



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

February/March 1994

volume: XXII, no. 3 (#72) 73

## Trenton's Old Barracks will be Subject of March Meeting

A meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton will be held on Monday, March 14, 1994 at 8:00 p.m. in the Riverton Public School Media Center. The school is located at Fifth and Howard Streets and attendees can enter the building through the main door on Fifth Street. After a short business meeting, Lawrence Schmidt, Curator of History and Interpretation at the Old Barracks in Trenton, will discuss the role of this National Historic Landmark during the colonial and Revolutionary eras and its subsequent archaeological and architectural investigations.

The Old Barracks was one of five such structures built in New Jersey between 1758 and 1760 for quartering British soldiers fighting in the French and Indian War. Other barracks were built in Philadelphia, New York and Charleston but Trenton's Old Barracks is the oldest one still standing. It was used during the American Revolution by British, Hessian and American forces as a barracks and as a military hospital. Following the Revolution, it was sold to private owners who renovated it for use as residences, shops and offices. In 1799, portions of the building were used to house the U.S. Treasury Department officials while the government fled Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic.

The Old Barracks Museum first opened in 1903 and its first large-scale "restoration" occurred between 1913 and 1917. Recently, the old Barracks has undergone a more thorough analysis that has included architectural, archaeological and documentary research as part of a second restoration.

Mr. Schmidt, who has been on the Museum staff since 1987, has worked closely with the archaeologists and architects in developing plans for the building's restoration. In addition to providing documentary research support, he developed the furnishing plan for the newly-restored Officer's House of the Old Barracks. A native of Burlington County, Mr. Schmidt is a graduate in history from the University of Pennsylvania. He has been a consultant to other historic sites and has provided historical

research to several film projects including *The Last of the Mohicans* and the George Washington miniseries.

The Old Barracks Museum is a museum of life in colonial and Revolutionary New Jersey. Located on Barrack Street in Trenton, the Old Barracks is adjacent to the State House, in the heart of the Capitol Complex. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. and Mondays by appointment. The admission fee for adults is \$2.00; seniors and students, \$1.00; and for children under 12, \$.50. For further directions or more information about upcoming events, please call (609) 396-1776.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Future Program Schedule

Frank Wagenknight, our Program Chairman, reminds us to keep the following date available for our last program of the 1993-94 program season:

May 9, 1994-Mrs. Delores Blake, Superintendent of the Beverly National Cemetery

\*\*\*\*\*

## New Leaf Afghans Warms Up Our Treasury

Last year, The New Leaf Gift Shop designed custom afghans for the towns of Riverton and Palmyra. After having them woven, they offered them for sale in their shop. With each Riverton afghan sale, Ray and Willanne Sulczewski, owners of the store, offered a \$5.00 donation to one of eight non-profit organizations in Riverton, leaving the choice to the customer. Palmyra afghan customers chose from a list of Palmyra charities.

A total of \$795.00 was raised in 1993 to benefit these charity groups, with the Historical Society of Riverton receiving \$86.25. Other beneficiaries of this marvelous program include: The Riverton Free Library, The Riverton Fire Company, The Riverton 4th of July Committee, The Porch Club, Friends of Riverton Park, the Shade Tree

### *Gaslight News*

is a production of the Historical Society of  
Riverton and is published four times a year.

-----  
Daniel T. Campbell.....President  
Paul W. Schopp.....Editor

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey 08077

### **New Leaf Afghans**

*continued from page 1*

Commission and our local P.T.A. The Historical Society of Riverton would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Ray and Willanne for their thoughtfulness. We also salute The New Leaf Gift Shop and the many customers that participated in the purchase of afghans.

The afghans are still in stock and organizations will continue to receive funds as the stock is sold. The afghan design is uniquely Riverton and features such scenes as the railroad station, the Yacht Club, the Library, Fire Company, War Memorial, the Porch Club, our school and park and The New Leaf Store. If you have not yet acquired one of these beautiful afghans, we urge you to do so before they run out. The New Leaf Gift Shop is located at 606 Main Street in Riverton. Thank you, New Leaf!

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

## **Riverton Incorporation Centennial Celebration a Great Success**

A celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Incorporation of Riverton was held on December 2, 1993. This gala event was a joint effort between the Borough Council and the Historical Society of Riverton. A large crowd assembled in the Riverton School auditorium to view displays of photographs, documents and artifacts and to hear short speeches by Council Members. This was followed by the presentation of a proclamation from the New Jersey Legislature by State Senator Brad Smith and the evening's keynote speaker, Betty Hahle.

