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Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, inc.
Riverton, N.J. 08077

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Program:

Monday, October 1, 1984 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
"Forgotten Towns and Wild Flowers of Southern New Jersey"
William Hawkins

The opening program this season will be given by William Hawkins, well known Pine Barrens photographer. He will present slides and a talk about areas that were once thriving communities, but which time has obscured to the degree that they are hard to find today. Wild flowers to be found in these areas will also be shown.

Mr. Hawkins, who lives in Pemberton, is no stranger to those who enjoy programs at the Rancocas Nature Center.

Following is a schedule of meetings for the 1984/5 year, with programs listed by Lenore Probsting, Chairman: (all on Monday nights)
November 26, Fossil Collection from New Jersey: Ned Gilmore
January 14, "GoodWill Fashion Show" and covered dish supper, at CE Parish House
March 4, Thomas Edison's Ogdensburg Iron Mines: Karl Anderson
May 6, ANNUAL MEETING; "In the Barnegat Bay Tradition" (film)

Local Issues:

307 Bank Avenue: Home of William Canby Biddle, Founder, built in 1851; architect, Samuel Sloan. The loss of this building to expansion planned by the Baptist Home of South Jersey has been of much concern to Riverton home-owners, and to those interested in architectural history and preservation of the integrity of the significant group of villas on the Riverbank here. The situation is not yet completely resolved. Over the summer the Zoning Board, in compliance with instructions handed down when the Home appealed the local governing body's refusal of the variance they sought, prepared a group of "reasonable conditions" to be met with issuance of the variance over the traditional "home rule" right to make such decisions. These include such matters as parking, truck traffic, drainage and sewage facilities, lighting, buffer zones, ingress/egress provisions, deed restrictions to effectively prohibit any future expansion here, and design of the proposed expanded building. In addition, payment in lieu of lost taxes to the borough, offered initially by the Home at hearings so many months ago are spelled out, and specific efforts to be made to sell the house for relocation are included. Some of these conditions are subject to site plan revue. The next Zoning Board meeting will be Wednesday, September 12, at Riverton School, at which time further information may be available. *meeting postponed - check new date*

The Planning Board will meet the same night, in the room over the Fire House. These meetings are both open to the public, and residents should attend them. First-hand knowledge of what is going on within the borough is preferable to rumors, or to learning, too late, what has happened. Lengthy litigation, such as this one issue has caused, costs all of us: in money, which must ultimately come from taxes, in goodwill and harmony among neighbors, and in a heritage we value.

Morgan Cemetery:

Anyone entering, or riding past Morgan Cemetery today must be shocked at the neglect-

ed appearance of it. Sections of the fine wrought-iron fence have been knocked down; it is overgrown with weeds and in need of mowing; there is trash about, and vandalism is evident as more stones are overturned and broken glass is on gravesites. The roadway continues to wash out and to deteriorate.

Three years ago the TriBorough Women's Club asked us to join them in writing to the State Cemetery Board to protest similar conditions. Results were soon apparent, as mowing was done regularly, trimming/clearing begun, and stones reset, under local maintenance supervision. However, about a year ago local maintenance and supervision were terminated by the owner, and the condition today is worse than ever.

William Kane, owner since 1956, seems indifferent to the fact that under his ownership this cemetery has gone downhill; he appears unwilling to provide the perpetual care many lot owners have paid for, or to give up ownership to prospective buyers who have approached him.

The cemetery, dating back to 1887, is the resting place of many early residents who helped to shape the communities in which we live, and who built the houses that are now our homes. Some buried there died before the cemetery existed, as they were transferred from Riverton's C.E.Churchyard in 1890, when that land was sold. William F. Morgan, recognizing the need for a local cemetery, with Methodist's nearing capacity, purchased land from Josiah Wallace, known locally as "Paradise", and they, with Isaac Evaul, Dr. Alex Marcy, Dr. H.B.Hall, Daniel Horner, Joel Horner jr., and Hon. Edwin J. Osler, incorporated as The Palmyra Cemetery. It met the need very well, and was well designed. And for many years, was well kept.

What can YOU do? Mr. Kane lives in California. But something CAN be done. First, visit the cemetery yourself, so that you know firsthand how neglected it is. Second, write a letter demanding immediate action to correct this situation NOW, AND to assure no repetition of this neglectful and disgraceful condition after a short lapse of time. Send your letters to: Mr. William L. Ingling/ Dep't. of Banking/ N.J. Cemetery Board, CNO40/ Trenton, N.J. 08625. Letters from individuals, Organizations, Churches will all help.

