



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

April 2009 Vol. XXXI No. 4

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past



President's Message

Just a Few Surprises

Surprise is the bane – and the joy – of historic preservation. Things rarely seem to go as planned. Almost always, there are unexpected roadblocks, added costs, but also unanticipated discoveries.

So it was with the Glen Ridge Historical Society's attempt to restore two historic atlases owned by the Glen Ridge Public Library. This project began back in 2005, not long after one of the volumes was rescued from a trash heap. No sooner had a restoration bindery taken charge of the volumes than its owner died. The bindery was sold, much of the staff was let go, and the half-finished project was put on hold. A few months later, we were told completion was expected by April 2007. April 2007 came and went, the bindery was sold again, and the atlases remained in limbo.

Last October, the restorer finally delivered one of the atlases. The other arrived just a couple of weeks ago, greeted with sighs of relief all around.

I am happy to report that the atlases were definitely worth the wait. The volume delivered in mid-March, the 1906 Mueller & Company Essex County Atlas, contains large plates of Glen Ridge marking every structure and the boundaries of every property. It shows the sand and gravel pits where Carteret Park now lies, the estates that then occupied much of the borough, and battery factory that stood on what is now Hurrell Field. Those interested in Bloomfield History will learn that Clark's Pond was then known as Poor House Pond, and railfans can trace the sweep of the Erie Railroad's planned tunnel – never built – to bring trains from Montclair into Verona.

Both of these extraordinary atlases have been deacidified and encapsulated in plastic for long-term preservation. The Library staff will be happy to direct you to them.

Fortunately, another recent preservation project went a bit more smoothly. Last autumn, we agreed to support the Women's Club of Glen Ridge in restoring a 1925 portrait of Emily Chapman. Mrs. Chapman and her husband, Henry, were prominent local residents, living where Glen Ridge High School now stands. Mr. Chapman donated the funds for the current Women's Club structure following his wife's death in 1923.

Against all odds, the portrait restoration was completed on schedule. Mrs. Chapman's portrait is again overseeing activities at the Women's Club, right where it belongs.

Marc Levinson

Mark Your Calendar

ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

7:30 PM

**Glen Ridge Congregational Church
195 Ridgewood Avenue**

- **John Boyd will describe the recent restoration of two stained glass windows in the Church, including one by Louis Comfort Tiffany. John supervised the restoration process and will explain how these windows are made and what makes each different.**

- **The 2009 Preservation awards will be announced and described.**

News from the Town Historian



The namesake of Darwin Place was born in Millville, New York on May 24, 1827. Asabel G. Darwin was characterized as a tall commanding figure of genial temperament and intense energy. When he moved to Glen Ridge in 1877 it was a "straggling settlement of a few houses." Upon concluding a successful career with several western railroad companies, he "conceived of the idea of making Glen Ridge an attractive and popular suburban development."

After building a magnificent mansion at 204 Ridgewood Avenue, he set out to develop the surrounding neighborhood. Trusting in the dictum "build it and they will come" he gave thousands of dollars towards the construction of a railroad station on Ridgewood Avenue. The houses he built on Hillside Avenue, Snowden Place, Clark Street and Woodland Avenue were quickly bought up by newly minted commuters.

Darwin's arrival in Glen Ridge was followed by Edward Page Mitchell (1882) and Robert Rudd (1885). Together, they were among the most influential citizens in the establishment of Glen Ridge as an independent community. Their proficient skills as a developer, newspaper editor, and lawyer provided the business acumen, the intellectual analysis and the legal shrewdness

needed to launch a successful community. They also recognized the importance of social interaction in a fledgling township and helped establish the Glen Ridge (Men's) Club with Darwin as its first president.

Darwin had a taste for first class architecture. His home, Sunnycrest, was described as "the most beautiful house in America." The Ridgewood Avenue train station was for many years considered to be "the finest station on the Morris & Essex Line." His appreciation of contemporary architecture is clearly seen in the design of his office building, the Glen Ridge Hall (see Mark Wright's article elsewhere in the newsletter) and the shingle style clubhouse of the Glen Ridge (Men's) Club.

Darwin died of pneumonia on January 20, 1892 in his beloved Sunnycrest. His death preceded the separation of Glen Ridge from Bloomfield by three years, yet his obituary described "the populous neighborhood of Glen Ridge as his best monument." Sunnycrest went into foreclosure and was purchased by Henry and Emily Chapman. Darwin's son, Harry, operated the family real estate business for several years thereafter. **Sally Meyer**

Nominees for Officers & Trustees

Will be voted on at the
Annual Meeting, April 22

Karin Robinson – Vice President
Geoffrey Darby – Treasurer

Alden Provost – Trustee 2011
Sarge Gardiner – Trustee 2012
Suzanne O'Connor – Trustee 2012
Margo Garrison – Trustee 2012

Officers and Trustees

President	Marc Levinson	Trustee (2010)	Chuck Graziano
Treasurer	Geoffrey Darby	Trustee (2010)	Karen Palm
Secretary	Martha Orbach	Trustee (2011)	Andrew Grisafi
VP and Town Historian	Sally Meyer	Trustee (2011)	Lana Keppel
Trustee (2009)	Lizanne Coleman	Trustee (2011)	Karin Robinson
Trustee (2009)	Margo Garrison	Ex-officio – Past President	Carolyn Badenhausen
Trustee (2009)	Ava Somogyi	Ex-officio – Library Director	John Sitnik
Trustee (2010)	Herb Addison	Ex-officio – Delegate LHSNJ	Gerry Addison

Editor's Note...The feature article on the history and architecture of the PNC Bank is by Glen Ridge architect Mark Wright. Mark and his wife, Karin Robinson, practice as Wright & Robinson Architects. Mark is also a member of the Glen Ridge Historic District Preservation Commission.

