



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE GASLAMP

## Illuminating Our Past

September 2016 Vol. XXXIX No. 1



*President's Letter*

## Hamilton! A Glen Ridge Walking Tour

MARK YOUR CALENDAR for the annual fall walking tour on Saturday, October 15. America's feverish interest in Alexander Hamilton has inspired us to take an in-depth look at the history and architectural styles of the houses on Hamilton Road and neighboring streets: Washington Street, Old Oak Road, Summit Street, Hillcrest Road, and Woodland Avenue. All ages are welcome. We'll meet afterwards for refreshments in the Terry S. Webster Museum. If you haven't had a chance to look at your house file yet, this will be the perfect opportunity.

To add to your Hamilton experience, this issue of *The Gaslamp* contains a special report by newsletter editor George Musser on Revolutionary War sites in our area. He discovered a French military map from the period showing that Continental Army units—and perhaps the Marquis de Lafayette—camped on Glen Ridge Avenue near the current location of Nicolo's Bakery.

Interest in Glen Ridge history doesn't take a summer vacation. Information and inquiries come our way throughout the year from near and far through snail mail, phone calls,

chance conversations, news, social media, and the web. People contact us to research their ancestors, share stories, compare experiences, and clarify their memories, and we do our best to help them out. Next year the Glen Ridge Historical Society will celebrate its 40th anniversary. As loyal

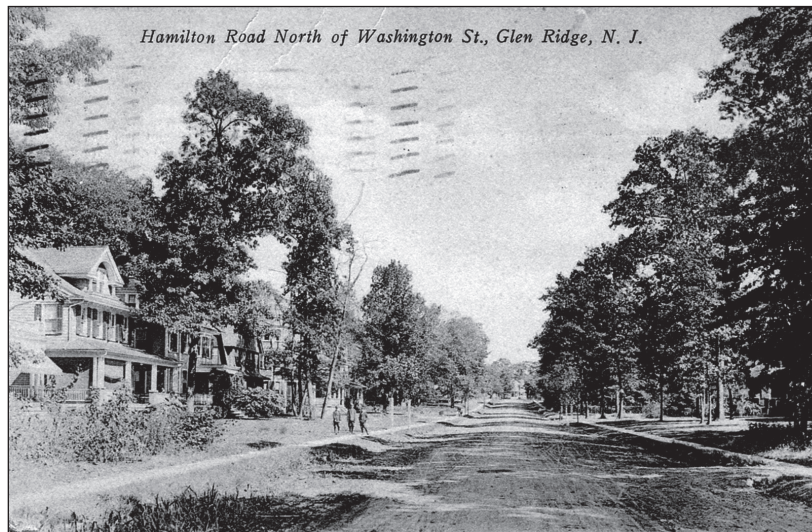
members, you can be proud of our ongoing efforts to promote local history.

This spring I visited the fourth-grade students at Ridgewood Avenue School for my annual Grandmother's Trunk presentation. I read them excerpts from an 1893 newspaper about bicycles ridden to the polls on Election Day, from a 1923 diary about the last day of high-school exams, and from a letter

by Dana Mitchell about tripping on the uneven sidewalks of Clark Street and spilling a pail of milk. I explained

the function of a dance card pasted into a senior-year scrapbook from 1909. I showed about 50 oversized photographs of people, places, and events in Glen Ridge history. Newspapers, diaries, letters, scrapbooks, photographs... the disappearing tools of historical research. It's worrisome to think about.

**Sally Meyer**



*Hamilton Road circa 1910, from the  
Glen Ridge Historical Society collection*

## News and Goings-On

**Fall walking tour.** On Saturday, October 15, meet us at 1:30 p.m. at the corner of Hamilton Road and Washington Street. Docents will point out the architectural styles of the 19th and 20th centuries and identify notable residents from the past. The rain date will be Sunday, September 16.

**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](mailto:glenridgehs@gmail.com).

**Museum hours.** The Historical Society maintains an architectural and historical file on every house in the Historic District, including documents and photographs from years past—an essential resource if you're planning any renovations or just are curious. Located above Boiling Springs Savings Bank, the Terry S. Webster Museum also features exhibits of town history. It is open the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon or by appointment with Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.



