



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

February 2017 Vol. XXXIX No. 3



President's Letter

Come Learn About a Celebrated Montclair Architect

THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY party brought together old friends and new who celebrated their appreciation for Glen Ridge history. Our thanks to Ryan and Megan Blank for welcoming us into their beautiful home for a very enjoyable evening!

Our winter program on February 27 will feature a slide talk on early 20th-century Montclair architect Dudley Van Antwerp. Our guest speaker, cultural historian Majda Kallab Whitaker, has identified over 100 Van Antwerp houses in Montclair and Glen Ridge (including 121 Forest Avenue, at right) which showcase his individual interpretation of the Arts and Crafts style. Whitaker will explore the many qualities that distinguish Van Antwerp's work and make his homes an important asset to the region. The meeting will take place at 7:30 p.m. in the Ridgewood Avenue train station. It is open to the public and free of charge. Refreshments will be served.

In an effort to show off the Terry Webster Museum to those who are unable to visit in person, we are in the process of creating a slide show that will be posted on our website.

Professional photographer Paul Zalewski has volunteered to take sweeping pictures of the galleries and individual photos of the various displays. Zalewski is a former trustee of the historical society and creator of the post cards we sell

showing seasonal images of the iconic Glen Ridge gaslamps.

Have you noticed a home restoration project that might qualify for our annual Preservation Award? Have you completed one on your own home? To nominate your neighbor or yourself, please contact Karin Robinson at karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net for an application. Criteria include quality and historically significant craftsmanship in the

preservation or restoration of the exterior of a home. The award will be presented at our annual meeting on April 20.

I am happy to report that we are currently enrolled in the Community Alliance Program at Boiling Springs Savings Bank and eligible for a quarterly reward. To guarantee our continued eligibility and increase the return, consider opening an account at the bank and let them know you support our mission.

Sally Meyer



121 Forest Avenue in 1913

News and Goings-On

Public lecture. Renowned local architect Dudley Van Antwerp is the subject of historian Majda Kallab Whitaker's talk. The event will be held 7:30 p.m. on Monday, February 27, at the Glen Ridge train station and is free of charge.

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 renova-

tions 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.

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.

The Artist at 26 Snowden Place

OUR MUSEUM COLLECTION has been greatly enriched by the recent donation of two works by the late Glen Ridge artist Joseph Konopka. They depict the houses at 25 and 30 Snowden Place, which are across the street and next door to Konopka's home for 53 years at 26 Snowden. The paintings were donated by Ronald A. Burness, the nephew of the artist's recently deceased wife, Casimera (Casey) Konopka.

Joseph Konopka was born in Philadelphia in 1932 and moved to Jersey City at the age of seven. After graduating from Cooper Union in 1954, he studied for one year at Columbia University under the famous Broadway set designer Woodman Thompson. In 1955, his first job at NBC TV was interrupted for 16 months by service in the U.S. Army. He was a military aide to President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the White House, where he did hand-lettering, script, and calligraphy for invitations, cards, and testimonials. Afterwards, he returned to NBC as a scenic artist, where he stayed for nearly 60 years until his death in 2013.

Joe's work included backdrops for the *Tonight Show*, the *Today Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Hallmark Hall of Fame*, and *Philco Theater*. *Tonight Show* hosts Steve Allen, Jack Paar, Johnny Carson, David Letterman, and Conan O'Brien were

in his thrall. His scenery and props were also seen on NBC soap operas, election nights, and news reports such as coverage of the Apollo moon landings.

