



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

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Become an Old House Detective - at October Meeting

Houses, Heroes and Gingerbread is the title of the program which will be presented at the first meeting of The Historical Society of Riverton for the 2000 - 2001 year on **Monday, October 2, 2000**. All persons, whether Historical Society members or not, are invited to attend this interesting, informative and entertaining event.

The evening will begin at **7:30 pm in the Riverton Public School Media Center**. After a short business meeting, we will move directly into the 45 minute color-slide illustrated talk. The subject of the program is methods of determining the history of a house through the study of deeds, title searches, government documents, architectural details, and construction methods.

Presenter of the program will be by South Jersey historian, photographer, and tour guide Mr. Bill Leap of Runnemede, NJ. Mr. Leap has spent 25 years researching, writing, conducting tours and talking about New Jersey to numerous historical societies and wildlife groups.

Bill is the recipient of state-wide awards such as "Local Historian Award of Merit", and "Outstanding Service to Public Knowledge and Preservation of the History of New Jersey", among others. He is a Past President of the Camden County Historical Society, Past President of the Audubon Wildlife Society, President of Heritage Assets Study of New Jersey, Vice President of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, and author of History of Runnemede, NJ 1626 -1976.

Mr. Leap's photographs have appeared on the National Park Service's "Great American Rivers" poster series, and in the N.J. Pinelands Commission slide-tape Interpretive Program.

The audience will be first taken back to 17th Century England as period architectural trends are reviewed and compared with early building practices, which were then imported to the United

States. Styles which became uniquely American and were prevalent in Southern New Jersey are the final focus of the program.

Bill uses the example of four houses in Haddon Heights, Camden County, NJ to show how a person becomes an old house detective when restoring or renovating an older home. The researchers of these homes encounter some surprising and even humorous results as they gain entry into the attics and cellars of historic properties.

All persons, are encouraged to attend this event. The Riverton School, at Fifth and Howard Streets, Riverton, and the Media Room (Library) are both handicapped accessible. Enter the building through the main doors facing Fifth Street. There will be refreshments following the meeting.

How to Apply for a Historical Society Plaque for Your House

If your house is 100 years old or older, you can use the techniques that you will learn at the October Meeting, to apply for an Historical Society Plaque to place on your home.

To apply, pick up an application from Dan Campbell or Betty Hahle. We provide an instruction sheet to guide you through the investigation of title search through the Deeds Office of the Burlington County Tax office in Mt. Holly. An architectural description will be written by Betty Hahle and reviewed by Roy Vollmer, AIA.

Each plaque is custom hand painted on a durable white laquered wood board, stating the date of construction, and other pertinent information, such as the original owner, builder, and architect if known. There is a fee of \$50.00, payable in two installments, for the materials needed for the plaque. If you have any questions about the process, please call Dan Campbell @ 786-8660.

Gaslight News

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The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey 08077

Membership Information

Enclosed with this issue is a membership form for your use. If you are a regular member, please renew with this form. If you would like to join the Historical Society of Riverton, please fill out this form attach a check, and send it in. All who apply are heartily accepted into membership.

There is often confusion about when Historical Society dues are payable. The Historical Society year is similar to the school year, running from September 2000 through May 2001. According to our By-Laws, dues must be paid by the end of February of 2001, therefore we refer to it as the 2001 year.

Next, please remember that dues are due in advance for a small-budgeted organization such as ours. We start our membership renewal process in September / October with this first issue of the Gaslight News.

We are grateful to members who respond promptly (before December 31), to this first dues notice. This allows us to update the membership rolls and prepare mailing labels for the coming year. It saves the Society the time and expense of dispatching additional reminders and the confusion created by missed or deleted names from the mailing list. Thanks again to those early birds who reply quickly and thank you for your support.

Jack Laverty, Membership Chairman



Riverton Building News

... occasional news and commentary about historic buildings in Riverton ...

