



Gaslight News

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

May - July 1985

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Program:

Monday, May 6, 1985

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

"In The Barnegat Bay Tradition"

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Film

Area residents knew and loved the Barnegat Bay areas long before so much of it became popular, crowded resorts. This short film from the State Library's Archives was shown on television about a year ago. Harry Shourds will be seen carving his beautiful decoys; sneakbox construction and use are shown; background music is by the Pinehawkers (remember Merce Ridgway's program here last year?), and in all, it is a delightful record of things unique, from the Barnegat Bay area.

Members and friends are invited to bring decoys, old postcards, pictures, or other memorabilia for display at this meeting.

During the week following our Society's program, the film will be shown to children in both Riverton and Westfield Friend's schools.

Elections:

This is also our Annual Meeting, at which time 4 members will be elected to serve 3-year terms on the Board of Directors. The following slate is presented by the Nominating Committee: Richard Wark, Janice Renn, John Parry, and Betty Hahle. (Committee members: Barbara Hayes, chairman; Sarah Guertler, Alice Myers) Liliane Reynolds and Harold Zayotti are not seeking reelection. Nominations may be made from the floor, if nominee is present and agrees to serve if elected, or, if absent, written agreement is presented. Following the General Membership meeting, the Board will hold its Reorganization meeting, at which time officers will be elected to serve 2-year terms, beginning June 1st (beginning new fiscal year).

Special Event:

"Friday Night at the Movies"

7:30 p.m.

Auditorium, Riverton School

May 31st, 1985

5th & Howard Sts.

Gather up family and friends, and join us for an old-time night at the movies. Two films will be shown: "Romance of Riverton", the silent black/white Chamber of Commerce film made ca. 1926, and a full length feature (with sound) from the time when movie-going reached its peak.

This is the Friday AFTER the legal Memorial Day week-end, so circle the date today. Donations at the door.

Update:

The Historical Society's April trip to Gemantown was a success in every way. It included a delicious buffet lunch in the (former) stables at Cliveden, where watercolors of Philadelphia, by Howard Watson, are on display, a tour of Cliveden with its outstanding examples of Philadelphia Chippendale and Federal furnishings, and displays of early toys, children's clothing, furniture, and other artifacts in 4 other buildings within the complex.

Gaslights: We are happy to see the gas street lamp back in service on Thomas Ave., above Midway. It was demolished by a car in January and had to be removed to be repaired.

A number of our members had expressed concern that it was gone for good when it was taken away and the hole filled in. We appreciate Public Service's maintenance of these lights. Thomas Ave., from Park to railroad, is the only section where they remain 3 to a block, staggered, as they once were throughout the town.

Plaques: Plaques for 3 houses certified by the Historical Society are currently being lettered, and should soon be ready for presentation to owners of the following buildings:

1. Riverton Free Library, 306 Main Street. Carpenter Gothic, frame, board and batten construction; built c. 1855 for Dr. A.A. Willits, but known locally as the Senat house, for bachelor George Senat whose home it was from 1863-1898. Purchased in 1907 from Senat heir by Mrs. Sarah Ogden, and presented in memory of her husband to the Library, following its incorporation, 1908.
2. Residence, 407 Thomas Ave., owner, Mrs. Walter E. Guertler. Masonry (stucco) house built 1881 by Eli W. Brown, stonemason and contractor/builder, in year of his marriage. Living room features fieldstone fireplace with rosewood mantle; addition on right side divided from original building line on inside with corbell archway. Half of open front porch enclosed 1978; part remaining open has block and spool railing. Some orig. wrought-iron fence remains along property line. Purchased by present owner from heirs of Eli Brown.

An April 1931 New Era ran a picture/article on the Browns, on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary, and gives date and circumstance of building of this house.

3. Residence, 212 Lippincott Ave. owner, Dr. Jay Lee Calesnick. Large frame Second Empire (Mansard roof) residence with porte cochere facing 4th St., built on 2 lots of "Lippincott Extension of village of Riverton" in 1884/5 for Dr. Harrison B. Hall. Property originally included the large barn facing Maple Lane, and lot on which #210 is now built (Dr. Hall had added a 3rd lot not long after original purchase). Dr. Hall's patients entered via the porte cochere entrance, where his offices and Library were located. House was apparently built soon after his marriage to Rebecca Peoples; not long after moving in, Dr. Hall took in another young doctor--Charles S. Mills--who remained in this home and office for some years before purchasing the Alfred Earnshaw home on Lippincott at 2nd St., where local residents remember his practice.

