



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

February 2014 Vol. XXXVI No. 3



## President's Letter

### Nominate a Home for the 2014 Preservation Award!

MY THANKS TO Frank and Eva Reda for hosting our holiday part this year. The Redas were especially hospitable in opening their entire house to us. It was a real treat to see the generous rooms and the extensive and varied architectural details throughout the house—just the sort of thing our members enjoy.

Don't forget to nominate a restoration project for our annual Preservation Award. It could be your own project, a neighbor's, or just a house in town you have seen and admired. Email me at [karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net](mailto:karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net) and I'll offer an application form to the owners. We will present the award at our annual meeting in April.

This program seeks to recognize Glen Ridge residents who have undertaken especially thorough restorations. We look for projects of all sizes that rebuild historically accurate design and construction. We have been giving out the award since 1985. Winners receive a plaque to display on the front of their houses and we showcase their projects in our booth at the Arts Festival in May.

I am also pleased to report that the Historical Society has received a grant from the Albert Payson Terhune Foundation. We will use the grant to buy equipment to digitize our archives and make multimedia presentations. Our aim is to increase public access to our collection while preserving the original items.

Terhune's story is interesting in its own right. Born in Newark in 1872, he lived most of his life in a 1786 Dutch Colonial Style house known as Sunnysbank in what is now Wayne. The house was originally his family's summer home, but Terhune made it his year-round residence in 1912. He began working as a reporter for *The Evening World* in 1894 and soon began writing fiction as well.

Terhune was widely read and very prolific, remembered most for his dog stories. Many of his stories featured the adventures of his own collie named Lad. His first collection of stories, published in 1919, was titled *Lad: A Dog*. The book was a bestseller in both the adult and the young-adult markets and was reprinted over 80 times. (My father, born in 1934, still has his treasured copy of the book.) In addition to writing about dogs, he bred collies at his Sunnysbank Kennels. The 44-acre estate in Wayne is preserved as the Terhune-Sunnysbank Park. The house is gone, but it's still possible to visit the grave of Lad.

Karin Robinson



45 Douglas Road, winner of last year's Preservation Award

## News and Goings-On

**Public lecture.** Love Glen Ridge's architecture and wish you could identify its various styles and elements? On February 27, town historian Sally Meyer will make gables, dormers, cornices, and pediments understandable to all. Her presentation will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Glen Ridge Congregational Church.

**Museum opening hours.** Come read your house file and enjoy the exhibits in the Terry Webster Museum Room. Newly relocated above Boiling Springs Savings Bank, the museum is open on the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon. You can also arrange another time to visit by calling Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.

**1906 maps for sale.** Reprints from the famous 1906 A.H. Mueller Atlas of Essex County are available (\$100, or \$80 for members). Email us at [glenridgehs@gmail.com](mailto:glenridgehs@gmail.com).

**Facebook.** Visit us on Facebook for news, event notices, or just to Like us. [facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety).

News from the Town Historian

## Educational Innovation During the Great Depression

FOR THE PAST six months I have read and clipped *The Glen Ridge Paper* from its first edition in April 1935 to the middle of 1941. One of the pleasures of this project has been reading about the Glen Ridge elementary schools during the latter years of the Depression.

In spite of budgetary constraints, teachers embellished their reading, writing, and arithmetic lessons with marvelous opportunities for creativity. In March 1936, during an assignment that would still be timely today, the fourth-grade students at Forest Avenue School traveled on an imaginary trip across the desert from Baghdad, Iraq, to Beirut, Syria (as it was at the time), and then by boat to Greece. The boys then helped their friend Markos tend his flocks in the mountains while the girls lent a hand to Demetra in the vineyards.

Later that year kindergarten students used orange crates to construct a child-sized *Queen Mary* complete with sleeping quarters, a galley, port holes, smokestack, and life boats. The major expense was the 10 pounds of nails used in its construction. A mural of sea and sky covered the walls, and two bell buoys and a six-foot lighthouse stood at the ready. Just a few months before, these same imaginative children enjoyed a special school day outing in Caldwell for

an old-fashioned sleigh ride.

At the annual Central School open house in May 1939, fourth-grade students hammered out the history of transportation on copper plaques. The fifth-graders created a 21-foot long mural depicting life in Normandy and dressed dolls in local costume. The third-grade students made a replica of an African village in Buganda (part of present-day Uganda). And after visiting the new Glen Ridge post office, the first graders built and manned their own post office with letters to their parents stamped, cancelled, and ready for delivery.

In May 1940 kindergarten students at Linden Avenue School enthralled visitors with a cleverly designed train. Its three cars included a dining car with tables set for a meal, a Pullman car with sleeping berths, and a lounge car with upholstered chairs. The other kindergarten created replicas of the United Airlines administration building and hangar which they had visited earlier in the year. The second-graders erected an Indian teepee and a log cabin with a leather-hinged door and cobblestone fireplace.

Amid core-curriculum demands and preparation for standardized tests, teachers might look nostalgically at these hands-on projects of the past.

Sally Meyer



Central School kindergartners built a train in 1939 and a ferry in 1940.



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## How to Research the History of Your Home

DID YOUR BACKYARD once open onto an ice-skating pond? Did a mad scientist live in your attic? Or a spiritualist doing séances? How did people cope in the Depression or during a typhoid outbreak? Is that strange room in your basement an old bomb shelter? You never know what you'll find when you research the history of your house. And if you haven't already done it, it's easy to do. In fact, a lot of the work has already been done for you by past homeowners and Historical Society volunteers. If you get hooked, you can trace the history of your property all the way back to the original colonial land purchases from the local native peoples.

**Glen Ridge Historical Society** Terry S. Webster Museum Room ([glenridgehistory.org](http://glenridgehistory.org)), located above the Boiling Springs Savings Bank next to the train station, is your first port of call. This is where you'll find the file on your house. Other resources include area maps from the mid-1800s onwards and reminiscences deposited by past residents. The museum is open on the second Saturday of every month in the morning and at other times by appointment.

**Glen Ridge Public Library** ([glenridgelibrary.org](http://glenridgelibrary.org)) is the next place to go. It has its own local-history room with house files, photographs, newspaper clippings, and city directories, many in computer-searchable form. The library's regular holdings include many of the standard references on local history: Joseph Fulford Fulsom's *Bloomfield: Old and New*, William H. Shaw's two-volume *History of Essex and Hudson Counties*, Henry Whittemore's *History of Montclair Township*, and the *Biographical and Genealogical History of the City of Newark and Essex County*.

**Essex County Hall of Records** ([essexregister.com](http://essexregister.com)) is where you fill in the gaps in your file and make a list of all the people who ever lived in your house. It takes some effort—you'll need to block out a couple of hours or spend your lunch breaks there the next time you're called for jury duty—but is worth it.

**Deeds (Room 130).** Land deeds form a chain that you can trace back to 1800. (A fire destroyed earlier county records.) Staff members will guide you through the baroque indexing system, although they never cease to be amazed that someone would do historical research out of interest. The basic procedure is to start with your name, look up your deed number in the computer database, and find the deed in the appropriate record book. The deed will tell you the number for the previous owner's deed. Look it up, and so on, all the way back. If a typo or lost document breaks the chain, you can use the name index books to recover.

**Road records (Room 240).** Not many people know about these, but they're fascinating. The country clerk maintains a written record of every single road built or modified since 1698. By looking up your street and neighboring streets, you may find a surveyor's map that shows your house. You might also find records of houses that were torn down to lay out the street. Very early roads are listed under "Newark" or "Bloomfield" rather than the road name.

**Wills (Room 213).** Many houses were passed down through a family rather than sold and bought. Wills can also clarify family relations: who is whose child or sibling. Enter the person's name in the computer database, which will direct you to an index volume ("docket"), which in turn will tell you the book and page number of the actual legal documents.

Having done the above, you can take your research in several different directions. You could use the details and structural clues in your house to figure out its architectural history, which can in turn guide your restoration work. Part 2 of this article in the next issue will focus on that. Here, I'll offer a few tips for fleshing out the personal histories of your home's former inhabitants—basically, doing genealogical research—and for

seeing what use was made of your land before your house was even built.

**Online genealogy sites** such as Ancestry.com, GenealogyBank.com, USGAarchives.net, MyHeritage.com, and FindAGrave.com contain a wealth of material. It's astounding what you can find on Google and Archive.org, too. But don't rely solely on Internet searches. They can mislead as well as illuminate. Much important material isn't online, and much of what is online is wrong. Amateur genealogy is especially gaffe-prone.

To trace land deeds prior to 1800, begin with the earliest owner recorded in the county deeds and look him up in the transcribed version of the colonial records. The multivolume series *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey* contains abridged versions of deeds, wills, and other documents. It is available on a couple of the above websites and at several of the libraries listed below. Some libraries also have *Colonial Conveyances*, a two-volume index to land transfers in this period.

**Bloomfield Historical Society** Museum ([bloomfieldhistorical.org](http://bloomfieldhistorical.org)), open Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, has extensive vertical files with newspaper clippings and historians' notes. It's in the Bloomfield Children's Library; take the elevator toward your right as you enter.



The Nolen Report: Part 4

## A Twelve-Point Plan for Improving Glen Ridge

In 1909 Glen Ridge commissioned landscape architect John Nolen to chart a future for the town. With this installment, The Gaslamp completes reprinting the text of this report.

Not all of Nolen's recommendations were implemented, but the spirit of the report was incorporated into the town's plans as it grew. As a humanistic document, it focused on those aspects of town planning that would improve residents' quality of life. These include:

**Schools:** Today's excellent school system is the result of many groups working to provide the best educational environment for the town's students.

**Transportation:** Nolen stressed the importance of transportation and his recommendations to eliminate train crossings at grade level and to widen the bridge over the tracks at the

Ridgewood Avenue train station were followed.

**Borough Hall:** Nolen's recommendation on building a Borough Hall was followed, but not in the location he specified.

**Stores:** The Arcade Building with shops was built where Nolen recommended, but not in the Tudor style he recommended.

**Street Names:** Naming streets is not a trivial exercise and the current names of the streets are a rich collection that includes the names of early residents and elegant names given to new streets as they were added.

**Historic Preservation:** Nolen recommended that "building ordinances be considered... preserving the homogeneity of neighborhoods...." The Historic Preservation Commission fills this recommendation almost to the letter.

Herb Addison

### RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE IMPROVEMENT of Glen Ridge I therefore submit the following recommendations:

(1) That the plan for the contemplated improvement of the station and surroundings of the Lackawanna Railroad include, (a) the widening of Ridgewood Avenue at the bridge, (b) adequate space south of the station for carriages and other vehicles, with a new approach from Woodland Avenue, (c) the abolishing of the grade crossing at Hillside Avenue, and (d) the widening of Clark Street where it passes under the railroad.

(2) That efforts be made to obtain from the Erie Railroad the removal of the grade crossing at Wildwood Terrace and the construction of the Sherman Avenue bridge.

(3) That the Glen Ridge Centre, at the intersection of Ridgewood and Bloomfield Avenues, be improved and perfected by the acquisition of the property at the northwest corner and its use for some public or semi-public purpose.

(4) That the advantages of building a Borough Hall, a few stores, and perhaps a small hotel or inn near the Borough Centre be seriously considered with a view to action.

(5) That consideration be given in advance of actual need to a convenient trolley route to provide service when necessary north and south through the Borough.

(6) That Ridgewood Avenue and its proposed extension be improved as an integral part of the proposed twelve-mile Circuit Drive in Montclair and Glen Ridge. That the Essex County Park Commission be petitioned to locate at once, and execute as soon as possible, a parkway that will connect the main drives of Glen Ridge with the County Park System.

(7) That the whole method of locating public streets and roads be investigated for the purpose of protecting

the interests of all the people of Glen Ridge and the further improvement of the Borough as a place of residence.

(8) That building ordinances be considered, with the intention of promoting health, preserving the homogeneity of neighborhoods and protecting the stability of real estate values; also that property owners be asked to cooperate in this provision by writing suitable restrictions in their deeds of sale.

(9) That attention be invited by the proper authorities to the names of the streets: first, to a revision of those that are confusing or conflicting and, secondly, to the adoption of a method for the future that will encourage the selection of distinctive and appropriate names.

