



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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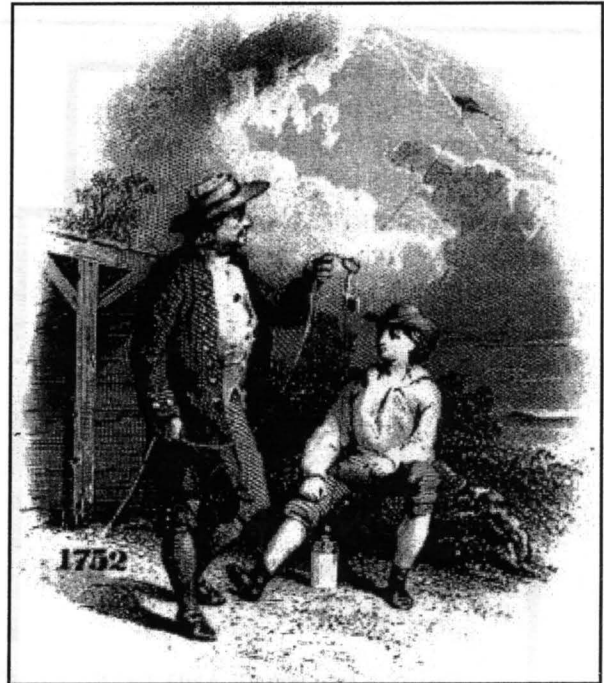
## "Young William" Benjamin Franklin and His Son

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program at the Riverton School. The program features an historical interpretation of "Young William" produced by Riverton Town Crier, Rip Pellaton.

"Young William" is a staged reading of a script donated to the Bridge Players about the tumultuous relationship between Benjamin Franklin and his son, William.

William spent much of his youth in England where he attended school at Oxford, earned a Master's degree and became a barrister and later married. He returned to America in 1763 and at the age of thirty-two he was appointed Royal Governor to New Jersey. During his tenure as the last Royal Governor in New Jersey he lived at Green Bank, a mansion located on the Delaware River, in Burlington City.

The script reading features Rip Pellaton as William Franklin and Frank Cosky as Benjamin Franklin. Roger 'Rip' Pellaton is a member of the Historical Society and the official Town Crier for both Riverton and Princeton, New Jersey. Rip is the Director of the Summer School and After-School Program at Princeton Friends School. Frank Cosky is an attorney and active with the Bridge Players theater company.



"They that can give up  
essential liberty to obtain  
a little temporary safety  
deserve neither  
liberty nor safety."  
Benjamin Franklin

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PART TWO

# Gaslight News

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## BURLINGTON COUNTY HISTORIAN SERIES

PRESENTED BY  
JOSEPH LAUFER

## NOTABLE WOMEN IN BURLINGTON COUNTY

MARCH 3, 2005  
7:00PM TO 9:00PM

FREE SLIDE SHOW AND TALK.

HEADQUARTERS LIBRARY  
5 PIONEER BLVD.  
WESTAMPTON, NJ 08060  
609-267-9660

REGISTRATION  
IS NOT REQUIRED

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON 2005

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

MARCH 7TH, 2005  
MAY 9TH, 2005



**Nipper** was a fox-terrier-mix who was the subject of a Francis Barraud painting, formerly known as "His Master's Voice."

The **HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MOORESTOWN** will co-host an art event this summer celebrating a Moorestown native, **ELDRIDGE JOHNSON**, who was the inventor of the **VICTOR TALKING MACHINE**. His former home is now the house at the Lutheran Home of Moorestown on East Main Street. Mr. Johnson is also credited with building The Community House.

The **HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MOORESTOWN**, along with four other Community Partners, will sponsor the joint "Public Art Project" this summer. Sponsors include the Lutheran Home at Moorestown, Perkins Center for the Arts, The Evergreens and the Moorestown Community House.

Artists will create fiberglass Nipper statues for display throughout Moorestown. These works of art will be auctioned in October with the proceeds benefiting the work of the five local non-profit organizations.

Visit the **Nipper 2005** website at  
[HTTP://WWW.NIPPER2005.ORG](http://www.nipper2005.org).

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

Part Two

## William Dreer Becomes President

Henry Dreer died in December 1873, after the move to Riverton was complete. His son, William Frederick Dreer (1849-1918) became President of the company and admirably carried on in his father's tradition. William became a knowledgeable horticulturist and made numerous trips abroad to study growing methods and to establish trade relationships with foreign seed houses. Like his father, he was an active member of the PHS (Pennsylvania Horticultural Society), and also served as its Treasurer in 1887-1888 and in 1898-1899. William maintained a residence on Arch Street in Philadelphia, but later moved to Rosemont, Pennsylvania. He also had residences in Santa Barbara, California, and Woodstock, Vermont, and had extensive private gardens at all three homes. (Bailey, PHS)

## 1876 Grand Centennial Exhibit

Dreer's had a huge presence at the heavily attended 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia. Their outside exhibit occupied 24,000 square feet and featured eleven flower beds of various designs. A written account of the Dreer display marveled at the "...1,000 plants in bloom at one time." Their main interior exhibit case was over 30' long, and the company received a Grand Prize Medal for their central display in Horticultural Hall that featured two large *Musa Ensete* plants. Opposite the exhibit case was a "...display of rustic work, lawn mowers, garden cultivators, trellises, and a show of Dutch bulbs." The company noted that their exhibits received "...visits from customers from Maine to Mexico, Oregon to Florida, and even as far as the Cape of Good Hope and Japan."

## Shrewd Businessman

The company's 1884 catalog described the Spring Grove Nurseries and Seed Farm at Riverton: "The Plant Department at Riverton contains one of the largest and finest collections of plants in the country. Especial attention is paid to the introduction of the best new varieties. Nearly 50 acres are devoted to the growing of Plants, Bulbs, and Flower Seeds, and upwards of 50,000 square feet of glass are employed in the propagation and cultivation of plants for the greenhouse, conservatory, and garden."

William Dreer proved to be an innovative and shrewd businessman. He accurately determined that the nurseries at Riverton could compete with European growers. It was economical for the company to raise plants from seed; they had a prime shipping location along the Delaware, and kept "modern," well-maintained facilities.

By 1888, Dreer's began carrying palms and ferns, as the demand for European varieties was fueled by the Victorians' fervor for parlor decorations. William added two additional greenhouses in 1895 and 1896 which covered two acres specifically for the development of palms and ferns. These greenhouses were heated by "...by seven hot water tubular boilers, from which hot water circulates through nearly nine miles of two inch piping, extending beneath the benches. These houses are each capable of holding 364,500 plants in three inch pots, or 540,000 in two inch pots."

In 1898, Dreer's shipped two million palms and ferns worldwide that were grown from seed in Riverton.

The Riverton nurseries were producing over three million spring-flowering bulbs to meet the world's demand. Nearly half a million of the Riverton grown bulbs were sent to Europe annually. The company shipped to customers all over the world, including South America and Japan..

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

# Then and Now...Dreer's Nurseries

Part Two

## Gardeners' Day

The company started a popular annual event in the summer, called "Gardeners' Day at Riverton," where both private and commercial gardeners and their families from the Philadelphia area were invited to tour the Riverton facilities. The August 31st event in 1897 drew over fifteen hundred visitors.

## World Exposition Awards

Dreer's Nurseries featured award-winning displays at the *Columbian Exposition in Chicago* in 1893 and the *Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, NY* in 1901. The company was the first American hybridizer of water lilies and exclusively featured displays of water ponds at the *Pan American Exposition*. The Exposition's handbook marveled at the Dreer accomplishment, "Any account of this beautiful garden with its varied exhibits would not be complete were we to omit the aquatics, which are exclusively the exhibit of the Henry A. Dreer firm." Dreer's maintained five acres in Riverton along the banks of the Delaware River for aquatic garden development. Large beds of Japanese Bamboo, Iris, and Peonies were grown alongside the Water Lily ponds.

## Japanese Beetle Arrives in Riverton

The Japanese beetle was first discovered in America at Dreer's Nurseries in Riverton in 1916 during a routine inspection. It was thought to have been a stowaway as a grub among iris roots that had been imported by the company from Japan. Since the insect was not immediately identified as the Japanese, it was well over a year before the United States Department of Agriculture realized the potential threat of the tiny immigrant. Repeated attempts to eradicate the beetle failed, and retardation to limit infestation became the goal. In addition to power sprayers and dusters, even children were paid by the quart to hand-pick and kill beetles. By 1920 the beetle expanded its territory to fifty square miles in New Jersey and Pennsyl-

## Horticultural Dynasty Ends

William Dreer died in 1918. During his ownership, the nurseries in Riverton were expanded to more than 300 acres. The company maintained greenhouses and trial grounds along Fulton and Broad Streets, on Cedar Street below 10<sup>th</sup>, as well as in East Riverton and Cinnaminson. Dreer's Nurseries produced not just flowers, but fruits and vegetables of every kind – including strawberries, raspberries, peas, lettuce, beans, radishes, and tomatoes. The nursery also developed a premier lawn grass for use on golf courses. Every new variety of plant was tested in Riverton before being sold to the public. The company had as many as 600 employees during its Riverton residency.

Although Dreer's Nurseries continued its horticultural development of plants and flowers after William Dreer's death, the company lacked management support from Dreer's surviving heirs. Despite new plant introductions – for example, the company introduced the popular climbing rose "New Dawn" in 1930, which was the first plant to be issued a plant patent in the United States – Henry A. Dreer, Inc. declared bankruptcy in 1944. The seed and trial grounds were parceled and sold off to various entities. Riverton's Memorial Park now stands where acres of the *Dreer Rose Garden* and trial grounds once blossomed for visitors.

In 1938, a leading horticulturist referred to the Riverton nurseries as "Dreer's Living Catalog." Today, many of Riverton's properties sport trees, plants, and flowering bushes that were grown by Henry A. Dreer, Inc. Those of us who are lucky enough to still have these stalwart beauties know that the passion that Henry and William Dreer had for horticulture continues to

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 English courses at Immaculata University and Burlington County College. Priscilla Taylor is a frequent contributor to the Gaslight News.