



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

November 2015 Vol. XXXVIII No. 2



President's Letter

Save the Date for Our Annual Holiday Party!

OUR ANNUAL HOLIDAY party festivities will be held on Friday, December 11, at one of the oldest houses in Glen Ridge. The welcoming owners of 118 Ridgewood Avenue are Michael and Kendra Poster. The house was built in 1869 by William S. Hicks, and occupied for nearly 80 years thereafter by descendants of his son-in-law, William T. Spencer. Nearby Spencer Road takes its name from the family. The house has been altered over the years to reflect the fashionable architectural style of the times, but its historic bona fides remain intact.



118 Ridgewood Avenue

The fall walking tour at Bloomfield Cemetery was a great success. Over 100 people came out on a beautiful October day to learn about the history of the cemetery and those who lie therein. Thank you to fellow docents Sarge Gardiner, Alex Meyer, and Rich Rockwell, who, along with several docents from the Historical Society of Bloomfield, led the tours with great enthusiasm.

We're planning a gingerbread decorating get-together on Sunday, December 13, from 1-3 p.m. at Linden Avenue School. Members have priority signup privileges for the event, which is limited to 40 families. Further information

will be sent to members by email. It will also be posted at www.glenridgehistory.org and www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety.

Did you buy a gaslamp ornament last year? If not, we've re-ordered them for your holiday gift needs. They will be on sale for \$15 at all of our events, during open hours at the museum, and at the Glen Ridge Public Library.

If you're looking for an inviting place to spend a cold winter morning discovering more about the history of Glen Ridge and its houses, I hope you'll visit the Terry S. Webster Museum on the second Saturday of the month from 9 a.m. to noon.

Sally Meyer

News and Goings-On

Holiday party. All members will receive a mailed invitation to our party at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, December 11, at 118 Ridgewood Avenue.

Gingerbread decorating event. Come to Linden Avenue School on Sunday, December 13, at 1 p.m. Capacity is limited, so please sign up at www.glenridgehistory.org.

1906 maps for sale. Reprints from the famous 1906 A.H. Mueller Atlas of Essex County are available for \$100, or \$80 for members. Email us at glenridgehs@gmail.com.

Gaslamp ornament. A beautiful custom brass ornament featuring the iconic image of a gaslamp (*right*) is on sale

for \$15. It is similar to ornaments we offer of the Ridgewood Avenue train station (currently sold out) and the Glen gazebo. The ornament comes in an attractive red presentation box and includes an insert with a brief town history. Local delivery is free; out-of-town delivery is available for an additional charge. Supplies are limited.



News From the Town Historian

“Sunset at Glenridge, New Jersey U.S.A.”

LAST MARCH JUDY TAUNTON of North Yorkshire, England, contacted the Glen Ridge Historical Society while researching the life of a distant relative named Thomas Clarkson Wilberfoss. Wilberfoss was a brother-in-law of Taunton’s grandmother. He was a British-born artist who came to Glen Ridge sometime before 1880 and lived at 66 Glen Ridge Avenue until his death in 1900. (The house was torn down in 1984 for the construction of the Victoria Commons condominiums.)

A death notice in *The British Architect* of August 3, 1900, tells us something of Wilberfoss’s life: “Having displayed in his boyhood some artistic instincts, he was placed at the age of sixteen in the office of Mr. J. L Pearson, R.A., and was subsequently with Mr. J. Clarke, another architect of repute, but he later directed his special attention to designing in furniture, metal, and embroidery, and in 1880 was engaged by the New York firm of Cottier & Co., in whose services his designs have helped to beautify some of the most famous interiors of that city.” We also know that in November 1908 a private collection of Wilberfoss paintings was offered for sale at the Fifth Avenue Galleries in New York.



“Sunset at Glenridge, New Jersey U.S.A.” by 19th-century local artist Thomas Clarkson Wilberfoss

While recorded information on Wilberfoss is scarce, an image of his profile can be seen on a bronze medallion cast by the American artist Olin Levi Warner in 1892, which is now part of the Smithsonian collection. After the recent death of her brother, Taunton inherited a small oil painting entitled “Sunset at Glenridge, New Jersey U.S.A.” that she has donated to our collections (left). It is a charming work in an ornate gold frame with a rainbow of colors across an open sky. Wilberfoss lived in Glen Ridge at the same time as the famed American artist, George Inness, lived his final years in Montclair, and the scene of the painting is not dissimilar to the Inness landscapes of Montclair.

By happy coincidence, while planning the route through Bloomfield Cemetery for our fall walking tour, I came across the monument that marks the burial site of Wilberfoss and his wife, Margaret. It is located atop a bluff overlooking the Glen Ridge side of the cemetery just behind the noted American composer of hymns William B. Bradbury. Its ornate sculptural design certainly suggests that Wilberfoss had a hand in its creation.

