



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

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## March Meeting program will be Riverton Trees

The Historical Society of Riverton, will meet on **Monday March 8, 1999 at 8:00 pm** in the Riverton Public School Media Center (Library) for a general meeting featuring an interesting and informative program. The program for the evening is entitled ***Riverton Street Trees - Past, Present, and Future***. The program will be presented by Mr. Barry Emens, Chairman of the Riverton, NJ Shade Tree Commission.

Mr. Emens is an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. For 33 years, he has specialized in diseases and insects which affect trees and shrubs. He has been the chairman of the Riverton Shade Tree Commission for 18 years, and has served on the Burlington County Shade Tree Commission for 15 years.

Barry's college degrees are in Forestry and Communications (Public Relations).

The program is will feature many slide photographs of Riverton trees, as well as information about individual tree species, possible diseases, and pests. Mr. Emens has developed a computer database of all of the trees in Riverton ranked by their location, size, condition, and maintenance requirements. Mr. Emens will answer individual homeowner's questions about trees on their property, and about street trees, during and after the presentation.

The meeting is open to all persons, whether Historical Society members or not. Attendees should enter the school through the doors facing Fifth Street. The school building and Media Center are handicapped accessible. Refreshments will be served after the program.

## News from the Board of Directors

At their January 18 Board meeting, the Directors voted to support the efforts of the Riverton Improvement Association by two actions: Purchase of a paving brick near the new clock at Broad and Main Streets, to be inscribed *The Historical Society of Riverton*; and purchase of a new historic replica gaslight for the next phase of the RIA's reintroduction of gaslights to Riverton's streets.

The next phase of gaslights is planned by the RIA to be approximately a dozen gaslights on Main Street in the residential areas from Eighth Street down to the river, and three on Bank Avenue, along the river. Dan Campbell has written a letter to Bob Thomson of the RIA strongly recommending that the historic pattern of gaslights still existing in Riverton be followed in this phase of replica gaslights.

Thomas Avenue, above the railroad has the most remaining gaslights, and therefore is the best example of the historic pattern. Gaslights were staggered along the street, alternating from side to side in a "zig-zag" pattern. On short blocks, there might be only one zig-zag from side to side, on long blocks there might be as many as two or three. At the intersection of streets, there is a gaslight on each of two corners, located diagonally across the intersection from each other, and not perpendicularly across.

Dan Campbell drew a plan for the RIA to follow when laying out these new gaslight locations. Bob Thomson has arranged for a representative of the NJ State Historic Preservation Office to come to Riverton to discuss the gaslights and the proposed brick paving around the clock.

*Gaslight News*

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Daniel T Campbell, AIA – President & Editor

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The Historical Society of Riverton  
16 Carriage House Lane, Riverton, NJ

## *Schedule of Meetings*

### **MAY 10, 1999 - ANNUAL MEETING.**

Annual election of new officers, program to be

***On the Tented Field - Civil War History in New Jersey.***

## Welcome to New Members

We welcome the following new members to the  
Historical Society of Riverton:

Bob & Joyce Bednarek  
Pat & Richard Bruner  
Thomas Dolecky  
James & Mary Egan  
Jennifer Laverty  
Steve & Christine Nociti  
Nociti Electric, Inc.  
(Business Patron)  
Jose & Dorothy Talavera  
Mary Unland  
Cindi Vee  
Paul & Jane Piro  
Nicholas Mortgu & Beth Lippincott  
J. Cletus Cunningham & Patricia Mecca  
J. Edward Gilmore  
Dennis & Kay Scanlan

For a small organization like our Historical Society, in an ever-changing town like Riverton, our membership is the life-blood of the organization and the best guarantee for continued recognition and protection of the unique history of Riverton. We thank all of our members - new and renewing - for their support!

## Area Programs of Interest

**The Camden County Historical Society** is hosting the next general meeting of **The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey** on March 6, 1999 from 9 am to 4 pm. The Camden County Society is celebrating their 100th anniversary, and will share their history with the League members who attend. **Paul Schopp**, who is an Historical Society of Riverton member and former Vice President, is the Executive Director of the Camden County Society, and we wish him much success in hosting this meeting.

**The Genealogy Society of New Jersey** presents its Spring Seminar - Saturday April 17, 1999 at the United Methodist Church of Red Bank, 247 Broad Street, Red Bank, featuring three important lectures by nationally renowned speaker Sharon DeBartolo Carmack. \$20.00 fee includes lunch. Call Suzanne Nunberg at 609-451-2848 to register.

**New Jerseytimes** - a series of radio programs about New Jersey presented by Rutgers University has two upcoming programs about NJ History: Sunday, March 14 @ 3:00 pm ***New Jersey in the Depression***; and Sunday March 21 @ 3:00 pm ***Preserving NJ History***. Both are broadcast on radio station WOGL-FM 98.1.

**The Burlington County Historical Society** announces their New Duck Decoy Exhibit, entitled ***The Marters of Burlington***, on display at the Corson Poley Center, 454 Lawrence Street, Burlington, NJ from January 17 to July 1, 1999. Call the BCHS at 609-386-4773 for more information and hours of their museum.

