



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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## Delaware River and Steamboat History at October Meeting

**The Delaware Valley, its History, Geography, and Steamboats** is the title of the program which will be presented at the first meeting of The Historical Society of Riverton for the 2001-2002 year on **Monday, October 15, 2001**. The evening will begin at **7:30 pm in the Riverton Public School Media Center**. After a short business meeting, the one hour slide-illustrated program will begin. The presenter for the evening's program will be **Mr. Bengt Hyberg**, a former director of the Steamboat Historical Society, who lives on the Delaware River just north of the Red Dragon Canoe Club. Mr Hyberg is a retired Colonel, U S Army, where he served as Master of a tugboat which plied the English Channel, including during the Normandy Invasion.

Mr. Hyberg has compiled an excellent collection of approximately 200 slides, many of them rare, showing the former steamboats, and steamboat landings of the Delaware River. His talk will cover the history of the river from the time when Dutch explorers merely called the two great rivers which they found on the east coast the North River (later the Hudson) and the South River (later the Delaware). The geography which gives this region the name (or misnomer) of the Delaware Valley will be explained.

River traffic was extremely important to the development, culture and economy of several states in the region, making the Delaware River arguably the most important river in the east. Steamboats provided both freight and passenger service between the States of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, from Cape May to Trenton. Allegheny (Phila), Andalusia & Bristol (Bucks Co.), Riverton, Burlington, Florence, Roebing, and Bordentown were familiar landings for steamboats from the mid-nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries.

Travel from Philadelphia to New York City was once a combination of river travel and overland travel, most of it by the Delaware River. Passengers boarded a steamboat in Philadelphia and traveled up river to Bordentown, where they rode in a train on the Camden-

Amboy Line to Perth Amboy. There they were ferried across the mouth of the Hudson making the trip only 38 miles by land and the majority of it by water. Domestic passenger travel on the Delaware River ended with World War II.

All persons, whether Historical Society members or not, are invited to attend this informative and entertaining 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. Refreshments will be served following the meeting.

## A Change in the Gaslight News

As reported in the previous issue, we recently reached a benchmark of 100 issues of the Gaslight News in the spring of 2001. That feat was largely accomplished through the creativity and perserverance of Betty B. Hahle, our former President and present Historian, who served as Editor for nearly three quarters of those issues and who created and wrote the "Yesterday" column.

Earlier this year, Betty requested that she be allowed to retire from contributing her "Yesterday" column. We, of course accept that request, yet we do so with our deep gratitude for her tireless contribution to the recordation of Riverton's history for all of these 30 years. The Board of Directors feels that it is also appropriate to retire the name of the "Yesterday" column, since no one will be able to write it quite the way that Betty did.

Priscilla Taylor has penned the story about Post Cards in this issue. She wishes to thank Betty Hahle for her time, conversation, and knowledge in helping with this transition. Note: if you have Post Cards of Riverton, please let the Society know about them so their existence can be documented. Several views of Riverton have yet to be found!

## Gaslight News

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## Membership Information

The Historical Society begins our membership renewal process each year with this first issue of the Gaslight News. 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 2001 through May 2002. According to our By-Laws, dues must be paid by the end of February of 2002, therefore we refer to it as the 2002 year.

Next, please remember that dues are payable in advance for a small-budgeted organization such as ours. 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. *Priscilla Taylor, Membership Chair*



This item appeared in a 1907 issue of The New Era:  
"JERSEY DEVIL HERE - The Jersey Devil, which was supposed to have been laid to rest some time ago is said to have appeared in Riverton. A local resident declares he saw it at Fourth Street and Lippincott Ave. last Monday night. He charged it with a large pocket knife but the creature vanished when he was almost within striking distance. The observer describes it as looking something terrible, with awful eyes."

... **HAPPY HALLOWEEN** ...!

## Upcoming Events

**"Buried in Burlington"** bus trip of historical cemeteries, Saturday October 27. Co-sponsored by the Burlington Co. Historical Society and the County's Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, tour given by Dr. Giles Wright. Bus will leave Smithville Mansion in Southampton at 8:30 am and return at 5:00 pm, \$15.95 per person. Call Smithville to reserve (609)-265-5068. (Great trip for Halloween)

**Bartram Harvest Festival** Saturday and Sunday, October 13-14, 10am to 4 pm at Historic Bartram's Garden, 54th and Lindbergh Blvd in southwest Phila (approx. 2 miles north of Phila Airport). Family Theater Performance (3 daily) "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Westmont Theater Co., horse and wagon rides, cider making, Colonial crafts and demonstrations, tours of John Bartram House and Botanical Garden, home of America's first botanist (18th century).

