



# GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

Feb - Apr 1983

No. 3

## Program:

Monday, March 7, 1983

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

Area Tall Clocks

.....

Robert Schmitz

A lifelong fascination with old clocks led to a second career for Robert Schmitz, by profession an engineer. What began as a hobby grew with research and experience into expertise, into a skill offering a much needed service to owners of such timepieces and a source of joy and satisfaction to himself.

Mr. Schmitz will present a program of slides, as well as commentary and anecdotes about clocks and clockmakers of the Philadelphia and New Jersey area.

Monday, May 2, 1983

The program will be announced in the next issue of Gaslight News, but this is a reminder that the May meeting is our Annual Meeting. Election of 4 Board members to 3-year terms will be held, after which the 12-member Board will hold a reorganization meeting to elect the officers who will serve for the next 2 years.

This is an important meeting for every member to attend, and to exercise your right to vote for those you want to represent you on our Historical Society's Board, from which the officers are designated, according to our By-Laws.

- - - - -

## Update:

### Gaslights:

Still without a globe, as the result of a rash of vandalism around Thanksgiving, is the gaslight at 8th & Thomas Ave., and several others are burning fitfully because of damage suffered by BB shot at the same time. Glass globes are expensive (\$50 each) and slow to arrive for replacement; plastic ones were tried, more resilient, but they yellow and cut down on illumination. Damage of this nature is both an expense and an annoyance to Public Service, and adds to their reluctance to have to have them in service. Since we care about these old gaslights, we can help by watching closely those within our own neighborhoods; if parents become aware of damage their children are causing, it can control such vandalism in the future. Unfortunately, when such acts are called attention to, publicly, the problem seems to increase.....

### 307 Bank Avenue:

The fate of the Riverbank Villa of Riverton founder William Canby Biddle, designed in 1851 by Samuel Sloan, has not yet been determined. After months of Hearings on the Application of the Baptist Home of South Jersey, Inc. for a variance to extend their facility at this site by razing this historically and architecturally significant house and building an addition across the limit of its lot, such permission was denied by the Zoning Board. Since then, the Corporate body has filed suit to set aside that decision and recover costs, contesting the legality of the Zoning Board. Such contention is based on a ruling of 1977 regarding land-use to be determined by a professional planner. Since Riverton was 99% developed already, the expense that would have been necessary to then hire such a planner did not seem realistic or even applicable in such a situation. The decision is still pending, as this is being

written, and will be significant to not only this, but to other small communities. What will follow will be determined by the decision that is handed down.

The Tri-Boro Wastewater Facilities Plan Study Group continues to hold public meetings in the area—most recent was in Palmyra, on Jan. 27th. The Study will be completed in only a few more months, after which their recommendations for Sewerage facilities for the Tri-Boro area will be made.

We suggest that area residents watch the small print in local papers for meeting notices, attend public meetings, and become aware of issues that will affect all taxpaying residents. While at first glance these issues may seem outside the interests of a Historical Society, be aware that they do, indeed concern it: sites and land-use concern us; increased taxes and other costs divert funds that otherwise would be available for preservation of our heritage, whether its form is in buildings, open spaces, documents, or other objects. Without means to protect them, they will be lost to those who follow us.

Morgan Cemetery: Clearing up is continuing, with brush being removed and trash cans being placed in the area and emptied regularly, but the fencing in of the property and the widening/paving of the road are still awaiting the official documented approval, long ago given verbally. Meanwhile, \$1000 has been spent to repair some of the older, large, markers that had been pushed over and broken. The Administration has suggested that those using the cemetery refrain from planting shrubbery or other things that would interfere with mowing (bulbs, etc. are ok), and the use of low, 1-piece markers, which cannot be overturned.

Survey: With 2 more volunteers working on the few remaining streets to be surveyed, it is moving along—too slowly, but at least progressing. Won't you help, so that this important project can be finished up?

Reminder: Dues for membership in our Historical Society are small, but essential to keep it functioning. Perhaps it is because a dollar or two is easy to forget. New members are welcome at any time; renewed memberships are due each Fall, by the October meeting. If your is in arrears, please remit to Treasurer John Parry promptly.

#### Yesterday:

On Thanksgiving of 1866 Riverton's Base Ball team played Deptford at Camden, and lost, 59-19. The game lasted for 4 hours, with S. Poey as Scorer for Riverton, and the team as follows: H. Knight (2-b); C. Flannagan (c); C. Biddle (1-b); P. Flannagan (ss); Clem Biddle (3-b); Lee Cook (left f); N. Senat (c-f); Chas. Biddle (r-f); and R. B. Knight (p).

In January of 1894 Palmyra passed an ordinance forbidding anyone to throw garbage in the streets; the newspaper notice observed that it should be enforced...

Years ago the river periodically froze over; in 1896, January, the ice was 5" thick. A few weeks later there was a thaw, and washouts of the Pennsauken and Rancocas rivers halted train service for more than 24 hours. The Yacht Club wharf was submerged, the club house threatened, and the riverbank at Dreer's and the Gun Club destroyed.

While a freeze provided fun by way of ice skating or ice boating on the Delaware, in earlier years it ended river transportation of needed supplies and of ferries. A clipping from a newspaper (undated) gives, in part, a letter dated Feb 7, 1820, in which the writer, Nancy Stokes wrote to her sister, Rebecca Evans, describing an attempt to cross the river over the ice, to visit relatives and friends in Byberry, that ended in tragedy.

The crossing was attempted near the Taylor farm, about 2 miles above Riverton, and the driver of the 2-horse carriage was Henry Warrington, of Cinnaminson. The ice seemed firm, several other carriages had successfully made the crossing that day, and so the group of 3 ladies and their driver started across. A little more than half over the horses started to sink, Henry jumped to the ice safely, and the writer also jumped. She, however, fell into the water, grasping at the ice, and Henry laid on the ice and reached out to her, holding her head up until help came. Esther Collins was found in the carriage on the sandbar opposite Philadelphia 12 days later.

and it was 2 months before "the remains of Ann Edwards were found on the Pennsylvania shore." They were buried side by side in Friends' burying ground at Moorestown. (The above mentioned clipping, as well as several papers pertaining to Henry Warrington family, and diagram of 1813 division of Warrington land along New Albany Road above Burlington Pike-rte 130-were recently given to the Riverton Historical Society by Mr. and Mrs. Rodman Zwirner)

In March of 1901 Dr. H. B. Hall died, a resident of Riverton for 25 years. Dr. Mills was a young physician working with him in his practice at the time, and he stayed there for several years, then purchased the Earnshaw home at 2nd & Lippincott where he practiced for many, many years.

February marks Founder's Day for the A & P--the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company founded in 1859 by George Huntington Hartford, who found he could reduce the cost of tea to his customers from \$1.00 to 30¢ by eliminating middle men and making his purchases and sales himself. Some Riverton residents still remember the red-painted brick building with the black and gold sign on the site of the present Esso Station on the point of Main/Howard streets. (The building had begun as Robert's Brick Store).

In 1931 the underpass at S-41 (now rte 73) was completed and opened, on schedule, and was a great improvement over the steep grade crossing that had been there. The New Era, a weekly paper published in Riverton for more than 80 years, was still selling for \$1.50, yearly subscription rate.

In the Fall of 1944 Pierre Clemenceau was a speaker at the Porch Club.

And Riverton's school kept on growing.....

Ruth Schmierer, a member of the Historical Society of Riverton from its beginning, and an officer as well, was a person of many interests. She was School Secretary for many years, and in that capacity often wrote articles published in the Nutshell, School Paper, and in local newspaper columns also. Some of her papers have been given to the Historical Society by her sister, Mrs. Grace Coles. The following are some notes made from her "Looking Back" papers:

Riverton's first school was a frame 1-room building at 4th & Howard streets, and it wasn't until 1874 that heat, a well, and a cellar were added. In 1876/77 Laura Pan-coast was the only teacher, with Mary Dobson replacing her later that year. Some of the family names of pupils then were: Bishop, Corner, Cheeseman, Burns, Slim, McIl-henny, and Faunce.

\*The school attendance increased, and in 1889 a 1-room annex was added to the old building, and then 4 years later the Catholic Church chapel was purchased for use as a Kindergarten for 4-year-olds--the first Froebelian Kindergarten in Burlington county. (this was something like the Montessori schools we know today). These buildings were used until 1910, when a brick building was erected and the chapel was again sold and moved.

Charles Davis was the principal when the brick building was erected in 1910. The offices and classrooms were all on the 2nd and 3rd floors; desks and chairs were bolted to the floor in straight rows. The auditorium was on the right side, at a lower level, and was reached by entering on the 5th street side and going down a few steps. The industrial arts room was at ground level, left of the main entrance. Wooden steps led to 2nd floor, where K was the 1st room to the left, then the teachers' lounge and dispensary--which shared space in the room used by the principal for his office. The Home Ec room was on the 3rd floor, a teacher's room was opposite, and the library books were on shelves along the walls. The ceiling had an opening for the rope to the bell that Mr. Leatherbury, janitor, rang for school's opening each day.

In October 1913 the first issue of the school's newspaper was published. Teachers that year were Miss Parker-K; Miss Evaul-1st; Mrs. Thomas-2nd; Miss Black-3rd; Miss Helen Wolcott-4th. And the Misses Collisi, Windfelt, Roberts, and Stimus taught various subjects for grades 5-8.

In 1914 there was a new principal, Luther Turner, and he had the Victrola placed in the hallway on the 1st floor so that classes entered and left the building to the sound of marches played on it. Two years later music began as a subject, and there was a Glee Club formed.

The boys' industrial arts classes had begun with a woman teacher, but soon a man was added to help with some equipment, and eventually took over that department. Joseph Joyce was their teacher--called manual training, by then--in 1916. The boys made such items in that general period as coat hangers, fern stands, stools, a ballot box (for the Board of Education), a loom, and a doll house for the 1st grade. Girls, in their Home Economics classes, learned to make button holes, patching and darning. They also made aprons, dresses, and middies, and some made hemstitched towels.

- - - - -

Events to watch for:

Saturday, February 12 8 p.m. A Cherry Jubilee--a festival of cherry desserts, held at the Porch Club by The Association for the Preservation of Riverton. Tickets from members or at door--\$2.50.

Watch the County Bell and BCT County Calendar listings for events of other Historical Societies and events of interest in neighboring communities.

The Historical Society of Riverton is planning now for a 1-day Workshop to be held in September on Victorian Homes--what to look for, how to care for, how to research, etc. There will be speakers, a box lunch, and a conducted walking tour included in the registration fee. Brochures will be circulated well in advance, and pre-registration will be required.

- - - - -

BBHahle, ed.

*Mrs. Mrs. Edw Heetmann, Jr  
708 Linden Ave  
Riverton N.J.  
08077*