



# Gaslight News

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

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Programs:

Monday, November 23, 1987 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School  
"Riverton's Yesterdays" . . . . .

Nancy Bowker

Nancy Bowker grew up in Riverton (she's the daughter of Jim Sønder, local artist), and now lives in Cinnaminson. She is a free lance writer, and her articles about various historic places in Burlington County are published in the Burlington County Times. In her talk, Ms. Bowker plans to cover celebrations, transportation, recreation and businesses in Riverton in years past. It will be a very interesting program--come and bring along a friend.

Monday, January 11, 1988 8 p.m. 201 Fulton St.  
"Antiques" . . . . .

Thomas DeFusco

Antiques and collectables of the Victorian period are a specialty of Mr. DeFusco, a dealer and collector who lives in Medford Lakes, and is a personal friend of our program chairman, John Handfield. Please note the meeting place: the Handfields have invited our members to meet in their home for this program, which will add much to the evening's presentation. Members are invited to bring along a small object that they would like to learn something about, and to have appraised. Mr. DeFusco is particularly interested in china and glass. Note the date on your new calendar now, as this is the only notice of the meeting that you will receive, and it is a program that you won't want to miss.

The Riverbank...

Ugly red and black "no trespassing" signs now dot the once friendly and well manicured riverbank area, and property owners there continue their efforts to ban public use of the riverfront, a custom of 136 years that long ago made such use a public trust. Deeds specify that the area is to remain open for "shade and recreation", free from fences, sheds, or buildings or enclosures of any kind--terminology different from that of building line areas, which are designated as open for light and air. Deeds also specify easements for Bank Avenue, a public road--old deeds not giving the width--but newer ones mention a width of 50 feet. A hearing is scheduled for February.

The Board of Directors voted to send a letter supporting the Borough Council in its position, that while the property in question is privately owned, and may be designated as such, the long established public use and custom prohibits posting notices, or banning, the public from the riverbank. After announcement of the decision at the general meeting in October, a letter was sent to the Mayor and Borough Council members of Riverton.

Improper use of the area is a matter to be handled by the police; to ban all residents from enjoying a walk along the river, or from sitting on the banks to watch the boats, is to destroy a part of our heritage, a feature unique to Riverton and one of the assets of every property owner in the borough. Efforts continue to reach a peacable solution to the problem, without resorting to further litigation.

October a workshop was given by Preservation New Jersey Inc. at Ocean Grove, co-sponsored by the Ocean Grove Homeowners Assn. and Chamber of Commerce, Hospitality Div. It included "Styles Through the Years: A Guide to N.J. Architecture", by arch. historian Sandy Brown; "What's Historic Anyway?" by Constance Greiff, consultant and pres. of PNJ; and "Local Preservation Regulation: What it Means to the Property Owner, by preservation consultant Gail Hunton.

Slides of various styles of architecture found in N.J., and in particular, in central N.J., were shown, and various features pointed out and explained. Buildings of the Victorian period are of the romantic era, and not as formal as earlier styles. It was emphasized that porches are an important part of these styles, providing a public space that is at the same time, private, for the family's use. Architecturally, a porch ties the building to the ground--thus, to remove a porch from these buildings takes away an important part of the architectural picture.

Although definitions of what is historic may vary somewhat, recently the government definition has gone back to the 1966 definition, that it must be 50 or more years old, must have integrity of location and design, and the setting must look and feel like the period it signifies.

Historic Nomination gives a measure of protection from publicly funded or assisted or licensed activities, but does NOT interfere with what an individual owner may do. That is regulated ONLY by LOCAL ordinances.

The new fire-codes were discussed briefly. Apparently, there has been some concern and misunderstandings about them, particularly as they apply to recognized historic buildings, and further interpretations and adjustments will be forthcoming.

Preservation is realistic, and adaptive uses of buildings is important. Hopefully, when this is done, the important features that can't be duplicated today, are saved. The importance of corner buildings was noted--often these are commercial buildings, and serve to tie in adjoining residential areas, compatibly.

"Learn about your house--treat it with respect: it deserves it."

#### Miscellany...

If you missed our opening meeting, on Lighthouses, you missed a very interesting and informative one. Did you catch a recent article in the Phila. Inquirer about the Ambrose Light? It is (by now, was) the last manned lighthouse in N.J., off the N.Y. harbor. Keepers are being replaced with batteries and computers, which run automatic pilots. Now there are only 13 of the Coast Guard's 445 lighthouses that still have keepers on duty--and all of them are on the East Coast.

When you start your Holiday shopping, remember that the Historical Society's note paper is a welcome gift--\$3.50 a box, and available at the Library and Victorian Thymes.

The next production of the NCS Theater Co. will be the musical, "1776", given at the old Court House in Mt. Holly, on 4 week-ends beginning Nov 20 and 21st, at 8 p.m. Tickets at door, \$6.50 (\$5.50 sr cit).

Is there interest in having a workshop, similar to the one reviewed above, in Riverton? If so, let us know, and we can plan one for next year. It has been several years since our last Workshop here, and would like some indication of support in advance of planning one, since incidental costs, such as site and insurance, have gone up, and some assurance that we will cover costs is needed.

Yesterday...

One of the most constant things in life is change. Some changes are abrupt, some are so small that they are scarcely noticed at the time. However they come, they affect our space, our thoughts, our customs--every aspect of our lives.