Konopka's personal studio was on the third floor of his large Victorian-style home. He worked in acrylics, watercolor, pencil, and pen and ink. His most admired paintings include realistic scenes of the boardwalk, beach chairs, and benches, as well as of cultural and architectural landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, the Chrysler and Empire State buildings, and views from the old World Trade Center. A painting depicting a traditional Polish



25 Snowden Place (left) and 30 Snowden Place (right), painted by Joseph Konopka. From the Glen Ridge Historical Society collections

Easter feast was selected to hang in the American contemporary gallery of the Vatican Museum. His works are also in the permanent collection of the Newark Museum, the Montclair Art Museum, the New Jersey State Museum, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The Konopka home at 26 Snowden Place was built in 1886. It is the last fully intact house of the 26 houses built by late 19th-century developer Asabel Darwin. It still has original siding and trim, porch detailing, windows, doors, and five extraordinary wood fireplaces. Its architect and builder are unknown.

Sally Meyer



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Our Favorite Houses

A Classic of the Shingle Style

We are pleased to announce a new column by local architect Karin Robinson. Each issue, she will pick one of her favorite houses in town and explain her choice. We welcome guest contributors, too. If a house strikes your fancy, contact us at glenridge-hs@gmail.com.

George Musser

ONE OF MY favorite houses in Glen Ridge is 11 Inness Place, at the corner of Walnut Crescent. Well before the Mountainside School of Nursing was built and before Inness Place and Roswell Terrace were laid out and developed, that land was one large property known as Roswell Manor. Roswell Smith built a large house there for his daughter Julia, wife of the landscape painter George Inness Jr. They lived there for 13 years beginning in 1887.

In 1900 Williams Evans bought the property and renamed it Wentworth Manor. A news clipping from 1916 states that “in addition to the manor house, which contains 22 rooms, the property has on it four houses, a combination stable and garage, and a studio.”

The history of the structure at 11 Inness Place is murky. It, or at least part of it, may have been the gardener’s cottage for the Wentworth estate. The centennial history of the Glen Ridge Country Club, published in 1984, suggested that two rooms in this building served as the original clubhouse.

Its design is representative of the 1890s. The wonderful paired gables

facing Walnut Crescent have the broken-roof-gambrel (or barn-roof) shape characteristic of the distinctively American Shingle Style of architecture. An old photograph in the Historical Society’s collection shows an open porch below; it has since been screened in, providing a wonderful amenity often overlooked in modern houses.

The long façade facing Inness Place has the charming appearance of being added to in many stages over the years. The left end, which I assume is the original body of the house, is a symmetrical composition built around a large chimney with another gambrel roof. The second floor has a large Palladian motif—an arched window, here substituted by a blank panel in front of the chimney, flanked by two smaller rectangular windows—which lends architectural sophistication to what is basically a modest cottage. Two small symmetrical dormer windows peek out of the roof on each side, breaking the line of the eave and adding to the picturesque appearance of the house. Most of the windows have mullions that divide the glass into a large center pane framed by small square panes.

I especially like the natural finish on the shingles. Houses of this era and style were never painted, but left to weather. Cedar shingles are very durable and, left on their own, will last far longer than a coat of paint.

Karin Robinson

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11 Inness Place circa 1976



Botanist Cynthia Westcott

The Plant Doctor

GLEN RIDGE HAS long been home to many kinds of doctors, but only one has ever hung out a shingle as a plant doctor. Cynthia Westcott, Ph.D., not only hung out the shingle; she trademarked the name “The Plant Doctor.” Her nonstop schedule was an ever-changing mix of hands-on plant care, research, writing, lecturing, and entertaining. But no matter where she went or what she did, her first love was roses. Her house at 96 Essex Avenue was a Mecca for rose lovers, many of whom flocked to see the 500 perfectly maintained rose bushes on display at her annual summer Rose Day.

Westcott was born in 1898 in Attleboro, Mass., the daughter of a Brown University- and MIT-trained civil engineer and a schoolteacher. She spent summers on family-owned farms and went on to Wellesley, aiming to major in German and Latin. A friend recommended that she choose botany to satisfy the school’s science requirement, and the future plant doctor was born. After graduation, she spent a year teaching high-school science and was offered a graduate assistantship in plant pathology at Cornell University. There she wrote her dissertation on control of fungal disease in climbing roses.

