



# Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton  
Riverton, New Jersey

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## “Groups, Organizations, and Corporations of Early Riverton”

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday May 7th, 2007 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program in the Media Center of the Riverton School at Fifth and Howard Streets.

Mrs. Betty B. Hahle, Riverton's town historian, will give a talk on the **"Groups, Organizations, and Corporations of Early Riverton"**. Mrs. Hahle will talk about how the work of these local groups, organizations and corporations contributed to making Riverton a special community.

A life-long resident of Riverton, Betty Hahle became a member of the *Historical Society of Riverton* shortly after its inception in 1970. She was elected president a few years later and served for about twelve years. During that time she developed the format for the *Gaslight News*, the Historical Society's newsletter, and until 1992 was its writer and publisher. Her latest article is featured in this issue, **“Remembering Frances Rupert”** a Riverton woman who became one of the nation's foremost female athletes in the 1920s.

Mrs. Hahle initiated a project to microfilm a collection of local newspapers now available in the New Jersey State Library and the Burlington County library system.

*Mrs. Hahle was instrumental in obtaining and preserving the 1926 silent film, "The Romance of Riverton", an Edwin Cooper production for Riverton's Chamber of Commerce*



Betty B. Hahle, Riverton Town Historian

### Inside This Issue

**FRANCES RUPERT**  
RIVERTON TRACK STAR 1903-1974  
ARTICLE BY BETTY B. HAHLE,  
RIVERTON HISTORIAN

**HISTORY CORNER**  
JOSEPH A. CAMPBELL  
ARTICLE BY PAT BRUNKER

**THINGS GONE BY...**  
THE LAWN HOUSE RIVERTON  
FEATURE BY PAT BRUNKER

**SECOND ANNUAL  
VICTORIAN DAY FAIR**  
SATURDAY JUNE 2, 2007

# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

## HISTORY CORNER



When the *Calvary Presbyterian Church* in Riverton was built in 1879, construction costs exceeded the original projections. As a result, there was no money left to furnish the building. Four wealthy members came to the rescue, loaning the extra money. One of these was founding father Joseph A. Campbell. Campbell and the others later forgave the debt.

We know very little about Campbell. He was born around 1817. In 1872 he purchased 308 Main Street in Riverton where he lived with his wife Sarah and three daughters. The property formerly extended to beyond Church Lane, backing up to the property now owned by Calvary. The 1880 Census lists Campbell as a "canned goods manufacturer", and that both he and his parents were born in New Jersey.

Campbell began as a fruit merchant. In 1869, he and a partner formed a business in Camden that produced canned tomatoes, vegetables, jellies, soups, condiments, and minced meats, which were sold from horse drawn wagons. The firm's employees packaged each can, one at a time, by hand. The company was well known for its giant beefsteak tomatoes so large that one would fill an entire can. An 1894 issue of Riverton's *New Era* newspaper featured an advertisement for Joseph Roberts' store listing **Joseph Campbell Preserve Company** "stewed and strained tomatoes" in cans priced at 15 and 20 cents each.

The company's big break actually came a few years after Campbell had retired as president of the firm that still carried his name. In 1897 a young, local chemist named Dr. John T. Dorrance joined the staff. Dorrance invented a way of reducing the water, or *condensing* the soup, which lowered the costs for packaging, shipping, and storage. Condensed soup became an affordable convenience, and the rest of the story is history.

Documents from the archives of the Riverton Historical Society report that Campbell commuted daily by train from Riverton to his Camden canning factory until just a few days before his death in 1900 at age 83. He is buried in Woodlands Cemetery. ARTICLE BY PAT BRUNKER

### WHEN YOU VISIT WOODLANDS CEMETERY

Upon your visit to the *Woodlands Cemetery*, located at 4000 Woodland Avenue in Philadelphia, you will find the gravesites of many famous Americans including three Riverton businessman. The Woodlands is a national historic landmark and its mansion is noted as one of the architectural masterpieces of 18th-century America (c. 1787) The greenhouses at the Woodlands historic garden was where Henry A. Dreer worked in 1835. Later Dreer's seed and plant business in Riverton, New Jersey specialized in bedding plants, palms, ferns and hybrid water lilies.

The Woodlands Cemetery, a national historic landmark in Philadelphia holds the gravesites of three important Riverton businessman: **Joseph A. Campbell** (1817-1900), **Henry A. Dreer** (1818-1873) and architect **John Fraser** (1825-1906) designer of Christ Episcopal Church at Fourth and Main Streets in Riverton, New Jersey.

