



Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Riverton, N.J. 08077

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Meeting: Monday, November 25, 1991 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
Program: Glass Paperweights

.....Robert Banford

Robert Banford has worked in glass for twenty years, first as a hobby, and for the past eighteen, as his livelihood. His specialty is paperweights with flowers, some with leaves and insects. Examples of his work are at Wheaton Village in New Jersey, and at the Smithsonian, Corning, and Toledo museums.

Paperweights of glass originated in the early 1800s, and were at first a luxury, an accessory for a desk referred to as a paper holder. Some of the finest were made in France. South Jersey's glass factories also produced some fine examples--Whitall Tatum produced the "Millville Rose", much sought after today by collectors of the old paperweights.

Mr. Banford's talk will be illustrated with examples of his work, and should be a most enjoyable program. Don't miss it!!!

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Meeting: Monday, January 13, 1992 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
Program: "Heritage New Jersey"

This is a New Jersey Bell Telephone Company program of slides, with narration by one of their representatives. Included will be anecdotes from New Jersey, many of which have appeared in the popular Tel-News pamphlets, relating to history, folklore, and personages from our State.

Please note the date NOW--the next Newsletter will not be distributed until February, AFTER this meeting, and you would not want to miss this interesting overview of important contributions made by New Jerseyans in many fields.

Frank Wagenknight, Program

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Miscellany....

Newspapers:

Do you have any old copies of The Palmyra News (or its various titles) that you are willing to lend for recording on microfilm? If so, please contact BBHahle (829-6315) so that their dates and other necessary information will be included when the inventory of those we know are available is sent in, to the Newspaper Microfilming Project, that did the New Eras a year ago. This is a valuable record of local history, and small town newspapers give information that city papers cannot cover, and would thus be lost.

Riverton Library's Groundbreaking:

On Saturday, November 2nd, a symbolic ground-breaking took place in front of the Library. Symbolic, because excavation had already begun, at the rear of the property, a full six months ahead of the anticipated starting date. Jean Robbins gave a brief, but interesting, review of the Library from its beginning nearly a century ago, after which Stanley Ellis, aided by his two small sons, "broke ground" in that area. Wouldn't Dr. A.A. Willits, who built a small Carpenter Gothic cottage on the site shortly after the village of Riverton was founded, be surprised to see how it has grown? And would likely be pleased, too, that it is a public Library. He was a clergyman, and was well known in this area for his lectures and for his part in dedication services. The Historical Society enjoys an excellent relationship with

Riverton Library, and was pleased to make a donation toward their building goal.

Reminders:

The County Library in Mt. Holly will be closed from November 18 to approximately February 18, while it is being enlarged.

If you have forgotten to send in your dues (forms were in the Sept-Oct Newsletter) please do so now. Make check to The Historical Society of Riverton, and take or send to Membership Chairman Harry Richman /617 Thomas Ave. / Riverton NJ 08077.

Romance of Riverton Video tapes are still available at \$17.95, and make good gifts for the Holiday season. Notepaper at \$3.50 or a "Celebrate Your Heritage" photo taken last May at the Yacht Club, at \$3.25, are also good gifts. Contact Dan Campbell or Betty Hahle; photos and notepaper also at Riverton Library.

Coming Release:

In March, 1992, the 1920 Federal Census Records will be released for public use. Those interested in genealogy have been awaiting this wonderful source of information, and will find the full release at the Federal Records Center in Philadelphia (9th & Chestnut), the New Jersey tapes at the Archives in Trenton, and tapes from local areas at the County Library. The Gloucester County Historical Society, in Woodbury, will also have the NJ films.

One can't help but wonder what future generations searching for genealogical information will have to do to find similar information contained in these records, when encountering present-day Census forms, with generalized statistics, relationships, individual or combined surnames, etc. Perhaps one way we can help is to update--or start--our own records for our children and/or grandchildren, noting correct names (and nicknames), dates and places of births, marriages, deaths, etc., and a word or two about every relative we can remember, which makes our ancestors "people", and not just "statistics". And by forming the good habit of identifying photos. A pencil with soft lead is best for this, on the back, in a spot that is not directly behind a face or other important part of the picture.

December is an important month; not just because of the busy Holiday Season and all the significant or festive activities this brings, but also historically. For Rivertonians, it marks the anniversary of Riverton's independence, from a small village within Cinnaminson township, to a Borough, in 1893, and the election of its first Mayor (Edward H. Ogden) and its first Borough Council.

As Americans, December 15, 1991, marks the bicentennial of our Constitution's Bill of Rights.

When the Constitution was securing approval, there were strong feelings by some that there was too much strength given the government, while others felt it should have more. In 1789, at the First Congress meeting in New York City, James Madison proposed changes that would give explicit guarantees of personal liberties. He suggested nine broad proposals, reorganized by a House committee into seventeen amendments to the constitution, further reduced to twelve by the House and Senate. These were approved, and President George Washington sent a copy of the proposed amendments to the Governor of each of the thirteen states.

Just a few weeks later New Jersey's General Assembly and Legislative Council (now called Assembly and Senate) were meeting in Perth Amboy, which alternated with Burlington as the seat of government. Governor William Livingston sent a list of 35 papers and acts to consider, which were referred to a committee to select those most in need of attention then. One of those selected was "a copy of the Amendments proposed to be added to the Constitution of the United States". New Jersey then had thirteen counties, with 36 Assemblymen from each; they notified the (Senate) that they had a committee to consider adoption of the amendments, and asked them to appoint their own committee, to be followed by a joint meeting. On the afternoon of November 5 they did so, and unanimously agreed to ratify, on behalf of the people of the State, all but the second of the proposed amendments.

