

# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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## New Year's Day in March? Come to the March Program for the Answer

A meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton will be held on Monday, March 13, 1995, 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 located on Fifth Street. After a short business meeting, guest speaker Jim Donio will present a program on the history and traditions of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade.

This spectacle, held every New Year's Day, is a unique tradition whose roots date back hundreds of years. The blending of a variety of European country customs contribute to what we call the Mummers Parade. The *American College Dictionary* defines a mummer as "one who wears a mask or fantastic disguise, esp. as formerly and still locally at Christmas, New Year's, and other festive seasons." Originally, mummary occurred in various ethnic neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia on New Year's Day. In 1901, the City government began to organize these localized events into a parade. It was in that year that the celebrants first made the famous strut up Broad Street to the delight of thousands of viewers. Nothing has changed, for it is still enjoyed by a huge number of viewers not only located curbside, but also those who watch it on television.

Those who strut in the parade belong to several sub-groups which include the string bands, the comics, and the fancy brigades. Each organization within these groups usually selects a theme for their performance and then fabricate their costumes and plan their routines around that theme. Every troop hopes that the costumes and routines assembled by them will help win the top purse for their category.

Our speaker, Jim Donio, comes to us courtesy of the Mummers Museum. He has been involved with the Mummers for nearly 25 years as a musician, costume

designer, choreographer, and dancer in both the String Band and Fancy Brigade Divisions. Jim also worked as a Television commentator for three years, providing background for the viewing audience. His presentation will include some of his original costume sketches, video segments from the parade and the actual costume he wore as a member of the Golden Crown Fancy Brigade in the 1995 Parade.



## Future Program Schedule

Frank Wagenknight, our Program Chairman, wants to remind you of the remaining program in the 1994-95 season:

May 8, 1995—Louis Borbi, President of the Roebling Historical Society, will deliver a program on the history of Roebling, N.J. and the John A. Roebling Co. This will also be our annual meeting where new officers and directors are elected.

More information about this interesting program will be forthcoming in the next issue of *Gaslight News*.



## Welcome to Riverton...

### A Progress Report

by Paul W. Schopp

I should have sub-titled this "A Lack of Progress Report" for my work schedule has prevented me from committing much time to our new postcard view book. However, that is not to say that nothing is being done. Betty Hahle reports that she has begun compiling the preface history of Riverton and four individuals have offered their personal postcard collections to be used in this book.

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### *Gaslight News*

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Daniel T. Campbell.....President  
Paul W. Schopp.....Editor  
The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey 08077

## **An Historic Appointment for Riverton:**

### **Betty Hahle to become Borough Historian**

by Dan Campbell

History will be made at the Riverton Borough Council meeting on Thursday, March 9, when Betty B. Hahle is appointed as Riverton's first official historian. In the Historical Society, she holds the position of Historian, and we have considered her as the borough's unofficial historian for many years. Under New Jersey municipal statute, the borough is permitted to designate such a person and Betty is the most qualified citizen of Riverton who could serve in this position.

Although not founded by Betty, she participated in the early development of the Historical Society, eventually serving as president for eleven of our twenty-five years in existence since the founding. The Society and Riverton owe her much gratitude for her tireless efforts to research, document and promote Riverton's unique history.

Betty has spent countless hours poring over old newspapers, searching through deeds and wills, and speaking to long-time Riverton residents to collect her historical accounts. She has seen to the documentation of many house histories and family genealogies, had many old newspapers preserved on microfilm, and lead many efforts to save Riverton's historical features such as the gaslights and brick or slate sidewalks.

The up-coming appointment was recently espoused in an article in the February 12, Philadelphia Inquirer Neighbor's Section. The story included a photograph of Betty in front of the Cecil Fitler mansion at 9 Bank Avenue, Riverton.

We extend our hearty congratulations to Betty Hahle on the occasion of this historic appointment.



