

Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

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History of Postcards Will be the Subject of December Meeting

Riverton's development as a waterfront community made it a vacation destination for many Philadelphians wanting to get away from the heat and bustle of the city. During the mid to late 19th century, we were "out in the country" to the city dwellers of urban areas. During the early twentieth century, the tradition of get-aways to Riverton continued. Of course, we all associate postcards with vacations, don't we?

That association will be borne out at the next regular meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton to be held on Monday, December 2, 1996 at 8:00 p.m. in the Riverton Public School Media Center. The night's program will be Postcard Collecting - 1893 to the Present. All members of the public, whether Historical Society members or not, are invited to attend.

The program will be presented by Neilson Wood, Jr. who has a Master of Library Science degree from Drexel University and has been a librarian in the Northern Burlington County Regional School district for over 30 years. His talk will survey the historical development and distribution of postcards in the United States beginning in 1893. Particular focus will be placed on "the golden era of the postcard (1907-1915)". Actual examples of postcards that Mr. Wood discusses will be projected for everyone to view. There will be a question and answer period after the presentation, and attendees are encouraged to bring any special postcards that they might have in their collections to share with the group.

Postcards are also used to commemorate creation of new places, such as our Memorial Park, in 1931. Postcards also commemorate or publicize new buildings, civic groups, or places of business and worship, all which were plentiful in Riverton.

History of Beverly & Edgewater Park at the January Meeting

The first Historical Society meeting of 1997 will be held on January 13, at 8:00 pm in the Riverton School Media Center. All members and visitors are welcome to attend. As always, please enter the school through the main entrance doors facing fifth street (not the gym), and turn right to the Media Center (Library).

Our speaker for the evening will be Carole Moore of Edgewater Park New Jersey. Carole is a founding member, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Riverfront Historical Society. She is the founding president of the New Jersey Landlord Association (for educating landlords). She is Secretary of the B.E.B.A., the Business Association for Beverly and Edgewater Park, and a tour Guide at the New Jersey State House. She is also chairman of the "Bring Billy Yank Home Committee", a group seeking the return of a monument to the Beverly National Cemetery.

Carole Moore resides with her husband Bill, twin daughters Lizzie and Carrie and their husbands Scott and Ed in the Family Bed and Breakfast named "Whitebriar" on Cooper Street, Edgewater Park.

Carole will speak to us about the history of the Beverly and Edgewater Park area including Delanco and Willingboro. These were surrounding farmlands, around what she calls "the smallest city in New Jersey - Beverly".

This will include several periods in the area's history. During the revolutionary war, Dunk's Ferry, Beverly, N.J. could be called "the other Washington's Crossing". She will include Civil War history of the area, and Victorian period development of the Beverly / Edgewater area and surrounding farmlands.

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Remaining Program Schedule

Please keep this issue of the Gaslight News handy in your home until January of 1997. The first page outlines the programs for both December of 1996 and January of 1997. The remaining programs for the 1997 year will be:

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.

Board of Director News

At a recent Board of Director's Meeting, the Board elected our member Joseph Farrell to the position of Vice President. Joe Farrell has been on the Board only about two years, but has taken on many duties already. Joe resides with his wife Gail at 200 Main Street.

Dan Campbell, President, has appointed our member John Farr of 404 Lippincott Avenue to complete the unexpired term of Paul Schopp on the Board of Directors. You may remember the house of John and his wife Michelle as one of the most beautiful on the Christmas House Tour of 1994.

Coming Events of Interest

'Tis the Season for Holiday House Tours...

The 34th Annual Cooks Tour of Moorestown will be held Wednesday, December 4th, 1996 from 10 am to 8 pm to benefit Memorial Health Alliance. Homes on the tour will be decorated for Christmas. Tickets are \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. This covers admission to the houses, additional events will take place at First Presbyterian Church on Bridgeboro Road. Tickets are available at Moorestown businesses, or call 235-2822 and 234-2518 for more information.

The biannual Riverton Christmas Candlelight House tour will take place on Saturday December 7, 1996, from 5 to 10 pm. Proceeds benefit the Friends of the Riverton Library. Tickets are \$8 and are on sale in advance at the library and at several businesses in Riverton and Palmyra.

The tour will consist of six houses, and also special Christmas exhibits including model train layouts at the Porch Club and at the newly renovated Farmers' & Mechanics' Bank.

