



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

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New Jersey Indian Sites to be subject of December Program

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on **Monday, December 1, 1997 at 8:00 pm** in the Riverton Public School Media Center. The subject of the evening's program will be **Indian Sites of the New Jersey Shore, and New Jersey's earliest Indian Sites.**

The presentation, approximately one hour in length will be made by **Archaeologist Andrew J. Stanzeski** of Camden. Andrew has been a member of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey since 1962 and has held a position on that Society's Executive Board for over twenty years. He has also been a member and state representative to the Eastern States Archaeological Federation.

Andrew acquired an interest in archaeology during his early high school years. He worked as a volunteer student intern under Dr. Dorothy Cross at the New Jersey State Museum from 1962 to 1966. His early professional archaeological work included an excavation and site report for an area known as the McDermott Site on Martha's Vineyard while serving in the Coast Guard.

Since that time, he has worked with a variety of archaeological survey and research firms throughout New Jersey. His archaeological work and research of sites along the New Jersey shore has resulted in locating and dating the oldest human occupants in the State. Andrew has authored several survey and site reports about his past excavations and is presently completing

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Antique Clocks to be featured at January Meeting

Historical Society member, local resident and nationally known horologist (collector of clocks) **Harry R. White** will speak to the Society about **Antique Clocks and Clock Collecting** at the Historical Society of Riverton meeting on **Monday evening, January 26, 1998 at 8 pm.**

Harry White is a member of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC). He is the current president of Chapter 93 of that Association which meets monthly in Cherry Hill. Harry is scheduled to speak at a national meeting of the NAWCC about his collection of Anniversary Clocks. We are fortunate to have Harry give us a preview of that talk.

Harry specializes in anniversary clocks, also known as 400-day clocks, which require winding only once a year. The owner of such a clock selects a particular anniversary as a reminder to wind the clock, hence the name.

The significant difference between these and swing pendulum clocks is that anniversary clocks are operated by a torsion spring that oscillates, rather than a coil spring which drives a pendulum. The anniversary clock was a popular style during the nineteenth century. However, as their popularity waned, they became an affordable collectors item.

Harry White began collecting cuckoo and other type clocks over twenty years ago. Approximately ten years ago he began his anniversary clock collection when given one by a neighbor. Since these clocks are usually found

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Daniel T. Campbell, AIA *President & Editor*

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey 08077

Indian Sites

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a book on Archaeological Perspectives of the New Jersey Shore.

Interested amateur archaeologists who attend the meeting are encouraged to bring artifacts which they have found in our area, to be examined and identified by Mr. Stanzeski.

All persons, whether Historical Society members or not, are invited to attend this educational and entertaining event. The Riverton School is located at Fifth and Howard Streets, Riverton. Attendees should enter the building through the main doors facing Fifth Street. The school building and meeting room are handicapped accessible. There will be a short refreshment period following the meeting and program.

Anniversary Clocks

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in need of some repair, Harry has had to become a self-trained expert in the repair of anniversary clocks.

Over the last decade, Harry has built a collection which he thinks is the third or fourth most significant collection of anniversary clocks in the country.

Riverton is fortunate to have Harry's special expertise in our midst. We were particularly lucky to have Harry introduce us to this clock type with a presentation of anniversary clocks in the school gymnasium approximately five years ago. Harry will make his new presentation, with slides and actual clocks on display, this time in the comfort of the School Media Room (Library). We encourage all to come.

House Plaque Awarded

An Historical Society Plaque has been awarded to 501 Main Street, owned by Nicholas and Beth Mortgu. This wood framed structure was evidently built in stages, therefore, the plaque will reflect two dates for the portions of the most significance.

The earliest portion was constructed by James Ward, Jr., circa 1860. This portion, believed to now be the center portion of the structure, is a rural vernacular style adapted to its corner site by following the angled property line facing Fifth Street. A more substantial 2 1/2 story addition was built facing Main Street in circa 1880 by William Harper. This latter portion is a good representative example of the Rural Gothic Revival Style typical of farm and town dwellings of the period.

Two items of local interest took place here:

When the Wm. Harper family lived here, meetings were held at 501 Main St. which led to the formation of the Central Baptist Church of Riverton and Palmyra in the summer of 1885.

