

Gaslight News

September 2011

Historical Society of Riverton

vol. XXXXI, no. 3 (#145)

Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978



Riverton Little League Team 1954
PHOTO CREDIT: BENJAMIN PERCIVAL

**PARKS & REC
MEETING TUES,
SEPT 27 8 pm
BORO HALL**

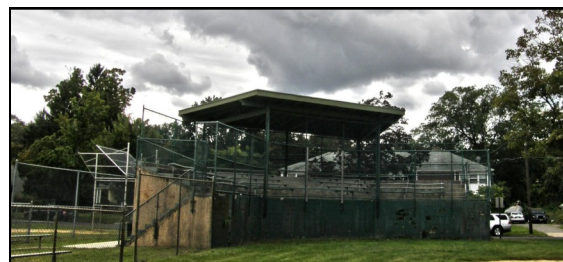


Sept. 28 HSR meet to focus on Riverton Memorial Park Improvements

HSR members to consider a response to Borough's plan to raze the grandstand

Join the Historical Society of Riverton for a special meeting on Wednesday, September 28th from 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. at Riverton Public School to review plans for the reconstruction of the grandstand at the Riverton Memorial Park.

The Borough of Riverton is considering a plan to raze the current grandstand in the park and build a new structure in 2012. Councilman Jeff Myers invites the public to attend a Park & Recreation Committee meeting at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, September 27th at Riverton Borough Hall to learn more about the proposed grandstand project and to offer public input to the committee.



Recent storm clouds over the 80 year old grandstand hint at the controversy surrounding it; some want it demolished and replaced with a new structure while others favor preserving and repairing the familiar gathering place of their youth. PHOTO CREDIT: JMC

The Borough of Riverton acquired the former Dreer Nursery tract that was to become Riverton Memorial Park in 1923 and dedicated it on Independence Day in

In this issue

**SEPT. 28 HSR MEET
TO FOCUS ON PARK
IMPROVEMENTS**
- GERALD WEABER

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**THE LYCEUM
INSTRUCTED,
ENTERTAINED,
CULTIVATED, ETC...**
- MRS. PATRICIA
SMITH SOLIN

1

**A REPORT FROM
THE FRONT**
- JMC

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See **PARK** on 2

The Lyceum instructed, entertained, cultivated, and amused Riverton's elite

In 1886, "dissatisfaction was very marked" when Riverton's first one-room frame schoolhouse, located on Fourth Street between Main and Howard and built in 1865, could not accommodate an overflow crowd of ticket holders for a special event. That night Riverton's Stephen Flanagan offered a plot of land on Fourth Street between Main Street Church Lane for the construction of a new, large building for "public entertainments,

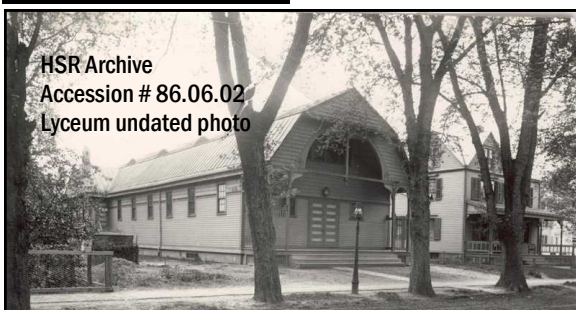
dances, fairs, etc."

For more than the next thirty years, gossip and society pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, other local periodicals, and even the *New York Times* noted "Riverton's wealthy residents" and "some of the best families of Philadelphia and the upper Delaware towns" attending dances for "sweet charity's sake," and various other entertainment, educational, and social functions at the Lyceum.