The Great Depression hit as Westcott was finishing her graduate work and seeking her first job. Gender-based discrimination was a revelation. “I learned that there were still a very few jobs for a woman graduate assistant, but none when she... was ready for a career,” she wrote in her 1957 autobiography, *Plant Doctoring is Fun*. Westcott took the only available job, as a part-time assistant in bacteriology at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station in New Brunswick. The pay was terrible.

A timely visit from Cornell plant-pathology professor Herbert Hice Whetzel propelled Westcott into the business that would make her famous. He had tried in vain to get male plant pathologists interested in private plant consulting, but none were willing to trade secure academic or government jobs for the uncertainties of self-employment. In Whetzel’s view, Westcott had the requisite skills and personality for the task. “He said I was too bossy to work for others all my life; I’d be far happier being the boss myself,” she wrote. “He was right,” she added.

Funding the new venture with a small inheritance, she found her house in Glen Ridge. The real-estate ad read: “To sell at sacrifice to settle an estate; large garden, fruit trees,

grapes.” It failed to mention the structure’s rundown condition. Westcott took the leap of faith. She and a Cornell colleague, entomologist Irene Dobrosky, formed a plant-doctoring partnership in 1933. Their first client was future Nobel laureate and Rutgers faculty member Selman Waksman, discoverer of streptomycin. After a short time, Dobrosky left for a job in private industry. Westcott stayed on and built the business, acquiring clients by word of mouth, plus exposure generated by articles and lectures to garden clubs.

She quickly established a cyclical routine. During the growing season, she and various helpers tended clients’ gardens, transporting their equipment all over the tristate area in customized Ford sedans. Although many of her regular clients employed full-time gardeners for routine

chores, Westcott focused on diagnosing diseases, identifying pests, and establishing regular treatment regimens. Though she treated many plant species, roses were her specialty. In the winters, Westcott wrote books and articles and traveled across the country to lecture, visit gardens, and collect specimens to further her scientific research. She eventually published six books in addition to her autobiography, including *The Gar-*

dener’s Bug Book, *Anyone Can Grow Roses*, and *Are You Your Garden’s Worst Pest?*

Though often on the move, she maintained strong Glen Ridge ties, belonging to the Glen Ridge Congregational Church and the Women’s Club. For 25 years she maintained the rose collection of prominent resident Clayton Freeman, now open to the public as Freeman Gardens. She also belonged to the Garden Club of Montclair and, with designer Avis Campbell, assisted in planning and planting the Avis Campbell garden on South Fullerton Avenue. In 1954, she presided over the first meeting of the North Jersey Rose Society, which for many years maintained the rose garden in Brookdale Park.

Westcott retired in 1962 and moved to a senior community in Croton-on-Hudson, where she put down roots, literally and figuratively. She continued writing, lecturing, and traveling for years. Honored by numerous professional societies and revered by gardeners in the U.S. and beyond, Westcott died in 1983 at the age of 84.

Elisabeth Ginsburg

Elisabeth Ginsburg is a professional garden writer trained at the N.Y. Botanical Garden. She and her 50 rosebushes reside in Glen Ridge.



Cynthia Westcott at the Freeman Gardens Rose Day in the 1960s. From the Glen Ridge Historical Society archive

Documenting Glen Ridge From the Air

The Glen Ridge Drone Project

EVER SINCE WE were little kids, my twin brother, Nick, and I have watched our dad (a photojournalist for *National Geographic*) take aerial photos using various machines and gadgets. From a plane to a motorized paraglider to a 40-foot pole, he used devices to get images of places that nobody had ever seen before or from new perspectives. Then drones came along. My dad bought a couple of hand-sized drones to get used to the new aircraft. My brother and I started to fly them as well. We'd take off from the dining-room table and fly down the hallway, through the kitchen and living room, and back to the table. My brother really took to piloting and asked for a small drone with a camera on it for Christmas. He started to get pictures from strange places, such as the school chimney, and grainy little videos of our house and backyard.

