



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
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Edgar Allan Poe will be Subject of October Meeting

The first meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton for the 1997 season will be held on Monday, October 21, 1996 at 8:00 pm in the Riverton Public School Media Center. The School is located at Fifth and Howard Streets. All persons, whether members or not, are invited to attend this educational and entertaining event. Attendees should enter the building through the main doors facing Fifth Street. After a short business meeting, the lights will be dimmed for a spine-tingling dramatic reading of some of the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

The presentation, approximately one hour in length will be made by local actress **Helen McKenna-Uff** of Cherry Hill. Ms. McKenna-Uff has a degree in theater arts from Rutgers University in Camden. She has appeared locally at the Ritz Theater in Oaklyn; Haddonfield Plays and Players; and Plays for Living, in Philadelphia. She first developed her Poe program as a senior project at Rutgers University.

Ms. McKenna-Uff is a tour guide in Philadelphia and a Park Ranger at Independence National Park. She was recently employed by the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site, Philadelphia.

Edgar Allan Poe, born in Boston, Jan 19, 1809, deserves the most credit of any American writer for transformation of the short story from a pastime to an art form. He virtually created the detective story in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" (1841) and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time--important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story--and had a worldwide influence on literature.

Poe's parents were touring actors; both died

before he was 3 years old. He was taken to the Richmond Va. home of John Allan, a successful merchant, and was raised Edgar Allan Poe. In 1826, he entered the University of Virginia but stayed only for a year. He was a good student, but ran up large gambling debts, which Allan would not pay. Allan removed him from the university, also ending Poe's engagement to Sarah Elmira Royster of Richmond. Without any means of support, Poe enlisted in the Army and attended West Point. By this time (1827), he had already written and printed (at his own expense) his first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*.

After 6 months at West Point, Poe apparently contrived to be dismissed for disobedience. John Allan temporarily reconciled with Poe and secured Poe's release from the Army and the appointment to West Point. His fellow cadets, during this time, contributed the funds for the publication of *Poems by Edgar A. Poe...Second Edition* (1831). This volume contained the famous "To Helen" and "Israfel", poems written in the restrained and calculated musical effect that were to become characteristic of his poetry.

Next, Poe took up residence in Baltimore with his widowed aunt, Maria Clemm and her daughter, Virginia. He turned to fiction as a means to support himself, being published in weeklies such as the Baltimore Sunday Visitor and the Philadelphia Saturday Courier in 1832-33. Poe, his aunt, and Virginia moved to Richmond in 1835. He became the editor of the Southern Literary Messenger and married Virginia who was just shy of 14 years old.

Poe published fiction, notably his most horrifying tale, "Berenice", in the Messenger, but mostly, his contributions were serious, analytical and

continued on next page

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Edgar Allen Poe

continued from front page

critical reviews, which earned him respect as a literary critic. He praised a few of his contemporaries, including Dickens, but wrote many devastating reviews of popular writers. His contributions undoubtedly increased the magazine's circulation, but they offended its owner, who also took exception to Poe's drinking. The January 1837 issue of the Messenger announced Poe's withdrawal as editor, while at the same time contained three works and five of his reviews. This was to be the paradox of Poe's career: success as an artist and editor, but failure to satisfy his employers and to make a living.

Next in New York (1837), then in Philadelphia (1838-44), and again in New York (1844-49), Poe tried to establish himself as a literary force, with only moderate success. He did, however formulate influential literary theories in the forms that he favored--highly musical poems and short prose narratives. Both forms, he said, should aim for "a certain unique or single effect". Exemplary of his short fiction stories are "Ligeia" (1838) and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which was to become one of his most popular stories. Exemplary among his melodious verses are "The Raven" (1845) and "The Bells" (1849).

The death of his wife Virginia, in January 1847, was devastating to Poe, however he continued to write and lecture. In the summer of 1849 he revisited Richmond, lectured, and rekindled his affection for the fiancée lost in 1826. On a return north to Baltimore, Poe was found unconscious in the street, and later died. In a brief obituary the Baltimore Clipper reported that Poe had died of "congestion of the brain".

Upcoming Program Schedule

Frank Wagenknight, our outgoing program chairman, has left us with a legacy of exciting and interesting programs for the coming year:

December 2, 1996 - HISTORY OF POSTCARDS Neilson Wood of Levittown, Pa., will speak about this common but highly varied art form.

January 13, 1997 - THREE CENTURIES OF BEVERLY AND EDGEWATER PARK Carole Moore, a resident of Edgewater, will summarize for us, the history of these fellow river-towns to the North.

