



Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, Inc.

Riverton, N.J. 08077

Founded 1970

Inc. 1978

Nov. 1990 - Jan. 1991

vol. xvii-ii (#60)

Meeting: Monday, November 26, 1990 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
Program: "Local Preservation and The Certified Local Government"

.....Charles Scott

Charles Scott, of the Office of New Jersey Heritage, in Trenton, will bring us a program dealing with the Certified Local Government (CLG) and just what it is. We have heard the term for some time, often without understanding it. This is an opportunity to hear from an expert what it is, how such designation is achieved, its advantages or disadvantages, and how it can help with local preservation. There will be ample opportunity to ask questions.

There will also be a slide presentation, which will include some of Riverton's buildings. Anyone interested in Historic Nomination and preservation should not miss this program.

Meeting: Monday, January 14, 1991 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
"The Columbian Exposition, 1892/3, and the Quincentenary, 1992"

.....Joseph M. Laufer

Until the Columbian Exposition in Chicago a century ago, Columbus was barely mentioned in history books. The Exposition changed that dramatically, and almost overnight he became a hero. The first set of Commemorative stamps was issued for the Exposition, and the first set of Commemorative coins minted. And there were other "firsts"...come and hear about them...

Plans to celebrate the Quincentenary throughout the world are well under way, and Historical Societies are encouraged by our Cultural and Heritage Commission to plan their own particular projects commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World.

Mr. Laufer, who comes most appropriately, from Columbus, N.J., heads the International Columbian Quincentenary Alliance, and publishes its Newsletter, *Discovery Five Hundred*. He is a most knowledgeable and enthusiastic speaker, and will bring for us his dramatic slide presentation of the Columbian Exposition, as well as items from his collections--spoons, stamps, postcards, coins, etc.

Make note of the date NOW, as your next Newsletter will not come out until after this program, and it is one you will enjoy thoroughly. Don't chance missing it!!

New Eras.....

The newspapers loaned by Fred DeVece for microfilming at the Archives were returned to him on October 18, along with a complete set of films--14 reels, in all. Fred donated them to our Historical Society, and we, in turn, gave them to the Burlington County Historical Society, where there are facilities for researching them (reader and copier) in the new Corson Poley Library. The earliest paper in the group is from July, 1894. From that date through 1921 there are single, or small runs of papers contained on the first reel. After that, with the exception of 1923, there are complete, or nearly complete, runs each year through 1949. Some papers have had articles cut from them, or have a section missing, but each year is identified with a chart showing what is missing from that run. It is a simply marvellous contribution to Riverton's history, for local issues are not always

important enough to be carried in larger papers carrying small columns of items from smaller towns, so would otherwise have been lost.

"Romance of Riverton" Now on Tape...

In good time for Christmas giving and enjoying, the Video Cassettes of this popular 1926 movie made in Riverton for its Chamber of Commerce, will be available, and at a very reasonable price. Running time is 43 minutes, and each tape comes with a small booklet giving the film's background, and identifying some of the people and places shown. Tapes may be ordered now, by calling 829-6315--and delivery is expected the first week in December. Price will be determined by the Board at its next meeting, but will be under \$20.00. The supply is limited to 100, so to avoid disappointment, place your order early.

Update...

Frank Wagenknight has accepted an appointment to complete the 1-year term on the Board of Directors that was open.

Borough Council has appointed a new committee to consider preparation of a Nomination of Riverton to the Historic Register. Dan Campbell is our representative, by Board vote. Other members, according to the newspaper, are Keith Betten, Louise Allen, Mort Traugott, Nancy Siefert, and Anne McIlhenny. They meet under the direction of Councilman James Johnson, at present.

The tour of Harleigh Cemetery in October was cancelled, for lack of adequate response. If the idea seemed novel, rethinking may let us plan for the tour at another time. Cemetery architecture is a special field, and sculptured pieces are beautiful--some done by the same artists whose works one admires in museums. At Harleigh there is the added attraction of birds--it is almost a bird sanctuary, with more than a hundred species sighted there. Similar tours in Philadelphia are sold out--and at a much higher price than the small donation we asked.

Remember to send in your dies for 1990/91, if you haven't already done so. Response has been good, to date--but some have been overlooked.

