

# Gaslight News

February 2012

Historical Society of Riverton

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Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978



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WITH RESEARCH & EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE BY PAUL W. SCHOPP

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## Songs of the Civil War by Plum Run at Riverview Estates Feb. 24

**HSR takes a Sesquicentennial event on the road to the Baptist Home**

Riverview Estates located at 303 Bank Avenue in Riverton will host the Historical Society of Riverton's February program on Friday, February 24, at 7:00 p.m. *Songs of the Civil War: History and Myth* is a lively and engaging musical history program featuring Plum Run with Lisa Godino and Chuck Winch.

This free concert is part of an ongoing series of HSR history programs to commemorate the American Civil War Sesquicentennial



Lisa Godino and Chuck Winch fittingly christened their musical collaboration Plum Run after a Pennsylvania tributary with a sobering connection to the Battle of Gettysburg, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War.

honoring the legacy of freedom, unity and sacrifice shared by our nation during the last 150 years. The public is welcome to attend the free concert by calling Gerald Weaber at 856-786-6961 to reserve a seat.

Plum Run's entertaining and informative performance brings to life the spirit and sensibilities of the Civil War era. They play reproduction and period musical instruments while wearing authentic 19th century attire. Their

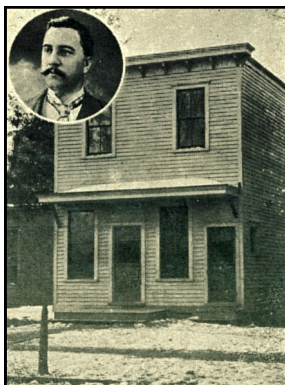
See **PLUM RUN** on 2

Riverton Has a New Postoffice - Special to The Inquirer.  
RIVERTON, N. J., Feb. 19.—For the first time in its history Riverton has a post-office building. The office has been at various times in the station, grocery store, drug store and a shoe store. The great increase of business in the last four years has made it necessary to provide a building specially adapted for postoffice purposes.

Phila. Inquirer, Feb. 20, 1903

RIVERTON POST OFFICE as it appeared when Ogden Mattis (inset) was postmaster. The office reached second class status in 1901.

The New Era, July 1, 1965, pg. 16



## SPECIAL DELIVERY Riverton's United States Post Office

Our current Riverton US Post Office facility has so far escaped inclusion in the recent closure lists. We look back at the many changes to the borough's postal service over 140 years as it operated from eight different locations.

Free mail delivery began nationally July 1, 1863. As long as postage covered expenses of the service, the government established a post office in a community. Riverton, established in 1851, did not yet have its own post office in 1864, so residents had either to pick up their mail in Palmyra or, as in other cities, pay an extra two-cent fee to a private local carrier for letter delivery.

Riverton's first railroad station opened in 1863 and once stood facing the tracks, close to today's site of the Riverton War Memorial. Railroad

Riverton mail carrier Joseph L. Yearly with his nephew Joseph B. Yearly, 1938.  
PHOTO CREDIT: JOSEPH F. YEARLY PHOTO ALBUM



See **SPECIAL DELIVERY** on 3

## Save the Date



A FREE HSR PROGRAM  
AT RIVERVIEW ESTATES  
- BAPTIST HOME -

February 24, 2012

7:00PM

SONGS OF THE CIVIL WAR:  
HISTORY & MYTH

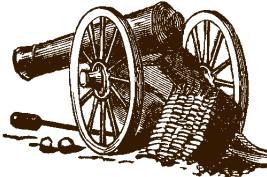
A LIVELY AND ENGAGING  
MUSICAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WITH

PLUM RUN

Featuring  
acclaimed singers, musicians,  
songwriters, and storytellers

Lisa Godino and  
Chuck Winch



# Plum Run brings to life the spirit and sensibilities of the Civil War era with music

PLUM RUN from 1

music, rich in storytelling culture, incorporates folk, bluegrass, and old-time and traditional country music. During the question and answer period following the performance, the instruments will be on display.

Chuck's great grandfather fought at the Battle of Gettysburg, and Lisa is a Civil War re-enactor with the 2nd South Carolina, Valley Division. Their repertoire includes both songs of the mid-19th century and original compositions drawn from their album titled "No Longer Gray or Blue" which tells stories of how soldiers may have felt in the time of war and the yearning of their families for their loved ones.

This performance by Plum Run marks the second year of Sesquicentennial events sponsored by the Historical Society of

Riverton. This past October, Jane Peters Estes lectured on the topic, "Gettysburg: Where Were the Women?" and in July 2011, a three-day exhibition at the Burlington County Farm profiled the lives of Riverton Civil War veterans.

