



GASLIGHT NEWS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON, INC.

Riverton, N. J. 08077

May - July 1981

No. 4

Coming programs:

Monday, May 11, 1981

8 p.m.

Music Room, Riverton School

"60 Years on the Delaware River" Charles W. Knight

Mr. Knight is a life-long resident of Riverton, and his love of sailing began when he was a small boy. Tales of Yacht Club activities, people, changes in boating over the years, recalled with a touch of humor, will make this a most enjoyable evening.

Mr. Knight, now "partly retired", is a former mayor of Riverton, and has, like his family before him, a deep interest in our community, and has contributed much to it.

This is also our Annual meeting, at which time 4 members will be elected to our Board. The Nominating Committee will present its slate of candidates, and nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

Soon after the Annual meeting the new Board will meet to elect officers for the next 2 years.

Come out to vote for your representatives, and to enjoy a fine program.

"The Romance of Riverton"

Friday, May 15, 1981

7:30 p.m.

Porch Club, 4th & Howard Sts.

The silent film about Riverton, made in 1926 and reproduced from the original nitrate film on modern safety film last year will be shown once again, this time open to the public. Come enjoy it again, and invite your friends and neighbors, too.

Please note time and place. A donation at the door (amount optional) will be asked.

Gas lights:

For years our street gas lights have been given the most minimal care, and time and again members and other residents have expressed concern about this. At our last meeting members were requested to write to the State Board of Public Utilities in Newark, protesting this neglect.

As a direct result of letters written by Art and Elsie Waters and Nell Layton, the Burlington office inspected the gaslights in both Riverton and Palmyra, found that they needed painting, some had missing parts, some were in need of straightening, and also found that there was no plan on record for their maintainance.

A program to correct these things has begun: at this writing the lampposts on Thomas Avenue above the railroad have all been freshly painted and look so much more attractive! Letters DO get results!! Our thanks to all those who wrote, AND to those who listened.

Survey:

If you have noticed someone carefully photographing various area about town, as well as businesses and individual houses, it is probably Pete Dechnik, working on this part of the survey begun so long ago. He carries a Historical Society identity card, and

has volunteered his services as photographer, saving us a considerable amount of the cost of such a project.

Mr. Karschner visited Riverton (from the Trenton office of Preservation) and outlined what needs to be done to finish the survey for presentation of Riverton as a Historic District, and commented favorably on what has been done so far.

We will finish the job this year. Over the summer we need help -- 3 or 4 people to help finish up areas not completed and to add to some that lack adequate information, and 3 or 4 more to type over ALL the forms will get the job done without too much being asked of anyone. Will you help? Call Betty Hahle, if you will...

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Walking Tour:

The Walking Tour of Riverton will be ready later in May, and maps may be picked up at the Library when they are ready. This project has been worked on for many weeks by Louise Vaughn and "Sister" Probsting, and will be in 2 parts. The first is geared for children, and arranged like a scavenger hunt, with clues and suggestions for finding a particular place or object. The second will be appealing to adults, with a wider range of sites and notes on architecture, etc. Both are sure to be interesting, and to make all who follow the map more knowledgeable about the town in which we live.

Try it.....you'll LIKE it.....

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Recent Acquisitions:

We have been given a wall map of Riverton/Palmyra, dated 1886, similar to the one now hanging in the Riverton Library, by Doris Steedle Malloy, and also a copy of the 1909 Christmas New Era. We have also received a collection of newspaper clippings from Mrs. Daly, and some newspapers (Philadelphia Inquirer) from 1861, one from 1909 with headlines from the San Francisco Earthquake and Disaster, and a newspaper-like condensation of reprints from papers during the Civil War, by Nell Layton. Some of these items are in good condition, and others are not. How best to store and preserve such items is a problem.

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Various Notes:

...A donation has been made to the Fourth of July program by our Historical Society.

This year we will also be represented by a float. We'll need some help both to participate and to decorate. We need YOU....

...Does your County Bell come late? We checked with Mr. Miller at the County Cultural & Heritage office at Smithville, and learned that they are at each post office in time for distribution BEFORE the date of the first event listed in each issue. After learning that many in Riverton receive theirs 4 to 5 weeks late, a special effort was made to get them out earlier, and a note to the Postmaster was attached, requesting that they be distributed on time. They were distributed 6 weeks later. If your County Bell arrives late, please let Mr. Miller know, and ALSO the local Postmaster. It SHOULD arrive in time to attend and enjoy the scheduled events in each issue.

...And more letters...The Tri-Boro Women's Club has a project to do something about the vandalism and neglect of Morgan Cemetery. Headstones have been knocked over, trash is littered throughout the grounds, the fence is broken, and dirt from the rutted roads washes out on to the street. They have contacted the owner without success. Now they have sent letters to the State Cemetery Association requesting their help in the matter. Many members have family members buried there, and those who do not still have an interest because of decency, property values, and the records of an area and the people who have lived there that the markers provide. Will you help by writing a letter to:
N.J. Cemetery Association/ c/o Mr. William Ingling/ Division of Banking/ State Street/ Trenton, N.J. 08608

State your concern about the conditions found at Morgan Cemetery, the lack of owner attention to the problems, and ask that your letter be read at their next Board meeting.

Letters DO get results.....

