



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

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## "Spirit of New Jersey lands at McGuire Air Force Base"

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program at the Riverton School. The program, re-scheduled from last January due to a severe winter storm, features Master Sgt. Gary Boyd, the official historian for the McGuire Air Force Base.

Last September 24th, 2004 McGuire Air Force Base received its first new military aircraft in 40 years. The first C-17 Globemasters arrived at McGuire after the retirement of the last of the Air Force's active duty C-141 Starlifters. The plane, officially named *The Spirit of New Jersey*, is a 174-foot long jet capable of carrying twice as much freight as the old C-141 transport, including the largest and heaviest equipment like tanks, helicopters and artillery.

Gary Boyd is the author of the book, *Images of America, McGuire Air Force Base*, printed by Arcadia Publishing. He will discuss the historic role played by McGuire as the air force's principal aerial port on the East Coast and as the nation's first base with a ground-launched anti-aircraft nuclear missile squadron.

McGuire Air Force base is home to the 305th Air Mobility Wing, the 21st Air Force and the Air Mobility Warfare Center located in New Hanover Township in Burlington County, New Jersey. The base maintains two active runways on over 530,000 acres within the New Jersey Pinelands National Reserve.

McGuire missions supported worldwide relief efforts and transportation for troops, cargo and material for *Operations Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*. The base is named in honor of a native son from New Jersey, Major Thomas B. McGuire, Jr., the second leading American Air Ace of World War II.



OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM  
KC-10A Extender landing at McGuire Air Force Base.  
(United States Air Force photo by Gary Ell)

### Inside This Issue

**DREER'S NURSERIES-**  
PART ONE OF ARTICLE  
BY PRISCILLA TAYLOR

**TACONY PALMYRA BRIDGE-**  
THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY  
Featuring the Riverton Family History  
of Elsie Wright Waters

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL-**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
RIVERTON  
Details inside the front cover.

**HISTORICAL RIVERTON-**  
Architectural History  
A new book by Bill Washington

# Gaslight News

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of Riverton, and is published four times per year.



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## FROM THE ARCHIVES



The latest item to be donated to the *HSR Clothing Archives* is a man's beaver top hat. It was given to (or left at) the Ruff family home and was donated by Anne (Bay) Knight Ruff. The hat was manufactured by *E.H. Parry Company*, located at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> & Market Streets in Philadelphia. The hat is quite worn around the top, but otherwise in very good shape.

Although there were many Parry's in Riverton in the early days of the town, we do not know if there is a connection between the company and the local family. If you know about the local Parry family history, please let us know. The hat will be on display at the next meeting.

**PAT BRUNKER**  
VICE PRESIDENT

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON 2004-2005

**GENERAL MEETING SCHEDULE**  
MONDAYS AT 7:30 P.M. RIVERTON SCHOOL

**NOVEMBER 29TH, 2004**  
**JANUARY 24TH, 2005**  
**MARCH 7TH, 2005**

## IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

in the

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Your annual dues for HSR membership are due November 1 for the year 2005. Your dues and tax-deductible donations support our mission to preserve local history as well as to underwrite the costs to produce the *Gaslight News* and the five historical programs offered to borough residents each year at the Riverton School.

Here's an easy way to check to see whether or not your payment is up-to-date. Look at your *Gaslight News* mailing label--if your label says "2005" or "Life," then your dues are current. If any other year appears on your label you will need to submit your dues to renew your membership in the Historical Society.

Please fill out the enclosed membership form and send it to Priscilla Taylor, Membership Chair, 105 7th Street, Riverton, New Jersey, 08077.