Interspersed throughout the events of the night were renditions of "gay 90s" songs by the ladies of The Porch Club Chorus. The room was trimmed and bunted, courtesy of the 4th of July Committee.

Following Betty's fine presentation on the people and events that led up to the incorporation of our town, President Dan Campbell made a surprise presentation to Betty for all of her service to the Historical Society. She was presented with a framed photograph of one of Riverton's famous gaslight. The evening ended with the cutting of a celebration cake, provided by Borough Council. A grand time was had by all!

On December 16, Mayor Anna Cannon dispatched a communiqué to Dan, thanking him and the Historical Society for all the effort put forth. The Mayor considered the celebration a complete success.

## **Coming Events of Interest**

The Cinnaminson Home is celebrating its 105 years of service to the community. They are holding their Annual Benefit on Friday evening, April 29, 1994. They request that we save that date for the event.

-----  
The Burlington County Historical Society cordially invites you to attend a program titled *Women's Suffrage in New Jersey* illustrated by Political cartoons and presented by Neale McGoldrick. The presentation will be made on March 13, 1994 at 4:00 p.m. at the Corson Poley Center, located at 454 Lawrence Street in Burlington. Refreshments will be served immediately following the program.

-----  
The Friends of Independence National Historical Park are presenting their 16th Annual **Philadelphia Open House** from April 27 through May 15, 1994. 30 different tours of homes and gardens are being offered. Tickets are available for each of the tours at varying costs. For further information, please call (215) 928-1188 or see Dan Campbell at the meeting to view the brochure.

-----  
The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey is holding its next general meeting in Greenwich, N.J. at the Cumberland County Historical Society on March 19, 1994. The host society is planning an interesting and informative program for that day. If anyone is interested in going to represent the Historical Society of Riverton, please see Dan Campbell for more details.

-----  
A **New Jersey Studies Conference** is being offered by the New Jersey Historical Commission on Wednesday, March 16, 1994, at Rutgers University. This conference is being offered to assist K-12 teachers, college faculty, librarians, museum curators and the personnel of historical organizations. The general public is also welcome. Subjects to be covered range from New Jersey's legal history to music and literature to our state's maritime heritage. The registration fee is \$8.00 per person with a \$2.00 discount offered to students and seniors. The fee includes a continental breakfast and a New Jersey studies information packet. If you desire more information about this conference, please call the Historical Commission at (609) 292-6062 or look at the brochure at the next meeting.

-----  
Many activities are either planned or presently occurring to celebrate Burlington County's 300th anniversary. While nothing has been planned yet for any type of celebration in Riverton, surrounding towns including Palmyra do have events scheduled. For a detailed listing of these events, please check *The County Bell*, the official publication of the Burlington County Cultural and Heritage Department. If you do not receive this quarterly newsletter, call the C. & H. Dept. for a subscription. Perhaps Riverton's 1994 4th of July Parade theme could be "100 Years of Riverton and 300 Years of Burlington County."

## Yesterday...

by Betty B. Hahle

In 1880, permanent and regular summer residents alike apparently felt that Riverton was the ideal place to be. The panic of 1873 and a five-year depression were behind them and, although some feared that falling prices might indicate another recession, the village was expanding, the building trade booming and life seemed good. Everything that was wanted was either right here, or readily obtained.

One thing the village did not have was a local newspaper and four young men decided to rectify that. A.A. Fraser, John Bioren, Edward Priestly and Edward Earnshaw, who were friends and neighbors, Episcopalians, published the first issue of *The Riverton Journal* in November 1880. It was a monthly paper with a subscription rate of fifty cents a year. Its purpose was "to amuse, not astound" and they kept to their plan of publishing no objectionable material, not to take sides in political issues and to devote not more than half of the four-page paper to advertising. Within a few months, their circulation was over 300, "primarily to subscribers in Riverton and Philadelphia."

Archie Fraser, son of architect John Fraser, of 101 Main Street, covered sports. John Bioren, son of the Banking/Brokerage family, of 100 Main Street, covered financial matters. Edward Priestly and Edward Earnshaw wrote editorials and other columns. There were columns of local news items and regular contributions from Dr. H. Hastings Weld and from friends traveling abroad or other places.

