



GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

May - July, 1979

No. 4

Annual Meeting

Monday, May 14, 1979 8 p.m. Riverton Public School
"Collections of the Burlington County Historical Society"

Becky Simon, Executive Director, BCHS

Slides and talk about some of the most interesting items of the county's collections. A most interesting presentation.

Becky Simon was formerly curator of Trent House in Trenton. She received her BA from the University of Pennsylvania, and her Master's in American Studies from Penn State.

Elections

Each year, at the annual meeting, 4 members are elected to the Historical Society of Riverton's Board of Directors for a 3 year term. The Nominating Committee has submitted their recommendation of the following candidates:

- Mrs. William Hall
- Mrs. John Parry
- Mr. John Parry
- Mrs. Joseph W. Hahle

—Betty Lockhart, Chairman
Nancy Washington
Carolyn Mortgage

Additional nominations may be made from the floor, providing the nominee has agreed prior to nomination to serve actively, if elected.

Following the general meeting a brief re-organization meeting of the new Board will be held to elect Officers for the next 2 years.

All members in good standing are entitled to vote, and are urged to exercise that right.

Come out ...Bring along a friend...Enjoy the program...Vote

Update on....

Gas Lights

Still no replacement of the street gas light that was removed from Elm Avenue last August after an accident knocked it down. Let's not let it be forgotten.....

Survey

There are still a few areas to be completed, and better dating/descriptions for some others, before the Nomination Form can be written. After several changes in his plans for photographing areas and some individual buildings in Riverton, Mr. McCrea has decided against setting another specific date, but will come when weather and his time

will permit. If you see him busily photographing our town, say "hello."

Film

The Doll House Show given by The Porch Club for the benefit of the preservation of the film, Romance In Riverton, will be May 18 and 19, after which we will be able to press for completion of this project. Donations from organizations and individuals wishing to help may contact Harold Zayotti, and would be gratefully received. Some help is also needed at the Doll Show; contact Betty Hahle if you will help.

Doll House Show...

Friday, May 18	1 pm to 8 pm	admission: \$1.00 donation
Saturday, May 19	10 am to 4 pm	.50 children and senior citizens

Drawing for prizes (miniatures) every hour; light refreshments available for purchase; doll houses and supplies

This Show is for OUR Benefit: Lend Your Support

New

The Burlington County Cultural and Heritage Commission has recently published a booklet- Structure and Ornament, A Guide to Architectural Styles in Burlington Co., N.J. 1700-1900, with text by Keith Betten. Riverton is one of the 9 communities named as having the various styles described. The booklet sells for \$1.00, and may be purchased from the office at Smithville, or from our Society, which has obtained some copies on consignment, for your convenience.

Reminder

A few membership dues have not been received...an oversight, but one that could keep you from voting at the Annual Meeting and from continuing to receive your Gas Light News. Please double check, and if you're not sure, call Nell Layton, treasurer.

Yesterday

Old newspapers make fascinating reading. When Riverton Village was being planned, one could find ads for information on runaway apprentices (1¢ or 2¢ rewards offered, no additional expenses), an occasional slave runaway, or a strayed horse or other farm animal--which apparently was valued more highly, as rewards of several dollars were offered for those.

Advice on many subjects was offered, from whitening linens (soak overnite in 1 Tbsp cream of tartar to 1 qt water), recipes (the tomato butter sounded good!), to a 1905 remedy for treatment of wounds that went like this: knife, nail, or otherwise--smoke it with walleden rags--use wool cloth bits, set on fire, make a cone or use a funnel and smoke the wound for several minutes; "it draws out pain and any poison, and will prevent lockjaw and blood poison, and draw edges of a wound together."

People sang In The Good Old Summertime, You're a Grand Old Flag, and My Gal Sal. Then, in 1909 the New Era said that smoke and whistles from the trains were a problem. They said it was taken up with the PRR " to abate same" in the Borough. No problem, there, but moving the freight station to East Riverton took longer. Other items mentioned the recurrent problem of fires on properties along the tracks from hot embers thrown out from the engines.

And then, there was May Day. Do you remember..... the May baskets made of paper, filled with a few spring flowers, and placed on the doorknobs on the homes of friends and neighbors? And the whole town's enthusiasm for the school's celebration?

