



Gaslight News

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

Nov. - Jan. 1986

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Programs:

Special--Friday Night Movie

Friday, November 22 - 8 p.m. - Riverton School Auditorium - donation, \$2

"TOP HAT" starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers; a 1930's classic.

Enjoy an evening's entertainment with the stars whose graceful dancing wove dreams for movie-goers a half-century ago. Can it really be that long ago?

'Boost-'n'pretzels, too....

Regular meeting and program:

Monday, November 25

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

"Privateers of the New Jersey Coast"

William Ward

Mr. Ward is the director of the Philadelphia Maritime Museum, and will give a talk about the pirates who sailed the New Jersey Coast between 1776 and 1812. He will also bring with him some artifacts from the museum. This will be a most interesting program, and one that members and their friends will not want to miss.

Covered-Dish meeting/program:

Monday, January 6, 1986

6:30 p.m.

Christ Episcopal Parish House

"Sherlock Holmes and Victorian Times"

Scott and Sherry Rose Bond

Mr. and Mrs. Bond are enthusiastic "Sherlockians", and are members of many Holmesian groups, including "The Baker Street Irregulars" and "The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes". Recall with them the exciting adventures of the amazing detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose own life gave him insight and ideas for his popular stories.

Please bring along a covered dish (to serve 6 to 8 persons) and any Sherlockian memorabilia you may have to share for the evening. And should you want to dress the part, that would be fun, too--remember, its always 1895 on Baker Street!

Update:

Filming Project:

The New Eras are catalogued and awaiting their trip to Trenton for filming, which is expected to be done at the end of this month. A total of 65 issues have been located (3 are not complete), as well as a Palmyra Record, several issues of The Palmyra News, and of the Cinnaminson Journal. There are also clippings from various issues of local newspapers. Because of the volume and cost to film the bound runs of the Palmyra News now at the Cinnaminson Branch Library, these will be filmed separately at a later date.

Following is a list of those who have contributed to this project: The Riverton Library collection; The Historical Society of Riverton collection; Mrs. Jo Metzger; Mrs. Lynn Metzger Pharo; Mrs. Ellen Layton; Mr. Joseph Yearly; Mr. Robert Latch;

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Gilmore; Mrs. J. K. Taylor; Mr. Lloyd Griscom; Mr. Harry Paul; Mrs. Alice Cook Costello; Mr. Harris Sacks; Mrs. Betty Hahle; Central Baptist Church archives; Mrs. Bobbi Centanni; Mrs. Cathy Daly; Dr. William Oliver.

Our thanks to these, and also to all those others who offered their copies of The New Era that proved to be duplicates of those already located, and apologies to anyone whose name may have been omitted here. Word regarding location and use of the completed microfilm will be included in the Feb-Apr newsletter. And your editor would like to add a personal thank-you to each and every person who has helped to make a long-time dream come true, to preserve these small-town weekly newspapers that are such a rich source of local history.

Morgan Cemetery:

Legal representatives for William Kane and The N.J. Cemetery Board appeared before Judge Wells in his court on November 1st, in which proper management of the cemetery was sought. A limited time was set for Kane to produce a verified agreement to sell the cemetery, and to make formal application, complete with all necessary documents to the Cemetery Board so that a new owner can sell a strip of land along Parry Avenue and thus raise funds to restore and maintain the burial grounds properly. The Board has the power to determine how much must be put into trust for such maintainance, and some control over how it will be spent. If conditions are not met within the stipulated time granted by Judge Wells, a receiver will be appointed by the court to manage the affairs of Morgan Cemetery.

Walking Tour:

The text of the walking tour has been completed and brought up to date, and estimates for printing it are being obtained now. Under consideration also is a project to make a tape for rental to individuals or groups taking the self-guided tour that will give additional information to that contained in the folder.

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Other notes:

Congratulations to Riverton School—to the entire teaching staff, to the Board of Education, to the children—and to the community, who joined together in a really outstanding history project centering on the 75th birthday of the building. If you missed the Open House on November 15th, you may yet have an opportunity to see the Time-Line and some of the high points of the celebration—tentatively scheduled is a time in March when an expanded version of the taped segment, plus video tapes made last week of the people attending, and some interviews, will be shown. Again, Congratulations!!!