## Society Acquires New Books

Since May, the Historical Society has acquired two new books to add to our collection at the Riverton Public Library. I will bring these books to the October meeting, then they will be donated to the Library.

***Spanning the Industrial Age - The John A. Roebling's Sons Company, Trenton, NJ 1848-1974***, by Clifford Zink and Dorothy White Hartman, Published by the Trenton Roebling Community Development Corporation. This is the work and sourcebook for our speaker from the May annual meeting, Clifford Zink. Clifford gave an excellent slide presentation about the Roebling Company's plants in Trenton and Roebling NJ. He graciously donated a copy of this work. If you missed the program in May, this would be a good way to see it.

***If These Walls Could Talk...An Easy Guide to Tracking Your House's Genealogy***, Picton Press, Rockport Maine. I was introduced to this book earlier this year at the Bucks County Hearth and Home Show (formerly the Phila Old House Fair) which I and some other members attended together in June. It is an excellent, easy to follow guidebook about researching the history of your house through deeds, census records, etc.; about identifying the architectural style and original features of your home, about decision-making in renovation/restoration, and it contains an excellent bibliography listing other sources about house history and restoration. It should become a must-read for Society members researching their house's history for a Society Plaque. For information about a plaque call Dan Campbell at 786-8660.

## Then and Now . . .

### The Golden Age of Post Cards

The picture post card of the early 1900's might very well be considered the "email" of its day: post cards changed both people's writing habits and the frequency in which they communicated. With mail being delivered as often as twice a day, many of the early post cards were used to report urgent, "same day" news. The space on a post card could not accommodate the Victorian practice of writing lengthy "expressions of endearment", so brevity became a necessity.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, post cards evolved from a simple, abbreviated form of communication into one of the world's largest collecting crazes. In 1913, more than 968,000,000 post cards passed through the United States postal system and by then, post card collecting was already on the decline.

**A New Form of Communication is Invented -** The earliest known post card is the unstamped, non-government issued card that John P. Charlton of Philadelphia copyrighted in 1861. Charlton transferred the copyright to H. Lipman, also of Philadelphia, who printed and sold his "Lipman's Postal Card," which bore an inscription of the same in the top left corner of the card. The Lipman card is the first card to ever be officially allowed for postal purposes by the United States Postal Act of 1861, which fixed a one-cent rate, prepaid by a postage stamp, and was intended for business use. Heinrich von Stephan, an official in the postal service of the North German Confederation, proposed in 1865 a "Postblatt" or "post sheet" bearing on one side space for the address and space for the message on the other. Stephan's proposal was ultimately rejected, but a suggestion by Dr. Emanuel Herrmann of Vienna convinced the Austrian Post Office to accept his stamped card design in 1869.

Postal authorities in other countries soon adopted the post card after Austria: Switzerland, Germany, and the United Kingdom in 1870; Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Holland, Norway, and Sweden in 1871; Russia in 1872; and France, Italy, Romania, Serbia, and Spain in 1873.

Lipman's card remained in use in America until the first government issued cards appeared in 1873. These U.S. Post Office cards featured in the upper right corner a one-cent stamp printed with a profile of the Goddess of Liberty. "United States Postal Card" was designated in the upper left corner, with

directions to "write the address only on this side-the message on the other."

**Pioneer Cards -** The first privately printed picture post cards designated for souvenir appeal and personal use appeared for sale in Chicago at the World Columbian Exposition of 1893 and are considered "pioneer cards" because of their issue date.

On May 19, 1898, an Act of Congress passed that allowed privately published post cards to have the same message privileges and rates as government issued cards. Up to this date, privately issued cards bore a two-cent postage rate vs. the one-cent government rate. Cards published after this date are inscribed "Private Mailing Card - Authorized by Act of Congress, May 19, 1898." Post cards published and/or postally dated prior to 5/19/1898 are called "pioneer cards" and are highly valued by collectors.

**Europe Ignites the Collecting Craze -** The popular "Greetings from..." post card that is still in modern use today had its start in Germany in the late 1890's. The cards were originally printed in one color, and as printing technology became more sophisticated, additional colors were added, often painstakingly tinted by hand. By the end of the century, post cards printed in Berlin were on sale all over the world. Even Queen Victoria's interest was so great; she is said to have commanded a royal relative to develop a post card collection for her.

In 1899, international exhibitions of post cards took place in Venice, Nice, Berlin, Paris, and Prague. One million cards alone were posted from the Berlin exposition hall.