March 10, 1997 - FAKES, FRAUDS FLIM-FLAMS AND SCAMS - A LOOK AT ANTIQUES Burlington Co. antique expert Ronald Shaffer will try to stump us with a game of is it real? or is it reproduction?

May 12, 1997 - OUR FOUNDING MOTHERS - WIVES OF THE REVOLUTION David Kimball, former National Park Service employee, now the Burlington County Historian, will enlighten us about the better half of our nation's founding families - with a sense of history and a sense of humor.

Membership Information

Enclosed with this issue is a membership form for your use. If you are a regular member, please renew with this form. If you would like to join the Historical Society of Riverton, please fill out this form and attach a check. All who apply are heartily accepted into membership.

There is often confusion about when dues are due. The Historical Society year runs from January to December. However, the "season" in which we have meetings is similar to the school year, running from September through May.

Next, please remember that dues are due in advance for a small-budgeted organization as we are. We start our membership renewal process in September/October with the first issue of the Gaslight News. These dues are for 1997. According to the By-Laws, dues must be paid by the end of February of 1997.

We are grateful to members who respond promptly to this first dues notice. This allows us to update the membership rolls and prepare mailing labels for the coming year. It saves the Society the time and expense of dispatching additional reminders and the confusion created by missed or deleted names from the mailing list. Thanks again to those early birds who reply quickly and thank you for your support!

Congratulations to Paul Schopp

Paul W. Schopp is our good friend and professional Historic Preservation Consultant who has served as our Vice President for the past several years. He has given us authoritative and entertaining programs about the subjects of Railroading, Steamships and Shipbuilding at some of our past meetings. Lastly, but not at all the least, he has done an excellent job as Editor of our Gaslight News for the past 3 years since Betty Hahle passed that responsibility to him.

We on the Board of Directors are happy to announce that Paul has recently been appointed the Executive Director of the Camden County Historical Society. Congratulations Paul!

This is, however a good news / bad news situation for us –Camden County's gain is our loss. Paul has informed us that regretfully he must resign from the Historical Society Board of Directors to fulfill his new duties – as well as continue his consultation practice.

So it is with regrets, but with great thanks that we have accepted Paul's resignation. His shoes will be hard to fill – but he has left us with straight and firm footprints to follow.

Thank you, Paul.

Dan Campbell

Coming Events of Interest

Free Appraisal Day sponsored by the Burlington County Historical Society and the Trust Department of Burlington County Bank on Thursday, October 31 from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm. Bring an interesting object, antique, decoy or work of art to the Bank at 1660 Beverly Road for one free appraisal by professional appraisers. Refreshments will be served.

A display of the Bob and Pauline White Decoy Collection will open at the Burlington County Historical Society on Sunday November 17, 4:00 pm at the Corson Poley Center, in Burlington. This will be a wine and cheese reception. Call 386-4773 for more information.

Yesterday...

By Betty B. Hale

From time to time newspapers, like other businesses, look for ways to increase interest in their products. In 1931 The New Era, Riverton's weekly newspaper, had a contest: each week an old picture from their files would be published as a "Memory Teaser", and the following week they would publish the best letter received from a reader about it. The winner also won a dollar.

The first picture was of an early Riverton Public School building, at 4th/Howard Streets, and the winning letter was written by Stanley Carty. The building was erected in 1892 by Grant & Lowden, had 6 rooms (4 on the first floor and 2 on the second, which could be converted into one large one), and cost \$4,000 —plus \$500 for a heater. Average daily attendance in 1909 was 232 children. After the new brick school was built in 1910 this frame building was demolished (1911) by George Shaner & Son for the materials, which were then used in building a row of houses on Warrington Avenue in East Riverton.

In 1931 that new brick school was overcrowded, in spite of adding a portable building at 5th/Cinnaminson, and there was much discussion about what should be done. Build a new school? (estimated cost, more than \$350,000) Build a junior high, for grades 7-8-9? (Practical only if Cinnaminson would also use it— and they were not interested) Enlarge and remodel the present building? That was finally the choice, influenced at least in part by the fact that a \$16,000 debt remained on the 1910 construction that would not be paid off until 1947. Remodeling would cost (estimated) \$168,350 to bring the number of classrooms up to 16, plus K and specialty rooms, and a gym. An additional \$168,350 would be needed for equipment. And since building enlargement would use the existing playground area, more property was needed for that purpose.

