



GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

Nov - Jan 1980-81

No. 2

Coming programs:

With all the activities that will fill the coming weeks, please note the dates of our next 2 meetings in the period covered by this newsletter.

Monday, December 1 (Monday AFTER Thanksgiving) 8 p.m. Music room, Riverton School
"Firemarks and Other Artifacts" Debra J. Force

Curator, INA Museum

The Insurance Co. of North America, founded in 1792 in Philadelphia, was the first stock fire and marine insurance company in the country. Their early records were carefully preserved, and over the years an impressive collection of fire and marine-related artifacts has been developed. The Historical Collection includes fire marks, buckets and other equipment; ship models and paintings, prints, trophies, and many other things.

Miss Force has majored in American Civilization and Culture, and has served as both researcher and consultant at Betsy Ross Foundation, Elfreth's Alley Museum House, and other area institutions, in addition to serving as curator-director of the INA Corporation Museum. She has also written a Thesis on "Women in Eighteenth-Century Virginia."

The program will involve an overview discussion with slides and some of the smaller artifacts of the INA Museum. On display will also be the copy of INA's book, The Historical Collection of INA, which has been donated to our Historical Society.

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Monday, January 12, 1981 8 p.m. Music room, Riverton School
"Great Scott" Carl and Walter McAllister

John Mc Allister came to America from Scotland in 1775, became involved in the Revolution, then in church, civic, and business activities in Philadelphia. He is credited with being instrumental in developing the profession of optometry.

Carl and Bus will talk about their ancestor, and then present something of their own earlier years in Palmyra and the development of their family businesses here, familiar to more than one generation of local residents.

They will bring a number of artifacts handed down through their family, and some old photographs from the Palmyra-Riverton area, for us to see and enjoy.

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Materials...

Where to house our Society's collection of pictures, papers, and other things so that they can be both well cared-for and available to those who would like to use them for research continues to be a concern. The Board is exploring several possible locations, and would also welcome any suggestions for additional exploration.

Old letters, pictures, newspapers, awards, deeds, and many other things are valuable keys to the history of a town and its people. They provide insights not found in any other place; yet when people move away, or decide to "really clean out that attic", these are the things that tend to be discarded.

Before you throw away things you may no longer want to keep yourself, offer them to the Historical Society. They can be invaluable to a researcher.

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Yesterday

In October, 1880, owners of cranberry bogs were having trouble getting enough pickers; wages were about 40¢ a bushel, and the bogs yielded about 100 bu. per acre.

In November of that year the Mt. Holly Herald noted that a U.S. steamer was at Delanco, with the engineer corps working on a survey in preparation for straightening the Ran-cocas Creek.

The bridge over the Pompestian creek (that's how they spelled it) on the east side of Riverton was reconstructed by "The Freeholder of Cinnaminson", and called "a good improvement long needed." The road had been very narrow and over swampy ground, often covered with water, and having it filled in and widened was much appreciated.

Thanksgiving day saw the 1st issue of Riverton's first newspaper, "The Riverton Journal" to be published monthly, started by "a couple of young fellows." (It appeared to have been well received...and predated the New Era by about 9 years. Has anyone reading this Gaslight News ever heard of that paper, or seen a copy of it?)

The weather was cold...one contractor building houses on Main Street built fires in the cellars to keep mortar from freezing so the masons could continue their work and the carpenters could get the framework up, in spite of the ice and snow covering their materials.

Good skating was reported at all the coves.

Post-election comments made a writer's own preferences clear. A December (1880) Riverton column said "...the high tariff party were victorious in the last election, manufacturers are looking forward to a good harvest. New manufactories are already springing up and this town is coming in for a share of them. A stocking factory has been started, and other weaving machinery will soon be introduced." (Any reader know location of this, or anything else about it?)

December 25, 1880, was a regular publication day for the Mt. Holly Herald. It was like any other working day, with no reference to its being Christmas.....

Holidays.....

