



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

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Program about The Big Band Era at Annual Meeting in May

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on **Monday, May 8 at 7:30 pm** for the annual meeting in the Riverton Public School Media Center. After a short business meeting, the evening's program will be about the 1930's in America - **The Big Band Era**. The program, approximately one hour in length will be presented by Stephen F. Marcone, Ph.D. who is Chairperson and Professor of Music at William Paterson University of New Jersey.

The 1930's was the decade of the big bands of American Jazz. This program will include the stylistic differences of bands of that era due to race, location and other influences. Audio and video examples will include Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Harry James and others.

The pianist and bandleader William "Count" Basie was born in Red Bank, NJ August 1904 and was one of the greatest exponents of "Swing". He studied with Fats Waller, a major influence on his work, and played with the New York and Kansas City jazz groups in the 1920's and early 1930's before forming his own band in 1935. Basie's band was celebrated for its polished rhythmic versions of blues melodies. Famous musicians who performed with Basie include the singer Billie Holiday and saxophonist Lester Young. Count Basie lived until 1984.

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was born in Washington, D.C in 1899, was a pianist and orchestra leader and was the most prolific composer in jazz history. Leading his own band, Ellington became a popular New York City jazzman in the early 1920's. From 1927 to 1931, he and his orchestra were the stars of Harlem's famous Cotton Club. Ellington's radio broadcasts and his first European tour (1933) made him a national and international celebrity.

Ellington wrote over 1,000 pieces -- concertos for orchestra and jazz soloist, long concert pieces in the jazz idiom, three large religious works, and several movie scores. His orchestra featured many of the greatest jazz artists of the time with compositions tailored to their special talents. Ellington's band created a unique sound and a precision and clarity that won them a reputation as the finest orchestra in jazz.

Known as the "King of Swing" during the era of the 1930's and 40's clarinetist Benjamin David "Benny" Goodman, was born in Chicago May 1909. His band followed the swing dance music (and used many of the same arrangements) as Fletcher Henderson in the 1930's. In addition to his big band, The Benny Goodman Trio formed in 1935, featured drummer Gene Krupa and pianist Teddy Wilson, the first black musician to be included in a white group. It soon expanded to include vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, guitarist Charlie Christian, and many other jazz greats. After 1945, Goodman played almost exclusively with small groups and as a soloist with classical orchestras. He died in 1986.

Our speaker, Stephen Marcone received a B.A. and a Masters degree in Music from Syracuse University in 1967 and 1969. After touring the country with an Epic Records' recording group as a trumpeter, he returned to Syracuse in 1973 as a faculty member, adjunct lecturer and in 1979, as an Associate Professor of Music. In 1984, he came to William Paterson University of New Jersey where he is currently Chairperson of the Music Department, and Program Director of the Music Management Department. Dr. Marcone also holds an Ed.D degree from Syracuse University.

Dr. Paterson has written articles for such publications as Music Educators Journal, The Instrumentalist, and Musician Magazine. He is the author of Managing Your Band, is an excellent lecturer, including frequent programs for the NJ Council on the Humanities.

The presentation for our May meeting was developed by Dr. Marcone and is made possible to us by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. All persons, are encouraged to attend this informative event. The Riverton School, at Fifth and Howard Streets, Riverton, and the Media Room (Library) are both handicapped accessible. Attendees should enter the building through the main doors facing Fifth Street. There will be a short refreshment period following the meeting. **Please note the time change - the meeting begins at 7:30.**

Gaslight News

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Board Election at Annual Meeting

The annual meeting on May 8th at 7:30 pm will include election of four members to the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Riverton. The slate for the election is as follows:

Richard (Rick) Wark for re-election. Rick is a long time member of the Historical Society and of the Board of Directors. Rick has served for approximately a decade as our Archivist, safeguarding the materials which have been donated to the society over the years.

