



Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, Inc.

Riverton, N.J.

08077

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Meeting: Monday, March 4, 1991 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
Program: "Our State House: Its Story And Its Restoration

... G. Gary Sullivan and Karen Poling

When we think of visiting an historic area, we often overlook what is right here at home: the Historic Complex in Trenton. The center of the Complex is New Jersey's State House.

Trenton has been our capital for two hundred years, and our State House is the second oldest in continuous use in the United States. And did you know that in 1871 Samuel Sloan, the architect who laid out the original village of Riverton, designed new wings for both Legislative Houses?

For 150 years additions, fires, modernization projects changed the State House, and then it was simply neglected. When it was scheduled for demolition it was almost lost, but for the past two years extensive restoration has been taking place. Over 300 workers and special craftsmen are making the State House once again a beautiful building, as well as improving utilization of space for the important work that is done there.

Gary Sullivan, Projects Coordinator, and Karen Poling, Exhibit Specialist, will review some of the State House's history, and present slides showing the work that is nearing completion now. They will also discuss the exciting new programs being developed to instill greater pride among New Jersey's residents, and to help us all better understand the lawmaking processes that affect our daily lives.

Invite a friend to come with you, to this most interesting program.

Update...

At the March meeting a Nominating Committee will be named, to present 4 candidates for election to the Board, at the May meeting. The following members are completing 3-year terms this May: Sara Guertler, Rick Wark, Frank Wagenknight, and Betty Hahle.

Tapes...

The Romance of Riverton tapes sold well. Tapes were donated to: Riverton School, Riverton Library, Burlington County Historical Society, and Joseph Stow. Mr. Stow's donation of the original reels of film to our Society enabled us to have the salvageable footage preserved--one of the very few films of this type extant from this era (1926).

Our thanks to those who manned a display table at the Library House Tour in December--Rod Zwirner, Paul Schopp, Paul Daly, Betty Hahle. And to Rick and Margie Wark, who helped with orders and sales.

Station Lights...

Borough Council has approved placement of the two station lights by the Borough building, as suggested by Dan Campbell's drawing. Sooner or later, everyone goes to the building, and will see them there. Since the footings and future maintenance of the lights will be Borough responsibility, it did not seem advisable to seek placement at the original site, which is railroad property, even though the station is long gone.

Bases for the lights were donated by the railroad, through the efforts of Paul Schopp; restoration work has been done by, and through, Rick Wark.

Books...

Two new books have been ordered, for addition to the Historical Society Reference Shelf at the Riverton Library:

Great Glass in American Architecture, by H Weber Wilson

...a comprehensive survey of decorative-glass art from 1840-1920, and illustrated with 90 color plates.

Preserving Porches, by Renee Kahn

...a guide to porch restoration, and including a study of designs from Colonial era through the present day back patio.

Both should be helpful to Riverton residents who are interested in learning more about their homes, and in preserving the integrity of them.

Miscellany...

Palmyra's School buildings..

A group actively interested in saving the old brick school buildings in Palmyra has formed a new Historical Society for that purpose. They have applied for inclusion in the Historic Registers, and for Grants to adaptively restore the two buildings. Palmyra's Council has supported the group with a promise of funds, contingent upon their Grant approval.

The older school, facing Cinnaminson Ave., was erected as a 1-room school in 1865. It was enlarged several times, then a second building was erected on the site, but facing Spring Garden St., in 1895/6. An 8-room school, it was built by Louis Lowden of Riverton, for \$12,000. Both buildings have been vacant, and the object of various plans--including demolition--since the last section being used was closed in 1978.

An Award..

In December Edith Hoelle, Library Director of the Gloucester County Historical Society, was honored by the N.J. Historical Commission for her many contributions to the recognition and preservation of the history of South Jersey. She has been instrumental in making their Library, in Woodbury, one of the finest research facilities on area history and genealogy, and in developing their important publications program. Those visiting the Library soon learn that Edie Hoelle has a wealth of information at her fingertips, goes out of her way to be helpful, and does it with a friendly smile. Her award, the Richard J Hughes Annual Award Pitcher, which is the Commission's highest honor, is richly deserved. Our Congratulations!!!

Anniversary..

