



Gaslight News



December 2015

Historical Society of Riverton

vol. XXXV, no. 5 (#163)

Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

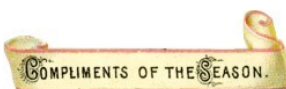
Incorporated 1978



Remember last year's news story about bones discovered in Riverton during excavation for a swimming pool?

[Last January](#), we learned the unsettling truth from Paul Schopp that human remains along Riverton's waterfront have been found before.

In Part 3 of this serial article Paul traces the development of Riverton's shad fishery.



Open this *Gaslight News* as a PDF file on rivertonhistory.com and all of the **blue highlighted underlined terms** become links to more content.

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MEMBERSHIP DUES AND DONATION APPEAL FORM ENCLOSED

Digging Up History in Riverton (Pt. 3)

Riverton Town Historian Paul W. Schopp continues his four-part series to speculate how human remains came to be found here during a riverbank excavation for a swimming pool in 2014

Extending back to at least the Archaic period in New Jersey and Pennsylvania (8000-1000 B.C.), man has exploited the spring runs of anadromous fish like shad and sturgeon as they travel up the Delaware River and its tributaries to spawning grounds. Indigenous people living proximate to the river and streams used a variety of methods to catch the fish, ranging from spears to weirs and nets. In shallow water, spears served to impale the fish. More elaborate traps, known as weirs, would channel the fish into a small area where they could be caught by hand or impaled by spear or arrow. Natives in canoes would use nets thrown from their craft to encompass a school of fish. Women and children, along with some men, would then clean and process the fish, which usually involved smoking them as a preservative method.

English settlers wasted no time in adding riverine fish to their diets. By the mid-eighteenth century, landowners with property and farms along the Delaware and its tributaries included fishery rights as an asset associated with their tenured holdings. Notices for land sales in local weekly newspapers often included the term "valuable Shad fishery" in the property's description. Shad was the primary food fish caught during the spring spawning runs.

Europeans operated unregulated fisheries along the Delaware River beginning in the

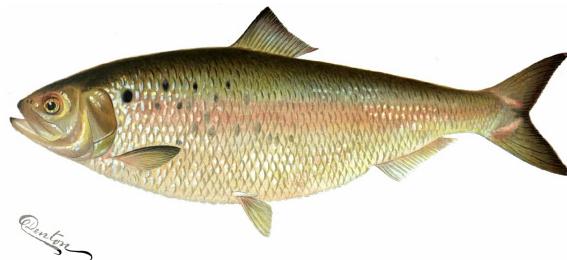
seventeenth century, from the settlement period forward. The Colonial Assembly, while sitting in session at Burlington during May and June 1765, passed the first regulations after numerous complaints from the citizenry. The act set forth requirements for the size of net mesh, along with obligating the owners of fixed nets, fish weirs, and other types of traps to immediately remove them from the river. In 1782, the Pennsylvania State Legislature passed an act to authorize New Jersey officials to police all fisheries along the Delaware River.

As is the nature of law, fishery regulations increased through time, including issuing

an annual license to operate a fishery. By 1834, over 30 commercial fisheries lined the Delaware River's eastern shore from the Pennsauken Creek down to Delaware Bay. Additional fisheries operated on the Pennsylvania side below Philadelphia. As

a general rule, the adjacent landowner also controlled any given fishery, but generally rented out the fishery to an operator, usually from the Kensington section of Philadelphia. Names like Rice, Faunce, and Cramp are often found in historical documents related to fisheries. The Rices and Faunces were related families.

The first fishery along Riverton's riverfront appears to date to the second half of the



THE SHAD. (CLUPEA SAPIDISSIMA)

"The Shad (*Clupea Sapidissima*)" by Shermon Foote Denton, Jan. 1896, First Annual Report of the Commissioners of Fisheries, Game, and Forests of the State of New York, p130.

See **DIGGING** on 2



Forensic anthropologist Donna Fontana scrapes away dirt from bones discovered in Riverton in October 2014 in this [6abc news story](#) complete with video.

PHOTO CREDIT: WPVI TV ACTION NEWS



The fishery was here before there was a Riverton as this detail from a [1847 map](#) attests.

President's Message

Greeting HSR Members,
An HSR ARCHIVES

MUSEUM update:

We have started to stage our space in the basement of the Library by painting, hanging drapes on windows, foraging for second-hand furniture, and putting down an area carpet.

With the cancellation of the Library's Candlelight House Tour, scheduled for December 5th, we shall resume work on it in January.

Some folks who have ventured downstairs to the basement for the weekly RFL used book sale have had an early sneak-peak at our work-in-progress.

For the past few weeks our editor John McCormick has attached a sale of HSR mugs to that Sunday afternoon Riverton custom.

