



Gaslight News

September 2008

Historical Society of Riverton

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How to place your historic home on the national and local registers Thursday, October 9th



October Presenter
Kathleen P. Galop, Esq.

Join us for the first offering in our new season of programs sponsored by the Historical Society of Riverton featuring a presentation by Kathleen P. Galop, Esq., a preservation consultant with a national reputation. Her presentation on the National Register of Historic Places: The Role it Plays in Our Local Communities is sure to be of interest to many property owners in the area.

New meeting night—Thursday

This free program will follow the general meeting of the Historical Society of Riverton on its new night, Thursday, October 9th at 7:30 pm in the Riverton School Media Center at Fifth and Howard Streets.

Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register serves as the official source of historic resources in the United States. Hundreds of New Jersey properties are among the 77,000 listed on the National Register.

The informative program will offer us an opportunity to learn more about the historic nomination process and how communities receive this national distinction as well as to gain a better understanding of how and why these valuable historic sites and districts are protected.

Ms. Galop a knowledgeable, experienced, qualified presenter

Kathleen P. Galop, Esq. serves as Principal of Preservation Possibilities, a historic preservation consulting firm based in

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Established under the Historic Sites Act of 1935 and expanded by the National

Theophilus Zurbrugg and the Philadelphia Watch Case Company

The *Philadelphia Watch Case Company* building in Riverside, NJ is a historic landmark site with an ominous legacy in the history of American capitalism and the organized labor movement.

A new business based on a simple question

The once-profitable Philadelphia-based watch case business was founded in 1853 by James Boss who posed a question to investors, "Why does a metal watchcase

have to be made of solid gold?" It didn't. The manufacturing process developed by James Boss produced a sturdier watch with a less expensive case by joining sheets of precious gold to a stronger copper-base metal creating the filled

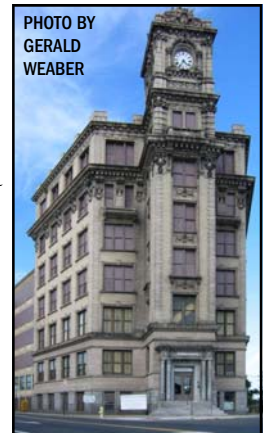


PHOTO BY
GERALD
WEABER

See WATCHCASE on 3

The HSR steps back in time with a program on the history of the phonograph



Mr. Charlie Martin, now retired owner of a Bristol, PA Victrola repair shop, fostered Mark Lewis' early interest in antique phonographs.

On May 5th, 2008, Riverton resident and phonograph collector Mark Lewis presented an informative and entertaining program in the Media Center of Riverton School on the history and evolution of the phonograph. The audience listened to several of Mr. Lewis' vintage recordings and even got to work the machines themselves.

Mr. Lewis was assisted by his friend, Mr. Charlie Martin who, in addition to his own expertise, brought a unique visual aid to the presentation—a tee shirt with detailed drawings of a few of Thomas Edison's inventions. Of course, we were to learn that it was the "Wizard of Menlo Park", Thomas Edison who would invent the first phonograph in 1877.

First, a history lesson



PHOTOS BY JOHN MCCORMICK

One machine took Mrs. Mary Bacon back to her childhood.

Mr. Lewis opened by narrating an informative slide presentation which detailed the history of that first Edison phonograph and its subsequent development. He had with him a number of antique phonographs which he had repaired and restored plus some of the old recordings to play on the machines.

He gave credit to Mr. Martin for much of what he had learned since Charlie had once had a store in Bristol, PA which repaired phonographs. Mark explained that his early interest in the mechanics and history of phonographs was fostered by his friend, Charlie.

Then, a demonstration

Together, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Martin explained and demonstrated several of the antique phonographs and fielded questions from the audience.

Mr. Lewis explained that his collection

started with his first Victrola purchased at a flea market in 1995 and has since grown considerably. It includes more than a dozen phonographs of different sizes and makes such as Edison, Victor, and Columbia plus original recordings from the years 1895-1945.

The audience got a turn

Those in attendance were rewarded with exactly the hands-on program they had been promised. The presenters played a number of their own vintage recordings on the antique machines and invited those in the audience to operate the machines.

