



Special Historic Riverton Criterium Edition Gaslight News



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Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

Riverton's bicycle racing legacy THEN and NOW

Riverton's 19th century bicycle race course declared "finest quarter-mile track in the country"



undated Riverton Bicycle Track
PHOTO SCAN:
ED GILMORE

Long before Carlos Rogers created the Historic Riverton Criterium, wheelmen raced on a [bicycle track](#) at Lippincott & South Broad in Riverton, NJ.

It is 5:50 PM on Saturday, June 8th, 1895, and according to a New York Times reporter, "two dusty riders" were the last of eighteen relay bicycle racers heading toward "the fine grounds of the Riverton Athletic Association."

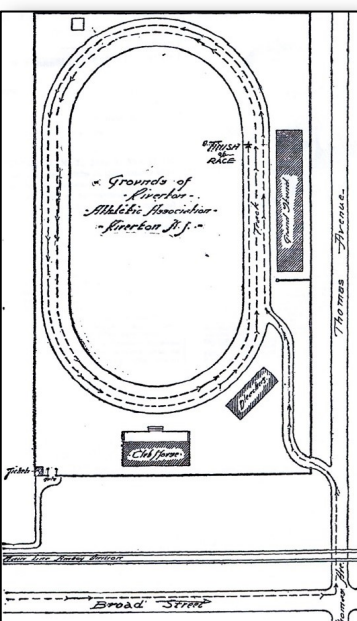
This exciting bicycle race, viewed by thousands along a 150-mile route from New York City to Riverton, NJ, was held during the decade called the [Golden Age of the Racing Bicycle](#).

As bicycle construction and roads improved, bicycles became a

democratizing sport—affordable and accessible for many people. Owning a bicycle was cheaper, and sometimes faster than using a horse (although one biting comment from a non-biker was that at least a person could eat the horse!).

Even liberated ladies, if they would sport the new "bloomer" trouser fashion and forgo their stiff corsets, could ride a bicycle. Horse racing was not officially sanctioned, especially by the Victorians, due to its ties to gambling and rumors of fraud.

However, the family fun of riding a bicycle and the sport



Bicycle track bordered by Lippincott and Thomas Aves. and S. Broad, *The New York Times*, June 4, 1895

See **THEN** on 2

Carlos Rogers' Historic Riverton Criterium forges a grand new 21st century bicycling tradition



2013 HRCriterium PHOTO: JM

On June 9, 2019, Riverton resident, civic supporter, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, Carlos Rogers, will reprise his role as the promoter of the premier bicycling event that he originated in 2011. Save the date and be there for the excitement.

The Historic Riverton Criterium is now firmly established as the town-wide family friendly tradition to which we now look to kick-start the summer. This year's contest is likely to draw at least a thousand participants, spectators, and vendors.



Carlos Rogers calls the 2018 HRC PHOTO: JM

Carlos started planning for this 9th Annual HRC almost as soon as the 8th concluded. Each year's event draws more competitors and fans, but each year also means securing the financial backing to underwrite the costs of staging such a complex event.

Carlos has recruited an impressive roster of corporate sponsors to support the Historic Riverton Criterium. Several have been with him since the first one in 2011.



The Society enthusiastically backs this awesome event and urges you to throw your support behind this 9th Annual Historic Riverton Criterium with your attendance and [sponsorship](#).

To the uninitiated, a criterium is a bicycle race of a specified number of laps on a closed course over public roads closed to

See **NOW** on 3



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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

THEN from 1

of bicycle racing was considered healthy and invigorating. The major threat to one's morals was the concern that church attendance would diminish in deference to enjoying a scenic Sunday ride along ever-increasing numbers of good roadways. Riverton, being a progressive town, enthusiastically embraced this new pastime and sport.

Oddly, bicycle racing in Riverton began with an amateur sporting club, the Riverton Ball Club. Founded June 19, 1865, it was among many popular clubs in town. There was the Cricket Club, with its 100 members at one point, the Gun Club, founded in 1877, which lasted until 1906, the Golf Club (1900) and, of course, the Yacht Club, founded in 1865 and one of the oldest in the country.



The Riverton [1872 Riverton Ball Club](#) of whom *Sporting Life Magazine* said in April, 1922, "...this club made the game it is today." IMAGE PROVIDED BY MR. BILL HALL

Over the years, various lots were loaned or leased to the Riverton Ball Club, including "Biddle's apple orchard" and "Miller's Grounds" (leased in 1870) where not only was baseball played, but also cricket, football, and tennis. To create an outstanding ball field at Miller's Grounds, trainloads of soil and sod were hauled from the Tacony section of Philadelphia to Riverton at a discounted price by the Pennsylvania Railroad. However, in order to have their own permanent field, the Club purchased land from the [Lippincott property](#) at the corner of South Broad Street and Thomas Avenue on April 29, 1885, and relocated the ball field to its new home.

The Rivertons, though amateurs, had quite a fine reputation as baseball players, and were once presented an award in 1890 at the Union League Club in Philadelphia as the best amateur base-

ball team in the area. Another team affiliated with the Riverton area was the Riverton-Palmyra Athletics, a baseball team in the International League for men of color.

However, by 1893, participation in the Baseball Club had diminished due in part to the expense that the players had to personally absorb in order to play the sport. One article from the time stated that the club withdrew from the Philadelphia Suburban League because they wanted to remain "strictly amateur ball and nothing else."

The Ball Club decided that it wanted to enlist more members as well as gain increased financial support by changing its focus from baseball to bicycle racing, the new rage. So on March 21, 1894, the Riverton Athletic Association was founded and the ball field was leased to the cycling club. In one year, the new RAA had 250 members which included "the ladies." While the Ball Club remained in existence, it remained small.

Paris, France hosted the world's first recorded bicycle race in 1868. By the 1880s bicycle design and the roads and tracks that they used had improved, and it even had its own sport stars. Racing clubs numbered in the hundreds, and a new magazine entitled *LAW* (League of American Wheelman) Bulletin and Good Roads provided guidance to enthusiasts about the best bicycles and improved terrain for cycling and racing.



Now that the RAA had leased the Lippincott field, they made improvements. Also on the grounds was a ticket office, "a large and commodious clubhouse ...with separate apartments and all conveniences for both ladies and gentlemen," bleachers, and a grandstand that could accommodate 3,000 people – improvements totaling more than \$14,000.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* [advert](#) for the July 4th, 1894 opening of the track proudly declared it was "pronounced by experts as the finest quarter-mile track in the country." Just two months later, newly installed [arc lights](#) intro-

duced the area to the novelty of night bicycle racing. Things would get even brighter for the fledgling cycling club.

Perhaps to increase readership, *The New York Times* began to sponsor and report bicycle races. Their second, well-publicized race would pit local, famous wheelmen from the tri-state area against one another in relay teams as well as invite individual cyclists to complete in a 150-mile race from the *NY Times* building in Manhattan to the newly-built racing track in Riverton, NJ. During the day of the relay and individual match races, the track at Riverton would hold its own race competitions.

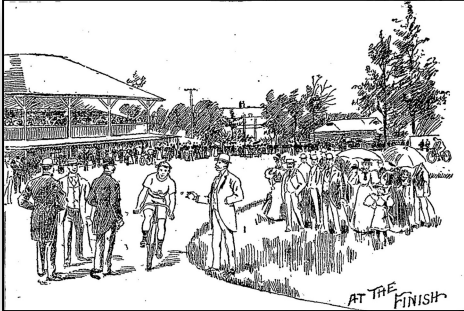
Members of the RAA and citizens collected money to purchase diamonds, the award for principal winning racers, along with silk banners, and a [special gold prize](#) for the individual winner with the best time. The man with the second-best time received a *Times* gold medal.

The Association authorized a further improvement to the field; they paid for a runway to be built, linking the street to the track and had an official program printed. For a nickel, spectators and referees, alike, could keep track of the winners of each of the local racing heats as well as the *Times* event. The local heats included: novice (15 entries), one-mile open (46 entries), one-mile handicap (60 entries), and five-mile handicap (42 entries) – 163 racers, in all.

