



Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON
Riverton, N.J. 08077

Founded 1970

Inc. 1978

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Program:

Monday, May 2, 1988

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton

"Burlington County's Claim to Fame" ...

School

Rhett Pernot

Quickly, now: How many sites or events can you name that might be included in a list of our county's claim to fame? If you are unable to get past five, you had better not miss this program!

Rhett Pernot, Administrator of the Burlington County Historical Society since 1982, will give a talk, with slides, that will enlighten us. She has earned a BS in American Studies from the University of Wisconsin and a Master's from NYU in the same field, with specialties in art and literature history. She has many credits that could be listed, among them her current status as vice-president of the Prison Museum, and is a past-president of that organization, and of the Burlington County Business and Professional Women's Association.

Rhett warns that we should come prepared to add bits of information we might have as the slides are shown.

This is also our Annual Meeting, at which time 4 members to the Board of Directors will be elected. The Nominating committee, chaired by Nancy Washington, offers the following slate for re-election: John Parry, Sarah Guertler, Rick Wark, and Betty Hahle. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

Awards:

In keeping with the major function of the Historical Society of Riverton, which is "to create an awareness of our heritage, to discover, restore, and preserve local objects and landmarks...", the Board voted to show its appreciation of preservation/restoration work residents do on their homes (or other buildings) by sending a letter of commendation to them each Spring, beginning in 1988. Last Autumn a committee of 3 was appointed to note work being done about town, and to determine who would receive letters. On April 15 eleven letters were sent out. Work done ranged from obvious improvements--removal of asbestos siding, removal of enclosures, replacement of deteriorated wood porches/columns in kind, restoration by replacing correct porch balustrades those removed by former owners, etc. Less obvious are the skillful replacement of rotted wood, removal of old paint etc., so that to the untrained eye there has been no change at all.

Those who have received our first Annual Letters of Commendation are: Mr./Mrs. Wm Goetz, 400 Midway; Mr./Mrs. Wayne C. Pollock, 200 Park Ave.; Mr./Mrs. Timothy D. Powell, 625 Main St.; Mr./Mrs. Frank Biefert, 304 Main St.; Mr./Mrs. Edward D. Smyth, 205 Lippincott Ave.; Mr./Mrs. Richard H. Wark, 406 Howard St.; Mr./Mrs. Kevin Murphy, 211 Howard St.; Mr./Mrs. Carl Polermo, 419 Thomas Ave.; Mr./Mrs. Harvey Sklar; Mr./Mrs. Stephen Wagenknight, 207 Main St.; and Mr./Mrs. Robert T. Recchiuti, 101 Lippincott Ave.

Congratulations to these caring residents who, in maintaining the integrity of their homes, and, therefore, of their neighborhoods, are

also preserving Riverton's visual history.

Recipients of letters have been invited to attend our May meeting, to be publicly recognized, also. We wish that we could include all of our residents who have maintained their Victorian homes so well over the years in our recognition program. We might suggest that readers walk around town, these nice Spring days, to see what has been done, is being done--and, perhaps, be encouraged to also help in keeping Riverton the lovely Victorian residential community that architects refer to as "a gem".

pdate...

Morgan Cemetery:

Shortly after we had tried to contact owner Norman Brewer by phone, and followed up with a letter, asking that the iron fence along Cinnamon Ave. be retained, it was removed, with several broken parts left strewn along the grounds. Piles of stone indicate work on the road is imminent, but there has been no communication with the owner.

Riverbank:

Lawyers for both sides of the question of use of the riverbank by the public agreed to drop the suit "without prejudice". The earlier ruling that owners have a right to post ownership signs has been used by some to post angry "keep out" signs, and, more recently, to plant thorny bushes along boundary lines. Deeds clearly spell out the intent of the founders, and subsequent developers, that the area between roadway and river wall be open for shade and recreation, and this for the enjoyment of all. Public use for more than 130 years has established its use, even if the deeds had not indicated this. The riverbank has been a part of our heritage, and a source of pride and enjoyment. Wouldn't it be a big step in restoring pride and friendship if all riverfront properties were once again green and shady, and those signs that "rights" permit were more attractive, letting newcomers and visitors know that it is privately owned, so that their generosity in sharing would be spontaneously appreciated?

New Jersey Historical Society:

We have received thanks for our donation of \$25.00 to the N.J. H.S., sent after learning of their tremendous need. It is not too late to write to our legislators, asking their support for this important organization, to help them meet their need for relocating and for staff that will let them properly care for their collections.

Books:

Our month-long display at Riverton Library has now been replaced with one of post cards of Palmyra, from Paul Schopp's collections. The books we have recently purchased that were a part of our display, are now available to the public for reference. Added to these are 2 notebooks of "how-to" pamphlets, with practical suggestions for old-house-care and maintainance. The books are: Houses & Homes, an AASLH "Nearby History" publication; Field Guide to American Houses, by McAlester; Fabrics for Historic Buildings, by Jane C Nylander; and Wall Papers for Historic Buildings, by Richard Nylander. The notebooks cover such topics as window repair, energy conservation in older homes, paint colors, mortar and wood problems, and many others. Included are also some leaflets on ethnic, Jewish, and Black Genealogy, as well as one on legal terms for genealogy and house history exploration.

her Notes:

The APR meeting on April 16th, to which Historical Society members were invited, was an excellent one. The speaker, Margaret Westfield, is a preservation architect, and included in her slide presentation many

Riverton houses. Many of those attending the meeting are members of both APR and our own organization.

The Office of Burlington County's Prosecutor has sent us information ^{on} a program located in their office called the Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy, which provides support and assistance to victims and to witnesses of crime. Aid or information can be had by calling (609)265-5048.

