

The Theodora Borden and Llewellyn Collings House

A brief history of the early years of 802 Main St., Riverton, New Jersey

Prepared by Roger T. Prichard © Historical Society of Riverton, rev. November 4, 2022



802 Main Street, Riverton photo by Roger Prichard November 4, 2022

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Introduction

This house was built on land which had been farmed by the Lippincott family for generations. In the last half of the 19th C., this section then passed through the hands of the brothers Robert and William Canby Biddle¹ (founders of the town of Riverton along the riverbank).

Ultimately this area was in the possession of William Dunton Lippincott and his wife Anna Heulings Lippincott, who subdivided off this 100' by 190' parcel, by then known as 802 Main

Street, in a sale on November 25, 1910 to Llewellyn Willis Collings for the sum of \$2,000, a price low enough to suggest that it was empty land at the time.²

Llewellyn Willis Collings (1881-1966)

At the time he purchased this land in his name, Llewellyn Collings was a single man living in Riverton at 613 Main St., in the home of his widowed sister Marion and her two children. He was a superintendent for the young Victor Talking Machine Company.³

Llewellyn's father was Joseph Zane Collings (1839-1917), who ran his family's Collings Carriage Company, manufacturer of carriages, coaches and wagons at Front and Arch Streets in Camden.⁴ His mother was Emily Willis (1841-1926). The Collingses were Quakers, presumably part of the family associated with Collingswood.

Llewellyn clearly purchased the land in anticipation of building a home in which to settle with his intended wife.

Theodora Borden (1885-1985)

There can be little doubt that Theodora was the second cousin of Lizzie Borden (1860-1927), notoriously accused but acquitted of the ax murders of her parents in Fall River, Massachusetts on August 4, 1892. See the family tree reproduced here in Appendix A in HSR's *Ancestry.com Early Families of Riverton NJ*.

Theodora grew up in Fall River, the youngest daughter of Jerome C. Borden (1845-1930), a wealthy lumber dealer⁵ (end note mentions Lizzie Borden connection), and Emma Elizabeth Tetlow (1846-1920).

How Theodora, a Baptist from Fall River, and Llewellyn, of a Quaker family from Camden, met is not known.

A month prior to their marriage, Llewellyn transferred title of the real estate to Theodora and it remained solely in her name as long as they lived there.⁶

Llewellyn and Theodora

Llewellyn was 29 years old and Theodora was 25 when they married in a Baptist ceremony at her family's house at 618 Rock St. in Fall River on June 12, 1911. (Per Google StreetView, the home still exists, restored and in use as a private school. In style it is somewhat similar to 802 Main, though on a grander scale.)

We know from the account⁷ reproduced below of their stylish wedding that 802 Main St., Riverton was her father's wedding gift. The account words this as a gift "to the bride". It's not clear now, 112 years later, if the omission of the groom is significant. The deed did remain in her name only.

With 150 guests at the ceremony in the home and 300-400 guests at the reception and music provided by "a string orchestra from the Boston Symphony Orchestra" the gift of this substantial new home was commensurate with the event.

Fall River Daily Evening News June 13, 1911, p. 10

COLLINGS-BORDEN

**Fashionable Wedding at Residence of
Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Cook Borden
on Rock Street.**

One of the society events of the season occurred on Monday evening, when Miss Theodora, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Cook Borden of No. 618 Rock street, was united in marriage to Llewellyn Willis Collings, of Riverton, N. J. The ceremony occurred at 7 o'clock and was performed by Rev. Arthur C. Baldwin, pastor of the First Baptist church, in the presence of about 150 guests from this city and out-of-town.

The interior of the spacious residence was very beautifully decorated with festoons of pink and white sweet peas and smilax. The very simplicity of the decorations enhanced the beauty. The delicate pink and white sweet peas were interwoven with smilax in profuse masses over the doors, curtains and mantels in all the rooms, while the table in the dining room was banked with the same, the whole effect being rich and beautiful.

The wedding party came down the stairs from the second floor and upon reaching the foot of the stairs, five intimate friends of the bride held white satin ribbons which formed an aisle to the southeast drawing room, down which the bridal party marched to their places, and under a canopy of sweet peas and smilax the wedding ceremony took place.

The bride looked very beautiful in a rich gown of white satin en train. She wore a veil caught with orange blossoms and carried a shower bouquet of valley lilies. The maid of honor, Miss Bertha Borden, a sister of the bride, was beautifully attired in lavender satin clouded with white marquisette, and carried lavender sweet peas. The five attendants who held the satin ribbons which enclosed the bridal party were Miss Madeline Peirce, of Providence, niece of the bride; Mrs. Andrew Gardner, Miss Florence Waring, Miss Dorothy Brayton and Miss Marian Tuttle of this city. Clifford Collings of Camden, N. J., a brother of the bridegroom, was the best man.