Gerald Weaber for re-election. Gerald has been a Board member for at least one term (the past three years), and was elected Vice President at the last officers election within the Board in 1999. Gerald has expertly stepped in to conduct some recent Board and General Meetings in the absence of the president.

Connie Danielson for new election to the Board. Connie resided at Lippincott and Carriage House Lane approximately 6 years ago before moving to California for a short time. She and her husband Mike have now moved back to a large home on Highway where they immediately began some restorative improvements.

Our fourth candidate is yet to be nominated, but will be by the time of the election at the annual meeting.

Our hearty thanks go out to Board Members retiring (or just resting for a while) who are:

Joseph Farrell who served a three year term and a two year period as our Vice President. We look forward to more and more exiting changes to Joe and Gayle's home on Main Street as their renovations and restorations continue.

Suzanne (Sue) Bauer who is involved in many and frequent causes in Riverton was gracious enough to fill out the unexpired term of a previous Board Member.

Society members are encouraged to attend the annual meeting to show your support for these new and re-newing candidates.

Women's Heritage Trail Being Developed by New Jersey

In February, 2000 the Historical Society was contacted by the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding a new effort to recognize women's contributions to New Jersey history by establishing a **Women's Heritage Trail**. The NJ SHPO, in conjunction with the Alice Paul Centennial Foundation, is contacting historical societies and local governments throughout the state for suggestions and nominations for sites to be included in the new trail.

Although founded principally by Quaker Men, Riverton, NJ has a well established history of active women who have contributed significantly to the region's and state's development.

The SHPO is gathering preliminary information about the sites through the use of their standard "Base Survey Form". The form asks for physical information about a site such as a photograph, its location and age, status information such as Local, State, and National Certifications or Historic Registrations, and has a section for an historical and architectural description.

Dan Campbell and Betty Hahle together filled out the forms for several sites which the Historical Society has nominated. Dan collected the physical information and took the photos, and Betty provided the historical information about the woman, or women, involved in each of these sites. In all cases, Betty has gathered so much information about these women, that we had to attach a separate page on which to continue the description portion of the base form. Briefly, the sites are:

The Porch Club - Women's Club since 1895, own and operate their own building from 1909 to present.

Mary VanMeter Grice Home - 1890-1905 home of the founder of the Porch Club, first president of the NJ State Congress of Mothers (later became the PTA).

Mary Biddle Fidler Home - Bank Avenue home of the authoress of four children's books from 1929 to 1934 (see Betty Hahle's Article in this issue of the Gaslight).

Dorothy Stewart Everett Home - a NJ Naturalist and early advocate of NJ Pinelands preservation.

Mary Marcy Home - Second President of the NJ State Congress of Mothers.

Frances Ruppert Home - 1929 World Record Holder for the Women's 40 yard dash (5.2 seconds), and more.

Lela Slater Bowen Home - 1930's president of NJSPTA as well as other Educational and Health Committees.

Isabella Wright Davis Site - Woman Forrester and authoress of c. 1903 book on forestry.

We expect the NJ SHPO to visit Riverton shortly to consider these sites for the NJ Women's Heritage Trail.

Yesterday...

Riverton, in the year 2000, is a very small town. Riverton, in the year 1900, was a much smaller town, in spite of having the same 435 acres of land within its boundaries, because much of the land had not yet been developed.

Main Street from the river to 8th, Cinnaminson Street up to 8th, and Lippincott Avenue from the river to the railroad, were well developed. Broad Street and Bank Avenue (between Howard and Thomas) were also well built up. But elsewhere the houses were scattered, with few of them found below 4th Street. There were marshy areas along the river and creek, small stands of trees, and cultivated fields within the boundaries of Riverton.