The Haddonfield Garden Club is holding an herb sale and Garden Party at the Haddonfield Historical Society, 343 Kings Highway East, on April 29 from 11-4. There you may enjoy sampling breads and savories, potpourri and wine--and find some plants to take home to grow in your own garden.

Remember to replenish your supply of Historical Society Note Paper, at Victorian Thymes, or at the Library. And a walking tour guide. If you have taken the walk before, retrace the route, branch out a little, and see what changes have taken place in the interval. You might be surprised...

Yesterday...

When winter gives way to Spring it is time to bring the bicycle out of the garage and think of riding again. By 1896 bicycles had become popular for both men and women, and there was a choice of models and makes. "The Continental" could be had from Wanamaker's, a sturdy vehicle built from Mannerman steel tubing, with Jersey tool steel drop forgings, Plymouth rims, Garfield saddle, and a choice of Hartfore or Morgan & Wright tires. Both men's and ladies' models cost \$45. These bikes had no springs, no brakes, no coasters.....but were enjoyed thoroughly both as transportation and for pleasure. Although by that time they were forbidden on sidewalks, Palmyra generously allowed cyclists to use them where streets had not yet been developed.



It wasn't long before the bicycle began to give way to the automobile. In 1902 the Automobile Club of America issued a circular advising drivers how to avoid runaway accidents (which were frequent and resulted in serious injuries). They were advised to stop when a horse approached, and if it appeared frightened, to lead it around his motor. "If all drivers were considerate", it said, "it would eliminate prejudice against cars, and soon the horses would be as indifferent to them as they now are to the once terrifying bicycles."

By 1912 car ads were increasing: A Studebaker roadster cost \$750; a Hupmobile Touring Car, fully equipped with top, speedometer, and windshield wiper brought \$1000. There was also the Mercer, the DeTamble, and the Everitt, which had a double ignition system. The numbers of cars continued to increase, and by May of 1941, there was 1 car to every 4 persons in Burlington county: population, 97,013 : 23,889 registered cars.

Just before the century turned, both Riverton and Palmyra were struggling with their new governments--and with the various new developments and inventions that meant progress--and controversies. Should electricity be brought to the towns? If so, by which new company? Is gas better? Do we really want water mains laid? Why change the sewer system?

In Riverton the problem of electricity brought about the abrupt resignations of Mayor Ogden and councilman, Dr. Hall, scarcely more than a year after they had taken office in the new borough government. And then there were rumors that trolley lines could be laid..and telephone lines. Ordinances were passed--and changed; lines could be laid--no, they couldn't. Yes, we want trolleys, but we have conditions--and the companies wouldn't agree to them. One by one, though, both towns found their answers. In April, 1900, a newspaper item in a Riverton column stated tersely, "Gas was turned on last week for the first."

Rivershore Gas Co. bought a lot at Broad/Main, and soon had a handsome building there. The water company raised the cost per fire plu8 to 15¢.

Palmyra still struggled between gas and electric street lights, and a newspaperman asked why they didn't put gas (at \$16. per yr) at one end of town, and electric lights (\$65-\$95 per yr, depending on size) at the other, and let the people decide which they liked better.

These matters were finally settled, and other problems took their place. In 1912 Fourth Street, between Delaware Ave. and Elm, was being improved, making it "a pretty thoroughfare all the way through Riverton, being well shaded and extensively used by pedestrians; and will be more so, when the sidewalks are laid."

Swimming was a natural part of summer, in riverfront towns, and the river was the scene of many boating and swimming accidents. But those years also were a time when swimmers dreamed of great feats. In 1912 Charles Duberow, a Phila. bank clerk who lived in Riverton, wanted to swim the Delaware Bay, from Cape May to Cape Henlopen, and set a date of June 30 to do it. His last long practice swim, about 2 weeks before then, was 16½ miles, from Burlington Island to ½-mile above the PRR bridge. He made it in 6 hours, with his coach following in a row boat. Oh--and before his swim, he had rowed over to Bristol to pick up his coach, and then over to the Island! Perhaps he never realized his dream--at least, no further word was found of him in the Mt. Holly Herald.

A few years later, the Riverton Yacht Club awarded bronze medals to boys who could swim across the river. In July, 1918, Stewart Hollingshead, Ellis Ogden, and Mercer Shreve won their medals.

Summer wasn't all fun, though. Housewives were reminded that they could make their work easier by removing many of the rocking chairs from the living room--and have more space to move about. And that a pile of newspapers by the stove was handy to set soiled and smokey pans on. And that a rug under a bed only complicates cleaning: 3 small ones are needed in a bedroom--1 before the dresser, 1 before the washstand, and one by the bed.

Without refrigeration and screens that we take for granted today, flies were a problem. Riverton's board of health in 1912 decided to reduce their population by offering 2¢ per 100 dead flies caught in the borough, until Sept. 15th. Silas Coddington was "paymaster and undertaker", and in one week paid up for 141,000 dead flies!!!

And a base ball game had to be interrupted when "clouds of potato bugs" swarmed over the field, players, and spectators, resulting in frantic swatting and ducking, until they went on their way.

At Cowperthwaite's Apothecary shop on Main St. one purchased a syrup of tar and cherry, for "change-of-the-weather coughs that lead to catarrh and consumption."

Still, there were picnics, dances, croquet (sometimes in the evening by candlelight), strolls through Dreer's trial gardens and rose gardens, and along the river;--there were books to read, letters to write, visits to make--more often than one would suppose in a period when travelling was not easy, trips were made "to Europe", to "the Orient", to "the Holy Lands"...these were all parts of "yesterdays"....

Have a safe and happy summer, and meet with us again in the Fall--renewed and ready to actively participate in the Historical Society of Riverton's new season of activities.

(bbh)