Smithville Mansion is having their Victorian Christmas Tours beginning December 9, 1996, featuring live musicians every day. Call the Friends of Smithville Mansion at 609-261-3780.

... And for Holiday Music:

The West Jersey Chamber Music Society presents "An English Christmas", Sunday December 15, 1996, at 8 pm at St. Matthews Lutheran Church, 318 Chester Avenue, Moorestown, NJ.

Admission is \$12, \$10 for Seniors, both at the door, or call 778-1899 to reserve tickets in advance.

Yesterday...

By Betty B. Hahle

When The New Era ran a picture of the fishery capstan in Riverton during its "Memory Teaser" contest in April, 1931, two members of the Faunce family were among those who responded. At the time there were still some local residents who remembered the fishery on the riverbank at Howard Street, and going there to pick out a big, squirming fish to be cooked for supper, fresh from the nets. The cost? About 25¢!

The fishery had been there for many years, from long before there was a village called Riverton, with its walled and landscaped riverbank. Deeds tell some of its story. In 1793 John Inskeep sold it to William Evans and Caleb Atkinson, who soon had a dispute over the fishing rights. In 1798 Evald and Bispham sold an interest to Atkinson, and in 1806 a line dividing the fishery and fishing rights was recorded in another deed. In 1825 Atkinson sold his plantation that included the homestead (201 Main Street) and the shad fishery to Joseph Lippincott. That deed gave him half part rights to fishing in the whole river from the plantation tract formerly held by Atkinson and Evans." A little earlier Isaiah Toy had bought a tract just below the Pompeston Creek and "so much of said fishery and the shore of the river Delaware without the fences as thereof."

Early Chester Township tax records, which list taxes levied on property owners for improved land, houses, horses, cattle, wagons, dogs and businesses, indicate that in the 1830s Lippincott paid taxes on his fishery, and in the next decade he and his son Asa paid half of the tax on it.

In 1851 after the village founders had made their initial purchase of Lippincott land, Daniel L. Miller Jr. and Rodman Wharton acquired title to an adjoining tract above it and extending almost to the creek, for the planned expansion of the village. When Wharton died in 1854 Miller purchased his holdings, and then, in 1860, went bankrupt. The land was auctioned off by the sheriff, and purchased by Thomas Ridgeway, Miller's father-in-law. In 1861 Ridgeway sold a tract fronting on the river (and including the fishery) to Samuel and Elizabeth Cook, between Howard and Fulton

streets. A Condition of that deed required Cook to continue the riverwall "in the same materials, style, and workmanship" as the village wall and to also landscape the bank above it, keeping open the public right of way across the property known as Bank Avenue. This was done within the time stipulated.

Mrs. M. Faunce's letter said that Jacob Rice of Kensington (formerly called Fishtown), a cousin of Michael Faunce, "rented the shore from Samuel Cook", saying the area went from the Yacht Club to Dreer's. In 1856 the fishery was taken over by Captain William Faunce, who had formerly lived in Kensington. She described the net they used as "two miles long", said it took 14 men to row it out, and a crew of 30 men to handle it. The crew was headed by Albert Faunce. The horse used to draw in the net via the capstan she recalled as being rented from a Mr. Owen of Palmyra, who ran a laundry there. She pointed out, as did Albert Faunce in his letter, that there were actually two capstans: the one on the Cook property was used for ebb tide fishing, and the other near the mouth of the Pompeston, was used for flood tide fishing.

Frank J. Hamlin wrote Albert Faunce's letter. Al was 74 years of age, lived on Cinnamon Street, and worked at J.S. Collins & Son. He said that he and his father (William) had operated the fishery from 1876 to 1904. The net they used measured 475 fathoms (2850 ft) and required a gang of 35 men to operate. The horse he remembered was rented each season from John Quigley, who ran a livery stable on Penn Street. (Quigley's son William was a Riverton police officer for many years).

A capstan is a turnstile sort of apparatus operated by a bar, turned by manpower or by a horse hitched to it, and is used to draw heavy seines out of the water and up onto the shore with their catch. The seines, which had weights on the bottom and cork floats on top, were rowed out and set by a team of fishermen in rowboats. Al Faunce said that they made seven hauls a day during shad season from March to June and that their record catch for one day was 10,000 fish. The record for a single haul was 3700. The fish were taken to the Philadelphia markets for sale, by sail if the weather cooperated, or else by rowing. The fishery got 2¢ each for roe shad, considered a fair price. Customers paid considerably more.