Hamilton! A Jersey Musical

How does a hip-hop historical Broadway sensation teach us about the founding of our nation? Through *Hamilton*, our era has reimagined the Founders in its own image. The musical is very Manhattan-centric, so you might never guess that much of the action actually takes place in New Jersey. Alexander Hamilton’s first port of call in North America was Elizabeth. He met and courted Elizabeth Schuyler at the Campfield House in Morristown, while Aaron Burr wooed Theodosia Prevost at the Hermitage in Ho-Ho-Kus. Hamilton and George Washington spent nearly half the war here.

More battles and skirmishes were fought on Jersey soil than in any other colony. A war of attrition laid waste to the eastern part of the colony, and residents were bitterly divided among Revolutionaries, Loyalists, and opportunists who played both sides. The concerns that Hamilton expresses in the play about “an endless cycle of vengeance and death” were not at all hypothetical. Historian Jim Gigantino has argued that the wartime depredations and fear of further instability were a big reason that New Jersey was a latecomer to the abolitionist cause, compared to other northern states.

The area around present-day Glen Ridge was significant in two ways. First, it was the crossroads of a major north-south route (River Road along the Passaic) and a secondary but nonetheless important east-west route (roughly paralleling what is now Bloomfield Avenue). Second, it was a rich agricultural region from which both armies purchased—and pillaged—their sustenance. Here are some local Hamilton-related sites that even history buffs might not know about.

“Right Hand Man”

New York City fell to the British in the late summer of 1776. Washington retreated across New Jersey in November and appointed Hamilton as aide-de-camp the following March. What remained of the Continental Army crossed the Passaic River on November

21 using what is now the Main Avenue bridge from Wallington to the City of Passaic (then known as Acquackanonk) (1). It marched south to Newark along what is now Route 21, which was, by all accounts, a beautiful bucolic lane. The only reminder of the retreat route today is a historic marker in front of the Belleville Dutch Reformed Church (2). Some of the pursuing British troops under General Charles Cornwallis detoured through Bloomfield (then known as Watsessing) and ransacked a dozen or so homes, including that of Joseph Davis, now the Bloomfield Steak and Seafood House (3). Refugees fled over the hill to Verona and Caldwell (then called Horseneck).

“Stay Alive”

As this song recounts, Washington engaged in guerrilla tactics to avoid an open battle against superior forces. The British responded in kind, and their foraging raids ravaged our area of New Jersey. In the most elaborate assault, several regiments led by British General Henry Clinton converged on Belleville (then called Second River) on September 12, 1777, and forced local militia to retreat west to Bloomfield. Clinton supervised the battle from a mansion that mining magnate Arent Schuyler, Elizabeth’s great-granduncle, had built on the east bank of the Passaic (4). (The spectacular house was torn down in 1924.) The next day the Redcoats marched up the Second River valley and were repulsed at what is now the south tip of Watsessing Park, near the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Dodd Street (5). Markers near the Second River bridge in Branch Brook Park (6) and near the Watsessing Avenue train station (7) memorialize the skirmishes. Clinton’s units also penetrated into Bergen County and were fought

Hamilton-related sites in and around Glen Ridge. The map shows present-day roads, parks (light shading), and bodies of water (dark shading). Dotted lines are routes surveyed by the Continental Army for troop movements. Base map ©Mapbox ©OpenStreetMap

north of Hackensack by Burr, who was an army colonel.

On July 9, 1778, after the Battle of Monmouth, the Continental Army marched back north through Bloomfield, as Virginian officer Joseph Clark recorded in his diary and as Washington mentioned in general orders issued July 12. During his overnight visit, the general held a court-martial and wrote letters addressed from “Newark,” which then spanned most of Essex County. He may have stayed with militia commander Thomas Cadmus at the corner of Washington Street (then known as Samuel Ward’s lane) and Ashland Avenue, as commemorated by a historic marker (8). Cadmus’s de-



scendants recounted the details to historians John Oakes and Joseph Folsom, but we have no independent corroboration. Folsom speculates that Washington may also have visited Joseph Davis and Moses Farrand, who lived at the corner of Franklin Street and Berkeley Avenue (9). Hamilton and Lafayette presumably accompanied Washington, since another of Washington’s aides-de-camp, James McHenry, placed the men together the following day at the Great Falls in present-day Paterson. That night they stayed over in Ho-Ho-Kus (then Paramus) at the house of Theodosia Prevost, Burr’s lover and future wife. Later in the month, Hamilton himself wrote a letter from “Newark.”