There were plenty of things to do in Riverton and of good variety. In early Spring, arbutus bloomed profusely for about three weeks and it was freely gathered by local residents. After arbutus came the wild magnolia, which grew in abundance in the swamps east of town.

The Yacht Club's new clubhouse offered another pleasure, as members and their ladies spent "many a pleasant evening on the spacious piazzas of the pavilion gazing at the tranquil flowing Delaware below." In the winter, planks were bolted to the pier around the building to avert damage from ice and tides; a system developed by John Davis. In 1881, a handsome set of decorative brackets was presented to the Club--but the donor was not named.

Regattas were popular. A contest for second-class yachts offered an intaglio locket to the captain who won two races--not necessarily consecutive--in the series. Competing were: Lawrence Lippincott in *Alice*; W. Bauer, in *Gypsy*; Leander Cook in *Curlew*; and F. Perot Ogden in *Ethel*. By August, four races had been held, with no winner. In September, Leander Cook, in his *Curlew*, won for the second time and was presented with the beautifully carved locket by Vice-Commodore William F. Dreer, who had donated the prize.

Athletic events were always popular, both for participants and fans. Cricket and base ball games were regularly scheduled, with Wednesday evening games noted as practice games between Riverton's own teams and Saturday's between competing clubs. Some teams

Vol. XXII No 3 #72 Feb 1994 Pg 3  
mentioned were: Young Americans, Keystone, Graefly, Atlantic, Foote, West Philadelphia, Wynwood, Burlington, Atlantic City, Trenton, Merritt, Kingston and Rutgers' College Base Ball Nine.

In 1880, a Ladies Out-Door Club formed and held matches in tennis and archery. They were permitted to use the Field Club's grounds on Howard Street below Fourth on Tuesdays and to schedule an occasional evening game. Men were voted into membership and enjoyed all privileges except voting. In 1881, Mrs. C.L. Flanagan, of Main Street, won a small wall cabinet for the high score in archery and Mr. C.C. Rianhard, a fine new racquet for best score in tennis.

Men enjoyed gunning and pigeon shoots were held at the Gun Club each Saturday--one letter to the editors protested the cruelty of these matches, but they continued for many years. In the Fall, migrating rail birds filled the marshes and gunners made the area "sound like a brisk engagement of the infantry." Another newspaper said that in the 1881 season, 25,000 rail birds were shot in the marshes below Riverton, with 35-40 boats with gunners there every day.

On a lighter note, there was soda-water of every flavor on draught at Cowperthwaite's Drug Store on Main Street, for which tickets sold at 15 for a dollar. A new English drink, called *Zoedone*, was billed as "strengthening as well as delicious," and cost \$.25 a bottle. Also available there were *Dentifrice*, bird seed, perfumes, "very fine Bay Rum" and a new remedy, compressed pills, according to their ads.

About town there were changes. Christ Episcopal Church replaced its old wood fence with a new one of wrought-iron on the Howard and Fourth Street sides of the property. Various fairs and entertainments were held at the schoolhouse to raise funds for church libraries and new buildings.

Thirty-eight coal-oil burning street lights, paid for by subscription, were lit by the lamplighter "according to the almanac," which sometimes erred. The lamps were usually turned off after the arrival of "the owl train" at Riverton station which, the *Journal* opined, was appreciated by burglars. While not entirely satisfactory, the *Improved Tubular Lamp* was felt to be the best at a reasonable price, in spite of its tendency to catch fire when bugs fell into the tubes and blocked the draught. Serving on the Committee were Edward Ogden, treasurer and D. Leeds Miller, Charles M. Biddle and William F. Dreer.

Since the Riverton Improvement Company's incorporation had expired in 1872, street maintenance had been poor. Streets needed grading to control gullies that let water run over the side walks and a watering cart was needed to control dust in the summer. (The latter wasn't addressed for another 25 years, when Porch Club took matters into their own hands and offered sprinkling by subscription). Residents were also lopping off limbs from trees along the streets, often with unsightly results.

The Post Office was also having problems. The *Journal* urged residents to mail all their letters from Riverton, instead of taking them in to Philadelphia, because the Postmaster was paid by the number of pieces of mail he handled and few letters meant a very low income



for him. In the past, the Postmaster also got a small amount for each stamp sold, but that had been discontinued. By 1882, a new regulation required each piece of mail to be stamped with the name of the Post Office and the date of receipt because complaints of unreasonable long periods between mailing and availability to addressee were made.