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Shad season ran from late March to early June, when thousands of shad were making their 200-mile swim up the Delaware River from the Atlantic Ocean to a point above Hancock, New York, to spawn. They were exhausted on their return trip, but safe from fishing nets as seines could be used only during the designated season. By September or October, the young shad would be big enough and strong enough to swim down the river to the ocean, where they would spend 3 or 4 years before returning to the place of their birth to repeat the spawning cycle.

Seine fishing was hard work, and often dangerous. Hours were long, in spite of laws prohibiting the use of the seines between 2 p.m. Saturday and midnight Sunday. A man earning \$12 to \$15 a week in a factory sometimes left his job for temporary work at a fishery during shad season, for there he could earn up to \$100 a week. Strong tides, squalls or storms, or accidents caused by tugs or steamboats running down a rowboat or tearing a net were all hazards to be faced. Nets had to be stretched out to dry each day, and tears mended.

Along with the shad, other fish were caught, too: salmon, trout, large mouth bass, rockfish, perch, muller, catfish, and others. Sometimes a net brought in an unexpected catch. In May, 1887, the body of Fran Reid, a fisherman from Beverly who had fallen overboard while dragging a seine during a squall two weeks previously, was caught in Faunce's net along with the fish.

Al Faunce said that there were several seines the size of that in Riverton that operated along the Delaware from Gloucester to Burlington, and that their huge catches contributed to "practically eliminating shad in the Delaware River." Later, pollution almost finished what excessive harvesting had

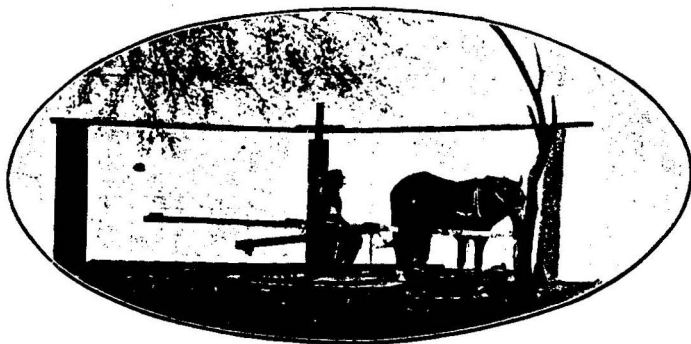
begun.

In 1902 the Cook heirs divided their riverfront property into building lots, and the fishery was soon gone. By 1906 there were four large new homes there. The special 1909 Christmas edition of *The New Era* pictured the old capstan, and said "There is still shad fishing done in Riverton, but it is with smaller boats and nets and lacks the picturesque features of the old fishery."

Further up the river, in Lambertville, a Shad Festival is held each year during the brief season in April/May. One attraction is the delicious baked shad served to hundreds of visitors attending the event. Another is the fishing (line) contest, with each fisherman hoping to win the prize for the biggest shad caught that year—perhaps even beating the long standing New Jersey record of 9 lb. 4 oz. Perhaps the biggest attraction of all is Fred Lewis and his crew of 6 men using a seine for shad fishing. His net is 100 ft. long, and half of the catch is thrown back by the State Fish, Game, and Wildlife Commission. If Spring thaws make the river run too deep and swiftly at his fishery, they do not fish because it is too dangerous for the men to set out the seine in the rowboats. Some years the catch is good, others not so good. In 1992 they caught 4700 shad, but in 1994 the catch was only 368.

Years of efforts to clear the river of pollution are slowly bringing fish back, but never again will we see the huge shad runs of those earlier Springs. Nor will we much longer be able to see seine fishing. Fred Lewis, now 81 years old, is the only fisherman now authorized to use a seine for shad fishing; he is the last member of a once-thriving fishing industry on the Delaware River.

Betty B. Hahle



One of the picturesque features of Riverton, until a few years ago when it was discontinued owing to the property where a landing was made being bought up for residential purposes, was the Faunce Shad Fishery. This fishery was started a half century ago, and has been kept in the Faunce family ever since. The hauls were made in great nets, laid by boats and drawn ashore by the horse-power capstan shown in the illustration, which was placed on the bank on what was at that time the Cook property. There is still shad fishing done at Riverton, but it is with smaller boats and nets, and lacks the picturesque features of the old fishery

THE NEW ERA