



# Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Riverton, N.J. 08077

Founded 1970

Inc. 1978

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Meeting: Monday, March 2, 1992

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

Program: "Edison's Glenmont"

Film by PSE&G Speakers Bureau, narrated by E.G. Marshall

Presented by Mathew O'Donnell

Tour Thomas Edison's stately Glenmont home and his laboratory in West Orange, via this film. The Victorian mansion has been kept as it was during Edison's occupancy, and the Laboratory Complex is now a national monument. Many of his more than 1000 inventions were worked on here; in one scene Edison recites "Mary Had a Little Lamb" into the first tin-foil phonograph, and in another the first motion picture studio is visited.

Mathew O'Donnell, who will present the film, will answer questions relating to Edison's career and his many contributions leading to life as we know it today.

Don't miss this excellent program! Plan to invite a friend or neighbor to enjoy it with you, and to socialize over refreshments following the presentation.

After hearing the program, you may want to know more about Edison and his work. An excellent biography is "Edison" by Matthew Josephson. Also, there is a new museum at 500 Lurgan Road, New Hope Pa., where David Heitz, an avid collector of Edisonia for 25 years, welcomes visitors--after approximately May 1st. Included are some 300 phonographs from 1880s-1927, wax cylinder records, an early incandescent lightbulb, and much more. Call Mr. Heitz at (215) 862-5717 for details. If enough members are interested, a group tour will be arranged for late May or early June.

May 4th will be our Annual Meeting, at which time there will be elections for 4 places on the Historical Society's Board. A Nominating Committee will be named at the March meeting, and the May Newsletter will carry the slate. Additional nominations may be made from the floor, with prior consent of proposed candidate. Those whose terms end this year are: Paul Daly, Nancy Washington, Helene Styer, and Dan Campbell. The program will be on Silver, and will be held at The Porch Club. Details in May News.

## Special Feature:

A year ago a questionnaire was sent to each member of our Society. Among the questions was one asking if any members would like to contribute an article of their choice to Gaslight News. Cindy Pierson, who lives on the upper side of the Pompeston Creek in a house built by her great-great grandfather, in 1889, has written about genealogy:

"Although I'm relatively new at this genealogy stuff, I'm learning quickly. I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learned that might help to make your genealogical quest more productive and fun.

I began actively working on my family tree about four years ago. My grandfather had been keeper of our family's past, but when he died (1989) his papers and documents all came to me. That's when the real work started.

Even though there was a lot of information, none had been written down in just one place. The first thing I did was fill in, on pedigree charts, all the data I had. I used forms from the National Historical Society/Guide to Genealogy for this. Once

that was done, I went through the charts to see what information I didn't have. Where would I find it?

One of the best sources for information is your own family. I made up two simple questionnaires to use when interviewing relatives. For close relatives I asked for date/name/place of birth for each subject, as well as his siblings, parents, and any recollections of family events. These could be happy or sad, and included military and wartime experiences, honors received, deaths, meeting (or becoming) a famous person, educational institutions attended, etc. A tape recorder is quite helpful for such interviews. This information also provides leads for further research: a family move from one part of the country to another suggests where vital statistics may be recorded for an earlier time. Much background information can also be found on veterans' military papers--my paternal grandfather's occupation was listed on these as "cowboy", something I had never known before.

The second form was for relatives who lived elsewhere. Again I requested dates/places of birth/death, parents, siblings, other ancestors, as well as any interesting facts recalled. I also requested copies of any photographs, news clipping, etc. that they could spare. In one response I learned that I had a cousin in Alaska who married an Eskimo; and another cousin sent me a menu from a restaurant owned by a branch of my family in Texas.

My favorite part of interviewing family members is the little bits of information that turn up. I have adapted my genealogy charts to include space for such things as that a g-g-grandmother had been known throughout Tipton Co., Indiana, for her long and beautiful bright red hair. This may not be earth-shattering in importance, but it makes the past more real!

As this information is received, charts must be filled in, and additional searches made through county clerks' records, genealogical libraries, military, church and school records, as well as local historical societies, for more complete records on your charts.

Climbing your family tree is an ever-continuing challenge, and I hope that you have as much fun in your efforts as I do.

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Regular readers of Gaslight News may remember that in the Spring of 1990 the Pierson family had a dogwood tree planted in Memorial Park in memory of her grandfather, Dorsey VanBibber, who had lived many places, including here--during the years he worked at Campbell's Soup farms, and drove the #9 bus.

