

# Gaslight News

November 2013

Historical Society of Riverton

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EVEN SANTA CLAUS ENJOYS  
READING THE *GASLIGHT NEWS*

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## Relive a timeless Christmas classic thru the eyes of Scrooge's sister, Fan

A Dickens Tea and Dessert Buffet planned for November's HSR meet at The New Leaf



The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand, saying, as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Thus, continues Stave Two of Charles Dickens' famous story of how three spirits of Christmas visit miserly Ebenezer Scrooge in

hopes of reversing his greedy, cold-hearted approach to life.

In this chapter of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, we first meet Fan, Scrooge's younger sister, who has come to fetch him home from school.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

Talented storyteller *Alisa DuPuy* will perform at The New Leaf as Fan Scrooge, the mother of Fred, Scrooge's nephew.

Fred, you may recall, was a genial man who loved Christmas. He invited Scrooge to his Christmas party each and every year, only to be refused by his grumpy uncle.

Dressed in authentically styled Victorian costume, Miss DuPuy's dramatic retelling of this timeless redemption tale may well transport you back to your own Christmases Past.

Reserve your place for the *Dickens Tea and Dessert Buffet* at The New Leaf **Thursday, November 21, 2013**, at 7:00 p.m. \$15 admission. For more information or to reserve a seat, call 856-786-0323.

Find out more about Alisa DuPuy and her many personas at [theladiesofhistory.com](http://theladiesofhistory.com)

- JMc



## Old news clip evokes dismay from descendant over a century later

The aged bulletin rekindled memories of Clan McDermott's deep ancestral roots in Riverton

### FELLED BY A FOOTPAD

**Robbed of Cash He Was Carrying to  
His Sweetheart.**

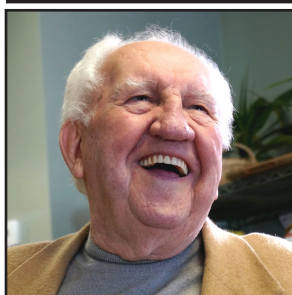
**Special to The Inquirer.**

**RIVERTON, N. J., Oct. 12.**—John McDermott, the day fireman at the Henry A. Dreer Nurseries here, was knocked senseless by a footpad last night and robbed of \$190. He is to be married next week and was on the way to his sweetheart to give her his savings to purchase furniture for the cosy little house on Elm avenue, where they are to commence house-keeping. McDermott was knocked down within a square of the house of his betrothed.

FELLED BY A FOOTPAD declared the headline. Knocked senseless and robbed of \$190!

"I knew right away that it was my grandfather, John McDermott. I never heard the story before, how sad. Our grandfather was always a gentleman. Father of 7 children— 3 sons and 4 daughters. They loved him dearly."

Such was Carl McDermott's reaction recently after reading a news clipping that I sent him



October is a big month for Carl McDermott who just turned 92 on October 25. His lovely wife Doris also shares an October birthday and the couple celebrated their 13th anniversary last month. But his recent learning of this holdup one October long past struck him as if it had just happened.

IMAGE CREDIT: JMc

**foot-pad** noun: a criminal who robs pedestrians

See NEWSCLIP on 2

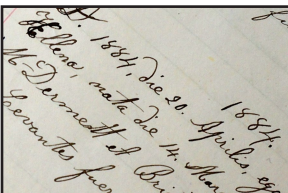


Carl McDermott, center, with his grandparents, c.1925  
IMAGE CREDIT: McDermott family Album

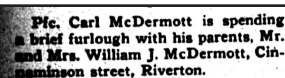


Margaret O'Neil Jordan McDermott IMAGE CREDIT: McDermott family Album

Carl's grandmother, right before she got married—about the time of the robbery. Carl recalls, "I was her favorite. When Grandmom made a big pumpkin pie, she always made a little one just for me."



A page written in Latin from a Sacred Heart Church Sacramental Book records a 1884 McDermott baptism. IMAGE CREDIT: JMC



New Era, Sept. 23, 1943.

## NEWSCLIP from 1

from an October 1895 issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Few people today can trace their ancestry back to 19th century Riverton. **Carl McDermott**, WWII veteran, PHS Class of 1940, retired electrician, raconteur, and full-time Riverton booster points to his McDermott forebears mentioned in the Sacramental Records of Sacred Heart Church and dozens of newspaper accounts as proof of his Riverton pedigree.

Mr. McDermott, who just turned 92, relates the following details about his beloved grandparents.

"I loved them—I sure wish I asked them a lot more questions. He worked hard at Dreer's Nursery in Riverton taking care of 7 coal fed furnaces for all the hot houses. Back then, barges came up Pompeston Creek loaded with pea coal to fuel the greenhouse furnaces.

My father did the same job. In the summer I would go one or two times with my father on the third shift 11pm to 7am. I was 10 to 12 years old. I would just follow him around.

Grandpop and Dad worked 7 days a week for \$5 a day. My dad's sisters, Aunt Margaret Flynn, and Aunt Helen Hannum worked in Dreer's office. Uncle Jim worked in the flower area. Also, Uncle Joe Flynn, Aunt Margaret's husband, was a specialist who worked with the plants.

