



Gaslight News

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Riverton, N.J. 08077

Founded 1970

Inc. 1978

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Program:

Monday, March 13, 1989

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

"Auctions - Appraisals & Antiques"

.....Robert Barron

Bob Barron, perhaps better known as "Mr. Web", literally grew up in the business of buying, selling, and appraising antiques. Many will remember the Web shop on Howard Street, a good many years ago, and then later on, at the old Keating Hotel just above the Creek. Bob lives in Riverton, with his wife and daughters.

The talk will be followed by a question and answer period, and then an appraisal period. For this, members are invited to bring along 1 or 2 items of their own for appraisal and discussion.

This is a popular type of program, so come early, with your treasures in hand, to be sure to find a good seat in our small meeting room.

May's meeting is our Annual meeting, at which time election of members to the Board will be held, recipients of Letters of Recognition will be recognized, and in addition, there will be a good program: River transportation, by Paul Schopp. More later, in the next Newsletter.

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Update:

The Game of Riverton proved to be a successful fund-raiser, and of the 500 ordered, at this writing, just 1 game is left. We have received one donation from the company's area representative for a group's contracting to do a similar game via our recommendation, and may possibly receive others, if more contracts are realized from our suggestion.

Our new supply of triple-fold notepaper arrived too late for Christmas, but in fine time to replenish supplies depleted by post-Christmas notes. Each package (15 sheets) contains two scenes: the familiar one of the Columbia at the Yacht Club landing, and a new one, of the Riverton Station at the turn of the century. The price is the same, (\$3.50), and boxes are available at the Library and The Victorian Thymes, as well as from Louise Vaughn, who has so capably taken care of this project.

Plaques: Two plaques for the Solin and Hayes homes on Main Street were delivered before the Library House Tour, in December. Five more applications have been requested, and when they are completed and returned, there should be no problem in having them approved. Anyone wishing a Historical Society Plaque for their home may apply for one, if (1) the building is 100 years old; (2) it is architecturally significant, or (3) of particular value to local history. For the present, applications may be obtained at 405 Midway.

Our Collections have been checked by Paul Schopp and Rick Wark, and a list of materials needed to store them safely prepared to present to the Board. We have some fine materials in our collection, and want to maintain them as carefully as possible. We need a place--a room where they can be properly kept and used, instead of just space in which to store them. Without a building of our own, that's a problem. If anyone has a suggestion, please contact any Board member.

Miscellany:

Salem County: Historical Society is sponsoring Open House in Fenwick's Colony, with more than 35 historic buildings open, on Saturday, May 6, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. A special feature this year includes a train ride between Salem and Woodstown on a restored passenger train, an antique carriage collection, and gardens. Tickets, \$7.50; train rides, additional \$10.00. Info, phone 935-5004, or contact their Historical Society at 79 Market St., Salem 08079.

"A Story of People", by Charles Harrison, published by Salem's Historical Society, tells the story of the county and its people for over two centuries. Many photos, maps; limited edition, \$25.00.

New Jersey Historical Society's Genealogy Club meets next on March 18. Speaker Howard Green, on Contours of New Jersey Immigration History. That same day there will be the 1st of 3 sessions on genealogy research, Beyond the Basics. 230 Broadway, Newark.

Interested persons are invited to attend a workshop on the National Estuary Program, and the work being done to enhance the water quality in the Lower Delaware River and Delaware Bay. Further info and reservations, call Dr. Mary Downes Gastrich, Program Coordinator, at (609) 633-7020. The date is February 28, 5:30-9:30 p.m. at Glassboro State College.

The Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission is researching possibilities for presenting an exhibition on New Jersey Inventors and Patent Models, to open Fall, 1989. They are asking our help in locating the existence of artifacts in our area, and want to include "nutty" inventions as well as those representing technological advances. Contact Kyle Nardelli, Historic Site Supervisor at (201) 745-4177 weekdays, or write c/o Middlesex Co. Cult/Heritage Comm., 841 Georges Rd, North Brunswick N.J. 08902.

Workshop: Free: Philadelphia Architectural Salvage, Lts., 1214 N. 26th St., Phila phone 215-236-9339. 10 a.m., Saturday mornings.

March 4, Interior Woodwork / March 11, Fixing Floors / March 18, Kitchens, Baths, and Fasteners.