1931's graduating class from Palmyra High School included 19 students from Riverton, and 3 sets of twins who lived in Palmyra; Harry and Richard Furman, Walter and Thomas Price, and Robert and Murray Kirkpatrick. Their yearbook, The Tillicum, was the third one to be published. The Tillicum (which means "friend" in the Delaware Indian language) was an idea by George Longe in

continued on page 4

continued from previous page

1928, and realized for the first time in 1929.

The next "Memory Teaser" was a photograph of Washington Hunter, a wealthy farmer who had lived in Cambridge (Delran) by a stream then known as Buck's Creek, before the turn of the century. Lawton Steedle wrote the winning letter that week, and told how, in earlier years before Riverton had a bank, local farmers and others would take their money to Howard Parry's office on Main Street; then he would take it to Moorestown Trust Company for deposit, often carrying as much as \$50,000 at a time in his horse and buggy. A driver for Parry, who came to know that Mr. Hunter often had large sums of money in his home left his job here, went to New York, and returned with three accomplices, bent on robbery. Hunter caught them in the act and fought them. He was badly beaten with clubs by the robbers, and died from the injuries in January, 1901. A year later three of the robbers were caught, tried and sentenced to hang. Steedle's letter concluded "just before hanging someone smuggled an ax into prison and the murderers were just about to escape when discovered by the keeper. The rope with which the murderers hung was made in Philadelphia by the Fitler Cordage Company who furnished the rope for all the hangings. It was delivered to Mount Holly by C.C. Fitler and Dr. C.S. Mills, who were given passes to witness the hanging, which they did." (Fitler lived at 11 Bank and Dr. Mills at 106 Lippincott Avenue).

In March, 1931, Walter Miller was made police chief of Riverton, after having been a patrolman for 27 years. And John Robinson was appointed a police officer. A month later Robinson, "Riverton's youngest officer" made his first arrest. He noticed a "suspicious" 74-year-old man around 4th/Linden, found him to be in possession of "burglar's tools" and arrested him. Subsequently, in Mt. Holly, the man was found to have a 24-year record of burglaries in the area.

Another "Memory Teaser" was a picture of the first Post Office building in Riverton built specially for that purpose. It brought numerous responses, and those from Ethel Braddock, daughter of a postmaster, Walter Armstrong, and 12-year-old Kathryn Schneider were published.

Prior to the erection of this building (circa 1903 by builder E. H. Pancoast, the Post Office has been located in several places on Main Street. First, in 1871, in the home of Charles Mattis by the railroad

track—which also served as the railroad station; then across the track to J.J. Adolph's store (which was later replaced by the Williams/Wright building, in 1923; then to Cowperthwaite's Drug Store (304 Main); then to Howard Parry's building (520 Main); and finally to the new building at 526 Main—now numbered 530. It was a simple two-story clapboard building, with open front porch on both levels. The second floor may have been used sometimes for a hall, but soon was identified as an apartment. When the Post Office moved to 609 Main, Adolph bought the just vacated building and had his cigar and newspaper store there. About 7 or 8 years later Edward Zisac bought the business, and doubled the size of the building with an extension from the rear, in which he had a pool and billiard room. At that time Fred Todd, a local building contractor who built many homes on Thomas and Linden Avenue above the railroad, lived in the second floor apartment.

The next owner was Theobald Schneider, who, with his family, lived upstairs. Kathryn wrote that both she and older brother Roy had been born in that house. (Roy had a prominent part in the 1926 film, *Romance of Riverton*, and Kathryn was in the 1932 class of Riverton Public School). In 1931 Schneider lost the business, which was then taken over by Chappie Keating. Today it is a hard to recognize the simple building that began as a post office. Asbestos siding was applied, and then in 1984 it underwent extensive remodeling. Porches were enclosed to extend the building forward. a pent roof added, etc, as it was converted into offices.

Other buildings have changed appearance and purpose, too. In 1931 Miss Ada Price had the second floor of the Price building converted into two apartments by Herman Eichner, builder. Her father had had the brick building erected on the site of the former Christ Episcopal churchyard, above Church Lane, in late 1891. It has changed appearance—and use—several times, since then.

Also in 1931 the Jessup farm in Cinnaminson, along route 25 (now 130) was purchased for a new cemetery: Lakeview Memorial Park, Inc. That same year the Burlington Bristol Bridge was opened, and Riverton's Memorial Park was dedicated to the memory of the town's servicemen and women—five who died, and 110 others who had served in World War I.

(reference: *The New Era*, DeVece collection; microfilm at Burlington County Historical Society: 1931, January-June)