...Local writer, Lloyd Griscom, is currently working on a book, "Tales of Three Towns",

with publication expected in late Fall. His historical papers and books are much enjoyed by local residents--and by former residents--and his new work will be of particular interest in our Tri-Boro area. We're looking forward to its publication....
...Watch newspapers and flyers for activities and programs of neighboring Historical Societies that schedule events throughout the summer months. Support them, and in the Fall bring back some new ideas to our own group.

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Yesterday:

When you hear the haunting strain of "Taps" on Memorial Day, you may also recall how it came to be written. In the summer of 1862 Gen. Daniel Butterfield, listening to the bugle sounding the last call of day, "Extinguish Lights", remarked that it was just too formal, and not as smooth and melodious as it should be. He spent an evening composing his own melody, and next night the bugler of his brigade used it. It was picked up by other Union army buglers in the huge camp (in Virginia, overlooking the James River), and soon replaced the customary call. Gen. Butterfield titled his bugle call "Taps".

On a different note, July's celebration in the growing village of Riverton was soon being called "Riverton's Glorious Fourth". In 1892 newspaper reports said "the quiet Quaker town put on holiday attire..." and described the yachts and all smaller boats decked out with flags of all nations, and the competition among home owners in decorating their homes. That year the 28th annual Regatta at the Yacht Club was held.

Celebrations focused on the children's flag parade and on athletic events as well. Baseball was popular, and each small community seemed to have its own team, with matches between neighboring towns and with Philadelphia and other waterfront teams as well. As bicycling grew in popularity, Wheelmen's Clubs were formed, and meets became a part of the growing interest in athletic events.

Riverton's team used a track on Fulton street, below the railroad, and then a larger one above the railroad, where Lippincott, Thomas, and 7th streets are today. June of 1894 saw the new track completed there, in time for the riders to begin training for the big meet on July 4th. It was the widest 1-4 mile track in the world, designed by O.S. Bunnell of Philadelphia, a much respected cyclist who would also be referee on the big day.

And what a day it must have been! Riverton, with a population numbering only a few hundred, had an attendance of nearly 4000, according to the papers. There were 8 class-A events, trick riders, an exhibition $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile ride by Harrison Barcus, a 5-year-old, on a 10 lb. wheel, and a 5-mile event that "kept spectators at fever heat from start to finish". Julius Blauberg, a prominent caterer from Philadelphia, had charge of refreshment stands, and prizes--oh, the prizes...5 diamonds, gold and silver medals, jewelry, and many other valuable articles. A.J. Briggs, Riverton's Athletic Association manager, kept things moving, and was careful that all activities and decisions were fair.

Soon color was introduced into the meets by having riders wear brightly colored shirts instead of numbers to identify them--and shortly there followed items of vandals breaking into the athletic building on the grounds and making off with "articles of clothing".

Fireworks were held at the bicycle grounds after the races.

In 1894 W.F. Sims was out to break his record of a mile in 2.11. He aimed to do it in 2 minutes--and made it. (Speed on the track was one thing; it was something else along the streets and paths of town, and increasingly there were reports of children being knocked down, teeth being lost in the process, and broken bones of older victims. Tempers grew short with this behavior--even on Sunday--and there were calls for dealing more severely with the culprits.

Boat races, swimming, and other water activities were all a part of the Fourth. As some of the other athletic programs lessened in popularity, the river events increased. Carnivals were popular, annual 10-mile swims were a challenge and brought swimmers from a wide area, including Europe.

Storms, which seem to have been rather more frequent and severe than seen here today, also played a part in some of the celebrations. In 1901 the Riverton Flag Association was presented with a 30-foot flag by the South Jersey Gas & Electric Company, which was to be raised at the annual flag parade by the children on the Fourth, on a 104-foot pole, erected on the triangle in front of the Roberts store. This point was often referred to

as the center of town, and also had a fine drinking fountain on it. The fountain was of dressed granite, 4 ft high, "for man and beast", and had been erected in August of 1896. Funds for it had been raised through various activities, one being a lawn party on July 3 of that year given by Mrs. John C. S. Davis. (Does anyone know when it disappeared???)

A few days before the Fourth (of 1901) a storm, with torrential rains that flooded the streets and lightning that set fires and did other damage, did it in. The metal ball on top of the pole was hit, split in half, and thrown to the ground. Ezra Perkins, sitting nearby, felt the charge, and had to be carried home--but wasn't seriously hurt. All the town's lights were burned out, according to the paper, by that storm.

Only a few years before that, the school's flagpole had also been demolished by a storm. (The schoolhouse was a frame one, on 4th across from the present Episcopal Parish house).

Many things were happening at the turn of the century--a Carnival of Flowers raised funds for the Childrens' Summer Home in Cinnaminson; Dreer's built more large hot houses; Palmyra school got a new flagpole for their school; petitions were being circulated to have the railroad stations lighted-by either gas or electricity-; radical changes in education were expected because of influence exerted by the ladies of Porch Club, who advocated improved public schools and had gotten 2 of their members elected as "directors"; the Lawn House's proprietor, W.G. Russel, had sold a big barn behind it, and it was demolished and the wood cut for firewood; the trolley line was extended from Riverton to Riverside. And milk dealers were calling for closer inspections of milk: they had about eliminated those who had been watering the milk, they said, but now some were adding acids as a preservative, cutting down the need for ice, and they felt that caused unfair competition, especially at resorts. And Jello was being advertised as a new dessert.....

A special note of thanks to Judy Olsen, who gave us many print-outs from the N.J. Mirror, from which much of this material, and that of last quarter's, has been taken.

BBHahle, ed.

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