“Guns and Ships”

In fall 1780, as he prepared to join forces with the French general Jean-Baptiste

de Rochambeau, Washington camped at the Dey Mansion in Wayne (then Totowa). From here Hamilton wrote at least one love letter to Elizabeth Schuyler, who was his fiancée by this time. On October 23, Washington ordered six battalions to guard the southern approaches to his base, including the Cranetown Gap, through which Claremont Avenue crosses into Verona (10). The next day Hamilton warned those troops about a possible British attack. A French military map places the units’ headquarters on the east side of what is now Glen Ridge Avenue, just south of Bay Street (then known as Wood Road) (11), and their campsite on the opposing bank of Toney’s Brook (12). To judge from a report in the *New York Gazette* newspaper, they remained there until the end of November, when the Continental Army left for winter quarters in Jockey Hollow and elsewhere.

A plaque at the corner of Valley and Claremont claims that Washington himself stayed in Montclair (13). It is based on an 1894 article by Montclair resident Oliver Crane, who gave an elaborate account—perhaps too elaborate—of how Washington slept in his great-grandfather William’s house for up to three weeks. There is no contemporaneous record of any such visit, and numerous documents place Washington in Wayne throughout this period.

Lafayette, though, did sleep a night in Montclair on October 28, 1780, while traveling back from an abortive raid on British-held Staten Island, as indicated in his correspondence. A plaque next to 551 Valley Road in Upper Montclair (then known as Speertown) claims to mark the doorstep of his headquarters (14). At some point during the army’s stay in Wayne, Lafayette may also have set up a guard post on the hill behind what is now Montclair State University, according to a plaque on Woods Road—a section of which is a rutted gravel track that seems to have changed little since colonial times (15). Although there is no other documentation of such a post, it would be consistent with Washington’s general orders to secure Great Notch, where Route 46 now crosses the mountain.

“Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)”

Washington and Rochambeau rendezvoused in July 1781 and marched across New Jersey on their way to the decisive Battle of Yorktown. Their full 680-mile route is a National Historic Trail with multiple historic markers. The bulk of the American forces passed through Caldwell; the French, through Parsippany. To cover the main columns, a regiment commanded by Brigadier General Moses Hazen marched down the Passaic along the route of the 1776 retreat and camped in Belleville on August 20 (16). A brigade under General Benjamin Lincoln followed a week later (17). Their campsites are unmarked, but the locations were estimated by historian Robert Selig in a 2006 report for the N.J. Historic Trust.

Epilogue

After the war, Hamilton saw New Jersey as crucial to his program for national economic development. In 1792 he helped to found the City of Paterson to exploit the hydropower of the Passaic, and he oversaw the purchase of copper from the Schuyler mine in North Arlington (18) for the U.S. Mint. Less happily for him, many people in our area—including Montclair’s prominent Crane family—came to oppose his Federalist Party. The song “Washington on Your Side” notwithstanding, Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic-Republican party was not just southern.

The above is based on *RevolutionaryWarNewJersey.com*; my own site visits; letters by Washington and Hamilton at *founders.archives.gov*; William Baker’s *Itinerary of General Washington*; a battle report by British General Henry Clinton; the state’s Revolutionary War Damage Claims database; local histories by Joseph Folsom, Charles Knox, John Oakes, and William Shaw; maps by Continental Army surveyors Robert Erskine and Simeon De Witt (37, 67A, 67B, 81, and 98A in the Erskine-De Witt collection at the N.Y. Historical Society); and a French military map by Lafayette’s aide-de-camp Michel Capitaine du Chesnoy (map 141 in the Louis Charles Karpinski Collection). **George Musser**



## The War Mayor

IN JANUARY 1916 Henry S. Babbage began the first of his two terms as mayor of Glen Ridge. His four-year stint showed superb leadership during World War I and confident foresight about the needs of a growing community.

Babbage was born in Patterson, N.Y., the son of a Baptist minister and the eldest of many children. He left school in East Orange at an early age to begin a 40-year career as general manager of the V. J. Hedden & Sons Construction Company in Newark. Among its notable buildings were the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower, original Prudential Insurance Company, and Essex County Courthouse.

His first wife, Adele Johnson, died in childbirth, leaving him to care for three sons, Ernest, Laurence, and Chester. His second wife, Callie Johnson, died shortly after the birth of their daughter, Dorothy. Andress Parrott, the children's nanny, who was 20 years his junior, soon became wife number three. They came to Glen Ridge in 1909, moving into a house Babbage himself built at 80 Douglas Road.

His first year as mayor was relatively uneventful, with the opening of Carteret Street and the paving of Ridgewood Avenue as the major accomplishments. But the demands of office changed dramatically with the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in April 1917. Babbage appointed a group of 30 town marshals as a kind of military reserve, which was soon absorbed into the state National Guard. These were middle-aged war veterans who drilled regularly on the school athletic field and the grounds of the

country club. Babbage also formed a committee to organize a public food market and plant a Victory Garden, located at the corner of Ridgewood Avenue and Bay Avenue, to supplement the wartime vegetable supply. He convinced so many town residents to buy Liberty bonds to support the war effort that a naval cargo ship was christened "The Glen Ridge." Some 215 residents entered military service during World War



Henry Babbage  
in 1916

I and Babbage made a point of meeting every group of recruits before it left for army camp. Seven died, and Babbage commissioned the war memorial in front of Ridgewood Avenue School.

After the war, Babbage and the borough council acknowledged the importance of civic buildings in a thriving community and negotiated the purchase of a site to build a municipal building and a library. The latter opened in 1918.

In his personal life, Babbage was known for his hospitality. He was a gourmet cook who kept oysters in barrels and cured game in his attic. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and gardening. He moved to Washington Street in Montclair in 1922 and died in February 1925 while hunting in Aiken, N.C. He is buried in Rosedale Cemetery surrounded by his three wives.

Sally Meyer



Glen Ridge town marshals, or Home Guard, at a training camp in September 1917. Photo from Barrows Collection



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*Three Generations in Glen Ridge*

## The Other Way Meeker, and Family

HIS EMPLOYEES CALLED him “The Other Way Meeker.” Chester Meeker was a self-taught electrician and engineer who co-founded Smith-Meeker Engineering Company in 1907. The firm started off doing house and commercial electrical installations, soon graduating to outfitting luxury yachts, such as those owned by the Vanderbilts and Mays. The company became the exclusive distributor for Edison storage batteries in New York Harbor, decided by a handshake with Thomas Edison himself—no paper documentation required by him. Chester was a tough task master. He got his nickname because he invariably asked installers, “Why did you do it that way?”

In 1920 Chester and his wife, Martha, moved from Bloomfield to 117 Clark Street, becoming the first of three generations to reside in Glen Ridge. Their three children were David (the youngest), Horace, and Dorothy. Dorothy was called “Dos,” as Davey couldn’t pronounce her first name. Grandpa Thomas was called “Gonka,” as Davey couldn’t say “Grandpa,” either. Horace was “Horse” to his friends.

Dorothy went to Bryn Mawr and Columbia Medical School, after which she moved to California. Horace and David both graduated from Princeton and worked for their father at Smith-Meeker. Horace met Constance, “Connie,” Nichols at a family gathering, after which they fell in love and wed in 1932. Despite the Depression, the firm did well and in 1938 Horace was able to purchase a foreclosed house at 14 Hamilton Road in Glen Ridge. Three years later, they relocated across the street to 19 Hamilton Road to accommodate their growing family—soon to be five kids. Abutting their backyard was an Old Oak Road house rented by Jim Moultrie—the Bahamian Ambassador to the United Nations—and his wife, Bernie. The Meekers entertained them, as well as Hollywood and Broadway actor Eddie Bracken and his wife, also named Connie.

As for David, he met his wife-to-be, Jean Burns, in fourth-grade at Linden Avenue School. Friendship eventually turned to romance. They married in 1934 and had five children. In 1940 they built and moved into their new home at 290 Linden Avenue. That property had been part of the estate of Robert L. Johnstone; the stone wall along Linden Avenue defining the property still exists. Johnstone was the inventor of “Mo-Jo” chewing gum, which he had manufactured in a factory behind David’s new home. It was a ruin by the time they moved in, and the kids tell of digging into the remains of a chicle pile for a “clean chew.”