**-RIVERTON-**

*A Century of Distinction as a Borough*

## **Coming Events of Interest**

The Burlington County Historical Society program on Sunday, March 26, 1995, will be "South Jersey Clocks and Gallery Walk Through," presented by Steven Petrucelli. The Society has a beautiful collection of tall (grandfather) clocks, which have recently been incorporated into the new museum gallery at the Corson Poley Center. The program is scheduled for 4:00 P.M., and light refreshments are served after the presentation.

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The Burlington County Historical Society's Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 18, 1995, at 8:00 P.M. in the Corson Poley Center. All members and prospective members are invited to attend. After a short business meeting, Gary Giberson will present the program "Duck Decoys and Folk Tales." Gary will demonstrate the art of decoy carving and will beguile us with tales of the Mullica River carvers.

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The Porch Club has scheduled a card party on Tuesday, March 21, 1995, at 12:30 P.M. A raffle will be held for a variety of prizes including a beautiful piece of jewelry courtesy of Anthony's Jewelers. For more information, please call Betsy Grovatt (235-2403) or Marjorie Thompson (786-1979).

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The National Trust for Historic Preservation re-opens its historic property "Cliveden" in Germantown, Pa. on April 1, 1995. Tours are given Tuesday-Sunday. Call (215) 848-1777 for more information.



### **A Progress Report**

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In the coming weeks, Dan Campbell and I will be making appointments with each of these individuals to select cards for possible publication. I appreciate your patience and will endeavor to complete this project as soon as humanly possible. We expect the book to be available for Christmas, if not sooner.

When this publication is completed, others who are not familiar with Riverton will find out what we already know—that our village is an historical and architectural gem! A sample postcard from the book can be found on the back of this *Gaslight News*. We thought that you would like to see one of the views. Please understand, however, that this publication is photocopied while the new book will be printed which will make a vast difference in image quality!

## Yesterday...

by Betty B. Hahle

On Friday, January 29, 1897 *The New Era* ran a long editorial supporting women's suffrage. Long, indeed, for it measured 23 inches long, in fine print.

When the U.S. Constitution was adopted it assigned the qualifications and procedures for voting to the individual states, and in New Jersey women had voting privileges. However, in 1812 Legislators removed that right, in the popular belief that women were not capable of serious thinking or judgments, such as voting required. Although the Fifteenth Amendment later said that everyone, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude had the right to vote, women, by prejudice born of custom, were still excluded.

Not all women cared about suffrage, but were content to let men handle such matters. No doubt some men's decisions were influenced by their wives and mothers and sisters. But by the late nineteenth century women were becoming more vocal, and a movement arose calling for the right of women to speak for themselves.

Opponents of voting privileges for women claimed that "infants, idiots, and women are all represented by men." Dr. Janney, owner and editor of *The New Era*, wrote "In what a category to place women!" He said that although infants and idiots were mutually incompetent and simply wards of the people, women "have mental ability equal to men." He wrote at length and with eloquence, pointing out that since women have equal mental ability, and no physical ability was involved, men had no moral right to impose an obstacle to deprive them of using that ability to vote. He added that women are more family organized and therefore better able to grapple with moral and refined matters, and that as a class they brought better material to the lot of problems that affect the well being of the masses from the standpoint of purity and right, in direct contrast to groveling and corruption so prevalent with men in politics,

Opponents also claimed that women would become "unsexed" by voting. Janney countered that if a woman has a tendency to get on a low plane of life, she'll do it with or without a vote. And he added that if people so feared corruption from voting, they should take the right away from men, who were already corrupt. He concluded by noting that women share an interest in government, and in "better present and future for people," especially their sons and daughters, as to home, state and nation, and therefore

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should be able to take part in the formation of laws pertaining to these things.

It wasn't until the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, in 1921, that New Jersey women were given back their right to vote. It was 1965 before our first woman was elected to the Legislative body. And just now we have our first woman Governor.

