

Gaslight News



January 2013

Historical Society of Riverton

vol. XXXXIII, no. 1 (#150)

Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

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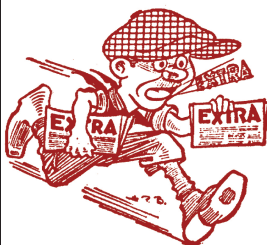
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Read historic local newspapers now online at rivertonhistory.com

This recent digitalization effort built on the labors of an earlier drive to microfilm newspapers



The Historical Society of Riverton is pleased to make available a veritable Fort Knox treasury of local history facts, genealogical information, and bits of news from the sensational and extraordinary events of the region to the mundane and commonplace details of a bygone era.

In cooperation with the Riverton Free Library Association, the HSR has just

posted hundreds of recently digitalized issues of four historic local newspapers—*The New Era* (1894-1949), *The Riverton Journal* (1880-1882), *The Palmyra Record* (1913 - 1918), and *The Weekly News* (Palmyra) (1887-1922).

Read between the lines and one can imagine what life was like for the area citizenry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when these riverfront communities were in their early development. Maybe you will even read about someone you know.

Find out more about it at rivertonhistory.com



Take tea with Queen Victoria (a.k.a. Alisa DuPuy) Jan. 31 at The New Leaf

An Anglophile's Delight - Limited Seating. —\$10 admission. Please reserve now.



Alisa DuPuy, the creative first-person historical interpreter with the remarkably authentic gorgeous gowns returns to the HSR in the guise of Queen Victoria Thursday, January 31, 2013, at 7:00 p.m. \$10 admission.

The longest reigning British monarch whose name defined an era will visit the New Leaf Tearoom at 606 Main Street to dish about the inside stories of her family, her life at court, and her romance with Albert with whom she had nine children. After an

assassination attempt this “Grandmother of Europe” once quipped, “It is worth being shot at to see how much one is loved.”

Regular attendees of such performances are well-familiar with the historical interpreter's convention of staying in character and referring to the past in the present tense while employing inventive dramatic techniques and often encouraging audience interaction.

The New Leaf's genteel décor is a fitting setting for this special visitation of Her Highness that includes tea and light refreshments served on the Tearoom's beautiful china.

Seating is limited for this reserved seating event. Please call Gerald Weaber at 856-786-6961, or contact him at rivertonhistory.com.

- JMc





Mr. William Hall, the author of this issue's feature article sits next to his better half, Mrs. Nancy Ritschard Hall, the Parade Marshal for the 2006 Riverton Children's Parade.



The adventurous young Bill Hall from neighboring Palmyra later learned to sail at the Riverton Yacht Club



where he first met Miss Nancy Ritschard sailing a Duster — a real -life *Romance of Riverton*.

Readers may recognize Bill for any one of the many parts he has played in the community over the years. He taught in Moorestown elementary and middle schools, served on Riverton School Board and Borough Council, sailed competitively at the Yacht Club, and remains an avid cyclist today.

However, his longest running role has been as spouse to the former Nancy Ritschard for the last 61 years. Scores of folks still fondly recall the wonderful Hobby Horse Nursery that Mrs. Nancy Hall operated from their home on Cedar Street for 45 years until its close in 2006.

What is on Mrs. Hall's flannelboard in Dec. 1990?
PHOTO CREDIT: JMC

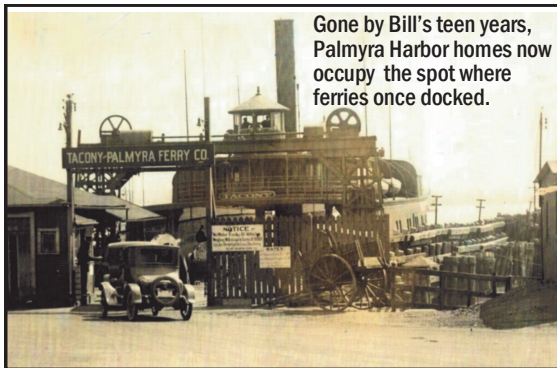


Adrift on the Icy Delaware

A vivid memoir recalled from Bill Hall's childhood, circa late 1930s

By today's standards, it was a cold and brutal February—so cold that the river froze over except for a narrow path over the channel. Huge blocks of ice piled up on the shoreline as the tide moved in and out. To a few youngsters it was a new playground.

