



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

September 2014 Vol. XXXVII No. 1



## President's Letter

### The Torch Passes to a New President

GREETINGS! AFTER a 34-year association with the Glen Ridge Historical Society, I am honored to serve as your president. Karin Robinson, our immediate past president, will be a hard act to follow. During her nine years on the board, Karin worked diligently to promote the cause of local history. Most notably, her vision and leadership resulted in the move and significant upgrade of our museum and archives from a small classroom space in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church to the second floor of the historic building at 222 Ridgewood Avenue. Karin herself designed the space with a welcoming entrance, exhibition galleries, an archival research area and an attractive meeting room. Thank you, Karin, for all of your hard work!

This summer I prepared an application for the Essex County Local History Grant Program. Its funding would provide support for one year for up to 20 percent of our annual operating expenses. Filling out the application was a very rewarding experience. After describing our membership and audience, I wrote a brief history of our organization. To refresh my memory I reread all of our newsletters since incorporating in 1977. Wow! We have accomplished a lot.

The application also asked about our mission, goals, and objectives; management and governance; essential programs and services; and collections, exhibitions, and publications. As I answered these questions, I felt very proud of our efforts. We have consistently achieved the

goals as stated in our constitution to provide facilities, materials, information, education and activities to promote the advancement of local history. Successful applicants will be notified in December 2014.

Mark your calendars for the upcoming fall walking tour. Vice-president Sarge Gardiner and his docents are designing an intriguing walk through the north end of town. "A Battleground of Architectural Styles: Classical Revival vs Tudor Revival" will take place on

October 26, from 1 to 3 p.m. I hope to see you there.

In closing I would like to make a few requests: Invite your neighbors and friends to become members of the Historical Society. Bring them along to one of our events. Tell them about the museum and the house files. Show them our newsletter, website, and Facebook page. The town that has the largest historic district in the state should also have the largest membership in its historical society.

Sally Meyer



## News and Goings-On

**Fall walking tour.** On Sunday, October 26, meet us at 1 p.m. at the northeast corner of Ridgewood Avenue and Bay Avenue. Following a loop on Ridgewood and Forest avenues north of Bay, we'll talk about how the development of the North End neighborhood completed our historic town. We'll explain house styles of the North End, the battle between Colonial and Tudor, the Nolan Report, and notable institutions and residents. The rain date will be Sunday, November 2.

**Museum hours.** Come read your house file and enjoy the

exhibits in the Terry S. Webster Museum Room. Located above Boiling Springs Savings Bank, the 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.

**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

## A Slice of Life in the Midst of War

A WHILE BACK a friend of mine bought a framed reprint of the front page of *The New York Times* published on the date of her birth. Recently I did something similar: look up *The Glen Ridge Paper* published on the date of my birth, March 16, 1945. What a treat for the town historian!

War-related topics dominated the front page. The masthead was flanked by two red crosses, and the lead article reported that the Red Cross War Fund drive had exceeded its \$29,500 quota by \$3,500. Isaac Forshay agreed to head a clothing collection committee for “needy and destitute civilians in the war-devastated countries of Europe and Asia.” Dr. Mitchell Gratwick, an expert in psychiatry, was scheduled to speak to the High School Home & School Association on the emotional readjustments that boys need to make in the army.

A representative of the Women’s Action Committee told members of the Women’s Club of Glen Ridge that the Dumbarton Oaks proposals for the United Nations must be tried as a way to achieve lasting peace. The Washington Street Association, a now-defunct neighborhood group, asked for clarity on the town’s plans for postwar construction of housing, single-family houses, and possibly high-rise or garden apartments. At the bottom of the page, the paper printed the salvage schedule for tin cans and scrap paper to be used in the war effort.

But not everything was about the war. The borough was celebrating its 50th anniversary in 1945 and the Glen Ridge Battalion Forum (a social group that had started during World War I) its 25th. The paper reported that Henry Cordley, the last surviving member of the original town council, would be attending a commemorative council meeting on April 9, and the membership of the Battalion Forum reached a new high of 502.

The high-school athletic teams had been having a banner year. Both the football and basketball teams were state champions in their group in 1944, the tennis team was conference champion, and the track team was second in both the conference and the state championship in its group. Nat Holman, a member of the original Celtics basketball team and coach of the College of the City of New York, was to be the guest speaker at the All Sports Dinner on April 7.

Lastly, the police reported 13 arrests in February as well as four dogs and one cat running large. The dog census showed a total of 569 dogs in town. February had only three fire calls, the lowest number in a month for the preceding 20 years. The Boy Scout troops of Glen Ridge planned to participate in Scoutorama, a three-day event at Montclair High School staged by the Eagle Rock Council. Even under the extraordinary circumstances of war, life in Glen Ridge went on.

