



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

February 2018 Vol. XXXX No. 3



President's Letter

Nominate a House for the Historic Preservation Award!

THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY party was enjoyed by all. Thank you to Mark and Ruby Pizzini for welcoming us to their beautiful home with such gracious hospitality. And thanks, too, to Alison Lang and her committee for the delicious food.

We will hold a fashion exhibition February 8 to 10, and while I'm writing today the committee is diligently at work. Clothing and accessories have been selected; mannequins are being dressed; and text and labels are underway. There is great excitement among the committee members as they revel in the exuberant fashion styles of the past. My great thanks to chair, Jen Janofsky, as well as Amy German, Toni Murphy, Megan Blank, Vivian James, Karin Robinson, and Ann Nicol for all of their efforts.

Thanks to Linda Potter, our ornament selection now includes the Ridgewood Avenue train station. Linda was co-chair of Locomotion 2000, a fundraising effort to restore the station to its original glory. She recently gave us a box of leftover ornaments from the endeavor and they proved to be very popular this past holiday season.

As part of our mission to preserve historical reference

materials, we recently scanned, printed, and encapsulated the Glen Ridge pages from the 1890 Robinson Atlas of Essex County. The book belongs to the Glen Ridge Public Library and is in very fragile condition. Two sets of the copies were given to the library for the use of their patrons, and two

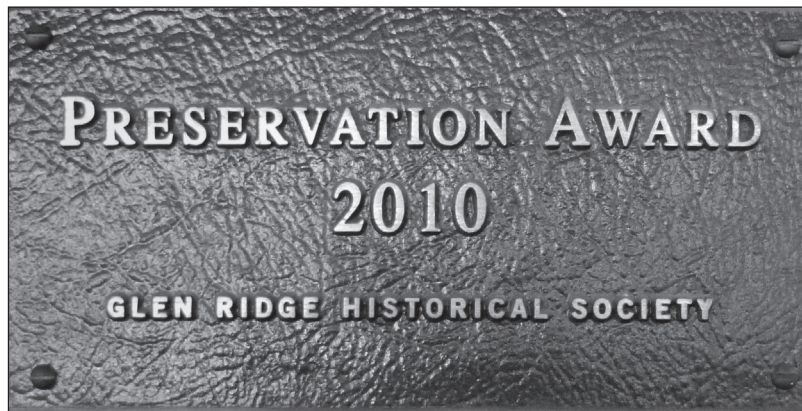
sets were added to our archives. Using encapsulated pages instead of the originals will help prevent further deterioration of the atlas.

Each spring the Historical Society selects a home restoration project for the annual Preservation Award. To nominate your neighbor or yourself, please contact Karin Robinson at [karinrobinson.arch@](mailto:karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net)

[verizon.net](mailto:karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net) for an application. Criteria include quality and historically accurate craftsmanship in the preservation or restoration of the exterior of a home. The award will be presented at the annual meeting.

Speaking of that meeting, our guest speaker will be the noted New Jersey preservationist and architectural historian Janet W. Foster. Her talk will be "The Queen Anne House." The meeting will take on the first floor of the Women's Club of Glen Ridge at 7:30 p.m. on April 26.

Sally Meyer



News and Goings-On

Fashion exhibition. The Historical Society fashion exhibition will feature clothing from the 1880s to the 1930s, including Victorian dresses, early-20th-century tennis outfits, flapper dresses, and children's pieces. A special members-only preview will take place on Thursday, February 8, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Terry S. Webster Museum, with refreshments next door at the Glen Ridge train station. The exhibit will be open to the public on Friday, February 9, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturday, February 10, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It will feature children's activities.

Preservation Award. We will announce the winner of the

2017 Historic Preservation Award at our annual meeting in April. If you or someone you know has completed a historically significant project in preserving or restoring their home exterior, please contact Karin Robinson at karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net for an application. Judging takes place in March.

Museum hours. Located above Boiling Springs Savings Bank, the Terry S. Webster Museum is open the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon or by appointment with Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674. It maintains an architectural and historical file on every house in town.

