



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November 2008 Vol. XXXI No. 2

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past



President's Message

Your Dues Money, Hard at Work

Every year, several hundred Glen Ridge households pay to join the Glen Ridge Historical Society. They receive some well-advertised benefits in return: a chance to accompany our annual walking tour, an invitation to our holiday party at a historic home, opportunities to hear interesting speakers at our public meetings. But your dues money brings some less publicized benefits as well. It helps us preserve and protect local history.

In recent months, we've had four different history-related projects underway:

Preserving early atlases. The Glen Ridge Public Library owns two atlases dating to the early 1900s. One of the atlases was rescued from a trash heap, and both were in poor condition. After three years of work financed by the Glen Ridge Historical Society, the 1907-37 Sanborn insurance atlas has been cleaned and deacidified. Its 70 plates are now encapsulated in Mylar, and are bound so the library staff can remove individual pages for photocopying. This volume is filled with fascinating detail about Glen Ridge's buildings and streets. We expect restoration work on the other atlas, published by Mueller & Co. in 1906, to be completed shortly.

Oral histories. Historical Society volunteers have conducted interviews with a number of individuals concerning important events in Glen Ridge history. These interviews are preserved on audio or video tape, but have

not been readily available to researchers. The Historical Society is funding the transcription of these important sources of information. Four interviews have been transcribed and are now available for use at the Glen Ridge Public Library.

Painting. For decades, an oil painting of the long-gone Moffat's Mill in the Glen, painted by an unknown artist around 1850, graced the mayor's office in the Municipal Building. The Historical Society trustees were concerned about its deteriorated condition and agreed to finance its restoration. The restored painting is now on display at the Glen Ridge Public Library.

Photo preservation. One of our town's secret treasures is a collection of house photographs by the late Nathan Russell, Sr., a longtime real estate broker. These pictures were recovered from the house of his late son, Arthur Russell, at 216 Ridgewood Avenue when it was demolished around 1968 for construction of the present Glen Ridge High School. The original photos, in the possession of the Glen Ridge Public Library, are deteriorating. The Historical Society recently approved a project to organize and preserve this valuable collection.

I hope you'll make use of these important resources to learn more about the history of your home and your community. And as you use them, give yourself a pat on the back, because your dues helped preserve them for all of us.

Marc Levinson

News from the Town Historian



The real estate business in Glen Ridge traces its roots to the Russell family of Cambridge, Massachusetts where Nathan Russell, Sr., was born in 1836. After completing his education in the local public schools and a short stint as a banker, he enlisted as a private in the Massachusetts Volunteers. He was promoted to captain and honorably discharged in 1863 after being seriously wounded at Port Hudson, LA. Soon after, he and his brother, Henry, established a wholesale glass and crockery business on Vesey Street in New York City.

In 1890, Nathan Russell, Sr., and his son Arthur founded a real estate and insurance firm on Broad Street in Bloomfield. Five years later when Glen Ridge separated from Bloomfield, they

opened a second office in a small frame building on the southwest corner of Ridgewood Avenue and Bloomfield Avenue where the bus shelter sits today. The business prospered as urban families left the city for cleaner air and fine new homes. In 1907, another son, Nathan, Jr., joined the firm.



Nathan Russell's first office at the corner of Bloomfield Avenue and Ridgewood Avenue. The fence to the right is probably along Bloomfield Avenue

After 1900, the mills along Toney's Brook closed down and the borough purchased property along the Glen for conversion to park land. Nathan Sr. moved his office building to land he owned at 45 Clark Street and reused it as the second floor of a new house. **(Continued on next page)**

Officers and Trustees

President	Marc Levinson	Trustee (2010)	Chuck Graziano
Treasurer	Geoffrey Darby	Trustee (2010)	Karen Palm
Secretary	Martha Orbach	Trustee (2011)	Andrew Grisafi
Vice President and Town Historian	Sally Meyer	Trustee (2011)	Lana Keppel
Trustee (2009)	Lizanne Coleman	Trustee (2011)	Karin Robinson
Trustee (2009)	Margo Garrison	Ex-officio – Past President	Carolyn Badenhausen
Trustee (2009)	Ava Somogyi	Ex-officio – Library Director	John Sitnik
Trustee (2010)	Herb Addison	Ex-officio – Delegate LHSNJ	Gerry Addison

