



Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Riverton, N.J.

08077

Founded 1970

Inc. 1978

May - June 1991

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Meeting: Monday, May 6, 1991 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
Program: "Historic Preservation and Camden's Future"
.... Ed Fox

Mr. Fox will present an illustrated talk about preservation planning, landmark designation, house and neighborhood rehabilitation, etc. His talk will include success stories and discussion of future directions.

Mr. Fox holds degrees in Preservation and Planning from Roger Williams College of Bristol, R.I. and the University of Virginia. He has experience in Neighborhood, Land Use, and Farm Land planning and preservation, as well as Preservation Planner for the City of Camden, and holds offices in many Preservation and Historical Societies.

Elections: The Nomination Committee has presented the following slate for election to 3-year terms on the Board of Directors: Frank Wagonknight, Rick Wark, Betty Hahle, and Grace Coles. Additional nominations may be made from the floor on May 6th, providing the nominee has agreed.

On May 29th the full Board will meet and elect officers to serve 2-year terms, and to appoint Committees for 1-year terms.

~~We thank Sara Guertler, who has chosen not to seek another term on the Board, for her years of active participation.~~

Memberships:

New members welcomed during the 1990-91 year are:

William J. Baxter	Titusville, N.J.	Mr/Mrs. E.M. Carhart	Hellertown, Pa.
Mr/Mrs. Anthony Gizzi	Riverton N.J.	Dr./Mrs. Robert Graham	Riverton, N.J.
Fred & Louise Grauer	Riverton N.J.	Dr./Mrs. Clifford Johnson	Riverton N.J.
Mr/Mrs. Elwood Johnson	Riverton N.J.	Robert S. Latch	Riverton N.J.
Mr/Mrs. Ralph Ragomo Sr.	Riverton N.J.	Joseph Stow	Moorestown N.J.

New Categories:

The Board has proposed adding the following categories of membership to the Historical Society of Riverton: Business Patron, \$25. ann.
Sponsor 50. ann.
Life 100.

Since adding new categories requires an amendment to our By-Laws, this notice will serve as the written notice to members. It will be presented for discussion at the May meeting. Since it has been approved by the Board, a general meeting majority will permit the addition of these categories, to start with the 1991-92 season.

New Rates:

It has been many years since our membership dues have changed, but our present rates no longer cover postage and printing costs. Reluctantly, the Board has voted that the following rates will take effect at the end of the present fiscal year:

Individual	\$6.00
Husband/wife	10.00
Sr. Citizen	4.00

Birthday:

The Historical Society of Riverton has reached its 21st birthday. We hold five meetings each season, offering a wide variety of topics in our programs, and publish a quarterly Newsletter. We've done other things, too...have been instrumental in preserving Riverton's gas lights, the 1926 Romance of Riverton silent movie, and local records--some church records, and many local newspapers (now on film); We've developed walking and children's tours of part of our town, held workshops on preservation and genealogy, a program of plaques for significant buildings, and letters of Commendation for preservation/restoration projects in town were started. A Reference Shelf has been set up in the Library, and is periodically added to--two new books, Preserving Porches, and Great Glass in American Architecture (stained glass) will be there after our May meeting. Souvenir Cards are distributed along the parade route on 4th of July (800 last year) with items from local history; a preliminary survey of buildings was made--which now needs updating and expansion. There have also been special trips, programs, displays, donations, and many other things--in all we've done some good and have a good time working together.

Questionnaire:

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a Questionnaire prepared by your Board for all members within participating distance. Please read it, complete it, and return it by May 10th by hand or by mail. It is YOUR opportunity to say what you want your organization to be and to do. Your input is important!

Station Lights:

We would like to have the restored Station Lights installed and dedicated in May, but are still in need of one fitting and shade--many sources have been explored, but so far, none has produced what we need. If you have any suggestions or contacts, please get in touch with Rick Wark (829-7052).

Volunteers are needed over the summer to help organize and conserve our collections, which have been growing. If you can give a few hours, contact Rick Wark, Paul Schopp, or Betty Hable.

Preservation Week:

Preservation Week this year will be celebrated from May 12-18, and marks the 25th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the 75th anniversary of the National Park Service, as well as the annual celebrations by preservation groups across the country. This year's theme is "Celebrate YOUR Heritage".

The dictionary defines "heritage" as that which is inherited, as possessions, characteristics, conditions, cultural traditions, bodies of knowledge, etc., handed down from past times. An individual's heritage includes genealogy--ethnic, racial, family traditions, etc.. Add to that a community heritage--local history, architecture, customs, neighborhoods, etc. And to that we add our heritage as Americans, where people of all sizes and shapes, ages, colors, backgrounds, talents, life-styles, faiths and beliefs, share our great Nation's history and treasures.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has suggested a number of ways in which to celebrate Preservation Week, to get people aware, involved, and to enjoy it. Our Mayor has formally proclaimed May 12-18 as Preservation Week in Riverton, and the Historical Society has planned a kick-off event.

We're going to create a poster promoting Riverton and Preservation Week--a very SPECIAL poster, for YOU will be in it! On FRIDAY, MAY 3, at 12:30 p.m. a professional photographer will be at the Yacht Club--a significant and well recognized historic building--to make a picture that will then be made into posters. We have been assured that posters will be ready before the end of Preservation Week, to place about town (and for individuals to purchase). All Riverton residents who want to be in the picture are invited to be there, and as many as will fit into it will be included! The children at Riverton School are making a banner, which they will hold from the balcony, and the Borough officials, firemen, business people, churches, Scouts--have been invited to take part and to be in RIVERTON's Celebrate YOUR Heritage Poster.

Our Poster will be exhibited at the National Preservation Conference in San Francisco in October, where posters will be evaluated, on (1) best portrayal of community heritage and historic resources, and (2) originality of photo composition.

REMEMBER: Friday, May 3, at 12:30 p.m., at the Yacht Club. BE THERE!!! Rain date, is 1 week later, Friday, May 10th--same time, same place (in case of rain, not clouds)

That's the beginning: Everyone can, and should, get involved in some Preservation activity this year. How? As individuals--look into your own genealogy..talk about your family, its customs/traditions with your children/grandchildren; in the community, walk around a different part of town than your usual route..really look at the architecture...say "hello" to neighbors there;

Every house has a story to tell--do you know your house's history? Photos, letters, period newspapers (microfilmed), older residents, deeds, etc. all help to piece it together. For Preservation Week decorate YOUR home: flags, banners, flowers, post its date of erection, or name of early owner. So many of Riverton's buildings qualify for plaques--yet few have them today. We'd be happy to have to order more made if you'll apply for one!

Expand your knowledge of what interests you most. Read a new book on architecture, stained glass, old gardens, care of brick sidewalks, biographies, restoration tips, historical events, etc. Enjoy YOUR heritage...do all that you can to pass it along for others to enjoy, too.

Yesterday...

Before there was a Riverton, the Lippincott farm's herd of cows crossed the narrow dirt road to Westfield each morning, to the meadow and creek beyond. The fields produced a variety of vegetables and some fruits, with potatoes and cabbages predominating. There were several houses scattered on it, including a few frame tenant houses. The fishery was productive, and in season, the large numbers of shad caught in the big nets brought eager buyers from the city.

In 1851 a group of 10 men designated one of their number to purchase 120 acres of the Lippincott farm lying between the C&A railroad line (1834) and the Delaware river, on which they planned to have summer homes built. Robert and William C. Biddle, Caleb and James Clothier, Prof. Charles D. Cleveland, Chalkley Gillingham, Dillwyn and William D. Parrish, Daniel L. Miller Jr., and Rodman Wharton, all but one Quakers, engaged architect Samuel Sloan (1815-1884) to design their villas and to lay out a complete village of 120 lots, to be called Riverton. The design included a walled and landscaped riverbank and pier with "station", a railroad stop at the upper boundary, and a small provisions store on the point opposite the railroad. Riverton has a fixed date of founding, has always had the same name, and, according to the noted architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock, was the first wholly planned residential sub-division in America.

The founders incorporated as the Riverton Improvement Company, to run for a period of 20 years, and issued deeds containing restrictive liquor clauses, heights of fences, building lines, etc. Riverfront deeds carried the further restriction that the bank remain forever open, free from any structure, for all to enjoy, while owned and maintained by individual owners. This tradition has been enjoyed by generations of Rivertonians, although abuses by a few in recent years have curtailed the privilege at present. The Company graded streets and maintained them, purchased and planted trees along them, and generally established the community we still enjoy. They individually purchased additional land above the railroad, planning for expansion, although until 1881 truck farming continued there.

