

HISTORIC RITTENHOUSE-TOWN REVISITED

J. ROBERT WAGNER

*WITH INDUSTRY'S
SUPPORT,
RITTENHOUSE-TOWN
WILL REMAIN A VALUED
PART OF THE
PAPERMAKER'S HER-
ITAGE NOW AND FOR
GENERATIONS TO COME.*

HISTORIC RITTEN-
houseTown is the
site of the first
paper mill in
America. This
enchanted colo-
nial village is located within
Philadelphia's Fairmount Park.

It was once a self-sufficient community, and today seven of the original 40 structures are still standing. Open to the public, the 20-acre educational center provides tours and educational programs throughout the year.

Designated by the U. S. Department of the Interior as a National Historic Landmark, RittenhouseTown is both a legacy and a treasure for the papermakers who follow in Wilhelm Rittenhausen's footsteps. It is a history lesson for all who visit.

Last fall I toured RittenhouseTown and invite you to retrace my steps.

NORTH AMERICA PAPER INDUSTRY'S BIRTHPLACE

Wilhelm Rittenhausen arrived from Holland in 1688 and within two years built a mill to make fine white paper. The first paper mill in North America began operating in 1690 along Monoshone creek in Philadelphia, a tributary of the larger Wissahickon Creek. According to legend, three men at the mill could produce only 1000 sheets in a day. Soon the mill complex grew into a small village with a fire department, stores, a church, and houses. The mill remained the center of papermaking in America for nearly 100 years.



(top) A model of the first paper mill

(center) Rittenhausen's house built in 1707

(bottom) An 18th century paper press

(right) Blacksmithing

(center) Cooking on a wood fire

(left) Candlestick making

(bottom) Firing black powder rifles



A flood in 1701 destroyed the original paper mill. But it was rebuilt and remained operational until the water pollution of the city forced the mill to close. Thanks to local community efforts, the building and area have been taken under the wing of the Fairmount Park Commission and is now thriving.

THE VISITORS CENTER

Recently converted, a 1720 colonial home at Historic RittenhouseTown serves as a combination museum and shop offering souvenirs, handmade paper from the village workshop; a working model of an 18th century paper mill, which is approximately 15 to 1 scale; and a 15-minute video, *The Fiber of History*, the story of RittenhouseTown.

THE COLONIAL VILLAGE

To experience a routine day for a colonial artisan, walk through the village and buildings. A blacksmith explains his craft while making useful parts and orna-

ments. The art of hackling flax to obtain linen and weaving on a hand loom is demonstrated. A cook, dressed in the garb of the time, discusses the technique of cooking in the enormous hearth using a wood fire.

Despite the distance from the creek and its necessary water supply, modern amenities allow a papermaking demonstration in which visitors have the opportunity to practice the art themselves. I chose to make a background sheet using the red slurry and then overlaid the red sheet with a figure using a triangular shaped mold filled with blue slurry. To me the triangular shape represents strength, and bridges have been designed from this shape for a countless number of years.

Colonial soldiers demonstrate the firing of black powder rifles and the billowing puffs of white smoke produced on discharge. The process of making soap is shown using an enormously large cast-iron kettle strategically placed over an open wood fire to heat the mixture of ingredients. Candlestick making, honey making, caning, and other crafts are demonstrated, and souvenirs or craft-made items can be purchased to take home to remember the splendid day at the paper mill.

HERITAGE DAY

Each fall, Historic RittenhouseTown holds Family Fall Heritage Day and a Papermakers 5K Race during the first week in September. This year it will be held on Saturday, September 7. The race, which starts at 10:00 a.m. is open to all for a nominal charge. Everyone who participates receives a T-shirt. Cash prizes are awarded to the winner in each age category. About 150 runners took home T-shirts last year.



(top right) Practicing penmanship with quill and ink on handmade paper

(top) Hand weaving

(right) Caning a chair



At 11:00 a.m., the Annual Family Fall Heritage Day begins. About 600 people participated in the fun and festivities in 1995. We invite you to attend the next one in the fall. **TJ**

Wagner is a professor at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science in Philadelphia, PA, and TAPPI JOURNAL's technical editor for TAPPI's Nonwovens Division.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT RITTENHOUSE TOWN

PATRICIA M. PAUKSTA
TAPPI JOURNAL NEWS COORDINATOR

Dedicated to perserving and restoring the site of North America's first paper mill, a small group of volunteers works behind the scenes for Rittenhouse-Town, Inc. The Paper Industry Advisory Council was organized in 1995 to provide ideas, planning, and support for the development of the colonial village as a visitor destination—a historic area in which the paper industry will take pride.

