



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

April 2011 Vol. XXXIII No. 4

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

www.glenridgehistory.org



The Historical Society Online

President's Letter



We have an exciting new project in the works: a new and improved website for the Historical Society. Our old website was a good start, until hackers halfway around the world damaged it beyond repair. Our vice-president, Sarge Gardiner, has led the effort and has been working with the web designer Mark McKinney of Four Story Design. The new site will have news, an events calendar, photo essays of Glen Ridge, back issues of the Gaslamp, and the option to join the Historical Society online. We plan to have the site online in the next six weeks.

Once the basic site is running, the possibilities are limitless. We hope to add historic photos and documents from our archives as well as text and photos from past presentations and walking tours. Preservation award winners, yearbooks, and maps can also go online. The site will provide easy access to information about Glen Ridge history not just to its residents but to researchers anywhere in the world.

In the meantime, please go to our

Facebook page for up-to-date information about the Historical Society and the launch of our new website!

In addition, we will vote on officers and trustees for 2011-2012 at the Annual Meeting (see below). Here are the candidates and their terms:

Sarge Gardiner - Vice President (April 2013)
Margot MacDonnell - Secretary (April 2013)
David Doernberg - Trustee (April 2014)
Andrew Grisafi - Trustee (April 2014)
Lana Keppel - Trustee (April 2014)

Karin Robinson

Annual Meeting

This year's meeting will be held at the Linden Avenue School (corner of Hawthorne Avenue) on Thursday, April 28, at 7:30 pm.

The school is celebrating its 100th birthday and Town Historian, Sally Meyer, will present a program on the history of the school.

The Preservation Awards for restoration will also be presented at the meeting.

A Century of Shopping at the Arcade Building

News from the Town Historian



On January 3, 1911 the Glen Ridge Realty Company (GRRC) invited citizens to purchase shares in "The Village Market." The proposed financing of the Glen Ridge Stores building was promoted as "a community project."

Since its inception in 1895, the GRRC had worked diligently to prevent such development in the center of town. By 1900 its shareholders had purchased all the properties along the Glen and sold them back to the borough for use as parkland. But in 1909 the Nolen Report suggested the need for a carefully planned commercial district in the rapidly growing community. Soon after, the sale of a plot on the north side of Bloomfield Avenue for "a small candy store and cheap garage" convinced the GRRC to go forward with Nolen's idea. "The best means of controlling the situation" was a building that contributed "to the architectural dignity of the village without detracting from its homelike aspect."

The GRRC asked citizens for "their moral as well as financial support." They hired architect William A. Boring – whose firm Boring & Tilton

designed what is now the Ridgewood Avenue School in 1900 – to draw up plans for a building in "the general style and color scheme of the school house nearby." The plans also included a large garage "located on the best thoroughfare in the county" for use as a car agency, repair shop, or taxicab service. The building contracts went to V. J. Hedden & Son Company at a cost of \$50,000 and the Glen Ridge Stores opened in May 1911.

The building is at 855 Bloomfield Avenue with six stores on the ground floor. They were promoted as "a rare opportunity for the right men to locate in a wealthy county...with all the town people behind them." Original merchants included a grocer, butcher, druggist, upholsterer, tailor, and florist. Upstairs were offices. The council chamber and borough offices occupied half of them until the Municipal Building went up in 1931.

Today we know the building as the Glen Ridge Arcade. Since its opening in 1911 a continuum of enterprising and reliable merchants have served the community well and fulfilled the hopes and expectations of the GRRC.

The Museum Room is located in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church. Please call Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674 to make an appointment. **Sally Meyer**

Member Privacy

The Historical Society is drafting a privacy policy concerning its members that will be described in the next Gaslamp (September 2011). In the meantime, members are assured that the society will not share its membership list with any outside organization.

Officers and Trustees

President	Karin Robinson	Trustee (2012)	Margo Garrison
Vice President	Sarge Gardiner	Trustee (2012)	Terese Broccoli-Bourscheidt
Treasurer	Alden Provost	Trustee (2012)	Jon Russo
Secretary	Margo Garrison	Trustee (2013)	Herb Addison
Town Historian	Sally Meyer	Trustee (2013)	Nelle Jennings
Trustee (2011)	Andrew Grisafi	Trustee (2013)	Robin Westervelt
Trustee (2011)	Lana Keppel	Ex-officio - Past President	Marc Levinson
Trustee (2011)	David Doernberg	Ex-officio - Library Director	Jennifer Breuer
		Ex-officio - Delegate LHSNJ	Gerry Addison

Editor's Note...For the article on page 3 I am indebted to Pricilla Arnold who several years ago asked why there are stairs leading up to the main floor of the Ridgewood Avenue School. In effect, Pricilla wondered why the ground floor was also not the main floor. The question set me off on a protracted period of research which the article answers. I also gratefully acknowledge the generous help of librarians Sara Harrington and Jill Baron of the Rutgers University Art Library in this quest.

Herb Addison herb.addison@verizon.net

Upstairs, Downstairs

Have you ever wondered why the main floor of the Ridgewood Avenue School, the main floor and reading room of the Glen Ridge Public Library and the main floor and Council Chambers in the Municipal Building are the *second floor* and not the ground floor?

The reason dates back to the Italian Renaissance. Renaissance architects differentiated between the ground floor and second floor of palaces and villas by relegating offices, servants' quarters, work rooms, and other utilitarian rooms to the ground floor. The floor above, by contrast, had higher ceilings, grander rooms, and lavish decorations – all intended for use by the owners and gatherings of nobles and their guests. The term for this floor became *piano nobile* in which the Italian word *piano* means floor or story and *nobile* (pr. “NOH-bee-lay”) means noble or great.

Examples of the *piano nobile* can be found in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome (1534), the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (1435 and after), and in the villas of Andrea Palladio in the Veneto (16th century).

But why would this architectural element be carried over to buildings in Glen Ridge built in the first half of the 20th century?

The answer lies in the pervasive influence that the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris had on American architects who studied there. The architectural curriculum at the École concentrated on Greek, Roman, and Renaissance models and among these were the palaces and villas of Renaissance Italy.

Richard Morris Hunt (1828-1898) was the first American architect to study at the École. An example of a *piano nobile* in his work is the main floor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with its high vaulted halls and its entry rotunda. The architects of the New York Public Library (1911), John Mervin Carrere (1858-1911) and Thomas Hastings (1860-1929), both of whom trained at the École, placed its main reading room and other fine rooms on the *third floor* (to allow books to be brought up to readers from the voluminous stacks below) – but it's still a *piano nobile*.

In Glen Ridge, the first public building to be constructed after separating from Bloomfield in 1895 was what we now call the Ridgewood Avenue School, built in 1900. Its architects were William A. Boring (1859-1937) and Edward L.

Tilton (1861-1933) and both had studied at the École. Inside the ground floor entry you climb a flight of stairs to a main floor with high ceilings, the library and offices. Its parentage from the Renaissance *piano nobile* is clear.

Next among the public buildings in the center of town to be built with a *piano nobile* was the Glen Ridge Public Library in 1918. Its architects were Hobart A. Walker (1869-?) and Hazzard (little is known about Hazzard) but neither seems to have trained at the École. The influence of that school, however, is clear in the grand reading room with high arched windows flooding the interior with sunlight that's on the second floor.



Main reading room of the Glen Ridge Public Library on the second floor

The last of the central public buildings was the Municipal Building (1931) designed by W. Orrin Bartlett (1886-?). Bartlett had not studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris though his design shows a thorough understanding of Beaux-Arts design principles. By then the pervasive influence of the École dictated what most architects designed for important public buildings. The council chamber, mayor's office, and other important municipal rooms, are on the second floor. It would be the last public building in Glen Ridge to include a *piano nobile*.

Herb Addison



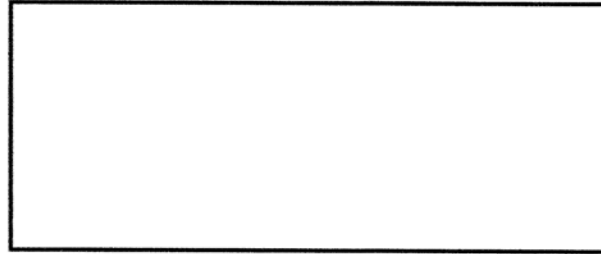
GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 164

Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

NONPROFIT
ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 710
CALDWELL NJ

Address Service Requested



***ANNUAL MEETING
APRIL 28***

Coming Events

Saturday, April 16 - "Tools of the Trade" -- Free workshop for non-profit historical organizations sponsored by the New Jersey Living History Advisory Council; held at Historic Wainford, the Monmouth Country Park System, Upper Freehold Township, NJ; 9 am to 3:30 pm. Info: 609-250-6275, or Sarah Bent, sbent@monmouthcountyparks.com.

Saturday, April 16 - Bus/Walking Tour of Newark - Liz Del Tufo, premier guide of Newark, will lead attendees to visit important historical sites and buildings. Cost \$45 per person. Bus leaves from Chatham. Info: 973-377-7023

News Briefs

There is still time to see the exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York titled "Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen." It explores the twentieth-century transformation of the kitchen and highlights MoMA's recent acquisition of an unusually complete example of the iconic "Frankfurt Kitchen," designed in 1926-27 by the architect Grete Schütte-Lihotzky. In the aftermath of World War I, thousands of these kitchens were manufactured for public-housing estates being built around the city of Frankfurt-am-Main in Germany. Featured alongside the Frankfurt Kitchen is a 1968 mobile fold-out unit manufactured by the Italian company Snaidero. These two complete kitchens are complemented by a wide variety of design objects, architectural plans, posters, archival photographs, and selected artworks, all drawn from MoMA's collection. Exhibit closes May 2, 2011.