



The 9th Annual Historic Riverton Criterium returns June 9, 2019

# Gaslight News



[rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com)

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Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

In a variation of the 1950s TV show...



...that fulfilled requests from viewers, we offer this not-so-condensed history of the Collins Building—a cornerstone of Riverton's business district for over a century. See Broad & Main on Google Maps [here](#). Add your recollections, scans, and photos to our online chronicle of Riverton history.



Riverton Fire Co. staged a mock fire at the Collins Bldg. for the 1926 filming of *The Romance of Riverton*. See the 3-minute clip here on [YouTube](#).

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## Shops come & go in century-old Collins Bldg.

Since 1914, the Collins Building has housed dozens of businesses and served generations



Collins Building, March 2019 PHOTO CREDIT JMC

Two inquiries from folks regarding businesses located in that strip of five storefronts in the big brick building on Main Street, across from the War Memorial, prompted this dive into the history of the Collins Building.

Jason Cioci, owner of Riverton Health & Fitness, and Shila Scarlet Griffith, a designer who is setting up shop in #3 where Gypsy Fish was, each asked about the history of the building in which his business operates. Shortly after, Jamie Kelly asked if we had a photo of Barbara Drumheiser's charming Victorian Thymes gift shop (we didn't) that once occupied two spaces between Cathy's Catering and Guido's.

### But which Collins Building?

By 1905, the merchant area along Main and Broad Streets expanded to include the J. T. Evans Coal Yard at the corner of Main and the railroad tracks, and the Thomas Bros. Lumber and Coal Yard which was located in a plot behind what will later become the site for the Collins Building.

Joseph S. Collins purchased the William M. Thomas Coal Yard in 1909,

expanding the site into a lumber and hardware business. (Collins also owned lumberyards in Moorestown, Maple Shade, Merchantville, and Riverside, along with the one in Riverton.)

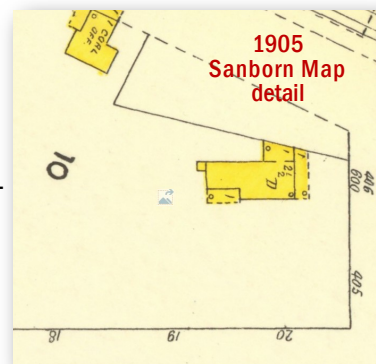


The New Era, December 30, 1910, p2

### Building on old Thomas Bros. property

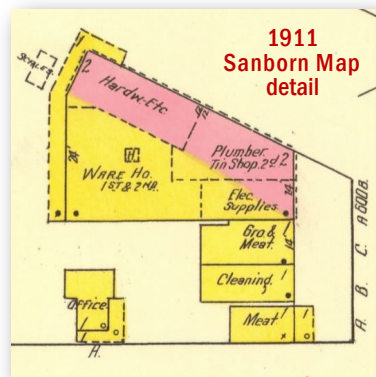
Sanborn Insurance Maps of the era for Riverton show the stages of development that led to the construction of the current form of the Collins Building. But they don't explain why.

In 1905, the Thomas Brothers complex included a 2½-story wood-framed building that occupied an area slightly larger than just one of today's storefronts in the Collins Building.



### Collins Building

By 1911, a brick section of a much larger building housed hardware, plumbing, and tin shops, and the remaining wood-framed structure held shops for electric supplies, groceries, cleaning, and meat.



Clearly, the 1911 map shows a wood-frame and brick structure that replaced a much smaller wooden building on the former Thomas Bros. property. Whether it was because of a loss or the building was due for replacement and Joseph Collins simply just seized upon a business opportunity, we can only guess. In any event, he added significantly to the commercial

See **COLLINS BLDG.** on 2



②

## THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

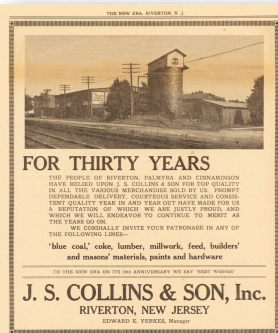
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Post Office Box # 112  
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E-mail/Web:  
[rivertonhistory@gmail.com](mailto:rivertonhistory@gmail.com)  
[rivertonhistory.com/](http://rivertonhistory.com/)

The J.S. Collins & Son  
lumberyard, hardware,  
and coal complex was  
once a much larger  
presence at S. Broad &  
Main in Riverton.