The sudden death of Dr. Robert White shocked residents and Dr. Alex March, Jr., succeeded him as the "resident Allopathic physician of Riverton." Dr. H.B. Hall was also in practice here and advertised regularly in the *Journal*.

Something new was added at Crosta's on Main Street: a "Self-Acting Parlor Fountain," a novelty designed in Germany and patented in Europe and America. Crosta's was the first one constructed in this country and those interested could order their own Parlor Fountain through him. Made of metal and glass, with a central glass tube connected to a reservoir below, motion was activated by an alcohol lamp under it.

The Village of Riverton was growing. The Lippincott Extension was almost completely developed. In 1881, Samuel Rudderow, builder and contractor, purchased a tract of land above the railroad. He erected a Coal, Lumber and Agricultural Depot, to sell building and farmers' supplies, for I.W. Huelings Sons, which opened March 1, 1882 (remembered now as *Evans*) and laid out the rest into building lots. The Thomas heirs ordered stone to continue the river wall across their property to the Morgan line and were waiting for the icy river to open up for delivery. Their Extension below the railroad would also soon open. And in Palmyra, William F. Morgan opened a tract above the railroad for development, which had sold all but one lot by December 1881. The *Journal* congratulated Morgan for opening a tract to develop Palmyra and noted that although streets were only 50 feet wide, the 30 foot building line would put 110 feet between facing houses.

A number of houses within Riverton were being remodeled or enlarged. Joel Grant was making changes to the home of D. Leeds Miller; Sam Rudderow had the contract to enlarge Joseph Campbell's home; and the house on the southeast corner of Main and Bank was sold and underwent such dramatic changes that the *Journal* said it had become a mansion and those familiar with the original house couldn't believe it was the same one (407 Bank Avenue, for Edwin and Nannie Fitler; architects Hazelhurst/Huckel). The Lawn House was also remodeled and enlarged and "now has all modern conveniences except telephones, elevators and electrical call bell," which would, no doubt, be added soon.

Cinnaminson was considering erection of a new Town Hall and the *Journal* suggested that it should be located in Riverton, since "Riverton and Palmyra combined make up most of Cinnaminson's population--and Riverton is larger and the more important of the two."

October 1882 was the final issue of *The Riverton Journal*. One by one, the young men found that budding careers demanded too much time to allow time for publishing a paper, and resigned, until only John Bioren

was left. He, too, found working in his father's brokerage demanding more time and decided to cease publication.

A regular contributor had been John Fraser, who was spending much of his time in New York and sent a letter each month about the buildings there. As he ended his final letter to *The Riverton Journal*, he said he had been thinking for some time of differences encountered, that "New York men as a rule seem to lack the polished manners for which Philadelphia is noted. The one great impulse here is to obtain money, politeness is a secondary consideration." Then he concluded with "The man who is fortunate enough to have Riverton for his home, is indeed favored and if he knows what is good for him he will never leave it."

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

## *The Riverton Journal* Microfilmed

The preceding *Yesterday...* column by Betty Hahle was excerpted from *The Riverton Journal*. Betty reported that *The Mount Holly Herald* noted the publication of Riverton's first newspaper as around Thanksgiving, 1880. An early issue of the *Gaslight News* mentioned this and asked if anyone knew of a copy of that paper, but none were found.

About two years ago, a bound copy of the paper, probably the only one to exist, was placed on exhibition in the display case of Schwering's Hardware Store. After I obtained the name of the owner from Steve Schwering, I contacted him and gained permission to have the bound volume microfilmed by the New Jersey Newspaper Project.

Mr. Al Zarzecki, the owner, was delighted to have it filmed and was very patient, as the filming took longer than expected. The Historical Society of Riverton would like to thank Mr. Zarzecki for allowing this rare publication to be filmed. Not only are we assured that the information contained in *The Journal* will be preserved for future generations, but filming permits access to this material by all of those in the present generation.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

May 8th to the 14th is **Preservation Week**. This year's theme is: "It's your memory. It's our history. It's worth saving." History is a like a multi-faceted diamond. Architecture and streetscapes, documents, oral traditions, photographs and post cards, material culture and ethnicity are just some of the facets of this jewel named history. Whatever part of our heritage interests you, pursue it! You will find yourself being fascinated, educated and, at times, infuriated. But through it all, you will gain the satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed to that great gemstone of knowledge we call history.

--Paul W. Schopp--