The Riverton Lyceum Association incorporated on April 6, 1886. Thomas Roberts

See **LYCEUM** on 3

HSR Archive
Accession # 86.06.02
Lyceum undated photo



Save the Date



A FREE HSR PROGRAM
AT RIVERTON SCHOOL

October 19, 2011

7:00PM

**THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG:
WHERE WERE THE WOMEN?**

UNDERSTANDING THE CIVIL WAR
FROM A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT
PERSPECTIVE

WITH

HISTORIAN,

HAGLEY MUSEUM GUIDE

AND

costumed presenter

Jane Peters Estes



Jane Peters Estes
PHOTO CREDIT: HOAG LEVINS

To preserve and refurbish or build new has benefits each way to consider

PARK from 1

1931 in memory to the soldiers and sailors from Riverton who served their country during World War I. The circa 1882 Pennsylvania Railroad Train Shed was moved from its original site at Cedar & Broad Streets to its current location in the park in 1998. At that time, the Historical Society of Riverton opposed the relocation of the historic structure to the park.

Recent improvements to the park are credited to the Borough of Riverton and the Burlington County Freeholder Board. The second round of funds awarded to Burlington County municipalities under the Municipal Park Development Assistance Program ranged from \$20,000 to the maximum of \$250,000. All municipalities that applied for park grants received an award. The borough received a second-round park improvement grant of \$250,000 for a new grandstand at Memorial Park.

The first round of Memorial Park improvements that have already been completed included upgrading and enlarging the soccer and baseball fields, improving access to the park trails by the Pompeston

Creek, as well planting trees and installing benches. The individual grants ranged from \$20,000 to the program's maximum of \$250,000.

Members of Riverton's Park and Recreation Commission include Jason Cioci, Joe Creighton, Jeff Elliott, Kevin Murphy, Paul Papenburg, Jim Quinn, and Tim Souder.

Following the Historical Society meeting on Wednesday, September 28th from 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m., the board will meet to discuss the feedback from members and consider the next steps in the process.

Please RSVP to Gerald Weaber 856-786-6961 to reserve your seat.

Remember: Park & Recreation meeting on September 27 at 8 p.m. at Riverton Borough Hall followed by the HSR meeting the next day, at 7 p.m. on September 28 at Riverton School.

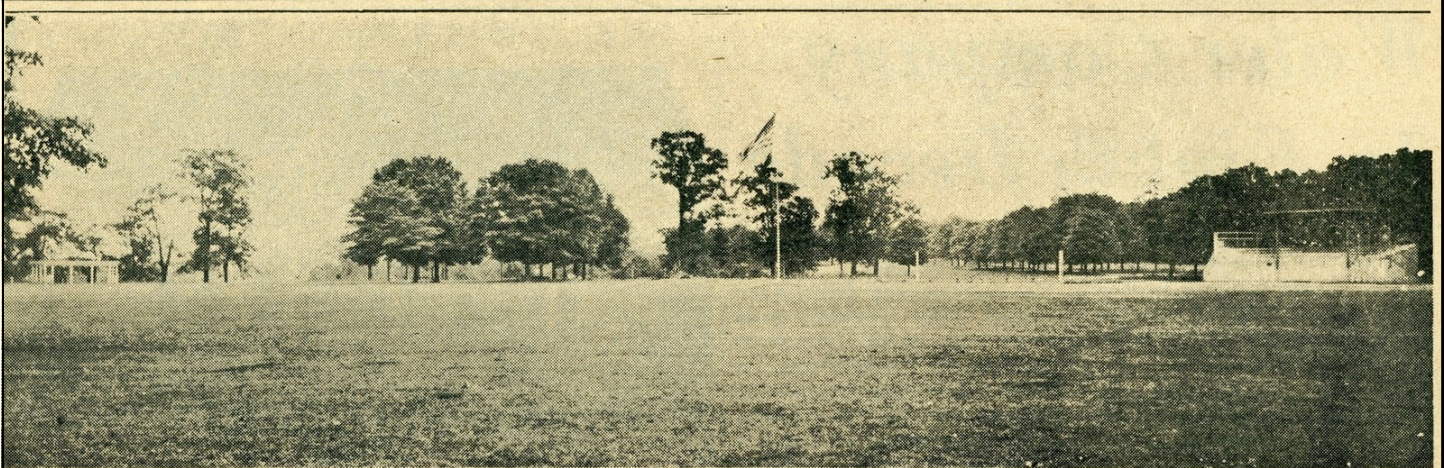
- GERALD WEAVER



Below, Riverton Memorial Park as it appeared shortly after its dedication in 1931. The grandstand is at the far right in this photo which appeared in the 75th Anniversary Issue of *The New Era* in 1965.