On the corner on of Elm & Broad Sts. was the O'Neil homestead where my grandmother lived, very close to the robbery.

I would like to go back to 1895 when the derby hat robber hit my grandfather and look for him!"

The Palmyra High Sports Hall of Famer would do it, too.

As the McDermott brood increased, *The New Era*, Riverton's hometown gazette, recorded many of the family milestones; football games, high school musical performances, July Fourth contests, getting Red Cross swimming badges at the creek, service enlistments, furloughs, and such are now preserved in the digitalized issues of *The New Era*.

Carl likes to view these files on his iPad and forward these bits of McDermott genealogy to

other kin in his email address book. He elaborated upon some topics during an interview.

Would you believe that Carl was Mayor of Riverton? He was—for a day—as part of a Palmyra High School senior civics exercise.

How Irish is he? In 1892, both his paternal grandparents, John McDermott and Michael O'Neil, helped organize the Riverton Chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

"Grandmom and Grandpop had their 50 years marriage celebration at the Riverton Porch Club. They always were my inspiration along with my mother, father, and brothers, who I looked up to.

The Dreer sisters who inherited the Dreer land went to Germany right before WWII. They couldn't return till after the war. My mother wanted to buy the corner lot on 8th & Cedar Sts., but had to wait till they returned in 1946.

For the record, my mother never gave up. Mary McDermott was

one of the first telephone operators in Riverton and Palmyra which was on the 3rd floor of the Riverton Bakery building (formerly Klipple's Bakery, until recently Zena's, now The Orange Blossom)."

There is no Riverton history without the context of the people who have helped make it. If you look up something or someone, let us know what you discover.

- CARL MCDERMOTT & JOHN MCCORMICK



Mary McDermott, 2nd from left, c.1926, pictured here with other telephone operators, worked at the switchboard above what is now The Orange Blossom. IMAGE CREDIT: Romance of Riverton





# Celebrating 53 years, Riverton's popular Candlelight House Tour returns Dec. 7

This biennial holiday treat started out in 1960 as a daytime tour in May



Scores of holiday merrymakers are anticipating the return of the biennial **Candlelight House Tour**. This year, select area homes and historic structures displaying holiday décor will be open on **Saturday, December 7 from 4 until 9 p.m.**

Tickets, available at the Library and The New Leaf, are \$15 per person and benefit the Friends of the Riverton Free Library. The Riverton Free Library ([rivertonfreelibrary.org](http://rivertonfreelibrary.org)) is both a branch of the Burlington County Library System as well as an association-supported library, expressly serving patrons in Riverton and Palmyra.

As the Candlelight House Tour has now passed the half-century mark, we may well wonder about its beginning. Oddly enough, it originated as a springtime house tour during the day in May 1960. This spring tour continued until the 1970s, when the RFL Association Board moved the tour to December, renaming it the Christmas Candlelight House Tour. For years realtor and long-time resident **Nancy Washington's** influence helped shape the direction of the Tour and get neighbors to participate.

Now slated for the first Saturday in December every other year, the tour has become a popular tradition of the holiday season. By the 1990's the name of the tour changed again to simply Candlelight House Tour to reflect a broader signature. However, many homes continue to be decorated for the season, which include Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza.

The Tour Committee seeks volunteers in Palmyra and Riverton willing to open their first floor, or their entire house, decorated for the season, for the nearly 1,000 visitors who will visit their home for the day.

The homeowner, with help from members of the Historical Society of Riverton,

researches and creates a structural description which becomes part of the Tour Program. A map inside helps attendees to plan their route from place to place.

The Friends of the Riverton Free Library have been fortunate to have hard-working, loyal volunteers who help with important library activities, such as library projects, used books sales, and other fundraising events that enhance library services.

**Bea Horn** and **Mari Veneziano**, chairs for Tours in 1986 and 1988, and **Joann DiNoia**, the current chair, recently shared their perspectives on what makes the Candlelight House Tour extraordinary.

"Our Tour is different from other local Tours," suggested Bea, adding, "...these are not 'showcase' homes."

Mari observed, "Our Tour accentuates the uniqueness and traditions of the individual home, and highlights that family's traditions -- what is important to that particular family..."

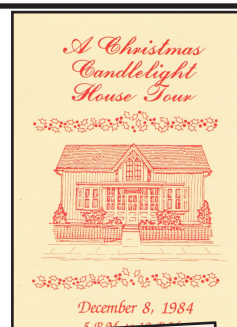
Organizing the event has not been without its difficulties. One year, the Tour set for 2000, was cancelled because too few property owners made their homes available. Luckily, Joann DiNoia and her team were able to bring the tradition back in 2001. She has chaired the House Tour Committee and has professionally run the Tour every other year since then.

Joann characterized the Tour as "...not a commercial house tour. You could walk away from this tour and you could say, 'I could do that!'"

She continued, "It is not all Victorian houses, but an eclectic blend of homes—big and small." Because of this, Joann confesses that she loves the element of surprise which so often is part of the Candlelight House Tour.

Start the holiday season with good cheer and help our local library!

- MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN



This brief sketch of the Candlelight House Tour's history is by no means complete.

