Mile, and reportedly began the tradition of playing The Star Spangled Banner at a sporting event.

## Biddle Wedding Dress to be Displayed

The Historical Society of Riverton is sponsoring one of the homes that will be featured during Riverton Library's House Tour on Saturday, December 8.

The Society will be designing and installing a temporary display on the first floor of 408 Main Street, currently owned by Dr. and Mrs. Anthony Cherico. This is the same location the Society used for Victorian Day, which proved to be very successful as over 200 people visited our June display.

One item that the HSR will showcase in the House Tour display will be the circa 1868 wedding dress worn by Hannah McIlvain Biddle of Riverton. The dress was recently donated to the HSR by members of the Biddle family.

December 8 will mark the first time that the HSR will display the beautiful gown to the public.

Admission to the Historical Society display will be included as part of the House Tour ticket. Tickets will be on sale at Riverton Library. For more information, call the Library, 829-2476.



If any HSR members would like to loan their Victorian-era items for use during the display, please contact Priscilla Taylor, 786-3555. We are in need of furniture and lamps.

— PRISCILLA TAYLOR

# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

## Eighth-Graders Conduct Oral Histories

Last spring, Riverton Public School teacher, John McCormick, charged each of his American history students with doing an oral history interview of a Riverton resident on some aspect of local history. Adults of all ages were interviewed and shared stories of everyday events like hanging out at Keating's Drug Store, school remembrances, or swimming in the Delaware River, and recollections of life during the Great Depression, the 1960's, and the Vietnam era.



Photo provided by Mabel Kloos  
Jennifer Pacek won an award for her videotaped interview with 100-year-old Mae Goodwin, part of a history project for school.

Then eighth-grader, Jennifer Pacek, interviewed longtime resident, Mae Goodwin, who, at 100 years of age, may be Riverton School's oldest surviving graduate. Jen found that she could compare and contrast her school experience with that of Mae.

Mae told of kids taking rides on fire trucks in celebration of the end of World War II, she did not particularly like school, and she recalled that in school, bad students were whipped with a strap. Even decades ago, children like young Mae went sledding at Double Bunkers at the Riverton Country Club.

Jennifer kept a detailed log in which she tracked the steps toward completing the complex project and she wrote an essay about it. Jennifer wrote that Mae was "...the perfect person to talk to," and that she was, "...happy to have made a new friend."

In June 2007, the HSR awarded a plaque and \$100 US savings bond to Jennifer as the first recipient of the *Historical Society of Riverton's BETTY B. HAHLE EXCELLENCE IN HISTORY AWARD*.

What made Jennifer Pacek's oral history project noteworthy were her attention to detail in acquiring the necessary oral history interview skills, the interview transcript, plus insightful personal observations expressed in her essay.

More than twenty adults generously granted interviews to our young Riverton School historians. John McCormick, Riverton School history teacher and HSR board member, acknowledged the efforts of all of his eighth grade students and credited them with providing a community service to Riverton by participating in the oral history project. Mr. McCormick is especially grateful for the mentoring the adult participants offered to the students during the project. The students' audio and video interviews will be compiled and made available for public viewing.

The eighth grade class of 2008 will participate in another oral history project and conduct interviews perhaps unified by the theme of Dreer's Nursery. If you or someone you know would be willing to be interviewed regarding recollections of that once thriving Riverton industry, Dreer's Nursery, please contact Mr. McCormick.

— JOHN MCCORMICK



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AND THE BETTY B. HAHLE EXCELLENCE IN HISTORY AWARD PLEASE CONTACT JOHN MCCORMICK AT 856-764-1551 OR BY E-MAIL AT [jlmcormick@comcast.net](mailto:jlmcormick@comcast.net)

# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON Welsbach Presentation Slated for Nov. 19

(from p. 1) gas streetlights for the town, most of which were installed on Main Street.

That we even have the gas streetlights to enjoy today is due to a combination of events—the invention of the incandescent mantle, the development of the gas streetlamp industry, efforts of local residents to fight for an exemption to keep them lit in the 1970s, and finally the generosity of individuals and groups who added to our streetlamp inventory in recent years. This program is a tribute to that debt to the past.