The necessary readings took place in both houses, promptly, then votes taken, and passed unanimously. The governor, who was also President of the Council (Senate) signed the act, and in August, 1790 it was sent to President Washington; and on August 6 he sent official notice to Congress of New Jersey's ratification.

New Jersey was the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights, as the amendments came to be known. The final state to ratify the amendments was Virginia, on December 15, 1791.

The amendment New Jersey did not ratify was one dealing with pay increases for legislators. Another, which our state had approved, did not get ratification, and specified the number of people that each member of the House of Representatives could represent, calling for increased Representatives as population increased. Although it must have seemed reasonable at that time, had it become law, with today's population House membership would number almost 5,000.

The ten amendments that were ratified became the Bill of Rights. They guarantee free expression of opinion, prohibit congressional interference with freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. They also guarantee rights to bear arms for lawful purposes, bar unreasonable searches and seizures by government, and troops cannot be quartered in private homes without consent of an owner.

They provide protection against unlawful arrest and punishment, guarantee right to a jury trial in most civil cases, and spell out that rights enumerated in the Constitution are not to be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people. The final amendment alludes to the states, reserving to them and the people "all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States."

(Information above taken from "New Jersey and the Bill of Rights", by Mary Alice Quigley and Mary R. Murrin, and printed and distributed by the N.J. Historical Commission.)

Yesterday....

In 1860-61 Riverton's population was 311, and passengers using the Camden & Amboy railroad line through town were prohibited from taking as baggage anything but wearing apparel--and that was limited to fifty pounds.

In November, 1875, when John S. Morgan of Cinnaminson was presiding over the Freeholders' meeting, among bills ordered paid were \$9114.22 for tenders and maintenance of 11 draw bridges in the county, and \$86.21 to John Morgan for "ordinary bridges." Four years later the Yacht Club decided to cover the sluiceway with an iron bridge, and abandoned their hope of erecting a clubhouse on the pier when the proposition was once again defeated. Then just a year later, they were successful in their desire, and the present stick-style clubhouse was indeed erected there.

On the corner of Broad/Howard sts. Mr. Steedle's shop was re-opened by Mr. Bishop, where he sold tobacco, cigars, trimmings and notions. Behind the store he had space for horses and carriages to occupy while their owners rode the trains to the cities. Before long Mr. Shields took over the store, and added fruits, vegetables, fish and oysters for sale, in the room facing the railroad. Forty years later the corner's appearance changed radically, with the erection of the 2-story brick Williams-Wright building.

As mobility increased, and facilities for pedestrian and wheeled vehicles expanded, sometimes unexpected problems arose. When the road from Rancocas Creek to the Pennsauken was laid out along the railroad in 1810, it was a narrow dirt road, with trees beside it. By 1879 there were problems: in Palmyra, as houses sprang up nearby, the road lines had been forgotten, owners had planted trees within it, and some had erected fences, as well. Eventually agreement was reached on what should be done: 16 trees within the roadway were removed, fences removed, and young trees set out at the proper boundary of the road. Not long after this there was a movement to change the name of Palmyra's post office to "Morgan", but it was not successful.

In December of 1880 "the Freeholders of Cinnaminson" reconstructed the bridge over the Pompeston creek "on the east side of Riverton", to the relief of travellers there. The roadway had been narrow, and since it was over swampland, was often covered with water. The new bridge was widened, and the land filled in to overcome the water problem. By this time the C&A railroad had double tracks, and gradually all bridges along the line were being reinforced and widened to accommodate the second track.

Pedestrians, however, were finding additional problems, for between fast horses on the streets and fast bicycles on the foot-paths, they were "in great danger of being run into". Cattle were still allowed to roam at large, but the State Legislature offered a bill to prevent this--leaving it to each town to elect whether or not to enforce the restriction.

As permanent sidewalks began to replace the wooden boardwalks required during winter and Spring months, another unforeseen problem arose: children roller-skated on them, getting in the way of pedestrians, and frightening "skittish horses". By 1900 the sidewalks on Howard Street were 5 feet wide!

Winter's arrival brought parties of all kinds into the lives of residents--skating, sleighing, cards, dances, etc. One that was popular near the end of the 19th century was the "German". At its height, it was THE most fashionable type of dance--ball--to give. It involved a lot of preparation, and no little expense, since it involved a series of figures, each dance being different, and at least 3 of them to include favors for each guest. These could run from a simple bouquet/butt'onaire, to miniature flags, butterflies, bon bons, bells, scarf pins, lockets; and even scarfs, vases, picture frames, or tickets for a writing desk!

A designated gentleman started each dance set by choosing a partner, and after a few turns, they separated and chose another, each presenting the new partner with a favor, continuing until everyone was dancing. One popular figure was "la corde", in which the gentlemen had to jump over a rope to search for his new partner; if he didn't trip over it, it was raised higher for the next round. Another popular figure was for the men to stand behind screens, each covering his face with a grotesque mask. Only these were visible above the screens; then the ladies had to choose a partner without knowing who he might be. Usually the German ended with a Sir Roger De Coverly, which was very similar to America's Virginia Reel.

Refreshments were as elaborate as the dances themselves. A wine drink that was popular was prepared by slicing a pineapple into a bowl, sprinkling it with sugar, then pouring two or three glasses of white or red wine over it. It was then chilled, and served cold.

(bbh)

Peace...Joy...Blessings...Thanksgiving...may these be yours throughout the
Holiday Season, and continue into the New Year