**The New Jersey Historic Preservation Office & The City of Englewood** will host the **Annual Historic Preservation Conference** on Saturday, April 24, 1999 at the Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood. This year's conference will focus on reinvestment in New Jersey's more densely developed, historic communities. For more information, contact Genny Guzman at the NJ Historic Preservation Office, 609-984-0543.



## Yesterday...

What was happening in Riverton a century ago, as time moved from the nineteenth to the twentieth century? If newspapers are any indication of interest in the change, there was none—it wasn't mentioned.

There had been changes since the village was founded in 1851. It had more than doubled in size, had gradually become a community of permanent homes, rather than of summer visitors, and country living had become easier. Coal grates replaced or improved fireplaces for warmth, coal ranges made cooking better and safer, transportation was excellent, and there were more than a million telephones in use throughout the country. Riverton's Fire Company, formed in 1890, had just added a 2-story extension, adding space for municipal meetings, a small jail for short term incarcerations, and recreational space. There was not yet a hook-and-ladder, or steam engine, but there were a growing number of fire plugs in at least part of the town. And since January 1, 1894, Riverton had its own mayor, council, and other elected officials.

The first small schoolhouse was long since outgrown, and was replaced in 1892. A second building was added in 1896 for a Kindergarten – the first in the county. Already the buildings were becoming overcrowded.

The water company served both Riverton and Palmyra, with a pumping station in Palmyra bringing up water from a well with two pumps. Water was then carried through cement pipes to a storage tank holding 75,000 gallons, and then to a brick tower that rose 40 feet above the ground. Running water in the home (unheated) was an improvement over yard or kitchen hand pumps, but some were still used.

Most roads were unpaved, but the stone road between Riverton and Riverside was just completed, and approved as "a good job in accordance with the contract." It was customary for residences along improved roads to be assessed a sum to help pay for the work. Heulings Co. refused to pay the assessment and ended up in court. (Coal/lumber company Broad/Main Sts)

In January, 1899 John Wanamaker offered a new type of sale: White Goods. Large newspaper ads told of a half-million garments that had been made specifically for this event. Included were a million pieces of muslin underwear, yards of muslin sheeting, etc. Petticoats with a ruffle and a row of hemstitching sold for 75¢; drawers with embroidery, 35¢. Men's white shirts (with linen bosoms) were 35¢ if unlaundered, 50¢ if laundered. Laundered dress shirts were \$1.00. The ads said "we shall not coax –

we never do that...store liberty will be as full and complete as ever. But prices for white goods are available at less than you—or we—have ever seen."

Philadelphia's Public Ledger also had a large ad, early in 1899. They offered a 200-page Atlas free for a pre-paid 26-weeks subscription, plus 50¢ shipping – a total of \$3.62. The 11 1/2 X 14 inch book had 157 full page maps in color, engravings of prominent people of the world, and marbled edges, plus cover of English cloth and gold stamp. It was "a special inducement to the working class", the ad said.

The Philadelphia Inquirer also advertised for subscribers, pointing out the articles they regularly carried by Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, Anthony Hope, and others, as well as puzzles and cash prizes.

In mid-February a great blizzard halted transportation and closed shops for several days. Snow was 2-to-4 feet deep everywhere, with much deeper drifts. It was slow and difficult work to clear streets, with horse-drawn scrapers. John Bell, a clerk at the Roberts store, was shoveling snow from the roof of the building when "an avalanche" carried him off the roof into a 4-foot drift of soft, wet snow below. He was not seriously hurt. The paper said Council had passed and published an Ordinance requiring residents to remove snow from their walks, but it was ignored and not enforced. The item continued "council might as well have saved the expense of publishing it if they don't enforce it."

Riverton Gun Club published a summary of their recent season. Their house and grounds in East Riverton were clear of debt, and 28,000 birds had been killed – their best season yet. They were unaware that in a very few years the SPCA would view their sport differently, and their Club would end.

Cultural events were not lacking in Riverton. William H. Appleton, a Swarthmore faculty member, delivered a lecture on Browning at the home of Miss Helen Lippincott. A series of lectures at the Lyceum on English Social Reforms was given by W. Hudson Shaw, of Oxford University, England. Notice of the series said "the trains arrive a few minutes before the lecture and leave within 25 minutes after. Full course, \$1.00; single lecture, 25¢ – the low cost being possible because of advance subscriptions of \$200. It noted that further information was available from John S. Bioren, secretary of the Society of University Extension Teaching, Riverton Center, Hotel Walton, Philadelphia.

The Dreer nurseries were expanding each year, and their seeds and plants made local gardens more diverse and colorful than those usually found in a

small town. In 1899 William F. Dreer hired Louis Corner to dig a canal to divert the Pompeston Creek's path from its wide curve, to make it instead a straight line from the railroad to the river.

The Keiffer pear crop that year was exceptionally large, and most of the fruit ended up at canneries. An Agricultural expert from Washington spoke here, and pronounced the the name as "Keefer", resulting in a scathing article in the Mt. Holly Herald. It reminded readers that Judge Wm. Parry had introduced that variety here, and he pronounced it Kifer", and "that's the pronunciation for New Jersey."