Riverton Yacht Club Building:

The exterior restoration of the Riverton Yacht Club building was completed over the summer. The project included roof repairs, new windows and doors, porch floor waterproofing, restoration of missing architectural details, and repainting in the original four-color paint scheme which was discovered under up to 20 layers of paint.

Infrastructure improvements included new electrical service, wiring and lighting, lightning protection, and an automatic fire sprinkler system.

We congratulate the Riverton Steamboat Landing Foundation for their success in the completion of this project, and especially Hank Croft AIA for his tireless dedication to the project. The Yacht Club held a rededication ceremony during their annual ice cream social on July 2, 2000.

The project was paid for by a generous grant of \$270,000 from the William Deitrich Foundation of Pennsylvania. Hank Croft exhibited a great commitment to hiring many local contractors to participate in the restoration of this unique building.

Riverton Yacht Club Pier:

The construction documents for the restoration of the Riverton Yacht Club Pier are nearly completed and ready for bidding to contractors. The drawings have been reviewed by the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office and received that office's finding that the project will have no adverse effect on the Riverton Historic District. The Riverton Architectural Review Committee also examined the plans at their most recent meeting.

The pier will be reconstructed along the outer half of its perimeter with new steel sheet piling in nearly the same size as it presently stands. The only change in the pier configuration will be the widening of the walkway from its present 22 feet to 28 feet.

It appears that the pier reconstruction will take place in the late summer of 2001 through the winter of 2002. This is due to State environmental restrictions prohibiting construction in the Delaware River between February and June of any given year.

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Yesterday...

“The New Jersey Organizer of the National Congress of Mothers, Mrs. Edwin C. Grice, and the Section of the Porch Club known as the Mothers’ Council, have arranged a New Jersey Congress of Mothers, to be held Saturday, October 20th in the Sunday school Room of Calvary Presbyterian Church, Riverton, from 11 a.m. to 4. p.m.”

“The President of the National Congress, Mrs. Theodore T. Birney, of Washington, and the Vice President, Mrs. Frederick Schoff, of Philadelphia, will attend and forcibly present the benefit to be derived from this organization.”

“A simple lunch will be furnished for twenty-five cents.”

“All men and women interested in the work of the Congress (which should reach every home in the land), members of the Child Study Clubs, or Sections in other Clubs, Mothers, Teachers and Educators are cordially invited to attend.”

“Every Woman’s Club in New Jersey is invited to send its President and two delegates to the Congress.”

“A permanent State organization will be affected at this Congress.”

(Signed) Mrs. Edward H Ogden,
President of the Porch Club

This was the invitation or “call”, sent by the sixteen women who were members of the Mothers’ Council section of the Porch Club of Riverton in October, 1900.

The Club had formed in 1890 with eight young women, led by Mary VanMeter Grice, and by 1895 had doubled in number. At that time they voted to organize formally, adopted a constitution and elected officers. Mary Grice was their first elected president. Although Porch Club considers the eight original members to be the Club’s founders, the twelve who, in 1895 voted to organize formally are also list-

ed as “founders” -- but the Club’s records do not list which twelve they were. With more members, the group divided into sections, one being the Free Kindergarten Section.

At this time, Kindergarten was not part of the public school system, and a growing number of mothers felt that there should be a gentler introduction to school for young children than an abrupt change from home to a strict schoolroom. Under the encouragement of the Section, Riverton’s public school acquired the deconsecrated Catholic Church building, moved and renovated it, and in 1897 opened the first Froebelian Kindergarten in Burlington County.

From there the group worked to have a woman elected to the School Board, and in 1898 Mrs. Grice became the first woman to serve in that capacity.

Meanwhile, in 1897 Mrs. Theodore Birney, of Washington D.C., sent out a “call” to clubs and others interested in forming a national Congress of Mothers. Porch Club responded by sending representatives to that meeting, including Mary Grice, whose seemingly endless enthusiasm and hard work earned her the title of “the New Jersey Organizer of the National Congress of Mothers.” The Section had changed its name, after gaining a kindergarten, to Mothers’ Congress, then Council, and finally, to Mothers’ Circle, which represented an ongoing circle of a woman’s life, from childhood to adulthood to having children of her own.

