



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

April 2018 Vol. XXXX No. 4



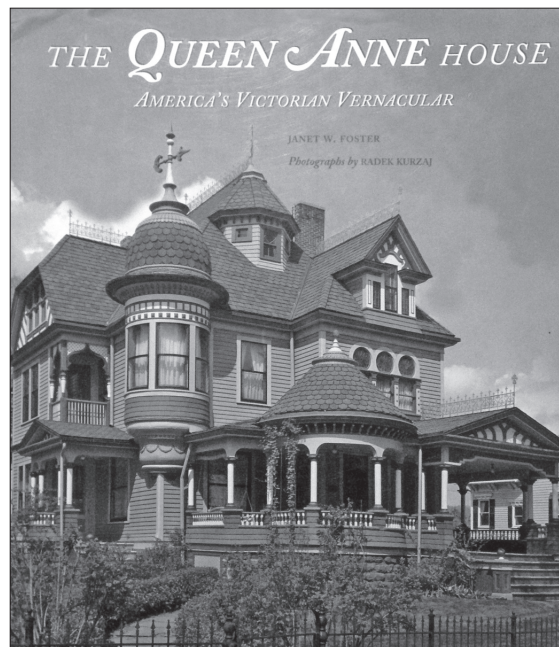
President's Letter

Contradictory, Undisciplined, Exuberant

KUDOS TO JEN JANOFSKY and her committee for the success of our recent fashion exhibit! It was carefully researched, beautifully mounted, and thoroughly enjoyed by nearly 300 visitors of all ages. Our thanks go, too, to the Gloucester County Historical Society for the generous loan of mannequins and dress forms.

At the upcoming annual meeting, our guest speaker will be Janet W. Foster, a preservationist and architectural historian. She founded Acroterion, a preservation consulting firm, and for many years was the associate director for Columbia University's Urban Planning and Historic Preservation Programs. She continues to teach there as an adjunct professor. She is also currently the chair of the New Jersey Historic Trust.

Her topic will be the Queen Anne house, which she described in a 2006 book as "contradictory, undisciplined, exuberant, and expressive" and maybe "the best example of a national vernacular architectural style produced in the United States." Foster lives in Madison in a Queen Anne-style house that she and her husband have restored.



She will include several examples of Queen Anne houses from Glen Ridge in her presentation.

Just before her talk, we will have a brief business meeting to present the budget, elect new officers and trustees, and announce the winner of the coveted annual Preservation Award. The meeting is at 7:30 p.m. on April 26 at the Women's Club of Glen Ridge.

This will be my final letter as your president, a four-year experience that has been wonderful. It has been such a pleasure working with both past and present members of the Board of Trustees. Recently rereading our mission statement, I felt very proud of our ongoing efforts to promote an interest in and appreciation of local history. Our founder and first president, Terry Webster, would be delighted to know that research is ongoing and membership is at an all-time high. Finally, I'd like to thank outgoing trustees Meghan Labot and David

Taylor for their dedicated efforts. Each brought new initiatives and ideas to fruition and led our organization into the digital age.

Sally Meyer

News and Goings-On

Annual business meeting. On April 26 at 7:30 p.m., the Historical Society will hold its annual meeting at the Women's Club, 219 Ridgewood Ave. Members will vote for new officers and trustees. The nominees are:

President (2018–2020)	Jen Janofsky
Secretary (2018–2020)	Megan Blank
Trustee (2018–2020)	Christine Brennan
Trustee (2018–2021)	Amy German
Trustee (2018–2021)	Vivian James
Trustee (2018–2021)	Ann Nicol

Merch table. Stop by at the Arts Festival/Eco Fair on Ridgewood Avenue on May 12 to see a sample Historic

District plaque and order one that is customized for your house. Postcards and other goodies will be on display, or you can just geek out over local architecture and history.