The Original Home of Shomrei Emunah

A 1903 PEN-AND-INK map on display at the Glen Ridge Public Library identifies a chapel on the corner lot of Highland and Glen Ridge avenues. The same building shows up later on Plate 20 of the 1906 Mueller Atlas of Essex County as the “M.E. (Methodist Episcopal) Church.”

In 1974 septuagenarian Arthur Anderson recalled that, when he was a child on Glen Ridge Avenue, the church “was a small congregation and ultimately became a black congregation.” His recollection is confirmed by a 1907 newspaper article about an attempted robbery on Glen Ridge Avenue, which quotes the suspect as saying that he threw his gun behind the “Colored Baptist Church in Highland Avenue.”

Soon after, the building would change its identity. In 1905 a group of 18 Jewish friends from Bloomfield and Montclair organized a congregation called Shomrei Emunah (Guardians of the Faith). Most were local merchants with small mom-and-pop businesses on Bloomfield Avenue. They held services in the back room of one of their businesses and set annual dues at 40 cents. Three years later they bought the then-defunct church building for \$500 and moved it to a plot of land they had purchased on Bloomfield Avenue. They held their first

services there on June 6, 1910. In 1914, in spite of minimal membership and serious financial difficulties, the congregation spent \$2,000 to remodel and enlarge the synagogue to its appearance in the photograph here. One member re-

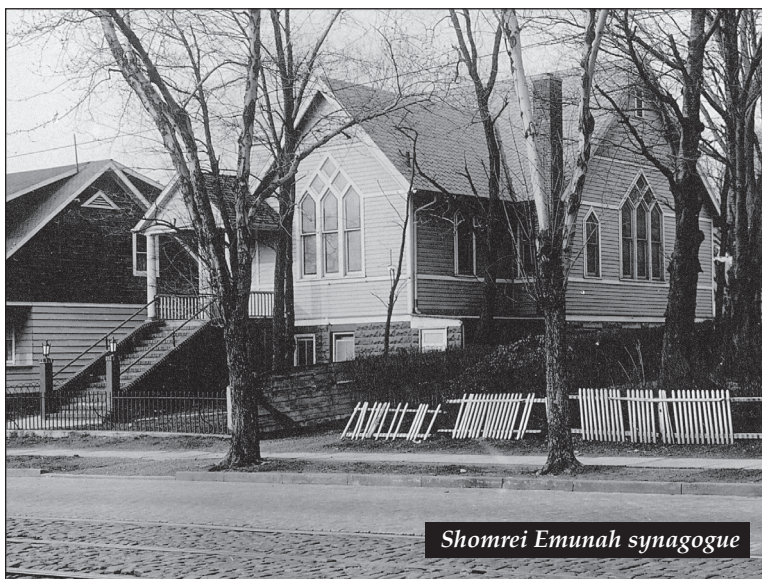
ported that the building included a sanctuary on the upper level and a social hall and dedicated space for a future Hebrew school on the lower. Until the hiring of Rabbi Morris Goodblatt in 1926, members of the congregation conducted services for themselves.

After the end of World War II, the congregation outgrew its home. In 1945 it bought a plot of land in Montclair for the building of a new synagogue. Construction at 67 Park Street began in 1949. On October 29, 1950, while

the congregation was negotiating the sale of its former home to Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Montclair, the building was destroyed by fire. The site is now a parking lot.

Glen Ridge old-timers like me probably remember Walensky’s Men’s Clothing Store and Cohen’s Stationers on Bloomfield Avenue in Montclair. Both of these businesses operated for most of the 20th century. Stanley Walensky and Morris Cohen were two of the original founders of congregation Shomrei Emunah.

Sally Meyer



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Editor	George Musser
Columnists	Sally Meyer Karin Robinson

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Our Own Local Version of Olana

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 176 Linden Avenue. There is no other house like it in Glen Ridge.

The house was built in about 1870 in a version of the Stick Style, which represented a new way of building in wood in America. Until this point, wood buildings had been typically constructed to replicate the brick or stone architecture of the Federal or Georgian periods. This resulted in the steadfast, solid massing of simple volumes. With the Stick Style, American domestic architecture came into its own. Timber was freely available for construction and houses became all about wood. The houses are remarkably light and fanciful—even vivacious—in appearance, each having a personal character.

