



GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

Nov - Jan 1981-2

No. 2

Programs:

Monday, November 30, 1981 8 p.m. Porch Club, 4th & Howard
"Turn-of-the-Century Musicale" The Porch Club of Riverton Chorus

Come and enjoy an evening of delightful music, under the direction of Ruth Schweizer, with songs and costumes popular a few years before and after the turn of the century, and comments and anecdotes about Riverton then.

This program will be held at the Porch Club, instead of at our usual meeting-place in Riverton School. The club was founded as a reading club, back in 1890, when a small group of ladies began to meet regularly on each other's porches--hence the name--and is the 7th oldest Women's Club in New Jersey. Their clubhouse was completed in 1909, and was built to permit their meetings on a pleasant porch to continue. As they grew, the porch was enclosed and a stage was added, but it has otherwise remained much the same.

We are most fortunate in having the Porch Club Chorus give their program for our membership, and deeply appreciate their Board's letting us use their Clubhouse for this meeting.

Monday, January 11, 1982 8 p.m. Music Room, Riverton School
"Family Treasures" Historical Society Members

Program Chairmen Donna Tarkington and Lenore Probsting will moderate a program in which Historical Society members are invited to bring a family treasure along with them, show it, and talk-briefly-about it.

Every family has something they treasure, that they enjoy talking about to others who appreciate hearing about it--could be an old photograph, a letter from a grandparent, a dish used and handed down through several generations--anything small enough to bring with you, and that, through your sharing with us, helps us to better know the people of a day past, and the times in which they lived.

This will be very informal, and can be one of the best programs of the season. It's one you won't want to miss. Mark the date now on your new calendar, and think about what you'll bring. Get it out NOW, and then, after the busy Holidays, you'll be ready to participate and to enjoy a most interesting evening.

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Survey:

Survey work moves at a snail's pace. More than a hundred photos have been taken, and many Deeds have been researched, so that when our work is completed, it will be as accurate as possible. The hours spent in checking--and double checking, if need be--don't show on the surface, but will contribute to the worth of the survey as a record of Riverton and its buildings.

Acquisitions:

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Hortman, who formerly lived in Riverton, have donated a large tinted photograph that had been given them years ago by Elwood Hubbs. It is entitled "Popular Walk - Cinnaminson Avenue, Palmyra, N.J. - 1898".

The Hortmans are now living in Maryland, and felt that the photo should be returned to the Triboro area, and their thoughtfulness is appreciated. The photo will be on display at the November meeting.

We hope that some day we will have a place where the artifacts gathered by the Society will be able to be displayed permanently, and enjoyed by all who are interested. For now, proper storage is a problem. At the present time the life-sized white horse that was formerly ours now lives at the PAWS Farm Sanctuary, looking right at home in the big barn of the John Darnell Farm in Mount Laurel. Our sleigh will soon be joining him there, on loan for an indefinite period. If you have not yet visited this old farm, dating back to late 1600s and early 1700s, plan to do so. (You'll love the animals, too....wear sturdy shoes to walk around the grounds).

Miscellaneous:

Books.....

Tales of Three Towns, by Lloyd Griscom, is now available at local libraries, and from the author. It contains a lot of fascinating information about the area, combining facts and legends, woven together in the author's popular style. It is attractively bound, hard cover, and reasonably priced at \$5.00.

The Riverside Line, by Barker Gummere, is the story of the Camden and Trenton Railway, the old trolley line that some of us remember that ran through this area beside the train tracks. The trolley line had a life of something under 30 years, but was of immense importance to the communities they served. While some rode trains to their places of business or to schools in cities, many others rode the trolleys to Dreer's, to Estebrook, to the Watch Case, or other factories. This is an oversize paperback, with many pictures (several from the Romance of Riverton film) and may be purchased from the author: Barker Gummere 1932 Riverside Dr. Trenton N.J. 08618 cost, \$7.00.

Architects.....

George W. and William D. Hewitt were architects who were at home in Burlington county: William was born in Burlington and George attended Burlington College. They lived between the 1840s and early 1920s, and designed homes, churches, and business buildings in both N.J. and Philadelphia, where they had an office on Chestnut Street. The Athenaeum is currently interested in locating any of their drawings, which seem to have disappeared following the last Hewitt's death. Of about 14 buildings known to have been designed by them in N.J., 5 of them are in Riverton--4, actually, since the old Country Club was one of them, and was razed years ago. Possibly there are more, that we are not at this time aware of. If you live in a house known to have been designed by Hewitt and Hewitt, and/or know where any of their drawings still exist, please contact your editor, who will forward the information to the Athenaeum's Architectural Librarian.

