



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
Riverton, New Jersey

Founded 1970

Incorporated 1978

April-May 2006

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"American History in Song"

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday May 8th, 2006 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program at the Porch Club at Fourth and Howard Streets. Join us for a special program of music, readings and historical insights featuring Richard Roden from the *Horizons Speakers Bureau* of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

Richard J. Roden returns to the PORCH CLUB stage for the second part of his musical program, "*American History in Song*". Last year Mr. Roden performed traditional early American songs. On May 8th Mr. Roden will pick up where he left off and sing traditional American songs from the frontier times through the World War I era.

Mr. Roden has performed with his guitar throughout the United States and many foreign countries. He is a retired New Jersey public school teacher and a resident of Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. "*American History in Song*" are musical works performed in a lyrical tenor voice accompanied by acoustic guitar. Each song will be introduced by Mr. Roden with historical commentary on the special place it holds in the lives of the American people.

"with a blend of music and narrative
Richard Roden plays out the panorama of
American history through folk songs that
mirror the events and temperament of the
people that formed our great nation from
frontier times to the era of WWI"



Inside This Issue

HSR MEMBERSHIP MESSAGE

JOIN THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND
HELP US TO PRESERVE RIVERTON

LIFE MEMBER RECOGNITION EVENT IN OCTOBER

HALLOWEEN BASH &
GHOST TOUR OF RIVERTON
BECOME A LIFE MEMBER

PORCH CLUB GARDEN TOUR

SATURDAY JUNE 3RD
EXHIBIT ON DREER'S NURSERY
SPONSORED BY THE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

WHO WE ARE

The HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON (HSR) was formed in 1970 to "create an awareness of our heritage, to discover, restore and preserve local objects and landmarks, and to continue to expand our knowledge of the history of the area."

Since 1970 we have stayed true to our mission. During the 1990's, a sustained effort was undertaken by Daniel Campbell, then President, and Betty Hahle, our Historian, with help from many others, to have sections of Riverton nominated as an historic district by the State of New Jersey for listing with the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES (NRHP). The Riverton historic district was successfully listed with the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES on March 5th, 1999.

The Riverton historic district roughly comprises the area west of Broad Street between Fulton Street and Thomas Avenue and the Delaware River. Three hundred and seventy-one 371 homes are listed as Contributing (older than 50 years and of historic and/or architectural significance) and 155 as Non-Contributing. There are also a few homes of historical significance on the east side of Broad Street. It is important that this information is readily available to the general public. You can now review and download the listing of historic district homes on the Historical Society web site. We are working to gain recognition of the historic district homes in borough zoning ordinances.

Riverton was described by the *New York Times* as one of the three remaining untouched Victorian towns in New Jersey. We believe that it is of the utmost importance for our beautiful town with its great history to retain its character, charm, and culture. The preservation of Riverton is important both for the sake of property values and for the historic architecture that is our children's legacy. There is much work still to be done. There are several historic structures in Riverton that are in danger of being lost in the near future due to apathy and neglect. The Society is working to strengthen the borough zoning laws so that buildings in the historic district are preserved and maintained. We also believe that the Riverton historic district should ultimately be expanded to include more of the homes on the east side of Broad Street.

A HOME FOR THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society has been offered two different buildings to serve as a headquarters. We also were recently offered a plot of land behind the old NuWay shopping center. Either building would need to be relocated to be used as the new home of the Historical Society. One building is inaccessible and the other is slated for demolition. Both Margaret Whitehead, noted preservation specialist, and Karl Nittinger of the New Jersey Historic Trust, recently visited Riverton and commented that each historic structure is worthy of preservation efforts. Moving a house also involves disconnecting and reconnecting electric, water and telephone lines, as well as cutting off tree branches to a height of twenty feet to allow the structure to move through borough streets. While there are grant monies available for the rehabilitation and maintenance of such a building, the Society does not own nor do we hold a long-term lease on a property in order to qualify for such grants. We have decided that relocating an existing structure is too expensive (thirty to forty thousand dollars for relocation of the structure itself plus the costs to clear the way, build foundations, obtain zoning site plans, etc.).

We are currently assessing the feasibility of other options to establish a home for the Historical Society. As a non-profit organization we are frustrated because we cannot afford to move either of these structures to a property we own. This is why we need your help.