Collins ad, *The New Era*,  
Nov. 2, 1939



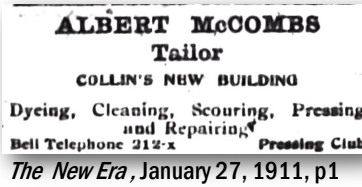
Collins metal sign,  
eBay auction 2015  
(No, we did not bid for  
\$1500. Do you know  
who did?)



### COLLINS BLDG. from 1

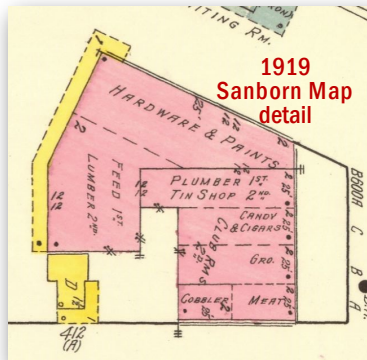
presence on Main Street when he put up the  
much larger semi-brick structure as shown in  
the 1911 map.

In this 1911  
newspaper ad,  
tailor Albert  
McCombs  
offered clean-  
ing, repairs, and more from his shop in  
“COLLIN’S [sic] NEW BUILDING.” Truth be  
told, he was still referring to the “new” building  
in November 1912. His place must be second  
from the left in the 1911 Sanborn Map.



### Collins Building v2.0

The 1919 Sanborn Insurance Map delineates a  
larger all-brick structure with several store-  
fronts. First-  
floor markets  
for meat, gro-  
ceries, candy  
& cigars, hard-  
ware & paints,  
plumbing, and  
tin faced Main  
Street. The  
back of the  
building held  
stores of lumber  
and animal feed.  
Club rooms  
on the second floor  
overlook Main Street.



Except for some changes to front entrances,  
this is essentially the layout of the Collins  
Building as it stands today. ([View larger  
versions of maps in this PDF on our website.](#))

### Fire companies contain loss

Numerous contemporary periodicals pub-  
lished accounts of the November 27, 1914  
blaze that destroyed the Collins Building and  
endangered other nearby homes and businesses.

Since the fire occurred in late November 1914,  
the brick Collins Building shown in the 1919  
map was likely built and completed some time  
after 1914, despite the 1914 construction date  
stated in Riverton’s 1999 Historic District  
Application (RHDA). ([5MB Available online](#))

An account in the November 27, 1914  
*Philadelphia Inquirer* reads:

*A \$50,000 blaze early today completely  
destroyed the two-story Collins Building.  
Harry C. Worrell, plumber; John J. Adolph,*

*news dealer; Albert  
McCombs, Tailor,  
and Cramer &  
Rogers, grocery  
store. The grocery  
store was in the  
hands of a receiv-  
er, but their  
“heavily stocked  
goods” were de-  
stroyed. The Col-  
lins lumber yards,  
in the rear of the  
burned building,  
was saved. The  
origin of the fire is unknown.”*

## FIRE NOW SWEEPING RIVERTON

Business Section Wiped  
Out Already And  
Flames Spread

Entire article available  
[Trenton Evening Times](#),  
November 27, 1914, p1

Fire companies from Riverton, Palmyra, River-  
side, and Moorestown responded. A line in  
the *Trenton Evening Times* that states, “The  
buildings are all frame, and the flames spread  
rapidly,” might confirm that the building de-  
picted in the 1911 map (v2.0) is indeed the  
building that went up in smoke in 1914.