Sally Meyer



The March 16, 1945 front page. Reproduced courtesy of The Glen Ridge Paper.



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## THE GASLAMP

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Editor Emeritus	Herb Addison

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How Glen Ridge Averted Dutch Elm Disaster

## The Tree Not Taken

FEW THINGS DEFINE Glen Ridge so much as its tree-lined streets. But it is a benefit we enjoy as a result of a rather idiosyncratic decision just over 100 years ago.

In 1909 the town's founding fathers, seeking to maintain the municipality as a "residential park," hired John Nolan, an esteemed planner and landscape architect, to draft a master plan for future development. Among his recommendations, Nolan called for the establishment of a shade tree commission to guide the planting and maintenance of the borough's street trees. Following through, the town council established such a commission on February 14, 1910.

Understandably, the three newly appointed

commissioners wanted to make a splash. So, in 1912, they turned their attention to the north end of town, which was the area then undergoing the most development. They stated: "It is the intention this year of the Commission to plant trees on either side of Ridgewood Avenue, from Bay Avenue to Watchung Avenue. Ten years from

now this should make one of the finest Avenues to be found in the State." And they succeeded. The trees that they planted continue to provide an overarching canopy of such magnitude and depth that it seems unequaled elsewhere. It is Glen Ridge's most iconic image, a hundred years in the making.

The vast majority of towns that were formally planting allées at the time were almost exclusively planting American elms. (Thus the ubiquity of streets named "Elm.") Mature elms are breathtakingly beautiful; their interweaving limbs form towering, umbrella-like canopies that spread horizontally at heights of 100 feet. In the early 20th century, these trees were touted for being hardy and long-lived. Plus, they have no acorns.

Yet Glen Ridge's commissioners chose to plant pin oak trees along Ridgewood Avenue in 1912 instead of elms. One reason was that the northern area of Glen Ridge had been heavily forested (hence "Forest Avenue"), predominantly with oaks. This meant that volunteer saplings were readily available for transplanting. Oaks were durable and strong and would provide the sort of cathedral-like canopy they desired.

In addition, the tree commissioners had been dealing with an unusually heavy infestation of elm bark beetles. The beetles were basically benign, generally killing trees that were old and already in serious decline. Nonetheless, residents were so disturbed by the proliferation of the ugly little pests that the commissioners felt they had to respond by asking the town council for extra money to deal with the problem.

Whatever the reasons, it was an amazingly lucky decision. As we now know, planting a monoculture of elms along streets turned into a very unwise decision by the 1930s, when Dutch elm disease began its rampage. The disease is caused by a fungus that invades and rapidly reproduces in the vascular system of the tree, preventing water and nutrients from reaching the crown. Like the current lethal longhorn beetle invasion, the fungus is native to Asia, where elms have natural defenses against it. Identified in the Netherlands in 1921, the disease hopped the Atlantic to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1930, apparently carried in logs from France. It denuded public parks and streets, often in a matter of months.

By October 1931, New Jersey was

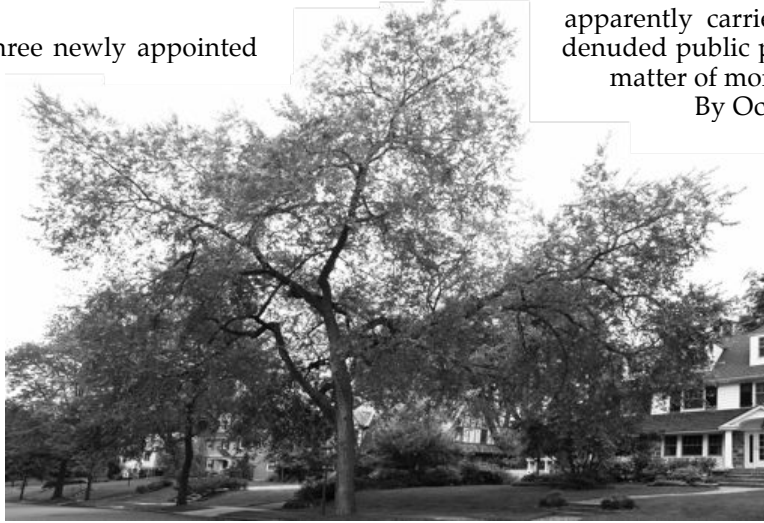
suffering a major outbreak, affecting some 628 trees. *The New York Times* dubbed it "the nightmare on Elm Street." In 1932, four elm trees in Glen Ridge had to be removed and burned. The Shade Tree Commission declared the remaining 558 elms "healthy," but that was not to last. By 1957, only 40 were left. Today,

there are only six public elm trees that survived the epidemic, two of which are street trees. Across the

country, 100 million trees died.