Volunteers needed. The Society is looking for six delegates to the Civic Conference Committee, a volunteer organization of town residents that meets monthly to review, nominate, endorse, and support candidates for local elective office. For more information, visit glenridgeccc.org. If you are interested, please contact Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.

Museum hours. The Terry S. Webster Museum is open the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon.

Last Factories in Glen Ridge

WITH THE SHUTDOWN of the Benson Rolling Mill and the Child Products Company in the early 1930s, the Glen Ridge industrial era was nearly over. Only two manufacturing enterprises were still in operation, Matchless Metal Polish in the Glen and Nevins Church Press at 92 Midland Ave., and only the latter was embedded in a residential neighborhood.

An earlier business on this site, New Jersey Aristotype Company, had made photographic sensitized papers. In June 1893 an editor of *Photographic Times* was “much struck by the size of the building and the enormous amount of paper prepared and sold.” A single batch of the gelatin-coated paper looped from one end of the 220-foot room to the other. The system produced nearly two miles of photographic paper at a time. The business was bought and shuttered by the General Aristo Company of Rochester, N.Y., in 1901.

The size and layout of the building were perfect for printing broker and salesman Matthew Nevins and his partner, Theodore Church, who purchased it in 1902. For over 50 years Nevins Church Press manufactured folding cartons, packaging materials, and five-color labels for familiar brands such as H.J. Heinz, C.F. Mueller, Best Foods, Bayer, Benson & Hedges, and Gillette Razors. It employed 350 people.

As development in the South End grew in the first half of the 20th century, the factory became something of an anomaly. Neighbors complained of noise from the machinery and worried about fire—justifiably. At least three small fires in

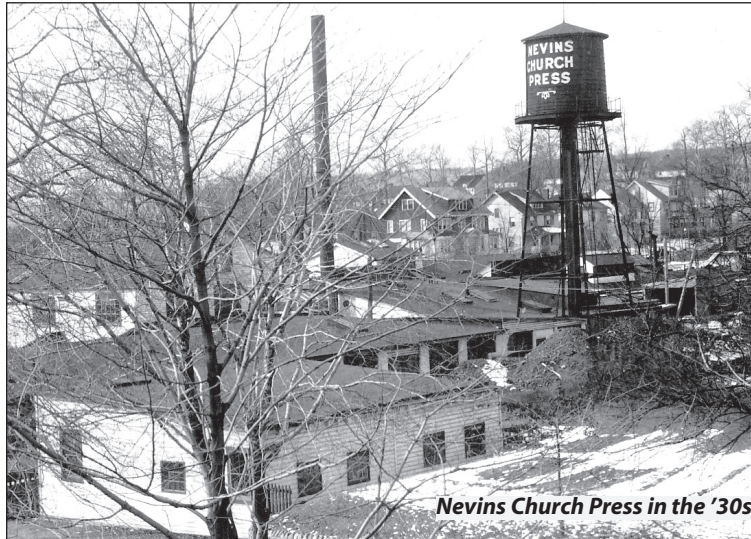
the '30s and '40s required the efforts of the Fire Department. The company's image improved during World War II when it was designated as one of the town's auxiliary fire stations and a command center for several regiments of the Home Guard. The business also scored a few brownie points by inviting students from Linden Avenue School for a tour.

But it was not enough. Nevins Church Press relocated to Clifton in the spring of 1953 and was eventually acquired by

Union Camp Corporation and, in turn, International Paper. Harry Schiffman of East Orange purchased the abandoned three-and-half-acre site the following year for \$36,000. Sadly, in December 1955, an open shed from the former factory attracted the curiosity of 9-year-old neighbor Donald Raphael, who was fatally burned when several cans of heat adhesive exploded there.

The area is easy to spot today by the postwar style of the 19 houses Schiffman built on Midland Avenue, Adams Place, and Astor Place.