Please join us on February 24th for a truly unique musical history program. The public is welcome to attend this free event. Call Gerald Weaber at 856-786-6961 to reserve a seat. Free refreshments will follow the performance, courtesy of Riverview Estates. This program is funded by the Horizons Speakers Bureau of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



NEW JERSEY COUNCIL  
FOR THE HUMANITIES

- GERALD WEABER



## A SPECIAL THANKS TO SOCIETY DONORS

We deeply appreciate the generosity of recent donors to the activities and programs of the Historical Society of Riverton. Our **Historic Marker Program** seeks to place plaques at sites of local historical interest in Riverton. A committee is updating the **Walking Tour** maps to guide students and adults through Riverton's points of historical interest. Our **Public Education Programs** bring local history to life with lively and informative presentations.

### Historic Marker Program

Alan and Helene Linholt, Riverton  
Jeff Chambers, Delanco, NJ  
Paul and Cathy Daly, Riverton  
June Geiss, Cinnaminson  
Patricia C. Lynch, Riverton  
David Kimball, Prison Museum Association  
Mabel and John Kloos, Delran, NJ  
Donna Mallory, former Rivertonian in Clearwater, FL  
Eleanor and Richard Paladino, Riverton  
John and Barbara Palko, Riverton  
Cheryl Smekal, Riverton  
Jean R. Stratton, Medford, NJ  
Gerald Weaber, Riverton

### Public Education Programs

Robert and Agnes Kennedy, Riverton

Please consider joining our distinguished list of dedicated supporters who are committed to preserving local history in Riverton.



The first twenty-five contributors of \$25 or more to the Society's 2012 fund-raising campaign will receive our special DVD collection of over 200 local vintage images as a gift, postpaid. The 16m,16sec video file plays on a computer or through DVD player to your TV.

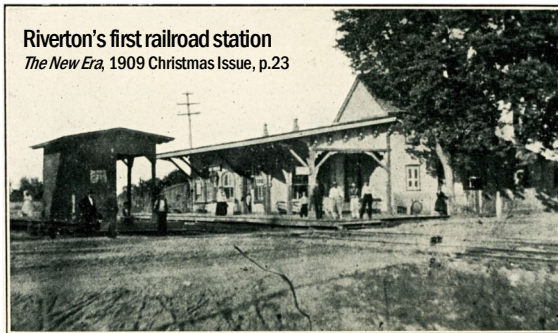
- Gerald Weaber



# Impact of Dreer's Nursery trade on Riverton Post Office inconclusive

## SPECIAL DELIVERY from 1

agent Charles Mattis lived in the house adjacent to the station and served as Riverton's first postmaster when the first Riverton Post Office was established in 1871. However, borough residents still had to trek to the Post Office to pick up or to drop off mail.



Riverton's first railroad station  
*The New Era*, 1909 Christmas Issue, p.23

Riverton's first railroad station opened in 1863 and once stood facing the tracks, close to today's site of the Riverton War Memorial. Railroad agent Charles Mattis lived in the house adjacent to the station and served as Riverton's first postmaster when the first Riverton Post Office was established in 1871.

Development and expansion in Riverton's early days caused population growth with each successive census that added to the volume of mail. No longer simply a summer refuge for wealthy Philadelphians, it had become a year-round community in need of a post office upgrade.

## DREER'S

**The Leading Seed and Plant establishment in Philadelphia—Nurseries and Greenhouses comprise nearly 300 acres and grow a complete line of high-grade stock.**

**Garden Implements, Fertilizers, Insecticides  
Lawn Mowers, Lawn Rollers, Etc.**

**We have increased our facilities by an additional building and are thoroughly equipped for handling our ever-increasing trade.**

**DREER'S GARDEN BOOK FOR 1914**  
offers nearly every flower and vegetable worth growing, and gives cultural notes. It is profusely illustrated—hundreds of photo-reproductions, 10 colored and duotone plates.

**CALL OR WRITE FOR COPY—FREE**

**Sow Dreer's Lawn Grass Seeds for Sure Results**

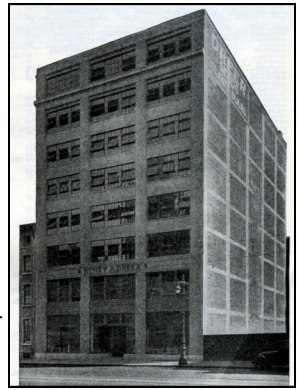
**Henry A. Dreer, 714-16 Chestnut St Philadelphia.**

Some longtime Riverton residents also add that post office capacity was influenced through a literally growing business: Dreer's Nursery. Comprising about 100 acres of seeds and plants, and eight acres of greenhouses, the highly regarded seed, bulb, and plant vendor demanded a quick and efficient way to deliver their products.