It has been 2 years since our Society held a workshop for beginning genealogists; if there is interest in further workshops, let us know. We are fortunate in having so many facilities within easy reach: County Libraries and Historical Societies (Burlington, Gloucester, Camden) have many files and books, as well as microfilms; Trenton State Library has Federal and State Census records, as well as Deeds, Vital Stats, and many records not found elsewhere. The Federal Records Center (9th & Chestnut) in Phila. has Census records from the entire USA, Naturalization records, and much more. In March the 1920 Census records will be released--eagerly awaited by family-tree-climbers. And don't overlook Deeds, Wills, and older residents living in the area of your interest. An excellent little book of how-to and resources is "How to Trace Your Family Tree" by the American Genealogical Research Institute Staff.

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**Reminders:**

Notepaper and "Romance of Riverton" videotapes are both still available. Call 786-8660 or 829-6315.

If you have forgotten to renew your membership, please do so at once. New members are welcomed at any time.

Spring months are always busy, with many activities. Here are a few dates you may want to note:

Preservation Workshop: Mirrors of Time: Preserving Photographic Collections...9:30-4pm  
\$15 includes lunch; March 5, Madison Pub. Library; March 6, Ocean Co Library;  
March 9, Vineland Pub. Lib. Reg. NJ State Lib CN520 Trenton 08625-0520 by Feb 21

Free Genealogy Workshops: Genealogy Club of N.J. Historical Society meets 3rd. Sat. each month. March 21: Brendan McConville will speak on "Your Troublesome Ancestors", some families involved in 18th century NJ land riots. On April 18 Thomas McNamara's topic will be "How to Locate the Living." Meet at 10 a.m., 230 Broadway, Newark. For info, call 1-201-483-3939.

Open Hearth Cooking Demonstration, Camden Co. Historical Society: Sunday afternoons, 2-4 p.m. Call 964-3333 for details. Members who went in Fall, 1989, found the talk, aromas, foods sampled, delightful. Tour follows demonstration. A group from the Porch Club will be going Sunday, April 5th, and Historical Members may join them. Cost, \$1 per person. Call 829-6315.

A Garden Tour will be hosted by Porch Club on Tuesday, May 12th. Tickets may be purchased either with, or without, lunch. Details later--but mark the date now.

A request: an author is researching NJ's coastal storms and hurricanes, and seeks first-person accounts or written records. Contact Margaret Thomas, 8102 Bay Terrace, Harvey Cedars, N.J. 08008; phone 494-1263.

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Yesterday.....

In the Spring of 1890 D. Henry Wright, of Bank Ave., published a book of poems called "Under The Red Cross." Sam Rudderow built a new storage shed for lumber at his warehouse (Evans bld), John B. Watson enlarged his business and had a new hack built for it at Woolston's factory (7th st.); Mr. Cowperthwaite sold his house and drug store to Edward H. Ogden, and the Palmyra Field Club decided to incorporate. In mid-April the shad season started, and the old stand opened once more. The capstan operating from the shore of the old Cook property had long since been purchased by the Faunce family, and when it closed, around this time, they continued their fishing from small boats, for many more years. The shad season lasted until the middle of May, and according to one old-timer, 1890's was the best in his memory.

In November of that same year Mrs. Edward Lippincott had a frightening experience, at home --Main/Shrewsbury, now-when she went into her linen closet, and the special lock on it slipped and locked her in. It was some time before the seamstress working there heard her cries and gave the alarm. And then a while longer before the door was opened, and she was let out.

January and February 1896 brought severe storms: wind, rain, ice. First, rain fell in torrents; then high winds blew the tin roof off of Roberts' Drug store, and broke a plate glass window. Chimneys were blown over, raining bricks on lawns all over town. The following week the river froze from shore to shore, and the ice measured 5" thick. Skating was enjoyed, but just a few weeks later more heavy rains fell, causing flooding and washouts.

With washouts on both the Rancocas and Pennsauken creeks, train services came to a halt. From 5:40 pm one day until after 11 am the next, a train was stranded in Riverton. The cars were "turned into sleepers", and residents prepared meals for the stranded travelers. Some local residents returning from Camden but stopped at the Pennsauken washout, got off the train and walked, precariously, arriving home after 9:30 that night. The Yacht Club walk was totally submerged, and in East Riverton those living in homes along the Pompeston had to vacate them, as the 1st floors were flooded.