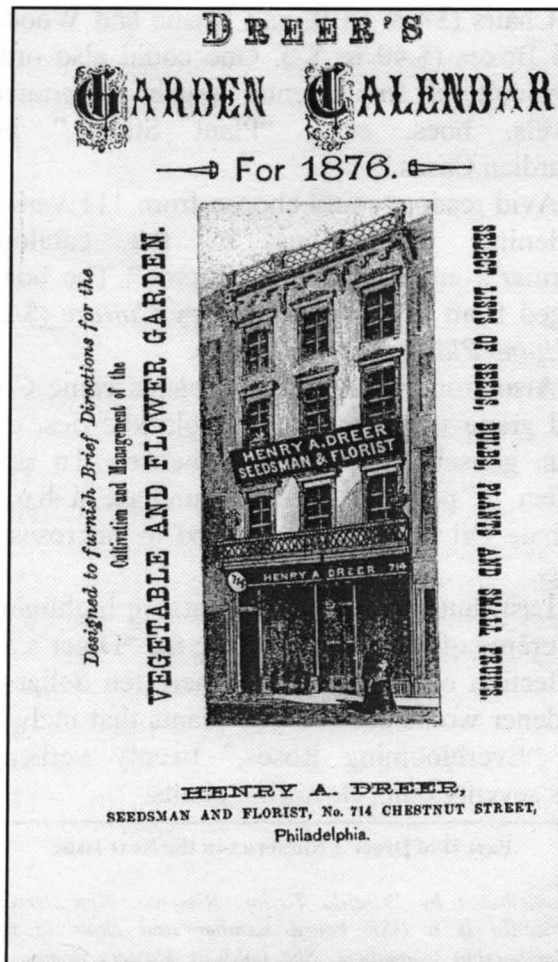
Contributions to the Historical Society of Riverton are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

Please consider a gift to the *Historical Society of Riverton* before the New Year to help us continue our programs and special events dedicated to preserving local history.

# Then and Now...*Dreer's Nurseries*

Anyone who passes by the now dilapidated commercial property at Fulton and Broad can't help but imagine the natural beauty Dreer's Nurseries brought to Riverton. In its prime, Dreer's spanned more than 300 acres in Riverton, East Riverton, and Cinnamonson.

The name Dreer held considerable international respect in the plant and seed industry, and the Trial Gardens at Riverton produced literally millions of seeds and time-tested plants that were sold all over the world. It's a wonder to mull over the events that ultimately led to the company's unfortunate bankruptcy and demise.



**Dreer's 1876 Garden Calendar**  
a view of their shop once located at  
714 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia.

Born in Philadelphia, **Henry Augustus Dreer** (1818-1873), was the son of a German immigrant cabinetmaker. He realized his ambition in 1838 when, at the age of twenty, he opened his seed and florist shop, **Henry A. Dreer, Inc.**, on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Dreer was passionate about his business and would be proved as an innovative forecaster as his company would become hugely successful due to his persistence in developing and maintaining trial gardens for flowers, plants, vegetables, grasses, shrubs, and trees.

Dreer would not live to witness the extent of his company's worldwide success and growth, but he left a powerful and immortal legacy. In "*A History of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1827-1927*," author James Boyd notes that "In 1838, Henry A. Dreer, destined to become one of the leading seedsmen of America, joined the [PA Horticultural] Society.

## A Humble Beginning

Between 1839-1850, Dreer kept a nursery on Andrew Hamilton's Philadelphia estate that was known as "*The Woodlands*." Dreer, his wife, their four daughters, and son William lived on North 35<sup>th</sup> Street below Haverford Avenue in Philadelphia. In 1850, Dreer moved his six small greenhouses to North 35<sup>th</sup> Street.

By 1868, there was a demand for lots in that area, and Dreer, anticipating the move of his greenhouses, acquired 100 acres in Riverton. He hired a Mr. C. P. Hayes to construct eight glass greenhouses and a three story stone building that would be used as a packinghouse.

Each of the new greenhouses measured 11' x 100', and the move from N. 35<sup>th</sup> Street to Riverton brought additional glass from the six original greenhouses. This material expanded the Riverton greenhouses to more than 20,000 feet of glass surface. A sawmill was later built on the site so the company could manufacture its own packing boxes.

