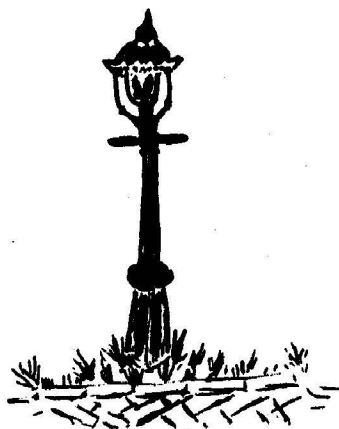


GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077



Sept-Oct 1982

no. 1

1982-83 Program Schedule:

October 4 1982

November 29

Monday nights, 8 p.m., Riverton School Music Room

January 10 1983

March 7

May 2

(Annual meeting; 4 Board members elected;
Officers (2 yrs) elected from Board of 12)

Program:

Monday, October 4, 1982

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

Man, The Rider

Zenon Bubnoski

Man's desire to avoid walking has led to some of the greatest changes in our society. The bicycle, relatively inexpensive as a means of transportation, became immensely popular for exercise and recreation as well, and in so doing also influenced fashions and customs.

Zenon Bubnoski, a resident of Moorestown, is a member of The wheelmen, a club dedicated to the history, preservation, and restoration of bicycles, particularly of the period 1880s-1890s, when bicycling reached its "golden age". Two of his sons are also members of the group. The wheelmen give demonstrations periodically at Smithville--many have enjoyed seeing them there.

In days past, Riverton had a bicycle track below the railroad, and in 1894 built a new and larger one just above it. Gaslight News had an article about its opening in the May-July 1981 issue. Members and friends are invited to display photos or memorabilia pertaining to bicycling in the past at the meeting.

SPECIAL EVENT:

Friday, November 5, 1982

8 p.m.

Porch Club, 4th & Howard Sts.

In response to requests, the 1926 film "Romance of Riverton" will be shown again this Fall, and we hope that those who missed it before will be able to attend this time. This was a Chamber of Commerce film recorded on nitrate film, which deteriorates badly. It was donated to the Historical Society by Joseph Stow, now of Moorestown, a projectionist and movie buff, and has been preserved through donations given for this purpose.

Enjoy a moment from Riverton more than 50 years ago as you watch the silent black/white film, then stay to share memories of our town with friends. (No admission, but donations may be given at the door by those who wish to do so).

307 Bank Avenue -- an Editorial

Throughout the summer the Hearings on the application for expansion of the Baptist Home of South Jersey have continued, 11 to date, and quite likely, more to follow. Indications are that an appeal will follow the decision, so that it may be some time, yet, before the fate of 307 Bank Avenue, the Sloan-designed home of Riverton Founder William Canby Biddle is known.

There is no argument with the stated need for more facilities for the elderly: those now on the waiting list face a wait of several years before admission, and that list grows

constantly. This is not a local Home, but one that serves a large area--from above Trenton to the southernmost tip of the State; from coast to coast. Few who come are from Riverton, or even from the Tri-Borough area. Residents come because this is where the institution happens to be located.

Expansion plans rest upon the removal of #307 Bank Avenue, and the building of a massive 3-story brick addition in its place, added on to the existing wing of brick previously added to the Ezra Lippincott brownstone building, built ca. 1864, that was the first "Baptist Home" here. The proposed addition would have a false mansard roof, apparently an attempt to mask its difference from its century-and-a-quarter-old neighbors, and would make the whole a solid mass across 3 lots that once each held a single home separated from any other by landscaped grounds. The 4th lot, at Lippincott Ave., is a parking lot, also planned for expansion.

The effects of such changes seem to vary according to one's point of view, with proponents finding increased traffic, parking, commercial vehicles, property values and safety factors for neighbors negligible, and opponents finding the same both grossly understated and unacceptable. The historic factor, of particular importance to the Historic Society of Riverton, is also a point of difference: it has been spoken of as an old house that has outlived its usefulness--yet even now it is a multi-family home, income-producing, and, as such, qualifies for Federal tax breaks designed to encourage the maintenance and continued use of such buildings that are very desirable. Needed repairs are well within limits found reasonable in similar situations elsewhere.