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 Brunker, Dan Campbell, Paul Daly, Michelle & Joesph 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

HELP PRESERVE RIVERTON

JOIN THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Our plan is to widen our membership base to prepare the Society for the day when someone from Riverton donates a home or building for use as our headquarters and museum. The Historical Society of Riverton is a small 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization with a current membership of approximately two hundred dues paying members. Everyone living in the borough and those with an interest in Riverton history and architecture are encouraged to become a member in the Historical Society.

What are the benefits of Historical Society membership? We present five history programs every year that are free and open to the public in October, November, January, March and May. These programs are as educational as they are entertaining. Visit our web site to read about past programs.

The Historical Society maintains a fascinating collection of Riverton artifacts which include photographs, maps, books, clothing and objects sure to pique one's curiosity. Items in the archives are displayed in special exhibits, displayed during HSR membership meetings, and available for members to view by special appointment. Our paper-based materials, including photographs and newspaper articles, are stored in the Riverton Free Library and were recently catalogued by an archivist.

Your membership dollars and tax-deductible gifts support our public education programs. We sponsor historical displays during special events like the CANDLELIGHT HOUSE TOUR, the RIVERTON GARDEN TOUR, and this year's VICTORIAN DAY. Last year we sponsored a trolley tour of Riverton landmarks in support of the FREE LIBRARY OF RIVERTON. Each year we provide artifacts and help set up a room at SMITHVILLE MANSION for the Christmas tour and assist other historical societies with their displays.

The Society presents *Certificates of Recognition* to Riverton homeowners who have significantly restored their homes. We also provide historical plaques to homeowners who have researched and documented the historical significance of their homes. In recent years the Historical Society sponsored two antique appraisal and old house fairs.

The Society's main source of funding is derived from our very affordable membership dues and special gifts from members. Other sources of support include revenues from the sale of a book by local author, Bill Washington, on the history of Riverton architecture. We also sponsor the sale of Riverton flags, note cards, walking tours and the video "The Romance of Riverton". Members also receive a subscription to the "GASLIGHT NEWS" newsletter with four issues every year.

The Historical Society is looking for new members to help us to preserve what is good and unique about the town we all call home. Please consider becoming a member today. Society membership is one of the best bargains in town. We hope you will join us in our efforts to preserve Riverton.

A membership application is enclosed in this newsletter or you may visit our web site to join the Historical Society of Riverton at <http://www.gaslightnews.homestead.com>. We hope you join us for our HALLOWEEN BASH planned for October to honor life members of the Society.

We hope you will join the Historical Society of Riverton as a new member in May.

Gaslight News

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Robert Bednarek, President and Pat Brunner, Vice President

Nancy Washington, Secretary and Paul Daley, Treasurer and Gerald Weaber Jr., *Editor*

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO SPONSOR HALLOWEEN BASH

IN OCTOBER, THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON WILL HOLD A COSTUME COCKTAIL PARTY AT THE PORCH CLUB TO HONOR THE LIFE MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY. THE EVENT WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR A FEE, BUT HSR LIFE MEMBERS WILL BE ADMITTED FREE.

A HISTORICAL (HYSTERICAL?) **GHOST TOUR OF RIVERTON** WILL BE PART OF THE FESTIVITIES. MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW!

If you'd like information on becoming a Life Member
of the Historical Society of Riverton
please call Priscilla Taylor 856-786-3555.

WANTED: DREER'S NURSERY INFORMATION /ARTIFACTS

The HSR is participating in the PORCH CLUB'S GARDEN TOUR on Saturday, June 3. We're hosting an exhibit honoring DREER'S NURSERY and are looking for donated or loaned items for use in the display. The display is open to the public and will be set up in the Guild Room on the first floor of the EPISCOPAL CHURCH RECTORY IN RIVERTON.

In addition to Dreer's items, we're looking for wardian cases, plant stands, and other Victorian garden items. If you have any items that you'd like to temporarily loan the HSR, please contact Priscilla Taylor, 786-3555. Tickets for the Garden Tour may be purchased at the RIVERTON FREE LIBRARY, VICTORIAN THYMES, and THE NEW LEAF.

Our 2004 Garden Tour display, "**100 YEARS OF WEDDINGS**" was a huge success, and we hope that our Dreer's display will be equally enticing! Please call Priscilla Taylor at 786-3555 for information or to loan your DREER'S NURSERY items to the exhibit.