Of Chester and Martha’s 10 grandchildren, I was the only one who returned to Glen Ridge. Like my father, Horace, I graduated from Princeton and worked at Smith-Meeker, becoming its third president. I lived for a time in a garage apartment behind 182 Ridgewood Avenue. After a stint in the army, I moved to Madison, N.J., with my wife and three

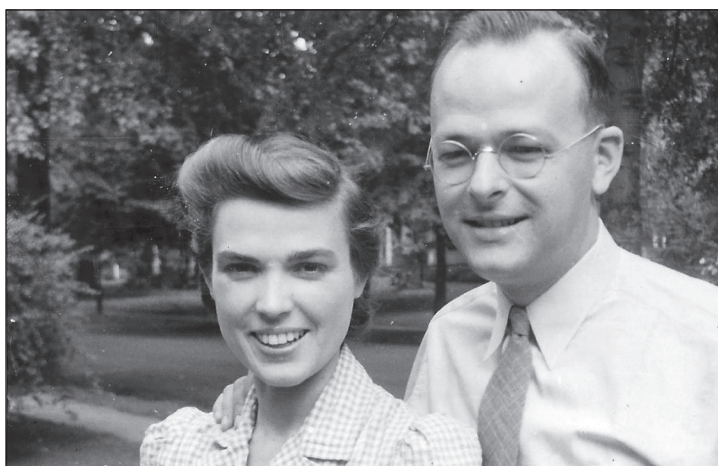
children, living there until my divorce. I came back to Glen Ridge in the early ’80s and in 1988 married Joanne Thompson, who had grown up at 51 Ridgewood Avenue. We now reside at 38 Chestnut Hill Place.

Chester and Martha had moved from Clark Street to 59 Chestnut Hill Place in 1953. She died in 1956, and Chester in 1972. David passed away in 1983, followed by Horace in 2002. A lasting legacy to the Meek-

ers in Glen Ridge is the stained glass windows in the Congregational Church. Chester donated them in 1956 in memory of Martha.

Designed by local architect Maxwell Kimball, the windows feature flowers to honor Martha’s love of them. The minister at that time wanted the windows installed on the west side of the church to be visible from Ridgewood Avenue. Chester insisted they be placed on the south side, where the sun would illuminate their beauty all day long, especially during Sunday services.

**Thomas G. Meeker**



*The author’s parents, Connie and Horace Meeker, in 1940*

## Gerry Addison, 1930–2016

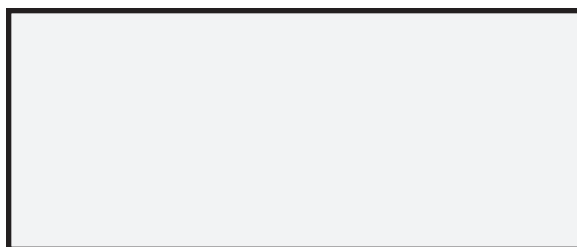
GERALDYNE “GERRY” HARVEY ADDISON died May 14, 2016, in Warminster, Penn. As a long-time resident of Glen Ridge, Gerry was an active and devoted member of the Glen Ridge Historical Society. She researched the origin of the name Sherman Avenue, her street, in the 1980s as a part of a townwide program to determine how the names of the streets in Glen Ridge were chosen.

For many years Gerry served as the Historical Society delegate to the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, representing our historical society at the state level, reporting back to us about ongoing programs in historic preservation in N.J. She and I moved to a retirement community near Philadelphia in January 2013.

**Herb Addison**



Address Service Requested



**HAMILTON! A FALL WALKING TOUR**  
**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1:30 P.M.**

## Current Events

**Essex County Parks Tour.** Official parks archivist Kathy Kauhl will lead a bus tour of the nine Essex County Parks in Newark. A picnic lunch will be provided. As Kauhl wrote in the November 2015 issue of *The Gaslamp*, the Essex parks system dates to 1895 and was the first of its kind in the nation. It contains historic landscape design by the Olmsted Brothers. Friday, October 14, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Register at [www.adultschool.org](http://www.adultschool.org).

**Simple Gifts: Shaker at the Met.** The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing—also known as the Shakers—is a utopian religious sect that rose to prominence in America in the 19th century. The Shakers established communities centered on gender equality, collective property, pacifism, and industry. This exhibit features more than two dozen works

from the Met's permanent collection, including furniture, textiles, and tools. These objects embody the Shakers' characteristic minimalist designs and careful craftsmanship, which have strongly influenced other artists. Ongoing to June 26, 2017, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**How Should We Live? Propositions for the Modern Interior.** This exhibition explores the collaborations, materials, and processes that shaped modernist interior design—including domestic interiors, re-created exhibition displays, and retail spaces—from the 1920s to the '50s. The exhibition brings together over 200 works drawn from MoMA's Architecture and Design department and other collections. October 1, 2016, through April 26, 2017, at the Museum of Modern Art.



*Herbert Matter. K(noll) Single Pedestal Furniture designed by Eero Saarinen circa 1957. Museum of Modern Art, New York.*  
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