NEW ERA 75th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Page Nineteen



MEMORIAL PARK, Riverton, as it appeared shortly after its dedication, July 4, 1931.

The Lyceum provided education, culture, and entertainment to a past generation

LYCEUM from 1

served as the association's first president with Charles F. Flanagan fulfilling roles as secretary and treasurer. In short order, the group erected the new meeting place on the site and soon, Riverton had a splendid all-purpose auditorium, concert hall, lecture hall, photography studio, and meeting place unlike any in the area.

Danced for Sweet Charity's Sake Special to The Inquirer.

RIVERTON, N. J., July 3.—The annual dance for sweet charity's sake was held in the Riverton Lyceum this evening. The dance was given by Mrs. John C. S. Davis. The room was handsomely decorated with flags of all nations, the Stars and Stripes being most prominent. The assemblage included all the society people of the borough, together with some of the best families of Philadelphia and the upper Delaware towns.

"Danced for Sweet Charity's Sake"
Philadelphia Inquirer, July 4, 1900, Page 4

Notations on the 1911 Sanborn Insurance map reveal some details relating to the large and spacious frame construction building that once stood on Fourth Street, just off Main. Two furnaces provided heat for the audience's comfort and gas provided interior lighting for evening performances. Opposite the front entrance was located a stage for scenery, with curtains and footlights. A WC (water closet) conveniently stood in the back of the Lyceum.

The Lyceum Movement, named for the place where Aristotle taught in ancient Athens, started in Scotland sparked by the Industrial Revolution, and it soon spread to France and the US by the early 19th century. Such lyceums, or clubs, formed for "mutual improvement," sponsored lectures and debates on topics of current interest. At first, members of the lyceum took turns lecturing to each other and met in houses, churches, and schools.

The movement flourished before the Civil

War, numbering 3,000 by 1834, with education as its primary goal. Esteemed guest speakers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Daniel Webster, Susan B. Anthony, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry David Thoreau, bolstered the popularity further as they earned lecture fees making the rounds of the lyceum circuit.

In New Jersey by 1860, "people from all over (Burlington County) came to the Rancocas Lyceum to hear recitals, dramatic interpretation, poetry reading, and other literary events." In 1876, the nearby Westfield Lyceum and Literary Society offered its members "debates, readings, essays, etc."

Riverton's own Lyceum Association hosted a wide variety of educational opportunities as indicated in periodicals of the day. W. Hudson Shaw, a political scientist, and staff lecturer in history for the American Society of University Extension lectured in Riverton. His publicity proclaimed "Trains arrive a few minutes before the lecture and leave within 25 minutes." Attendees could subscribe for the full course of lectures for \$1.00, or enjoy a single lecture for 25¢. Riverton was one of many towns that paid the \$150 annual subscription for the series, and did so for at least seven summer sessions. Lecturers spoke on a broad scope of topics: history, literature, civics, economics, finance, sociology, science, painting, architecture, religion, ethics, philosophy and music.

Among the Board of Directors of the American Society of

See LYCEUM on 4

Save the Date

December 3, 2011

4-9:00PM

CANDLELIGHT
HOUSE TOUR

benefiting the

RIVERTON
FREE LIBRARY



\$15 tickets available at
The New Leaf,
Riverton Free Library
Beneficial Bank

also...