- Phyllis Rodgers



with apologies to Thos. Nast

DIGGING from 1

eighteenth century. Known as the Cinnaminson (with spelling variations) Fishery, begun by William Cox and listed as one of assets offered for sale by Sarah Cox, William's widow in 1769. Andrew Anderson purchased the Cinnaminson Farm and Fishery along the Delaware River from Sarah Cox. As noted in the previous installment, when Andrew died, his widow, Elizabeth Toy Anderson, received a half-interest in all of her late husband's real estate, with the remaining moiety devised to Andrew's nieces, Keziah, Catharine and Anna.

Having the Cinnaminson Fishery's ownership split between two separate parties created manifold problems and caused numerous pleadings and counter-pleadings before the New Jersey Supreme Court. John Rice held a deed for the fishery dated 26 December 1821, granted to him by Benjamin Cox, who obtained it from Isaiah Toy, acting as a lateral heir to Elizabeth Toy Anderson Bispham's estate. Meanwhile, Joseph M. Bispham claimed a right of possession due to his father's intestacy. This development foreshadowed a clash over ownership of the Cinnaminson fishery.

In a case of forcible entry and detainer before the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1826, Joseph M. Bispham, Elizabeth B. Moffett, and Ann Myers claimed that John Rice, Jacob Rice and John P. Rice "...by violence and threatening to kill, maim and beat the said parties in possession, entered into and upon a certain piece of land and fishery situate in the Township of Chester aforesaid commonly called and known by the name of the Cenimenson [sic] fishery,

and with force and strong hand and by the violence & threatening aforesaid now detains and holds the possession of the said piece of land and fishery...whereof the said complainants say that the said John Rice, Jacob Rice and John P. Rice are guilty of a forcible entry and detainer of the said premises."

The Rice trio went on to compound their assault when they "...then and there fished... for fish and the fish to wit, ten thousand

shad, two hundred thousand herring, and two hundred sturgeon of great value to wit, of the value of two thousand dollars."

Given the number of fisheries lying downriver from the Cinnaminson Fishery that also fished the spring spawning run, the reported haul by the Rices is an amazing amount of fish for about a one-week period or so at the end of March.

To be SOLD, by way of public vendue, on the 10th day of April next, on the premises,

A VALUABLE plantation and tract of land, containing about 97 acres, situate in Chester township, Burlington county, fronting the river Delaware, at a place called Senemenson,¹ about 9 miles from Cooper's ferry, by land, and about the same distance from Philadelphia by water; there is a share of a good shad fishery belonging to the premises, a good apple orchard, and other fruit trees, about 12 acres of drained meadow, supposed to be as good as any in said county, most part of which is cleared, and under good grass, and is well secured from the tide by a good dam and flood-gates; there is on said premises, a log house, with two rooms on a floor, a spring-house and sundry other convenient buildings. The land is exceeding fertile for raising market truck; late the property of William Cox, deceased. Any person who has a mind to view the premises before the day of sale, may apply to John Cox, in Moore's-town, or the subscriber, living on the premises. The conditions will be made known at the time and place aforesaid, when attendance will be given, by

SARAH COX, Executrix.

—The Pennsylvania Gazette, No. 2098, March 9, 1769.

¹ Usually written Cinnaminson.

Curiously, a jury found the Rice family NOT Guilty due to their holding a deed granting them a moiety in the fishery; they had the right to be there, despite the complainant's protests to the contrary.

Presumably, Isaiah Toy forgave them for he finally gained full title to the fishery and continued to lease it to the Rice family.

In 1841, Toy caught the Rice fishermen using gill nets, which the state laws strictly forbid. He took up his shotgun and pursued a number of fishermen, pushing their empty boats away from shore and cutting their nets. Toy then directed the Rices and their fishermen off his land and advertised for new management to operate the fishery in the 6 September 1842 edition of Philadelphia's *Public Ledger*:

TO LET.—A SHAD FISHERY on the Delaware, about ten miles above Philadelphia, formerly occupied by Peter, Jacob and Samuel Rice. None need apply but such as are willing to fish agreeably to law, and to assist in suppressing all illegal fishing. Innumerable breaches of the fishing laws have been committed in this fishery, by persons pretending to fish under a common right, which does not exist. False and malicious prosecutions have also been instituted against me by some of those on whom the penalties of the fishing laws have been inflicted, with the evident design of intimidating me from the protection of my property. I am not, however, to be thus intimidated, and I hereby caution and forwarn all persons against trespassing on my fishery, as I am determined to continue to enforce the laws. For terms of lease, apply to **231-1w*** **ISAIAH TOY**

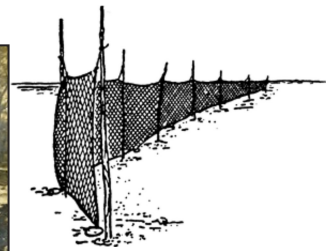
Toy found new operators among the Faunce family, who continued to run the fishery into the early twentieth century, when pollution prevented the fish from moving upriver to their ancestral spawning ground.

Walter Bowen, publisher of Riverton's *The New Era* weekly newspaper, captured what

was likely the last fishery operation in 1907:



A commercial fishery still operates in Lambertville, representing the very last of a tradition that stretches back at least 250 years along the Delaware River.



typical gill net

In the next and final installment of this series, Mr. Schopp will discuss the old farmhouses that once stood on the riverfront, but disappeared as Riverton began to flower.