Mary Biddle Fitler wrote a series of books about a boy and his friends growing up in that early Riverton. REDDY, the first of the series, was written at least ten years before being published, and was dedicated to her sons Nathan, Biddle, and Ralston, from whose combined characteristics "Reddy" was created. She described Riverton as "a little town that had just been made into a brand-new borough, that boasted of its progressiveness, flaunted its proud new mayor at every opportunity, and in the zeal of its new importance, laid sidewalks, installed street lamps, cemented gutters, repaired roads, and made ordinances fast and furiously at every council meeting."

Although Mrs. Fitler was described in book promotions as "a socially prominent Philadelphia woman", she had a strong Riverton background. Born here in 1879, she was the daughter of Henry Biddle and the granddaughter of Robert Biddle, one of Riverton's founding fathers. She grew up in a lovely riverfront home in a town where many aunts, uncles, and cousins also lived. She married Nathan Myers Fitler in 1902 in the local Episcopal Church, and shortly after (1905) they purchased the Thomas property at 109 Bank Avenue, where they reared their four children (3 sons, 1 daughter.) When their children were grown, the Riverton property was turned over to Mr. Fitler's young sister and her family, and they removed to their home in Ardmore.

REDDY a publication in 1929 was instantly successful, with reprints needed within a very short time. It was followed by three more books: KID (1930), Anna-Mary (1931), and The Big Wharf (1934).

Reddy, when first met, is a boy about 12 years old, who is very independent, honest, ambitious and resourceful—and poor. His widowed mother supports them both by cleaning. His best friend is Stocky, only son of a wealthy banker. The boys

belong to a club, The Red Lions, whose leader is Reddy. They meet in secret, plan all kinds of activities, and are fiercely loyal to each other.

KID introduces a slightly younger girl into the ongoing story of their lives, a girl who is a tom-boy and resents being a girl and having to learn to be "ladylike" instead of enjoying the adventures boys are allowed to have. In time these three main characters form a lifelong friendship.

The BIG WHARF continues with the boys having completed basic educational requirements (Reddy at Riverton's high school classes, not yet 4-year courses) and then a year at Prep school (Reddy via a football scholarship). Over the summer Reddy substitutes for Mike Faunce as wharf man, putting to good use his knowledge and love of various kinds of boats, the river with all its moods, his knowledge of its tides and currents, shallows and channels, and more. With the help of his friends, he learns to dock the sidewheelers that stop at the wharf — the very large Columbia, whose captain was John Warner, the John H. Warner, whose captain was Mr. Crabbe, and the smaller boat, the Twilight. The faster and more frequently run trains were just beginning to cause a noticeable difference in their passenger traffic, as did the recently extended trolley line.

Ringling the sight bell was another duty of the wharf man. The bell, mounted on a pole at the end of the wharf, was rung by pulling a rope. It was 18" in diameter, and its clapper made a sound that could be heard throughout the whole community. It was rung when the Columbia left Torresdale for its stop at Riverton.

The bell was sometimes referred to as Riverton's alarm clock. One character in the story said this: "It never took more than two strokes for about all the front doors along the river bank to bust open and out they come, men swallowin' half-eaten eggs and toast, or buttonin' a coat, for if they missed the boat in the old days they didn't get another in a hurry, and young and old they ran like mad across those lawns. But if (Mike) tolled it slow and regular, they all turned over for another forty winks."

Through the various adventures of the children, the books picture Riverton in earlier times, noting a new chemical fire engine, the one and only public telephone, the 5¢ trolley ride to Riverside, where there were boatbuilders and shops, and so on.

The Red Lion clan got involved in many things, one of which was an annual boat race with a similar group from Tacony, across the river. They found

fun in helping others, such as using their wagons to collect cans of ashes (from coal heaters) standing along the alleys (now “lanes”) and spreading them on streets, one particularly icy day. They had been enjoying ice skating across roads and frozen lawns, saw horses — and pedestrians-falling, and found a way to skate and help others at the same time.

