



# Gaslight News

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, inc.  
Riverton, N.J. 08077

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Feb. - April 1984

vol. x xxxiii

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## Program:

Monday, March 5, 1984

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

Post Card Collections .....

Alfred S. Newton

Post cards first appeared more than a century ago, but reached a peak in popularity early in this century. The photographic cards that were so plentiful then, offer today a novel record of history, through their scenes of new streets, both business and residential architecture, people and their activities. Almost everyone has at least a few of these cards tucked away, forgotten, in an old trunk or drawer—or has found these simple artifacts highly collectable.

Mr. Newton, a retired building contractor, has a collection of postcards from many of our area towns, as well as those pertaining to a particular subject. He is very knowledgeable about them, and exhibits at antique shows.

For this program Mr. Newton will give a talk on the history of post cards, and also project some of his cards onto a screen, as well as display others. Members are invited to bring along a favorite post card of their own to display, also.

This program's topic is one that has been requested for several years past, and one for which securing a speaker has not been easy. We are delighted that Mr. Newton is able to come to us, this year.

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## Notepaper:

The sale of triple-fold notepaper picturing the "Columbia" approaching the Yacht Club (photo, ca. 1915) was a success, with the supply quickly exhausted. Those who were disappointed by not getting some before Christmas, and those who would like additional boxes will be pleased to know they are again available: contact Louise Vaughn at 829-1238. A few boxes are also available at Riverton Library.

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## Gaslights:

The light on Thomas Avenue, opposite 8th Street, has once again been the object of vandalism, and is without a globe. One wonders at repeated damage to a gaslight at a particular location; how long will it be before a gaslight as a target for destruction and a moment's excitement will be replaced by a more mature appreciation of these old streets? Of the greater pleasure to be had from protecting this part of our heritage? Replacement parts are increasingly expensive; the soft glow of a gaslight is missed, when any one of our 52 protected street lights is cut off service, and we hope it will soon be repaired. (DONG!)

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## Survey:

Two orientation meetings have been held in the past month, and work is under way to gather the necessary information about streets not previously done, and those for which additional or more complete information is needed. Historical Society members who have now volunteered are: Patty Dranoff, Sara Guertler, Phyllis Rodgers, Marcelaine Lotman-Wurtzel, Muriel Alls, Louise Vaughn, and Eleanor Sklar. Earlier this year Ruth Zayotti and Bunny Hunn wrote some house descriptions that had been omitted; Elsie Waters and Joan Hartman, both early workers, have agreed to do a little more now. It is encouraging to have help again, toward completion of a project too long waiting!

A Telephone Committee has been set up—Elsie Waters, Ed Gillmore, Sally Mattis, Ruth Schweizer, and Ed Moore—and their influence was apparent at January's meeting. A large turnout on a cold, snowy night for the covered dish supper, followed by a program of folk tales and music by Merce and Arlene Ridgway that was delightful, can be attributed to their reminder.

On Sunday, February 5th, a guided tour by the Burlington (City) Historical Society for our organization's members was arranged. If you forgot to sign up for it, or otherwise missed this tour, another date later on can be arranged, if other of the Historical Society of Riverton's members would like to go in a group.

Otherwise, such tours are regularly scheduled by that Society, as are others in our area. With Spring approaching, now is a good time to look into some of them: Burlington, Mt. Holly, Bordentown, Moorestown, Medford, all have interesting Tours that make history come alive; and the County Historical Society's Library and complex of buildings, and Smithville, are others not to be overlooked.

And, closer to home, is our own self-guided walking tour, maps for which are on hand at the Library—both the regular one, and the "treasure hunt" geared for children, which has been up-dated.

7 30 PM  
15 Feb 84  
The Planning Board will soon be discussing the value of recognizing the historic significance of Riverton and its architecture, and what steps need to be taken to assure its preservation for future generations to also enjoy. A speaker from a neighboring community is expected to be at a February meeting (Wednesday nights, speaker on the 8th?)—please check date with Borough Clerk's office, or with a Planning Board member. This is something of interest to all of us....

#### Reminders:

We're still trying to locate copies of The New Era, published in Riverton for almost 90 years, and containing a wealth of information, for a joint project with the Riverton Library to have them recorded on film. While many people have saved the special issues--the 1909 Christmas Issue, various Anniversary issues, etc., the others seem to have disappeared. When one considers that over those years, a weekly paper would have printed more than 4,600 issues, more than a small handful should have survived. The papers will only be borrowed--filmed--returned. Will you help? See Donna Tarkington at the Library, or Betty Hahle, 829-6315.