The house itself is one of a group designed by Samuel Sloan, one of the most significant architects of the 19th century, whose influence went far beyond this small village that he designed so carefully, and whose importance is only recently becoming widely recognized. Of the 8 documented villas he designed for Riverton's 10 founders that are extant, this Biddle house is the least changed today. The Lippincott and Thomas extensions to the original village shortly after its founding placed this house in the center of what is now the oldest and most significant, historically, part of Riverton today. To destroy #307, one of the only known such group of Sloan villas in existence, could quite possibly have a negative effect on the recognition of the entire area as an historic district; it could also have a domino effect on not only the other riverfront properties, but throughout the town.

One must wonder at the determination of one group of people to push ahead a plan that would cause loss for so many others; at willingness to spend large sums of money on legal fees, expert witnesses (who have visited the town for an hour or so), printed transcriptions of testimonies, documents, displays, etc., at loss of the good-will formerly enjoyed with neighbors, for a stop-gap measure. The promise has been given (again) that no further expansion will ever be made at this site: considering the pace of growth of the waiting list for admission, by the time the expansion now being debated could be ready for new residents, the list will very soon again be as long as it is today. Might it not be more prudent to seek another site where future needs could be readily met? Where transportation is better for visitors--and for those residents who could benefit from it? Which is more centrally located for the area it serves?

Perhaps it is easier to champion changes that are to occur somewhere other than next-door to one's own home. A case in point is the work now being done on Riverton's Bank building. The beautiful plasterwork ceiling is now going the way of the wrought iron window guards that disappeared last winter. At this writing it is being covered with a modern dropped-ceiling, supported by metal framework rooted in gouged-out sections of the plasterwork, so carefully preserved many years ago by the local administration when the lobby was modernized. We can sympathize with the need to conserve heating costs, but there must be some less destructive way of doing it, but out-of-area owners should consider the local effect of their decisions, too.

We would hope that our Borough Council will seriously consider enacting an ordinance or other necessary law that recognizes the architectural importance and the heritage it, and the character of Riverton represent. While it would not stop an owner from doing to his property as he saw fit, within the law, it would be a statement of awareness and could influence decisions where changes are contemplated.

Survey:

This is moving along slowly, but...moving; this year will see it completed.

Acquisitions:

- ..from Richard Moon, of Medford N.J., bottles uncovered on Homewood Drive during street work being done there last summer. Included are one from Stiles Drugstore, a quart milk bottle from Cole's, and a Shaeffer Beer bottle. (Palmyra, not the OTHER company')
- ..from Marie Hulse, 2 books: Preservation in American Towns & Cities, by Weinberg, and Historic Preservation in Small Towns: A Manual of Practice, an AASLH publication by Ziegler and Kidney.

Did you notice the letter-to-the-Editor recently in BCT from David Miller, Adm. of Burlington County Cultural/Heritage Commission? It protested the over-long periods between mailing and receipt of the County Bell, in particular, those with a zip of 08077. Bulk rate mail is supposed to be delivered within 72 hours of receipt; 4 weeks is not unusual for 08077 addressees to wait. If your County Bell arrives very late, protest to the local Post-Master, and also let Dave Miller know.

Heritage Day:

Saturday, September 11...Medford Park, on Main St, Medford...11 am to 4 pm
If you have not yet picked up your ticket at Riverton Library for these festivities, don't delay any longer. There will be many exhibitions and demonstrations of old crafts, as well as various ceremonies, all celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Penn's signing of the Purchase of West Jersey from Lady Elizabeth Cartaret (widow of the Governor), and sponsored by the Colonial Dames. The \$1.00 admission ticket also entitles holder to prizes--1st prize will be a hand made quilt made by the sponsoring group, a copy of a Metropolitan Museum Piece. There are others, also--antiques, art work, etc.
Rain date is the following week, September 18th. Tickets sold in Riverton will benefit the Historical Society, so...buy one and enjoy a celebration and support the Society at the same time!

Yesterday:

Palmyra and Riverton...towns closely associated, part of the same family, and, like family members everywhere, sometimes working together and sometimes having differences. Both towns began at about the same time, along the river boundary of Cinnaminson township. When the Philadelphia Public Ledger carried an article announcing the plan of Riverton, a new community designed by Samuel Sloan for a group of 10 prominent Philadelphians, it carried, the following week, one about Palmyra. Villas were springing up as if by magic, that April, 1851 article said; only a short time ago there were only a half-dozen houses there, but now there were upwards of 30, and 500 lots had been sold with the past 3 months. N.J. Legislation had authorized construction of a wharf of the Delaware, it went on, and every half-hour steamboat connections were contemplated. The Camden and Amboy Railroad had an agency in the town, which was the first stopping-place on that line.

