



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

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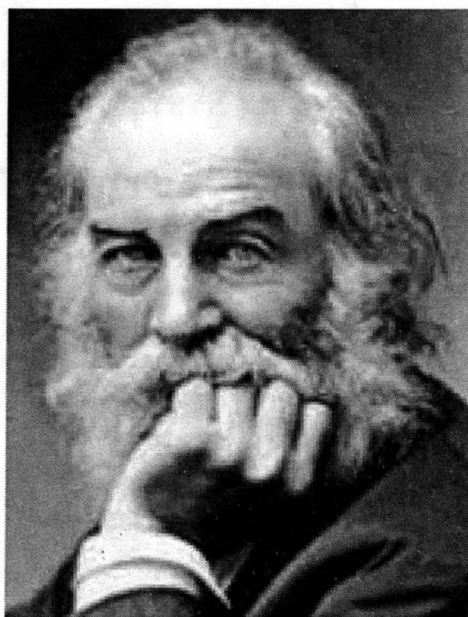
"What's American About America?"

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday March 6th, 2005 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program at the Riverton School. Our March program titled, **What's American About America?** Featuring a special presentation by Professor Michael Aaron Rockland, Ph.D. and founder of the American Studies Department at Rutgers University.

Professor Rockland's talk *What's American About America?* is described by the New Jersey Council on the Humanities as "a look at American artifacts and cultural productions of all kinds to see what is American about them. An examination of everything from American landscape painting to modern dance to the Constitution to soap operas and comic strips to jeans to fast food to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* to rock and roll and rap and the surprising discovery of what these disparate "things" share.

Dr. Rockland has written extensively for popular magazines such as *Philadelphia*, *Adventure Travel*, *Explorer's Journal*, *Big*, *Preservation*, and especially *New Jersey Monthly*, where he has long been Contributing Editor.

"**Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike**" was co-authored by Dr. Rockland and was recently chosen as one of the "Ten Best Books Ever Written on New Jersey or by a New Jerseyan." by the *New Jersey State Library*.



Walt Whitman— American Poet

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Gaslight News

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BURLINGTON COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH PROGRAMS

ALICE PAUL, NEW JERSEY'S
HEROINE FOR EQUALITY

PRESENTED BY
KRISTINA MYERS OF THE
ALICE PAUL INSTITUTE
MARCH 9, 2006
7:00PM TO 8:30PM

WOMEN IN LITERATURE

PRESENTED BY
SHARON EIFERMAN
MARCH 16TH, 2006
7:00PM

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

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON 2005

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

MARCH 6TH, 2006

MAY 8TH, 2006

NEW JERSEY WOMEN'S HERITAGE TRAIL



In recognition of Women's History Month, Dorothy P. Guzzo, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for the *New Jersey Historic Preservation Office*, will present a program on the New Jersey Women's Heritage Trail.

The program sponsored by the Cherry Hill Public Library highlights the notable sites affiliated with important women in New Jersey history, and those reflective of the diverse contributions women have made to our past, have been documented in the New Jersey Women's Heritage Trail.

COPIES OF THE NEW JERSEY WOMEN'S
HERITAGE TRAIL WILL BE AVAILABLE.

MARCH 9, 2006

CHERRY HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY

1100 KINGS HIGHWAY NORTH
CHERRY HILL, NJ 08034

CALL FOR TIME AND DETAILS

(856) 488-7886

Then and Now... Riverton Gun Club 1877 to 1906

This article was extracted from the Riverton Gun Club History, a book published by Thomas S. Dando in a limited edition of 100 copies in 1906 and donated to the *Historical Society of Riverton* in 1985. It contains many fascinating pictures of the founders, the grounds on the Delaware River and the Club House.