From 1903 to about 1940, the back section of the building housed "Cole's Dairy". This milk depository business was where milk was bottled from bulk quantities, and supplied to, among others, the Riverton School - until the expense of pasteurization equipment closed the business after 1940.

Over thirty deed exchanges were extensively researched by Nick Mortgu and Betty Hahle to confirm the ownership history of the property. The architectural significance was confirmed by Roy Vollmer, AIA, portions of his descriptions and Betty's research are paraphrased in this article.

Upcoming Program Schedule

March 10, 1998 - TREES OF RIVERTON

Barry Emens, Chairman of the Borough of Riverton Shade Tree Commission will explain the placement, maintenance and variety of the street and park trees of Riverton.

May 11, 1998 - SEWING AND QUILTING IN

COLONIAL AMERICA - A local expert will show us in the fine art and necessity that was Sewing, Needlepoint and Quilting during the 1700's

• *Wishing Happy Holidays To All...DTC* •

Yesterday

By Betty B. Hahle

From earliest time man has hungered for news. Whether it came by sound or symbol, by words spoken, written or printed, it has been eagerly anticipated, discussed, savored, or used, according to its content.

The earliest newspaper is said to have been produced in China in the 500's, from carved blocks. Romans posted and distributed papers written by scribes, informing citizens and those at a distance of business and political events. Germany produced the first regularly issued printed newspaper in 1609, followed twelve years later by one in England.

The first American newspaper was printed in Boston in 1690. Soon others were started in Philadelphia, New York, and other cities. 1770 saw thirty-five papers being published in the Colonies.

In 1818 a weekly newspaper, *The Burlington Mirror*, began publication in Mt. Holly, NJ. The owners and name changed several times, finally remaining *The New Jersey Mirror*. In 1828, a second weekly paper started there, *The New Jersey Chronicle*. A Whig paper, it opposed the political views of the *Mirror*. Over twenty years, it too changed, to *The Family Casket*, then *The Burlington County Herald*, and finally, in 1850, to *The Mt. Holly Herald*, as it stayed until it ceasing publication in 1983.

Newspapers in the early 1880's used large newsprint and small type, and focused primarily on politics and business transactions—largely agricultural, in this area. The 6¢ price limited subscribers to those with higher incomes, but in the 1830's the promotion of "penny papers" changed readership, creating the first popular journalism in America.

The Mt. Holly papers carried transportation and mail schedules, and listed letters waiting to be picked up by the addressee from the Post Office serving his village. Foreign news was reprinted from city papers, and ads were not only for businesses and farm sales, but also for the return of runaway indentured men and women, slaves, and horses. The biggest rewards were offered for the horses.

Religious articles became regular features, and notes from various villages and townships within the circulation area were printed under individual headings. Up to thirty such headings appeared in a single issue, some with place-names that no longer exist. On Thursday, February 6, 1851, under a heading of "Local Facts and Fancies" the *N.J. Mirror* printed:

"We hear that a new town, to be called by the appropriate name of Riverton, is about being laid out on the New jersey side of the Delaware opposite Tacony. Ten new houses, costing about \$2000 each will be shortly erected; plans are being made to extend its borders..." The item added that many Mt. Holly mechanics were finding work there, commuting back and forth each day.

From time to time updates on the new town's progress were included in both papers. In May a reporter said he had seen the town's plans; in September it was reported that "the new village has been beautifully improved over the past 5 months", with a wharf completed, the bank walled and sodded, and 10 villas completed and "filled with the owners." Governor Fort had visited overnight, landing at the new wharf. Soon after this, news of Riverton began to be found under its own heading.

As the village grew, its residents began to want a newspaper of its own, one that would carry more news of local interest. Four young men, all between the ages of 16 and 18 years, decided to do something about that, and in November, 1880, produced the first issue of *The Riverton Journal*. Archie Fraser and his friends John Bioren (who lived across the street at 100 Main), Edward H. Earnshaw (2nd & Lippincott), and Edward Priestly, (who lived with his uncle, the Rev. Dr. H. H. Weld) contributed articles about finances, local development and issues, sports, and religious matters, working together at the Fraser home at 101 Main to produce each issue. The paper was published monthly, printed in Phila.