Despite its ostensible success, the Shade Tree Commission was eliminated shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor and replaced by a Shade Tree Division within the Department of Public Works. The latter was then disbanded in the 1960s in a cost-cutting move. Presumably, the seamless maintenance of the borough's trees over the years had given the impression that the process required no specialized attention. In the 1990s the state of our urban forest suggested otherwise. Glen Ridge began to lose street trees at the devastating rate of over 60 per year. Worse, the cost of tree removals left no money for replacements. Alarmed by the crisis, the town council, under the leadership of Mayor Peter Hughes, re-established the Shade Tree Commission in 2010 and subsequently committed to planting 1,000 trees over the next five years.

To govern this reforestation initiative, the current commission is working on its own master plan. It does not, however, have the blank canvas that the first commission had in 1912. Instead, the new commission is challenged with filling in the many treeless stretches along our streets in such a way that the borough's historic arboreal canopy can be restored and preserved. It can only be hoped that the commission will show the same apparent foresightedness (and have same luck) that the first commission did in 1912. The development and success of Glen Ridge would have been substantially different if, in 1912, it had chosen elm over oak. **Elizabeth Kemp Baker**



*Elm tree at 230 Forest Avenue, one of only two street elms in town to survive Dutch elm disease*



Glen Ridge During World War II

## Victory Gardens and Horse-Drawn Milk Carts

*In June 2010, former town resident Leslie Fries sent us these memories of his childhood in Glen Ridge during the 1930s and '40s. They were such different times, and yet, in many ways still very familiar.*

**George Musser**

MY INTRODUCTION TO Glen Ridge occurred in 1936 when my parents, sister, and I moved from Hudson County. We rented the wood-framed house at 25 High Street, two doors from Belleville Avenue, which was cobblestoned then and quite noisy since a bus line and large trucks used it.

I went into kindergarten at Central School, and my sister started there the following year. My father joined a men's softball team, which played evenings at Carteret and Hurrell fields. My mother went food shopping at the A&P on Herman Street. It is now Fitzgerald's 1928 restaurant. Speaking of restaurants, there was a Howard Johnson's restaurant on Bloomfield Avenue where Bottle King and Starbucks are now located.

In spring 1938 we moved to our new home at 106 Stonehouse Road. I enrolled at Forest Avenue School and remained there until seventh-grade. The school playground as we know it today did not exist. It was a wooded area with many sassafras trees. A Works Progress Administration project was clearing the trees and leveling the land for a playing field. I remember the fragrance coming from the sassafras roots as they were being cut up. The field—named Palmer Field in honor of Herbert Palmer, a popular local resident who organized an annual musical that satirized life in Glen Ridge—became the primary recreation area for grammar-school boys living north of Bay Avenue.

I remember Orson Welles's famous radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* in 1938. I was getting pretty nervous until my father came into the living room and assured me it was just a story and no aliens were landing in New Jersey. A neighbor got panicked and called Police Chief William Higgins. He went to their house and, he later told my father, found the parents and children praying on their knees with the lights out and candles burning, believing they were doomed.

Pearl Harbor occurred the day before my 10th birthday. I was in the kitchen on the afternoon of December 7 when the program on the radio was interrupted with the news. To most kids and likely a large segment of adults, Pearl Harbor was an unknown place. Our fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Curtis, brought us up to speed on the war

situation and I developed a keen interest in the war news coming from the radio and from reading the *Newark Evening News*. The radio newscast on station WOR ran for 15 minutes starting at 6:30 p.m. There was also a morning newscast I listened to while having breakfast. Later the newscasts were expanded.

My father was an air-raid warden. One of his duties was to extinguish the gas street lamps in the event of an air-raid drill or the real thing. Each lamp had a wire attached which, when pulled down, would turn off the flow of gas and cause the light to go out. The drills were supposed to be a surprise, but my mother's cousin was a police captain in another town. He would call the afternoon of the drill to alert her. I was sworn to secrecy not to let anyone know of the impending drill, and never did.