(10) That the Shade Tree Commission (the formation of which is advocated) be requested to take up in a broad and efficient way, much after the manner of East Orange, for example, the whole question of planting and maintaining street trees.

(11) That the land already purchased by the Borough for parks and playgrounds be developed and utilized

as rapidly as possible under carefully prepared plans, including a wading pool, skating pond, and outdoor gymnastic apparatus.

(12) That some public authority be empowered to study and survey the Borough with a view to establishing an adequate system of school yards, school gardens, playgrounds and parks for the present population and to reasonably anticipate the needs of the immediate future.

### IN CONCLUSION

IN CONCLUSION IT should be stated frankly that it is not expected that all of these recommendations will be carried out at once. It is true that some are urgent and de-



A century ago, this was Glen Ridge's firehouse, located on Herman Street.

continued on page 5



*House History (continued from page 3)*

**Bloomfield Town Hall** ([bloomfieldtwpnj.com/content/municipal-clerk](http://bloomfieldtwpnj.com/content/municipal-clerk)) has a dusty basement vault with pre-1895 property tax records, essential if your house dates to this period. These records will tell you precisely when your home was built. Access requires advance written permission.

**Montclair Historical Society** library ([montclairhistorical.org](http://montclairhistorical.org)) and **Montclair Public Library** Local History room ([montclairlibrary.org/content1192](http://montclairlibrary.org/content1192)) have resources of potential use to Glen Ridge residents: old documents from the Dodd and Crane families, information collected by the local Daughters of the American Revolution, back issues of Montclair newspapers, and thousands of photographs. If you live near the Montclair town line, you have a good chance of finding an old picture of your house.

**Ridgewood Public Library** has a fantastic local-history room, the Bolger Heritage Center ([ridgewoodlibrary.org/localhistory](http://ridgewoodlibrary.org/localhistory)). Although it focuses on Bergen County, it has vital resources for Essex, too, notably a series of books by Richard Hutchinson transcribing colonial records that are missing from the official anthologies.

**N.J. Historical Society** ([jerseyhistory.org](http://jerseyhistory.org)), across from NJPAC, should be on everyone's to-do list. Despite a severe budgetary crisis, it still has an extensive archive of old manuscripts and maps, with online finding aids to help you look up people and subjects. The hours are limited and the library staff asks for advance notice.

**Newark Public Library** has a storied local-history room on the third floor, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center ([npl.org/Pages/Collections/njic.html](http://npl.org/Pages/Collections/njic.html)). This is the place to find one-of-a-kind unpublished and self-published treatises—a local history buff's typewritten labor of love. Unfortunately, the stacks are

closed. For basic reference materials, you're better off at the Ridgewood library or N.J. Historical Society library.

**N.J. State Archives** ([nj.gov/state/archives](http://nj.gov/state/archives)) keeps the original colonial deeds and wills. It's always a good idea to look at the originals, since transcribed versions can omit crucial information. The archive staff will mail copies to you for a fee, sparing you the trip to Trenton. It takes a couple of weeks.

**New York Historical Society** ([nyhistory.org/library](http://nyhistory.org/library)), next door to the American Museum of Natural History, has a deep archive of material related to colonial New Jersey, including maps and the papers of surveyors-general James and William Alexander.

**Rutgers University Alexander Library** ([libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/service\\_info/reference\\_services.shtml](http://libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/service_info/reference_services.shtml)) is the best place to track down individual people. It holds the files of the Genealogical Society of New Jersey and the state Daughters of the American Revolution, which are indexed using a handwritten card catalog. These are not primary documents, but notes assembled over the decades by local historians.

To me, house history makes the past come alive and gives me a fresh perspective on the present day. If you thought that moving from Brooklyn to the Jersey suburbs was a recent phenomena, you might be amused to learn that it goes back to the 1800s. Glen Ridge seems so leafy, but a century ago it was an industrial center. Upscale homes were multi-family boarding houses during the Depression. Going even further back, families fled through our area to escape British raids on Newark during the Revolutionary War. I look forward to hearing what you find! Please email your discoveries to me at [georgejr@musser.com](mailto:georgejr@musser.com).  
**George Musser**