However, to what degree the Dreer mail-order business affected the post office cannot be determined. Customer requests for catalogs went to Philadelphia headquarters, not Riverton. The 1916 catalog described a warehouse at 710 South Washington Square for filling of orders and a 1938 catalog displayed photos of a mailing department, which appear to be housed at their 1306 Spring Garden Street address. In short, we lack data that would help decide Dreer's impact on the post office.

In 1887, the post office remained in the house at 601 Main when the new train station at Broad and Main replaced the old one. Dorothy Mattis had assumed postmaster duties since 1876. In 1888, proprietor Milton Cowperthwaite doubled as postmaster when the post office moved to his drug store at 304 Main.

An experiment in delivering mail in rural districts commenced in February 1898. A month later postal operations moved to 520 Main Street and Ogden Mattis became postmaster. In 1901, the post office changed from third class to second class due to the increase in mail volume and



Dreer Building  
1306 Spring Garden, Phila., PA

There is plenty more about [Dreer's](#) on the website. Just go to [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com) and use the search box at the top right. Send us a family anecdote, photo, or a memoir about that long gone Riverton institution.



The Historical house plaque by the front door reads: RIVERTON'S FIRST DRUGSTORE c. 1855. Proprietor Milton Cowperthwaite also doubled as postmaster there for ten years from 1888–1898. PHOTO CREDIT: JM 2008



See **SPECIAL DELIVERY** on 4



POPULATION OF  
RIVERTON, NJ

YEAR	POP.	% change
1880	586	—
1890	1075	+ 83.4%
1900	1332	+ 23.0%
1910	1788	+ 35.2%
1920	2341	+ 30.9%
1930	2483	+ 6.1%
1940	2354	- 5.2%
1950	2761	+17.3%
1960	3324	+ 20.4%
1970	3412	+ 2.6%
1980	3068	-10.1%
1990	2775	- 9.6%
2000	2759	- 0.6%
2010	2779	+ 0.7%

# Riverton's early population growth spurred post office advances

IMAGE CREDIT: SCAN OF VINTAGE POSTCARD COURTESY BOB BEISHLINE



Postcard detail: Riverton's second railroad station opened 1887, replacing the first one that once stood on the lot now occupied by the Riverton War Memorial. Note Roberts Store, built 1891 on point. View is toward the river at Broad & Main.

## SPECIAL DELIVERY from 3

stamp revenue. Under Ogden Mattis' tenure, the post office again outgrew its space and moved to a new building at 528 Main Street, which opened on February 19, 1903. That day's Philadelphia Inquirer explained, "The great increase of business in the last four years has made it necessary to provide a building specially adapted for post office purposes." However, Riverton residents would still have to wait almost twenty years more to receive home delivery.

Under new postmaster Charles L. Flanagan, the post office service relocated to 609 Main Street (now Freddy's Shoe Repair) in 1909. Nine-thousand pieces of mail passed through the post office per day. In addition to Charles L. Flanagan,

three more postmasters each served terms as postmaster there: Horace G. Stonaker, Ross E. Mattis, and Mrs. Mervil E. Haas.

With the establishment of standard house numbers within the borough, home delivery in Riverton finally debuted November 1, 1922. In April 1936, the old Cinnaminson Bank at 611 Main served as the next location for the Riverton Post Office, with the former post office becoming the new office of Riverton's hometown newspaper, *The New Era*.

Postmaster Mrs. Mervil E. Haas holds the Riverton record, discharging her postmaster's duties from three different Main Street locations spanning the years 1933-1959. She served the greater part of her

IMAGE CREDIT: SCAN OF VINTAGE POSTCARD COURTESY ED GILMORE



POST OFFICE AND BANK, Riverton, N. J.



## THEN and NOW

AT LEFT: 609 Main Street, fifth location for the Riverton Post Office, operated under three postmasters.

ABOVE: Freddy's Shoe Repair PHOTO CREDIT: JM



career in the next and most ambitious upgrade of all Riverton Post Offices.

The Riverton July Fourth festivities agenda in 1940 included a dedication ceremony for a new post office built by the federal government during the New Deal at 613-615 Main Street. Just five decades later, with Riverton's years of growth and development behind and declining population from the 1970s to the present, downsizing was all but inevitable.



Vintage postcard of the 1940 Riverton Post Office built by the federal government during the New Deal at 613-615 Main Street. PHOTO CREDIT: WILLIAM DOWNS

In November 1991, all offices and carrier services transferred to a new Cinnaminson facility with Riverton retaining only counter services and 250 boxes. More scaling back loomed on the horizon. Over Memorial Day Weekend 2009, Riverton's stately post office at 613-615 Main relinquished all mail services to a diminutive postal facility that opened at 605 Main Street, part of Riverton Square, LLC.



Riverton Post Office since 2009 - 605 Main Street

Many thought the shuttered federal building an ignoble end to the imposing Main Street edifice that was so familiar to their memories, for not only providing mail service, but also for serving as a place of employment. Riverton officials considered the

possibility of moving municipal offices there for a time, but abandoned the idea as impractical. Ultimately, it became home for Tristate Hvac, and a developer built three homes on plots carved from the old parking lot.