Thanksgiving's history goes back to an English festival of the 16th Century, Harvest Home. It celebrated the gathering and harvesting of the main grain crop, but so disrupted the harvest that by the end of the Century it was put off until after the crops were harvested. It was a celebration of revelry and feasting, and went on for days. The custom was carried across the sea by the Pilgrims who, grateful for a harvest in 1621 bountiful enough to see the survivors through the winter, extended an invitation to their native American friends to feast with them. For 3 days they feasted on geese, ducks, and "a great store of wild turkeys" and then the Indians added 5 deer. With this they also had stuffings, puddings, fried corn cakes, and strong, sweet ale. In addition to eating--which appears to have been considerable--there were songs, dances, and sports, such as stool ball, stagging, and pitching the bar, as well as demonstrations of skill with firearms and longbows.

Dates varied, but customs changed little until the romantic Victorians did some revision of history and pictured America's 1st Thanksgiving as prayerful. That picture captivated the imagination and inspired writers of school books, and eventually Thanksgiving became as we know it today--a day of thanks....with a special dinner and sports still very much a part of it.

Like to try the forerunner of our pumpkin pie? Stewed pumpkin is made from diced fresh pumpkin simmered with 1 cup dark beer or porter, 2 to 3 tblsp malt vinegar, and salt, pepper, and spices to taste. Use a heavy casserole, and simmer several hours.

Christmas had its origin in pagan festivals and has changed many times in both date and customs. The Roman Emperor Constantine, who lived from 288-337, is believed to have standardized the date on December 25th, and various customs came into being in other countries since that time. The Germans contributed the lighting of the Yule log, Christmas trees and decorations with evergreens; St Francis of Assisi introduced the creche or manger with figures adoring the Christ-child; the Dutch brought Santa Claus to America when they settled in NY in 1621, as Sinter Klaas, their counterpart of St. Nicholas who visited children and scolded or rewarded them for their behavior; and the English established the tradition of sending cards at Christmas.

Christmas had not always been accepted--in England, back in late 15-1600s, the Church of England thought it one of the holiest of days. But Puritans thought it popish, put down the feasting and revelry and tried to suppress it. In America the Puritans levied fines for anyone "found observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting, or any other way, any such days as Christmas day....for every offense 5 shillings." Quakers, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians also denounced it. But Church of England, Dutch Reform, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches celebrated it.

Gradually hostility lessened, more immigrants came to America, bringing their customs with them, and by 1870 American Sunday School publications included Christmas instructional material. Many of our most popular holiday songs were composed between 1850-1870, and by 1890 Christmas was a national holiday.

Around that period it became popular to arrange farm and village scenes under trees, and the early 1900s introduced fine paper and then glass ornaments to supplement, then replace, the simpler paper, popcorn, and candle decorations. Currier & Ives illustrations of Christmas with snow scenes, sleighs, skaters, etc., have helped shape our image of Christmas today into something far more romantic than history pictures its beginnings.

For a Christmas table centerpiece, you might like to try making a pyramid of citrus fruits by attaching fruits to a styrofoam cone with floral picks, and setting it in an attractive bowl. Stud some (not all) of the fruit with cloves, fill in spaces with sturdy greenery and some berries (pieces of rose hips, pyrocantha, or cranberries on toothpicks), and enjoy a fragrant, attractive, and long lasting arrangement.

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Membership in the Historical Society of Riverton is one of the best investments around: for only \$2.00 per person per year (\$1.00 for senior citizens) you get not less than 4 interesting programs each year, and usually more than that.. Gaslight News, published quarterly, delivered to your home.... the pleasure of sharing your interest in history with others... the opportunity to help maintain an awareness of what we have in our community, and its place in history...

Dues can be brought to the next meeting, or sent to Mrs. Ellen Layton, treas.

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Watch newspapers and notices for various activities you won't want to miss this Holiday season. There are many house tours, bazaars, plays, exhibits, etc.

Among them will be the Riverton Library House Tour on December 13th, with an opportunity to visit some of homes, and to see some of our Historical Society's costumes and pictures from Riverton at an earlier time displayed at the Library.

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Finally, for those of us who mean to ...renew a membership....get out to more meetings.... invite a friend to come along--and join us....become more active in our activities.... and then something else takes our attention and the moment slips by.....here's a reminder: NOW's the time to get a -

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