As early as September, 1877, several gentlemen formed the Riverton Rifle Team and shot three matches with the Torresdale Rifle Club. About this time, the Saturday Gun Club was being formed in Philadelphia. The Riverton men then invited the Saturday club to join them and they then called themselves the "Social Gun and Rifle Club". The real formation of the Riverton Gun Club started from a meeting held by John C.W. Frishmuth, Henry H. Ellison, F. Perot Ogden and several others at the residence of Mr. H. H. Ellison in Philadelphia in January 1878.

The first regular meeting of the Club was held on March 26, 1878. The name selected for the new organization was "*The Riverton Rifle Club*". Dr. Lloyd Bickley was elected the first President; Mr. William Dreer, Vice-President; Mr. F. Perot Ogden, Secretary and Treasurer. Messrs. John Frishmuth, Henry Ellison and Charles Biddle were appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws. A governing committee was also elected consisting of Messrs. Henry Ellison, William Ellison, John Frishmuth, John Kinsley and Charles Biddle.

For the purposes of the Club a rifle range was leased on the property of Mr. William F. Dreer in Riverton. At the annual meeting in January of 1880, held at the Union League Club in Philadelphia, the membership stood at 68. The name of the club was changed to the "*Riverton Gun and Rifle Club of Philadelphia*". The total number of birds shot at on the Club grounds during the year 1879 was 7481; killed, 5337; missed, 2141.

Excluding rifle shooting, there were about 16,000 shots fired upon the grounds during the year. The Riverton Club was referred to in a newspaper article of July 6, 1880 as one of the four leading gun clubs of America.

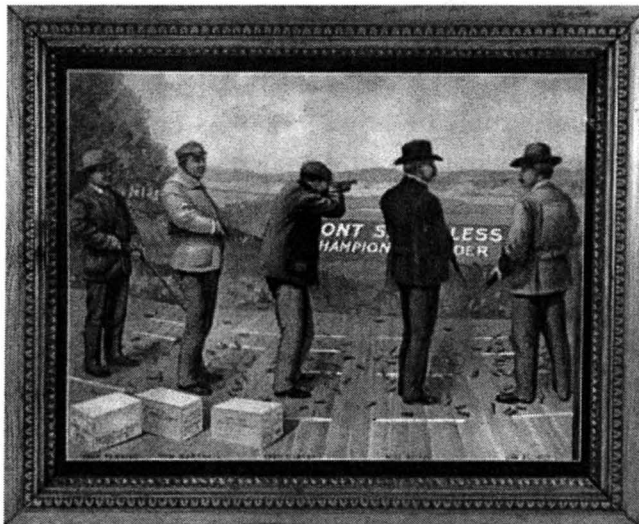
A newspaper article of April 12, 1882 describes the first 200-bird match ever shot on the Riverton grounds between Donald Swan of Baltimore and Charles Macalester of the Riverton Club. It took three hours and forty-five minutes to shoot the race. He relates, "The writer stood behind a tree outside the bounds with Mr. F. Sartori, and between us we killed 36 of the missed birds; and on one occasion, where a bird was missed with the first barrel and started straight for the tree, Mr. Sartori, thinking the bird had been killed, put his head out to look when the second barrel was shot at the bird and one single pellet went through Mr. Sartori's lower lip up against his teeth. We were at least 90 yards away."

The club was incorporated on May 26, 1891 in order to purchase land to build pigeon lofts. Land was subsequently bought from Mr. Price of Riverton and included over 30 acres. The property cost the club over \$30,000. October 17, 1891 was opening day of the new grounds on the Delaware River. Dr. Marcy won the opening event by shooting 11 birds straight in a tie-breaker.



A trophy medal issued by the Peters Cartridge Company in 1901 trapshooting tournaments.

Then and Now... Riverton Gun Club 1877 to 1906



DuPont Company smokeless powder poster circa 1899

By 1904, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had been introducing a bill for several years in the Legislature at Trenton known as the Pigeon Bill to prevent the shooting of pigeons.