### What was the new, new Collins Bldg. like?



Main Street, Riverton, NJ c1915

The RHDA document very straightforwardly  
describes the Collins Building in architectural  
terms and provides a short history:

*Description: High two story brick commer-  
cial block, stone foundation, Italianate styling  
with decorative brick banding, window sur-  
rounds, diamond shaped accents in parapet,  
and brick banding surrounding stucco sign  
panels under grouped windows (2 and 3  
together - all replacement vinyl 1/1 sash.)  
Arc-headed single windows at left and rear  
elevations. Pent windows across front facade  
over plate glass store fronts - one continuous  
roof at center shops, separate pents at end  
shops on brackets. Cast stone coping on para-  
pet, horizontal at center on each façade and*

CONTINUED →



*slightly arched at corners, small castlions [sic]. Various additional entrances at right side and rear.*

*History: Brick Collins building, architect J. Fletcher Street, contrator [sic] F.L. Lowden, replaced a smaller frame building and yards that had burned in December 1910. A covered wood ramp from Harrison side to the railroad side deteriorated over the years, and is now gone. Present owners have made changes, particularly to the rear.*

Historian Paul W. Schopp offers two corrections to what may be typos. Although many sources confirm the 1914 fire, our research found no source that mentions a 1910 fire. The contractor must instead be Louis F. Lowden, *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 29, n. 51 (12/23/1914), and *not* F.L. Lowden.

If walls could talk, the Collins Building would have countless stories to tell about the various activities and business enterprises it has harbored there through the years. But that would take a few more pages.

In a February web post called [A little help...](#) we asked for recollections and photos about some of them. Mary Lou's Shop sure left an indelible impression on some folks! Also mentioned were various delis, Mr. Bill's Bicycle Shop,

Watkin's Furniture, and the Victorian Thymes. ([Readers' comments](#) are still open if you care to add yours.)



An older generation might recall [Karl Frank's Meat Store](#), [Hullings & Son Plumbing and Heating](#), [The Jersey Fruit Cooperative](#), [Mattis Meat Market](#), [The Christian Science Reading Room](#), and the firm that started it all, [J.S. Collins & Son, Inc.](#)—at far right in the image above.

This subject of businesses back in the day may well bear revisiting in another issue if we can get a little more help.

- PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN & JOHN MCCORMICK

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by Paul W. Schopp and Roger Prichard, as well as the previous research of Betty Hahle and Keith Betten.



## History repeats itself as the HRCriterium returns June 9

In a recent Facebook post we posed three questions to our 713 followers about the **Historic Riverton Criterium**:

- 1.) Is it a sporting event?
- 2.) Or is an a treasured Riverton tradition?
- 3.) Or is it an incredibly generous philanthropic enterprise that has awarded thousands of dollars in grants to area institutions and causes since its inception?

**ANSWER: YESSSS. All of the above.**

Race promoter **Carlos Rogers** tells us that the race serves two primary functions: To promote grassroots bicycle racing, and to raise funds for various local community organizations.

In 2012, right before the 2nd Annual HRC, I interviewed Carlos, came away a fan, and wrote in the GN:

*Years from now, the Riverton Criterium will be the history that people recall. In the best tradition of the Ogdens, Grices, Biddles, Flanagans, Wrights and others who strove to improve Riverton during its early days, Mr. Rogers' meticulous attention to detail, passion for the sport, and selfless desire to give back to the town and its organizations have added a new chapter to Riverton's history ....*



Carlos Rogers, race promoter, philanthropist, 2012  
PHOTO CREDIT: JMc

The Society enthusiastically backs this awesome cycling event and urges you to [visit our website](#) to see how Carlos' effort to revive Riverton's century-old bicycling legacy resulted in a bonanza for community charities and organizations.

Today, as we look forward to Carlos' 9th Annual Historic Riverton Criterium, the Society heartily congratulates him for truly making history and thanks him for his generosity.

Carlos' philanthropy has directly distributed over \$35,000 to various area organizations, and we are grateful and humbled to be included as a recipient this year.

Find out more at the new and updated Historic Riverton Criterium website at <https://rivertoncriterium.com> and like the [HRC Facebook page](#) to show your support.

Want to *really* show your support? Embrace this new 21st century Riverton tradition and throw your support behind it with [your sponsorship](#) so that it may continue.