The *Times* invited Class A cyclists to participate in the race. A committee was formed to select eighteen of the best relay racers, dividing them between three teams – New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and placing the riders along the 150-mile course at each interval of the 25-mile stops. Also promoted was a challenge match between two well-known wheelmen, [A.W. Fuller](#) of Brooklyn and F. M. Dampman of "the Keystone State." Individual competitors who were to race the entire route started at least one hour ahead of the relay racers.

The race relay points were set: starting in New York City, then Paterson, Morristown, the Wheatsheaf Hotel (Surelay, NJ, between Elizabeth and Rahway), Woodlawn, then on to Riverton, the finish. The *Times* published a [map](#) with

specific street names and their turns so that, not only could the cyclists know the route, but it also provided ample notice for "thousands upon thousands of people ...to watch its progress as it winds through the beautiful valleys and over the fertile hills of New Jersey."



The [end of the 1895 race](#) at Riverton's track as depicted in the pages of *The New York Times*, June 9, 1895

Fuller and Dampman left NYC around 7 a.m.; relay racers left at 9 a.m. The weather could not have been better. At the end of a day of local racing, the Riverton bicycle stadium was packed to capacity, awaiting the end of the relay and the winner of the individual meet.

The crowd in "perfect pandemonium" cheered as two relay cyclists entered the track, a wheel's distance apart and took their last lap. In the end, the New Jersey team won, scoring the most points. F.M. Dampman, at times soaring past relay teams, made the trek to Riverton in 10 hours, 43 minutes, "a marvelous record." A.W. Fuller arrived about two hours later, tired, "plucky" and "disgusted with the series of accidents such as a "smashed wheel and a broken tire."



F.M. Dampman, winner of the individual match race in 1895, made the trek from NYC to Riverton in 10 hours, 43 minutes.

Alas, the glorious days of bicycle racing in Riverton were not to last. Amateur racing at tracks began a decline, and so, too, the ability for local Rivertonians to sustain their beautiful bicycle track.

According to former Riverton Town Historian, Betty Hahle, by 1909, unable to pay the rent on the leased land, the track was demolished and the land sold for housing.

Yet, some things do not change. As the *Times* noted, "...fun has a very strong hold on the swell set down this way."



In 2014, Rob Gusky memorialized the 1895 NYC to Riverton race by organizing the Historic Riverton Century Ride and securing funding for this [Bicycle Track Marker](#) PHOTO: JM

Yes, we Rivertonians still enjoy sport and our town.

MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN
& JOHN MCCORMICK



(Borough Historian [Paul W. Schopp](#) made remarks at events in [2014](#), [2016](#), and [2017](#) which further burnish Riverton's bicycling legacy. You can read them on our website.)



NOW from 1



normal traffic. More than a few enthusiasts have likened a

"crit" to NASCAR, but on bikes.

It's an apt analogy since racers must combine strength, speed, endurance, and tactics to win.

Races last about an hour and often have prizes called primes (pronounced "preems") for winning specific intermediate laps.



Carlos announces a prime, 2016 PHOTO: JM

Cyclists compete in several categories, including Pro-Am Men, Amateur Men, and Amateur Women.

Even the kids get in on the fun with races sandwiched between amateur races and trophies and medals going to participants. Live music rocking from DeVries' porch, food trucks, [Wade's Snow Cones](#), and a [balloon twister](#) add to the block party atmosphere as spectators enthusiastically cheer on competitors with [cow-bells](#) in this USA Cycling sanctioned bicycle race. Pick up yours at the race.

Returning for the ninth consecutive year, Historic Riverton Criterium serves the dual purpose of providing a unique hometown venue for bicycle racing while raising funds that benefit community organizations and charities.

We are honored that Carlos has chosen the Historic Society of Riverton to receive a grant this year.

Everyone knows that the Society has been a fan of the HRC since the beginning—after all, the word HISTORIC is in our names! Carlos once explained that the reason for his inspired description of the race as "historic" was Riverton's great tradition of bicycle racing going back to the 1890s.

JM



(In 2017, [Carlos](#) collaborated with veteran Wheelman [Gary Sanderson](#) and [Matt Morse](#) of Cynergy Cycling Club to present "Bicycles Then & Now" at the Porch Club. You can read our [recap of the program](#) and view the entire [78-slide presentation](#) on our website.)

