

GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

Feb - March-Apr 1982

No. 3

Program:

Monday, March 1, 1982

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton
Public School

Riverton And The Library

.....

Donna Tarkington, Library Director

An informal talk about the Riverton Library and its place in local history, including many stories and anecdotes gathered or handed down over the years. There will also be a display of some of the documents and photographs in the Library's collection.

Donna Tarkington and her family have been a fairly recent addition to our community, coming to Riverton from Kansas, but her enthusiastic involvement in activities, especially the activities for young people last summer at the Library, is appreciated.

Donna joined our Historic Society's Board last Spring, and is now the Director of Riverton Library, succeeding Alice Myers, who has retired after more than 10 years in that position.

Invite a friend to attend this meeting with you, and get better acquainted with a fine resource here in our own community.

May 3rd will be our Annual Meeting, and the final one for this season. A program about early tools and their use has been arranged for, and should be most interesting. More about it later--but mark the date on your calendar today.

- - - - -

Miscellaneous Notes:

A letter has been received from the Board of Trustees of PAWS inviting our members to visit their farm and enjoy the sleigh now in the barn. An invitation was extended to come either individually, or as a group; if by a group, they will provide a special tour. If you are interested in visiting PAWS as a group, please call 829-6315.

A letter has been received from the N.J. Cemetery Board, regarding Morgan Cemetery. Mr. Thomas Weber was then contacted for more specific information; extensive clean-up work will begin this Spring; contracts have been made to have both the cemetery and the field mowed regularly; application has been made to permit sale of a few building lots along the street at the rear of the cemetery, and money from expected sales will go into a perpetual care fund--the 1st major projects will be to improve and surface the driveway and installation of a chain fence around the property. Any questions or information, phone George Weber, manager, at 461-4700.

With better weather on the way, volunteers to help complete surveys on several streets are needed. This is a project that should be finished up this year--will you help?

We are a small Society, and our dues are very small. Perhaps because of this it is easy to overlook renewal of memberships. Support your own Historical Society by keeping your own membership active, and by encouraging others to join. Visitors are always welcome at our meetings, and we hope that they will want to become members, too.

The gas light that was knocked down by a car over the Holidays is still not replaced-- the insurance settlement is the cause for the delay. The pity is that the lovely old standard will be replaced by newer one, of somewhat different design.

We who live in this area are most fortunate in having so many resources for research, whether for area history or for genealogy, available to us. In addition to our own small library there is the County Library in Mt. Holly, with its New Jersey Room and special collections; the County College Library at Pemberton; the Archives in New Jersey State Library at Trenton. And there is the library of the Gloucester County Historical Society, in Woodbury, one of the finest anywhere.

In each of these libraries, on our side of the Delaware, there is help available, not only from the materials there, but also from fine staff members, who know their materials well and go out of their way to help one find what is wanted.

- - - - -

Yesterday.....

January, coming as it does after a bright and busy Holiday season, is something of a let-down. Days are cold and short, and Spring seems years away, and it is oh, so tempting to hibernate. But the Riverton Athletic Association held its annual meeting right on schedule, in 1896, and elected officers--J.C.W. Davis, president, and W.W. Hughes, manager of the base ball team. They decided to put a strong ball team in the field, that year, and to push bicycle racing.

Atwood Grant had just finished building a new brick barn for Samuel Cook; and the new 8-room school house in Palmyra was expected to open on schedule. Voters had appropriated \$12,000 for it, ground had been broken on September 14th, and it was about ready to serve the town's growing population.

Riverton had sported a uniformed policeman for the past 6 months--and he was kept busy. In October a waiter at Miss Sallie Seckel's White House, on Main Street by the river, had stolen \$15 and articles from other employees and made his escape by train....but with the law hot on his trail, he couldn't even get his luggage off that train, in Phila.

There were other types of problems, too...Palmyra's telephone service was said to be so bad that many of the regular customers gave up trying to use it. And Riverton had sewerage problems. The past summer the borough had employed Harry Haines to make a survey and establish grade lines, at a cost of \$750; Main Street was hooked up...and its residents strongly objected to having Lippincott Avenue residents using the same line!

Pastures would soon be turning green again, and would cover the burned-out place where sparks from a locomotive had set fire to the woods in a pasture in Riverton that "nearly cooked John Graham's cow." The executive committee of the Girls Friendly Society had been entertained by Mrs. Thomas Roberts, at her home on the bank--the gray stone house corner of Bank and Thomas, later purchased by N. Meyers Fidler.

Times were still hard, and jobs scarce, but money was gradually becoming more stable. A Cashier in Farmers National Bank of Mount Holly had a \$3.00 note, issued by that bank Oct. 1, 1817. It had stayed in circulation for 62 years, and the Mt. Holly Herald said that was a record for any U.S. Bank note. Prior to the National Banking Act, in 1863, Each bank issued its own notes, which could be used for payment, but not converted to gold or silver, and they could be used only if the receiver was willing to accept them in payment.