## REMEMBERING FRANCES RUPPERT

### FRANCES RUPPERT

Frances Ruppert, one of the nation's foremost female athletes in the 1920s, was inducted into the *Palmyra High School Athletics Hall of Fame* last February 23rd, 2007. This program was established in 1999 to recognize students whose athletic skills and contributions during their high school years brought honor and glory to their school and community. Frances met these requirements well.

Frances Ruppert was born in Riverton, New Jersey in the family home on Fulton Street, and attended Riverton Public School. She learned to swim in the Delaware River, only a few blocks from her home, and to dive from the Yacht Club pier.

In June 1918, Frances graduated from the Riverton Public School, and in the fall entered Palmyra High School. She was described as petite, shy, vivacious, with a ready smile—and curly auburn hair, which earned her the nickname of 'Reds'. She enjoyed all sports, and tried everything, but most of all, she liked to run. And she was fast.

Just a few years earlier high schools had begun to include athletic programs for boys and girls, and more recently there had been a wave promoting more opportunities for girls, who had less time and/or opportunities to enjoy sports. A clipping in the Ruppert Scrapbook said that Palmyra girls were caught up in the movement, and with tongue in cheek added "*girls are casting aside the croquet mallet for the baseball bat, the hoop skirt for the abbreviated costume of the athlete, and ball and jacks for basketball*".

Not everyone was pleased with the movement, but for the first time in history girls' sports competed on an equal basis (with standard allowances) with boys. Palmyra High School supported the trend, and made a large addition to their building for "a gym equipped with facilities for all sports, and lockers". (later known by students as '*the pit*').

### 1903-1974

At about this time Palmyra hosted a track meet for competing high school girls. Frances and a group of friends were watching the events. One suggested to her that she should enter the next event—surely, she would win. She replied that the idea was ridiculous, that she couldn't run in a track meet! Her friend, (whose identity has been lost over time), didn't give up, but countered with a bet, a box of chocolates, if she ran and won—she could be a champion!

She hesitated for a moment, and then walked over to the starting line and joined the contestants. And she won! That box of candy not only persuaded her to run that day, but kindled a taste for competition, and a prophesy fulfilled.

There was little opportunity for competition beyond the Burlington County track meets, held at the Fair grounds in Mt. Holly. But in 1921 the *National Athletic Association* (AAU) was organized and the following year the AAU added track for women at their meets. Frances entered as many meets as she could during her high school years, and readily outshone her competition. She was largely self-taught, with some guidance one year from the physical education teacher, and then from others who became interested in her.

The first big league competition Frances entered was the *College of Osteopathy*'s indoor track and field meet in Philadelphia in 1923. In spite of being unfamiliar with the standing start the girls used there, she won second place.

Her second try was at the Meadowbrook Athletic Club's meet, where her competitors were well know athletes and winners at major competitions. Frances won third, and made a promise to herself that day that she would someday beat all of them.

In 1908 Rodman Wanamaker initiated the Wanamaker-Millrose games, which became widely known as perhaps the most prestigious indoor track-and-field event in the world. Millrose was Mr. Wanamaker's country estate near Jenkintown, Pa. He also inaugurated the Wanamaker Mile, and reportedly began the tradition of playing The Star Spangled Banner at a sporting event.

## REMEMBERING FRANCES RUPPERT

Betty B. Hahle's article continued from the previous page.

Her third big meet was in the *Middle Atlantic District Championship*, held at the Armory in Philadelphia. There she won her first AAU title in the fifty yard dash.

The year 1923 was an extremely significant one for Frances Ruppert. She graduated from Palmyra High School that June, and would no longer be able to run in high school events. But what a record of athletic achievement she had left there. She had just won the AAU 50 yard championship, and had held the county 75 yard dash record for three years. She had played hockey, basketball and volleyball.

She was center halfback on the hockey team for three seasons, and was also a three letter track team member. Each year she had won a silver cup for winning the highest number of points in the Burlington County Meets, and had won nine medals plus many other trophies and certificates. She had established a relay team, called 'Palmyra Girl', and ran as its anchor. A scrapbook clipping called her "the PHS record-breaking athlete", and said that 'few sportsmen have not heard of Frances Ruppert, a Riverton girl'.

Frances ran as a free lance athlete for a short time and received letters from athletic clubs with invitations for her to join them. After considering each one, she settled on Meadowbrook, a club noted for speed. There, for the first time, she had professional coaching and support. She wanted to compete in many categories, but with advice, learned to concentrate on her best runs, sprints and dashes.