At each session the Legislature did not take enough interest or think the matter of enough importance to do anything on the subject, but "by some underhand method, after the Legislature had ignored the Pigeon Bill and adjourned, Governor Murphy called a special session to put through the Canal Bill, and at the same time mentioned the Pigeon Bill, and by influence and threats the bill was finally put through and became a law, which prohibited any gun club shooting pigeons; in fact, the owner of pigeons cannot shoot them from his own barn!"

Clubs across the country relented to the demand to end the use of live pigeons as targets at trapshooting tournaments, the Interstate Association decided to hold the tenth and last Grand American Handicap tournament in 1902 at Kansas City, Missouri. The first live pigeon tournaments were held in Long Island, New York and the fourth through seventh were held in two New Jersey locations— Elkwood Park in Long Branch and Willard Park.

On September 30, 1904, the Riverton Gun Club decided to test the legality of the law and in a friendly suit designated Mr. R. F. Harned and Mr. Charles Davis to kill a bird so that a test case could be tried. The case came up on October 20, 1904 in Mt. Holly. The jury brought in a verdict against both defendants and Judge Gaskill imposed a fine of \$85 and costs upon each defendant. Appeals were taken to the Supreme Court and The Court of Errors and Appeals and the courts sustained the finding of the lower court in the spring of 1906.

A Special Meeting of the Riverton Gun Club was held at the Club House on July 18, 1906. The club decided to carry out the sale of the Club real estate and the Club property. All household effects were sold and the amount realized was in the neighborhood of \$700. The meeting was to have been followed by a clay pigeon shoot, but the shoot did not come off. "The feeling of the members seemed to be one of general depression and gloom, as it was the winding up of an organization where we for over 25 years had had many good times with the best of fellowship." During the 28 years, 1877 to 1905, there had been 348 members of the Club.



Riverton Gun Club Story

Contributed by Pat Brunker, Riverton, New Jersey. Pat is a board member and Vice President of the Historical Society of Riverton. She is also a member of the Riverton Porch Club. Pat Brunker is a frequent contributor to the Gaslight News.

A Message from the President of the Historical Society of Riverton

We hope that this special issue of the Gaslight News has been interesting and informative for both our members and those considering membership. While it was important for us to define who we are it is also crucial that we declare the intentions of the Historical Society of Riverton:



We ARE NOT looking to dictate what people can do with their homes. We ARE NOT a Riverton governing body. We are acting as concerned Riverton residents that want to see our homes preserved and maintained. Current borough zoning language is weak and should be strengthened. We do not want to see historic homes razed or to fall into such disrepair that the homes become uninhabitable.

We are looking to codify the zoning language to achieve this end. We are doing so in the daylight of our Borough Council Meetings and Planning Board meetings. We would appreciate your support in our continuing preservation efforts. We invite your opinions and suggestions.

Please share with us your ideas and concerns.

BOB BEDNAREK, PRESIDENT HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON
Box #112 Riverton, New Jersey or E-mail at rivertonhistory@usa.com

The **HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON APPRECIATES ITS MEMBERSHIP** and gratefully acknowledges the tireless efforts of: Bob Bednarek, Pat & Richard Bruner, Dan Campbell, Paul Daly, Michelle & Joseph Daniel, John Farr, Betty Hahle, Aggie and Bob Kennedy, Bert Landsman, Charlotte Lippincott, Pat Lynch, Rip Pellaton, Michael Robinson, Phyllis & Bryan Rodgers, Paul Schopp, Priscilla Taylor, Cindi Vee, Roy Vollmer, Nancy & Bill Washington, Elsie Waters, Gerald Weaber, and countless others whose steadfast support and volunteer efforts contribute to our success.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

INDIVIDUAL \$6.00
HUSBAND & Wife \$10.00
SENIOR CITIZEN \$4.00

2006 MEMBERSHIP FORM

BUSINESS PATRON \$25.00
SPONSOR \$50.00
LIFE MEMBER \$100.00

Name _____

Address _____

City and State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ e-mail _____

MEMBERSHIP DUES LISTED ABOVE ARE FOR THE 2006 PROGRAM YEAR.
PLEASE SEND YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON
TO PRISCILLA TAYLOR, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR. POST OFFICE BOX # 112 RIVERTON, NJ 08077

The Historical Society of Riverton's Open Letter to the Borough

March 6, 2006
Mayor Robert Martin and
Riverton Borough Council

Dear Mayor Martin and Members of Council,

I write to you concerning the impending purchase of Mrs. Anne Ruff's property at 4 Thomas Avenue by a real estate developer. It is the intent of the developer to purchase the property, demolish the house, and build two new houses on the site. The property contains two suitable building lots.

One of the major functions of the Historical Society of Riverton is to create an awareness of our heritage, to discover, restore and preserve local objects and landmarks. The house located at 4 Thomas Avenue is listed as a Contributing Dwelling on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. More than half of Riverton's homes are included in the Historic District. The original house was designed as a playhouse for one of the Fitler's daughters. The Fitler's were one of Riverton's founding families. In addition, the property contains the first in-ground swimming pool built in Riverton. Most recently, it has served as the longtime home of local author, artist and town treasure Anne (Bay) Ruff.

The Historical Society of Riverton would like to see the structure at 4 Thomas Avenue preserved and not demolished. The current Zoning Code that covers the demolition of historic properties is section 128-50 copied below:

§ 128-50. Demolition or moving of structure.

It also intended that demolition of an historically and/or architecturally significant structure or a portion thereof shall be discouraged by this chapter, as the loss would be a common loss to the Borough and the neighborhood. Moving of such a structure should be encouraged as an alternative to demolition if there is no other way to save the structure at its existing location.

All applications for full or partial demolition or moving of structures shall be referred to the Planning Board for consideration. In making its determination, the Planning Board shall use the criteria set forth in this chapter. If the Planning Board determines that demolition or moving is not appropriate, it may postpone issuance of the permit for a period of six months. During this period of time, the Planning Board may hold other hearings to determine if there is some other means to preserving the building. The Planning Board is empowered to work out with the owner feasible plans for preservation of structures where demolition or moving thereof would be a great loss to the public, the Borough, the streetscape or the neighborhood. In the event that it is shown that the owner has a

reasonable economic use of the property, and that the structure should be preserved on the basis of the standards set forth in this chapter, the Planning Board may deny the application for demolition.

It is weakly worded and provides for a maximum of a six-month delay while other alternatives to demolition are researched or studied. The Historical Society of Riverton believes the Zoning Codes should be strengthened so that all houses located within the Historic District can be preserved. We would like stronger language preventing the possibility of Contributing homes to the Historic District being demolished unless deemed to be uninhabitable. This will discourage future developers from tearing down the treasures and the very reasons we chose to make Riverton our home. The Historical Society will make suggestions to the Planning Board for revision of the above zoning law, based on examples in other nearby towns currently used for historic preservation.

It should be noted that the developer has approached the Historical Society of Riverton and has agreed to work with the Society. He is willing to donate the house in the hopes it can be moved to another location and used by the Society as a museum. Failing this, he has agreed to the possibility of either incorporating significant details from the house at 4 Thomas Avenue in the construction of the newly planned houses, or setting aside materials that could be incorporated in a future building project benefiting Riverton. This includes a possible future home for the Historical Society of Riverton.

In conclusion, it is not the Historical Society of Riverton's intention to divide the townspeople of Riverton or to dictate private property rights. We are not going to chain ourselves to the front door to block the bulldozer. We are reasonable people. We do believe that the very essence of Riverton is defined by its history and the structures that have made Riverton unique for over 150 years. Each time a historic structure is razed, a part of Riverton history is lost forever. Currently there are no zoning laws that can prevent the destruction of the jewels of Riverton. We urge you Mr. Mayor and Members of Council to strengthen our Zoning Laws so that the demolition of historic properties becomes impossible or exceedingly difficult and time consuming to undertake.

The Historical Society of Riverton and our members welcome the opportunity to assist you in your efforts to work towards this goal.

Robert J. Bednarek, President