Mrs. Mary Bacon, cranked one machine and she said that the sound which poured forth immediately reminded her of her childhood. She recalled that her father had worked at RCA and that her family had had a similar machine. From her expression, she seemed quite transported.



Mrs. Paladino brought her own recording. Ms. Eleanor Paladino, herself a collector of vintage recordings, had come hoping to get to hear her own

cylinder played back on the antique machines and Mr. Lewis obliged by gently placing the fragile recording onto his Gramophone. A couple of adjustments and a deft movement of a switch coaxed a song from that cylinder which had not been heard in decades.

We were all witnessing a Time Machine of sorts, even if it only went backwards. And we had two capable tour guides to thank for the trip—Mr. Mark Lewis and Mr. Charlie Martin.

—JMC 



Gramophone: A Time Machine for brief trips back to the 20th century

WATCHCASE from 1

watchcase. The Boss patented process reduced the cost of production, and the gold pocket watch became a popular and affordable fashion accessory for men in the late nineteenth century. It was during World War I that the wristwatch gained in popularity and the demand for the pocket watch declined.

Prices fell, demand increased; Free enterprise succeeds

At the time, the pocket watch industry was organized into two sectors—firms that excelled at the production of time mechanisms and companies that manufactured watch cases.

Demand for filled watch cases increased as retail prices dropped. The drop in cost was the result of the use of less costly metals, like silver and nickel. The use of hand-engraved designs on the watch cases attracted a new customer base, and filled-watch cases captured nearly ninety percent of the pocket watch market by the turn of the century.

The *Philadelphia Watch Case Company*, once a subsidiary of the *Keystone Watch Case Company*, became a highly profitable enterprise under the leadership of Theophilus J. Zurbrugg beginning in 1884. The Philadelphia plant was built in 1880 on the east side of North 19th Street, north of Brown Street, in the Francisville section of the city. The business employed 200-300 people of all ages, including 40-50 girls and 160-250 men at a time.

Zurbrugg creates huge profits but tactics anger labor, ruin competitors

The numerous Zurbrugg mergers and acquisitions created soaring profits for the owners, yet produced outrage and controversy among labor leaders, competitors and the growing anti-trust movement. The companies paid shareholders impressive dividends averaging five to six percent a

year, achieved by fair means or foul. Claims by the government alleged that Zurbrugg and his companies acted as a trust to restrain free trade and destroy competition. Business tactics designed to dominate the market included flooding the market with product at less than cost to force competitors out of business; requiring fixed prices for retail sales of all products; and intimidating companies not interested in being acquired by the trust.



In the early 1900s Zurbrugg amassed a vast enterprise through the acquisition of competitors. He captured eighty percent of all filled watch case production and sales in the United States. According to the *New International Year Book: A Compendium of the World's Progress*, published by Dodd, Mead and Company in 1912...

“the government charged that in 1904 the Keystone Company had by contract become the exclusive agent in charge of the export trade of the Elgin Company, except in Canada; and that in 1909 a similar contract was made with the Waltham Watch Company, except as to the trade with Great Britain, France, and Spain. The defendants were charged with forcing jobbers and dealers to handle only their goods at prices fixed by them, maintaining black lists for this purpose. They were also charged with threatening independent companies with destruction should they refuse to sell out to the combination. The government charged that defendants had asserted that “they would spend a million dollars, if necessary, to drive some of the larger competitors out of business, and that they would hang crepe on the doors of such competitors' factories.”

Watchcase manufacturers at the turn of the century often employed workers on the

Mr. Gerald Weaber is past vice president of the Historical Society of Riverton, former editor of the *Gaslight News*, and a frequent contributor to this newsletter.



“He (Zurbrugg) captured eighty percent of all filled watch case production and sales in the United States.”
New International Year Book: A Compendium of the World's Progress



The crown logo pictured above goes to this watch. Time mechanism by Elgin. Watchcase by Philadelphia Watch Case Co.

Theophilus Zurbrugg

At 15, Swiss-born Theophilus Zurbrugg was the first of his family to come to the United States, settling in New Jersey in 1876. He soon sent for his father, John, a Swiss watchmaker who opened a jewelry shop in Mt. Holly, where he repaired watches and sold clocks. Theophilus was an apprentice at a watchcase company in Philadelphia, one of three such companies. At that time, watchcases were made of solid gold and were too expensive for most consumers. In 1883 he founded T. Zurbrugg & Company. Within 10 years, he had bought out the two competing companies and, in 1892, purchased the Pavilion Hotel on Fairview Street in Riverside. In 1907 a new building constructed on the site became the home to the Philadelphia Watch Case Company, which became the world's largest manufacturer of pocket watchcases.

WATCHCASE from 3

minute system, or sweating system. The company paid engravers a non-negotiable rate per watchcase regardless of the time required by the craftsman to produce the piece. Workers often spent ten hours a day, five and a half days per week on the job, often producing watchcases at fixed piecework rates. Working only until noon on Saturday was considered by many employers as a Saturday holiday.

The industry formed the *Watch Case Manufacturers Association* to crush the organized labor movement. A watchcase engraver was blacklisted if the company believed that the worker had attended a union meeting or had spoken of organizing fellow workers. Family members working in the same factory were fired if their father was suspected of being involved in the labor movement. Photographs of workers enabled the industry to bar employment of engravers discharged for union activities.

Philadelphia Watch Case moves to Riverside; diversifies

The factory of the *Philadelphia Watch Case Company* moved to Riverside in 1892. T.J. Zurbrugg and C.A. Wessel formed the *Riverside Metal Company* in 1898 to create a reliable source of high quality metals for watchcase production. The business expanded as demand from a wide variety of industries increased for the quality, non-ferrous specialty metals produced at the Zurbrugg mills. In 1907 a large factory that stood at the former site of the Pavilion Hotel was expanded.

At about the same time, the company built a seven-story structure of reinforced concrete measuring 68' x 313' feet with a six story office building adjoining the factory at a cost of \$400,000. The factory produced 4,000-6,000 watchcases per day and employed some 1,500 workers

In 1904 Zurbrugg merged the *Keystone Watch Case Company* and the *Philadelphia Watch Case Company*. The

Keystone Watch Case Company became a division of the *Riverside Metals Company* in 1942.

By the time of the one hundredth anniversary of the *Riverside Metals Company* in 1953, it had earned a sterling reputation as a leading producer of specialty metals for Packfong, a nickel-silver musical instruments company in China, military and civilian aircraft instruments and shell fuses and achieved industry prominence in developing the Riverside Alloy 209 grade D, a copper and tin alloy produced in the Riverside wire and strip mill.

T.J. Zurbrugg gave back to the community with bequests, charity

T.J. Zurbrugg is remembered by many in Burlington County for his bequest of \$250,000 to the former hospital in Riverside named in his honor—Zurbrugg Memorial Hospital, where his wife worked as a nurse and he was treated for a stroke in 1912. His good works also included the creation and support of the *Homestead*, a home for girls who worked in his watchcase factory.



H.K. Porter Company acquired the Philadelphia Watch Case Company building when Porter bought Riverside Metals Company. The structure has been vacant since 1972. In 2000 Riverside zoned the Watch Case Building for conversion to 150 to 200 living units but, to date, there has been no development on the historic site.

The *Philadelphia Watch Case Company* is listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*. -GERALD WEABER, JR.



A View from the Tree House

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings from the Tree House! Wasn't this past summer just spectacular? We were blessed with unusually pleasant weather and spared the typical hot and humid NJ heat. I hope you had an enjoyable summer. The Historical Society Board is well rested, and we've made a few changes going forward for our 2008-2009 program year.

Our programs will now be held on Thursday evenings instead of Mondays. We're hoping to attract more people to our events and thought that meeting later in the week would be more convenient for our members and prospective members. We'll still meet at Riverton School, in the Media Center, and our programs will still begin at 7:30 pm.

So, mark your calendars for our new schedule, seen at right.

Thursday, October 9 How to Place Your Historic Home on the National and Local Registers

Thursday, November 13 Colonial Cooking: A Peek Inside a 1770's Burlington, NJ Cookbook

Thursday, January 29 Riverton and Other Local Views by John McCormick

Thursday, March 26 Theatrical Performance: A Visit With Abigail Adams

Thursday, May 21 To be announced

Happy Fall,

Priscilla

Priscilla Taylor

President, HSR

P.S. We are unable to present our Ghost Tour this year.