[rivertonhistory.com](#)

HRC EVENT PHOTOS, VARIOUS YEARS: JM



A couple making a difference

For the past eight years in June, Carlos Rogers has brought to residents, visitors, and competing athletes the excitement of the [Historic Riverton Criterium](#), a competitive bicycle race he originated.

This fantastic, so positive, and inclusive event makes for a great family day at the races and also serves a laudable philanthropic purpose. For each of these events, race promoter Carlos and his wife, Adrienne Rogers, have donated thousands of dollars to worthy local charities and organizations.

Carlos comes honestly to bike racing, as he was once a professional cyclist. As a US Pro Racing Tour member, he has raced in the US as well as abroad. He began racing in 1992 and competed in many memorable races, including on the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe in 1997 and 1998.



Allentown Sportsfest
Criterium 1998



Greentree Practice
Crit 2016

The Rogers Family made Riverton their home in 2009.



Adrienne, Leo, & Carlos Rogers

Carlos, Adrienne, their son, Leo, and their wonderful dog, Ruby, live next door to Iris and Richard Gaughan, Adrienne's parents, who have lived in Riverton for more than fifty years.

Although the couple owns and operates [Hush Salon Philadelphia](#), located in the heart of Philadelphia's Old City, they have carved out time to create this event every year.

Yes, every year requires work. They seek local permits, get USA Cycling course approval, provide signs and barriers to promote safety for all, arrange for excellent food for spectators and cyclists, and lure terrific cyclists to challenge the course.

In addition to providing a great family day and cash prizes for the race winners, the HRC has awarded the biggest prizes of all to local organizations.

The [NJ nonprofit 501\(c\)3](#) organization has awarded to date over \$35,000 to at least a dozen worthy causes.

- Riverton Memorial Park
- Riverton Shade Tree Commission
- Bread of Life Food Pantry
- Palmyra Ambulance Association
- Riverton Free Library
- Christ Episcopal Church
- Pal/Riv Athletic Assn.
- Riverton Fire Department
- Riverton Public School PTO
- Historical Society of Riverton
- Police Unity Bike Tour
- Palermo Children's Education Trust
- Bike MS

The impact of such generosity on people and community programs is undeniable.

As for the Rogers' newest project? They



are helping to organize and secure funding for Riverton's first dog park! Check out their [GoFundMe](#) page for more information.

We thank them for their commitment and for their charitable community spirit.

MRS. PATRICIA SMITH SOLIN



RPS observes two Arbor Days a century apart

Inspired by Mrs. Pat Solin's [Jan. 2017 Gaslight News](#) article, Riverton School students observed Arbor Day on April 18 and remembered Riverton's "[Gold Star Boys](#)."



Exactly 100 years before, on April 18, 1919, an earlier generation of students planted six London planetrees as a living memorial to honor six men from Riverton who had died in The Great War. These six trees still stand on school grounds today.

Accompanied by a PowerPoint, third grade students dressed in period clothing described Riverton of a century ago and the town's war effort. Eighth grade students

told about the [six young men](#). Shade Tree Board Chairman [Barry Emens](#) told the kids about the six trees.

HSR President Bill Brown presented a [plaque](#) with the names of the men to Mrs. Eck

Our thanks to [McCarter-Dallman Farm & Garden Center](#) for providing six yellow ribbons for the trees.

Former teacher and HSR School Liaison, Susan Dechnik, pulled off the hat trick that contributed to much of the program's success. She coordinated the HSR's efforts with school staff, took photos, and wrote the story above. Thank you. JM



Bill Brown presents
plaque to Mrs. Eck
PHOTO: SUSAN DECHNIK

SUSAN DECHNIK



We welcome these new members - Travis & Britney Blindt; Brad & Mar-yann Young. They will view the newsletter online, at [rivertonhistory.com/gaslight-news/](#) saving \$\$ on printing and postage.

We gratefully acknowledge these generous cash donors: Kirk Fullerton, Nancy Geiss, Eileen Gilbert, Paul Grena, Henry Parrish Hackett, Helen Hughes, Michael & Mary Kate Kearney, Alan & Helene Lilholt, Robert Lundstedt, William & Patricia McDermott, Geno Mori, Mary Pat Peters, Bill Probsting, Paul W. Schopp, Samuel Wargny