In 1879-80 the country was emerging from a period of depression that followed the Civil War. In 1872 the corporation of the Riverton Improvement Co. ended, as planned, leaving the village of Riverton without its control and direction, and this resulted in additional changes. Local news items seemed to ride on an undercurrent of friction, with references to houses that consumed enough coal to heat a dozen smaller homes, resentment at a proposal that several small houses be replaced by a single large one, snide remarks about the "newly rich" who seemed to have acquired feelings of superiority at the same time. Improvements about town were no longer being made, and one reporter said "when the town was laid out, all classes of people were invited to come and settle here", and he mentioned manufacturere, mechanics, and laborers, all living together in harmony. Recently, many had been made to feel unwelcome, and the final straw seems to have been when some objected to enlarging the public school, calling it "a public nuisance". Others finally banded together and made their own thoughts heard....

Earlier in the year, though, other changes were mentioned: in April the Mt. Holly Herald said "the face of the country around Riverton has undergone a great change. A few years since the range of hills on the east of the town were covered with a dense woods. Now it is nearly all cleared off and the ground put under cultivation. Indeed, the whole township of Cinnaminson may be regarded as a vast vegetable garden"...

Business was picking up slowly. The Catholics secured a lot in the center of town to erect a church. "With the public school on one side and the church of the other denomination in front of them, no doubt it will be a musical time when they all get in operation, the jingle of cast iron and metal bells will make a strange kind of music." This was the 4th religious organization in town, and the item continued, "we certainly ought to be a righteous people if religions will do any good. We have the smooth, easy going Episcopalians, who have had a church here for 15 years, but the morals of the community have not improved any in that time. Perhaps the united efforts of the recent organizations may accomplish something, as we now have the fiery Presbyterian, the energetic Catholic and a small organization of that peculiar class of people that never swear except it is by the good yea and nay."

The desecration of the Sabbath by playing quoits, base ball, and other sports was deplored, along with delivery of Sunday newspapers and business at the cigar store--whose proprietor rang the bell for Episcopal services!

The Presbyterian church was dedicated on July 2, 1879. Although the building had been completed for some time, the interior and furnishings had caused some delay. Pews were of solid walnut, "being very neat and comfortable." The pulpit, tables and chairs were also of walnut, and were designed especially for the church by John Fraser, architect, who had designed the building. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Rev. A.A. Willits, of Philadelphia--who, Gaslight News readers will recall as the original owner of the building now housing the Library, and a very popular speaker, in his day. The stained glass windows were described as being of superior quality, and one, a triple paneled window dedicated to the Fraser children, was relocated in the vestibule of the present church. Some original pews were also transferred to the present ediface, along with a pair of chairs on the pulpit.

A few days later, on July 6th, the Catholic church was dedicated, with Bishop Corregin of Newark officiating. Confirmation was held in the afternoon. The bell, a "large one of bell metal and presented by a lady of

the town" had been blessed the week previously. A tower to house the bell was still to be erected.

Football was becoming a popular sport with the boys, but base ball was supported by everyone. Shooting was also popular--"thousands of pigeons" and other birds were shot each week. Plans were being made to add cock- and dog-fights to available sports. Bicycling was gaining in popularity. In fact, "a dozen or more may be seen any day, moving about town with great speed. They dart along with all the ease and grace of a swallow sailing through the air; the smooth, gravelled foot walks around the village are a fine road for them, and as their wheels are covered with rubber, they make no noise." However, a warning was issued that if, in the future their numbers increased, or if bicycles were to "get into the hands of reckless people", there could be serious problems; all wheeled vehicles should be relegated to the centers of roads, whether propelled by man or beast.

Runaway horses caused problems, destroying fences and vehicles; and chickens, most of which roamed the streets freely, would, the following Spring suffer great losses from an epidemic of chicken cholera.

The wharf was being repaired again--decayed logs replaced, and an iron bridge took the place of the wooden walk over the sluiceway. A boat club house had been planned for the wharf, but objections by a group referred to as "the injunction grannies" caused the plan to be abandoned. Although the wharf was closed for business, passengers could reach the boats by "walking the plank."

Changes via expansion came when Edward Lippincott opened a section of his farm for development, and by September several large homes had been erected on Lippincott Ave. Another section was to be opened with lots sized and priced for "persons of moderate means".

Early in 1880 the tax collector had his hands full--some people became abusive when he appeared to collect sums due, which seem unbelievably small, today--usually, under \$2. The feeling was growing that those who would not pay up should be "deprived the right of suffrage", that those who refused to do their duty should not have a part in making laws for those citizens who were loyal.

Riverton's canning factory turned out 45,000 to 50,000 cans a day, and soon needed a bigger building. Twenty years later the brick factory by the railroad stood vacant, and was demolished.

Railroad employees were getting eye exams for the first time. A high rate of color blindness was found among the engineers, and firemen, after working in the glare of the furnace, could hardly see a light at 100 yds.

Judge Wm. Parry, pomologist, published "a neat little pamphlet of 20 pages" on 40 years of pear growing, with steel engraving of the author on the front, which would be mailed to interested persons for 15c.

In Palmyra, Wm. F. Morgan sold a piece of his farm to the PRR for a depot, then laid out a town plot adjacent to it. He named the boundary streets Cinnaminson Ave., for the old Indian name, and Morgan, Wallace, and Toy Ave., to preserve the names of the oldest families in the vicinity.

Another enterprising Palmyrian, Abe Springer, visited Philadelphia, where he saw a magician locked in a box from which he escaped in a minute. Abe examined the box, discovered its secret, and built one himself. After that, for a dime he would perform the trick "like an expert", in his store.

Riverton's school was finally enlarged, after meetings, arguments, petitions an injunction, and a new school board. A disgruntled reporter suggested the extra space be used "for a lunatic asylum for the accommodation of the aforesaid 26"--that is, the group who signed the petition circulated by "strong-minded women in the upper part of town" regarding the management of education of the children.

(bbh,ed)

BLESSINGS...PEACE...JOY...throughout the coming Holidays...