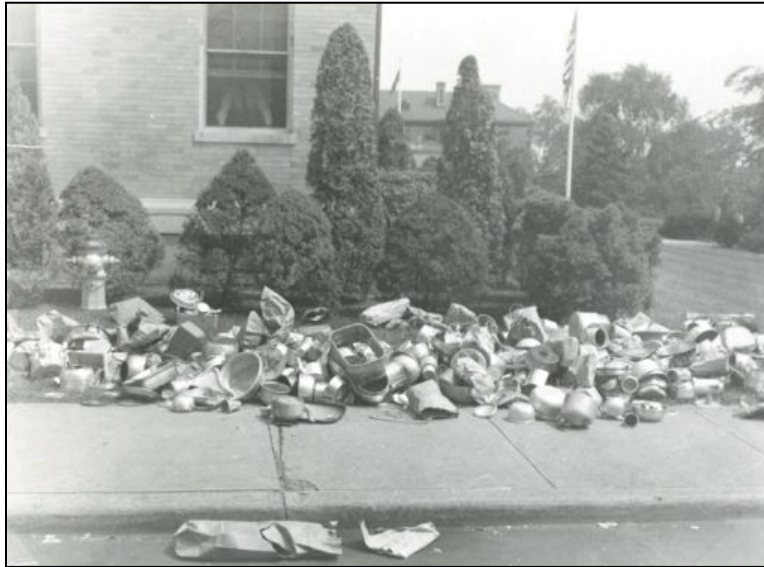
My recollections during the war years include flattening tin cans, bundling up newspapers, and putting out scrap metal for collection. About 4:30 p.m. in the winter months, I would start a fire to help keep the house warm. We burned cannell coal in a large grate in the fireplace. The chunks of coal were dirty, but effective in supplementing heating oil, which was in short supply. We set the thermostat at 60 degrees and I always wore a wool sweater or jacket in the house.

An acre at the north end of Palmer Field was set aside for "victory gardens," local vegetable patches intended to supplement the general

food supply and aid the war effort. They were planted and tended by people living

nearby. As fuel rationing put a premium on driving, we went food shopping by walking to the stores on Broad Street in Bloomfield between Warren and James streets. I would get my wagon and my mother and I would set off for the stores.

I remember being invited to the birthday party of a grammar school classmate at the Glen Ridge Country Club. It was wintertime and for a few years the club erected a wooden toboggan slide that started at the back porch of the clubhouse and went down towards Broad Street. My parents were not members of the club, so the party was a rare treat. Most of my sleigh riding was done on Avon Terrace between Forest Avenue and Essex Avenue in Bloomfield. The snow lasted longer on the roads back then,



Scrap metal collection in 1942

***My father assured me that no aliens were landing in New Jersey.***



because there were fewer cars and little snow- and ice-melting materials. It also seems we had more snow than we have had in recent years.

In the mid-'40s a horse-drawn milk wagon made deliveries on our street. The milkman would take one or two of us on part of his route. The first time I went, the milkman got off and went into the backyard of a house on Forest Avenue and the horse started walking away. I got panicked, but the horse went about three houses and stopped. Then, sure enough, out from behind the third house the milkman reappeared and got back in the wagon. He assured me the horse knew the route as well as he did.

In September 1943 I started junior high school. No more going home for lunch: I ate in the cafeteria with my newly acquired friends from Linden Avenue School. Like most boys living in the north and south ends of town, we hitchhiked to and from school. Occasionally the police would enforce the law prohibiting hitchhiking, but mostly they winked at it. (The older policemen lived in town and their kids went to school with us.) After school ended for the day, many kids headed for the drug store in the Arcade building to get a soda. Many of the high-school students smoked, too. Later, two brothers opened the Campus Luncheonette on Herman Street. The place had a jukebox and became our destination after school. It's gone now, with a parking lot in its place.

The *Newark Evening News* and the *Newark Sunday Call* were delivered by boys employed by Les Kolodin. His distribution center was in the old baggage room of the railroad station on Ridgewood Avenue. I worked there sorting papers for the delivery guys.

Near the end of World War II, as I was sitting with several friends in the Hurrell Field bleachers watching football practice, a young man with a cane came walking very slowly with a friend up the running track. As he got closer, one of my friends told me that he was Tommy Marshall, an Army veteran who had suffered severe injuries when a mine he was defusing exploded. Seeing the young man so crippled had a profound effect on me. I always regretted not going up to him and thanking him for his sacrifice. I do know that he lived a long life.

Howard Devaney organized baseball and touch football teams for boys between fifth- and eighth-grades. There were the North Side Ridgers, who played at Palmer Field; the Spencer Aces, who played on a lot on Spencer Road; the Carteret Comets at Carteret Field; and a team from Central School which played at Hurrell Field. In the late '40s, my father and a friend played tennis on Sunday afternoons on the courts that were located

across the street from the Sherman Avenue School playground.