Reminder.....

Membership renewals are due in the Fall of each year. If you have not sent yours in, please do so promptly. At only \$2.00 per year (\$1.00 for senior citizens), membership is a bargain hard to equal. Expenses are minimal, with all volunteer help, but postage and supplies continue to rise in cost, and the budget is tight. Renew now, and bring in one new member this year!

Yesterday.....

Philadelphia newspapers of 1861 carried notice that the 1st week of November ended the brickmaking season, and Friday of that week was the last pay day.....S Millikin and a company offered extra heavy power loomed half-bleached table linen at 50¢..... and a "photographer of children, 18 months old, taken standing up" ad also copied old Daguerreotypes for \$1 and colored photographs for 75¢.

- .. On our side of the Delaware, the Mt. Holly Herald in November of 1882 noted that the street lights in Riverton "kept burning all night without any regard to the moon"..and added that it was a great accommodation to those who came home from town late at night with weak knees. The United States numbered 33, and voters turned out in good numbers. Riverton, staunchly Republican, was unhappy that year: the columnist observed that gentlemen walking to their trains had heads down and attitudes that seemed more appropriate for mourning the loss of a friend than an election; but new buildings were going up there and in Palmyra, mechanics were busy, and the country was "not ruined yet" in spite of the victory of the Democrats.
- .. November 4 was commencement day for Burlington Public Schools, and graduates offered recitations, solos, orations, and other entertainment. A great favorite of the times, a poem entitled "Oh Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?" was offered by one student, and another sang "Down the Shadowed Lane She Goes."
- .. The weather was unusually mild, for November, and ripe raspberries were discovered on the farm of William F. Morgan. Another discovery, in Riverton, was of a different sort... some children found a skull on the outskirts of town, and some other bones. Coroner Bishop investigated, dug up a human skeleton, which had been buried in a sitting position. The report said that this was the manner of Indian burials, but that they were unable to determine the race of the man whose bones were found that day.
- .. In Palmyra, back in 1893, the Society Hall Assoc. had bought the M.E. Church, raised it 4 ft., added 12 ft. to the front, painted it white, and had it ready for use early in October. Plans were reported in December that a stock company planned to erect a large boarding house facing the river, on the Thomas estate, to be opened the following summer.
- .. In Jan. of 1896 the N.J. Mirror reported a severe storm that flooded the streets, toppled the chimney on the Baptist church, lifted off the roof of the freight station in West Palmyra, and blew off the roof and shattered the plate glass window of the Roberts Drug Store in Riverton. The school's flag pole was demolished, the fence around the field gone, and many trees were blown down.
- .. Christmas sales were discretely noted, with polite suggestions that albums, gloves, books, and other items were available. If your taste ran to music, a solid walnut organ could be had for \$65. Wanamaker's, back in 1880, had a long narrow column, in prose, that began, "Visitors invited, whether to see or buy.. parcels are checked, waiting room provided where you may rest with ladies and children; guides conduct you through the house, or you may wander at will, there are many things of interest to see, and a welcome."
- .. The early homes of Riverton village similarly reflected the gracious way of a time past. Robert and William Canby Biddle, brothers who together had a hardware business in Old Philadelphia and who had married sisters--Rachel and Anna Miller--were among its founders. They were Friends, descended from a long line of men and women who contributed much to their country, to education, to humanity. The earliest Biddle here was a proprietor of West Jersey, and later Biddles were instrumental in founding Westtown School, Swarthmore College, Friends Asylum, to name a few institutions readily known and respected today. William C Biddle's home was built on the Riverbank, near the limit of the new village, and was between that of his brother Robert and his friend Prof. Charles D. Cleveland--who shared his deep interest in the anti-slavery cause. It was designed by Samuel Sloan, beautifully simple in line; huge, by our standards today, but built to last, to stand proudly, a tribute to those who built it and lived there. With its hip roof and gables, diamond mullioned double door with transom and side lights, side bays, shutters, and long extension to the back, it has changed very little, and has outlived its earliest owner by many years.
- William C. Biddle was quietly unassuming, with a keen intellect. He was gifted in math and in languages, and worked tirelessly, in spite of ill health for some years, to help those in need. He died in 1887, but his contributions in many fields continue to live and to grow and to benefit others.
- William Canby Biddle's home on the Riverbank was purchased last Spring by the Baptist Home, which is next to it. It is to be hoped that their need to expand their fine retirement home will not cause them to raze this fine piece of architecture dating from late 1851, a part of Riverton's heritage that, once lost, cannot be replaced.

BBH, ed.