Dues—if you have not yet renewed your membership, please do so now. Dues are \$2 per person each year, plus \$1 per family to help us meet rising printing/postage costs. Checks may be sent to treasurer John Parry, 803 Main St. Riverton, or brought to any meeting. New members are welcomed at any time.

Note paper—is once again available, at the same price of \$3.50 per box. It makes a nice gift, at Christmas or at any other time. Available at meetings, or call any Board member.

Dates—reminder: note the January meeting date now, as the next Gaslight News comes out in February—in time to tell you about the March meeting, but too late for January's. Don't miss a wintery evening warmed by good friends, good food, and a good program.

A special event will be scheduled in March, on the 17th, jointly with The Porch Club when Abraham Lincoln will visit Riverton. Keep the date open....

Many house tours will be listed during the coming holiday season, among them an Open House at Indian King Tavern, built 1750, and Greenfield Hall, 1841, from noon until 5 on Sunday, Dec. 15th, by the Haddonfield Preservation Society; and Mt. Holly's Candlelight tour will be on Dec. 14th, will include 21 buildings. Tickets are \$5, available at the old Court House. Inf. by calling 261-2490, Ida Nagy.

On Dec. 7th the N.J. Historical Commission will present awards to John T. Cunningham and Richard P. McCormick for their works ensuring continued scholarly study of N.J.

history, and will also hold a different kind of conference, focusing on researching old schoolhouses. Call 292-6062 for details and registration.

A correction—in last issue's Yesterday column a "typo" gave the date of construction of the Williams Wright building as 1913: it should have read 1923.

Yesterday:

Each season marks its arrival by special things—chores, activities, smells—many small things not thought about until suddenly they are there again. Some have passed with the years—the odor of burning leaves, the appearance of seasonal foods, since shipping and processing have given them to us on a year-around basis, etc. For a moment, pause perhaps while you rake some leaves, these last balmy Fall days, to look into another time, almost a century ago..... as found in reprinted articles from the Palmyra News, dating from 1888, and loaned by Lloyd Griscom for filming....

The coal cart was replacing the summer ice wagon, and the rattle of the iron chutes as they delivered coal into the bin in the basement made a comfortable sound. Storm doors were being put up, and it was time for stoves to be kept burning again. Chestnuts had been harvested, and shell barks would be the next ready to gather. Celery was appearing on the market, but the writer voiced the opinion that it needed more frost before it would be really tasty. In 1890 a storm with high tides covered the wharf in Riverton, and farmers anticipated a large crop of pumpkins. Five years later peppers were so scarce "they can't be had for love or money", and if found, brought 10¢ a dozen. Foliage "has been transformed to a profusion of autumnal tints...

November brought elections, and heated discussions, not always limited to verbal disagreements, especially at the Annual Town Meeting, where candidates were nominated and elected on the spot by voice votes. As the larger townships divided these meetings "grew tame", one man said, when West Palmyra separated from Palmyra. Then in 1900 a law changed the open meeting/vote followed since 1846 to voting by ballot, both for candidates and for money spent for township purposes. And just five years later, Palmyra used its first voting machine in an election.

Other issues were at stake, too; there was a growing feeling that a woman should be on the School Board, and in 1898 Mrs. E. C. Grice, president of The Porch Club, was elected. This, remember, was still in the open-vote period, and the reporter noted that in deference to a feeling by a large segment that a woman should serve, no one was nominated to oppose her, and so she was elected.

Women were campaigning for their right to vote, too, and in 1915 an amendment was voted down by only 50 votes, locally, and 50,500 state-wide. "A novelty this year was the presence of women watchers; they were treated with every courtesy by officials and voters." And in 1920 they had won their right, and flocked to the polls, outnumbering men who voted. In Riverton's 2nd district 267 women voted, and 85 men. In Palmyra's 2nd district every lady voting was presented with a bouquet!