Dr. Hall was born in Bridgeton in 1851, the son of Dr. Ellis B and Hannah L. Hall. He studied at Hahnemann, and, with his widowed mother and 3 sisters, came to Riverton in the mid-1870's, and lived diagonally above this house. For a time a younger sister had a private school at the earlier site, since gone. Dr. Hall was active in civic affairs, serving on School Board, Borough Council, as an officer of local S & L and Water Co., and others. He was also a Mason. He died in March, 1901, from tetanus, which developed following injuries received in a "runaway accident". His Will provided for his widow and adopted son, and for the Estate to be given to Hahnemann Hospital to provide beds for the poor after Rebecca's death. Rebecca Hall died in Delaware in 1940, and the property was sold in 1944 to the Bigelow's, who later sold a portion of the gardens for a separate plat, and the remaining premises to the present owner. Dr. Hall, his wife, and his parents, are buried in Morgan Cemetery.

Morgan Cemetery:

No further word on legal action voted in December by NJ Cemetery Board against Mr. Kane, owner, has been received. An article recently appearing in the "Neighbors" section of "The Philadelphia Inquirer" summarized the situation well, and the reporter has expressed her intention to follow through on this until the situation is remedied.

307 Bank Ave.:

Trustees of the Baptist Home of South Jersey, inc., are going ahead with their building plans at this site, after losing their Certificate of Need, and are still trying to find someone interested in relocating the historic building on it. If unsuccessful in doing this, various materials will be salvaged before demolition.

New Era Project:

Calls continue to be received about issues found, which most often prove to be copies of, or parts of, special Anniversary issues that were most often saved. We appreciate

the interest and cooperation shown in this project, and ask once again that you look around carefully for any tucked-away-and-forgotten issues you might have, so that as many papers as possible may be filmed. There's always the possibility of a really great find!

Survey:

A few more houses have been completed, and the remaining b/w photographs taken (we hope!); thus, progress, although slow, continues.

Other Notes.....

Birthday: June 1985 marks the 15th Anniversary of the first meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton. Some original members are still active; one who immediately comes to mind is Harold Zayotti, whose generosity in taking care of our printing needs and his work in various capacities for the benefit of the organization has meant so much over the years. We regret that ill health prevents his continued active participation at this time, and offer our thanks, our encouragement, and our best wishes to him now.

Preservation Week is May 12-18, with the theme "The Action's Back on Main Street". Recent emphasis has been on upgrading and preserving business districts, and such rapidly disappearing landmarks as railroad stations, movie houses, fire houses, corner drug stores, etc. Why not support Preservation Week by visiting a Library and learning more about the architecture of these and other types of buildings? There are many books and magazines in both local and County Libraries for reference; Bookstores have good selections, too--a handy paperback, at \$7.95, is "What Style Is It?--A Guide to American Architecture."

Listings of Coming Events:

Burlington's Street Fair, May 4th

Palmyra Day, and also Mount Holly Day parade, May 18th

Friday Night at the Movies--May 31st (Historical Soc, at Riverton School)

APR's 3rd Annual Riverton Porch Party, Sunday, June 2

Reservations needed; call 829-4125; -2694; -8091; or 786-8422

Self-Guided Walking Tour of Early Riverton, Maps still available at the Library

..watch County Bell and local newspaper listings, for the many tours, trips, etc. that will be available all summer...

Acquisitions:

Blueprints for building and heating system, 1910 Riverton School; Deeds for properties purchased by Brd. of Ed.; cash-books 1925-8; papers pertaining to 1973 building addition; personal records from his term as Pres. Riverton School Board, from J. Edward Gilmore.

Xeroxed copy of 1866 meeting Riverton School Board, from earliest record book, and copy of 1909 pamphlet "The School Question" comparing enlargement of existing school house with plan for new building/location, from Mrs. Alice Blake, Riverton School.

Program, K of C activities: 25th Anniversary (1919-1944); Charity Ball, 1957; New Eras: Christmas 1909 and 11 Dec. 1931; 8 clippings, from William O. Myers, Jr., Edgewater Pk.

New Eras: April 1953; 10 March 1966; 5 May 1966; 22 June 1967; Palmyra News, 1 May 1953.

Stationery, Riverton Memorial Garrison #52; Fourth of July Programs: 1937, 1943, 1947, 1956, 1967, 1970; Program, 1933 Ball by Palmyra Bugle & Drum Corps; Program, 1951 Pal-River AA Baseball Team Dinner Dance; Souvenir program, Palmyra Old Home Week Celebration 1953, from Mrs. Alice Cook Costello, Burlington.