In 1851 the Riverton Loan & Building Association formed in Moorestown "to benefit mechanics and laboring men, enabling them to procure homes of their own and pay for them in a few years with installments, instead of renting."

In 1865 a Yacht Club was formed, with sons of some of the Founders, as well as subsequent residents, among its members. It is now the oldest on the Delaware River, and one of the oldest in the country. It met at Ogden's home on the Riverbank (503)

until Spring, 1880, when the now-familiar stick-style clubhouse was erected, on the existing "Iron Pier". Within a year there were 30 yachts anchoring there.

Sailing took a drop in popularity when base ball became the favorite local sport, and Athletic Clubs (including Bicycle clubs and a professional race track) were favored. Motor launches, canoes, and sailboats gradually replaced the larger yachts, and in 1932 the Duster was introduced at Riverton Yacht Club. Earlier, another tradition had been initiated when, in 1897, members started to sponsor a Children's Parade on Independence Day, replacing the Firemen's Parade and loosely organized parties and races, and laying the foundation for Riverton's traditional Fourth of July celebrations.

Changing times and customs sometimes created problems. When the original Corporation expired, the Biddles, the only remaining Founders in residence, purchased all the unsold property from the company. New people came to Riverton--some who were newly wealthy from Civil War profits--and some friction developed when they wanted to make it a more "exclusive" village, and suddenly realized they missed the city comforts they had been accustomed to, like public gas and water supplies, electricity, police and fire protection, etc. Eventually, though, differences were resolved, and in time these conveniences came to Riverton--although it was 1914 before electricity was available for 24 hours a day.

When the village was founded, it was a few streets within the larger township of Cinnaminson, which was itself within the much larger township of Chester. Cinnaminson separated from Chester in 1860, and in December, 1893 Riverton separated from Cinnaminson, as a borough. Its first mayor, and council of 3, were sworn in on Jan. 1, 1894

So little space allows only the briefest of sketches of Riverton. Its only industries were Woolston's Carriage Trade, at 7th and Main Sts., and then, from 1873-1944, the Henry A. Dreer Nurseries, with its nearly 300 acres of greenhouses and trial gardens. Small convenience shops grew as building and residents' needs demanded, but Riverton has remained primarily a residential community.

Growing as it did, bit by bit and developing one neighborhood at a time, its architecture depicts a century of American architecture in just 3/4 of one square mile.

Within these small boundaries there are 4 churches (the first dating from 1854), with others very close by; a 12-acre Memorial Park (to WW I veterans) designed by architect Fletcher Street (and named in some textbooks as an "ideal" Park for a small community); a Volunteer Fire Company, formed in 1890, and the Porch Club, formed the same year, whose members brought to Riverton better streets and sanitation, the county's first public Kindergarten, first women on School Boards, founding of the NJ Congress of Mothers (early name of NJSPTA), Visiting Nurse and Family Services, and more.

The first telephone was in service in Riverton in 1886, just 10 years after its invention. Many names are important in Riverton's history--Lippincott, Parry, Ogden, Clothier, Campbell, Ellison, Roberts, Grice...many, many more. Many buildings are significant, too--the designated "historic district" of Riverton is misleading: there are more significant buildings outside of it than within it! Two brick Lippincott farmhouses, at 900 and 201 Main Street, pre-date the town; the Nat. Casean offices began as a Dreer packing house, erected before they moved here permanently in 1873; Freddy's shoe repair shop began as CE Church's Sunday School building in 1876, moved across the railroad, was joined by the early Sacred Heart chapel that had just served Riverton school as its Kindergarten, became Porch Club's building, then the Post Office, then the New Era (weekly newspaper 1889-1970's) office/print shop...and on and on. The original village expanded with the Lippincott Extension in 1877, followed by the Thomas Extension in 1882; above the railroad, Main and Cinnaminson Sts. developed in 1881, then developed over to Linden from 1900 (when the Country Club was also founded), and then expanded to Elm Terrace, once called Second Avenue. When Dreer's liquidated, that property was open for development, and there was no more room for expansion. "Opened for development" does not necessarily indicate actual building, however, and the last section actually built upon (save for Dreer's) was from 4th Street down, long after the area above the railroad was almost fully developed.

There is much in Riverton to see...to learn...to share...to enjoy. It's YOUR heritage.