The contrasts between the post offices at 613-615 Main and 605 Main are astonishing and give some residents pause to wonder what further cost-cutting measures will bring. Will 21st century downsizing threaten to return our Post Office from whence it came--relegated to being a sideline business for a storekeeper.

We shall not debate here the many complex reasons for the postal service's financial crisis. Clearly, the universal postal service envisioned by Benjamin Franklin is in jeopardy as events play out which will challenge everyone's "special delivery."

- MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN & JOHN MCCORMICK  
WITH RESEARCH & EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE  
BY PAUL W. SCHOPP



*We love mail - snail mail, email, any kind of mail. Send us your recollections, photos, scans, or historic items that will help us continue to make Riverton history.*

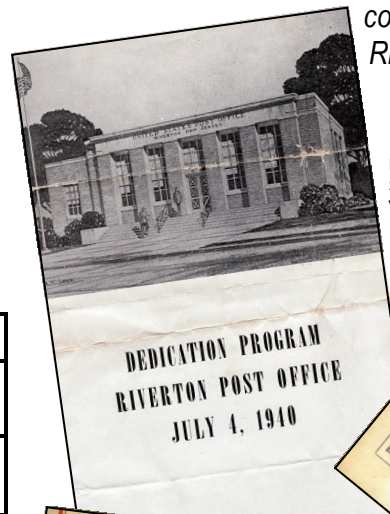


IMAGE CREDIT:  
Scan of program sent by Mary Yearly Flanagan



IMAGE CREDIT:  
Envelopes owned by John McCormick



IMAGE CREDIT:  
Stamp scanned from collection of John McCormick

## RIVERTON PRECANCELS

Precancels are postage stamps that have been canceled before being used on letters or packages. Typically they are stamps cancelled with two lines, and the city and state where they were mailed.

This is the first postage stamp to honor Roosevelt. It was issued on his birthday, October 27, 1922.



Philatelists, please visit our website and help us make some history! [rivertonhistory.com/](http://rivertonhistory.com/) Please drop us a line and send us a scan of your Riverton related stamps, first day covers, commemoratives, precancels, post office ephemera, etc.





## Don't believe everything that you read...

...even here.

Regular visitors to the Historical Society of Riverton website at [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com) are probably familiar with the many moments in time and long departed landmarks captured by the charming photographs in the Joseph F. Yearly Photo Album.

Mrs. Mary Yearly Flanagan very graciously sent us scans of dozens of photographs that her grandfather, Joseph F. Yearly, had taken. The remarkable candid shots of family milestones and local happenings set against the backdrop of locales from Main Street to the riverbank provided enough blog-fuel to generate at least three postings and attract hundreds of visitors.

After the photos were posted, some visitors left comments expressing their appreciation for seeing

them on the web-site or asked for more particulars; a couple of critical readers (meant in a good way) added considerably more detail or even found and corrected caption errors.

Now, that's what I call a collaborative website.

Recently, Mr. Jerry Mooney very kindly pointed out that a photo I had captioned as a runaway coal car at Evans' Lumber is actually one of the Collins Building, also long gone. If any reader can send more details on the Collins Building or that incident, please contact us.



#041 runaway coal car demolishes Collins Bldg.  
PHOTO CREDIT: JOSEPH F. YEARLY PHOTO ALBUM

- 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: We look back at the many changes to the borough's postal service over 140 years with "Special Delivery - Riverton's US Post Office. Also, Pres. Gerald Weaber acknowledges donors and invites you to the Baptist Home to hear Plum Run Feb. 24.

## Gaslight News

is a publication of the Historical Society of Riverton and is published four or five times per year.



### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Post Office Box # 112

Riverton, NJ 08077

856-786-6961

Gerald Weaber, Jr.	President & Website
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<http://rivertonhistory.com/>



DANIEL  
GOFFREDO



RALPH  
RAGOMO



ELWOOD C.  
JOHNSON

## Vets' Names and Photos

Mayor Bill Brown continues to identify more names for the Riverton War Memorial.

Help us honor veterans on the HSR website page at [Riverton Remembers its Veterans](http://rivertonhistory.com/RivertonRemembersitsVeterans).

We also need more photos of servicemen and women to match the names on the Memorial. Please send a scan by email, a photo by mail, or contact us if you need assistance.

- JMc



## Girls' Day Out

The birthday girl at right is Mrs. Eleanor Tilmont, 96 years young.



Helping her celebrate the occasion at [Due Amici](http://rivertonhistory.com/DueAmici) last week are some friends, coincidentally, many of whom are also retirees from Riverton School.

Get a better look at [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com)

- JMc



02/09/2012