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
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.

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)
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

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**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

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**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.