Series of 3 Old House Workshops, by Samuel Y. Harris, P.E., at Community Center, Crosswicks N.J. (near Bordentown)

April 1, Roofs / April 15, Walls / May 6, Structure.

These are excellent workshops, and more info may be had by calling 215-922-6600. Cost, \$150 per session, or \$400 for series. Fee includes workshop materials, refreshments, and catered lunch.

Reminder: If you have overlooked renewing your membership this year, please do so now, using the enclosed form. If you do not need the form for your own membership, please see if you can help our organization to build by bringing in a new member, with the form. Guests are always welcome to attend our meetings, but active members are needed, too. New members may join at any time.

Yesterday.....

During the month of February, PTA's throughout America celebrate Founder's Week. It was on 17 February, 1897 that mothers summoned by Mrs. Theodore Birney, a dedicated child-welfare activist from Georgia, came together and organized the National Congress of Mothers, the first name by which the organization was known.

A hundred years ago the infant mortality rate was very high. Scarcely any family had escaped the loss of at least one child, and it was not uncommon to have lost three or four. Epidemics were a part of life, and remedies for illnesses or accidents were few. In Riverton and similar rural villages, there was not yet gas or electricity, city water supplies, and the river received such sewage as was collected through a few private lines. Cooking was done on a coal range in the kitchen, and water was heated there, or in washtubs outside. Laundry was done by hand, on a scrubbing board resting in the washtub, with home-made soap. Milk was bought at the dairy or from a vendor, and carried home in a pail. Most families had a few chickens, but not good facilities for storing eggs--few families had ice chests, so

"refrigeration" was most often limited to a window sill, or a cool cellar. School rooms were crowded (50 children, 1 teacher, 1-room building) in poorly heated and ventilated buildings, and shared drinking water from a bucket and common dipper. Tuberculosis was prevalent everywhere. Horses and cows within the village, and open heaps of trash and garbage, the norm for the era, provided many breeding places for flies and mosquitoes, and there were no screens. If a new mother was ill or died, the infant's chance of survival plummeted.

In 1890, eight young women in Riverton formed a Literary Club, called The Porch Club, for their meeting place. Five years later they decided to organize formally, elect their first president--Mrs. Edwin C. Grice--and then decided to also expand their membership and scope of interest. Two Sections were formed, one of which was called the Free Kindergarten Section, under the direction of Mrs. Grice and Mrs. Howard Sharp. This was actually a child-study group, a new concept in a period that was just beginning to consider the value of understanding the growth and development of the child, and the care and feeding of the infant. For the past decade concerned mothers had begun to form Mother's Clubs for this purpose, but very few existed outside of the larger cities.

The idea of a Kindergarten to precede the formal--and strict--schooling of the child, was still largely experimental. The movement began in Germany in 1837 when an educator, Friedrich Froebel, who felt that children should have a place to develop "under gentle treatment", opened "the children's garden" for 3-and 4-year-olds. In 1855 the first Kindergarten in America was opened in Wisconsin for German-speaking families, and 5 years later the first public one, in Boston, was opened. For some years Kindergarten was considered to be a form of charity, for underprivileged children primarily, and was usually privately supported.

The Porch Club's Free Kindergarten Section apparently made itself heard, for in 1896 Riverton's School Board purchased the deconsecrated Sacred Heart Chapel, enlarged it, and opened Burlington County's first Froebelian Kindergarten, for 4-year-olds.

The following year the Section sent delegates to Washington DC in answer to Mrs. Birney's call, and participated in the founding of the National Congress of Mothers, which would have its National Headquarters in Chicago, where interest had been shown for many years. One of their first crusades was the establishment of Kindergartens in public schools, and since Riverton's had already begun, one may assume that our delegates were active in that program. The Congress' basic goal was to create a better environment for children in the home, school, and community, and they have worked through many agencies at all levels to bring about reforms we take for granted today. An early goal was "to save 100,000 children" (through education of parents and all those associated with child rearing/education/care), and adopted a slogan: To save the children today is to save the Nation tomorrow.

In Riverton the Section set up meetings for all mothers interested in hearing talks on various aspects of child-care--feeding, clothing, bottle and milk care, sick children, developing trust, punishment, venereal diseases, sex education, reading materials, and many more. Toward upgrading school conditions, where the teacher's word was law and parents were not permitted to interfere, the ladies campaigned to have a woman elected to the School Board. In 1898 Mrs. Grice became the first woman to serve in that capacity.

Somewhere in this period the Section changed its name to "Mother's Council", as more descriptive of its work. Still later it became "Mother's Circle", symbolic of an endless chain of maternity, parenthood, childhood.

After the formation of the National Congress, Riverton's Section joined it, and also became affiliated with the Pennsylvania State organization, since there was none in New Jersey. In 1900 the 16 members of the Mother's Council had printed 500 "Calls", sent throughout the State, inviting representatives to meet at Presbyterian Church in Riverton, to form a New Jersey Congress of Mothers. They contacted well known educators to serve as an Advisory Board during the organizational period, and on 20 October, 1900, the New Jersey Conference of Mothers was formed--with Mrs. Grice elected as the first State President. Her term was followed by the election of Mrs. Alexander Marcy jr. to that office, and in 1907, in the same room where the State Conference had been founded, she was presented with a gavel from the local Mother's Council.

The New Jersey organization changed its name in 1918 to the N.J. Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, and then, in 1928, to the N.J. Congress of Parents and Teachers. When the State building was dedicated in 1957, Mrs. Nancy May, president of Riverton PTA, presented them with a framed copy of the original "Call", which hangs in that building today.

Lectures and training for mothers continued. In 1907 they launched a crusade to clean up the refuse in town, calling themselves "Fly Fighters". They encouraged individuals to burn or bury what they could, and the mayor to provide teamsters to haul away what was left; then they helped owners beautify business and vacant lots. There was a noticeable decrease in flies that spring.

The Circle, with the help of pamphlets from National and outlines and awards from The Woman's Home Companion magazine, held a Baby Contest, in which 40 entrants (infant-5 yrs) were weighed, measured, and tested in 5 areas of growth/development, and which was preceded by several months of weekly meetings (of a kind of early well-baby clinic), where they were weighed, parents counseled on feeding, sleeping, clothing, etc. The Contest took 2 days, tests were administered by 4 MDs and 1 dentist (all local), and was held in Christ Episcopal Parish House. On the 2nd floor were posters, displays, charts, and 3 sample nurseries, advertised as having everything needed for good infant care and affordable for all parents.

While the mothers listened to speakers (at meetings over the years) their hands were busy, making garments for less fortunate children. Boxes of garments were sent to San Francisco after the earthquake; 500 garments were sent to Belgium for children devastated by war there; boxes were sent to a child-care center in Camden (10¢ a day, 6 am to 6:30 pm and included bathing, clothing, and feeding). The May meeting was always a May Party, with demonstrations by school children of something learned that year--a Kindergarten fire drill, one year; singing of scales and identifying music symbols by elementary students another, when music in schools was new; etc. It ended with a May Pole by the older girls--and the custom was the forerunner of the lovely May Days Rivertonians enjoyed for so many years.

Although around 1901 all mothers attending meetings (and membership grew to about 150) to join the Mother's Council (Circle), the work was under the direction and administration of the Porch Club Section by that name. In March 1917 the last meeting was held, and the gavel and bank balance (\$5.14) turned over to Miss Parker, secretary of the group--which by then included teachers and fathers--and the group re-organized as Riverton PTA. In May the Porch Club officially discontinued the Circle Section, and the new PTA continued its work independently. (from Porch Club, but affiliated with State/National Org.)

In 1965 the PTA disbanded in favor of an independent Parent's Group--for no one reason, but a combination of many small things. This year the Parent's Group has given way to a PTA, and so a cycle is completed.

This "Yesterday" column is a tribute to the many accomplishments of PTA, from National to local levels. There are far too many to even list here, but include playgrounds, school lunches, Summer Round-Ups, safety programs, vocational training, juvenile courts and probationary programs, institutional care, and employment of matrons (vs all-male care), domestic science, music, and art taught in schools; awarding of prizes encouraging proficiency in particular subjects to students; sponsoring Camp Fire and Scout troops, and sponsoring and helping with local health and immunization programs. These, and many, many more things we take for granted today trace their roots to the work of the PTA. The new Riverton PTA deserves our support, and has our best wishes for success as it continues the tradition of helping to meet the needs of our children.

bbh/ ed.