

Yesterday

(In 1974 Therese Spackman Barclay Willits wrote the following poem to her lifelong friend Marjorie Marcy Crowell on the occasion of her 80th Birthday. A copy of it was placed in the Riverton Library, where your writer found it about 20 years ago, and would like to share it with the Gaslight News Readers.)

Rhyme of Old Riverton

Dear Marge, though it's not customary
I crave of you a present,
A piece of time, I hope may be
For both of us most pleasant.

We'll both stretch out upon the deck
Down at the Jersey shore,
And cast our memories back upon
The Riverton of yore.

When all the streets were dusty roads
Wet by a watering cart,
And little friendly stores there were,
And no big shopping mart.

There were no buses then or cars,
But ten steam trains a day,
And later on a trolley car,
A slower cheaper way.

The doctors drove in buggies,
The country round about,
Delivering babies in their homes
And treating croup to gout.

The iceman brought great blocks of ice,
Nice Harvey, big and black...
He wore a great thick rubber pad
On one side of his back.

If a thieving girl climbed the wagon step
He'd grin and never scold her
But mark, and cut, and weigh a chunk
And toss it to his shoulder!

Mr. Tippenhouer, the butcher
And the grocer Mr. Frank,
Came weekly to take orders
For all we ate and drank.

Any forgotten item
Had to remain unknown--
We couldn't call about it,
for no one had a phone.

Mrs. Smith sold "notions"
And penny candy too--
We'd ponder there, before the case
To chose, as children do.

There were no movies or TV
But lectures, plays and dances
Held within the Lyceum's doors
Remember learning lancers?

In a little house on Main street
Lived "Uncle George Senatt."
He loved all kids, and for us
There was welcome on the mat.

He fed us all on peanuts,
And like to see us come.
His little house was later
The Riverton Library's home.

The Library in those days
Was in the Parish House
And in it we were quiet
As any small church mouse.

In the reading room a rubber plant
Hid a chair in a little nook,
and that is where I'd make for
With a Henty or Alcott book!

The Pansy Club, Mrs. Marcy's scheme
To make us keen and wise--
"Read one half hour every day
And you will get a prize!"

We went to school to Mrs. Sharp--
You were the "little one"
And there the jon was out of doors
Which we considered fun!

We went to Lothrop's studio
To have our pictures taken--
It seemed like nearly every year
If I am not mistaken.

The drugstore, you remember,
Run by Mr. Copperthwaite.
It had delicious sodas,
And if you had a date

Who only had one nickel
It mattered not, because
He'd hand one foaming soda out
with two diverging straws!

Dreer's Nursey had a fine display
Of flowers, vines and trees;
We always took our company
To "Oh" and "Ah" at these!

The lily ponds were fabulous,
Some plants had pads so large
A small child could stand upon one
You ever try it, Marge?

We played down at the river
Where the "John A" and the "Annie L"
Traveling up to Trenton
Made rollies that were swell

We powdered stones on the river wall
"For medicine" says you--
For me a muddy sort of paint
Or like attractive brew.

We watched the 5 o'clock boats
On summer afternoons,
And Sonny Wright dived off the deck!
Sometimes a band played tunes.

The Columbia, a big boat
Stopped at the wharf for freight.
And for commuting men folk
The "Sight Bell" rang at eight.

At shad run, in the spring time
We'd watch the floated net
Be windlassed in the upon the shore
And pretty soon we'd get

A great big squirming glistening shad
Can there be better show?
The price was just a quarter--
Think what that would be now!

We learned to swim at Frishmuth's Wharf
And dive from off the float.
We thought we had it made when we
Could reach their anchored boat.

We ate our sandwich lunches
In a leaky old boat.
It kept one of us bailing
For her to stay afloat.

When older, we paddled to Taylor's
For beach fires on the sand
And floated back in the moonlight
And wished we need never land!

There were catboat races on weekends--
Good sailors not a few!
And many a wistful wharf-rat
In hopes of a chance to crew.

We sailed to Burlington Island
And lay becalmed all night,
While we were singing and laughing
Our families fought off fright.

We followed the winding Pompeston
from marshland back to the wood
Where we had hilarious picnics
(where my sons later played Robin Hood!)

A place we called "1000 Islands"
Was covered with flowers in spring--
We crossed a tree bridge to reach it,
A daring and dangerous thing!

Back then there were tall groves of chestnut
Before the chestnut blight,
We went every fall to despoil them--
Those nuts were a beautiful sight!

We flung sticks high to dislodge them
 From their prickly velvet lined burrs-
 And they pattered like rain in their falling
 Through thickets of redolent firs.

I remember in election years,
 After stormy political sessions,
 The men came swarming down the street In
 noisy light processions.

With shouts and banners
 Drum and fife,
 And great flares lighting
 The autumn night.

The diamond of our famous nine
 Was up "above the tracks",
 Also the livery stable
 Where one could hire hacks.

And then in nineteen hundred
 An era new was off,
 The Country Club was started
 And all the rage was golf!

Oh later we played hockey
 that brought you to fame
 I played it, too, more feebly
 But loved it just the same.

In winter there was "hitching"
 Can skiing be more fun?
 Your sled would need a lengthy rope
 If steering well were done!

From any sleigh or wagon--
 "Bell and Frank's" was the best
 One hitch out, another back--
 The round trip gave it zest.

We knew the sound of sleigh bells
 Upon the frosty air--
 The river froze and ice boats
 And skaters darted there.

Parades would walk across then
 Clear to the Pennsy shore
 But modern navigation
 Permits that never more.

July the 4th, red letter day--
 Our patriotic town
 Had speeches, races and parade
 The like was never found.

The great parade marched down the street
 From old Joe Roberts' store,
 With beating drums and blaring brass
 Down to the river's shore.

The band was smartly costumed
 With epaulets on shoulders,
 Traditionally the march they played
 Was "Onward Christian Soldiers".

The judges judged the costumes
 And decorated floats,
 The breeze blew all the children's flags
 And gaily bannered boats.

The speeches that were heard that day
 Were fiery and ornate,
 We swelled with pride to hear them--
 Far cry from Watergate!!

And all the day's activities
 Were on the river bank.
 And families came to picnic,
 And napped and ate and drank.

They watched the races, tub to yacht
 And also the canoe
 In which participating were
 Sometimes me and you.

Until at dusk the fireworks!!
 And again the band would play.
 And then the final "set piece"
 Would end the glorious day.

From Sunday School on Sunday
 Till baths on Saturday night
 Dawns then rose clear and rosy
 And sunsets clouds were bright.

So, Marge, come talk about it,
 There may be more to say!
 I really do expect you,
 So set the time, come May!

Marjorie Marcy Crowell, daughter of Dr. Alexander and Mrs. Marcy, was born in 1894 at the home of her parents at 406 Main St., and lived there all of her life. She died in 1979. Therese Spackman Barclay Willits was born in the home of her grandfather, Joseph Campbell, on Main St., because the new home of her parents at 205 Lippincott Avenue was not quite finished in December 1889. She lived there after her first marriage, moved to Philadelphia suburbs for a time after her second, and then came back to Riverton. She was past her 100th birthday when she died.