Although a number of clubs had similar circles, there was not a State organization to coordinate their work and goals, and the Circle of Porch Club led by Mary Grice, sought to correct that.

They planned well in advance of calling their October 20th meeting: they determined the purpose of the meeting, the goals they sought, and how to accomplish those things. They contacted noted educators throughout the State, and from those who responded positively, formed an Advisory Council for the meeting. They found a place for the meeting (they were still meeting at Mrs. Ogden’s house at that time), when the Elders of the Calvary Presbyterian Church offered the use of their

new Sunday school building for the day, and the use of the Chapel itself should the numbers attending require more space. The opening invocation was given by the recent pastor of the church, who had gone to another church a few months previously. A caterer was found who would furnish a sandwich, coffee, and ice cream to those who attending for a modest fee.

When these things were accomplished, the Section presented its full plan to the Club, and it was voted that the Club's president should sign and send the "call" throughout the State.

On the appointed day, Saturday, October 20, 1900, the talks and discussions were accomplished, and by day's end the New Jersey State Congress of Mothers had been formed, Constitution approved, aims outlined, and officers elected. Mary Grice was elected the State's first president, and served two terms.

The aims of the Congress which changed its name several times, finally to the more familiar State Parent Teachers Association (PTA), were to raise the standards of home-life, and to develop better informed and trained parents. They sought to improve the environment of the child in every aspect of its life -- better pre-natal and infant care, childhood, schools, community, play time, courts, institutional, workplace -- a very large goal, yet, working together over many years, much has been accomplished.

With a central base for coordinating priorities and "how-to" suggestions, each local community (PTA or Women's Club, etc.) could choose which need they were most interested in, and get help in finding ways to reach their own goals. Porch Club's Mothers' Circle set up well-baby clinics, worked closely with the schools and teachers to encourage broadened curricula, introducing manual training for boys and home economics for girls as well as academic subjects, and then music, and much more than space permits.

Riverton's Mothers' Circle remained under the auspices of the Porch Club until March 1917, when it became Riverton School PTA. Although it had been under the leadership of the Club, membership far exceeded the Club's own -- all mothers, then teachers and fathers, were welcomed into the group, which totaled more than 150 members.

In 1935, when Porch Club celebrated its

annual Founders Day "Mr. Bates, of Calvary Presbyterian Church, most graciously arranged a time at the end of their morning service for Mrs. Edwin C. Grice, ex-president of NJ Congress of Parents and Teachers, to say a few words of greeting and recall memories of the first meeting and to honor the founders of the National Organization" (direct quotation from Porch Club record). Mary Grice died the following year (1936).

In honor of the 100th Anniversary of the formation of the New Jersey Congress in Riverton, on Sunday October 22, an Open House will be held at the Porch Club from 1 to 4 pm. Representatives from the State Womens' Clubs and PTA are expected to attend, as well as many others actively interested in their work.

Betty B Hahle 9/2000

A note for those of you who save your Gaslight News issues: Number 53, Feb/April 1989 has a longer article on the PTA in celebration of Founders Week.

Riverton Building News

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Riverton Light Rail Transit Station:

The planned location of the South Jersey Light Rail Transit System station for Riverton has been changed from between Main Street and Cedar Avenue to between Main Street and Thomas Avenue. In 1998, the Borough of Riverton relocated an historic Penna. Railroad utility building from its original location at Cedar Street on the railroad to the Riverton Park, in premature anticipation of the station being located near Cedar and the track.

The new design, requested by New Jersey Transit and endorsed by Riverton Borough Council calls for the station platform and passenger shelter to be located along the railroad track on South Broad Street between Main Street and Lippincott Avenue, with the parking lot extending all the way to Thomas Avenue.

The new design is required to be reviewed by the Riverton Architectural Review Committee and the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office for a determination of no adverse effect because the station location and parking will be within the Riverton Historic District and the Camden & Amboy State Historic District.

Dan Campbell