Article by Priscilla Taylor on  
*Dreer's Nurseries* is continued on the next page.

# Then and Now...*Dreer's Nurseries*

(Continued from previous page)

It was quite a feat to heat the new greenhouses. The company's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary brochure boasted, "The heating of the Greenhouses is derived from twelve boilers, having a capacity of seventy-five hundred horse-power, both steam and hot water being used. The consumption of coal in a winter season amounts to about two thousand tons. Over sixteen miles of pipes are used in radiating the steam and hot water. The lumber used in box-making amounts to over one hundred and fifty thousand feet annually.... The steam Saw-Mill is almost constantly busy, and two carpenters are kept at work through the year making packing boxes."

## Why Riverton?

While we cannot be certain of how Henry A. Dreer came to discover Riverton, we can be sure of these facts:

- ❖ Dreer contributed articles about gardening and plants to *Godey's Lady's Book* – publisher Louis Godey summered in Riverton until his death 1878;

- ❖ Riverton architect Samuel Sloan designed the first Horticultural Hall for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) in Philadelphia in 1866 – Dreer served as the PHS Treasurer from 1862-1873; and

- ❖ One of Riverton's founders, Chalkley Gillingham, was also a member of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

## Riverton Location Prominently Featured

In 1873, the "Spring Grove Nurseries" at Riverton (as the location was originally named) grew mostly bedding plants such as verbenas, geraniums, petunias, roses, plus trees and shrubs.

By 1876, the company's *Garden Calendar* featured a full-page advertisement that urged patrons to visit the nurseries at Riverton. The ad described the 8 mile trip up the Delaware River by steamboat as "...one of the most delightful excursions that can be had around Philadelphia."

See previous page for *Dreer's 1876 Garden Calendar*

William Dreer loved roses, and the 1876 catalog showcased the rose collection from the Riverton grounds that featured 178 varieties. The Collection received the "First Premium" for the "largest and best display of Roses at the Grand Autumnal Exhibitions of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1872, 1873, 1874, and 1875." A gardener could purchase 12 of the Riverton roses for a mere \$1.50 as advertised in the 1876 catalog.

Also advertised in that year's issue were "Bride's Bouquets...of choice white flowers, with fine lace papers, or deep silk fringe, and cord and tassels, \$5 to \$10." The company offered "Lawn Baskets, Flower Pots ('very neat'), Fern Stands, Children's Arm Chairs (\$5), Rocking Chairs (\$8 & \$10), and Rustic and Wooden Bird Boxes (\$.40 to \$2). One could also order "Horticultural Implements" (such as pruners, trowels, hoes, etc.), "Plant Stands," and "Wardian Cases."

Avid readers could choose from 111 various gardening publications in the catalog's "Farmer's and Gardener's Library." The books ranged from *Fuller's Strawberry Culture* (\$.20) to *Alpine Plants Illustrated* (\$9).

Also from the Riverton grounds came Concord grape vines, raspberries, blackberries, currants, gooseberries, and strawberries. To rid a garden of pests, one could purchase a bar of "Whale Oil Soap" – guaranteed to rid roses of slugs.

Last, but not least, 1876 catalog highlighted the crème of the Riverton crop: the "Dreer's \$10 Collection of Plants." For a mere ten dollars, a gardener would receive 100 plants that included ten "Everblooming Roses," twenty verbenas, plus seventy other flowering plants.

## Part II of Dreer's Nurseries in the Next Issue

Contributed by Priscilla Taylor, Riverton, New Jersey. Priscilla is a HSR board member and chair of the Membership Committee. She holds a Masters degree in Elementary Education and teaches gifted students grades 2-6 in Audubon, New Jersey and undergraduate courses at Burlington County College in Pemberton. Priscilla Taylor is a frequent contributor to the *Gaslight News*.