The major objective of the non-profit corporation which operates the site is to tell the historical story of papermaking and the importance of paper products

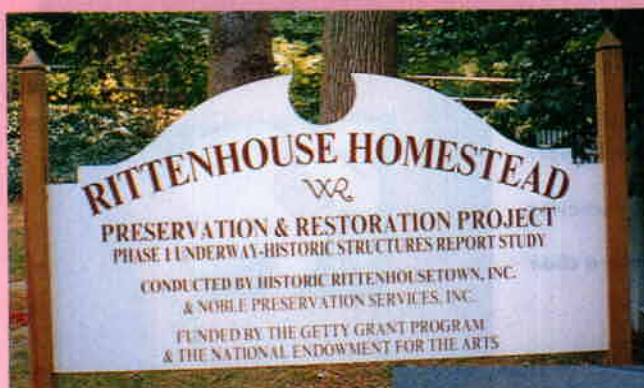
and to teach the craft of hand papermaking in its papermaking workshop.

Hugh B. Hanson, founder and first president of Historic RittenhouseTown, established a community group in 1984 to preserve the site. Hanson, formerly national marketing director of Weyerhaeuser Paper Co., is currently the chairman of the 20-member Advisory Council.

Topics of discussion to date concern restoration achievements and steps needed to develop public attendance and increased funding. Historic Ritten-

houseTown's Paper Industry Advisory Council met on March 10, 1996, in New York during *Paper Week*. Here are some highlights of the meeting:

- Historic RittenhouseTown president Betsy Lukens reported that 1995 was a record-setting year for the village. Attendance numbered 12,500 and membership in RittenhouseTown grew to 680. A reported 1500 visitors received papermaking instruction.
- The Long Range VISION for RittenhouseTown—under study for 10 months—includes a bold plan based on 40,000 visitors a year. Specific details will be announced at a later date.



(top) Restoration is an ongoing project

(right) Founder Hugh B. Hanson



While we wait for the VISION, here is the educational package of events that is currently creating interest in RittenhouseTown:

EVENTS THAT DRAW CROWDS

As Robert Wagner mentioned in his walking tour of the village, the annual Family Heritage Day and 5K Race is an important event at RittenhouseTown. However, throughout the year, other special events draw crowds to RittenhouseTown as well. Along with "Spirits from the Past—Visits with Edgar Allen Poe" which was offered last October and the Holiday Tour of the village offered in December, here are some other main attractions:

Papermaking Workshops

Classes are offered year round for children, adults, artists, teachers, and families. Special workshops are available for schools, camps, and other groups. Last summer, 13 noted experts held scheduled classes to offer a "hands-on" experience in the art of papermaking.

Recently ten school groups participated in a special project, sponsored by the "Peopling of Philadel-

phia Collaborative," to study urban ecology, water usage, and environmental problem solutions. The students made the cover sheets for their course journal at the restored RittenhouseTown 18th-century hand papermaking barn.

Guild of Papermakers

Organized in 1991 by papermaker and bookmaker Winnie Radolan, the Guild of Papermakers brings together artists working in and with handmade paper for the common goal of sharing artistic and technical experience with papermaking. The guild provides the experts who conduct the workshops in papermaking at RittenhouseTown.

Over 70 artists from the tri-state area and across the country participate in the guild. Every spring, the guild presents *Paper Awareness*, a show featuring the work of these artists.

SHOW SUPPORT—JOIN

Historic RittenhouseTown, Inc. is a non-profit group of over 680 members across North America. Together with the Fairmount Park Commission, this group is dedicated to the preservation, restoration, and active interpretation of the site, as well as continued research into its important history.

Your membership in RittenhouseTown will help to keep this organization strong and vibrant. Many new projects are planned such as Phase II of the preservation and restoration of the Rittenhouse Homestead and the emergency stabilization of the circa 1800 Jacob Rittenhouse Home. The completion of these projects and others will only be possible with your interest and support.

RittenhouseTown offers a variety of membership levels from US\$ 500 as Benefactor to a Student Membership rate of US\$ 15. A family membership runs US\$ 35. As a member, you will receive the Rittenhouse newsletter, *The Papermaker*, which provides current information on RittenhouseTown and upcoming events.