This program is the result of research using a number of primary and secondary sources. Jeff Cole, the presenter and the one who initiated this worthwhile project, used Welsbach catalogs, company literature, trade publications, texts, internet resources, advertising collectibles, and his own recollections to frame the narrative about the development of the Welsbach Streetlighting Company. Betty Hahle contributed more infor-

mation from own files which was pertinent to the Riverton gas lamps and outlined her battles to preserve the lamps. Professional historian and author Paul W. Schopp generously loaned the Welsbach materials in his library for research. Finally, a slide presentation was fashioned around all of this material by John McCormick.

All of these topics and more will be covered in this comprehensive presentation so please plan to attend particularly if you able to contribute additional information. Those in attendance are encouraged to bring to the meeting any vintage photos, ephemera, or anecdotes relevant to the topic of Victorian era gas lamps which they wish to share during the program.

On display will be Riverton postcards and various Welsbach ephemera, lamp parts and collectibles. Refreshments will be served after the program.

— JOHN MCCORMICK



## Riverton's Images of Yesteryear...



**NEVOCHROME**  
LEIPZIG DRESDEN  
BERLIN  
Printed in Germany  
Pos  
Dear Readers,  
Do you have an  
image or story to  
share which others  
would enjoy?  
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directly at 856-764  
-1551.  
Regards,  
John McCormick,  
No. E 2202 Pub. by W. H. Stiles, Druggist, Riverton, N. J.

To:  
Gaslight News  
Subscribers

See about 130 vintage  
images of Riverton on  
our website.

NY Times Online Archive a Bonanza for History Buffs

The complete backfile of The New York Times can now be searched from NYTimes.com, over 13 million articles in all—and more than a few are about Riverton, NJ. You can search the Article Archive back to 1851. Articles in the Public Domain (1851-1922) are free. Premium articles can be purchased with accompanying photos, charts and graphs in PDF for \$3.95 each or 10 articles for \$15.95.

**WELCH IS NOW CHAMPION.**

August 3, 1894

**Killed Ninety-eight Birds in the Match for the Riverton Plate.**

RIVERTON, N. J., Aug. 2.—The sportsmen who journeyed to the grounds of the Riverton Gun Club to-day were amply repaid for their trouble, as they were enabled to witness one of the finest exhibitions of trap shooting ever given in this country. The occasion was the sixth match in the series for the Riverton Challenge Plate.

Here you can find accounts of trap shooting contests at the renowned Riverton Gun Club mentioned in the Mar/Apr 2006 *Gaslight News*. And, yes, they used real birds.

**WHERE TIMES RACE ENDS**

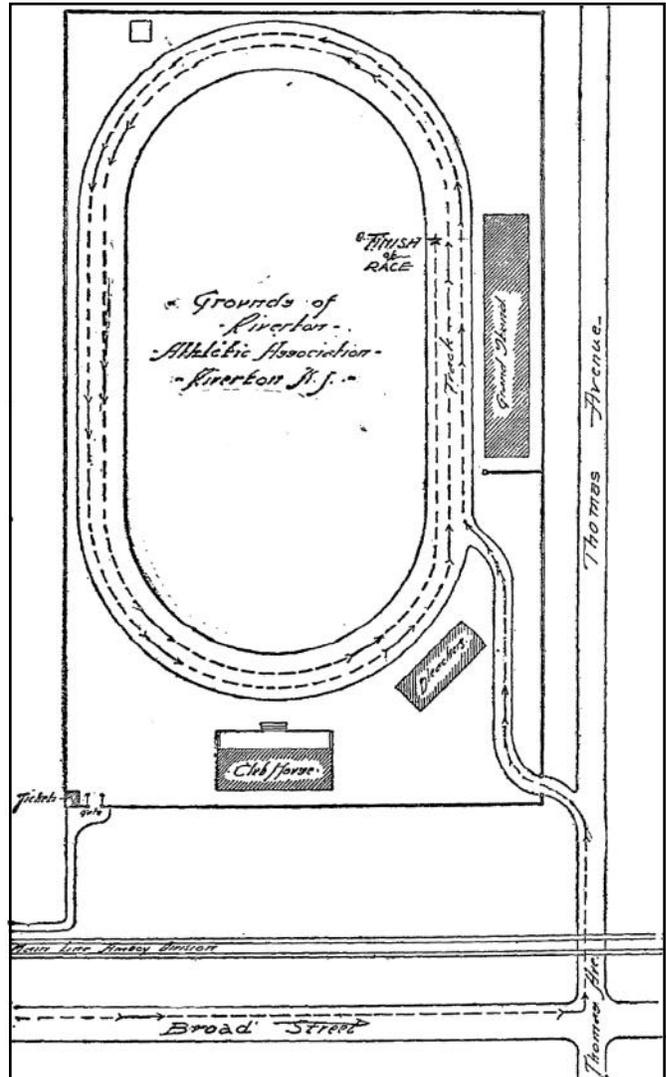
**The Fine Grounds of the Riverton Athletic Association.**