From 7:30 to 9 o'clock a reception was held, and from 300 to 400 were present, and extended to the happy couple their hearty congratulations. Before and after the ceremony and during the reception, a stringed orchestra from the Boston Symphony orchestra, John Crowley leader, rendered selections. The orchestra was stationed on the second floor at the top of the stairs.

During the reception, luncheon was served in the dining room, Lyman of Providence, catering. The wedding gifts were exceedingly numerous, beautiful and costly, with a profusion of cut glass and flat silver. The gift of the bridegroom's father to the bride was a beautiful residence in Riverton, N. J., completely furnished, where Mr. and Mrs. Collings will make their home at the completion of their wedding tour. The deed and a picture of the residence were on exhibition among the other gifts. The bridegroom is connected with the Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, as contract manager.

The decorations were done by Frank Buffinton, florist, of this city.

Construction of 802 Main was so delayed that it was not ready “at the completion of their wedding tour” as the newspaper said. In fact, the contract for it would not be awarded until September of 1911, so presumably construction would not have been completed until sometime in 1912.

The notices published in *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* for that year and reproduced here show the mentions of the architects being retained and the contract being given. The architecture firm was Lackey & Davis of Camden, a firm briefly in existence founded by Benjamin Howell Lackey (1884-1970)⁸.

The construction of the house of fireproof terra cotta block walls was not unusual for upscale homes in Riverton in this era.

In the time that they lived in this house, the Collingses had two children, a daughter, Dorothy, and a son, Llewellyn Jr.

Llewellyn’s career with the Victor Talking Machine Company advanced. In a newspaper article about their wedding he was described as Contracts Manager. In a few years he became a regional wholesale distributor for Victor in the North Jersey and Northeast Pennsylvania markets.⁹

Accordingly, Theodora put this house up for sale and it closed on November 8, 1919, sold to C. Alice Templin.¹⁰ The deed lists Theodora as living in South Orange, Essex County, New Jersey. The 1920 Census similarly lists the family as living there.

A trade directory from 1923¹¹ lists a private company “Collings & Co.” located in Newark, NJ, as “jobber of Victrolas and Victor records.” It shows Llewellyn as president and general manager and, intriguingly, T. Borden Collings as treasurer. “T. Borden Collings” could only have been Theodora, herself. This, along with the Riverton house being deeded in her own name alone, suggests that she brought serious skills to the relationship and must have been a fascinating personality.

They remained in North Jersey the rest of their lives. When Llewellyn died in 1966 at 83 they were living in Bay Head and his obituary listed him as being a member of various country clubs – including, still, the Riverton Country Club. He was also a member of the Bay Head Yacht Club.¹²

Presumably the inestimable Theodora remained in North Jersey. She died in 1985, a few months shy of her 100th birthday, and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Brielle, New Jersey.

The Philadelphia Real Estate Record AND **BUILDERS' GUIDE**

Vol. XXVI. No. 12.

PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 1911.

Less than One Year
15 Cents per Copy

Construction News

Residence, Riverton, N. J., \$7000. Architects, Lackey & Davis, 307 Market street, Camden, N. J. Owner, Leuellen Collins, Riverton, N. J. Terra cotta, tile and plaster, 2½ stories, 49 by 24 feet, hot water heat. Plans in progress.

Vol. XXVI. No. 28.

PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 1911.

Less than One Year
15 Cents per Copy

Construction News

Residence, Riverton, N. J., \$7,500. Architects, Lackey & Davis, 307 Market street, Camden, N. J. Owner, L. W. Collins, care of architects. Hollow tile and plaster 2½ stories, 40x22 feet. Tile roof, electric lighting, steam heating. Plans in progress.

Vol. XXVI. No. 39.