Next month, look for our **Special Gaslight News Issue** dedicated to the **Historic Riverton Criterium**. - JMc



### HISTORIC RIVERTON CRITERIUM

SUNDAY, JUNE 9th 2019  
BENEFITTING  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
RIVERTON



## S.R.O. at RFL for Campbell's Soup presentation

Hardy history buffs and lovers of Campbell's Soup nostalgia sat in chairs, sat on the floor, and stood (some with obstructed views), to hear Marisa Bozarth as she chronicled the history and development of Campbell's Soup Company on March 12 at Riverton Library.



After the slide show, the meeting carried over next door to the home of Jan and Dennis DeVries, the former home of Joseph Campbell.

Our hosts doubled-down on the evening's refrain and carried out the Campbell's Soup motif by hanging a portrait of the home's early owner in the kitchen area next to a framed print of a soup can and an illustration of a Campbell's Kid.

Refreshments there fueled animated conversations about the show and prompted a few people in the group to share memories of Campbell's.

Bill Hall once worked on Taylor's Farm and delivered tomatoes to the Camden plant. Bill McDermott worked in the Camden plant.



mugs that depict the Joseph Campbell home.

Parts of this column excerpted from a longer web post on [rivertonhistory.com](http://rivertonhistory.com)

- JMC



The Society is thankful for those who renewed membership for 2019, and for these new members...

- ◆ Dr. Nicole Belolan & Tyler Putman, Riverton
- ◆ Christopher Ford, Greensboro, NC
- ◆ Jerry Mooney, Cinnaminson
- ◆ Jim Nachman, Cinnaminson

... and we acknowledge the generosity of these cash donors...

- ◆ Keith & Memo Betten
- ◆ C. Miller & Joan Biddle
- ◆ William Brown
- ◆ Pat & Richard Brunker
- ◆ Janet & Dennis DeVries
- ◆ Lynn Johnson
- ◆ John & Terri Laverty
- ◆ Eleanor Paladino

... and we acknowledge the generosity of these folks who gave the following items for our museum...

- ◆ Margaret Jones Perritt of Boothbay Harbor, ME found us on the web and generously donated a lady's silver chatelaine purse frame that belonged to Hannah Biddle Frishmuth of Riverton.
- ◆ Jim Nachman, a former Riverton resident now living in Cinnaminson, donated scale models of Riverton's long-gone railroad station and the Collins Building.



We heartily welcome the support of four more households of the Society's efforts. However, we regret that 18 families chose not to renew their sponsorship for 2019. This translates to a net loss in membership numbers which now stands at 97—an unsustainable low level of backing from the very community for which we serve.

Please help us keep Riverton history alive in 2020 and beyond.

- JMC



**WELCOME**  
to our  
**NEW**  
**MEMBERS**

## Arbor Day 2019, RPS students plant a tree and mark sacrifice of WWI soldiers

It can be said that history is the story of past events. Without retelling the story, we can forget. The celebration of Arbor Day, 2019 is a special day to remember and retell.

The children at Riverton Public School will mark Arbor Day on April 18, 2019, with projects and songs and the planting of a tree at 211 Howard Avenue with Mr. Barry Emens, Shade Tree Commission Chair.

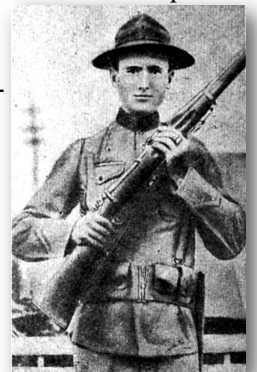
This ceremony will reenact and remember an event, 100 years to the day, when the children of Riverton Public School honored the service of [six Riverton servicemen](#) who died in World War I with the planting of six London Plane trees along 5th St. and Cinnaminson St. on [April 18, 1919](#):



- ★ James A Bradley
- ★ Charles Kelley
- ★ Walter M. Kennedy
- ★ Raymond T. McGivney
- ★ Raymond Pratt
- ★ Thomas R. Reath

HSR President, Bill Brown will present a plaque to Principal Mary Ellen Eck in honor of those servicemen so that their service and sacrifice will not be forgotten.

See much more about these men in "Riverton's Gold Star Boys of World War I" in the [Jan. 2017 Gaslight News](#).



Walter M. Kennedy, KIA, age 26, October 10, 1918, while helping to blow up a German machine gun nest

- MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN

