



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

June 2009 Vol. XXXII No. 1

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

www.glenridgehistory.org



SPECIAL NEW MEMBERSHIP AND RENEWAL ISSUE

President's Letter

Please Cut Up this Gaslamp!

The Glen Ridge Historical Society, as you might expect, doesn't usually advocate destruction. But this month we're making an exception. This issue of *The Gaslamp* includes our annual appeal for non-members to join the Glen Ridge Historical Society and for current members to renew, so we'd like you to cut out the form on page 4 and mail it in.

The historic fabric of Glen Ridge is what brought many of us to live here. The Historical Society asks for your support so we can continue to play an important role in preserving that fabric.

We use our members' dues to preserve and promote local history in many ways. Our museum room, which holds historic files on almost every house in town, is a vital resource for restorers. Our public programs educate the community about Glen Ridge's past; in recent months, we've offered a walking tour exploring the borough's former role as a manufacturing center, a presentation about an early science fiction writer who resided on Ridgewood Avenue, and a look into the restoration of a Tiffany stained-glass window at the Glen Ridge Congregational Church. Our grants help preserve and document Glen Ridge's past. This year we protected a deteriorating collection of historic local photographs, cleaned and rebound two early twentieth-century atlases, and helped the Women's Club of Glen Ridge restore a portrait of one of its founding members, Emily Chapman.

We have even more ambitious plans ahead. High among them is to make our new website, www.glenridgehistory.org, into a community resource.

Our website is the product of a unique collaboration. Three computer students at Glen

Ridge High School, Kate McParland, Fazeena Mohammed, and Victor Demel, and their teacher, Mayra Bachrach, volunteered to design and build the initial pages, and they put them on the internet in March. For now, the site is fairly basic, but we have great plans. We hope, over time, to add portions of our trove of documents, photos, and other historical records, creating a virtual archive available to anyone interested in Glen Ridge history.

We invite you to join with us. You can do so by taking pictures over the summer for our photo contest; joining our next walking tour in October; and attending our members-only holiday party in December – and by cutting up this newsletter and sending in your membership today.

Marc Levinson

PHOTO CONTEST

Enter the second annual photo contest.

Deadline for entries:

September 23, 2009

Open to all Glen Ridge residents

•

Photos must have been taken in Glen Ridge since September 2006

•

Enter in one of these three categories:

- 1) People
- 2) Houses
- 3) Public Places & Spaces

Entry forms and instructions will be available over the summer

News from the Town Historian

If these walls could talk...oh, the stories they would tell. When researching the history of homes talking walls are not to be had. But many options are available to help find answers.

Our first Glen Ridge home was located at 26 Forest Avenue. The house was a modest vernacular style building from the mid-nineteenth century. When we bought it in 1969 our realtor told us that Annie Oakley might have lived there as a child. The myth was debunked several years later when a research project to determine the oldest houses in Glen Ridge discovered much about the early owners of 26 Forest Avenue.

Maps traced the development of the property. Deeds surfaced at the Newark Hall of Records. Permits for alterations came to light at the local municipal building. Newspaper clips mentioned owners. Photographs showed changes over time. Neighbors reminisced about former families. Bit by bit the history of 26 Forest Avenue unfolded. Several interesting stories emerged sifting fact from fiction.

An 1871 map of the property identifies Ira Oakley as the owner. Oakley was a local builder and part time farmer who kept cows behind 26 Forest Avenue. Annie Oakley was born Phoebe Ann Mosely in Woodland, OH in 1860 and took her stage name after marrying Frank Butler in 1882. She never lived in Glen Ridge.

An early photograph of the house shows a towering cupola that is no longer there. The *New York Globe* of August 4, 1902 reported the

suicide by hanging of Anna Van Liew Pierson. Her son, John, found her dangling from a rope in the cupola. Earlier news accounts noted that the same John Pierson, a member of the Bloomfield Cyclers and the Glen Ridge Foot-Ball Eleven, ran for the position of County Clerk.

Anna's late husband, Dr. William Hugh Pierson, was a direct descendant of a founding family of Newark. In 1867 he was granted a patent for celluloid that was later rescinded because of an opposing claim. Under the wallpaper in one of the two parlors were strips of a plastic material that resembled tortoise shell.

For a short period of time after the death of Anna Pierson, the house was rented by the family of John C. Van Duyne. In the early photograph he is the young boy on the steps of 26 Forest Avenue. He later served for over twenty years as Glen Ridge Tax Collector.

Descendants of the Whiteley family arrived one day and asked to see the house. They lived there during the 1920s when the staircase was situated between the parlors. They told us their grandmother had been laid out in one parlor and their aunt was married in the other.

During the Depression the house was leased to tenants. In December 1937 the Bloomfield Bank & Trust Company filed a building permit for removal of the cupola. Charred boards on the attic floor suggest a fire took place just before Christmas.