January of 1982 will be one of those remembered for its storms and prolonged cold spell. In spite of a temperature touching zero, Riverton's Historical Society members gathered in the Music Room to share their own treasures and memories of "yesterday." A brochure from 1936 showed the very modern building that was proposed to replace the aging Yacht Club. Seeing it made one realize how much we owe those who held out for restoration instead of replacement--the stick-style building is one of the most painted and photographed buildings in this entire area, as well as an important part of this community.

A doll purchased at the Centennial in 1876 in Philadelphia, then dressed in high French fashion of the day by a talented needlewoman, drew admiration from the ladies. Toys, stereoptican and cards, and many other objects were tried and exclaimed over.

A shield-shaped card in red, white, and blue from a 1920 Riverton Fourth, and a photograph showing children scrambling for the cards along the riverbank turned thoughts to warmer weather. The cards were dropped from a low-flying plane, and entitled the bearer to a 1¢ purchase at the stores of Theodore Schneider, John Adolph, or D.D. Bastion. And a tale about a ride in that plane on an earlier occasion brought a spontaneous round of applause from the audience.

The most significant item shared that evening was small and unassuming in appearance--a little booklet in plain brown cover that proved to be a copy of the Act of Incorporation and By-Laws of the Riverton Improvement Company. The founders are named--all 10--and the land, about 120 acres, recognized as having been sold to Daniel L. Miller junior, in trust for the group as named; the Company's solicitor had examined either original or certified copies of all deeds for the land purchased from Joseph Lippincott, back to the original survey, made in 1683, and found that his title was good. At the time of the incorporation, March 12, 1852, the town had been laid out, the wharf built, and "a number of substantial dwellings and other buildings have been erected thereon."

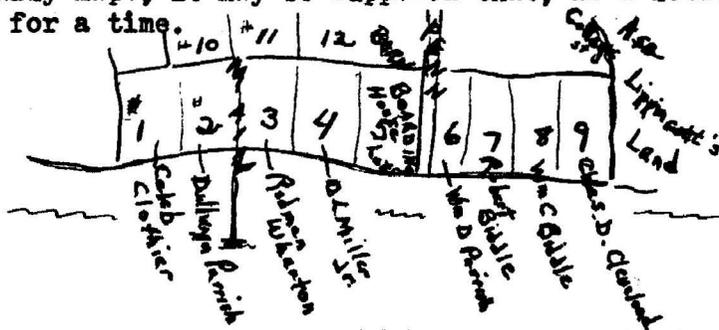
The original Incorporation papers are in the Archives in Trenton, beautifully hand written, and as clear today as when written. It is also recorded in the printed Acts of the 76th Legislature of the State of N.J., 1852.

The distribution of the first lots to founders and others is recorded in at least 2 different books in the County Clerk's office (Deeds), but again, all 10 founders are named: Daniel L. Miller, junior, Rodman Wharton, Dillwyn Parrish, William D. Parrish, Caleb Clothier, James Clothier, Charles D. Cleveland, William C. Biddle, Robert Biddle, and Chalkley Gillingham.

Miller retained one lot for himself, as agreed; Wharton had 2 lots, and Gillingham and James Clothier apparently did not elect to have any. Gillingham remains something of a mystery, but early census records list a Chalkley Gillingham and family on a farm in Cinnaminson, and the earliest map of the village says he may be contacted "near Moorestown", so probably he, of all the founders, was all ready a NJ resident, and did not wish to move into the new village. James Clothier, shown on early maps to be at what is now 101 Main Street, never owned that house or lot, but may be assumed to have rented from Rodman Wharton, who owned that and another on the Bank. In 1857 James purchased land from Leeds that adjoined the Westfield School lot, and remained there for some years, then resold it to Leeds and moved back to Northampton, his native township. Caleb, his brother, sold his riverbank home 6 months after getting title to it, to James Willis; then bought #10 (101 Main) in January, 1853, for \$800 from Wharton.

The founders soon were reduced in number to 7: Rodman Wharton died in 1854, and James Clothier and Chalkley Gillingham withdrew, selling their shares to Daniel L. Miller, junior. There was evidently disagreement between Miller and the other 6, which resulted in lengthy arbitration, and then litigation, resolved in November, 1862.

Other "first residents" listed on the same Deed record as the founders, were: Charles Hall, Francis Crosta, Peter Keen, Israel Hullings, Charles Jones, and James Ward. Charles P. Miller, brother of Elizabeth, Rodman Wharton's wife, built on lot # 11, and the R.I.Co. built its "White House", where the Episcopal Church held its first meeting, next to that. Since Chalkley Gillingham's name shows in that location on some early maps, it may be supposed that, as a local founder, he may have had an office there, for a time.



BBHahle, ed.