Then my dad bought his first professional-quality drone and started using it on some of his magazine assignments. One day he tested out a new lens on our neighbor's house. When the neighbor saw the photos, he said that an aerial survey of town could be of great significance to the Glen Ridge Historical Society. My dad thought, "This would be a great project for the boys." So he gave us a loan to buy our own drone: about \$1,800. My brother

and I got jobs at the community pool to pay off the debt. We presented our plan to a monthly meeting of the Historical Society trustees, who generously offered to pay for ink and paper to make a print of each house we photographed.

We also went down to the Glen Ridge police station to let the police know what we were doing. They were fine with our project, as long as we stayed out of people's backyards and remained far enough away from homes so that we would be capturing only overviews. My dad contacted a camera-bag manufacturer, which donated a backpack, so that we could strap our drone on our backs while riding a bike or a skateboard.

We started photographing houses last May, when the flowers were blooming. As we live on

the south side of town, we began there. Since my brother is more tech-savvy, he took care of the picture taking, editing, and toning, while I did the people stuff: emailing and talking to homeowners. We went out late in the afternoon and kept shooting until just after sunset, when there is nice soft light and no awkward shadows to obscure the houses.

On a good day, we could photograph about eight to 10 houses. Our routine was to knock on a door and ask for permission to photograph the house for the benefit of the Historical Society. Of the 160 homeowners we approached over the summer, 157 were happy to be part of our effort, while three just wanted to be left alone in their privacy, which we understand. The police received three complaints from neighbors who thought we were photographing houses without permission. Each was quickly resolved.

Some families asked to pose in front of their house for the picture. Some wanted to see the product, so we came back the following week or emailed them a copy. Some even purchased extra copies of our Historical Society prints for their own use, which helped to pay off our loan.

We're taking a break during the winter, when the trees are bare and we have schoolwork to do during daylight hours, but we look forward to resuming the project this summer and exploring other parts of town. Glen Ridge has around 2,200 houses, but we're only freshmen in high school, so we have a few more summers to go.

John Steinmetz

John Steinmetz is a freshman at Newark Academy and can be reached at GRPhotoHP@gmail.com.



110 Ridgewood Avenue, from a height of 125 feet

The author and his brother, Nick (right), with their drone



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LOCAL ARTS & CRAFTS ARCHITECTURE
PUBLIC LECTURE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Current Events

NY at its Core: 400 Years of New York History. What made New York New York? Follow the story of the city's rise from a striving Dutch village to today's global metropolis. Framed around the key themes of money, density, diversity, and creativity, this new permanent exhibition makes the city's history and future come alive through the stories of immigrants, politicians, tycoons, dreamers, and master builders. Exhibits include a ceremonial club from the Native people of the area, a slice of a wooden pipe that formed the original water system of the city, and Boss Tweed's gold tiger-headed cane. In an interactive space, you can help imagine the city's future. Design a street, a building, and a park. At the Museum of the City of New York.

How Should We Live? This exhibition explores the complex collaborations,

materials, and processes that have shaped the Modernist interior, with a focus on specific environments—do-



mestic interiors, re-created exhibition displays, and retail spaces—from the 1920s to the '50s. The exhibition brings together over 200 works, drawn from the Architecture and Design collection as well as the Library, Drawings and Prints, Painting and Sculpture, Film, and Photography. At the Museum of Modern Art through April 23.

Life, Love, Death: The Ballantines. A half-century ago, the mansion at the Newark Museum was home to one of the country's most important beer dynasties. One child found happiness here. One found tragedy. Through new interactive galleries, discover what really happened here during the Gilded Age. At the Newark Museum.

Poster for an exhibition organized by the Deutsche Werkbund at the Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart, 1927. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson