



# GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

Feb - Apr 1981

No. 3

## Program:

Monday, March 9, 1981

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

"Trails Before Stagecoaches"

.... Elizabeth M. Woodford

Elizabeth Woodford, field naturalist, writer and lecturer is well known throughout this area. She shares her love for nature, and the Pine Barrens in particular, through slide-lectures, articles in magazines and newspapers (her column used to be in BOT, but is now featured in the Medford paper), and classes for adults, as well as tours enjoyed by many schoolchildren of the banding station and wildlife refuge at her own home on Cedar Run Lake.

This program will tell of trails that became stagecoach routes, and then busy highways, as people travelled across the Pine Barrens from the Delaware River to the Ocean, with many beautiful slides of the wildlife encountered. Old recipes and medicines from native plants will be included in the talk, as well as a letter from William Penn to the Society in London describing the wealth and beauty of the wildlife found in the area.

This is a program you won't want to miss. Come early, and bring a friend.

- - - - -

Monday, May 4th...Sailing on the Delaware...more information will be in your next Newsletter, but you may want to circle the date now.

This is our Annual Meeting, and the participation of every member in good standing is both a right and a responsibility.

- - - - -

Film...The Romance of Riverton...In response to a number of requests by residents to have this film shown again, plans are being made to show it in late April. It will be open to the public, and date and place will be advertised in the newspaper--please watch the paper and local postings for specific information in April.

- - - - -

## Elections and Appointments:

The Annual meeting in May is the time for elections, and this paragraph is a review of our Historic Society's procedures. The board consists of 12 elected members serving 3-year terms, with 4 persons elected each year. Those whose term will be completed this year are: Ellen Layton, EllaMay Moore, and Louise Vaughn. There is also 1 vacancy since Ruth Schmierer recently withdrew from this position after many years of service to the Historic Society. After the May election the Board will hold a reorganization meeting to choose from among that group the officers who will serve for the next 2 years. The time differences in terms has both advantages and disadvantages as it ensures a regular changeover of leadership, allowing for growth through fresh approaches and ideas, and limiting over-long responsibilities for anyone.

Program and publicity chairmen are appointed annually, and terms are not limited. Term of Curator is also not a limited one.

We hope that those who have served will be able to continue to do so, and that others approached by the Nominating Committee will respond positively. Wouldn't it be great

if members would VOLUNTEER to help? You have the interest and the ability..and your active participation is needed. Think about it, and then do something about it.....

The text to accompany the map "Battles and Skirmishes of the Revolution in New Jersey" has been purchased, and should arrive any day now. The reprint of Woodward/Hageman's History of Burlington County, ordered several months ago, is also expected any day--watch for these books at the Riverton Library.

.. Our Historical Society sent 2 members to the Workshop of Preservation held at Smithville in January. Several other members attended at their own expense. It was gratifying to have this program of the N.J. Historical Commission Services held in our own area.

.. The Walking Tour of Riverton is expected to be ready in May. This will be a guide, primarily for children--but as readily enjoyed by adults--to points of interest within the borough. It is by no means a complete list of all there is to be seen, but it is a good place to begin to see with a fresh appreciation some of the things we have that we take so much for granted that we no longer see them at all.

We live in a changing world. Our towns, so much the same over the years, are in reality changing constantly--often without our even being aware of what has happened until one day we notice with surprise what has disappeared, or appeared.

Properties change hands more often than they once did, in our town. Once-large lawns and gardens become the site of a new home--sometimes a modern one in the midst of much older ones. Fires, new uses for old buildings, remodelling, and in our times in particular, the use of aluminum or other sidings, all change the familiar landscape and influence the way we live.

Not all things of historic interest can, or should, be saved, of course. But neither can we afford to lose our heritage through ignorance or indifference. We need to know and appreciate what we have, and to share this knowledge and interest with newer residents and property owners in our community, and with our children. In this way, the best of our local heritage will be preserved and enjoyed more thoroughly today, and in the future by others yet to come.

Please double-check your records: membership dues of the Historical Society of Riverton are modest and easily overlooked. In spite of rising costs, our dues remain at \$2.00 per year (\$1.00 for srs.); our policy of 4 or 5 good programs each season, plus 4 Newsletters delivered to members has not changed. We donate to the Fourth of July program, purchase such books etc. as we are able, maintain a growing collection of artifacts, and hold down expenses by sending out dues reminders as seldom as possible, by hand-delivering Newsletters within town, and by being an all-volunteer organization. If you have overlooked your dues for 1980/81, please send same to Ellen Layton, treas., 630 Linden Ave., Riverton.

Yesterday:

Blow out the candles! It's time to celebrate! Did you know it? Riverton is 130 years old this month! One announcement of its "birth" was in the N.J. Mirror on Feb. 6, 1851, which said, in part...we learn of a new town to be called Riverton being laid out on the (New) Jersey side of the Delaware river, opposite Taconey....10 new homes, to cost about \$2,000 each, will shortly be erected; preparations will also be made to extend its borders....it is a fine location--high and commanding, with a bold shore, affording many advantages, and rendering it a delightful summer retreat for the business men of the city. ....

By April there were arrangements being made for the erection of "quite a number of handsome villas", a river wall and bank "ornamented similar to the celebrated Riverside in Burlington", a wharf for steamboat landings, and a house for the Camden & Amboy r.r., "which passes through the property."

By September a wharf with a 50 ft front had been completed, the river wall built and the bank sodded, and "10 villas erected, most of which are already occupied by the owners." And in February of 1852, just a year after the village's beginning, the founders were in the process of becoming incorporated, writing into the 8th section the clause remaining in our Deeds to this day that prohibits the manufacturing or sale of "ardent spirits" here.

The Philadelphians who founded the village of Riverton lived and/or had businesses in Old Philadelphia, shared a love of sailing, and a friendship and trust that permitted arrangements to be sealed with a handshake. The Jersey side of the Delaware was familiar to them not only from sailing into its coves, but also through business contacts. William D. Parrish had for some years advertised in Burlington county papers (wholesale dealer in paper, rags, school books, blank books, writing paper, printing and wrapping paper, wall and curtain paper, all at manufacturer's prices), as had others of the group. Dillwyn Parrish was a druggist, Robert Biddle a hardware merchant, Caleb Clothier dealt in bricklaying, Rodman Wharton in paints, and Prof. Charles D. Cleveland, whose name is so often omitted from inclusion as a founder in spite of his early residence here and service as director and officer of the Riverton Improvement Co., had a girls' school. Miller McKim, whose name is usually listed as a founder, had an anti-slavery office near Cleveland's school, and entered the picture when he purchased Cleveland's riverbank house in 1852.

The other founders were also merchants. Daniel L. Miller, jr., was treasurer of the group, and it is his name that is found on the early Deeds. Caleb Atkinson and William Evans were tenants in common of a plantation along the river in Chester. On it was a shad fishery. Jos. Lippincott purchased Atkinson's land, and at the time the fishery was not mentioned in the Deed, probably through oversight, since this was rectified for \$1.00 a few years later. It gave him  $\frac{1}{2}$ -part of rights of fishing on the whole river of said plantation.... Miller purchased a portion of this tract (plantation) from Joseph Lippincott for the group, on which a village was then laid out. It was primarily meadows, running from the Pomreston to just below Penn (to a proposed street to be called Cottage), up to 3rd, then at an angle along what became Church Lane, and a section above the r.r. on the road (or, Public road), to Westfield. There were a few homes and businesses within the area being developed, among them the Lippincott farmhouse and Crosta's and Shinn's stores, and at least 1 boardinghouse for summer vacationers. A steamboat landing and a spot (near Fulton) where the train could be flagged to a stop afforded area farmers ways to reach markets for their crops, but the founders realized that residents would need better transportation, and promptly set about getting it.

The village grew. In 1877 it added a section from Cottage Ave. to Thomas, from river to r.r., purchased from Asa Lippincott, who had gotten it from his father, Joseph, for \$1, around the time the village began. The "Thomas Extension" ca. 1882 moved the border down to Elm, and then after 1900 the land above the r.r. opened up. Lippincott land began to be developed from the present upper boundaries toward the center of town, in 2 stages; then the large [former Thomas] Biddle property, site of the old ball and bicycle tracks, was developed, and finally, in 1949, the large section formerly the property of Dreer's Nurseries was developed.

Through the efforts of John Seckles, who ran the Lawn House, a church was begun in the village. He attended Episcopal churches in Philadelphia when he could, and groups met in homes, but in 1855 the rector from Moorestown agreed to hold an evening service here. D. L. Miller jr. allowed the group to meet in the "White House", a boarding house of the Riv. Imp. Co. on Main Street (later burned down). After this, services were held monthly; with the bell of the small steamship at the pier rung to call the worshipers together.

In June, 1859, the cornerstone of Christ Episcopal Church was laid, on property across from the r.r., between Main and the Lane, purchased from Prof. Cleveland. It was built in Gothic style, could seat 250, and was completed the following year. A cemetery began alongside it. The little church was moved in 1871 to a recently acquired site on Main below 4th, where it stayed until it was outgrown and replaced; then it moved again, in 1884, this time to Palmyra, where it remains today. The early cemetery was emptied when that property was sold, with some being reinterred in Morgan cemetery.

In so little space it is impossible to tell much of our town's history. Records in newspapers and Deeds and Minutes tell of new houses being built, of others being moved to new sites, of families moving back to Philadelphia for the winter months, of schools, businesses, churches, organizations; of families coming, of those leaving; of baseball games, of bicycle and sailing races; of parades, of fires, of funny, of tragic, of serious things.... of all the things that add up to growth. In April of 1893 Riverton left its parent, Cinnaminson, to become a borough in its own right, and elected Ogden as its first mayor.

Some of the Philadelphians who conceived the village lived only a little while after its birth. Rodman Wharton died in 1854, Wm. D. Parrish in 1863, Prof. Cleveland in 1869. They remained "Philadelphians", but the care and foresight of these philanthropists laid the foundation for the Riverton that evokes a special feeling in those who later would call it "home."