Historical Society note paper makes a nice gift--\$3.50 at the Library and The Victorian Thymes, or from Louise Vaughn.

The Library's House Tour this year will be on December 8, and some very interesting homes will be open for the tour.

And speaking of the Library--an effort is being made to locate the books our Society has placed in the Library over the past few years, and they are now on a particular shelf near the New Jersey collections. Our books have been meant for reference, only...if some have been borrowed and forgotten, please get them back where they will be available for others to read, too.

Yesterday.....

The 1894 New Era in the DeVece collection is larger than later issues, and has a somewhat different format: there is a separate page headed Palmyra, and another headed Riverton, concentrating on news from these towns. There is also a column of events from Riverside. Dr. Janney editorializes about the opposition to another paper within the area that he has felt since taking over the paper from Mr. Brewster, and says that he isn't in it for the money, but because he feels that a "town like Riverton should have a well written paper representing it." Supporters of the Palmyra News seemed to feel that it was competition, and were trying to discourage the local businesses from advertising in it.

The third reel in the collection covers 1925 and 1926, and provided so much information about the era and the filming of The Romance of Riverton that were not available anywhere else. The era between the Great War to End Wars and the Great Depression was one of many changes. Times were good...new inventions were making work easier and expanding recreational activities. Victrolas were popular, and records could be purchased in Palmyra for 39¢; player pianos were still in many homes, and music rolls were 59¢--or 79¢ for the newest tunes. Riverton's Park, a memorial to its veterans, had finally been made possible by a purchase from Dreer's, and had a baseball diamond and football field, but would not be paid off until 1928, or developed with grandstand, playground, etc., and landscaping until 1930. New street lights were installed at the foot of

Fulton, Howard, Main, and Penn streets, warning people that they ended at Bank Avenue. Most streets were of rough surface and full of potholes; few streets had curbs or permanent sidewalks, although a program to rectify this was beginning.

Frances Ruppert set a new record for the 100-yard dash at the Middle Atlantic Track and Field Championship meet in August, 1925, of 11.8 seconds. That was just 1/5 of a second short of the world record. Frances, who lived on Fulton street and whose father worked for Dreer's, ran for the Meadowbrook Club, Phila.

The Delaware River Bridge (Ben Franklin) opened in 1926, with ceremonies followed by pedestrian traffic on July 4th, and more ceremonies, after which President Coolidge was escorted across, on the 5th. Then the bridge was opened to all. And incorporation of a Tacony-Palmyra Bridge Company was authorized, with work to begin the following year, and its grand opening in 1929. The ease with which people from other areas could reach town via bridges prompted Riverton's Council to consider what could happen if someone decided to try to industrialize our residential town, and passed its first Zoning Ordinance.

Earlier in 1926, though, topics of interest ranged from concern about the frequency and severity of railroad accidents at crossings, from the steep grades that had gradually been increased in recent years, and the trolley tracks running parallel to them. Since trolleys didn't have to stop at crossings, a vehicle moving over the tracks could find itself in the path of a trolley, with a train approaching at the same time. The railroad wanted to close most crossings and move the station to Elm Ave., but finally agreed to lower the tracks and cut down the weeds that were growing high, along them. And local police were empowered to arrest any trolley motorman who didn't come to a full stop at crossings.

A Rotary Club had been organized in December, and got its Charter in February, 1926, with 25 members. Dr. Charles S. Mills was elected its first president. And a new professional base ball team was put together, with hope of reviving Riverton's "glory" from the past. They played home games each Saturday afternoon, and 1 night game. In mid-season their star shortstop, Joe Luciano, was signed up by Connie Mack's scouts, and left for Delaware and training there.

Over Christmas the Post Office had been extremely busy. In about six weeks they had sold more 2¢ stamps than in a whole year shortly before, and in the last two days before the holiday had run 4400 pieces of mail through the cancelling machines. PostMaster Mattis reported that when the office closed Christmas night, everything was delivered. On the Saturday following, the newly organized and equipped highway department got its first test, when there was a heavy snowstorm. Two men with plows had the sidewalks cleared by noon, and then shovelled the crossings. On Monday tractors and the scraper cleared the gutters, and the new dump truck carted the snow away from the intersections.