Sally Meyer



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THE GASLAMP

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Parks of Essex County

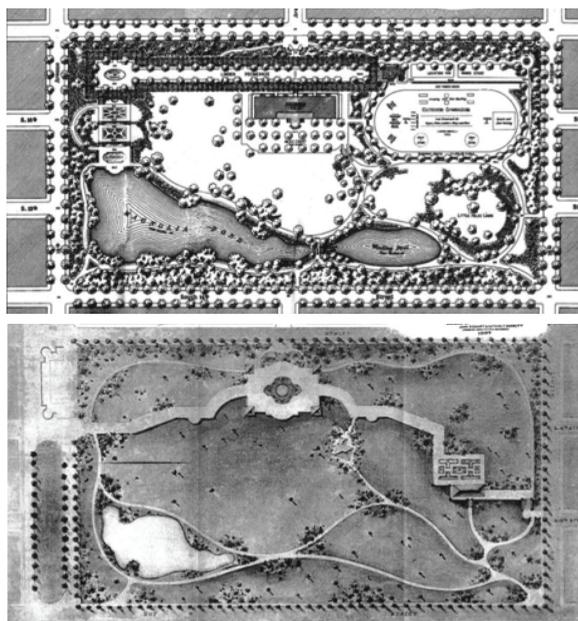
Enlightened Planning

At the Montclair Public Library this past July, Essex County Parks archivist Kathy Kauhler recounted the origins of our county park system. **George Musser**

THE ESSEX COUNTY Park System was the first of its kind in the country. It goes back to state legislation passed in 1894 that set up a preliminary board, whose five members traveled all over the county, meeting with town officials, interested citizens, and noted landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted (designer of Central Park and Prospect Park), his sons, Nathan Barrett, and John Bogart. The *New York Times* commented: "As every municipality in Essex County thinks that it ought to have a park in its midst... it is not strange that the commission is being besieged with petitions for other parks, to be located at almost every place where there is a vacant lot." The board finished its work under budget and ahead of schedule.

At the time, Essex County had only 25 acres of parkland. The board recommended establishing a system of 4,000 to 4,500 acres, at an estimat-

Contrasting plans for West Side Park in Newark by the Olmsted Brothers (top) and Bogart and Barrett (bottom)



ed cost of \$2.5 million. It would be run by a permanent commission with authority "to acquire and maintain... in Essex County, ample open spaces for the health, pleasure and profit of its growing population." State legislators passed the plan unanimously and voters approved it in a referendum by a margin of two to one.

The new commission appointed Bogart and Barrett as landscape architect and engineer, respectively, and directed them to proceed with plans for seven parks. Their goal was to synthesize large city parks, neighborhood parks, reservations, and parkways. Commissioners had power to acquire land by gift, purchase, or condemnation, paid by bond issues and ultimately by the increased property values the parks would generate. They worked quickly and quietly to avoid land speculation.

By the end of 1895, they had begun assembling what would become Orange Park, Eagle Rock Reservation, East Side Park (later renamed Independence Park, located in the Ironbound), South Mountain Reservation, West Side Park, and East Orange (Oraton) Parkway. The commission soon received the reservoir property for the Southern Division of Branch

Brook Park. In 1898 it replaced Bogart and Barrett with the Olmsted brothers. By that point, the plans for East Side Park and Orange Park were well underway, and the Olmsteds adhered to Bogart and Barrett's original vision; they drew up their own designs for the other parks.

By the 50th anniversary of the Essex County Park Commission in 1945, the system consisted of 4,204 acres of parks and 12 miles of parkways. It set a precedent for other county park systems in N.J. and elsewhere.

Kathy Kauhler

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Oldest Houses in Glen Ridge

The Magnificent Eight

In the April issue, we published a list of the first houses built in Glen Ridge, drawn up in 1918 by Abijah Brewer. Sadly, many of those homes have since been torn down. Here is the current list of historical record-holders.

George Musser

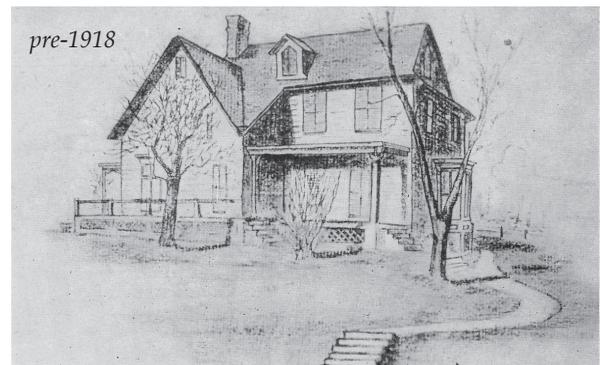
IN THE SPRING of 1975 the Heritage Committee of the Mayor's Bicentennial Committee set out to identify the oldest houses still extant in Glen Ridge. Members included Terry Webster, town historian Percy Wilson, researcher Barbara Mulhern, architect Kenneth Underwood, and New York University history professor Paul Baker. They talked to homeowners and examined their basements, located old maps and scoured their contents, and researched proper-

ty deeds and transactions in the Essex County Hall of Records. If you'd like to do such research on your own house, the February 2014 issue of *The Gaslamp* has a how-to guide.