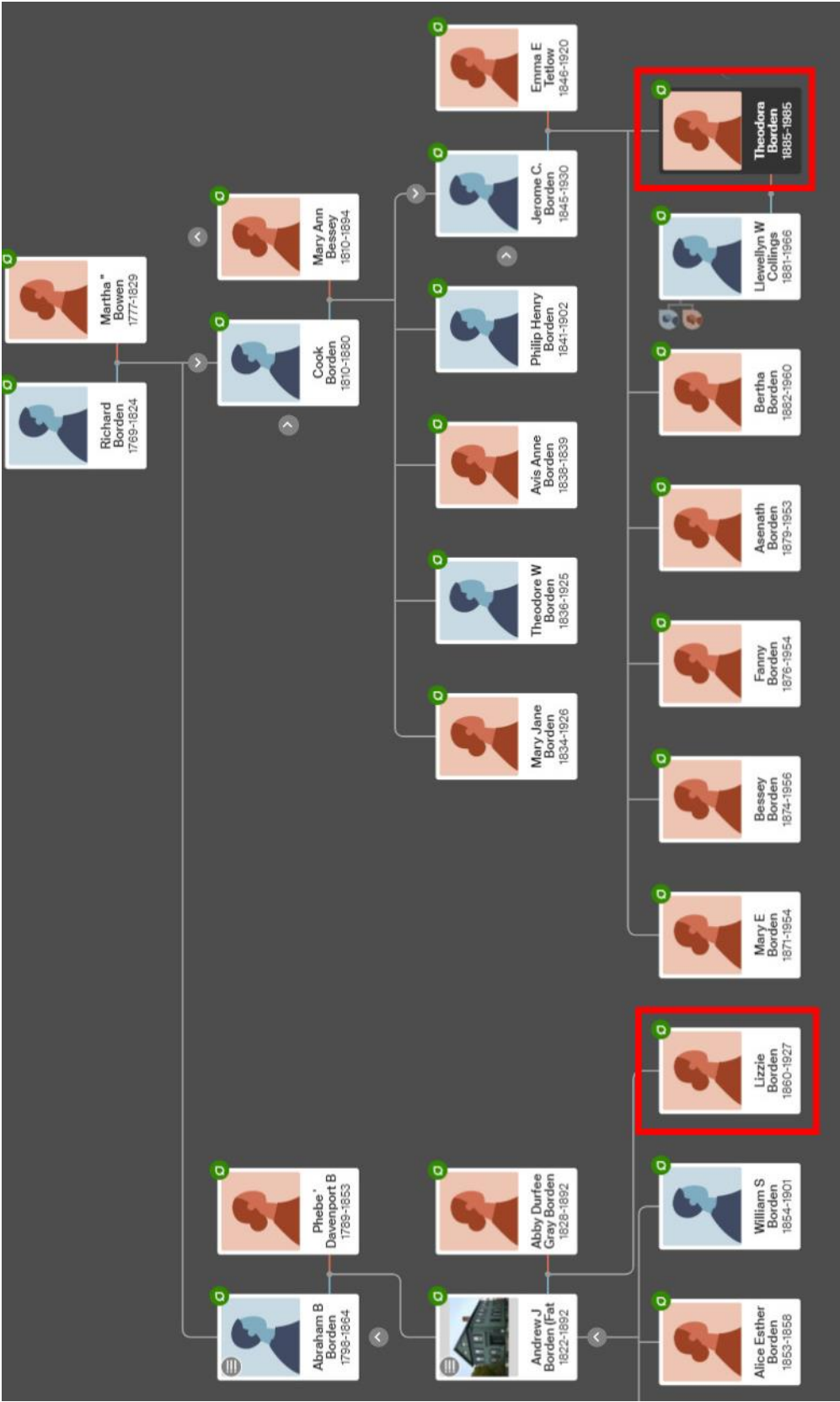
PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1911.

Less than One Year
15 Cents per Copy

Contracts Awarded

Residence, Riverton, N. J., \$7500. Architects, Lackey & Davis, 307 Market street, Camden, N. J. Owner, L. W. Collins, Riverton, N. J. Hollow tile and plaster, 2½ stories, 49x24 feet, tile roof, steam heating, electric lighting, hardwood floors. Contract awarded to J. S. Rogers Co., Stanwick, N. J.

Appendix A – The Lizzie Borden Connection



Source material

Much material not specifically sourced in the Endnotes below may be found in the public family tree on Ancestry.com named "Early Families of Riverton NJ".

<https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/108021762/family?cfpid=322427215310>

Endnotes

¹ [deed], Burlington County Clerk's Office, Deed Book 300, p. 397, November 8, 1892

² [deed], Burlington County Clerk's Office, Deed Book 465, p. 329, November 25, 1910

³ "Thirteenth Census of the United States – 1910 Population", Riverton Borough, accessed November 3, 2022, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/7884/images/31111_4330860-00169?pid=16052206

⁴ "Emily W. Collings Dies of Pneumonia", *The Morning Post [Camden]*, January 18, 1926, 6

⁵ [finding aid] "Cook Borden and Co. Account Books", UMass Amherst Libraries, Robert S. Cox Special Collections & University Archives Research Center, accessed November 3, 2022, <http://scua.library.umass.edu/borden-cook-fall-river-mass/>

⁶ [deed], Burlington County Clerk's Office, Deed Book 471, p. 47, May 16, 1911

⁷ "Collings-Borden", *Fall River Evening News*, June 13, 1911, 10

⁸ "Lackey, Benjamin Howell, Sr.", *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project*, accessed November 4, 2022, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/24008

⁹ "Obituary for Llewellyn W. Collings", *Asbury Park Press*, July 11, 1966, 2.

¹⁰ [deed], Burlington County Clerk's Office, Deed Book 564, p. 24, November 8, 1919

¹¹ *Talking Machine World Trade Directory*, (New York: Edward Lyman Bill, 1923), 211, Google Books, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://books.google.com/books?id=QSEyAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA211>

¹² "Obituary for Llewellyn W. Collings", *Asbury Park Press*, July 11, 1966, 2.