**Americans Catch the Post Card "Fever" -** Word of the post card craze reached America by 1902. The European "Postal-Card Craze" was first reported by writer Julian Ralph in the February 1902 issue of Cosmopolitan magazine (not the magazine published today of the same name). The October 21, 1905 issue of the Dry Goods Reporter mentioned the increased demand for post card albums: "The souvenir postal card craze, which has spread over the country like wildfire, has created a big demand for postal card albums, of which quite an extensive line is shown." By 1906, which many consider the height of post card's golden age, card collecting in the United States reached European proportions and over 770,500,000 cards passed through the U. S. postal system in that year alone.

Those fortunate enough to travel sent cards



home to their friends and family. Many a picture post card album was displayed in front parlors to be admired (and envied) by visitors. It became easy to collect post cards from afar: many ads appeared in magazines for post card pen pals. National and international clubs organized to promote "philocart" or "cartephilia" (post card collecting) were formed and gained eager members in the U.S.

American Magazine ran an amusing commentary in its March 1906 issue on the collecting craze, and described the post card albums appearing in American homes as "...these monstrosities are often bestowed on the center table in the parlor, and about the only thing that can be said in their defense is that they crowd off the plush thesaurus of family celebrities.... [post card] victims have been known to decorate all the available surface of their living apartments except the ceilings...."

In 1909, the fad of arranging a "postcard show-er" for a friend was reported in America with most recipients receiving as many as 200 cards as gifts.

Over one million people were employed in Germany (primarily Berlin) in the post card printing business by 1909. The best artists of Europe were hired to design illustrations for post cards. Several American artists, including Charles Dana Gibson (creator of the infamous "Gibson Girl") gained worldwide appeal with their charming designs.

**Early Riverton Post Cards** - The majority of Riverton post cards found in collections today are photo "view" cards that were produced from 1905-1913 and sold (in those days) two for five cents. They depict street scenes, the yacht club, steamboats and sailboats on the river, single Victorian homes, storefronts, the railroad station, the public school, the country club, businesses such as Dreer's Riverton Nurseries, plus events such as the Fourth of July Parade, to name some existing examples.

On the back of post cards is indicated who published the card and where it was printed. We know that several Riverton and Palmyra businesses helped to publish the early Riverton post cards. While many were printed by Riverton's newspaper, The New Era, most of the cards postally used prior to 1909-10 were printed in Berlin, Germany. The W.H. Stiles Pharmacy (where the New Leaf now exists) advertised cards for sale that were printed in Germany; The New Era ran ads of its own encouraging its business readers to "drop a postal and we will call." Also selling Riverton cards were: the

Riverton News Agency (located in a Riverton post office building next to the bakery at Broad and Main), the Brick Stores (on the triangle of Main and Howard), and L.L. Keating's drug store (at the corner of Main and Howard where the dance studio is located today). Riverton's J.L. Lippincott & Company Real Estate had cards printed that featured photos of the different homes available for sale and rent.

In Palmyra, both Schwartz's store at Broad & Garfield and McAllister's Stationer sold post cards of Riverton and Palmyra. One of Schwartz's ads in the Palmyra Record in 1911 boasted of a "Fine Assortment of Christmas Candies and Post Cards, also Ice Cream, Rockaway Oysters and Cigars."

**The Post Card Retires** - The National Post Card Association was formed in 1909 to stabilize the industry and introduced a tariff that restricted German imports. Retailers, anticipating the loss of German cards, panicked, overstocked, and dropped their prices. Stores such as F.W. Woolworth offered for sale millions of post cards at a mere \$.10 per dozen. Interest in post cards began to wane, and in 1912, a new paper interest emerged as the folded greeting card with envelope made its debut in the United States.

In 1914, The National Association of Post Card Manufacturers announced that their annual convention was canceled due to a lack of interest, and that same year, the National Association of Greeting Card Manufacturers was formed. By 1915, trade papers omitted the mention of post cards entirely.

**Then and Now** - The popularity of collecting post cards continues to grow as post cards prove to be one of the last breeds of affordable antiques. Affordable may be disputed, however, as some of the rare and valuable cards that were first sold for a few pennies each are being auctioned today on ebay for a great deal more. Recent sales on ebay show that a single Riverton card can fetch as much as \$40 to more than \$75. A great majority of collectible cards, however, can still be found at post card shows and antique shops for an average price of \$4.00-\$15.00 each.

The simple beauty of a picture post card is its existence in capturing a moment of our history's time. Post cards give us an historical and accurate look at our town, caught forever in the blink of a photographer's shutter, to be preserved and passed on to future generations.

*Priscilla Taylor - Board of Directors*