Please advise us of any omissions or errors and lend your voice to the record at [riverton.history.com](http://riverton.history.com)

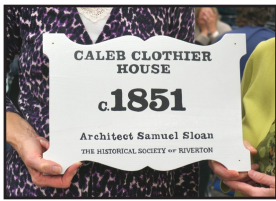
## HOUSE TOUR CHAIRPERSONS

1984 - Barbara Hayes & Denise Kassekert  
 1986-1988 - Beatrice Cook (Horn) & Mari Veneziano  
 1990 - Barbara Hayes & Eleanor Paladino  
 1992 - ??  
 1994 - Kay Daniel & Barbara Lucasi  
 1998 - ??  
 2000 - No Tour  
 2001-2003 - JoAnn Di Noia & Susan Lozaga  
 2005 to 2013 - JoAnn Di Noia

Please help if you can further complete this list.



## Another HSR season is off and running



Now available—*historic plaques* awarded for qualifying structures, minimum 100 years old,

of particular architectural significance or of local historical significance. Call 856-786-8422 for an application which the HSR will review. Plaque donation: \$150. Look for online applications and more details soon.

Read about the RFL's December 7th *Candlelight House Tour* inside. In between your House Tour stops please visit the HSR's *Museum for a Day* on exhibit at The New Leaf at 606 Main. The charming century-old building has at times been a butcher's store, a drug store, a furniture store, a plant and flower store, and now a cozy, yet elegant tea room. Free admission. Contact **Cheryl Smekal**, 856-829-9375, if you have an

item to donate or loan for display.

We gratefully acknowledge the following gifts from members:

**Keith Betten**, Riverton: small color photo of Biddle Mansion taken in 1968 by Karl Livingstone



**Jeff Cole**, Ormond Beach, FL: J.S. Collins wooden nickel; RPS pin '31; RPS pin '57; 2 Lothrop cabinet cards



**J. Geiss**, New York City: \$100

**Nancy Hall**, Riverton: Richard D. Barclay - Bees for Pollination business card

**Carl McDermott**, Palmyra: 1929 Riverton-Palmyra Telephone Book; [two b/w 8"x10" photos](#) showing a procession at Broad & Garfield, Palmyra

**Cheryl Smekal**, Riverton: several news clippings, July 4th Programs, newspaper supplements about Riverton

We thank those members who renewed dues this summer and early fall. Know that dues paid throughout the end of 2013 will be applied to the 2014 fiscal year. **Kindly remit your dues** payment at your earliest convenience.

For news in between issues go to [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com). If you could not view in the past the *Riverton Veterans Album* because the file was too big, please try downloading the [PDF file](#) instead of the [PowerPoint](#).

We will be happy to include a service photo, news clipping, or relevant image for anyone listed on the Memorial in this [online HSR tribute](#) to our military veterans.

Until the next issue, Readers, don't take any wooden nickels.



- JMc



In between issues visit the HSR website at [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com) for information on past and upcoming events, back issues of *Gaslight News*, hundreds of vintage images of the region and shore points, a veterans' page, our blog, and more.

Readers: Inside this issue read about Nov. 21, 2013 special event, **A Dickens Tea** at The New Leaf, **Carl McDermott's** reaction to a hundred year-old news clip, a short history of the popular **Candlelight House Tour**, plus a heartfelt **thanks** to several generous members.

## Gaslight News

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### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

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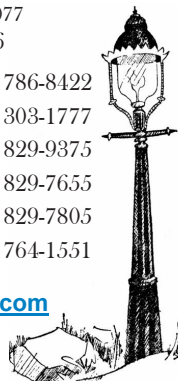
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Mayor Bill Brown reports that at least five veterans' names will be added to the Honor Roll during a November Veterans Day observance at the *Riverton War Memorial* on Main St. Sunday, November 10 at 10:30 a.m.

For more information on how to apply to have a veteran's name added to the Memorial, check with the Riverton's Military & Veterans Affairs Committee through the [Borough webpage](#).

### RIVERTON WAR MEMORIAL HONOR ROLL

- ★ Jeffrey R. Cole
- ★ Edward J. Lohan Jr.
- ★ Frank G. Lockhart
- ★ William G. Lockhart
- ★ Harry Watkins

## "ALL HISTORY IS LOCAL."

Attributed to various people, the quote has become a mantra for genealogists, educators, historians, and information professionals who are engaged in the trend toward using collaborative partnerships to produce digital collections of primary sources.

That Biddle Mansion photo above, newspaper clippings, a 1984 House Tour Program, Jeff Cole's school pins, and even that J.S. Collins wooden nickel are all primary sources unavailable in any textbook.

With enough of these 'snippets' of history we can analyze them and make inferences and develop reasoned explanations and interpretations of events and issues in the past and present.

If you have a snippet (or a boxful) to give, or a memoir to contribute, know that you are adding to a growing community resource.

As illustrated by Carl McDermott's marvelous memoir in this issue, and last issue's Steedle saga, family history and Riverton history are powerfully linked.

Wouldn't this be a great way to involve students in collecting primary source material and examining the interplay between national, state, local, and personal history?

- JMc