**DUES:** If, by chance, you forgot to pay yours for the 1983-84 year, please do so at once. They are payable at the first meeting each September or October, and in return for that small investment you have a season of interesting programs, a quarterly Newsletter, voting privileges, and fellowship with others who share your own interests. Dues are modest--\$2 per person a year (\$1. for sr. cit.), plus \$1 assessment per family, to help meet increased operating costs. Send to: John Parry, Treasurer, 803 Main St., Riverton. New members are always welcome, too.

**MARCH 5th--Monday evening--our next meeting date.** Mark your calendar NOW. These dates roll around before you know it. Come out, and ask a friend to join you.

#### Note on Researching:

If it has been a while since you've been to Trenton's Archives, you'll find some changes have taken place. The new New Jersey Reference Room is on B level of the Library, and brings together all published N.J. information into one area. We are most fortunate to have such a fine collection of history and genealogical information within such a short distance from Riverton.

#### Yesterday:

During the year of 1871 Burlington county recorded 214 marriages, 762 births, and 634 deaths. Early into the following year two new towns held their first meetings--Florence and Mount Laurel, which brought the total number of townships within the county to 25. Each successive year showed continued growth.

By 1886 Riverton and Palmyra, often referred to as the "twin post towns" had each more than 600 residents, with Palmyra edging ahead of Riverton in numbers. Many

new houses had been constructed in the past two years, mainly of frame, and no longer was it the lightning rod salesman who promptly called upon an owner, but the insurance man. There was not yet a fire company in either village.

In Riverton, the village had grown from the river up toward the railroad; in Palmyra, development began with a cluster of houses around the railroad at its west end, then moved along the railroad toward Riverton, before extending downward toward the river.

One Sunday morning in early May, 1886, a fire started in a new, unoccupied double house on Cinnaminson Avenue--described in the newspaper account of the day as "a thoro fare from the railroad to the river." The house couldn't be saved, and soon the house next to it was also burning. Winds carried cinders to the rest of the houses in the group, and then to the houses and stores on Broad street facing the railroad. Every man in town helped--wet blankets were put on roofs, water was thrown against sides of buildings, but the fire raced out of control.

The telegraph operator at the station sent out calls for help, to Camden and to Burlington. The wind changed direction, and the fire was finally brought under control, but not before many houses had been destroyed and others seriously damaged. Then help began to arrive: a special train from Burlington brought a steam fire engine and two hose trucks; a few minutes later a team arrived from Wrightstown Hook & Ladder Co. The next volunteers to arrive were dirty, winded and tired--they had dragged equipment 6 miles by rope, from outside Camden. The local women rallied to feed the men who had come to help, and gave them places to clean up and to rest. A tramp who helped got a new suit of clothes. And by this time, "hundreds of people were arriving, some even riding on the tops of the trains, to see the sights."

This terrible fire, that could so easily have destroyed the entire village, brought home the need for a local fire company. In August, 1887, the Palmyra Independence Hook & Ladder company number one was organized, and members with subscription books were busily raising money to purchase equipment. A new truck was ordered and a temporary shed was built on Broad Street, near Delaware Avenue. Charles Davis, of Riverton, was elected chief of the company.

On Thanksgiving day there was "an old fashioned fireman's parade" for the housing of the \$400, 1100-lb. truck built in Seneca Falls, New York. A special train ran from Camden, bringing in people from Gloucester and Philadelphia. The procession was a quarter-mile long, with 700 men parading. They marched from Palmyra to Riverton, and back again, and Palmyra's volunteers, 42 in number, must have cut a fine figure in their new uniforms of black pants, red shirts, blue caps, and white belts. The new truck was "filled with flowers".

The housing was by the Young America Company of Burlington. Everyone sang the "Firemen's Song," and the ladies entertained the visitors at the West Palmyra Pavillion.

Palmyra's original apparatus took part in the parade, too: a plantation wagon carrying several ladders, drawn by a line of boys.

The newspaper article noted that volunteer fire companies had gone out of style in Philadelphia, and some of the old firemen from there had had a hand in making the parade and housing a success. It added that they had not forgotten the days when they ran at top speed (to a fire) bellowing through their trumpets to make way for the "Hibernia" or the "Goodie" or the "Fairy" companies.

(BBHahle, ed.)