

12 May 2022

Researching Your Riverton Home, Revised 2022

A Presentation for the Historical Society of Riverton

Patricia Smith Solin
Roger Prichard, Town Historian

John McCormick, Editor of The Gaslight News

Slide One – Introduction

Welcome the General Meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton.

I am Pat Solin. My husband, Barry and I have lived in Riverton, on Main Street since April 22, 1983. I sincerely thank John McCormick for all his technical and beautifully creative work on this presentation, as well as for his keen editing!

I might be introducing new information, so I've prepared a handout that you can use now, and take home with you as a reference. John will be uploading this presentation to the HSR's *Gaslight News* website, too, for later reference. But if you have questions, I would be pleased to answer them as I go, or I will be happy to speak to you after the presentation is concluded.

Slide Two – Outline

- Purpose of Presentation
- Brief Early History of Riverton
- Suggested Protocol
- How to Apply for a HSR Plaque

Slide Three – Purpose of Presentation

So many more tools are available online for those who want to research the history of their Riverton home and the people who lived in those homes! It is time to revisit our 2016 presentation. This revised guide should make it even easier for you to find the story your home and its earliest residents. Have your pencil, pad of paper, and your computer ready for research!

Slide Four – Brief Early History of Riverton

Do You Know a Bit of Riverton History?

As we noted in our 2016 *Researching Your Riverton Home*, some towns and cities in the US were founded so much earlier than our 1851 date. Certainly, there is a history to the land and our community before the establishment of Riverton. This guide is to help our current residents extend our knowledge of the history of the town by researching its homes and businesses, and its early residents, primarily after its 1851 founding.

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Farmland was purchased by the ten founders of the town from the Lippincott family. They hired architect Samuel Sloan to design the town layout as well as their beautiful summer homes which were built along the Delaware riverfront, what is now Bank Avenue. The original tract of Riverton land was first developed in 1852 – all riverbank homes were ready for occupancy in less than a 12-month period! In those early days, the town continued down Main Street from the Delaware River, ending at the railroad track. These Philadelphia merchants formed the Riverton Improvement Company who, in turn, sold plots of land, encouraging new homes and businesses to be built along this route. With the notable exceptions of some earlier residences, additional buildings were developed over time, extending up Main Street beyond the railroad track, then spreading wider and wider as farmland was sold to meet the demand for more homes, recreational parks, and businesses.

Slide Five -- Early Historic Dates

In the early days of the town, Riverton was accessed by Camden and Amboy train as well as the ferry from Philadelphia. It was a summer respite from the heat and congestion of Philadelphia until The Season ended in September, sending its families back to Philadelphia. As boarding houses were built along Main Street, other friends and families joined the founders to enjoy summers in town. In time, advancements encouraged its citizens to become more like a year-round town with businesses, a post office, bank, school and churches.

Slide Six – Suggested Research Protocol

Where to Begin My Research of My Home? Step 1 – Maps

I think **maps** are terrific and easy to use, so I like to start my house research with maps. Even if you already have a current deed to your home, it is great to actually see how your property may have changed over the years.

Slide 7 – Map Sources

Where to find these maps? Our own [Historical Society of Riverton website](#) and the [Library of Congress Sanborn Insurance maps](#) have a wealth of free map information. On our HSR website you can start with maps of the area before Riverton was established and work your way up to the excellent 1890 map.

Slide 8 – Two Favorite Riverton Maps

I have two favorite Riverton maps. The *1886 Hunter & Richards Map of Riverton and Palmyra* and the *1890 Birds Eye* map (on sale by the HSR!) is informative and beautifully decorated.

The *1886 Hunter and Richards Map of Palmyra and Riverton* is helpful because it shows property lots as well as the names of owners, with or without houses on the property. The

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1890 Birds' Eye Map is beautiful, with details of the structures. You can purchase a copy of the 1980 map through the Historical Society of Riverton's website – suitable for framing!

Slide 9 -- Sanborn Insurance Maps

A significant resource was lost to the country in a fire at the [Commerce Department Building in January 1921](#). The *US Census* is not released until 72 years after the data it is collected; with the loss of the *1890 US Census*, a decade of historical information about Riverton in its heyday was destroyed.

However, the [online Sanborn Insurance maps for Riverton \(1895-1919\)](#), show terrific, detailed home information, such as wrap around porches, building materials, home entrance locations, building elevations, and so much more, like property lines that might have changed over time. Be sure to print-screen the detail section of your homes in these maps and save them to your computer by date, such as **1886 Hunter, 1890 Birds Eye, 1915 Sanborn**, etc.

Slide 10 -- Step 2 – Deeds

Your next step is to locate the deed to your property, a primary resource document.

Deeds are loaded with pertinent information about your home and the people who owned it.

In it you will find information about property lines, dates it was bought and sold, who sold it, who purchased it, and for what price.

Researching deeds in Burlington County is now totally available online. No more making the trip to Mt. Holly and working with musty, heavy deed books!

Slide 11 – Your Deed Table

- ☞ You need to keep track of the information you find in each deed for your house.
- ☞ Create a table that has the deed date, grantor, grantee, deed book/page number, sale price, and a section for notes.

First, start by making a table for recording your deed search. You need to keep track of the information you find in each deed for your home.

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Deed Date	Grantor (Seller)	Grantee (Buyer)	Deed Book/Page Number	Sale Price	Notes
02 Feb 2000	Martha & George Washington	YOU – John & Jane Doe	202020/777	\$200,000	Block/Lot Number 100/1
10 Mar 1983	Estate of Mary Lincoln	Martha & George Washington	191919/555	\$1.00	As sole heir, Martha inherits her mother's estate.

Every line of your table reflects information for one deed. In this example, the first deed dated February 2nd, 2020 is to be your most current deed. It shows that George and Martha Washington sold their house to you, John and Jane Doe for \$200,000. On that deed, usually at the top of the page, you will find the deed book and page number where the deed can be found. Also, the most current deed will have the block and lot number of your property.

In the most current deed, usually in the first or second paragraph, you can find the substantiation that George and Martha had the right to sell their property because it lists the previous deed by deed book and page number. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO ADD THAT INFORMATION TO THE NEXT LINE BELOW SO THAT YOU CAN GO BACKWARDS TO THE NEXT, EARLIEST DEED.** You'll note that I've highlighted that information in red on this table.

I'll show you how to work backwards to trace earlier deeds. In our example, Martha inherited the property from her mother's estate. Be sure to add a new line to your table so you can note the deed book and page number of Mary Lincoln and perhaps her late husband, Abe's deed.

Slide 12 -- Block and Lot Numbers

Do you already know the **block and lot number** of your property? You can see it on your annual property tax statement postcard from the borough. Or check out the [Riverton's Application for the National Register of Historic Places](#). It's an *excellent* place to start to see if your house is already listed. Bear in mind that the build-date *may* not be completely accurate because not every property in the National Register received a full deed search – this is why you can verify the information with your own research! Another great reason to start with the [National Register of Historic Places for Riverton](#) is that it can give you a head start on the history and architecture of your property along with the block and lot number. Your house not listed in the National Register of Historic Places? You can call the borough to get the block and lot number.

Slide 13 – You Have Your Current Deed

You have a copy of **your most current deed**? Excellent! Your block and lot number are listed on this document. Begin to complete your deed table from the information on your deed. Again, be sure to go down to the next line of your table to add where the **previous** deed can be found by book and page number.

Slide 14 – No Deed?

Go to the [Burlington County Public Records Electron Search System \(PRESS\)](#) and begin a Property Records search or continue your search.

Select *County Clerk* from the menu at the left, then *Property Records* in that drop box.

When you get to this screen, be sure to select **By Block and Lot** as your document search – see red arrow. You do **not** have to narrow the search by date, but if you have the dates you can add it.

Slide 15 – Sample Search Result

Your search may give you multiple document options, such as mortgage documents, but choose entries that specify **Deed**.

Once you select and open the deed from the system, you'll need to select **GET IMAGE** to see it as a PDF. Add ALL the information to your deed search table from this document. Be especially mindful of seeing where the book and page number for the next, earliest deed is noted – it is usually in the first or second paragraph. You'll need that information to go and search backward to the *next* earliest owner of your house – each deed goes backward, showing where the previous deed is located by book and page number and who sold the house to that owner. In PRESS you can select "Download" to save this deed as a PDF to your download folder then print it out when you're ready.

Slide 16 – Problem Going Earlier?

Problem: You have an early deed book and page number that won't open on PRESS?

- ☞ Exhausted the PRESS online site?
- ☞ Go another website: [Burlington County's Deed Archives](#)

This means that you have to go to another Burlington County property search engine. You can actually keep going backwards to find all earlier deeds by accessing [Burlington County's Deed Archives](#). Again – no visiting the basement of Burlington County's record building in Mt. Holly!

Login to Image Sync as a **Guest** (tiny letters just above Username and Password, but you won't need either) and use **By Book and Page** number and select DEEDS to find each earlier deed, again working backward. This site doesn't have the ability to download the deed, so as you did with maps, take a screen shot to save an image of the important deed information and complete your deed table. Note: most of the important information about deed date, price, names, and where to find the previous book/page is typically located in the first paragraph but can be hard to read since the earliest deeds were hand-written. Don't be ruffled by a sale price of \$1.00 – sales among family members, business associates, or absorbing someone's mortgage – a myriad of reasons -- often kept that information private, hence the \$1.00 sale price. Again, be sure to add

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all the information from each deed to your own deed table. You can print out your screen shots, later, but be sure to rename them such as by **date & book & page**. **Sample: 1922 191919-222**

Slide 17 -- Finding Your House's Roots

With a nod to the PBS series, *Finding Your Roots*, you can continue your research to reveal more information about the architectural features of your house as well as about the people who lived in your home over the years. Using your deed template you now have a list of names to research!

Document architectural attributes of your home as well as the people who lived in it.

Slide 18 – Architectural Attributes

- ☞ What style is your home? Victorian, Italianate, Gothic Revival, Stick Style, Second Empire, Colonial, or another one?
- ☞ Determine the architectural style of your home and make a list of its qualities and unique characteristics

What qualities of your home make it special to you?

Our Riverton Public Library has many architectural style books. Especially useful is the [Historic Riverton: Notable Architecture, People and Events, 1775-1930](#).

Of course, online resources can help you define the features of your special home, such as stained-glass windows, parquet flooring, mantel pieces, and types of wood that was used in your home, etc.

Be sure to take a walk around the neighborhood to see other homes in Riverton by using the [HSR's walking tours](#). You are welcome to print your own copy or purchase them at the library for a modest donation. You can learn so much by just walking and looking carefully at other homes and their charming details.

Slide 19 -- More Resources

- ☞ See if your home is listed in Bill Washington's book: *Historic Riverton: Notable Architecture, People and Events, 1776-1930* available at the Library or for sale by the Society
- ☞ Find hundreds of structures listed in Riverton's 1999 National Register for Historic Places Registration Form [available online](#)

As noted earlier, the 1999 National Register for Historic Places may be a perfect place to find information about your Riverton home. Again, remember, not every home listed in the Register had a deed search.

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One book that might save you some time is located in our library. Historic Riverton: Notable Architecture, People and Events, 1775-1930. This book can be purchased through the Historical Society of Riverton.

You can find online the application for Riverton's historic district designation. About 500 structures are detailed in this document, which might help you with your research.

Another great resource: Structure and Ornament: A Guide to Architectural Styles in Burlington County, New Jersey, 1700-1900, text by Keith W. Betten, artwork by Mildred Engle. c.1979. (Thank you, Keith, for your help with my house's research!)

Slide 20 -- More Resources – Riverton Walking Tours

The HSR has a handy and informative Self-Guided Walking Tour of our town. It has a wealth of information of housing styles and architectural design information.

You can purchase copies of all three walking tours for a nominal donation. Visit the Riverton Free Library or Tillie's Trinkets & Treasures Gift Shop to pick up your print copies.

Slide 21 -- Riverton's Historic Newspapers and The Gaslight News

For another free source of local information, you can research online by going to the [HSR's main page](#) and use their *Search This Site* to find articles from early newspaper such as Riverton's The New Era. Newspapers highlight marriages, births, deaths, and other "newsy" items and are full of details about town events. Don't be surprised to see items such as where neighbors vacationed to when someone mowed their lawn – an early "FaceBook" that published almost everything!

Our own HSR website has an excellent collection of blog and Gaslight News newsletter articles so don't miss those articles, either.

Slide 22 – People

Now you can research the people who owned or lived in your house.

With so many free resources and subscription sites, it is amazing what you can discover once you begin using your list of names from your research table.

Maybe your previous homeowner had a servant living in your house? Where was each person born? What was their occupation – servant, farm laborer, merchant, at school, Lady? Could they read? So much information can be found in the state and federal census. Be sure to remember that Riverton was once a part of Cinnaminson Township and that early US Census records did not list street or house numbers until 1900.

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To search US and NJ Census records for free, check out the Burlington County Library System's [Ancestry Library Edition](#) or visit the Riverton Free Library and access the website there, too. The BCLS also offers an excellent list of resources on its [Genealogy Resources](#) page.

Be forewarned -- streets were not named, nor were house numbers standardized until after 1880 (at least in Riverton). So in order to find the name of a former property owner from your deed prior to 1880, you will have to hunt early records page by page for the Chester or Cinnaminson area, but with no street name or house number to guide you.

Birth and death dates, parish records, migration records, military records, *and* US Census records can be accessed for free at the online resource created by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), [FamilySearch.org](#).

Slide 23 – Two More Sources

Have you ever seen the HSR's [The Romance of Riverton](#), the 1926 film? You can see businesses and homes as they looked in the 1920s.

This 1929 Manning's [Riverton Classified Business Directory](#), a kind of "Yellow Pages," has the names and addresses of local Riverton businesses. Perhaps your home once housed a business?

Slide 24 – HSR Plaque

Once you have completed the research on your home, you can submit an application to the HSR Board.

Check out the [guidelines](#) and the [application](#) on the HSR website

Happy Researching!

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Resources

Slide 4 – Brief Early History of Riverton

- Otley & Whitford Map of Burlington County 1849. West Jersey History Project.
<http://www.westjerseyhistory.org/maps/countymaps/burlingtonco1849.shtml>

Slide 5 – Early Historic Dates

- See Historical Society of Riverton, The Gaslight News. <https://rivertonhistory.com/>

Slide 7 – Map Sources

- Historical Society of Riverton. Images: Maps
<https://rivertonhistory.com/images/maps/>

Slide 8 – Two Favorite Riverton Maps

- Hunter and Richards Map of Palmyra and Riverton, 1886
<https://rivertonhistory.com/images/maps/#jp-carousel-125869>
- Birds Eye Bird's-Eye-View, Riverton, Otto Koehler, 1890
<https://rivertonhistory.com/images/maps/#jp-carousel-1411>

Slide 9 – Sanborn Insurance Maps

- United State Census: History: 1890 Census Fire, January 10, 1921
https://www.census.gov/history/www/homepage_archive/2021/january_2021.html
- Sanborn Insurance Maps: Princeton University
<https://library.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids/sanborn/burlington/riverton.html>

Slide 12 – Block and Lot Numbers

- National Register of Historic Places Application Form, Riverton NJ, 1999.
<https://rivertonhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Historic-Riverton-District-app-1999.pdf>

Slide 14 & 15 – No Deed? & Sample Search Result

- Burlington County Public Records Electron Search System (PRESS)
<https://press.co.burlington.nj.us/Press/clerk/ClerkHome.aspx?op=basic>

Slide 16 – Problem Going Earlier?

- Burlington County Deeds Archives
<http://ccarchive.co.burlington.nj.us/Login.aspx>

Slide 24 – HSR Plaque

- HSR Plaque Guidelines & Application
<https://rivertonhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Guidelines-for-Preparation-of-Historic-Building-Plaques-2016.pdf>
<https://rivertonhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Historic-Plaque-Application.pdf>

More Resources

- Washington, Bill. Historic Riverton: Notable Architecture, People and Events:1775-1930. Riverton, NJ: The Historical Society of Riverton, Inc. 2004.
- Structure and Ornament: A Guide to Architectural Styles in Burlington, New Jersey, 1700-1900. Text by Keith W. Betten. Artwork by Mildred Engle. Mt. Holly, NJ: The Burlington County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1979.
- The Historical Society of Riverton, The Gaslight News, Self-Guided Walking Tours: 1989, 2021.
<https://rivertonhistory.com/2021/05/better-late-than-never-two-riverton-walking-tours-available/>
- The Historical Society of Riverton, The Gaslight News, Historical Newspapers
<https://rivertonhistory.com/historical-local-newspapers/>
- The Historical Society of Riverton, The Gaslight News Newsletter
<https://rivertonhistory.com/gaslight-news/>
- The Historical Society of Riverton: An Edwin Cooper Production for Riverton's Chamber of Commerce, 1926. A 43-Minute Videotape Made From the Original Film. The Historical Society of Riverton. Commentary notes researched and written by Betty B. Hahle. 1990.
<https://rivertonhistory.com/store/>
- Griscom, Lloyd E. Tales of Three Towns: Cinnaminson, Palmyra & Riverton. S.l.: s.n., 1981