June 4, 1895

**CLUB FORMERLY A BASEBALL TEAM**

**Organized in 1865, It Won Many Notable Victories Over Amateur Nines — Its Prominent Officers.**

RIVERTON, N. J., June 3.—Few of the so-called athletic clubs in this country have made so distinguished a success as the Riverton Athletic Association. Organized in 1865, the club has had many ups and downs, until now it is a comparatively wealthy organization, with magnificent grounds and a reputation in the world of sports that is second to none.



The “magnificent grounds” of the Riverton Athletic Association were the site of many regional sports competitions. Note the Thomas Avenue and Broad Street location.

**Amateur's Long Swim In the Delaware.**

*Special to The New York Times.*

August 9, 1909

PHILADELPHIA, Aug. 8.—Charles B. Durborow, an amateur swimmer of Riverton, who a few weeks ago swam from Tacony to Burlington Island and the Upper Delaware in five hours, this afternoon swam from Market Street wharf, Chester to Market Street wharf, Philadelphia, a distance of 14 38-100 miles in just exactly 5 hours 40 minutes and 30 seconds. Durborow does not yet know how to swim the overarm stroke or any of the modern speed strokes used by fast swimmers in distance racing against time.

Now, *that* is a swim. Do your own search query for yacht club, country (see p. 6)

www.gashightnews.homestead.com  
Rivertonhistory@usa.com Website  
856-786-6961 E-mail

OF RIVERTON  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Website: John McCormick, Editor  
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Nancy Washington, Secretary  
Pat Brunke, Vice President  
Priscilla Taylor, President

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**Gashight News**

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(from p. 5) club, golf, or maybe even your name.

There are early accounts of our battles with the Japanese beetle, reports of rail and traffic acci-

## WILL USE MILES OF POISON.

March 26, 1916

### Great Areas in New Jersey to be Made Deadly to Japanese Beetle.

The Japanese beetle, a small insect pest recently imported, that attacks a great variety of plants, has become established over an area of approximately 10,000 acres near Riverton, N. J. The Federal Department of Agriculture in co-operation with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture is waging a campaign of eradication, or if eradication is impossible, of such control as to hold the insect within a limited territory.

dents, sports and business news, obituaries, and more. This extensive archive will certainly prove to be a rich resource for articles of local and regional historical interest. A caveat, however,

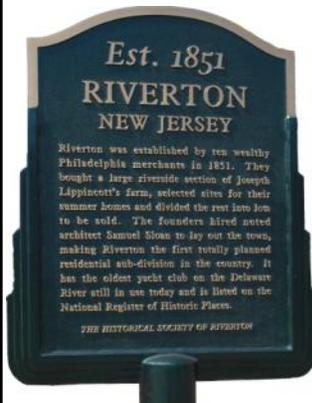
You will get addicted to following up on provocative headlines such as this one from November 1894, "TRIED TO MURDER THE BABY; ACT OF A SERVANT GIRL IN RIVERTON, N.J., CRAZED BY ANGER."

Have fun at <http://www.nytimes.com>

— JOHN MCCORMICK

## HSR Donates Historic Marker

This historic marker relates the history of River-



ton. The marker was purchased by the Historical Society and donated to the Borough of Riverton. It is permanently installed on the brick walk in front of Zena's bakery on Broad Street and was unveiled on Victorian Day, June 2007. — PRISCILLA TAYLOR