

Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton

Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

September/October 1995

volume: XXIV, no. 1 (#78) 79

Dreer's Nursery Subject of October Meeting

A meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton will be held on Monday, October 2, 1995, at 8:00 P.M. in the Riverton Public School Media Center. The school is located at Fifth and Howard streets. Attendees can enter the building through the main door located on Fifth Street. After a short business meeting, our special speaker, Betty Hahle, will present a program on Dreer's nursery.

The Henry A. Dreer Nursery was an integral part of Riverton for seventy years. When the Nursery moved here from Philadelphia in 1873 Riverton was a small village of homes, most of which were primarily summer homes. Residents enjoyed the country living and healthful atmosphere, and adjusted readily to the absence of conveniences they were accustomed to in their city homes.

Dreer's found good soil, good transportation by river and by railroad, and a post office—which their volume of mailings soon made a first-class one. They gave steady work and brought many more people to Riverton, and their acres of greenhouses and blooming flowers added beauty to the area. Visitors came from all over. Some came to teach, some to learn, some to enjoy, some to stay. As the Nursery grew from a hundred acres within Riverton, to nearly three hundred acres, extending into Cinnaminson and Delran, between two hundred fifty and three hundred men and women were employed—many of whom lived in Riverton or in Palmyra.

Dreer's became the largest nursery in America, and the largest grower of roses in the world. Special attractions throughout the year were held, such as specialized flower shows and "garden days", and the trial gardens were THE place to take one's guests on a Sunday afternoon stroll.

When the Henry A. Dreer Nurseries were closed in 1944 an era was ended, and a new one began as homes and stores replaced the gardens and greenhouses, and

automation replaced the older hands-on methods in businesses.

This program will offer the story of how Dreer's began and grew, some of the people involved, and a small display of Dreer materials.

Betty Hahle is no stranger to most members of the Historical Society of Riverton. But for those who are not familiar with her, Betty was appointed the first Official Borough Historian on March 9th of this year. This appointment represents the culmination of 20-plus years of researching and writing about every aspect of Riverton's history. She has assisted numerous authors writing scholarly books about subjects that touch upon Riverton in some way. Many of the historic houses have been individually title-searched by Betty, either for her own information or to aid the current homeowner. She has expended countless hours hunkered over a microfilm machine reading Riverton newspaper articles.

Betty will be writing both the introductory history of Riverton for our new Postcard View Book and also composing most of the captions. For all practical purposes, Betty should be, and is, the Historian of Riverton.

Upcoming Program Schedule

Our Program Chairman, Frank Wagenknight, has planned another outstanding season of presentations for the upcoming program season:

November 27, 1995—Campbell Soup
Tureens

January 22, 1996—New Jersey Lighthouses

March 11, 1996—A program on the Marquis
De Lafayette

May 13, 1996—The Delaware River



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

Rodman Zwirner Will be Missed

The Historical Society of Riverton mourns the death of Rodman Zwirner, a member of our Board of Directors, who died at Cinnaminson Nursing Home on May 8, 1995. Rod had served many years on our Board and was a past president of the Burlington County Historical Society. He and his wife Bert had given tireless and cheerful service to both Societies in the past. Rod always had a quick little joke or pun to brighten up your day. The twinkle in his eye and his wry smile will be missed by us all.

Bert was very gracious to suggest donations to the Historical Societies of both Riverton and Burlington County in his memory. We were thankful to receive over six hundred dollars in memory of Rod. We are currently making arrangements with the Shade Tree Commission to plant a tree in Riverton Memorial Park in Rod's honor, to take place in the Spring.

Membership Information

We have placed a membership form in this issue for your use. The Society appreciates a prompt response to this first dues notice. The membership form is addressed to our Membership Chairman, Jack Laverty. Renewals can either be mailed or dropped off at Jack's house on Cedar Street.

We begin the membership renewal process each year with this (the September/October) issue of the *Gaslight News*. This allows us to update the membership list and prepare mailing labels for the coming year.

One change in the coming year will occur on the membership cards. No longer will a two-year span be listed on the cards, i.e., 1994-95. Rather, the new cards will merely state "1996". This should eliminate any confusion about the membership year and when dues are to be paid. Remember, your membership actually spans the calendar year, from January to December. This differs from the program year, which runs from September until May.

Thanks again to those early birds who reply quickly and thank you for your support!

Coming Events of Interest

An **Antiques and Collectibles Benefit Auction** will be held on Sunday, October 7, 1995, to benefit the Monmouth County Historical Association, Shrewsbury, New Jersey. Please call (908) 462-1466 for further details.