Schools had problems with expanding populations. Palmyra, in 1889, had 5 teachers for 248 pupils, and a year later were urging residents to save coupons in a contest to win a piano for their school. Boys liked to hide in the woods instead of going to school, and residents asked the Board to hire a truant officer to stop this. Epidemics were expected—and took their toll every year. Do you remember seeing the contagious disease cards in windows along the way as you walked to school? Or having the yellow armband pinned around your sleeve when you were finally allowed outside for a breath of air after confinement for whooping cough? The advantage of the new single desks over shared seats was proven to residents when a little girl in 1898 had been at school in the morning, and in the afternoon came down with diphtheria—had she had a seatmate, that child, too, would have been ill, they said. It was in 1929 that Dr. Dean LeFavor offered a plan to immunize all of Palmyra's school children, at a cost of 17¢ each, and the Board approved it, thus moving in a direction that would in time free families from these diseases.

There were other problems—streets were dusty or rutted, and residents complained loudly. Houses were numbered—and it was confusing and a nuisance to have to know your home by a number. There were more streets—and Palmyra looked into purchasing

wooden street signs, available at 25¢ a hundred. There was a constant clamor for more sidewalks, and cement was by then preferred to brick. But when both sides of a street were done at the same time, the inconvenience aroused loud protests. Riverton had voted down a proposed sewage system in 1898, but soon had to make other plans when a law was passed forbidding emptying into the river after 1911. J. B. Watson's sign over his livery stable on 7th street was hanging over the street, and he was ordered to remove it. George Spayd was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the clock he had ordered to be placed in front of his new building on Broad Street in Palmyra. It had a 2-foot dial, guaranteed to be visible from any direction. Train service drew complaints from commuters who found that one train got them to Philadelphia a few minutes late, while the earlier scheduled one made them more than an hour too early. Their lateness cost them "a penny a minute" in wages. They moved. These were times when a working day was 10 hours long, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., with an hour off for lunch at noon. A laborer could earn from \$1 to \$3 a day.

On a lighter note, this was also a period of many available activities, through clubs, church-related activities, and parties of all sorts. Christmas holidays brought the young people home from school then, as they do today, to share in the festivities. In the 1880's, and for many years after that date, Euchre parties were popular. (Euchre is a card game for 2 or 4 players, using a deck of 32 cards; one side names trump, and to win, a side must take 3 or 5 tricks.) In 1890 a reception for Rev. and Mrs. Paul Houghtaling featured a new game called "TIDDLEY WINKS", which was enjoyed by all. In 1898 Mr. & Mrs. Freemont Miller gave their "annual honey party" during Christmas week, and Frank Willard and Lillie Earnshaw gave "a German" at the Lyceum. Mrs. Mathews gave a mistletoe party at her home.

In 1900 the Lyceum Choral Society of Riverton was organized, with 53 members. Walter Wilson was elected president, Harry Ruddick, VP; Mrs. E. B. Showell, corresponding sec.; and Milton Cowperthwait, treasurer. And Diamond Jack's Medicine Show at the Palmyra Grove caused some excitement when an actor knocked over a lantern and the tent caught fire.

On Christmas Day, 1888, Joe Roberts presented each of his customers with "a nice card", and baker Mailer gave out loaves of current bread. The M.E. church presented their organist, Katie Meginney, with a "handsome antique oak rocking chair, upholstered in plush, in appreciation for her faithful service, rendered gratis." And in 1908 John R. Parry sent 10 boxes of oranges from his plantation in Orlando, Fla., as Christmas gifts to his friends.

With winter came snow and ice, with their own special activities--and woes. Ice skating parties were popular, as were sleighing parties. But all too often an icy river would hold the sidewheelers captive, effectively halting traffic for hours, or even for several days at a time. On Christmas day, 1909, there was a 21-inch snowfall! Years later, in January of 1925, 65 citizens from Palmyra were summoned before the local JP (Fichter) for violating the recent snow-removal ordinance, and were fined \$5 plus costs apiece. and so it was, just yesterday.....

bbh, ed.

To all of our members and friends, a very Blessed and Happy Christmas Season.....
and a New Year enriched by greater Peace and Trust