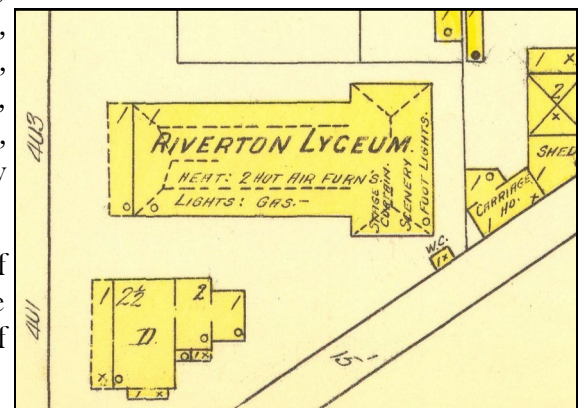
BE SURE TO VISIT THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF RIVERTON'S

Museum for a Day

AT
THE
NEW LEAF



Detail from a 1911 Sanborn Insurance Map of Riverton, NJ. Yellow indicates a frame building; other notations show the Lyceum to be one story and have a slate or tin roof. See article for more details.



The Lyceum's demise must have left a void for other Riverton clubs to fill



Please visit our
website at

rivertonhistory.com

You can further
check out this
topic in an
expanded online
version with more
text and images
than is practical
to display here.



LYCEUM from 3

University Extension were Isaac Clothier, Justus Strawbridge, and Henry Pancoast – all men who had connections with Riverton.

An intriguing fact is that Theodore Roosevelt lectured for the ASUE during two summer seasons in 1893 and 1894 prior to his presidency when he served as head of the US Civil Service Commission. According to the 1939 Anniversary Issue of *The New Era*, he stayed with Samuel Allen, a Pennsylvania Railroad executive who lived at 404 Lippincott, but the date of his stay is unknown. As it was typical for lecturers to board in local homes, it is quite possible that Mr. Roosevelt was here during the summer of either of the years that he lectured with the series, staying with the Allen family.

Few Riverton Lyceum official programs or newspaper notices have survived, so it is difficult to document many of the association's activities over its existence of more than three decades. Further, *The New Era*, Riverton's newspaper, which undoubtedly covered Lyceum events, is not on microfilm from 1886 through 1918, the period of the association. However, Riverton Lyceum and its "swells" made the social columns of Philadelphia and other local papers. So, beyond the educational mandate of the Riverton Lyceum Association, the building served many other purposes, including hosting political, civic, and charitable functions, as well as some of the premier parties and social events of Riverton.

Typical among them was what may have been one of the first events at the new venue—a dance hop at the Lyceum on the night of July 4th, 1887, attended by "the larger portion of Riverton's wealthy residents" with music furnished by the

The hop in the Lyceum, on Monday night, under the direction of Messrs. Charles Flannagan and Charles W. Davis, proved a success, the larger portion of Riverton's wealthy residents attending. Music was furnished by the Reese orchestra, of Philadelphia. Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. Charles

"July 4th Hop in the Lyceum"

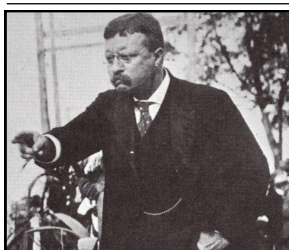
Philadelphia Inquirer, July 9, 1887, Page 7

Reese Orchestra of Philadelphia.

In July 1898, the Riverton Lyceum was the scene of a "Patriotic Progressive Euchre," for the benefit of the National Relief Association, an organization whose object was to direct aid for any sudden "...necessity arising from conflagration, or other disaster, epidemics, famine, or war..." Incidentally, euchre is a card game, similar to bridge in that it is a trick-taking card game played with four players in teams of two. Note that this "prominent social event" occurred during the Spanish-American War.

Fund raising and theater sometimes conspired to cause amateur actors to put on productions for the benefit of another organization. Members of the Riverton Dramatic Association presented "Under Two Flags" in the Lyceum on February 29, 1908, to raise money for the Riverton Athletic Association. The Riverton Players Club appeared January 12 and 13, 1912, at the Lyceum in "Captain Swift" to benefit the Riverton Field Club.

Also in 1908, Riverton's Lyceum hosted the 14th annual convention of the NJ State Federation of Women's Clubs, with nearly three hundred delegates and visitors present. Mrs. Thomas Roberts, president of the Riverton Porch Club (and spouse of Thomas Roberts, the first president of the Lyceum Association), welcomed Enos Mills, forester, government lecturer, and creator of the Rocky Mountain National Park. His speech that day— "Our Friends, the Trees."