Other problems were encountered by train passengers, of a different sort. It seems that all too often ladies alighting from a car would trip and fall, getting at least a bad shaking-up, and sometimes a more severe injury. In May a conductor said he knew why this happened: women didn't get off the trains properly. First, their long skirts contributed to the danger, because they had no pockets for them to put things into. A lady had to hold up her skirt with the left hand, and hold her pocketbook in the other, which left no hand to hold onto the handles, when stepping down from the train. Further, it just seemed to be their nature that they couldn't get off properly: they tended to get off before the train came to a complete stop, and then, instead of facing the front as they should, just stepped off into the direction they planned to go--resulting in a fall as they stepped onto the platform.

By November, 1900, the first men's championship match had been played at the new golf links, and O.H. Fitler held the record of 46 for the 9-hole course. Ladies also played--

the misses Martha M. and Lillian Biddle were competing for the "Blasted Hope" Cup. Thirty-two years later the RCC Annual South Jersey Amateur championship found Dick and Ed Lippincott playing the 18-hole course in 77. Other local entrants that year were C. Brook Wallace, jr., Howard S. Coe, Raymond Eastwood, Louis J. Meunier jr., J.W.Hiltner, and Clement Buerri.

Heavy snow fell, in January 1908. George W. Tucker was the Rural Mail carrier, from Riverton Post Office, and he got stuck in a snow bank near Charles Jessup's farm in Cinna-minson, between the creek and Westfield road. When he got the team dug out, the horse was too exhausted to continue the route, so Jessup loaned Tucker a mule for the job. It worked out fine, and Tucker thought about making an offer for the mule. As he put the animal into his own stable, it kicked up its heels, narrowly missing Tucker's head, and bolted out of the door. After a long hunt, he gave up and phoned Jessup--only to learn that the mule had returned home, and stood waiting outside its own stable door, to get in.

In June, 1916, Riverton's "noted long distance swimmer" Charles B. Durburow swam across the Chesapeake Bay--the first time that feat had ever been accomplished. The air distance measured 18 miles, and it took the swimmer 8 hours, 43 minutes. Weather was ideal, and the swim accomplished "without accident", using the "trungeon stroke" all the way. Capt. Edw. Berken, of Atlantic City, accompanied Durburow in his launch.

Two years earlier an inventor in Wisconsin had devised a cigar lighter, the size of a match safe, for those who didn't want to carry matches in their pockets. It was a small bottle of combustible pellets that fed one at a time into the neck, which would ignite by the friction from snapping the top open. The item suggested that its chief demand would be as a novelty...

Dreer's trial gardens were always spectacular, and difficult for those who never saw them to visualize. In 1941 they had developed a new rose, Crimson Glory, which not only was listed in the top ten new roses, for was first on the list. A large circular bed of them was displayed in the gardens where homes along Cedar Street are today, and attracted visitors from all over.

Toward the end of 1944 the Lions Club of Palmyra and Riverton formed, and was chartered on January 9, 1945. Walter Snover was president, Arthur Thum sec/treas., Harold P. Haines 1st vice-pres., Dr. J. Rowland Dey 2nd vice-pres., and Joseph F. Yearly 3rd vice-pres. Pete Heisler was named lion-tamer, and Herbert Johnson, tail-twister.

1963 brought the closing chapter of one part of Riverton's history: the end of the commuter train run between Camden and Trenton. A vital part of this town for a full century, by the 1960s buses had replaced many of the trains, until only a twice-daily run was left. In March PRR filed a request to end the commuter line, saying fares covered only about one-third the cost of running it. Riverton's and Palmyra's mayors and solicitors battled the proposal at hearings held in Camden, attended by many who wanted the line not just continued, but also improved. Trains had been left without adequate servicing, and sometimes brakes failed to hold properly, or else locked unexpectedly. Schedules were no longer reliable, leaving passengers frustrated by trains that too often arrived anywhere from one-half to two hours late. In spite of this, commuters wanted to keep the train, and said that new riders would be attracted by paying some attention and funds to the local, because buses and highways were often overcrowded and traffic delays at peak hours frequent. Testimonies, briefs, and other materials were studied by the State Highway Commissioner, who then had to make the final decision. A newspaper reporter said it was like a death watch on the railroad. And so it proved to be. Soon the last commuter train made its way over the once-busy line. Many former riders turned out for that last ride, and at stations all along the way people gathered for one last time, cheering the train, crew, and passengers.

bhh, ed.