The committee identified the eight oldest houses, and the list first appeared in the Glen Ridge Heritage book published in 1977. Seven survive: 100 Glen Ridge Avenue, dating to the 1850s, was torn down in 1988 to build the Ridgmont Condominiums. The thumbnail histories are republished here in edited form, with recent photos of the houses taken by Historical Society trustee David Doernberg. The next oldest house is probably 96 Ridgewood Avenue, although there are other contenders; the photo here was taken by local architect Mark Wright. **Sally Meyer**



DOREMUS-WAKEMAN HOUSE, 15–17 Sherman Avenue. This may be the oldest house still standing in Glen Ridge. Some records date it to 1782, which would make it one of the first to be built in the area. When owned by shopowner Gorline Doremus in the mid-1800s, it stood on the south side of Bloomfield Avenue just east of Freeman Parkway. In 1867 Richard Wakeman bought the house. It was the scene of a brutal matricide in 1905 when his grandson Richard Wakeman hatcheted his mother. The house was moved to its present site in 1908.



BROWER-DODD HOUSE, 28 High Street. Built by Samuel Brower during 1829–1830 on the present site of the Ridgewood Avenue School, this house is an early example of Gothic Revival architecture. It was occupied by the Brower family until 1870, when Thomas C. Dodd purchased the property. The house was moved to its present site in 1895. The house remained in the Dodd family until 1957, when it was purchased by Louis Shaw.



PHINEAS WARD HOUSE, 298 Washington Street. This house is shown on the 1856 Thomas Hughes map, but probably dates to 1851 or even as far back as 1835. It was a small three-story farm house that faced west. The towers and north additions were probably built between 1875 and 1885.



BRADBURY-LANGSTROTH HOUSE, 289 Washington Street. William Bradbury, a composer and piano-maker, bought the land in 1856 from the Cadmus family for \$1100, a price that signals a house was included. He sold it to Thomas Winsor Langstroth, for whom Winsor Place is named.



ANSON MC CLOUD HOUSE, 190 Bay Avenue. McCloud bought one acre of land for \$167 and erected this house in 1856. It is cited on the 1859 H.F. Walling map of Essex County. An old family tombstone is incorporated into the present backyard patio.



JOHN DOUGHERTY HOUSE, 25 Lincoln Street. Probably built in 1856 on four acres Dougherty had purchased for \$210, this was a typical farm house of that period, with the original front door probably where the left window is now. The present entrance hall may have been a kitchen.

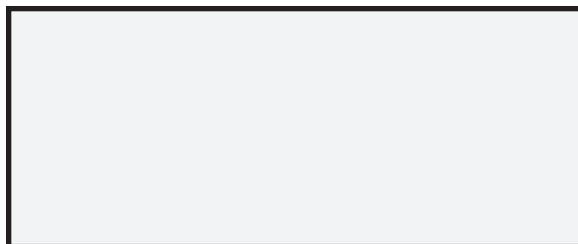


JOHN RASSBACH HOUSE, 318 Maolis Avenue. Rassbach, a German immigrant, bought five acres of land on Cadmus Street (now Midland Avenue) in 1862 for \$1000. The house was moved to its present location at some time prior to 1890.



WARD-MILLER HOUSE, 96 Ridgewood Avenue. Norman and Jennie Miller bought the land from Joseph Ward in 1868, by which point the house may already have existed. The bracketed eaves are a surviving original feature. The center entry is a later Colonial Revival remodeling.

Address Service Requested



HOLIDAY PARTY
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11

Two Unusual Historical Events, Now Running

Architectural art exhibit at the Met. Continuing through September 18, 2016, the Metropolitan Museum of Art presents "Design for Eternity: Architectural Models from the Ancient Americas." From the first millennium B.C. until the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, artists in the ancient Americas created small-scale architectural models to be placed in the tombs of important individuals. These works in stone, ceramic, wood, and metal range from minimalist representations of temples and houses to elaborate architectural complexes populated with figures. Such miniature structures were critical components in funerary practice and beliefs about an afterlife, and they convey a rich sense of ancient ritual as well as the daily lives of the Aztecs, the Incas, and their predecessors. This exhibition, the first of its kind in the U.S., sheds light on the role of these objects in mediating relationships between the living, the dead, and the divine.



Ceramic house model, 12 inches high, from Nayarit, Mexico, 100 B.C.–A.D. 200. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Used by permission

Dawn of the Information Age. Continuing through April 17, 2016, the New York Historical Society presents "Silicon City: Computer History Made in New York." Using images, artifacts, interactives, and oral histories, the exhibition explores local innovations that were key to computer development, from vacuum tubes and punched cards to transistors. (The effect that governs vacuum tubes was first observed by Thomas Edison while working on the light bulb.) The exhibition also highlights pioneering work after the IBM building and exhibit at the 1964 New York World's Fair introduced the wonders of the digital world to come. These include the computer graphics revolution born in New York City a decade later. Long before Silicon Valley became synonymous with all things digital, New York was a hub for imagining, developing, and selling the technology that would reshape entertainment, commerce, and daily life.