



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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## Antiques will be the Featured Subject of the March Meeting

The Historical Society of Riverton will host a general meeting on March 10, 1997, at 8:00 pm in the Riverton School Media Center. The subject of the evening's highly informative program will be **"Fakes, Frauds and Flim-Flams - or How to Identify Real Antiques from Reproductions"**.

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). The program will commence after a short business meeting.

Our speaker for the evening will be noted Burlington County appraiser of antiques & appreciable residential contents, Ronald E. Shaffer. Mr Shaffer will invite attendees to preview a number of supposed antiques, prior to the presentation. Only one of the displayed items is an actual antique - over 100 years old. The others are fakes and frauds. The program will then continue with a visually diverse slide show featuring examples of glassware, dishware, silver, pewter, furniture, paintings and decorative arts. by the end of the program, it will be learned that **nothing is beyond the faker's capabilities, and the real antique on display will be revealed!**

Mr. Shaffer is Graduate of the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Performing Arts), where he completed dual degrees in Interior Design and in Dimensional Design. His subsequent completion of university-level appraisal courses, and career experience in four diverse businesses have given him the expertise with which he will educate and entertain us for the evening.

Mr. Shaffer is co-owner of Exemplars, Inc., a Vincentown, NJ antique business, founded in 1980. Exemplars, Inc. has an diverse inventory of 18th and 19th century furniture, decorative arts, china, glassware, and oriental rugs. They specialize in Americana prior to 1830. Exemplars, Inc. has been privileged with total content appraisal assignments

for such New Jersey landmarks as the Batsto Mansion.

Antiques and other furnishings are appraised for insurance companies, trust departments, attorneys, moving companies, and numerous individuals. Appraisals are done for the purpose of insurance, estate tax liability, charitable contribution, divorce, bankruptcy and fair market value to sell. An appraiser makes no offer to buy or sell. An appraiser such as Mr. Shaffer must maintain an extensive and diverse research library and must keep well established working relationships with well known expert sources, specialists and published authors.

Some of the techniques for telling if an antique is genuine are as follows:

**TOOL MARKS** from hand sawing and planing by 18th century artisans make antiques of this era look thick and slightly uneven compared to wood that has been prepared with machine tools.

**WEAR MARKS** are evidence of well used furniture, however be careful of dents and scratches that are in the wrong places - they can be faked.

**CONSTRUCTION DETAILS** should be examined closely. Most pre-19th-century pieces were put together using hand-cut, mortise-and-tenon joints at legs, and dovetails at corners such as drawer sides and backs. Overall, the entire piece should look correct for the wood used, the supposed time period, and the locale where it was constructed.

Ronald Shaffer's interest in fakes and frauds is a result of his purchasing what he refers to as "his fair share". Attend the March meeting and learn from his valuable experience. Then, perhaps you too, like Ronald Shaffer, will be seen at auction sales, turning furniture upside down to verify authenticity!

Attendees are invited to bring a small piece of furniture, or a household object, for an appraisal by Mr. Shaffer, free of charge, after the program.

## *Gaslight News*

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The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey 08077

### Remaining Program Schedule

#### **May 12, 1997 Program: 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.

### Memorial to Anna L. Cannon

Our beloved former Mayor, Anna L. Cannon, sadly, passed away nearly one year ago. The Board of Directors recently decided that the Society should make a donation to the Riverton Public Library in the memory of this historic woman.

Ann faithfully served the community for over twenty years: first, on the Park and Recreation Committee; then, for fifteen years as the first woman ever elected to Council; then for the last four years as the only woman Mayor in the history of the Borough.

The memorial will be in the form of a two volume text on women's history entitled "The Underside of History", from Sage Publishing, edited by Edith Boldine.

### Happenings in Riverton...

#### **Historic House Plaque Awarded**

In November of 1996, a Historical Society Plaque was awarded to Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Buenzle for their home at 401 Thomas Avenue. This award was previously kept a secret, as it was given within the family as a gift. There is no secret now, however as to the significance of the property, as certified by our Society Historian Betty B. Hahle.

The land was purchased in 1886 by John Thorton, Sr. from Edward Lippincott (the Lippincott Extension), and the residence was erected within the following year. The house is a

two-and-a-half story, L-shaped, three-bay Victorian Queen Anne style building with classical detail. The basic structure is unchanged, inside and out.

The original clapboard and scalloped shingle gable ends scrollwork on the peaks have been covered by aluminum siding. The wrap-around porch is enclosed on the left (4th Street) side, and a smaller sunroom has been added to the second floor on the right side over the entry.