Sally Meyer



Nevins Church Press in the '30s



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE GASLAMP

Editor	George Musser
Columnists	Sally Meyer Karin Robinson

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Little House in the Prairie Style

In 1910, *ARCHITECTURAL RECORD* magazine published a photograph of 89 Baldwin St., another of my favorite houses in town. It was labeled simply “House at Glen Ridge, N.J.” as part of an article entitled “The Small Country House: A Collection of Inexpensive but Well Designed Suburban Dwellings.”

The article begins: “It is by no means easy to find many examples of thoroughly well-designed but inexpensive suburban and country houses.” It continues: “There can be no doubt, however, that the number of interesting and seemly, but inexpensive dwellings, is increasing both absolutely and relatively; and the reason for this increase is that an increasing number of people of moderate means are coming to demand a dwelling with some distinction and propriety of appearance.”

It’s a little surprising to find 89 Baldwin included in an architecture article full of Colonial, Federal, Georgian, and Tudor Revival-style houses. 89 Baldwin is a prime example of Prairie Style architecture, which grew out of the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright in the suburbs of Chicago and throughout the Midwest. It is one of only a few distinctly American styles, and it presented a bold alternative to upright and constricted Queen Anne and Victorian houses of the late 19th century. With the widespread use of pattern books, these houses were built all across the U.S. and in all landscapes.

89 Baldwin was designed and built in 1908 by the firm of Wagner and Fairchild. Like the earliest Prairie Style houses, it presents a symmetrical façade to the street. It has the long, low profile that was meant to harmonize with the flat landscape of the American plains, even though this particular instance sits on a heavily wooded site, with the land dropping off sharply to Essex Avenue below.

The hipped roof is shallow to reduce the apparent height of the house and emphasize its horizontal profile. Other details, such as the broad eaves and the decorative horizontal bands under the windows, reinforce the hor-

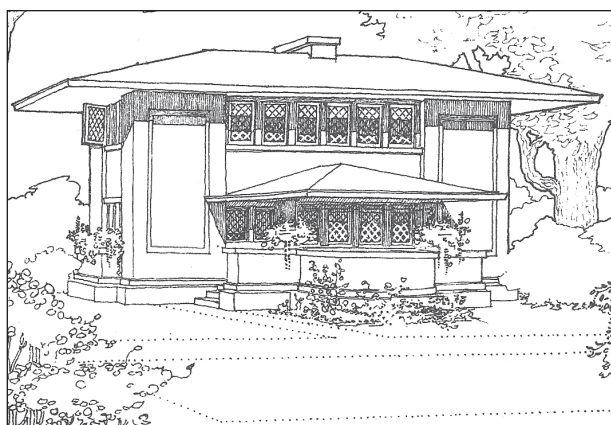
izontal theme. The chimney is broad and flat. And at 89 Baldwin there is the obligatory long window box—one of my favorite features.

In contrast to the busy shapes of Victorian houses of the day, this house is composed by combining a few simple rectangular volumes. The exterior is stucco, which creates visually uninterrupted expanses of wall surfaces. The large windows are grouped together as a single large panel. The second-floor windows dominate the façade. Many Prairie Style houses minimize the appearance of the first floor and empha-

size the second floor.

Although they were popular in the early 20th century, interest faded away very quickly after World War I. Even Frank Lloyd Wright moved on to develop his “Organic” architecture. The Prairie Style does live on in the form of ranch houses, whose long, low profiles were inspired by Wright’s designs.

Of course, Glen Ridge does have a house designed by Wright himself, on Chestnut Hill Place. It was one of his late designs, however, representing his “Usonian” design theory—but that is for another article. **Karin Robinson**



Drawings from Frank Lloyd Wright's Wasmuth Portfolio, published in 1910 and now in the public domain in the U.S. The wide distribution of these drawings helped to popularize Prairie Style architecture in the U.S. and Europe. The designer of 89 Baldwin had no doubt seen them.

Treasure Hunting for History

DID A HESSIAN soldier lose a coat button during a Revolutionary War march through what is now Glen Ridge? Did a couple accidentally leave a Model T Ford hood latch behind when they drove away after picnicking in Brookdale Park? Did a priest bless a cache of metals before burying them a century ago? These are just a few of the questions I've pondered as a 15-year-old metal detector, aspiring anthropologist, and museum curator.

The button, hood latch, and metals are just few of several items I have found buried in Glen Ridge and the surrounding area. As a resident of Glen Ridge, I live in walking distance to Brookdale Park and have assembled a collection of artifacts from various

decades, equipped with my Garret Ace 250 metal detector and Garret Pro-Pointer 2. While some items might have more kitsch than financial value, I have been fortunate enough to unearth gold and silver rings, old silver coins, and an assortment of buttons that date back centuries.

I began metal detecting when I was 12. My first major find was the Model T Ford hood latch, which I located along the road that weaves through Brookdale Park. After the discovery, I decided to upgrade my equipment and more aggressively pursue this hobby. My parents helped me to purchase a new detector, and I saved up to buy the pro-pointer, a mini-detector that helps you pinpoint a metal item after it has been located by the larger device. The pro-pointer is particularly important in finding small items such as old bullet casings, buttons, and coins. The Ace 250 metal detector is sensitive to objects up to 8 inches underground;

the pro-pointer, up to two inches. The detector does not always pick up items near the limit of its range, so I swing it over an area several times. Both instruments can detect iron, lead, copper, gold, silver, and other metals.

After my initial success at Brookdale Park, I expanded my search locally into the Glen, the clearing behind Wells Fargo Bank, Mills Reservation, and private and public homes (with the owners' approval, of course). When I want to explore a new detecting spot, I

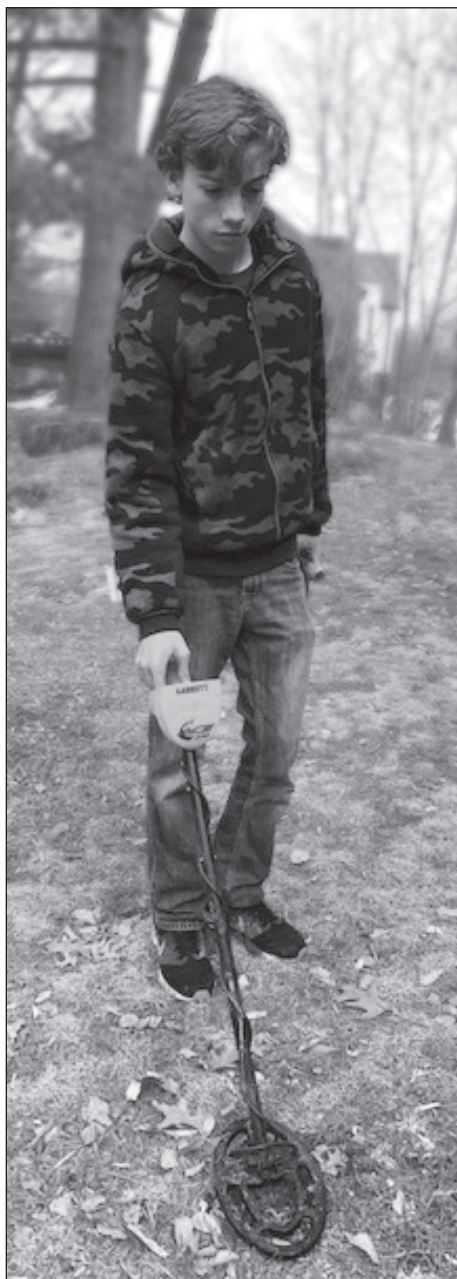
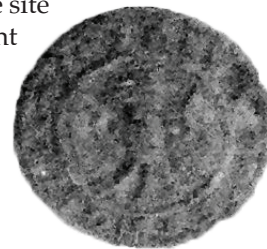
consider the age of the site and whether it might have seen any significant activity back in the day. However, I have found old relics at seemingly unpromising sites, too.