Stick Style buildings were popularized by architectural pattern books of the mid-1800s, notably those by Andrew Jackson Downing. As this information spread to carpenters across the Northeast, a new philosophy emerged: By exposing and emphasizing the underlying wood structure, builders made a home more honest, utilitarian and democratic. Most of all, the style was completely fresh and up-to-date.

The Stick Style is most easily recognized by the horizontal and vertical boards (“sticks”) which interrupt the wood clapboard siding. Some of these houses have diagonal boards as well. This pattern creates a visual cage that contains the volume of the house, much as the structural wood framing itself contains the interior spaces. The result is a continuous decorative texture over the entire exterior, rather than ornamented doors and windows on simple walls.

176 Linden Avenue has horizontal and vertical bands all around the house: at floors, ceilings, eaves, corners, and window frames. Additional vertical bands extend below the windows. The wall surfaces between the bands are clad with narrow clapboard siding. The shallow roof slopes extend into very broad eaves supported by large brackets. The brackets are not just ornamental, but provide true structural

support. These brackets are notable for the attenuated vertical ends that run down the face of the corner boards—a trait of a very refined Stick Style house.

Beyond the picture-perfect Stick Style design are cutwork panels at the railings and lintels of the porches. This is what makes the house so fascinating to me. These details are clearly Moorish in origin. The Moorish style

The friezes have multifoil patterns in the panels. The narrow arches have a horseshoe shape. The availability of automatic lathes and milling machines simplified production of this kind of ornament.

Although the wall surfaces are elaborate, the house itself is completely symmetrical, with a pair of gabled three-story box bays flanking the cen-



176 Linden Avenue

was one of the exotic revival styles that reached the height of popularity in the mid-19th century. It was sought out as an historic source beyond Western Classical and Gothic traditions, as part of the European Romantic movement. The style became widely known in the U.S. with the construction of Olana, the Hudson River residence of the landscape painter Frederic Church. And it appears here in Glen Ridge as ornament on a Stick Style house.

The jigsaw-cut railings and friezes of 176 Linden show a widening vocabulary of ornament. There are elaborate, small-scale geometric patterns.

Simple volumes like these fell out of favor in the 1880s, giving way to the picturesque Queen Anne Style. Curves and polygons in asymmetrical arrangements became fashionable. Ornamentation remained popular, although it tended toward turned spindles rather than excised shapes. The Stick Style, with its modest roots, vanished amid the broad flamboyance of the late Victorian era.

176 Linden Avenue was honored with the Historical Society’s 1989 Preservation Award and currently sports a lavender, pale green, and gold color scheme.

Karin Robinson

Advancing the Spark on the Pumper

In 1895 ONE of the first orders of business for the government of the newly independent town of Glen Ridge was the creation of fire protection, beginning modestly with the allocation of \$50 for a hand-drawn hose cart. The hose itself soon followed and, a year later, a firehouse made part of the new municipal building on the west side of Herman Street.

Its brass bell weighed over a ton and sounded alarms for over 40 years from a bell tower. It also welcomed soldiers returning from World War I and rang on other ceremonial occasions, but was finally donated to a town-wide scrap drive during World War II. It had been replaced by an electronic system in 1939, one that sounded a numbered code to indicate the location of a fire. Huge fire horns were placed at the dead end of Sherman Avenue, at Nevins Church Press (a factory in the south end), on Bloomfield Avenue in the center of town, and no doubt somewhere at the north end (I cannot redis-

cover where). The system also gave out every day a “6 o’clock whistle” to test the equipment, set the town’s clocks, and signal suppertime to its children at play.

The handcart was followed by horse-drawn apparatus. In 1912 Glen Ridge became the first town in New Jersey to have an automotive fire truck. By 1931 the new municipal complex between Ridgewood Avenue and Herman Street housed two pumpers and an aerial truck in the section now occupied by the rescue squad. I remember that in the 1950s the oldest pumper still had a hand lever on the steering column to “advance the spark”—that is, to manually adjust the timing of the engine ignition.