Copy #70, Riverton Gun Club History, 1877-1906, which had been given to Mrs. John Voss in 1982, now given by Father Salmon. Also, 2 issues of New Era (duplicates).

Xerox copy of orig. advertising folder for C.F. Woolston's Carriage Mfg. in Riverton, found in a 1909 New Era, courtesy of Mrs. Natalie McDougall, Burlington.

Xerox copies of papers re. proposed changes to riverbank (1933) and School (1934), courtesy of Mrs. Nancy Washington.

(Names of those who have loaned their copies of The New Era for Filming Project, and which will be returned when project is completed, will be published later)

Yesterday

When a little town is located on a river, many of its activities and much of its news relates to events on the water and its shores. Summertime brought picnics, boating, swimming (more often, "bathing"), celebrations, and these sometimes resulted in accidents. Newspapers carried hints for coping with summer's usual maladies (to keep a small boy from drowning, tie an eel around his ankle and keep it dry), news

of vacationers; summer desserts ("pineapple and wine: slice a pineapple, sprinkle with sugar, pour over it 2 or 3 glasses of white or red wine; place on ice and serve cold"); events elsewhere, but of interest locally because of connections through former residency, etc.

In 1881 Strawbridge & Clothier "gave their cash boys a picnic in the Park". The day was spent in games of various kinds, a trip on one of the Schuylkill steamers, dinner at Strawberry mansion, and a visit to the Zoological Gardens. This was a 4th of July celebration treat.

In 1882, in Riverton, John K. Boyer, a young man who had built a new home for his bride on Main St. only two years earlier, was drowned in July 4th. And a few days later the large stone stables of Charles Biddle burned. Men sleeping on the 2nd floor were awakened by smoke and heat, and saved a horse, carriages, and "other movable property", but of the building, only the walls remained. (It was later rebuilt, and today is a fine residence, on Carriage House Lane)

In 1884 Riverton held its first Memorial Day Parade. Bands from Camden joined the Riverton and Palmyra Bands, and they all marched together, under the direction of Captain Hall (not to be mistaken for Dr. Hall) all around Riverton, and then to Palmyra, "to decorate the graves of Palmyra Cemetery". (Morgan Cemetery)

In June of 1892, ground was broken for the Catholic Church building on Linden Ave. It was a frame building, and the cornerstone was laid in August. Eli Brown had the contract for the masonry work. (The Church was replaced in 1965 with present one)

By 1932 Riverton, along with every other community not only here but throughout the world, was struggling to recover from the effects of a long, serious Depression. Many new agencies, new programs, new ideas were emerging. A Regional Planning Federation for the TriState District had been set up, and had developed plans for the Delaware river within their district, one of which was for a "Delaware River Parkway" along its course.

In Riverton, which was included in the district, Mayor Killam Bennett set up a Citizen's Committee to determine what to do about our riverbank area. Surveys by the Federation's Field Secretary and Engineer found the existing road "public use of a private road" probably not intended for the kind of use the automobile had since created, and not being maintained by either owners or borough, each of whom felt the other should do that; they felt that it would be better to relocate the road closer to the river, and possibly to make a park (public) of the 3-lot vacant section at Linden Ave., right down to the river, thus discouraging thru-traffic--but then necessitating turning areas between that and Howard Streets. They felt the existing houses along the Bank were outmoded--encouraged improvements, modernization, etc.

The Committee reviewed various suggestions, and in 1933 came up with a proposal--contingent on receipt of Federal Aid--for improvement of the River Front, "one of our Borough's greatest assets", by reclaiming ground beyond the existing river wall, providing the population with greater access to the River Bank, and accomplishing a first step to the future Delaware River Parkway.

The proposal was for a new wall or bulkhead of concrete over sheet steel pilings, with lighthouse-style lamps on it at intervals and a railing; a 10 ft. strip of sod, then a 6 ft concrete walkway, then another 10 ft sodded area, and a 20 ft. roadway of oiled gravel. The accompanying artist's conception shows water lapping at the bulkhead (high tide?), massive trees by the proposed roadway, hiding the houses from public view.

Apparently the funding did not materialize, and the riverbank has remained open and lovely for all to enjoy. The "outmoded houses" are recognized as assets, and care and preservation can restore more of them to their 19th century splendor, fine examples of the architecture of*the first totally planned sub-division in the United States.

(* the statement of Henry Russell Hitchcock, considered the foremost authority on American Architecture, the "Dean" of Architectural Historians, that remains unchallenged today)

(bbh, ed.)