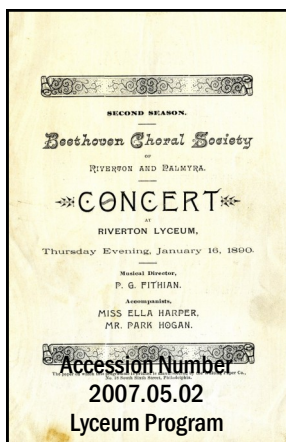


There is documentation for Theodore Roosevelt staying in Riverton for a visit at 404 Lippincott. But did the ASUE lecturer appear at the Lyceum?

ROOSEVELT HERE

Unknown to itself, Riverton enjoyed an unusual honor last Sunday when Theodore Roosevelt, governor of New York and vice-president-elect of the United States came on a quiet visit to his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel J. Allen, of Lippincott avenue.

"Roosevelt Here" *New Era*
1939 Anniversary Issue



Accession Number
2007.05.02
Lyceum Program

Concerts and musical entertainments at the Lyceum ranged from popular to highly cultured. The *S. S. Stewart Banjo and Guitar Journal* describes a June 23, 1892 concert at the Lyceum involving banjo and violin solos, humorous songs, and sayings while a surviving program from a January 1890 performance by the Beethoven Choral Society of Riverton and Palmyra lists a two-part program with fourteen selections.

The spacious venue also afforded a gathering place in which to discuss public and civic issues, the solutions to which we see today as great leaps forward in Riverton's development. The *Philadelphia Record* reported on March 30, 1893, that the citizens of Riverton had met in the Lyceum and fixed the boundary lines for the borough. Another Lyceum meeting in June 1905 resulted in deciding to substitute gas street lamps for the oil lamps then in use. That night citizens also first heard a proposal to form a corporation to supply public electricity and water. Citizens attending a June 1909 public meeting in the Lyceum decided upon purchasing the lot at Fifth and Howard Streets and "...erecting thereon a schoolhouse, the cost of which shall not exceed, with furnishings, \$34,390..." Again, at the Lyceum, in August 1909, Borough Council received a proposal from the Riverton Improvement Association, which sought to bond the borough for \$40,000 to gravel the town's seven miles of roads.

In 1917, after the United States entered World War I, the *NJ Mirror* reported that Mayor

1913 postmark
Newvochrome color postcard,
published by Riverton News
Agency, printed in Germany
Caption: THE LYCEUM HALL,
4TH & MAIN ST., RIVERTON, N.J.



Edward H. Flaggs called for a town-wide meeting to plan for Riverton's contribution to the war effort that was to take place at the new brick school, built in 1910 on 5th and Howard Streets, rather than the familiar Lyceum. The late Mrs. Hahle surmised in the Riverton Project webpages that the Lyceum building hosted its last event in 1917 and burned sometime in 1918, but documentation is lacking.

State records show in 1918 that the association had \$5,000 in capital stock and owed \$5.00 in taxes for that year, but no records concerning dispersal of those assets have been uncovered so far. The record is clear, however, in showing that by 1919 a private home stood on the lot once occupied by the Lyceum.

Was it a coincidence that the demise of Riverton's Lyceum Hall occurred during a change in the national attitude during wartime, coupled with society's increasing mobility and other entertainment options such as radio, Victrolas, and talking pictures?

Perhaps folks' energies were then directed to participate in Riverton's many other clubs, fraternal organizations, religious, political, and civic groups.

Whatever the case, it was an end of an era and the end of a way of life in Riverton when the Lyceum was no more.

- MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN

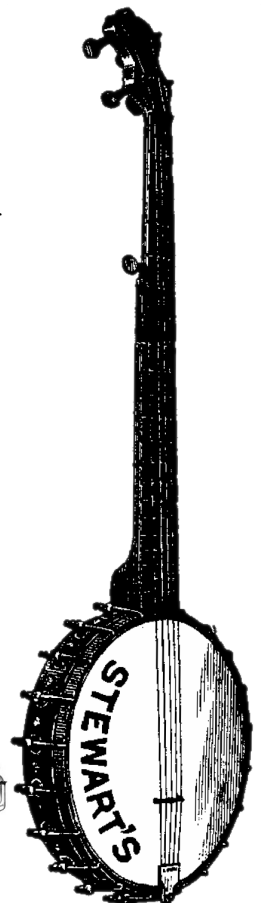
RIVERTON PLAYERS' CLUB TO OFFER "CAPTAIN SWIFT"



WILL APPEAR IN "CAPTAIN SWIFT"

The upper pictures from left to right are Mrs. R. S. Williams, and Miss Marjorie Dargis, and the lower, Arthur T. Hall and Edward R. Williams.

"Riverton Players' Club to Offer Captain Swift"
Philadelphia Inquirer
December 31, 1911





Edwin L. Kaewell shows the colors of the Jersey Yahoos

A report from the front...

...of the History Faire at the Burlington County Farm Fair

Do you recall that spell of humid near-hundred degree days we endured this past July? That is when HSR President Gerald Weaber and I represented our Society for four days at the History Faire Tent at the Burlington County Farm Fair, July 20-23, 2011.

To mark the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, each of the participating historical societies under the tent displayed information and artifacts relevant to their respective community's response to the conflict.

With so many Civil War history and genealogy enthusiasts, quite possibly, some readers of this column may have a head start on us, so we sincerely invite anyone with more facts or suggestions for sources of information to please contact us.

What we were initially looking for were names of Civil War veterans who had spent some part of their life in

Riverton, either before entering service or afterward. A preliminary examination of records yielded at least 16 veterans' names associated with at least eight different regiments in NJ and PA. We appeal to our readers to dust off those family albums and shake those family trees to see if we missed anyone. You can see what we have so far at rivertonhistory.com

Ultimately, a comprehensive treatment of Riverton's response to the Civil War needs to include much more—the reactions of women, Quakers, conscientious objectors, clubs, fraternities, churches, various institutions, and the business community to the war effort each need to be investigated. We would be grateful for any amount of relevant information or images which you could share, big or small.

While at the Fair, we met Civil War reenactor Edwin L. Kaewell who endured the heat in his woolen Union uniform. He hopes to capitalize on the resurgence in interest for reenactment for the 150th anniversary of the Civil War by forming a squad for the 23rd Regiment NJ Volunteers—a regiment in which at least two Riverton residents served during the Civil War.

- JMc



Visit the growing HSR website at <http://rivertonhistory.com/> for information regarding events, past issues of *Gaslight News*, membership information, links to Riverton School's Riverton Project, slide shows of vintage images, video clips, our blog, and more.

Readers: Find inside our member Pat Solin's thoroughly researched and absorbing article on a long-gone Riverton institution - the Riverton Lyceum Association. Also find out about Boro plans to improve the Park.

Gaslight News

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

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A little help...

LOCAL FIRES: As reported here in this past May issue, Palmyra firehouse veteran Matt Gideon, known for transferring the home movies of the late Dr. Dean LeFavor to DVD, is researching old fires in the area in order to produce a detailed history of both the Palmyra and Riverton Fire departments from the founding of each up through about 1920. We have about exhausted what can be found in newspapers, but there must be some real photos stored in albums or shoeboxes that could help in his research. He can be contacted through this newsletter or the website.

SHARON SHOP: Roberta Riddle contacted us through the website to ask if anyone had an old photo of the Sharon Shop that her father, Harry Riddle, owned in the 1940s. I recall eating lunch there during the mid-1970s when the Kolaroviks owned it. I'd love to help her out, but I have nothing and found no reference to the Sharon Shop in our HSR files. If you can help, please contact us with a comment or photo.

VET'S NAMES AND PHOTOS: On a blog from this past May called Riverton Remembers its Veterans I asked for some help to identify more names that may have been left off of the War Memorial. We also need more photos of servicemen and women. - JMc