Dr. Joshua D. Janney, who wrote the editorial, was a physician who had served with distinction in the Civil War, and who lived in Cinnaminson (and practiced there) and who was active in local politics. He served as a committeeman and as coroner, as well as in other offices. His daughter, Frances, was also a physician, and together they opened the Cinnaminson Home. Its purpose at that time was to bring out poor children from the city for a vacation in fresh air, with good care. Dr. Janney was active and involved throughout his long life, which ended in his nintieth year.

In 1890 Dr. Janney became interested in Riverton's weekly newspaper, started just a few months previously by Charles W. Brewer, who printed *The New Era* in his shop in Moorestown. Dr. Janney liked the idea of Riverton's having its own paper, and had his own ideas of what kind of paper it should be. He purchased printing equipment and opened shop on the second floor of the Roberts building (point of Main & Howard Streets). The weekly paper was a four-page publication, large (20"x26") with eight columns across each page. Half of the front page was reserved for ads, with editorials and local news inside.

Two years later the paper expanded, and moved to the third floor of the new Price building (Broad & Church Lane). (The telephone exchange moved into the second floor, and Smith's store was opened on the first floor). That same year Walter L. Bowen joined the staff, as manager. He was still a very young man, having just graduated from Riverton Public School.

In 1905 the paper moved again, this time across the railroad and into a building erected by Samuel Rudderow for a print shop and office (building destroyed and razed at Evans fire).

In 1919 Dr. Janney retired, and Walter Bowen became owner, editor, and publisher. His commercial printing was of top quality, and his newspapers, with many special editions, left no doubt as to the pride he felt for his home town.

Karl Latch joined the paper in 1930, and Fred Metzger in 1937. Soon after that the paper incorporated, and moved once again, to 609 Main, just next door. Bowen died in 1961, Fred Metzger a year later, and in 1963 the paper was sold. After that the paper



was no longer printed in Riverton, although the office was maintained here, it was printed in Pemberton where Armshire, then owner, printed a number of other newspapers. Eventually the paper was sold again, and was phased out, after almost ninety years of publication.

Various bits of local interest were published in this, and other newspapers. The 1895 Census recorded that Riverton had 248 homes, and the same number of families in them. The winter of 1896 saw severe storms—in February floods covered the pier and threatened the Yacht Club building on it. The river wall on Dreer's and Gun Club's properties were damaged at that time, and homes in East Riverton were flooded.

That summer, July 1896, young Carl Frank, then seven years old, had a narrow escape when a horse he was driving took fright and ran down Main Street and out onto the wharf. It was finally stopped, just at the water's edge. Carl was the son of George C. Frank, of Bell & Frank Grocers of Westfield and Cinnaminson. The family home was in Cinnaminson, on the turnpike (later Route 25, now U.S. Route 130). Some readers may remember Carl Frank's grocery store on Main Street, near the New Era building, many years later.

Pool tournaments at the Riverton Fire House drew large crowds. And "the social event of the month" in November 1900 was a euchre to benefit the Yacht Club, held by members at the Lyceum. They had a full-rigged mosquito boat in the center of the room, and 18 tables, each with a prize, around it. "All the society folks of the town and some from Philadelphia turned out for it." (euchre is a card game of 2-4 players, with 32 cards; 1 side chooses trump and must take 3-5 tricks to win)