May Day celebrations date back to ancient times, marking the revival of life in early spring after winter. Each country developed its own particular way of celebrating, but all use flowers and singing and dancing, gifts, and joyous festivals. The Puritans

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frowned upon such festivities, so here in America there has never been the enthusiasm for May Day that is found in other countries. However, in many of our towns and cities it became a celebration by the children, and so, for a while longer, the customs were continued.

Back in the '20s May Day, or Field Day, as it was generally called, was held on the playground on the Howard Street side of the school. May Poles with their crepe paper ribbons were erected, and each class, in turn, presented its dance or drill and the townspeople lined the sidewalks to watch.

Later, as the population grew, the celebration moved to the Park. The program grew, too, and family picnics were the order of the day. Families arrived with baskets and blankets, chose their favorite spot, and soon the trains brought the fathers to join them. At the shelter overlooking the Creek there were sandwiches and beverages prepared by PTA members for those who did not pack their own suppers. Then, at just the right time, so that the program would end at dusk, the celebration began.

Music was chancy—a strong breeze could carry the melody coming from the record player in the wrong direction, adding to the anxiety of the teacher, already breathing a prayer that the many weeks of preparation would produce a smooth performance by her class. As each class skipped out to center field, beginning with the smallest, the children were transformed for the moment—with the help of an apron or fringed jacket or feathers and beads or paper wings and wands—into children of other lands or stories.

Children in the middle grades ran relay races, to the encouraging shouts of all who watched. Boys in knickers, and girls in black stockings and bloomers, topped by a white middy blouse, earned well deserved applause with their dumb bell and Indian Club drills, done with precision in perfect unison.

The climax was the May Pole dance, done by 7th and 8th grade girls, dressed in their prettiest dresses. They skipped out, two-by-two, formed circles around the 2 May Poles, and began the familiar dance. Around they skipped, now in circles, now approaching the pole, retreating, around again. At a certain point each pair of girls skipped to the center and took a ribbon from the little 1st grader who had been positioned there, holding the ribbons for this moment, and then the weaving began.

It was a happy day, and families walked home together, re-living the activities just enjoyed.

Years brought changes...population continued to increase, the program grew longer and more elaborate. A May Queen and Court were added, and choices brought new feelings of rivalry and disappointments into play. Interest lessened in picnics, participation and support dropped off, and finally the traditional May Day in Riverton was ended.

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For the Days Ahead

Here's a list of some events coming up, and places you might enjoy visiting over the summer:

- Saturday, May 5 Lumberton Day Flea Market, Fiddle Contest (open to anyone), and full day of events. Lumberton Historical Society has a collection plate of Cobbler's House for sale.
 - May 18 and 19 DOLL HOUSE SHOW, THE PORCH CLUB OF RIVERTON. See page 2 this issue.
 - June Annual Quilt Show of Medford Historical Society. Museum at Kirby's Mill.
- Burlington County Historical Society: Cooper House and Lawrence House on High St. in Burlington. Some souvenirs available—miniatures of colonial cradles, churns, etc.; paper needlepoint bookmark kits; others. Open Sundays 2-4 pm; Wednesdays 1-4 pm. Library by request.

Historical Society of Moorestown, Smith-Cadbury Mansion, 12 High Street; antique furnishings; gift shop.

Historical Society of Hamilton Township—John Abbott II House—group of 3 buildings on Kuser Road, to the right of Rte 533 going north, between White Horse circle and Mercerville. Open Sat & Sun 12 - 5 pm.

Hancock House- State-owned historic house museum, recently reopened after restoration work of several years. Lower Alloways Creek Township, Salem Co. Wed-Sat, 10-12; Sundays, 1-6. 50¢ admission.

Don't forget the State Parks—Batsto Village in the Wharton Tract, and Allaire Village.

Then further south is Wheaton Village, a restored village with a magnificent glass museum, craft demonstrations, shops, and light lunch.

And—Riverton's Library, and the County Library..... and keep watch in the newspapers—"Jersey Life" has good suggestions, as does BCT's County Calendar; and the County Bell has a list of activities for all summer.

An idea...how about jotting down your impression of places you visit and enjoy, and we'll include them in the Fall issue of Gas Light News.....ok?

Don't forget to mark the May, 14 Annual Meeting on your calendar now. If you would like to help on a committee, to become more active in your Historical Society, let us know. Your help is valuable, and appreciated.

BBHahle, ed.