The **Designer Show House**, sponsored by the Zurbrugg Health Foundation to benefit the Zurbrugg & Rancocas Hospitals. The featured home this year is **Green Gables**, located at 621 Chester Avenue, Moorestown, New Jersey. The home is open September 16 through October 8, 1995, 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. Admission is \$12.00 at the door, \$10.00 for senior citizens, students or groups of twenty or more. Call (609) 835-3686 for more information.

The **Lewis W. Barton Arboretum** at Medford Leas presents an illustrated talk by Edward Lindemann, horticulturalist, entitled, "Innovative Ideas for Small Gardens". The date is Saturday, October 28th at 10:00 P.M. Mr. Lindemann is a landscape architect, designer, director of the Phila. Flower Show, and manager of the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society's gardens in Independence National Park. There will be a question & answer period and walking tours of small gardens on the grounds. There will be no charge for admission to this event. (609) 654-3009 is available for details.

A **Harvest Apple Fest** is sponsored by *STEM* to assist in preserving open spaces in Moorestown. Apple desserts, ice cream & family activities will be featured. Admissions: Adults \$4.00, Children 4-10 years \$2.00. Sunday, October 8, 1995, 12:30 to 3:30 P.M. Moorestown Community House.

The **Gilder House**, 211 Crosswicks St., Bordentown, New Jersey: Members of the Bordentown Historical Society will conduct guided tour of this 1780s home, which houses a collection of possessions of Joseph Bonaparte (Napoleon's cousin). Tours will be available 1:00 until 3:00 P.M. weekends October 7 and 8, 21 & November 4. Call (609) 298-1740 for more information.



Yesterday...

by Betty B. Hahle

In December, 1932, when the Pennsylvania Railroad opened a direct route from Broad Street Station in Philadelphia to Riverton (and other riverfront towns). The New Era published a special edition to congratulate them. It was a "red-letter day" and so was printed on red paper.

The train stopped at 30th Street Station, North Philadelphia, passed through the Frankford Junction, and then crossed the Delaware, stopping next at Palmyra and then Riverton. The trip from Philadelphia to Riverton took 33 minutes.

The paper had a congratulatory editorial and special messages from Mayor Killam Bennett, Riverton Country Club, The Porch Club, The Yacht Club, Riverton Civic Association, Palmyra-Riverton Rotary Club, and Riverton PTA. There were large ads from local businesses offering congratulations, and a full page of endorsements from prominent local Citizens.

In 1937 Palmyra got a new ambulance to replace the one they had used for five years. It was built on a Packard chassis, had hydraulic brakes, safety glass windows, and was equipped with regulation stretcher with a hair mattress, a fan for cooling in hot weather, and a hot water heater for warmth in winter. It also had a complete first-aid kit.

August, 1943, brought a cry for help from the U.S. Employment Service: there had been a bumper crop of tomatoes in Burlington county, and at the food processing plants "the annual caravan of high-stacked tomato trucks" converged and piled up. With manpower depleted because of war efforts, there was a marked shortage of help. Soldiers and Coast Guardsmen volunteered shifts (in addition to their military duties), women were responding well, but a call for more help went out. The USES called upon "housewives who had never before worked outside their homes", business and professional men who could pool their time to cover a shift, and high school boys and girls—and also those who might be on vacations—to help the food canning and processing industry. They said the work was fairly simple and not hard, and canneries were really "just a big kitchen." Prevailing wages were paid to everyone volunteering.

Food costs give some indication about prevailing wages at that time. Fresh peas sold 2 lbs. for 29¢; large cantaloupes for 19¢ and 25¢; a pound of Crisco was 21¢, and 2 lbs. of A&P coffee could be bought for

47¢. Victory Gardens were encouraged, and newspapers ran articles on what to plant, how to grow successful crops, and noted particularly successful efforts.

Many things were rationed—meats and fats, sugar, fuel, gas, tires, etc.—and Ration Books were carefully guarded. "Lost & Found" columns carried notices of lost books from worried owners. New books were applied for periodically, on special forms, by mail. If new books were not received by their valid dates, a trip to the local ration board was made, with the application stub bearing date for-proof, and (usually) emergency stamps could be issued. A new baby or discharged serviceman needed proof of birth of status to get stamps. Certificates were required for replacing a tire or an inner tube. Butcher shops were urged to display coupon values for meats and fats so that shoppers could determine what they might be able to buy. Scrap materials were collected on specific days throughout each town.

In 1944 Riverton Memorial Post representatives, in combination with Citizen & Veterans Honor Roll Committee were well underway with their Memorial structure project. Names were being received of those men and women in service from Riverton, and all but two sections were completed and lettered. Funds were still needed for completion, however, and Palmer Adams gave 10 and asked for a hundred other citizens to do likewise to meet the need. The Memorial was completed, and dedicated on Sunday, September 9, 1995, soon after Victory had been won and peace restored to a weary world.