When they found a family in need because of the father’s illness (no insurance or social security then!) they decided to see that the family with 7 children had a good Christmas. They worked at running errands (at 1 or 2¢), delivering groceries at the Acme Tea Co. (5¢), put on a show (10¢ admission) and whatever else they could do to earn money for the project. They purchased warm caps and mittens for each family member, got a small tree and trimmed it, collected some foods from the Acme, added a small sum of money toward fuel, and filled a Christmas stocking for each child with a new stocking, an orange, an apple, a small toy, a shiny penny, and a stick of striped peppermint candy. They delivered it quietly, at night, so the family wouldn’t be embarrassed by not being able to provide for its own.

Fourth of July activities centered around the river, with various swimming and boat races. The riverbank was crowded with people long before the 11 o’clock starting time, with many coming across the river in canoes, rowboats, or sailboats for the festivities. Tacony and Torresdale were Riverton’s traditional opponents, and supporters of each cheered wildly for their favorites as they went from the wharf to Plum Point, for as many laps as needed to total the distance set for each race.

As a poor boy, Reddy was always seeking ways to earn money to help his mother with supporting the family, and to build a fund toward getting the college education he was determined to have. Once he tried his hand at shad fishing, something he has watched all of his life. He soon found it more rewarding to tow the fisherman’s boats, with their catches, with his motorized canoe. It was much faster than rowing, and by getting to the Arch Street Wharf earlier, they got a better price for their fish. Reddy charged 2 fish for each tow job, and sold his fish at good prices, also, so everyone profited.

While commercial fisheries used large seines to catch shad, other fishermen worked in pairs from a small boat, laying out long nets on the ebb tide, and working until the flood, sometimes getting three drifts to a tide. Lights burning on corks along the tops of the nets made a pretty sight as they twinkled in the dark, up and down the river, as several teams fished. One man handled the oars, keeping

the boat in line but letting it move with the tide, and the other man stood on the seat in the stern, hauling in the net lap by lap and dropping it neatly into the bottom of the boat, ready for the next drift. Fish in the net were caught up by hand and dropped into the boat, until the run was completed. Then the men could row for 45 minutes to the Philadelphia wharf, or wait for the commercial fish boat that followed the boats along the river, and sell their catches at a lower price for the convenience of not having to row so far after a hard day’s work.

When Reddy grew discouraged and felt that a poor boy had little chance of ever becoming a lawyer, Miss Lizzie, the librarian, went out of her way to find books for him to read, about poor boys who had become successful men through hard work and perseverance. Books about John Wanamaker, Edward Bok, and many others. Miss Elizabeth Campbell and her sister were both devoted to helping children learn to love reading, and, as the town’s librarians, influenced more than one generation of Riverton children.

Mary Sue, better known as “the Kid”, got her first car at the age of 15. She and Reddy and Stocky learned to drive it through trial and error. It was a Ford, had no windshield, no lights, no running boards, no starter (a crank was needed), and could reach 25 mph — although they felt 7 mph was pretty fast going. They had no licenses, and simply took off — once they got it running — to Palmyra, then out to Five-Points, which was “out in the country”, then up to Westfield, and back to Riverton. Stopping became a crisis — until they found the button to do it.

When her father drove to the highway a few days later, he noted with displeasure the stands of produce springing up along it. But he stopped to buy some fruits and vegetables, and paid for them with a twenty-dollar gold piece.

Anna Mary, the third Fitler book to be published, is not a part of Reddy’s story, but is that of a girl growing up in Riverton in the 1880s. It is based on Mrs. Fitler’s own childhood here.

These delightful books have long been out of print, but the Library and the Riverton School, as well as some individuals, have copies of them. It is hard to realize that children of 12, or 14, or 16 years were so naive, so innocent, in that time. Yet with all the advantages today’s children have, those earlier children had one advantage lost today: time. There was time to play, time to share unhurried family meals, time for leisurely Sunday afternoon walks or visits with relatives or friends. In short, time to simply be children. That, too is a valuable part of growing up; in any time. -- BBH 4/2000