In 1856 Palmyra's population reached 150, and a Post Office was established. In 1893, when Riverton incorporated as a borough, separating from Cinnaminson, it included--for just one year--all that is now Palmyra. In 1894 Palmyra Township was formed, taking part from Cinnaminson and part from Riverton, then incorporated in 1923 as Palmyra Borough.

An 1891 Directory of Atlantic, Burlington, and Gloucester counties described the towns as "twin post villages in Cinnaminson", with 3 regular stations of the Amboy division of the Pa. R.R. (West Palmyra, Palmyra, and Riverton). The earliest names for the vicinity of the two towns had been successively Brimstone Neck, then Runtown, Jugtown, Hayti, and Texas, it recorded, and it was not until 1851 that either of the present towns was started.

Mention was made of the towns' popularity as a resort and for summer residences of city business people. Special note was made of Riverton's ordinance forbidding erection of buildings on the river front, then 1 full mile in length, which ran "from the river wall to the artistic houses set back a goodly distance....a green, velvet like lawn, without fence or party line, a perfect landscape garden, which has become one of the distinctive features of the place." Good churches and educational facilities in the towns were also noted. Various businesses were described in detail, and some had sketches to illustrate them.

Josiah Wallace's West End Hotel, at Broad & Race, opened in 1884, a 3-story building near

West Palmyra station. The dining hall seated 40 at a time, served all fine foods, and the bar offered choicest brands of foreign and American wines and liquors--and temperance beverages to suit all tastes. Mr. Wallace, a native of Burlington county, also owned 15 acres laid out in building lots, offered at "remarkably low figures", and was "deservedly popular hereabouts."

- J.V. Astor's Restaurant, Ice Cream and Oyster Parlors were new and elegant, having opened in the Spring of that year. A 3-story building measuring 20x50 ft, with large bay windows on second and third floors, had salesroom carrying choice French and American confectionery, tropical, Mediterranean, California and domestic fruits and nuts, and miscellaneous mdse. Meals, lunches were served at all hours, and oysters and ice cream in season. A specialty was Mr. Astor's ice cream moulds for banquets--probably held on his 3rd floor, which seated 200 comfortably. Do you recognize the building as the present-day Palmyra Pharmacy?
- G. P. Dilks had a blacksmith shop at Broad and Elm, 18x26 ft in dimension, and Mrs. Smythe, an Englishwoman, had a new Tea and Coffee shop on Delaware Avenue. McIlhenny had moved into his new store at Broad and Thomas, the Riverton Stove & Heater Works, and had all ready been in business for 15 years. He carried a large stock of best makes of cooking and heating stoves, ranges, hollow ware, store furniture, tin, copper, sheet iron, kitchen utensils, house furnishing goods, etc. He employed 5 men in the manufacturing department, where they did sheet metal work, slate roofing, spouting, etc. He had resided in Burlington county since age 5 years, his article said.

John Quigley had Livery, Boarding, Sale, and Exchange Stables on Penn Street, established in 1886, and above the railroad J. T. Woolston had a carriage business at Main and 7th. At that site, established also around 1886, he had a series of buildings of 1, 2, and 3 stories in height, where he and his employees made about 50 new carriages per year and repaired others. He hired between 8 and 15 men, who did iron and wood working, painting and trimming of carriages, buggies, phaetons, light and heavy wagons, and so on, and also handled blacksmithing and horse shoeing. Mr. Woolston was a native of the county.

BBHahle, ed.

(Phila Public Ledger, April 1851; Directory at Glo. Co. Historical Society Library; Bisbee's "Sign Posts"; N.J. Civil Boundaries)

Acknowledgment of source would be appreciated when using materials researched and shared through these Newsletters.

*Mr. & Mrs. Edw. Horstmann
708 Linden Ave
Riverton NJ*

Dues for Memberships are now due. Membership in the Historical Society of Riverton, Inc. includes meetings with programs covering a variety of subjects each year, and a Newsletter, Gaslight News, published quarterly, delivered to your home.

Because our dues are modest and costs, such as postage, keep rising, it was decided last January that beginning this season, 1982/3, an assessment of \$1. per family would be requested.

Please send or take your Dues to John Parry, Treasurer, 803 Main St., Riverton 08077, or bring with you to the October meeting.

-----tear off slip -----

Historical Society of Riverton, Inc. Membership for 1982/3

Name _____

Address _____ zip _____ phone _____

Amount enclosed: General, \$2. per person _____ Over 65, \$1. _____

Assessment, \$1 (per family) _____

Paid 4 Oct 82