Riverton had a very active Chamber of Commerce, and came up with many ideas to promote the town and to increase business for the many shops--almost 70 businesses were listed in Riverton, in 1926, mostly home-based and family operated. In October they held an Old Home Day, and the New Era invited old residents to write in, in an effort to discover Riverton's oldest residents. Published responses came from Albert Faunce, b. 1857 in Phila., in Riverton since 1859; Mrs. JCW Frishmuth, who was the daughter of founder Robert Biddle, and came here in 1851; Mrs. Edward Lippincott, who had been married in Indiana in 1868 and came here to live one week later; William Hatzell, born in Palmyra in 1847, who said he had moved here at age two years. He added that he had worked for Edward Ogden for 50 years. Wm. N. Mattis wrote that he had been a resident for over 50 years.

That same month the New Era started a new feature: "The Riverton School Broadcaster", a bi-weekly column of essays, poems, and news written by school children "to let readers and parents know what is happening in the school." The first issue had items from 2nd graders Clifton Mayfield and Edward Smith, and 6th graders Charles Woolston and Cecil Gest.

C of C members were promoting building a movie in Riverton, but soon news of a new

project was announced. A movie would be made in and about Riverton, to be called "The Romance of Riverton." It was considered to be the newest form of civic advertising, in an era when large-scale advertising was something new. Philco, for example, was just launching its first big campaign, with a goal of manufacturing and selling a million radios in a year. Riverton's picture had a goal of raising awareness and pride in Rivertonians, and stimulating local business.

Edwin Cooper, of Hainesport, was engaged to produce and direct the film. Louis C. Clelland, the Chamber's secretary, was assigned to work on the script of the story as outlined by Cooper. H.B. Conner, Karl W. Latch, and Walter L. Bowen were appointed to work with Cooper on what should be included in the film, and many others helped with recruiting actors, setting up times and plans for action for scenes, etc. Local people became the "stars", primarily the sons and daughters of Chamber members. Oliver Bowen, the hero, was a senior at Moorestown High at the time; Elaine Hatch, who lived on Golf Road, played opposite him. The final scenes were shot in her home.

With the movie a better business promotion was organized, with slogans, an essay contest on Riverton: Past - Present - Future, open to Riverton and Cinnaminson children, and an array of prizes donated by local businesses, to be distributed by drawings at the three scheduled performances of the finished film.

The New Era articles mention the general theme of the movie, from "history"--a rather fanciful one, to the "growth and development of Riverton to the present", via a love story. It was to include churches, schools, industry, officials, prominent people and places, etc., in Riverton and Cinnaminson. The opening scenes were done in sepia, which added to the scenic beauty of the Park, where it was taken. Because film used at that time was nitrate based, and very unstable, about half of the finished movie was lost through deterioration during the years before it was redone on safety film.

On May 6, 7, 8, the completed movie was shown to an appreciative audience in the Riverton school auditorium. There were afternoon and evening shows, by ticket only, and shown with The Romance of Riverton was another film, The Man Without A Country. In addition, Lee Mitton and his band provided music (he lived on Cinnaminson street, was for many years a church organist, and may be remembered as an upholsterer), and the prizes were awarded to holders of tickets they had received with local purchases. Prizes included socks, shirts, silver pen, a 10-lb. cake, baskets of groceries, baseball bat and glove, 25 gal. gas, and more.

The movie was shown twice more, at the Mt. Holly Fair, a few weeks later, and then in September at a Camden Exposition. From concept to viewing, it held the spotlight for about 5 weeks! And its "rave reviews" were limited to our town's papers: not a word was found in bigger papers that routinely carried items from town.

It was considered "a success in every way" by the Chamber of Commerce, according to the New Era's final article on it--and relegated to "the Chamber's Archives." It was occasionally aired at the Broadway Palace, where it lay forgotten for years, and was given to Joseph Stow (who had won 3rd prize in that Essay contest, long ago) by the Broadway's manager. It remained in his care until he gave it to our Historical Society. We, with the help of Rotary and Porch Clubs, had the remaining film transferred to modern film, and now to tapes. In this way, a bit of our town's past has been saved for others to see and enjoy now, and in the future--a living record of our "yesterday"....

bbh, ed.

Remember to make note of coming program dates, as you enjoy the coming Holidays and all of the season's festivities.....

Greetings to all, and a prayer for peaceful settlements where differences exist.....