Every day in the firehouse at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. all the engines and doors were tested to make sure everything was ready to go. The walls, floors, and ceilings were all made of nothing but stone and concrete, so the sounds of those huge, under-muffled machines

revving up and of those sirens testing made a show that never failed literally to move its audience through vibrating flesh and overwhelmed eardrums. And when a call came in and the big doors opened for real, the three engines roared out down Herman Street with bells clanging and sirens wailing to clear the traffic on Bloomfield Avenue.

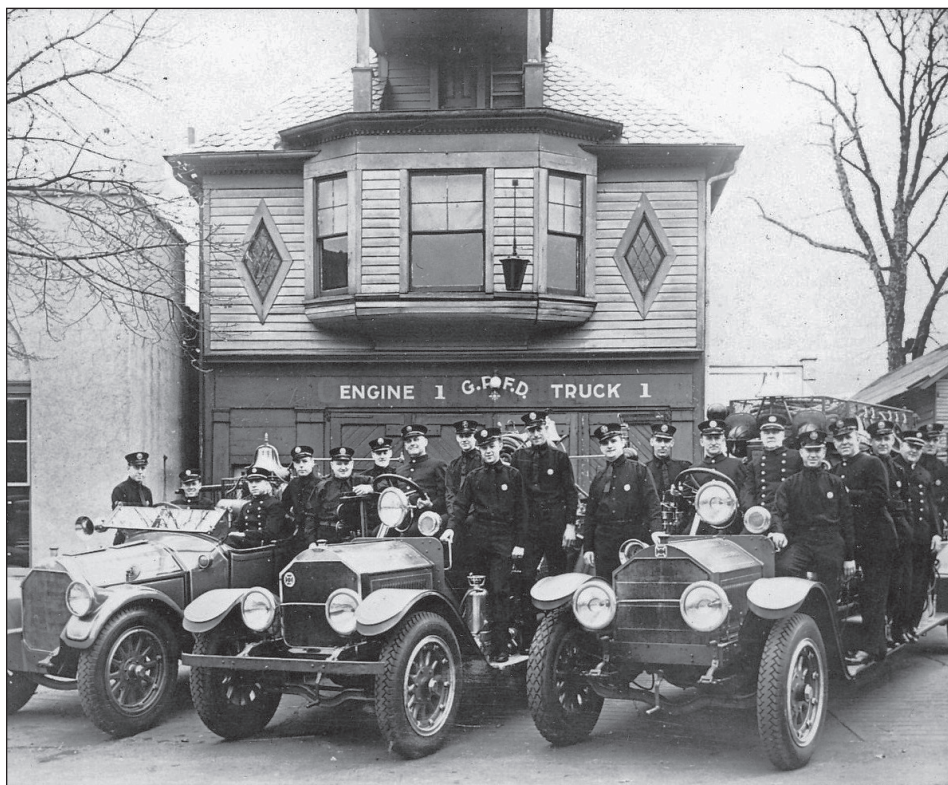
The initial force was all volunteers organized in companies by location, but in 1910 James Hartigan became the first paid firefighter. In 1939 Thomas Carty became the first paid fire chief. My father, William F. Vesterman, joined the department in 1939 and became chief in 1959.

For most of its nearly 100 years of existence, the department relied on a combination of volunteers and paid men. The latter provided 24-hour coverage in two shifts. Their job was to get the apparatus to the fire and to direct the work of the volunteers who would meet them there, having driven in their own cars. Fred Stay, who owned the barber shop in the Arcade, would leave a customer still lathered up and dash across the street to drive the third truck.

Longtime resident Gertrude White once recalled for me a fire on Summit Street: “Smoke was pouring out of the house. Engines pulled up with sirens wailing. Cars screeched to a stop and men jumped out, putting on gear from the trucks and pulling out hoses. It seemed like chaos, but when Chief Vesterman shouted, ‘Follow me, men!’ a group with axes and poles and hoses rushed into the house. In minutes the smoke stopped, and the fire was out.”

The town purchased its first ambulance in 1950 and housed it with the fire engines. It was staffed primarily by firefighters, both paid and volunteer, all of whom received emergency medical training.