Readers:
 HSR Archivist Mrs. Aggie Kennedy would like to gratefully acknowledge several gifts of items of historical value from individuals. From Mrs. Elsie Waters—paper dolls c1895. From Mr. Ed Gilmore—Ledger from The Riverton School c1880, Dedication service program for the Riverton Fire Company building addition July 4, 1961, Newspaper clippings June 1961, Klipple's Pastry Shop menu c1950, Film development envelope from Keatings c1950, Historical Society of Riverton rubber stamp. From Anonymous—Book of music titled "Songs That Never Grow Old" c1909.

MEETING from 1

Summit, NJ. A practicing attorney since 1972, Galop has extensive experience and a national reputation in the administration of historic preservation projects.

Ms. Galop received a John F. Kennedy Library Foundation Research Grant and a White House Historical Association Grant to conduct a historic preservation research project on Jacqueline Kennedy. Her resulting research on "Jacqueline Kennedy's Historic Preservation Legacy" was published in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's forum Journal in May 2006.

Knowledgeable in the preparation of State and National Register Nominations, Kathleen Galop prepared the nomination which placed Branch Brook Park on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. At the present time she is preparing the Register Nominations for Briant Pond Park in Summit, NJ and for Anderson Park in Montclair, NJ.

Ms. Galop will discuss the benefits arising from the placement of a property on the State and National Registers and she will address the popular misconceptions concerning Register status for a property.

HSR led efforts to list Riverton

The Riverton Historic District, with its 800 acres and 371 buildings, was first listed on the National Register on March 5th, 1999, after careful and exhaustive research by members of the Historical Society of Riverton and the borough led by former board presidents Daniel Campbell and Mrs. Betty Hahle and other local residents.

The Historical Society of Riverton appreciates the support for this program from the Horizons Speakers Bureau of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

-GERALD WEABER, JR.



The New Jersey Council for the Humanities is a nonprofit organization with 501 (c)(3) status, making all gifts to the Council tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

⑥ THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RIVERTON

Post Office Box # 112
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 856-786-6961



Zurbrugg Mansion, Delanco, NJ

Do you have any vintage photos, postcards, maps, ephemera, or recollections to share which you would allow to be highlighted in an upcoming issue or a future program? Please contact Mr. McCormick directly in order to make arrangements. 856-764-1551
 jlmccormick@comcast.net

postcards courtesy of Mrs. Betty Hahle



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Readers: Find inside Part One of a new two part feature article by Gerald Weaber on Theophilus Zurbrugg and the Philadelphia Watch Case Company. This installment outlines the firm's history. A brief story on the return of the long-lost Illuminator Regulator clock mechanism to the new owners of the building will appear in the next issue.





PAGE RIGHT THE NEW ERA, RIVERTON, N. J.

1938 New Era scan courtesy of Mr. Fred DeVece



CASING
WORLD FAMOUS
TIMEPIECES
since
1853

BY reason of consummate craftsmanship THE KEYSTONE WATCH CASE CORPORATION has been privileged to case the products of the most famous names known to watch history. Among these are the renowned American names of Hamilton, Waltham, and Elgin, and the quality-famous foreign names of Longines-Wittnauer, Gruen, Omega, Zenith, etc.

Illustrated here are a few of our very latest models for both domestic and foreign movements. The top row are men's pocket and strap watches. The second from the left [with two stems] is a special aviator's watch, designed and invented by Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, and known as the "hour angle watch."

The second row illustrates the very latest in dainty feminine strap watches, with faces measuring from half to three-quarters of an inch. The watch in this group on the extreme left, known as the "Nu-View," has a sloped dial, keeping the time always in view without the usual awkward wrist twisting.

To be sure of the ultimate in style and lasting quality, look for and ask for the precision-built "KEYSTONE" case on the next watch you purchase.

The Keystone Watch Case Corporation extends its congratulations to The New Era on its 50th year of public service. May it continue to be an influence for community betterment in the years to come.

THE KEYSTONE WATCH CASE CORPORATION
 RIVERSIDE, NEW JERSEY