Ownership of a home takes on an added layer of significance when you learn its history. We encourage you to examine your house file at the Museum Room. Please call Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674 to make an appointment. **Sally Meyer**

Officers and Trustees

President	Marc Levinson	Trustee (2011)	Andrew Grisafi
Vice President	Karin Robinson	Trustee (2011)	Lana Keppel
Treasurer	Geoffrey Darby	Trustee (2011)	Alden Provost
Secretary	Martha Orbach	Trustee (2012)	Sarge Gardiner
Town Historian	Sally Meyer	Trustee (2012)	Margo Garrison
Trustee (2010)	Herb Addison	Trustee (2012)	Suzanne O'Connor
Trustee (2010)	Chuck Graziano	Ex-officio – Past President	Carolyn Badenhausen
Trustee (2010)	Karen Palm	Ex-officio – Library Director	John Sitnik
		Ex-officio – Delegate LHSNJ	Gerry Addison

Editor's Note... This special issue of *The Gaslamp* is designed to show one of the benefits of membership in the Glen Ridge Historical Society. The feature article by Ted Meyer on the old woods in the south end is one kind of living history found in *The Gaslamp*. We urge members who have memories of Glen Ridge's past to contribute articles. Also, if you have a special expertise in, for example, architecture consider contributing an article on some aspect of Glen Ridge's rich architectural heritage. To discuss a contribution, contact the editor: herb.addison@verizon.net

Everything in these Woods Except Wolves

I recently enjoyed dinner with old friends who have spent most of their lives in Glen Ridge. During conversation one in the group identified the southern boundary of our borough as Carteret Street. As a former south ender I knew he was mistaken. As patiently and persuasively as possible I described the continuation of Hawthorne Avenue south for another two blocks to meet Glen Park Road at the East Orange border.

The following day I had reason to go to the south end. I could not resist a visit to my childhood neighborhood and a pass by my old homestead at 27 Sommer Avenue. I thought about events that shaped the memories of my early life, some of which relate to a wonderful feature of my neighborhood that is no longer there.

We had woods all over the place. We had woods at the end of my block and we had woods at the end of Ridgewood Avenue which we entered by running through Kent Hollander's back yard and climbing the back fence. But the real woods began a block and a half away at the dead end of Victor Street. These woods were bounded by Carteret Street on the north, Midland Avenue houses on the east, Hawthorne Avenue houses on the west and a dirt road in East Orange which I was told never to cross.

The minute we boys got home from Linden Avenue School we raced to change into old clothes, grabbed our weapons, and met in the woods to "play guns." We usually played until it was so dark you could no longer see the enemy. One time the Sommer Avenue gang felt so nervy and overconfident it challenged the Hawthorne Avenue gang to a game of guns in the big woods that lasted until after dark. I found myself lost and scared to death.

As we matured our taste for challenge and adventure in the woods followed suit. We began the development of a complex of underground forts and connecting tunnels. Armed with trenching tools purchased at the Army/Navy store on Washington Street and a few shipping pallets we "borrowed" from the Nevins-Church Press dump, we produced subterranean marvels.

A whole new opportunity emerged when the woods on the northeast corner of Ridgewood Avenue and Glen Park Road were cleared for the eventual construction of a church. We boys discovered the challenge of above ground construction projects using the cinder blocks and bricks which would eventually be used in the

church foundation. Without benefit of cement, we built interconnecting block houses and forts. These early advances in construction ended when Dr. Arnold discovered our work and put an end to the project.

As the foundation of the church progressed we discovered the sport of barging. After a series of heavy rains the new concrete cellar filled with two or three feet of water. Using the mortar mixing troughs we were able to paddle around our new lake. Barge bumping led to inevitable consequences. Fortunately, our parents seemed to have limited knowledge of these activities.

The same Dr. Arnold lived just two doors from the Sommer Avenue woods. In the late fall he went hunting. He was usually successful, returning home with a buck tied across his car fender. The big event of the evening began when he hoisted the dead deer up to a strong tree limb and proceeded to butcher it. With Coleman lamps glowing eerily in the night, the entire experience seemed unreal, especially for a sheltered nine year old boy.

With the arrival of winter sleigh riding began. Sledding took place every snowy day in the Victor Street woods where the best rides went straight down the hill to Carteret Street. In the days before salt spreaders, the streets developed an icy glaze and the cars were few in number. The most unforgettable sleigh rides began at the top of the Hawthorne Avenue hill and went south to Carteret Street where we would take a hard left and fly the length of the block toward Midland Avenue.

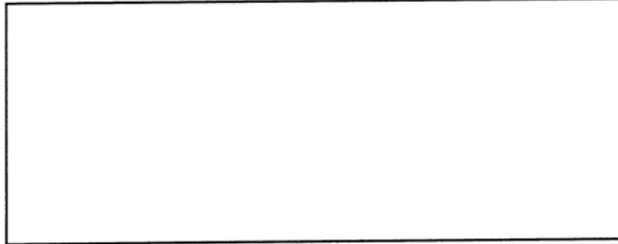
In the years following World War II the veterans returned home, the economy grew and one by one the available lots were sold and homes were built. Victor Street was extended to form a semi-circle that met Glen Park Road and split-level houses filled the lots. The woods were great while they lasted.

Ted Meyer



Where
The
Woods
Were

**NEW MEMBERSHIP & RENEWAL
BROCHURE
2009-2010**



NONPROFIT
ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 710
CALDWELL NJ


GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO Box 164
Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

CUT ALONG THIS LINE

Glen Ridge Historical Society Membership Form

Yes, please enroll me as a member in the following category:

Senior Citizen \$10 Household \$20 Patron \$50 Sponsor \$100

_____ I am interested in helping the Historical Society in some way; please call me.

_____ I have a corporate matching gift program and my form is enclosed.

Name/s _____ Date _____

Address _____ State _____ Zip code _____

Home phone _____ E-mail address _____

Please clip this form and send it in the enclosed envelope with your payment to:

Glen Ridge Historical Society
P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

Membership runs from May 1 to April 30 ***** Your membership contribution is tax deductible