Thorton built and lived in several other houses in Riverton, among them 410/412 Main Street and 201 Linden Avenue. The Thomas Avenue house sold after his death, then was sold again in 1906 to Harry Sim, an executive of the Henry A. Dreer Nursery in Riverton. In 1969, the Buenzles purchased the property from Sim's daughter (heir). Congratulations to the Buenzles for their plaque!

*Plaques are awarded to buildings that are one hundred or more years old, or that have particular historical or architectural significance. Applications are available from Betty Hahle, by calling 829-6315.*

**Olde Tyme Riverton Porch Party**, June 1, 12:30 pm. Lunch on local porches, music, antiques. Riverton Victorian house owners willing to host contact Marjorie Thomson at 786-1979. Tickets available in May - \$15.

**Riverton Beautification Project.** There is an effort afoot, led by Bank Avenue resident Robert Thomson, to beautify areas of Riverton, particularly portions of our business district. You probably noticed last year, the flower planters placed near the intersection of Main and Broad Streets, maintenance of the landscaped traffic island there, the picket fence on Main across from the Collins Building, and recently, the new bushes along the Fulton Street side of the Nu-Way Market. These are all results of Bob's determined efforts among our business people, to "spruce up" the downtown area.

Most recently, Bob recruited architects, engineers and other professionals from Riverton to volunteer ideas toward this effort. The result is an Improvement Plan for the Main St./ Broad St. intersection. This includes improved signage, crosswalks, benches, and locations for 18 new gaslight fixtures which exactly replicate our his-

toric gaslights. Looking to become a non-profit corporation for this effort, Bob will take donations from individuals and Riverton businesses to finance the cost of the improvements. The flow of money began with a private donation of \$10,000, and is up to \$25,000 as of this writing.

We applaud Bob Thomson, including his wife Marge, for their diligent and up-beat promotion of this cause for the betterment of Riverton. It is well proven in many small towns across our country that downtown revitalization is a key step in the financial and social well-being of a community. Thanks, Bob, and keep up the good work!

## And Outside of Riverton...

**24th Annual Moorestown Antique Show,** March 21, 22, 23. Moorestown Friends School Gym, sponsored by the Y's Men's Club.

**Heisman Fine Arts Gallery of Ardmore Art Auction,** Saturday April 19, Moorestown Community House. Sponsored by the Alice Paul Foundation. Preview, hors d'oeuvres, wine and soft drinks 7 pm, Auction 8 pm. Highlighted works - limited edition prints from the Barnes Foundation. Tickets \$7.50 or \$10.00 for two. Contact Cheryl Maitlen at 235-6312.

**Historical Society of Moorestown,** exhibit of wedding gowns dating from 1826. Also shoes, slippers, boots. The Cadbury Mansion, High Street, Moorestown, Tuesday afternoons 1-3 pm.

**Annual Spring Open House and Plant Sale,** Saturday, May 3, raindate and additional sales May 4, Historic Bartram Gardens and House Museum, 54th and Lindberg Blvd., Philadelphia. Bartram Gardens is the colonial home and America's first botanical garden created by John Bartram, 18th century botanist. Located in the Eastwick neighborhood of southwest Philadelphia. Call 215-729-5281 for more information and directions.

**Burlington County Historical Society Annual Meeting,** May 15, 8 pm in the Corson Poley Center, rear of 457 High Street, Burlington, NJ. Election of officers and trustees followed by program: "Understanding History through Music: Songs of River and Sea."

## Yesterday...

*By Betty B. Hahle*

Everybody walked. Although there were always some who preferred to ride, in a small country town like Riverton, just about everybody walked. They walked to the pier to take the boat, to the station to catch a train; they walked to church, to meetings, to entertainment, to school, to visit friends. And in time, they walked to neighborhood shops and to work.

On a pleasant Sunday afternoon families walked together, perhaps to the riverbank, where they might sit for a while on a blanket spread on the grass to watch the boats, or swimmers; to the woods or the orchards beyond; to the creek; to the gardens of Dreer's Nurseries. In Autumn they might gather nuts from the trees in the wooded area by the creek. In Spring groups took walks to gather wildflowers: arbutus, violets, wild azaleas, daisies and buttercups. On May 1st children would make baskets out of paper and fill them with flowers they had gathered, then hang them on the doors of their favorite persons. After ringing the doorbell they would scamper out of sight to watch as the door opened and the person found a May Basket instead of a person there. It was a charming custom that survived until the middle of this century.

Riverton was planned not as a money-making enterprise, but for a small community of homes in a healthful setting, without factories or bars to interfere with the kind of life its founders wanted. And that's the way it was for as long as the Riverton Improvement Company controlled it. After the corporation's term expired, in 1872, very gradually a few small shops began to open in front rooms of homes near the railroad. As the town grew and more services and conveniences were wanted, more shops opened.