*Nolen Report (continued from page 4)*

lay, with many of them, expensive; but then others can wait without serious disadvantage. Taken together they form a general coherent plan of action—one that if consistently followed will reduce unnecessary waste and dissatisfaction to a minimum. Some of these recommendations may be carried into effect at once through the formation of a Tree Commission, the passage of building and revised street regulations, and the establishment of a voluntary organization to look after matters that do not properly fall under public control. The cost of the proposed improvements need not be excessive; in the main it will be in the nature of investment rather than expense. Much of it should, therefore, be provided by bond issues, supplemented, however, by private gifts and by a share in the unearned increment from land, in case New Jersey passes a law corresponding to that common in Europe, and which has already been adopted by a number of States in this country. In order to actually raise the standard of the common life of Glen Ridge above that of other places, it may also be necessary for a time to increase slightly the tax rate. I believe that this will be found to be justified by both direct and indirect results and that no other expenditure will be so profitable. Glen Ridge has a population of over three thousand—a three-fold increase in fifteen years. While the size of the Borough protects it from a large population, it may reasonably expect to double its present number. Action now,

therefore, will prevent many of the mistakes, both of omission and commission, that other-larger residence towns have made, and the purpose of this Report is to advocate a more skilful method of town making, a more confident belief in the future, a larger early public investment in land, and even-greater regard for beauty and recreation, and in particular, a wider application of sound business principles to public affairs. The expenditure of money, time and effort involved in this program will be justified in a better Borough to live in, the avoidance of waste, and the legitimate and unfailing returns of enterprise, wisdom and public spirit. Glen Ridge is already unlike any other town; it has its own character, its own claims to distinction. Wisely has it reflected its topography in its streets and other public places, and developed its public ideals with a rare regard to essential public-needs. Consistently following what is best in the past, the present plan is intended to promote an even clearer consciousness on the part of the citizens generally of what the Borough life should be, to avoid the oversights and mistakes of merely drifting, and secure the well-defined results of a carefully considered program for the future.

JOHN NOLEN,  
*Landscape Architect.*

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,  
November 15, 1909.



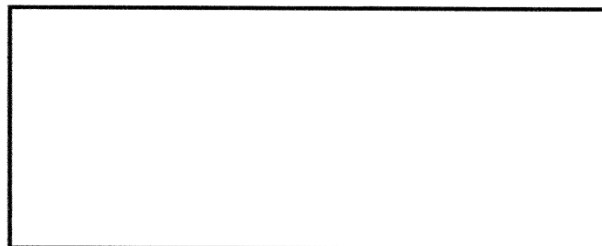
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***“GLEN RIDGE ARCHITECTURE 101”  
LECTURE BY SALLY MEYER ON FEBRUARY 27, 2014***

**Current Events**

To July 31, 2014 – “100 Works for 100 Years: A Centennial Celebration”; Montclair Art Museum. The museum celebrates its centennial with 100 works reflecting its rich cultural history and legacy. Featured are works from its founding collections, including Native American art, works by Childe Hassam, Ralph Albert Blakelock, Julian Alden Weir and others. Added to the collection since include works by Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent and Edward Hopper.

To April 19, 2014 – :Sky High: The Logic of Luxury’; The Skyscraper Museum, 39 Battery Place, New York City. The exhibit examines the recent proliferation of super-slim, ultra-luxury residential towers on the rise in Manhattan. These pencil-thin buildings constitute a new type of skyscraper in a city where tall, slender structures have a long history. For these buildings, however, there is also a “simple math” in the logic of luxury that shapes the design of these projects in every aspect.

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**The Last Chapter in the Preservation of the Bell Labs Building in Holmdel?**

An important part of historic preservation is saving major works of Modern Architecture. Among these are the Bell Labs building in Holmdel, NJ, designed by Eero Saarinen and opened in 1962. The building was closed in 2007 after it was bought by Alcatel-Lucent from AT&T. Since then, as readers of *The Gaslamp* know, the city of Holmdel has explored ways of converting the building to yield economic value to the township. In late August 2013 it was bought by Somerset Development for \$27 million after Holmdel approved a plan to redevelop it into a complex with a health care center, residences, a hotel, and retail space. Will the estimated \$100 million investment to redevelop the site pay off with enough tenants to fill the space in a weak local commercial real estate market? Only time will tell.