



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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## Program about the Roebling Company at Annual Meeting in May

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on **Monday, May 14 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 **History of the John A. Roebling's Sons Company of Trenton and Roebling, NJ.**

Roebling is the name of a family of American engineers, father and sons, who were pioneers in the development of suspension bridges, wire cable and steel. They are best known as the designers and builders of the Brooklyn Bridge which spans from the Borough of Manhattan to Brooklyn in New York City.

John Augustus Roebling, born in Germany in 1806, immigrated to the United States in 1831. In 1841 he produced the first wire cable in the United States which was used principally for pulling freight-carrying barge traffic on the many canal systems in the early republic - especially for overland pulling of barges where canals could not be connected to each other by waterways.

John Roebling founded his wireworks company in Trenton in 1850. By this time, "wire rope" technology had expanded to include support of suspension bridges to carry elevated canals and other transportation such as the railroad suspension bridge (1851-55) over the Niagara River at Niagara Falls, NY. John Roebling designed the Brooklyn Bridge but, while supervising preliminary construction operations, was injured and died on July 22, 1869.

Washington Augustus Roebling, born in PA in 1837, was made chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge after his father's death. Although disabled by decompression sickness after entering a caisson in 1872, he completed the bridge in 1883. Thereafter, he managed the family firm in Trenton, NJ, where he died on July 21, 1926.

Space in Trenton did not allow for needed expansion, so by 1905, a 237 tract was developed a mile below the village of Kincora in Burlington County, where raw materials for steel could be received via the Delaware River, and manufactured steel rod could be conveniently taken by rail to the Trenton Works for finishing.

Charles G. Roebling and his brother Ferdinand were in charge of the Kincora Works, including the design and construction of the company town to the west of the plant. The town buildings are not especially archi-

tecturally significant, however the sizes of dwellings, and the layout of the village was reflective of the various income and social levels of the occupants. It is remarkable that all of the industrial, commercial, and residential designing and engineering was accomplished entirely by the office staff of the Roebling Company. The company remained in family ownership until 1953 when it was sold to Colorado Fuel and Iron which closed in 1974.

Our speaker will be historic preservation consultant and Roebling Scholar Clifford Zink, from Princeton, NJ. Mr Zink is a graduate of Columbia University with a Master's Degree in Historic Preservation. Mr. Zink is co-author of the book *"Spanning the Industrial Age: History of the John A. Roebling's Sons Company in Trenton, NJ, 1849-1974"*. Mr. Zink's talk is a summary of that book, with drawings and slides, and will discuss the Roebling Company, historical development of the Trenton and Roebling sites, and also the modern redevelopment of both sites.

At the Roebling site in the Chambersburg neighborhood of Trenton, Clifford Zink co-founded the Roebling Community Development Corporation to plan and guide the redevelopment of the factory complex. Mr. Zink served as Executive Director of that organization for 12 years. In 1990, Mr. Zink undertook an architectural survey of the buildings remaining at the Florence Township (Roebling Village) site, including the recording of many of the slides which we will see in his presentation. Mr. Zink's book will be available for purchase after the meeting.

The presentation for our May meeting 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 meeting time - begins at 7:30.**

Contains excerpts from Roebling Historic District National Register Form, and the Grolier Encyclopedia, c. 1995.

## Gaslight News

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Daniel T. Campbell, AIA *President & Editor*

The Historical Society of Riverton  
16 Carriage House Lane Riverton, NJ 08077  
856-786-8660

### Board Election at Annual Meeting

The annual meeting on May 14th at 7:30 pm will include election of four members to the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Riverton. This year, all four candidates are incumbent directors, and coincidentally are Officers of the Board. The following are your candidates for new three year terms on the Board of Directors:

**Nancy Washington** is a long-time member of the Society, having served faithfully as Board Secretary and on several of the Board committees for many years.

**Jack Laverty** has recently retired as Membership Chairman, but will remain on the Board. During his past two terms he has made advances in the record keeping of the membership, and recruited many new members to the Society. Many thanks for a job well done!

**Paul Daly** has been our Treasurer for over a decade - keeping faithful watch over the money collected, and spent on worthy projects. His outdoor activities include distributing the souvenir Fourth of July cards during the parade (plus Paul and Jack both climb their ladders to decorate our gaslights with the bows you see at Christmas).

**Dan Campbell** has been President for nearly ten years, edits this Gaslight News and coordinates the efforts of the other Board members to conduct the regular business and special committee activities of the Society.

In addition, **Judy Evans** regretfully has resigned her position on the Board due to family obligations. (her young son Phillip will keep her busier than ever)! Judy has been our publicity chairperson for the last several years.

**Connie Danielson** has also resigned, since she and her family are moving out of the area. Thanks, Connie!

Members are encouraged to attend the annual meeting to show your support for these candidates.

### Milestones

Close watchers and collectors of the Gaslight News will have noticed a milestone which was passed this year. The March 2001 marked the 100th issue of the Gaslight News. The Gaslight news began as a type-written newsletter in September of 1978, the year of the Incorporation of the Historical Society of Riverton.

Betty Hahle, our past President, and esteemed historian of the Historical Society and the Borough of Riverton, hand-typed the Gaslight for 70 of these issues and provided the Yesterday column for all 100 of them - a monumental task, for which the Society is extremely grateful. Betty began listing the numerical order for each issue on the front page, at the request of readers who retained their copies.

Paul Shopp, our previous Vice President developed the current format of the Gaslight, now produced by computer word-processing, and edited approximately 15 issues. Dan Campbell our current President edited the last 15. Many thanks to these contributors, especially Betty Hahle for her long-lasting compilation of Riverton's history.

The Society will be archiving all past issues of the Gaslight News in the Riverton Library - available shortly - for access by the public.

A very significant milestone taking place in 2001 is the 150th anniversary of the founding of Riverton. In the fall of 1851, ten Quaker gentlemen from Philadelphia with ties to the local NJ area established the Riverton Improvement Company, which purchased the land for Riverton from Joseph Lippincott, and hired noted Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan to layout the town, and the initial building lots.

Please look for more information about this sesquicentennial in your copy of the Fourth of July booklet, to be published shortly.

### Awards

The Exterior Restoration of the Riverton Yacht Club, completed in July of 2000, by the Riverton Steamboat Landing Foundation, has been selected for two awards. The Burlington County Cultural and Heritage Commission will present an Preservation Recognition award to the Foundation at the Riverton Borough Council Meeting on Thursday evening, May 10, and The NJ Historic Preservation Office and NJ Historic Sites Council will present their award for excellence in preservation at the opening ceremonies of Preservation Week at the State House in Trenton on May 12, 2001.

# Yesterday...

(In 1974 Therese Spackman Barclay Willits wrote the following poem to her lifelong friend Marjorie Marcy Crowell on the occasion of her 80th Birthday. A copy of it was placed in the Riverton Library, where your writer found it about 20 years ago, and would like to share it with the Gaslight News Readers.)

## Rhyme of Old Riverton

Dear Marge, though it's not customary, I crave of you a present, A piece of time, I hope may be For both of us most pleasant.	There were no movies or TV But lectures, plays and dances Held within the Lyceum's doors Remember learning lancers?	Dreer's Nursey had a fine display Of flowers, vines and trees; We always took our company To "Oh" and "Ah" at these!
We'll both stretch out upon the deck Down at the Jersey shore, And cast our memories back upon The Riverton of yore.	In a little house on Main street Lived "Uncle George Senatt." He loved all kids, and for us There was welcome on the mat.	The lily ponds were fabulous, Some plants had pads so large A small child could stand upon one You ever try it, Marge?
When all the streets were dusty roads Wet by a watering cart, And little friendly stores there were, And no big shopping mart.	He fed us all on peanuts, And like to see us come. His little house was later The Riverton Library's home.	We played down at the river Where the "John A" and the "Annie L" Traveling up to Trenton Made rollies that were swell
There were no buses then or cars, But ten steam trains a day, And later on a trolley car, A slower cheaper way.	The Library in those days Was in the Parish House And in it we were quiet As any small church mouse.	We powdered stones on the river wall "For medicine" says you- For me a muddy sort of paint Or like attractive brew.
The doctors drove in buggies, The country round about, Delivering babies in their homes And treating croup to gout.	In the reading room a rubber plant Hid a chair in a little nook, and that is where I'd make for With a Henty or Alcott book!	We watched the 5 o'clock boats On summer afternoons, And Sonny Wright dived off the deck! Sometimes a band played tunes.
The iceman brought great blocks of ice, Nice Harvey, big and black... He wore a great thick rubber pad On one side of his back.	The Pansy Club, Mrs. Marcy's scheme To make us keen and wise-- "Read one half hour every day And you will get a prize!"	The Columbia, a big boat Stopped at the wharf for freight. And for commuting men folk The "Sight Bell" rang at eight.
If a thieving girl climbed the wagon step He'd grin and never scold her But mark, and cut, and weigh a chunk And toss it to his shoulder!	We went to school to Mrs. Sharp- You were the "little one" And there the jon was out of doors Which we considered fun!	At shad run, in the spring time We'd watch the floated net Be windlassed in the upon the shore And pretty soon we'd get
Mr. Tippenhouer, the butcher And the grocer Mr. Frank, Came weekly to take orders For all we ate and drank.	We went to Lothrop's studio To have our pictures taken-- It seemed like nearly every year If I am not mistaken.	A great big squirming glistening shad Can there be better show? The price was just a quarter-- Think what that would be now!
Any forgotten item Had to remain unknown-- We couldn't call about it, for no one had a phone.	The drugstore, you remember, Run by Mr. Copperthwaite. It had delicious sodas, And if you had a date	We learned to swim at Frishmuth's Wharf And dive from off the float. We thought we had it made when we Could reach their anchored boat.
Mrs. Smith sold "notions" And penny candy too- We'd ponder there, before the case To chose, as children do.	Who only had one nickel It mattered not, because He'd hand one foaming soda out with two diverging straws!	We ate our sandwich lunches In a leaky old boat. It kept one of us bailing For her to stay afloat.