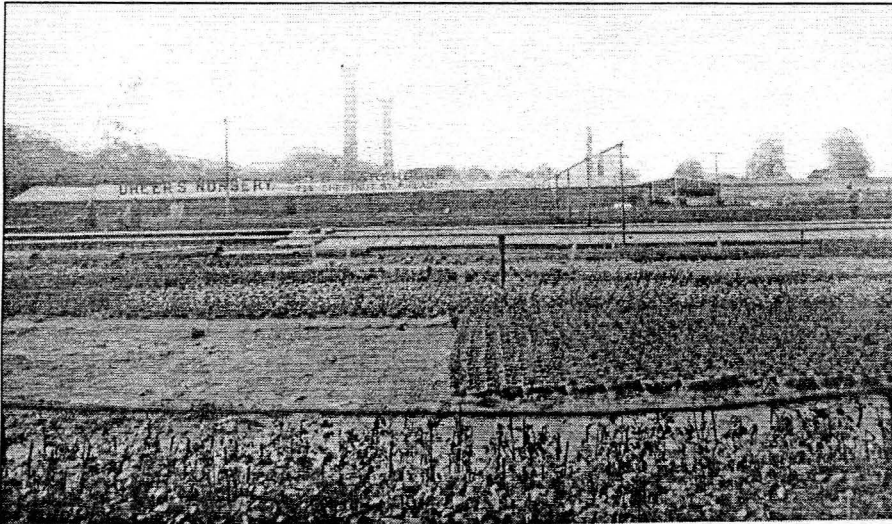
January 1, 1951 saw postage rates jump to 3¢, for first class mail. Penny postcards remained unchanged.

In July, 1966, a tax on sales and services was initiated. Editorials said it was poorly timed—coping with temperatures of 104° was enough, without the confusion of a new tax. Collecting it and setting up bookkeeping records placed a burden on shopkeepers. Some were unsure whether to assume some of the burden through a slight price increase—then that led to profit changes and more bookkeeping. Certificates of exemptions added to the confusion. The editor of one paper said people would probably meekly pay up—and the tax would never go away again. And he was right!

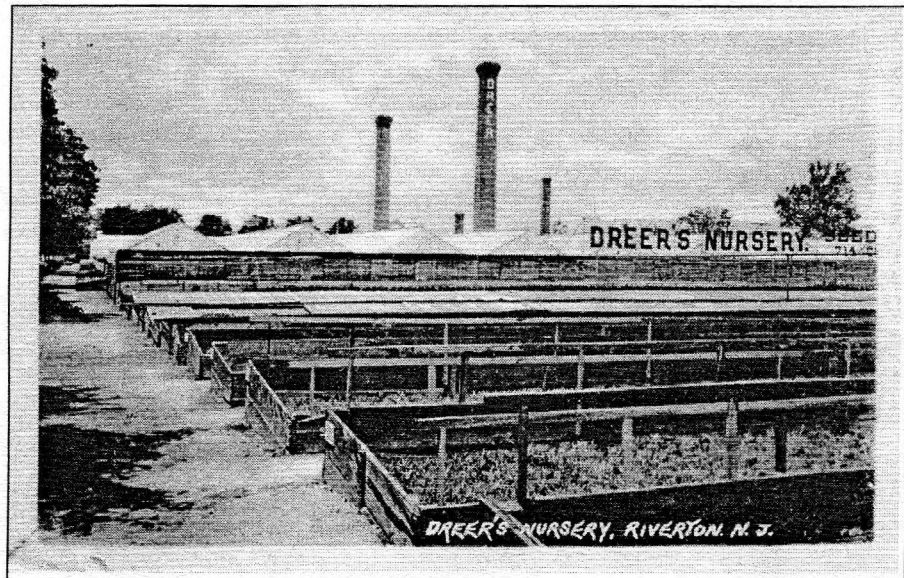
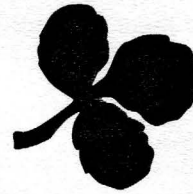
—RIVERTON—

A Century of Distinction as a Borough

To prepare you for Betty Hahle's upcoming program, we are reproducing three postcards of Dreer's Nurseries. These cards replace our normal last page. We hope you enjoy these views!



DREER'S NURSERIES, RIVERTON, N. J.



DREER'S NURSERY, RIVERTON, N. J.



VICTORIA "TRICKER" LILY POND, DREER'S NURSERIES, RIVERTON, N. J.
(The leaves of these lilies average 5 feet in diameter.)