The N.J. Historical Commission celebrated its 25th Anniversary on January 20th, at the Newark Public Library. Each speaker gave a brief talk on a part of the Commission and its work, from its beginning with a job, but no staff and no budget, to its small beginnings, to its accomplishments and goals for the future. Gail Greenberg of the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission, was one of three from such groups who spoke, and she pointed out a number of things made possible through the Commission's work in South Jersey. There was also a display of the many books that have been written and published through grants from the Commission. The final speaker was John T. Cunningham, whose rather fiesty talk included his concern because for the first time since its creation, the appointments are being made by political party affiliation. At the Reception the Newark Public Library was also honored with an Annual Award Pitcher, for its many contributions to history.

New Notepaper..

The Burlington County Historical Society has just issued new notepaper--available at their buildings in Burlington--each note picturing a different historic site in our county. For the first time, Riverton is included: one of the notepapers shows a fine view of Riverton Yacht Club, est. 1865, the oldest on the Delaware River.

Opportunities...

Feb. 23: Final workshop on "Discover Who Lived in Your House in 1880" at the Historical

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Society of Pa. on Locust St. This one will focus on the Fairmount section of the city. Info: 1-215-732-6200. The Library, Archives, and Museum are now open for extended hours: Saturdays, 10-5; Wednesdays, 10 am-9 pm (and Tues, Thurs, 10-5)

March 1, Reservation deadline: Program on Care & Conservation of Maps, sponsored by N.J. State Library and the Northeast Document Conservation Center: \$15 includes coffee, lunch; 2 locations: Monday, March 11, West Deptford Pub. Library (Grove & Crown Point Rds, Thorofare), OR Tuesday, March 12, Morristown and Township Joint Free Public Library (1 Miller Rd., Morristown). Send check: Map Workshop, Asbury Park Public Library, 500 First Ave., Asbury Park, N.J. 07712.

March 1 Reservation Deadline: Workshop, preservation/conservation of archival materials, on Saturday, March 23, Salem County Historical Society. \$15 includes registration, coffee/donuts, program, demonstration, and box lunch. Contact: 79-83 Market St., Salem N.J. 08079

March 2, Sunday afternoon: International Ethnic Festival, featuring musicians and dancers whose origins are in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Region. 2 p.m. at the Camden County Historical Society, Park Blvd/Euclid Ave., Camden. FREE 964-3333 for info.

May 11: Open House in Fenwick's Colony--more than 30 sites open, 10-5; it is hoped that a few railroad cars will also be open for display. Adv. sales, \$10. Group rates available. Salem Co. Historical Society, 79-83 Market St., Salem N.J. 08079.

(Note: If Hist. Soc. of Riverton members are interested in going as a group, please contact BBHahle, 829-6315)

May 18: Mid-Atlantic Center for Arts, and PNJ, are sponsoring a tour of 10 restored Victorian houses in Cape May. More info next Newsletter...or call 1-201-359-4557.

"Urban Artifacts" offers period pieces for those restoring homes (fireplaces, mantles, etc) Located at 4700 Wissahickon Ave., Phila...1-215-844-8330; for info.

Yesterday...

Seventy-five years ago America was watching a war in Europe, and being gradually drawn into it. There was deep concern for the plight of those in Belgium, and "Self-Sacrificing Days" were held to raise funds for food to send there on a New Jersey ship. The Porch Club "adopted" its first child, a custom of supporting a child in need through donations from members, that continues today.

Riverton had been growing rapidly, especially above the railroad--although Second Ave., (Elm) would have only a few scattered homes for another decade. Below the railroad there were very few homes below 4th St., below Lippincott. In 1915 J.L. Lippincott cut a new road through his apple orchard, running northward from Highland. And the Yacht Club financed the local 4th of July celebration for the last time.

A Suffrage auto parade passing through our area seemed--at least on the surface--to have good support, but in the county vote it lost by about 35,000 votes. The following year saw local boys returning from service on the Mexican border, among them, Raymond Bailey, who had served with Battery B, Camden Unit.

In April, 1917, a Brussels carpet, 9x12, cost \$20; ice for your ice-box was 20¢ for 50 lbs or 10¢ for 25 lbs. A Dodge touring car cost \$785--or \$950, if you wanted a winter top. That month war was declared on Germany, and two months later the first troops sailed for France. "Over There" was sung everhwhere, patriotism ran high--and moviegoers were raving about Mary Pickford. Men aged 18-30 registered for the draft, and in July 17 men from Palmyra, 12 from Riverton, and 9 from Cinnaminson, left for Camp Dix to fill our district's quota. Send-offs were gala affairs. In February, those leaving for Camp were given gifts of stationery, pens, khaki handkerchiefs, and, when assembled in Beverly, a pipe, all donated by Home Guards, town commissions, etc.