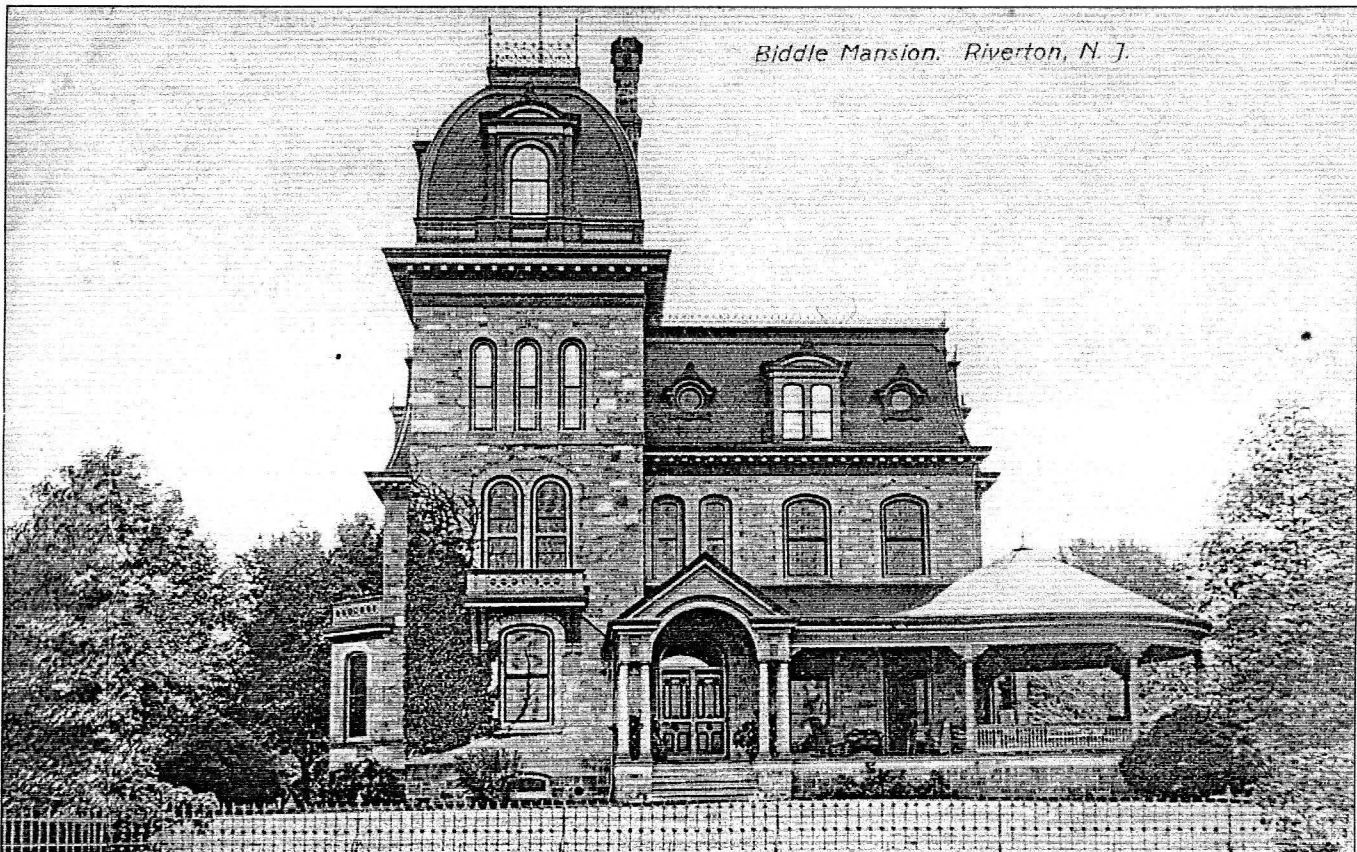
When Riverton School held its closing ceremonies in June 1901 there was just one graduate: Evelyn Kennedy.

A sign of changing times was a Ragtime concert given in Roberts Hall, in 1903. However, they varied the program, so that there would be something of interest for everyone.



Robins have returned to Riverton and the trees are beginning to sprout buds—Spring cannot be far off! May this time of renewal reinvigorate your interest in the history that surrounds you. A vision of the past provides insights for the future. I hope this is a good season for each of you.

—Paul W. Schopp—



*Biddle Mansion. Riverton, N. J.*

According to our Walking Tour of Historic Riverton, 207 Bank Avenue was built circa 1876. It is a Second Empire villa constructed with Pennsylvania greenstone (also known as serpentine stone). Although missing today due to a fire, prior to 1978 the three story tower was topped with a vaulted, convex roof as shown in the above postcard. In 1878 this beautiful riverbank home was purchased by Charles M. Biddle, son of founder Robert Biddle.