When older, we paddled to Taylor's  
For beach fires on the sand  
And floated back in the moonlight  
And wished we need never land!

There were catboat races on weekends-  
Good sailors not a few!  
And many a wistful wharf-rat  
In hopes of a chance to crew.

We sailed to Burlington Island  
And lay becalmed all night,  
While we were singing and laughing  
Our families fought off fright.

We followed the winding Pompeston  
from marshland back to the wood  
Where we had hilarious picnics  
(where my sons later played Robin Hood!)

A place we called "1000 Islands"  
Was covered with flowers in spring-  
We crossed a tree bridge to reach it,  
A daring and dangerous thing!

Back then there were tall groves of chestnut  
Before the chestnut blight,  
We went every fall to despoil them--  
Those nuts were a beautiful sight!

We flung sticks high to dislodge them  
From their prickly velvet lined burrs-  
And they pattered like rain in their falling  
Through thickets of redolent firs.

I remember in election years,  
After stormy political sessions,  
The men came swarming down the street  
In noisy light processions.

With shouts and banners  
Drum and fife,  
And great flares lighting  
The autumn night.

The diamond of our famous nine  
Was up "above the tracks",  
Also the livery stable  
Where one could hire hacks.

And then in nineteen hundred  
An era new was off,  
The Country Club was started  
And all the rage was golf!

Oh later we played hockey  
And that brought you to fame  
I played it, too, more feebly  
But loved it just the same.

In winter there was "hitching"  
Can skiing be more fun?  
Your sled would need a lengthy rope  
If steering well were done!

From any sleigh or wagon--  
"Bell and Frank's" was the best  
One hitch out, another back--  
The round trip gave it zest.

We knew the sound of sleigh bells  
Upon the frosty air--  
The river froze and ice boats  
And skaters darted there.

Parades would walk across then  
Clear to the Pennsy shore  
But modern navigation  
Permits that never more.

July the 4th, red letter day--  
Our patriotic town  
Had speeches, races and parade  
The like was never found.

The great parade marched down the street  
From old Joe Roberts' store,  
With beating drums and blaring brass  
Down to the river's shore.

The band was smartly costumed  
With epaulets on shoulders,  
Traditionally the march they played  
Was "Onward Christian Soldiers".

The judges judged the costumes  
And decorated floats,  
The breeze blew all the children's flags  
And gaily bannered boats.

The speeches that were heard that day  
Were fiery and ornate,  
We swelled with pride to hear them--  
Far cry from Watergate!!

And all the day's activities  
Were on the river bank.  
And families came to picnic,  
And napped and ate and drank.

They watched the races, tub to yacht  
And also the canoe  
In which participating were  
Sometimes me and you.

Until at dusk the fireworks!!  
And again the band would play.  
And then the final "set piece"  
Would end the glorious day.

From Sunday School on Sunday  
Till baths on Saturday night  
Dawns then rose clear and rosy  
And sunsets clouds were bright.

So, Marge, come talk about it,  
There may be more to say!  
I really do expect you,  
So set the time, come May!

Marjorie Marcy Crowell, daughter of Dr. Alexander and Mrs. Marcy, was born in 1894 at the home of her parents at 406 Main St., and lived there all of her life. She died in 1979. Therese Spackman Barclay Willits was born in the home of her grandfather, Joseph Campbell, on Main St., because the new home of her parents at 205 Lippincott Avenue was not quite finished in December 1889. She lived there after her first marriage, moved to Philadelphia suburbs for a time after her second, and then came back to Riverton. She was past her 100th birthday when she died.

BBH April 2001

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