I unearthed the Hessian coat button in the hill behind the Wells Fargo. It has a Teutonic eagle on the front of it, and the writing around the face of the rim reads *Es Deus Spes Nostra* ("God Is Our Hope"). [Editor's note: According to diaries kept by British and Hessian soldiers, a column of Hessian Jagers passed through Bloomfield, then known as Wardsession, during Washington's retreat across New Jersey in November 1776.] Other relics I now have in my collection include a pot handle from the 1700s, bullets dating back to the 1800s (or earlier: one appears to be a lead musket slug), and a small army of lead soldiers.

While finding something of value is a bonus, the thrill of the hunt is what motivates me to continue to search for local treasure. My interest in history—as well as curiosity about those who lived in Glen Ridge in the decades and centuries that preceded me—has prompted me to contemplate the purpose and significance of every item that I find.

After finding a brass wedding ring buried in a friend's backyard on Forest Avenue, I assumed it was purchased by a couple with very little money. After researching brass rings, I discovered that during World War I American soldiers left for Europe wearing them, leaving behind their gold bands with their wives to have a proper burial for them if they died in battle.

An assortment of 16 religious medals buried in a single hole in my grandparents' backyard was also an intriguing find. After my grandparents said that they had no idea how they got there, I did some research and discovered that their property once



Right: The author in Brookdale Park, courtesy of Andrea Bianchi

Top left and bottom right: Religious medals from an ex-churchyard in Cedar Grove

Top right: Coat button

belonged to a nearby church. I also discovered that Catholics (as well as people in some other religions) bless, bury, or burn their metals rather than throw them away. I thought about reburying them in the same spot, but ultimately decided to turn them in to a church. The priest I gave them to was pleased to have them and said that he would give them to children and senior citizens in local nursing homes.

Local parks and clearings have provided some unique and compelling finds, but I am most interested in discovering what is hidden in the backyards of Glen Ridge. I believe the potential for interesting finds is much higher at private homes than public areas that may have been searched previously.



In my own backyard, I found four old British half-pennies, a cast iron statue of a knight, and a creepy gold and crystal charm from the late 1800s with a drop of blood still preserved in the center!

What sort of treasure might be buried in your backyard? If you are interested in having me inspect your property, please contact my dad, John, at johnjwooten@yahoo.com. When I dig, I use a small professional-grade shovel that allows me to cut small plugs that are easily filled, so that the intrusion is unnoticeable. Anything I find is yours to keep, but if you would like to donate or loan it to me, I will use it as part of an exhibit I hope to organize in partnership with the Historical Society.

I also encourage you to try metal detecting yourself. Don't get disheartened if you don't find anything on your first or second hunt. You will definitely find stuff as you acquire more experience.

Jack Wooten

Jack Wooten is a freshman at Glen Ridge High School.



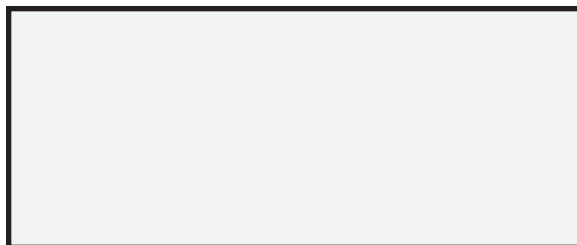
Above: Crystal blood charm

Top right: Cast-iron knight statue, Model T Ford hood latch, and other finds

Middle right: 1940s-era bullet

Bottom right: World War I lead toy soldiers

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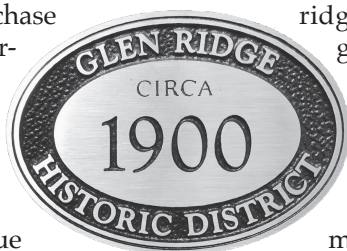
ANNUAL MEETING
THURSDAY, APRIL 26

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.