



Gaslight News

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August 2021

Historical Society of Riverton

rivertonhistory.com

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Founded 1970

Riverton, NJ 08077

Incorporated 1978

“

The mansion was designed to occupy the entire two hundred twenty-five (225) foot frontage. Changes to that are a loss to the mansion, the historic fabric of the Borough and the neighborhood.”

Architectural Review Committee

Groves Mansion status still undecided

Ahead of a 6/24 Planning Board session, the HSR urges preservation of the historic home

The 1901 home of a steamboat company president has another date with the Planning Board, on August 24, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

We mentioned in the [May 2021](#) issue and in our April web post, “[A unique Riverton restoration opportunity!](#)” that the Edwardian home of steamboat company president **Frederick S. Groves** is in need of someone with restoration experience who is unafraid of a big (but beautiful) job.

So here is an update. Background: the property is 409-413 Lippincott Ave., right in the middle of the Riverton Historic District, on one of our most beautiful streets. It is listed as a “contributing resource” to our district that is



[Frederick S. Groves Mansion](#), 411 Lippincott Ave., March 2021 PHOTO: Roger Prichard

on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is a big house on a full acre lot, built in 1901 to a design by Philadelphia architect **Frank Mercer** as a total rebuild of an earlier, smaller house. To build it, the owners assembled three smaller lots in order to have room for this expansive home.

In recent years, its latest owners (now deceased) allowed it to deteriorate, though they did some good work on parts of it.

Their estate put it up for sale in January. JRB Properties purchased it on March 26 at a premium over asking price. (JRB Properties is an LLC of new-home builder **Jim Brandenburger**,

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Roger Prichard is now the Borough Historian

At the May 18, 2021 meeting of the Riverton Borough Council, **Mayor Suzanne Cairns Wells** announced the retirement of Borough Historian **Paul Schopp** and the appointment of **Roger Prichard** as his replacement.

With a superb grasp of Riverton's history as well as having insight into how our town fits into the larger scheme of the region, Paul Schopp provided distinguished service for eight years as our second Borough Historian. **Betty B. Hahle** was the first.

Mayor Cairns Wells and **Borough Council** issued a joint proclamation declaring **Paul Schopp** to have “earned the respect and admiration of the residents of Riverton through his extensive contributions.”

Mayor Cairns Wells told Council, “When I learned that Paul wanted to resign, I immediately knew that Roger was the obvious choice

to succeed him.”

We are grateful that Paul will continue to consult for us as his schedule allows.

Roger Prichard is an HSR Board member who may be best known to Rivertonians as the creator of most of HSR's growing collection of historical markers along the riverbank, at the Riverton Free Library and at Riverton School.

Roger looks forward to this new appointment, with the opportunity to speak for the interests of Riverton's history and its historic places, as they have no voice of their own.



L-R: Mayor Cairns Wells, Roger Prichard PHOTO: ROGER PRICHARD



"preservation" has been our mission since our inception

Founder Mrs. Betty Lockhart wrote a letter to a local newspaper, inviting anyone interested in forming a historical society to meet at her home to discuss it. On June 4th, 1970, 54 persons attended the first meeting held at the Porch Club and voted to form such an organization.

They decided to meet twice a year and elected Mrs. Lockhart as its first president. By 1974, the organization had drafted a constitution and bylaws and became incorporated. Mrs. Marilyn Colozzi wrote a one-page undated newsletter containing announcements of activities which the group christened the *Gaslight News*, named for the quaint streetlamps which, at that point, PSE&G had earmarked for removal.

That modest beginning was the start of the Historical Society of Riverton.

Due largely to the activism of HSR members, those original 52 gaslamps were saved in the late 1970s, thus preserving the Victorian atmosphere of the town.

Later years saw many more preservation achievements:

- Conversion of Romance of Riverton film to video
- Microfilmed then later digitalized historic hometown newspapers
- Conservation of maps, photos, and documents
- Initiated historic house plaques
- Nomination of Riverton's Historic District to the NJ and National Registers of Historic Places
- Introduced website & Facebook
- Installation of historic markers
- Organization and storage of irreplaceable HSR collections

Will you help the Historical Society of Riverton continue its preservation endeavors with your membership or give a donation?

Use the [PayPal DONATE](#) button at bottom left of our homepage or go to our [CONTACT & MEMBERSHIP](#) page.

GROVES from 1

who has constructed a number of houses in Riverton over the years, none involving historic properties.)

The new owner immediately proposed cutting the 225' frontage it into three pieces. JRB promptly relisted for sale the center third (only the part holding the historic house) on the assumption that they would be able to get the Riverton Planning Board's approval for subdivision to create two more lots, on which they would build new houses.

No parts of that subdivision proposal are permitted by legal right under the zoning code

(nor is a demolition permitted for the purposes of subdivision, if it comes to that). The proposal would result in very narrow side yards for the historic home (which for 120 years has had side yards of about 80', as designed). One of the other lot frontages would also be narrower than legally permitted.

JRB has also marked with spray paint all of the mature trees to be removed. An informal count and measurement of those over 10" in diameter showed that twenty trees would be destroyed, including a ginkgo 30" in diameter, a double holly 37" and a beautiful copper beech.

Throughout, the Historical Society of Riverton (HSR) has had an active email list to keep its board and interested neighbors informed.

In June, the HSR wrote a [letter to the Planning Board](#) for the first hearing urging that every effort be made to protect it.



[Groves Mansion, July 2021](#)
PHOTO: Roger Prichard



[Groves Mansion, July 2021](#)
PHOTO: Roger Prichard

Borough Historian **Roger Prichard** also

made a detailed six-page [statement](#), putting it in the context of Riverton's strong tradition of historic preservation and its Master Plan, which encourages it.

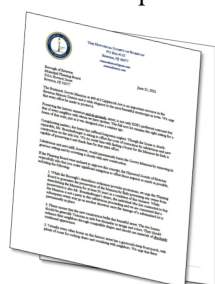
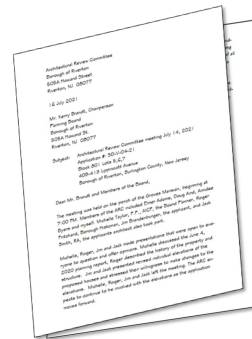
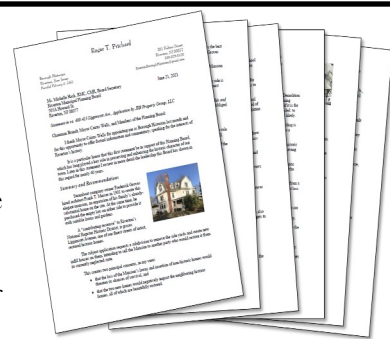
The Borough's Architectural Review Committee then met with JRB and subsequently wrote a [letter to the Planning Board](#) with an unambiguous statement, affirming, "The mansion was designed to occupy the entire two hundred twenty-five (225) foot frontage. Changes to that are a loss to the mansion, the historic fabric of the Borough and the neighborhood."

All three of those statements placed preservation of the entire one acre parcel as their strongest recommendation.

JRB requested a postponement from the Planning Board until its August meeting. No reason has been released for this and it is not known how they might intend modifying their proposal. **Mr. Brandenburger** has said that he has a qualified buyer for the historic house itself on the center third of the property, who is prepared to restore it. HSR is concerned that this further delay could be harmful, as it seems that maintenance of the property has come to a standstill.

Though JRB has cut the grass sporadically, the one acre yard has become overgrown with shrubbery and vines climbing the historic house, raising worries by neighbors and many others that it is on the road to [demolition by neglect](#)."

We urge interested HSR members to express their opinions to the Riverton Planning Board. The public may submit questions or comments via e-mail to mhack@riverton-nj.com no later than 4pm on August 24.



- ROGER PRICHARD



Criterion grant funds HSR huge preservation task

Archives Preservation Committee Chair Keith Betten and members Iris Gaughan and Pat Bruncker with processing volunteer Pat Solin tackled the massive task of organizing and cataloging the HSR Collection



HSR Collections PHOTO: JMC

A \$4,000 grant in 2016 from **Carlos Rogers' Historic Riverton Criterion** underwrote our still ongoing historical marker project; another \$5,500 HRC grant in June 2019 established a fund to organize our growing historical collection.

The HSR Archives Committee reports that more than twenty-five percent and perhaps nearly thirty-three percent of the society's current archival documentary holdings have been fully catalogued, described and housed in permanent, labeled boxes on the shelves of the storage racks in the archives storage section in the basement of the Riverton Free Library. Finding aids for all of these records have been prepared and will soon be available for access on line.



Included in the completed Record Groups/Subgroups are all archival records of the Borough of Riverton, the Riverton Porch Club, Public School Records (including Riverton Public School, the PTA/PTO, and Palmyra High School), and the Riverton Free Library (including documents from its 1899 founding - An-

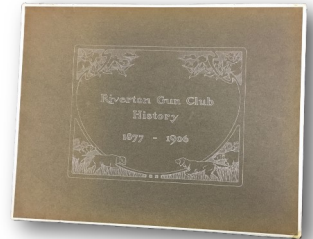
Riverton School photos PHOTO: JMC

nual Reports, Treasurer's Reports, Accession Records, Circulation Records, Members Records, and Accounting Records, etc). Also, soon to be processed are the recently discovered "first" and "second" Minute Books of the Riverton Improvement Company which describe the official activities of Riverton's founders between 1851 and 1864.