In the afternoons after school, a number of us would show up at the foot of Morgan Avenue to have fun playing tag or hide-and-seek on the jumbled ice floes.

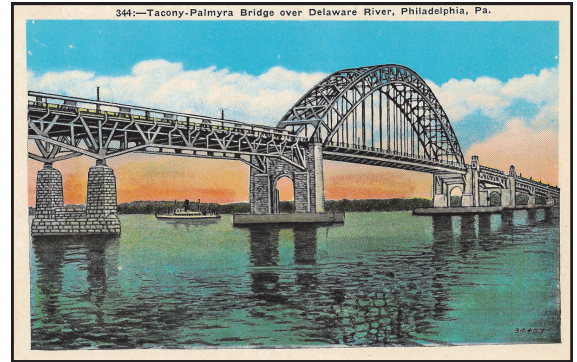


Tacony-Palmyra Ferry Wharf 1924

One afternoon there weren't but four or five of us who showed up. Soon some left, leaving only Dicky Webster and me. We thought it would be fun to see how close to the open water we could get so we stepped over the piled up ice and out on to the smoother ice toward the open channel.

Suddenly from behind us came a loud WHUMP and our icy platform began to rock like a small boat. We looked back and already there were four feet of water between the icy shore and us. We were free—freer than we wanted to be, slowly moving downriver with the current.

We both realized we were in trouble. The piece of ice was about 15 by 20 feet and shaky. We found the center of balance and sat down holding on to each other. What to do? We couldn't get close to the edge to paddle and no one was near enough to hear us.



Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, undated vintage postcard IMAGE
CREDIT: scan courtesy of Harlan Radford, Jr.

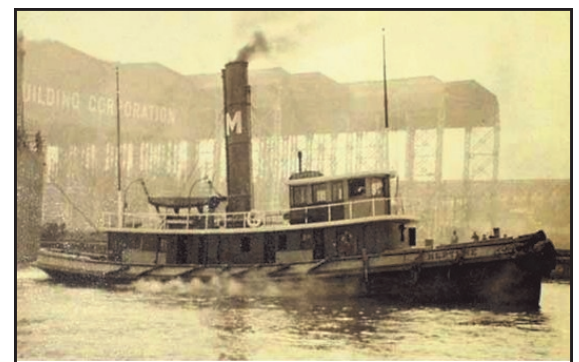
As we drifted toward the bridge, we heard the distant throb of an engine. We were then somewhere near the old ferry wharf and the bridge. A tugboat was coming up-river. It passed under the bridge and we started to wave our arms and yell.

For a few moments, it seemed that the boat was going to pass us by, but slowly its bow turned toward us and the engine slowed.

"What in hell are you two doing?"

"The ice broke loose back there, "Dicky answered.

"Well, we gotta get you off; don't move.



Tugboat Neptune 1920

After some careful maneuvering, they brought the boat right alongside our ice floe. By then, a crewman had a length of rope. "I'm going to throw the rope to you; one of you tie it around your chest under your arms."

Dicky caught the rope, tied himself on, and slowly moved toward the boat. The crewman told me to move back slowly at the same time to keep the ice balanced—but not too far. He kept the rope tight, and as Dicky got close enough, the crewman gave a sudden and powerful yank on the rope, and Dicky literally flew onto the boat's deck as I skittered back to the middle of the ice.

Back came the rope with instructions for me to do the same. But who would keep the ice platform from rocking *me* into the freezing water?

After tying myself on, I slid on my bottom toward the edge, but with no counter-balance the ice began to tilt and I began to panic. Suddenly, I was flying over the rail and on to the deck of the tugboat.

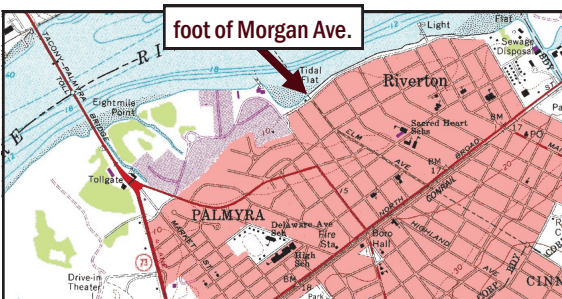
We were hustled into the tugboat's cabin to warm up and be chastised in no uncertain terms. They decided to put us ashore at the Yacht Club wharf after calling the Riverton Police to pick us up.