Before long local papers were noting that good carpenters were getting hard to find--"so many have gone to Wright's town to build the soldiers' city". A local Red Cross Unit formed with 43 members from Riverton and Palmyra, "to prepare for peace or war". This was the war in which the submarine came into wide use, and the machine gun was used in fighting. And air warfare was developed. At the onset, planes were small,

slow, and used mainly for reconaissance, but by the end of the war small persuit planes reached 150 mph. Bonbers were slower.

Edgar Shaner, Palmyra's only Army flyer, passed his qualifying tests for the U.S. Aviation Corps early in 1917, one of a small group accepted. By August, 1918, he had been soloing for a month in Texas, and was learning to do figure-8s, tailspins, and the falling leaf, all helpful in fighting tactics.

Women also served. Amanda Faunce (Howard St.) went to France with the Pennsylvania Hospital Unit. Helen Elsie Biddle (Bank Ave.) left in May, 1918, for 14 months in France with the Friends' Service Unit. Edith Coale (Lippincott Ave), also served as a nurse. Caroline Richter was the first nurse called for service from Palmyra, and Edith Holvick left her position as night supervisor at Cooper Hospital to serve at the Naval Station with a Red Cross Unit.

Palmyra's police adopted khaki uniforms, instead of the familiar blue ones, and a tablet bearing the names of Palmyra's servicemen was ceremoniously unveiled. However, a few months later the Palmyra News wondered why it had then been neglected, for no more names had been added, and misspelled names not corrected. In April, 1918, the Home Guard raised a flag honoring Riverton's servicemen/women with over 70 stars on it; Palmyra's flag had almost twice that number.

January, 1918, was a bad winter. Cold was severe, shortages were felt, and snow was heavy. Mr. Denneler cleared paths in the streets of Riverton and Palmyra with a wedge drawn by 8 horses. Epidemics of measles and whooping cough closed public places, including schools and churches. Mayor Killam Bennett was appointed coal administrator for Riverton, and dealers could not deliver coal until approved by him or his representative. None was delivered to anyone with a ton of coal on hand. Industries operated on part time schedules, and that resulted in growing unemployment. N.J. had a new Compensation law, to pay \$5 to \$10 per week, maximum time, 300 weeks (for death or total disability) and Palmyra was considering insurance for township employees.

By Fall flu, "Spanish Influenza" had replaced childhood epidemics, and in October that year it was estimated that there were over 1000 cases in Riverton and Palmyra. Nine deaths in 1 week in October were noted. A few courageous women went about helping stricken families, ignoring their own safety, among them Mrs. J. Weart, Mrs. H. Syckle-moore, and Mrs. C.C.Green.

Dr. A.P.Lore parked his auto on Broad Street with the motor running, one day, and although "it had no starter and wasn't hitched to the post" it took off on its own, along the trolley tracks, to the curve for the station, where it collided with Vaughn's delivery wagon, which ended up on a post. The frightened horse got out of its harness and took off. It took 5 men to untangle auto and wagon.

The Armistice was signed in November, 1918, and the news was received with joy and much celebration. But casualty lists continued to arrive. Franklin D'Olier (Park Ave.), serving in France, remained and helped organize the American Legion in Paris. He was elected its first National Commander.

Gradually, the boys came home, and life resumed; new homes were built, old ones "modernized". Palmyra had a new knitting mill and preserve company, and the paper said "Palmyra is making strides toward becoming an industrial center".

A 1920 Ford cost \$440 (with starter, \$745), and Dreer's offered an expanded line of vegetable, flower, and grass seeds, as well as roses, dahlias, perennials, garden implements, lawn mowers, rollers, fertilizers, etc--and a free new garden book. The towns were "dry"--Palmyra having voted so just 2 days before the Armistice--and a League of Women Voters was formed. A New era had begun....

(bbh)

Note: Please make a correction in your VCR booklet: It was JAMES W Taylor who had the garage at Broad/Fulton Sts., NOT Cliff. Has anyone found other errors???