Although today one thinks of 16- and 17-year-olds as High School students, in that period such young men had completed their formal education, and were working at what would become their careers. In October, 1881, Edward Priestly joined Marcus Ward & Co. in Phila., and left the *Journal's* staff. The following March the company had removed to New York, and Archie Fraser joined them there. Just three months later, Edward Earnshaw found the pressure of his work too demanding to continue with journalism and left. John Bioren remained, but soon bowed to the inevitable. The final issue of *The Riverton Journal* was published in October 1882, just two years after it had begun.

Three years later John Shiedell and Frank Etris started a weekly paper in Palmyra. *The Weekly News*, like other newspapers, changed both owner

and name several times over the ninety years of its publication. Then in 1889 Charles Brewster printed the first issue of *The New Era*, Riverton's weekly paper. He printed it in his shop in Moorestown, along with several other papers. The following year Dr. Joshua Janney, known for his service in the Civil War and his large practice around Westfield, where he lived, bought the paper. He also purchased printing presses, and set up a shop in a corner of the second floor of the Roberts building in Riverton. In 1892 *The New Era* moved to the third floor of the new Price building, on Broad Street. That same year 16-year-old Walter Bowen joined the staff as manager, and was soon listed also as its publisher.

Initially there was opposition from the Palmyra paper's owners, who did not welcome competition that could reduce its own income from advertisers and subscribers. At that time newspapers realized 2/3 of their income from ads, and 1/3 from subscriptions. In time a better relationship developed between the two papers, although they were often on opposing sides of political and other issues. Each paper had its loyal supporters, and many residents regularly read both papers.

The New Era of 1897 was different from today's papers, in style, content, and size. Print was small, and the only pictures were standard prints made from copper plates that some advertisers paid extra to use. The front page was large, with half devoted to notices of church services, lodge meetings, post office information, and ads. The other half was used for a sermon, printed in entirety. Inside, within the Masthead, was a statement that said "*The New Era* is devoted to the business and home interests of Riverton and Palmyra, independent of political or religious belief — the people's paper." There was a lengthy editorial, and separate sections for news about Riverton and Palmyra. There was also a short "penny-a-word" column, advertising fine cigars at Wolfschmidt's barber shop, Woolston's new saw mill, houses for sale or rent, and so on. There were also foreign and local stories, and some larger ads, on the back page.

The New Era moved again, in 1902/3, to a building erected for it by Sam Rudderow, on his lot above the railroad. This building was lost in the Evans fire, in 1979. When Dr. Janney retired in 1919, Walter Bowen became sole owner and editor. Over the years changes were made in presentation as well as format and size of newsprint used. New presses made larg-

er and clearer print, the front page was devoted to local and/or national news of importance to readers, and many small ads were published on a page headed "business directory". Sports, health, food preparation, and other features were also added.

In 1930 Karl Latch joined the staff, bringing to the paper his skill as a news photographer, and his down-home philosophy expressed through a cartoon character "Si Kology Sez:...". Frederick Metzgar soon joined the staff, and in 1937 the paper moved for the last time, to the recently vacated post office building next door. *The New Era* incorporated that year, with Bowen as president, Latch vice-president, and Metzgar secretary/treasurer. Mr. Bowen retired in 1955; Karl Latch left around the same time, and Fred Metzgar became owner and publisher. Shortly before he died he sold out to a group consolidating small papers, particularly those designated "legal papers". They published papers according to region, replaced local news with more ads, and changed the papers to "throw-aways". *The New Era* name was kept, and the office remained open on Main Street, for a few more years. In 1963, after towns passed ordinances banning throw-away papers as a nuisance, Jack Armshire, of Pemberton, bought the *New Era's* stock, equipment, and real estate. He printed several papers in his Pemberton office, and within a few years sold out to Stevens, then Calkin Newspapers, which discontinued the *New Era's* name and publication.

Riverton's weekly newspaper was indeed the product of a "new era". It covered a time in which many changes occurred in our culture: in transportation, communication, social services, educational opportunities, conveniences, science and health services—things that today we can't imagine being without. It was also a time of national and hometown pride. *The New Era* did fine printing, and took great pride in its work. The special editions that were published on its 50th and 75th anniversaries, and those dedicated to the opening of new municipal facilities reflected the community pride of publisher and townspeople alike. Particularly so was the 1909 Christmas edition with its wonderful information about both Riverton and Palmyra.

Extant copies of the papers mentioned here have been preserved on microfilm, that can be read at the County Library and/or the County Historical Society Library. It takes time to read them, reel by reel; but it is time that is very rewarding.