Special Meetings:

Some months ago the Riverton Planning Board drafted a recommendation proposing an Historic District in Riverton. Before taking action on the recommendation, the Borough Council wants residents to understand the meaning and implications of such action. To this end, the Association for the Preservation of Riverton, and The Historical Society of Riverton are sponsoring an open public meeting on Friday, September 14, 7:30 p.m., at Sacred Heart Auditorium on 4th Street, between Linden and Thomas Avenues. The program will include short talks, slides, and a question-answer period. Scheduled speakers are: Martin J. Rosenblum, Restoration Architect, on Architectural Significance of Riverton; Joan Aiken, President, Haddonfield Preservation Society, on Why Historic Preservation?; Robert Ericson, Bordentown, on Preservation Success Story; Robert Perry, Dep't. of Environmental Protection, Trenton, on Tax Incentives; Guy Elzey, Haddonfield Real Estate Appraiser, on Effect on Property Values; and Betty Hahle, local resident and history buff, on Riverton's History.

APR has mailed invitations to the meeting to all residents, and a large attendance is anticipated. Historical Society members may want to review the article in the May-July 1984 Newsletter on "why/what" of Historic Districts. Be sure to attend.

A meeting significant to all TriBorough residents is one to be held at Cinnaminson's Community Center on Manor Road on Tuesday, September 25th, at 8 p.m. At this time the Wastewater Facilities Plan Study Group Public Hearing on their conclusions and recommendations for all 3 communities will be presented. Written copies are posted now in Clerks' Offices and Libraries. Taxpayers and any other interested persons should plan to attend.

Etc.....

..The Survey work continues to move forward, although slowly. Those who have worked on this project, over the years since it started, agree that their rewards in

recognition and appreciation of Riverton's architecture well compensate for the time they have given to the project.

- ...A reminder, that Historical Society Notepaper is still available, at \$3.50 per box.
- ...DUES...to renew your memberships, are now payable. At the bottom of the page is a tear-off form for your convenience. Dues are \$2.00 per year, per person (or \$1.00, if 65 or over) plus an assessment of \$1.00 per FAMILY, voted several years ago to help us meet increasing costs. New members are welcome at any time.
- ...Some activities that will be coming soon...

Fall Festival, at Smithville, Sept. 22/23, 10 to 5; Entertainment, booths, etc.
Medford Historical Society's Apple Festival at Kirby's Mill, Saturday Oct. 13
Riverton Library's House Tour, December 8th...more information later
And many more--check your County Bell and local Newspaper....

Yesterday...

Just a century ago a large turnout for the Quarterly meeting of the Society of Friends at Westfield heard addresses by Benjamin Brown, of N.C., and Edward Sharpless. The Hon. William Parry, who was president of the American Carp Culture Assn., went to League Island to oversee the draining of the carp pond at the Navy Yard by Navy Officers. Elections, then as now, filled much of the newspaper space. Citizens actively supported the candidate of their choice, with torch-light parades, fiery meetings (no pun intended), charges and counter-charges. Newspapers left no question about which candidate they supported, and one has the feeling that too much enthusiasm, rather than passivity, was typical of the day. One ardent Blain supporter bought 40 new brooms, with which to "sweep the country clean" in the anticipated victory parade--one wonders what he did with them, when Cleveland won. By the end of November election tales were finally dying down, and a comment was made that "it is a pity all parties can't come before the public with a platform without resorting to trickery, falsehoods, and deceit." A sentiment that could be echoed today....

Game was plentiful, in the marshes along the river and creek, and not only rail and reed birds were shot and served up on toast, but also robins. A columnist wrote that the public had thought of robins as game birds for 50 years, and the law ought to recognize them as such. Estel Compton said that conditions had caused the price of sugar to reach 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ a pound, and Royal Baking Powder was being advertised as "Absolutely Pure."

The children of the area had returned to school--200 days in a school year, then, and fewer holidays--mostly to 1-room schoolhouses, where all grades were taught by the same teacher. Palmyra's 1-story brick building on Cinnaminson Ave., built in 1865, had been enlarged, but did not yet have a second story. Cinnaminson had 3 schools, 1 each at Five Points, New Albany, and on Moorestown-Riverton Road--the latter having 2 rooms. Many of Riverton's children attended school at Westfield Friend's, but others went to the frame schoolhouse on 4th st. above Howard--still small, but boasting by then a cellar, heat, and a well. In all of them, boys and girls entered by separate doors--or in separate lines.

Riverton was growing. As yet, there was no fire company, no library, no Women's Club, and the Yacht Club's building was brand new. There were far fewer streets than there are today--and they were rutty, dirt roads, except where merchants had loads of crushed oyster shells spread over them in front of their shops. The population had not yet reached 600, and a fair percentage of that number were really "summer residents", although "summer" seems to have begun as early as April and lasted into October and sometimes even later. Houses were mainly along the River and close to it, along the railroad (on Broad, Railroad Ave., or 6th St--known by any of these names, as well as others, at different times), and Main St., from river to the Parry Plantation above 8th street. Howard, Fulton, and Cinnaminson (above the rr) had a growing number of homes, and scattered farm, tenant, and similar buildings were to be found throughout the area. The Lippincott extension had opened and in this period the greatest number of new homes were going up there.

Who built those homes? Some have been documented as designed by architects Samuel

Sloan, John Fraser, and Hewitt & Hewitt, each of whom is recognized as an outstanding architect of his time. Carpenters were drawn to an area where work was plentiful, as well as masons and others with specialized skills; construction methods had changed with the coming of the industrial age, and train transportation brought factory produced millwork to the area, widening the choice of materials and decorative features and reducing the overall time of construction. Israel Hullings and Joel Grant were two of the first carpenters in Riverton, and in all probability, worked on many of its earliest houses. They bought land here, built their own homes, and became early permanent residents of the little village. Samuel Rudderow, a century ago, had grown up here, become a carpenter whose skills soon led him to be identified as an architect-builder, and would build a number of the houses on Lippincott Ave.--at least some of them of his own design.

Samuel Sloan was employed by Riverton's ten founders to lay out the village and their own villas along the river. His biographer says that Riverton was the first planned community in America. Sloan himself was one of the leading Philadelphia-based architects of the middle 19th century. He began as a carpenter, but was recognized as an architect after commissions for the Delaware county courthouse and jail in 1849, and the Eastwick villa on Bartram's Gardens the following year. He drew many plans and wrote essays on building materials, adaptations, innovations, etc., and his pattern books, published by Lippincott co. in Philadelphia, and others, and the regular appearance of his designs in Godey's Lady's Book, influenced building throughout the country. Some consider his prolific writings to be his most enduring contribution to architecture. In 1868 he began the Architectural Revue and the American Builder's Revue--the first such journals to be published in America.

After the Civil War, which had slowed down building, and some other set-backs, Sloan left this area for N.Y., returned briefly, then moved south, to open an office in N.C. He died in that state in 1884, just a century ago.

John Fraser, born in Scotland and educated there, opened an office in Old Philadelphia in the same area as Riverton's founders' own businesses. Quite likely in this way he soon moved to Riverton with his wife, children, and widowed mother. He was one of the earliest members of Christ Episcopal Church, founded in 1855, and in 1866 he purchased 101 Main St., which was to be his home until 1903. During this time he spent several years as Acting Superintendent of Architecture for the Treasury, and also had an office in Washington D.C. He designed the beautiful CEChurch buildings on Fourth and Main Sts, as well as the earlier frame buildings since moved to other locations. He designed the first Presbyterian Church building, now gone, and it seems likely that he must have designed others here for his friends, although to date, no other documentation has been found. Fraser knew much tragedy, losing 5 of his 6 children, and died in 1906, not long after moving to Philadelphia with his wife and remaining daughter, Julie.

George Hewitt and his younger brother William, were other noted architects whose work may be found in Riverton. Educated in Burlington, where their parents taught at St. Mary's (and another brother also taught), they had been in partnership with Fraser, Furness, and others, before settling down to working together. George Hewitt purchased property in Riverton and later sold it--who built the houses there now is not documented. But other works are--the Spackman home at 205 Lippincott Ave., in 1889, and the original Country Club building, as well as others in that area, at the turn of the century.

Space does not permit more than these few words about those who have given Riverton some fine architectural examples from each period of its development. We sometimes forget, when a house is "showing its age" that a porch removed from a Victorian river-town resort leaves it somewhat undressed; that a pent roof of a style more than a century before the Victorian era, added now, may briefly satisfy a desire for a freshened-up appearance, but will in the long run make it just another building of no particular significance. We have a rich heritage; with it is a responsibility to do our best to preserve it for the future.