Sports followers wondered where she would fit into the *Meadowbrook Athletic Club* that already had winning track members: who would be displaced by a newcomer? Then plans were made for Meadowbrook to challenge the crack Canadian relay team, as a special feature of the *Millrose Games*, only weeks away. It would be held in Madison Square Gardens in New York. A new relay team was put together with Frances Ruppert as anchor. They won, setting a new record for the 440 yard course.

Some newspaper reports of this event referred to the team as the "Wanamaker girls". At that time it was common knowledge that the *Meadowbrook Athletic Club* was started by John Wanamaker for his employees, and their gym was within the store building, in Philadelphia. Originally for men, one female athlete was allowed to join, and others soon followed. By this time there were a hundred or more members, many of them consistent winners at area meets. Although employment at the store was no longer a requirement for joining Meadowbrook, Frances did work in Wanamaker's accounting department after graduating from high school. A clipping noted that she worked for her living as well as successfully trained and competed as an athlete.

In early 1924 Frances' title to the 100 yard sprint was challenged. The competition was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and it was an exciting event. The course was muddy, and Frances got off to a slow start. Half way around she was far behind the pack, and not looking good. At 75 yards she was still behind, though catching up a little. At 80 yards 'something happened', perhaps she realized that she was losing her title. She began to move up, and in the last ten yards she overcame the pack and crossed the line, a winner, and still *Women's Senior National Century* title holder.

Part two of Betty B. Hahle's article on Frances Ruppert will be featured in the next issue of the *Gaslight News* and on the Society's web site <http://www.gaslightnews.homestead.com>

Mrs. Betty B. Hahle is the past President of the *Historical Society of Riverton* and former editor of the *Gaslight News*. She long advocated the inclusion of Riverton on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and conducted research and contributed to the application which won approval in 1999. Mrs. Hahle was named Riverton Town Historian in 1995, and continues to help others seeking information about local history.

A life-long resident of Riverton, Mrs. Hahle attended local schools and Temple University Hospital School of Nursing in Philadelphia. As a Registered Nurse she worked in public health, and later in a residential treatment center for seriously disturbed children. Now retired, she still pursues her favorite hobby: learning and sharing more about Riverton's history.

## THINGS GONE BY...

### THE LAWN HOUSE RIVERTON, NEW JERSEY



Postcard image of the Lawn House during the winter.



Postcard image of the Lawn House during the summer.

The **Lawn House** existed before Riverton was founded in 1851. The structure was a brick farmhouse that became a favorite vacation spot for those who rented rooms during the summer. It was located on the corner of Bank Avenue and Penn Street. This location was within the boundary of the original land purchase for Riverton and it became the property of the founders through the entity known as the **Riverton Improvement Company**. During the lifetime of the Lawn House, it had numerous owners and was improved and enlarged several times. At its peak, it was a beautiful four-story hotel, with renowned dining and activity calendar for guests during each summer season. Its carriage house and out buildings were situated behind the hotel along Penn Street and extended to Second Street. When the hotel lost prominence, the out buildings were sold, and the hotel eventually deteriorated and was demolished. ‘THINGS GONE BY’ FEATURE BY PAT BRUNKER

The postcard images of the Lawn House Riverton, New Jersey are courtesy of the John McCormick Collection. Prints of old postcard images are available for purchase from John McCormick by writing [rivertonhistory@usa.com](mailto:rivertonhistory@usa.com) or from the **New Leaf Gift Shoppe and Tea Room** 606 Main Street Riverton.

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON  
Post Office Box # 112 Riverton, NJ 08077

## Gaslight News

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Robert Bednarek, President  
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Publicity; Gerald Weaber Jr., *Editor*

### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

856-786-6961 ext # 3 E-mail-  
[Rivertonhistory@usa.com](mailto:Rivertonhistory@usa.com) Web site  
[www.gaslightnews.homestead.com](http://www.gaslightnews.homestead.com)

## Victorian Day

Main Street Promenade of Events

**SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2007**

10:00am to 3:00pm

The Riverton Business & Civic Association and the Economic Development Committee host the **2nd Annual Riverton Victorian Day Fair.**

Last year's event drew thousands of visitors to the Main Street Promenade of Events.

This year an even greater turnout is expected with some 8,000 visitors enjoying the beauty and history of Riverton.

Visit the Historical Society of Riverton on Victorian Day as we host a group of Civil War reenactors from the New Jersey Civil War History Association.

*Celebrating the Charm & History of Riverton*