He will also summarize the possible scenarios on how the human remains came to be buried near Second and Howard streets.

- article and images by **PAUL W. SCHOPP**



Ken Frank's lecture at American Entomological Society meeting sheds new light on an old pest

We told readers in [October](#) about [Kenneth Frank](#), the Philadelphia physician who contacted us last summer concerning his interest in researching Japanese beetles.



Kenneth Frank addresses the room as his wife Sue looks on

Recently, Bill and Nancy Hall, Jeannie Francis, and my wife Linda, and I heard Ken lecture on Japanese beetles at a meeting of the American Entomological Society at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia and it was outstanding.

That the blame for the introduction of the destructive invasive species to America rests on Riverton is well-known. However, the



extent to which Henry A. Dreer played a part in mounting a propaganda campaign that fought against government efforts to contain the Japanese beetle destruction is not as well known.

When early efforts to contain the spread of the Japanese beetle failed, Henry Dreer's influence managed to keep the very nursery plants which were the source of the scourge exempt from quarantine and embargo measures and deflect attention to corn instead.

Ken was informative and entertaining and elicited laughter from the assembled scientists when he compared the people who ignored the warnings of the then impending Japanese beetle crisis (c.1916) to those who deny climate change today.

Years later, Ken explained, Rachel Carson would decry the indiscriminate use of chemical insecticides to control the bugs and launch an environmental movement with her book, *Silent Spring*.

Riverton's own Ned Gilmore, Collections Manager of Vertebrate Zoology at the Academy, sat two rows behind us, and at the break he graciously shared his perspectives of the natural history and geology of Riverton.

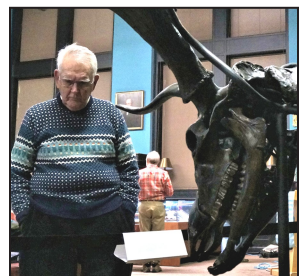
Enjoy Dr. Frank's [Ecology of Center City](#) free PDF, and we look forward to his next publication.



- JMc



Ken Frank wrote later that he particularly enjoyed the recollections of Master Gardener Jeannie Francis who retold family anecdotes about Dreer's and...



...Bill Hall who recalled as a youth hand picking and killing Japanese beetles for the nickel bounty a quart that Mr. Coddington paid.

A SRO performance for Maggie Worsdale's One-Woman Show as Martha Washington at RFL



Actress Maggie Worsdale played to a capacity crowd in the meeting room of the Riverton

Free Library Tuesday night, Nov. 17.

Understand that capacity in that room is only about 30, but a couple of people did have to stand, nonetheless. It was indeed the agreeable result of a RFL/HSR partnering to underwrite the expense of bringing such a professional caliber presentation to our audience.

More like a one-woman play than a typical historical interpreter's lecture, Ms. Worsdale entertained in character for a full hour, delivering her divert-



SRO crowd with her recounting of episodes in, not only Martha Washington's life, but also for many other of America's 44 First Ladies.

One could certainly fill up an hour reporting on the lives of First Ladies, but this remarkable performance was full of little known, often touching, anecdotes which were obviously the result of her exhaustive research and preparation.

To members of other clubs: Consider

ing and fact-filled monologue with no notes.

She absolutely did delight, teach, and inspire the



this short review a 5-star endorsement of Maggie Worsdale's production of Martha Washington should you

have a chance to enjoy this compelling material performed live. Book her without hesitation.

But you might want a bigger room.

Find more at marthawashington.com and see a short video there.

At the conclusion, folks shared conversation, cider, cookies and cake, and some placed orders for our new mugs.

- JMc



Help make our HSR website at <http://rivertonhistory.com/> grow with YOUR comments, recollections, and contributions. Check in for information on upcoming events, past issues of *Gaslight News*, vintage images, a veterans' page, our blog, and more.

Readers: Inside this issue read Paul W. Schopp's 3rd installment of his serial article, "Digging Up History in Riverton," get a review of our trip to Ken Frank's Japanese beetle lecture, and read the recap of Maggie Worsdale's Nov. 17 performance as Martha Washington.

Gaslight News

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



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continue to explore new ways to share our region's rich cultural history with the public even as our membership rolls continue to decline.

FYI

Member dues are for the *calendar year*. Please pay 2016 dues by Dec. 31, 2015.

Your additional donation to our Annual Appeal assures that the Society can con-

SOMEDAY, we hope to offer photo enlargements,



map reproductions, DVDs, mugs and other merchandise for sale by

mail, but our first order of business is to get the HSR ARCHIVES MUSEUM open and ready for visitors. See more than [30 mugs](http://rivertonhistory.com/) now available.



SEE rivertonhistory.com for more of former mayor Bruce Gunn's [1950s era color slides](http://rivertonhistory.com).

- JMc