RYC Minute Book PHOTO: JMC

Many Record Groups and Subgroups remain to be fully processed for access for referencing purposes, including "Riverton Images/Photographs", "Riverton Families", the "Riverton Yacht Club", the "Riverton Gun Club", the "Riverton Country Club", "Transportation" (including the railroad and the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge) and the "Riverton Fourth of July Committee."



Riverton Gun Club History 1877-1906 PHOTO: JMC

Stay tuned for more exciting developments that will enable us to display more of our holdings online.

- KEITH BETTEN



Duster sailboat still intrigues us

Visitors sometimes land on our website at rivertonhistory.com as a result of an internet search. Call it a coincidence but three different website visitors recently made inquiries that touched on the Duster sailboat.

Calling from his Florida residence, **Steve Loving** inquired about his parents' former homestead at 307 Bank Avenue (now demolished to make room for Baptist Home expansion) because he planned to visit Riverton.

HUNN SAILS TO WIN IN RIVERTON EVENT
Riverton, Aug. 21.—Taking the lead with a 100 feet to go, Knute Hunn won top honors yesterday in the dusters division, sponsored by the Riverton Yacht Club. Nine competed in the event on the Delaware River.
Second place went to Lou Clelland, followed in the order named by John Malloy, Mrs. Woodward, Miss Michener, George Kimball, Les Kimbal and Charles McCann.

The Morning Post (Camden), 21 Aug 1944, p13

The Yacht Club awarded his mother **Geraldine Michener** the **Upside-Down Trophy** for being "...the member who performed the most spectacular dumb stunt or the most dumb stunts during the year" in 1944 but misspelled her name Gerry as Jerry.

What she did to earn that hapless distinction is unknown.

The perfectly capable young Miss Michener likely rubbed elbows with pioneer Duster sailors of Riverton Yacht Club such as the legendary **Merrills, Hunns, Lippincotts, Coes, Knights,** and **Shoemakers.**

Town Historian **Roger Prichard** explains, "The Upside-Down Trophy is still awarded. In fact, the telling of the embarrassing stories is the highlight of the Riverton Yacht Club banquet after the end of every season. I won it once."



Irene Gustavsen, shown in the frayed news clipping at right, hoists sail on her Duster, Terangi II at Riverton Yacht Club.

Irene competed in Duster races here in the 1940s under her maid-



Philadelphia Inquirer, 10 Jun 1940, p22, PHOTO: KRISTINA TOOL

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DUSTER from 3

en name and later, by her married name, Irene Tool.

Barney Tool, Riverton, with his wife, Irene, as his crew-mate, won the duster class race, in a field of five, when only two out of the five finished. Ted and Lou Clelland were second. Fred Collings upset in his duster No. 2; Bill Waters did the same in his No. 33, while Knut Hunn had trouble with No. 21, and dropped out. (see entire article online)

Philadelphia Inquirer, 28 Sep 1942, p24

Her granddaughter, **Kristina Tool**, shown below sailing the Duster on Long Beach Island that her grandfather, **Bernard Joseph Tool**, built for her recently contacted us to ask what interest folks in Riverton still have in Dusters.



Undated PHOTO: Kristina Tool

We'll see!

Lastly, **Nick** wrote in to tell us that he "... just acquired a Duster sailboat with the #356 carved into the center-board box and rudder. Your page has me interested in restoring the boat... Love the legacy now that I am aware of it!"

Legacy we have, but no Dusters are currently in use at Riverton Yacht Club.

There is still one active fleet that keeps the class alive on [Lake Naomi](#), an exclusive resort community in the Poconos. [The 75th Dusters National Regatta](#) is scheduled there for Aug. 20, 21, and 22.

We hope that Nick will update us on the restoration of his vintage 1972 Duster that was last registered on Pines Lake, PA in 96.'

- JMc



Historic c1910 glass slides scanned

As mentioned in our last issue, HSR member **Richard Gaughan** undertook the task of making slides and [prints](#) from a collection of large glass slides in 1976. Fifty years later, we gave it another go with modern scanning equipment.

Roger Prichard just returned from the [Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts](#) in Philadelphia with super-high-resolution digital copies and the results are in the professional opinion of former NJ State Archivist Keith Betten, "WOW!!!"

More details to come in a later issue.

- JMc



(see web resolution online)

We heartily welcome two new members:
Elizabeth Rafter, LeRoy McClellan
Nancy Hall donated her Great-Grandfather Lippincott's carriage blanket, made in his own shop.
More details to come.

Gaslight News

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Post Office Box # 112
Riverton, NJ 08077

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of 17 and 24 stops respectively.

Together they encompass an area from Broad Street to the Delaware River.

View each Riverton Walking Tour online and download printable copies, or pick up one of a limited number of hard copies available at [Riverton Free Library](#), [Tillie's Trinkets & Treasures](#), and [Nellie Bly's Olde Tyme Ice Cream Parlour](#) for a \$1 donation.

[Riverton Walking Tour #1](#)
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- JMc