Community means continuity. Like the school system, the Fire Department was very much a part of the town’s identity. In most years more than 50 people served as volunteers—almost all of whom had grown up in town and graduated from its schools—and



Glen Ridge Fire Department in 1915, in front of the original firehouse on Herman Street. This and the other images are from the Glen Ridge Historical Society archives.

the firehouse was not only the location of frequent drills for training, but a kind of clubhouse where they would play cards in the back room, watch ball games on the TV upstairs (only steps from the fire pole), and recondition toys in the basement workshop for distribution at Christmas. The annual Memorial Day cookout—which was held after the whole force, led by the engines, marched in the parade—is one of my fondest memories of the local fellowship fostered by the organization. The parking lot between the firehouse and what was then an A&P was filled with firefighters and their families. There were hot dogs and hamburgers, grilled sausages, cold salads and hot backed beans, cases of soda, and (of course) a cold keg of beer.

Fire Department volunteers would paint the houses of their aging, ailing, and incapacitated fellows; coach in youth sports leagues; and raise money for local charities. Most of the town's police officers and many of its municipal workers were volunteer firefighters, and all employees of the town used to be required to live within it.

Continuity means community. My father was raised at 59 Midland Avenue, my mother at 195. His father had been a firefighter in Bloomfield, driving horses at the beginning of the century. In a picture of the paid men in the department, taken in 1960 [see photo at upper right], my father stands on the left. Next to him stands Captain James Corcoran, who lived five houses up the block from our first home on Baldwin Street and who took care of the town-wide alarm system. He was the father of my teammate and lifelong friend Jim. Next comes Kevin Oates, who lived on Carteret Street and married one of my father's cousins. Frank Anderson is next. He grew up on Laurel Place, around the corner from our second home on Sherman Avenue, and was the son of former longtime department member, Captain ("Uncle Bud") Anderson. Jim Hughes, next in line, was a new man whom I did not know well since I was away at college when he joined. He is followed by John Harris, who lived around the corner on Hathaway Place with children who were in my brothers' and sisters' classes. At



the end stands Joe Devaney, the son of a local police officer. Joe grew up next door to the Corcorans and had been an older childhood friend to Jim and me. In a list of 40 department members of 1930—a generation or so earlier—nearly half the family names belong to people I knew growing up.

Community means taxes. That's what the Town Council thought when it made a much-contested decision to dissolve the department in 1990 and contract with Montclair for protection. Only the volunteer ambulance squad survived to continue the tradition of

community service. The school district sold Central School (my school) around the same time for the same reasons. Nothing is forever. But just as the district now hopes to repurchase Central School, perhaps the Glen Ridge Fire Department will one day rise again from its ashes. **William R. Vesterman**

William R. Vesterman is an emeritus professor of English literature at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

*Top: Paid firefighters in 1960
Above: Firehouse circa 1910*

Address Service Requested



***FASHION EXHIBITION OPENING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8***

Glen Ridge Historical Society Catalog

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for Glen Ridge history by making a purchase from our catalog of Historical Society items.

Historic District house plaque. Celebrate your home's history with a custom cast-bronze plaque denoting the Historic District of Glen Ridge and your home's circa construction date. The order form is available on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety. Plaques take approximately six weeks for delivery. Member price \$180

Holiday ornaments. A beautiful custom brass ornament featuring the iconic image of the Glen Ridge gas lamp is available for \$15. Each ornament comes in a red presentation box and includes a brief town history. The order



form is on our website at www.glen-ridgehistory.org/glen-ridge-gas-lamp-ornament/. You may also purchase ornaments at the Glen Ridge Public Library. We also offer the older gazebo and train-station ornaments for \$15.

1906 maps. Reprints of the famous A.H. Mueller Atlas of Essex County are available for both the north and the south ends of town. Member price \$80

Glen Ridge Memory and Matching Game. A classic handcrafted memory game with 48 tiles showing historic sites

and buildings in Glen Ridge. The storage box includes a description of each image. Suitable for all ages. \$15

Gas lamp postcards. Full-color 4x6 postcards showing a Glen Ridge gas lamp in spring, summer, autumn, and winter. \$1 each



To make a purchase, email us at glenridgehs@gmail.com or mail your order and payment to P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028-0164. Purchases may also be made by visiting our museum during open hours on the second Saturday of each month. It is located above Boiling Springs Savings Bank at 222 Ridgewood Avenue.