The editor apologizes for the great delay that members who don't live in Glen Ridge have experienced in receiving their copies of *The Gaslamp*. This is the fault of the USPS. Beginning with this issue, out-of-towners' copies will be mailed First Class and that should fix the problem. **Herb Addison** herb.addison@verizon.net

A Glen Ridge Landmark with a Rich Architectural Heritage

The PNC building at 222 Ridgewood—originally known as Glen Ridge Hall—was built in the popular Richardsonian Style to the design of a good architect whose name went unrecorded in favor of that of his client, developer Asabel G. Darwin (1827-1892). Darwin built 26 houses in the center of town and, with others, the train station and the Glen Ridge Club that stood across the avenue. His Hall project, which was a rumor in March 1888 and opened to its first public event in March 1890, provided a large civic meeting space over a ground floor with Darwin's offices in front and a room for the Library Association behind. Real estate broker Nathan Russell, Sr. occupied the offices from 1906 until 1912, when the Glen Ridge Trust Company bought the building and moved the library upstairs. A brick annex was added in 1923 to provide space for the post office. A succession of banks has each altered the building and annex.

The anonymous architect of the Hall was working in the manner of Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886). The most famous American architect before Frank Lloyd Wright, Richardson exerted an influence comparable to that of Frank Gehry today. There is scarcely a town founded before the turn of the last century, anywhere in the United States, that doesn't boast at least one "Richardsonian" building.

Comparing Glen Ridge Hall to the roughly contemporaneous train station next door shows something of the brooding sobriety Richardson brought to the architecture of the post-Civil War era. Among his most highly regarded buildings were the Ames Gate Lodge in North Easton, MA, the Crane Memorial Library in Quincy, MA, and the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail in Pittsburgh. Though Richardson's early inspiration for monumental building had been the Romanesque architecture of central France, these mature works were animated by a more abstract, muscular primitivism, and seemed almost to have achieved—for his colleagues—the status of works of Nature.

Aside from its characteristic brownstone walls, what makes the Hall a Richardsonian building?

- Its exaggerated voussoirs—the wedge-shaped stones over the windows.
- The gutter integrated into a primitive, molded cornice that protrudes very little from the

wall. (Lost when the building was re-roofed in imitation slate.)

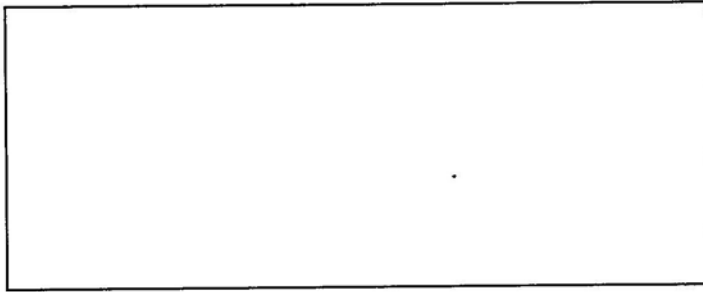
- A tall roof that deforms in small ways, making it seem to drape big spaces that are swelling the structure. The roof lifts on each side to suggest dormers.
- The turret on the corner that seems to push out of, rather than be added on to, the main mass. The cornice followed a gentle curve (still visible in the swept roof valley) to meld the turret into the building.
- The porch and turret also meld together, favoring union: *a part is never permitted to secede from the whole*. The porch—built half in and half out of the mass—originally had stone walls, capped at sill height, that further engaged it into the building. The turret reaches its last facet deep into the recess of the porch.
- Colors (often dark green or rich, tinted grays) were chosen to blend the trim into the shadows of the walls, granite and brownstone in the case of public buildings or weathered cedar shingles in a Richardsonian "Shingle Style" house.

Despite the alterations made over the years the inherent quality of this fine building remains—an ornament of the period when Glen Ridge was forging, but had not yet asserted, its independent identity.


Mark Wright, AIA – The author's article "H. H. Richardson's House for Reverend Browne, Rediscovered" appears in the March 2009 issue of the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians.



Glen Ridge Hall as it looked between 1913-1922



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Coming Events

April 18, 2009 – Historic Church Tour of Bloomfield sponsored by the Historical Society of Bloomfield. Walking tour begins at 1:00 PM and includes seven downtown historic churches. Meet at the corner of Franklin and Freemont Streets (Westminster Hall/Robert Van Fossan Theatre)

April 22, 2009 – Annual meeting at the Glen Ridge Congregational Church, 7:30 PM. John Boyd will describe the stained glass window restoration. The winners of the Preservation awards will be announced and discussed. Also, GRHS officers and trustees will be voted on.

News Briefs

The New Jersey Historical Society is featuring a new exhibition, "What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties." It examines the social forces that led to the outbreak of urban rebellion in 1967 and the lasting impact on the people, landscape, institutions and economy of the region. NJHS, 52 Park Place, Newark (down the street from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center). Closed until April 1. Call ahead to confirm hours: 973-569-8500.

The saga of the Bell Labs building in Holmdel, NJ, continues. The township wants to demolish this 1962 glass building designed by Eero Saarinen and replace it with a golf course and million dollar houses. Preservationists want to convert it to multi-use. New Urbanists want to make it the center of a new residential community. Stay tuned.