After much pleading on our part, they put us ashore and went on their way. We shot home.

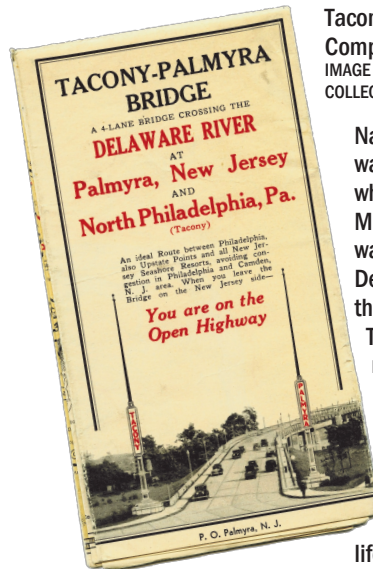
Neither one of us ever talked about our adventure to *anyone*; if word ever got home of what we had done, I'd have been flayed and my hide nailed to the barn wall.

As time went by the story became more and more distant until only recently some conversation with acquaintances who wondered if the river ever froze brought it all clearly back.

- MR. WILLIAM HALL



Bill and Dicky's adventure started at the foot of Morgan Ave. section of Frankford USGS Quad 1967, rev. 1983



Tacony-Palmyra Ferry Company roadmap
IMAGE CREDIT: JMc, PERSONAL COLLECTION

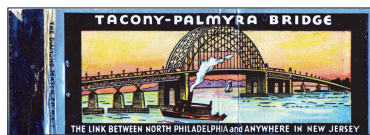
Nancy Hall recalls she was 5 years of age when her Grandmother Miller took her on a walk across the frozen Delaware just to touch the Philadelphia side.

That and, in warmer months, swimming to the other side was considered a rite of passage for many area youngsters.

What memories of life near the river still echo to you across the intervening years?



Tacony-Palmyra Ferry Company stock certificate
IMAGE CREDIT: JMc, PERSONAL COLLECTION



Tacony-Palmyra Ferry Bridge matchbook
IMAGE CREDIT: JMc, PERSONAL COLLECTION

Many more stories of Riverton remain to be told, and many more pictures and collectibles lay forgotten in basements and attics than we could ever display here.

Please send your recollections and give or loan photos, collectibles, or historic items that will help us continue to tell your Riverton stories.

If you need help, call or email our helpful staff.

rivertonhistory@gmail.com
856-764-1551
John McCormick, editor



THE RIVERT

NEW BOAT WINS RACE ON FOURTH

Owen Merrill's "Duster" Proves to Be Fast. Three Classes in Contest

Those who are interested in sailing races probably had one of their greatest thrills in the start of the 16-foot and miscellaneous class sailboat race at the Riverton Yacht Club on the Fourth. Eight boats were all crowded on the line at once, and all fighting for the windward position. During the scramble Archie Seabrook in the Big Hurry had the misfortune to foul Rod Merrill,

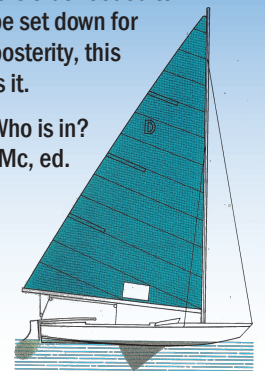
The New Era, July 5, 1934
Find out more on the historical newspapers page at rivertonhistory.com

DUSTER

Riverton born and bred

Jim Merrill and his father Commodore E.K. Merrill built the first Duster Class boat in a workshop on the third floor of 301 Main Street. Ultimately, the relatively inexpensive, simple to build craft probably helped transform hundreds of lubbers into sailing enthusiasts. If there ever was a bit of Riverton lore that needed to be set down for posterity, this is it.

Who is in?
JMc, ed.



These Lippincott kin to Nancy on the ice confirm that the Delaware did indeed freeze over. FROM THE HALLS' FAMILY ALBUM.

2013... time to get a ROUND TUIT™



When I was a thirty-something middle school teacher in the late 1970s, Jack Lauber, our maintenance man/school supplies quartermaster teased me one busy day that I needed to have one of his circular whatchamacallits—a round TUIT. I think his was wooden and about the size of a silver dollar.

Jack was a former WWII Army paratrooper who found his drop-and-roll combat skills useful when he fell out of a third floor classroom window while changing a screen. Recovered and back on the job, he delighted in telling war stories, and I half-listened while I worked at my desk after school.