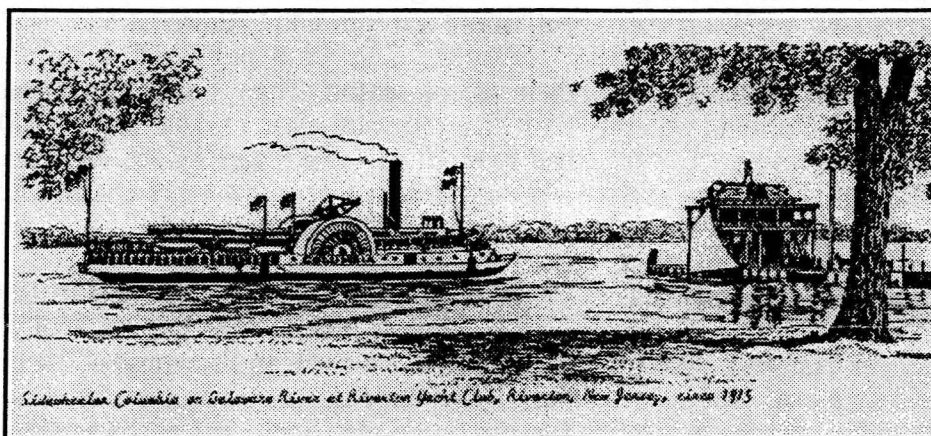
Pronunciation of other names merited articles, too. One on Indian names noted that the "Lenne Lenape" names had been recorded by people of different backgrounds, each hearing, and therefore recording them, as seemed right to English, German, French, Spanish settlers. It was noted that Passaic County is the only NJ county with an Indian name, but of the 600 postoffices (at that time) 60 had Indian names – although some were "twisted". The writer urged preservation of those names, which are a valuable part of our heritage.

Each issue of newspapers carried a list of deaths, many of which were of children or young adults. In winter pneumonia was the greatest cause of death, soon followed by communicable diseases, and also tuberculosis. There were many medical problems,

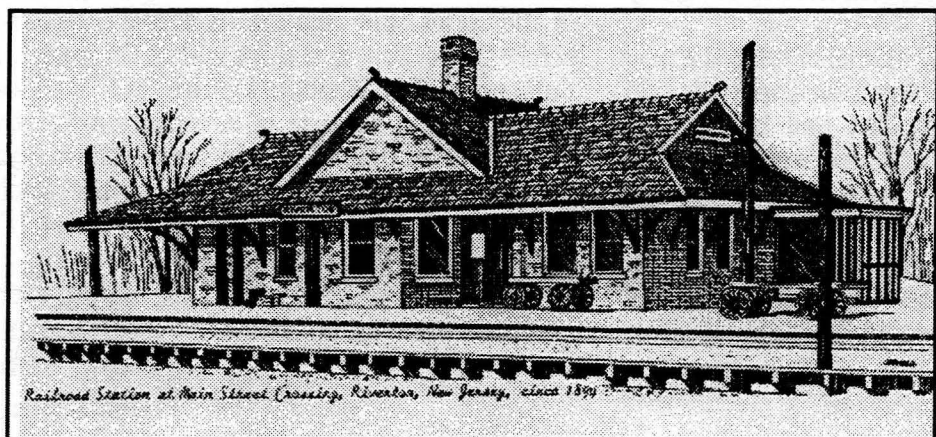
and few treatments. The adulteration of milk created problems, and although inspections had been initiated, they were inadequate. It was a common practice for milk dealers to rinse out milk pails, then pour the rinse water into the fresh milk. Some claimed that helped preserve it; some sold concoctions with fancy names as additives to delay souring – which were actually formaldehyde, and illegal. Ice was expensive, and refrigeration very limited. Flies were also a problem, with breeding grounds in garbage piles and in streets travelled not only by horses, but also by dogs, and some cows, chickens, and goats. Enough animals roamed about that after the turn of the century a stone wall had to be erected around the schoolhouse to keep them out of the schoolyard.

In September, 1899 the RiverShore Gas Company was founded, and Ezra Lippincott, Howard Parry, Wm. F. Dreer, Edward Ogden, and Isaac Clothier were the incorporators. They considered a site for operation at the Ball Grounds, but when residents voiced fears that "the air would decay" they chose a site at the end of town instead. In 1900 their office was built and opened (Broad/Main, the bakery now) and in May gas was turned on. Although other utility groups formed, it was not until 1914 that Riverton had 24-hour-a-day electricity. And after that, changes came quickly

Betty B. Hahle



*S.S. Columbia on Delaware River at Riverton Yacht Club, Riverton, New Jersey, circa 1915*



*Railroad Station at Main School Crossing, Riverton, New Jersey, circa 1899*

## Riverton Notepaper

The Historical Society has 7" x 10" folded notepaper with these two images printed on the outside fold. The notepaper is packaged in sturdy boxes of 15 cards each (with envelopes) in an approximately equal mix of the two images.

The cost of the notepaper is \$3.50 per box, and it is available at Victorian Times, the Riverton Free Library, at all general meetings, or by calling 786-8660.