Back in the late '40s, as the country was settling into peacetime, television was just in its infancy. The firehouse had a TV set and the firemen would let kids watch old movies, mostly westerns and comedies, such as Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello.

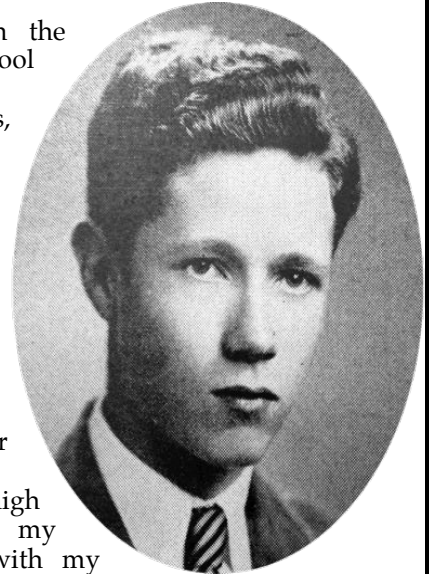
While I was in high school, another of my pastimes was going with my friends to municipal court on Monday nights to hear Judge Lloyd Beatty preside. The judge would read out anyone who tried to contest a traffic ticket. He had little mercy, especially for out-of-town drivers who came before him.

George Stay (father of a war veteran who joined the police force) had a barber shop in the Arcade building that faced the fire house. He was also the designated driver of one of the fire engines. If the alarm sounded while George was giving a haircut, the patron either waited until George returned or left with a partial cut.

After completing Glen Ridge High School in 1950, I attended Seton Hall University. Most students were day hops, since the university had very little in the way of living accommodations. In the summer I held various jobs. One year I worked for the town maintenance department. I helped paint the chain-link fence that ran the length of Carteret Field—and there were no such things as paint rollers then. We also cleared leaves from catch basins and trimmed bushes around the firehouse, municipal building, and library. About halfway through the summer I was assigned to work in the Shade Tree Department. We parked our truck in the old field house on Herman Street, which had once been the firehouse. The Freeman field house was completed in 1950.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been raised in Glen Ridge and to have had the opportunity to write this reminiscence, which has brought back so many fond memories.

*Leslie Fries now lives on Highland Avenue in Montclair.*



*Author's high-school yearbook picture*



*Wooden toboggan run at the Glen Ridge Country Club in the late '30s*



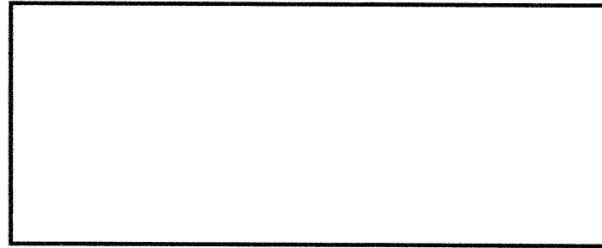
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***FALL WALKING TOUR  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2014***

**Current Events-**

Ongoing to October 19, 2014 – “Conceptions in Space: Recent Acquisitions in Contemporary Architecture” – Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition addresses how contemporary architects continue to embrace spatial creation as a fundamental focus of their work. Twenty international projects by architects and artists in large-scale models, drawings, photographs, videos, and even a room-sized installation survey how architecture addresses this expanded field.

Ongoing to December 23, 2014 – “Hoboken, Ellis Island, and the Immigrant Experience, 1892-1924” – Hoboken Historical Museum. Following the Immigration Act of 1891, Hoboken’s – and the entire country’s – demographics changed dramatically. During the next three decades, 20 million people immigrated to the United States, and more than half, 12 million, passed through New York and Hoboken. The Hoboken Historical Museum examines this period in a new exhibit.

**Was This the Death of Historicist Postmodernism?**

Ongoing to January 18, 2015 – “TIMES SQUARE, 1984: The Postmodern Moment” – The Skyscraper Museum, 39 Battery Place, Battery Park, NYC. Times Square today is bright and crowded - a tourist Mecca, entertainment district, retail powerhouse, and pedestrianized precinct that matches in vitality any decade of its storied past. But thirty years ago, the future of Times Square was in limbo. This exhibit looks at a number of proposals – some visionary, some fantastic, and some earthbound -- made in a competition to “clean up” Times Square. None ever saw the light of day, but some still had an impact. In a review article in the New York Times Joseph Giovanni (August 22, 2014) surveyed the exhibit and concluded that “In a sense, the competition marked the death of historicist postmodernism as [Philip] Johnson practiced and promoted it and helped knock the top-down corporate establishment off its base...Thanks to the bottom-up efforts of lone architects offering new approaches, the genie was escaping from the bottle.”