So back to my point about Jack's TUIT do-dad.

He also liked that this college boy didn't get his round TUIT reference. Was it about the military?

"C'mon, Jack, I'm busy...papers to mark, lesson plans to do," I griped as he swept the floor in my classroom.

Jack paused. "What you need is a round TUIT so next time you won't have a reason for not getting *arounuwnd toooo* it."

"Oh, yeah, funny, Jack. I get it. I just need more hours in my day." My wife and I each had two jobs at the time.

What was true for me then is true now, even in retirement. I am not so much a procrastinator than I just want to get more done. I do wish I had kept track of goings on then, taken more pictures, and written down more of people's stories. Even Jack's.

I think the same thing when I look at my family album—I should have paid better attention because there are questions I can't ask now because people have passed.

The 2011 US Census counted 2,784 persons in Riverton (and there are also many former Rivertonians at heart now living elsewhere). Know that each of them, and certainly you, have something of inestimable value, perhaps even something

irreplaceable, because of your unique position in this community and your place in time.

That something is your memory and knowledge combined with a particular skill or ability that will enable you to tell and preserve any one of the countless compelling stories of Riverton history that remain to be told. If not by you, by whom else?

What is stopping you? You may have discounted this precious gift as unimportant or ordinary, but I promise you, it's not.

Few things are frustrating for a historian as a story that does not get told because a link to the past gets irretrievably broken. Eliminate obstacles and self-doubt, and align yourself with other positive thinkers.

Now that you are considering what your special Riverton legacy will be, are you going to let your ideas lie wasting away until it may be too late? Or are you going to now set yourself a goal?

All you need now is to get a round TUIT.

Jack would get a kick out of this. -JMC



Visit our absorbing HSR website at <http://rivertonhistory.com/> for information regarding events, past issues of *Gaslight News*, membership, links and contact information, historical newspapers, slide shows of vintage images, video clips, our blog, and more.

Readers: We invite you to The New Leaf Jan. 31 as Alisa DuPuy transforms into young Queen Victoria. Also, read Bill Hall's Riverton memoir about his excursion down the Delaware...on an ice floe.

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

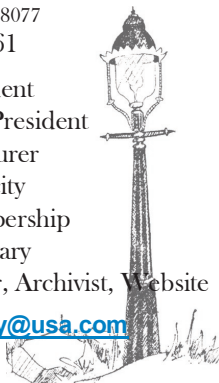
Post Office Box # 112

Riverton, NJ 08077

856-786-6961

Gerald Weaber, Jr.	President
Phyllis Rodgers	Vice President
Paul Daly	Treasurer
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Nancy Hall	Membership
Charlotte Lippincott	Secretary
John McCormick	Editor, Archivist, Website

E-mail/Web: rivertonhistory@usa.com
rivertonhistory.com/



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Constitution - Article II - Purpose

The purpose of the Society shall be to bring together those people who are interested in history and especially the history of the Borough of Riverton, but not limited thereto.

The Society's major function will be to create an awareness of our heritage, to discover, restore, and preserve local objects and landmarks, and to continue to expand our knowledge of the history of the area.

Readers: Our color laser printer broke down. It wasn't the years; it was the mileage. We had to outsource the job. Find much more online that we could not deliver in this issue—a recap of Jane Estes' "Christmas Past" and more gems mined from the newspapers preserved on the HSR website. Read about how we owe this recent digitalization success to many who worked on a microfilm project in the 1980s led by Betty Hahle.



During the 1930s, this rustic character dispensed homespun opinions on society and politics. Look for him atop the New Era's masthead.

THE NEW ERA

and three other vintage area hometown newspapers have just become available on rivertonhistory.com.

The effort to collect and preserve the records of the lives and accomplishments of our forbears and understand the environment in which they lived continues.

We can only hope that some of the many missing New Era issues for years published from its start in 1889, to its finish around 1975 may yet survive tucked away in dusty attics.

Who knew that my Nixon era castoffs would be the collectibles of today? Maybe you have some from the days of Eisenhower or Hoover.

Old advertising matter, maps, photos, newspapers, audio and video recordings, catalogs, invoices and bills, movies, postcards, and many such commonplace items of everyday living become the antiques of a later generation.

Please keep the Society in mind before you dispose of any such items of local historical interest. Call me.

No kidding. 856-764-1551

-JMC