Editor's Note...This issue includes Town Historian Sally Meyer's article on Nathan Russell, Sr., Glen Ridge's first real estate agent. It combines a fascinating biography of an important early Glen Ridge figure with details of how the Glen Ridge Historical Society is working to preserve the documents and pictures of our history. In this case the irreplaceable photographs that Russell took as a part of his business. The article is long enough to serve as the News from the Town Historian on its page and continue onto the featured article page. **Herb Addison** herb.addison@verizon.net

(Continued from previous page)

From 1906 until 1912 Russell occupied an office in the Glen Ridge Hall – now the PNC Bank – located on the second floor in the corner turret.



Nathan Russell, Sr., in his office in the Glen Ridge Hall, now the PNC Bank. Taken in 1909.

In 1912, he relocated to an office building he erected at 227 Ridgewood Avenue where the Bank of America is located today.



Nathan Russell, Sr., built this office in 1912 that has subsequently been extensively remodeled and is now the Bank of America

Russell died five years later at the age of 81. Arthur continued to run the business until his death in 1931. His widow, Kathryn, took over the reins in the midst of the Depression until her death in 1967.

In his president's message, Marc Levinson mentions our efforts to preserve the Russell collection of photographs. Nathan Russell, Sr., employed photography extensively in the promotion of his real estate business. Several boxes of glass negatives and over fifteen hundred prints were found in Kathryn Russell's home at 216 Ridgewood Avenue shortly before it was demolished. They were salvaged by Syd Wilson, the first town historian, and Tom Booth from the trash that had been left behind. Envelopes were stamped "Nathan Russell's Real Estate Photograph Gallery." The images show evidence of good equipment and technique. They include buildings in Glen Ridge, Bloomfield, and Montclair and summer homes in Greenwood Lake and Lake George. The prints are mounted on cardboard with listing information handwritten on the back. Wilson cleaned and catalogued the entire collection before donating it to the historical collection of the Glen Ridge Public Library.

The Museum Room of the Glen Ridge Historical Society is located in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church. To schedule a visit, please call Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.
Sally Meyer

Photo Contest Winners

Billy Reilly – First Prize in 18 and under
Fazina Mohamed – Second Prize in 18 and under
Karin Robinson – First Prize in Private Homes Category
Pat Pignatello – Second Prize in Private Homes Category
David Doernberg – First Prize in Public Spaces Category
Jon A. Russo – Second Prize in Public Spaces Category
Sally Streeter – First Prize in Professional Category
Tracey Alampi – Second Prize in Professional Category

Judges

Les Fincher
George Steinmetz
Vince Timpanaro

Coming Events

Tuesday, December 8, 2008 -- The Glen Ridge Historical Society Holiday Party is being held at Chris and Mary-Paula Allegaert's house at 76 Hillside Avenue beginning at 7:30 pm.

It's not too early to mark your calendar for next year:

February 24, 2009 – Public Program

April 22, 2009 – Annual meeting

News Briefs

- A reminder that the Nolen Report of 1909 detailing a plan for the development of Glen Ridge is now available in digital form. It will be included on the GRHS website and the GR Library website when they are up. If you are interested in getting the report on a CD-ROM call Herb Addison at 973-748-5012, or e-mail at herb.addison@verizon.net.
- The winning photographs of the GRHS contest are on exhibition in the Library.
- The New Jersey Historical Society has a current exhibition called, "Ebb and Flow: New Jersey and its Rivers," that investigates the role that rivers have played in the history and development of the state. Note, however, the museum will be closed from November 17 through November 30, 2008. The museum is located at 52 Park Place, down the street from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in downtown Newark.