For about 35 years there was a factory in Riverton. By 1887 Charles Woolston, a carriage builder, had purchased a large piece of land above the railroad on which he built his home and his factory. The house faces Main St., at the corner of 7th, and the factory was behind it, along 7th Street to where (at the time) the street angled down to Lippincott Avenue, giving a lesser frontage there. The factory had a section for a blacksmith, another

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for a wheel wright, and a showroom between. Behind it were a barn and woodshed. Facing Lippincott, a small twin house was erected and rented out (possibly to employees). Woolston's ads in 1890 offered carriages, surreys, sleighs, and an assortment of buggies, as well as special "low-down shelving" wagons for farmers.

In 1905 the factory was destroyed by fire, but was soon rebuilt to twice the size of the original one. The street was squared off instead of angled, and the new building was 50 x 210 feet, with special sections. The blacksmith, with 3 forges, had the largest section, toward Lippincott. Next was the wheel wright's section, with 4 gas-powered tools. Then came sections for painting, varnishing and trim, and finally, an office and showroom. Rooms were heated with coal stoves, and lighted with gas. Fifteen men were employed there.

A decade later electric lights had been installed, the showroom was bigger, and ads promoted not only a complete line of carriages and supplies, sundries, and medicines for horses, cattle and dogs, but also automobile supplies. Mr. Woolston said, in a brochure he distributed, that the automobile had become so popular that he had taken up that branch of the business, and had on hand a good assortment of supplies, or could obtain anything not stocked by telephoning for it—and would have it in an hour. He had the agency for Diamond, Fisk, and other rubber tires, and could supply new engines, axles, wheels, tops, and also do painting and trimming of automobiles.

In 1912 the Ford Motor Company in Detroit distributed a booklet aimed at encouraging women to drive and to own cars. "The Woman And The Ford" said that women were "coming into their own, sharing the responsibilities and now demanding the opportunities and pleasures of the new order." It cited the automobile as playing a major part in this change, by "broadening her horizons, giving new vigor to her body, making neighbors of far away friends, multiplying her range of activity – a real weapon in a changing order."

It called the Ford a woman's car because of its simplicity, lightness, economy; it was "as easy to drive as the old family horse – and as safe" it said, and added that its initial cost and upkeep were also comparable to that of a horse. Two styles were

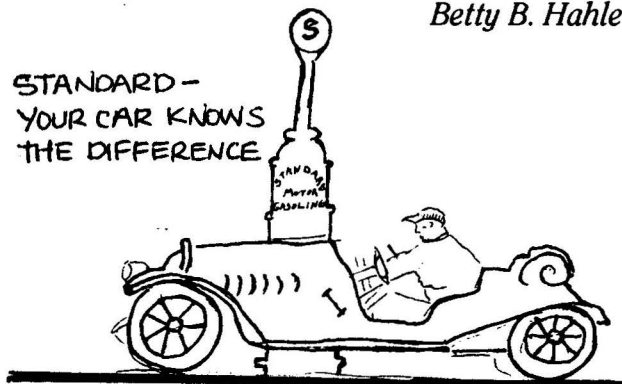
offered at \$590, and maintenance averaged \$10 a month. Also noted was a feature Ford had introduced "the left hand drive," enabling a driver to step out of the car directly on to the sidewalk or curb without having to step into a street. It concluded by saying that driving was not a fad, but adapted by all women seeking health and pleasure and escape from the artificial conditions and worries of the drawing room or kitchen.

Mr. Woolston also recognized that automobiles were not just a fad. Carriage making was falling off – only 6 employees were needed by 1919 – and in 1920 he sold his business to devote full time to selling cars and trucks. In the 1926 *Romance of Riverton* film the Woolstons and their Star agency on Howard Street are shown, along with other local businesses.

The Woolston factory was purchased by a Pennsylvania corporation, PennMotor Corp., and used to make automobile and truck bodies, and some trucks. For a very brief time a car was also manufactured there; the Hilton, named for its designer Hilton Shofield, whose office was in Philadelphia. It was a 4 1/2 horsepower closed coupe with wire wheels and a very large rear deck. Three people could sit in the front seat – the driver was seated slightly forward, allowing room to turn the wheel and operate the car. In June, 1921, the factory burned to the ground, in spite of valiant efforts by Riverton firemen and other companies that responded to the call for help. All together there were 15 pieces of fire apparatus there. Their efforts kept the fire from spreading to nearby residences.

This time the factory was not rebuilt. Instead, the land was cleared off, divided into buildings lots, and group of bungalows erected

Betty B. Hahle



1916 GASOLINE ADVERTISEMENT