



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

illuminating Our Past

April 2013 Vol. XXXV No. 4



President's Letter

Glen Ridge in Miniature

OVER 150 PEOPLE joined us at the high-school cafeteria for our winter event "Come Build Glen Ridge." The project at hand was constructing 50 historic Glen Ridge buildings out of Lego blocks, from the Municipal Building to the Frank Lloyd Wright house to the train station to the schools. Everyone took on the task with great enthusiasm and the buildings came together beautifully.

Families worked as teams using photographs as well as over 50,000 Lego pieces. They carefully recreated the arches of the Arcade building (shown at right), the Palladian window of 190 Ridgewood Avenue, the porch of 80 Glen Ridge Avenue, the tower of the Congregational Church, and the formal Italianate façade of the library. At the end of the afternoon, we assembled the buildings on a giant map for all to admire.

Volunteers from the Historical Society and Boiling Springs Savings Bank handed out town maps showing the locations of the buildings. We hope everyone will recognize and appreciate the history of our town when they see the buildings for themselves. Special thanks go to Boiling Springs Savings Bank for sponsoring the event. You can see more photographs at glenridgehistory.org.

Our next event will be our annual meeting on April 25th at 7:30 p.m. at Fitzgerald's on Herman Street. The

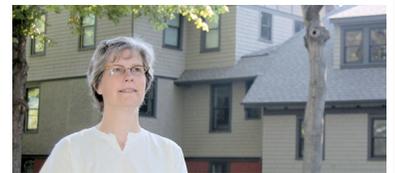
highlight of the evening will be a talk by town historian Sally Meyer entitled "Spending Time on the Veranda: A Study of Historic Porches of Glen Ridge." She will tell the history of porches still standing and long gone. She will also show us porches that have been rebuilt with great historical accuracy by their current owners. Before the presentation, we will hold a brief members' meeting to review our finances, approve new trustees, and announce the winner of the 2013 Preservation Award.

The candidates for officers and trustees to be voted on at the meeting are: Sarge Gardiner, nominated for a second term as Vice President; Alden Provost, nominated for a second term as Treasurer; George Musser, Alison Lang, and Barbara Kalemkerian, nominated for trustees with terms ending in 2016; and John Baker, nominated for trustee with a term ending in 2014. Please join us!

Karin Robinson



Karin Robinson is an architect who has lived and worked in Glen Ridge for 15 years. She has been Glen Ridge Historical Society president since 2010.



News from the Town Historian

Glen Ridge 07028

IN EARLY MARCH, the *New York Times* reported that the U.S. Postal Service may have to sell up to 200 post offices to raise money. Many of these buildings are legacies of the New Deal era. The Glen Ridge post office was one such project.

Fortunately, it is not on the list of properties for sale. Still, the news reminded me of the special history of the building.

The first post office in Glen Ridge opened in the train station in 1883. In 1924 it moved to larger quarters at the back of the Glen Ridge Trust Company (now the Boiling Springs Savings Bank). In 1932 the federal government added Glen Ridge to a list of municipalities whose postmasters requested a new building. At first, the Borough Council worried about the potential cost to the town and asked to be removed from the list. It did a U-turn in response to rumors that, without a building of its own, the Glen Ridge post office might be merged with Bloomfield's. In 1935 two councilmen made several trips to Washington to lobby for the building.

Glen Ridge was one of 443 winners and was allocated \$16,000 for the lot and \$67,000 for the building. (That is a total of roughly \$1.5 million in 2013 dollars.) The federal government entertained 10 bids for the site, including lots on Herman Street, Bloomfield Avenue, Woodland Avenue, and Ridgewood Avenue. It chose 209 Ridgewood Avenue, on the southeast corner of Snowden Place, the site of a private house.

Mayor John Koch and the council pushed hard against this choice and promoted two adjacent properties at 223 and 227 Ridgewood Avenue, owned by Nathan Russell and the Glen Ridge Savings & Loan Association.

The Russell property included the defunct Glen Ridge Men's Club. Council members wanted to preempt other possible uses for the site, such as a gas station, retail store, movie theater, or apartment house—all of which

they thought would be detrimental to the neighborhood. The problem was that the asking price of \$27,000 was well above the \$16,000 appropriation.

After long negotiations with Russell and the Savings & Loan to lower their bids, as well as five trips to Washington to plead his case, Koch convinced the federal authorities. The mayor established the Glen Ridge Citizens' Committee to raise funds to compensate the sellers for the financial loss they had sustained, following the example of earlier

citizen efforts to purchase properties in the Glen and along Bloomfield Avenue for the common good. The committee raised \$5,014.32.

The building was designed by an unnamed government architect in the Colonial Revival style to harmonize with its neighbor, the Women's Club of Glen Ridge. Ground was broken on September 16, 1936. Dedication took place on June 19, 1937. Local artist James Chapin painted the lovely mural on the south wall of the post office; the model for the young girl in the mural was the daughter of the postmaster in 1935, Stuart Tobin.

Sally Meyer



The post office on March 3, 1937

The Museum Room of the Glen Ridge Historical Society, located in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church, welcomes visitors. To arrange a time, please call Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.



Glen Ridge Historical Society Officers and Trustees

President	Karin Robinson	Trustee (2014)	David Doernberg
Vice President	Sarge Gardiner	Trustee (2014)	Andrew Grisafi
Secretary	Nelle Jennings	Trustee (2014)	John Baker
Treasurer	Alden Provost	Trustee (2015)	Terese Broccoli-Bourscheidt
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Trustee (2013)	George Musser	Trustee (2015)	David Taylor
Trustee (2013)	Alison Lang	Ex-officio – Past President	Marc Levinson
Trustee (2013)	Robin Westervelt	Ex-officio – Library Director	Jennifer Breuer

The Gaslamp is co-edited by Herb Addison (herb.addison@verizon.net) and George Musser (georgejr@musser.com).

Amateur Archaeology

Unearthing the History of Glen Ridge

A FEW YEARS ago, while swimming in the Manahawkin Bay down at the shore, I stubbed my toe on something hard. When I pulled it up, a shiny green glass bottle greeted me. Little did I know it would change my life and offer a way to illuminate some of the untold stories of our town's history.

A little research online revealed that the bottle was criminally ordinary, just a beer bottle from 1973, but more important it taught me that there is a dedicated group of people who collect antique bottles. I would soon meet some for myself. Some time later, our plumber came over to fix the sink, spied some bottles I'd put on the mantle, and told me about a fellow plumber, Mike Safer, who is the local bottle guru. Safer introduced me to another local collector, Tom Leavy, who has become my personal bottle mentor. Together we dig for bottles in the wild—specifically, in old privies, or filled-in outhouses.

I know what you're thinking: "Do you seriously dig in old outhouses?" Well, yes. As these privies filled up with, ahem, organic matter, household garbage was also thrown in. After all, which is more convenient: riding three miles to the dump in your horse and buggy in the dead of winter to throw out the week's trash, or just going out back and tossing it down the privy hole? Exactly. The average privy was used for around 10 years, although its life could be extended by hiring someone to "dip" out the contents using buckets. Life went on like this until most of Glen Ridge (and the country) got indoor plumbing by the early 1900s. The privy was then filled in for good and forgotten.

There it would have remained for all eternity, if not for bottle collectors like me. There are hundreds of us in the Garden State, and thousands more across the country.

I have collected hundreds of bottles since I started, buying some at bottle shows, digging up others in Glen Ridge. More important than expanding my collection,

digging has added to my appreciation of the town's history. Some stories might never have come to light if not for the artifacts excavated from privies.

I've dug five privies in all: two on Highland Avenue, two on Forest Avenue, and one on Glen Ridge Avenue. I've found a trio of beautifully colored 1850s inkwells, a 1910s bike frame, 1860s stoneware, and more. Each site had its own challenges and triumphs. But easily the most interesting was at 26 Forest Avenue. I went into the dig blind, not knowing what to expect. The house was built in 1868 and occupied for a time by a farmer, Ira Oakley. In the 1870s, a physician, William H. Pierson, bought it and moved in with his family. He was from Orange, served as a surgeon during the Civil War, and had turned his attention to being an inventor. He was granted a patent in 1867 for one of the first plastics,

celluloid, but it was later rescinded due to an opposing claim. One can only imagine the crazy experiments going on in the house. But I knew none of this on the frigid December day when I dug the privy with Tom.

We located the privy with a tool called a probe, a thin five-foot steel rod with a handle on the end. We stick the probe into the ground at an angle to feel the soil texture and, ideally, locate the rock walls of the privy. Strangely, this privy didn't have regular walls, making it difficult to be sure we had found it at all. To check, we dug a shallow test excavation and confirmed it was a filled-in hole. We carefully cut up the frozen topsoil and got to work. We opened a six-foot by 5-foot pit and went straight down. As with most digs, we started early, at 9



Artifacts recovered from the privy at 26 Forest Avenue, including chemistry labware and homemade plastic shapes



Outhouse behind the Thomas Moritz house on 15 Woodland Avenue, next to the train station.



Another one on the Kyner farm on the north edge of town. Barrows collection pictures #529 and #920.

a.m., in order to finish and fill it back in by 4 p.m.

A smashed 1860s Saratoga mineral water bottle was one of the first signs of life. More old bottle shards popped out. That's when things got weird. In addition to the usual mix—rocks, coal ash, bottles—we found what seemed like masses of chemicals, charred wood, and other evidence of burning. Deeper down, we came across an intact oil lamp, a hard rubber medical syringe, small ceramic dishes stained by chemicals, and a large pitcher that had been beaten almost to the point of breaking from use.

It all started to make sense when we found a bottle filled with a hard substance that smells of pine resin, perhaps camphor gum—which was used in making celluloid. We also found several items made out of celluloid: belt buckles, curtain rings, and blanks used to make denture molds. Later, reading up on the history of the period, I discovered that such blanks were the first major product to be manufactured out of celluloid. The Albany Dental Plate Company opened in 1870 and soon moved to Newark. Factories sprang up all over Newark, which became the plastics capital of the U.S.

Privy-Digging Video

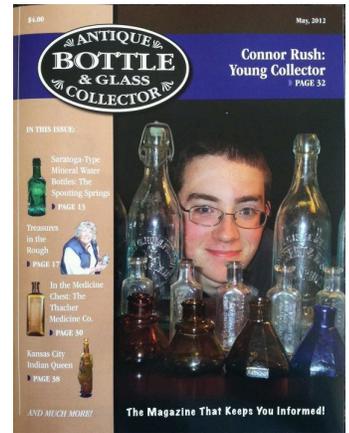
To see the author in action, watch the YouTube video at <http://tinyurl.com/grprivy>. Last December, he and his digging partner Tom excavated the privy at 80 Glen Ridge Avenue, home of Gaslamp editor George Musser. The site was unusually rocky and muddy, making it hard work, but nonetheless yielded numerous bottles and potsherds.

discover these stories and bring to light the artifacts that help me tell them.

Sadly, Pierson was not part of this booming business. One can imagine the frustrated inventor tossing his life's work down the privy in a fit of anger. His story—and many others—were forgotten when the privies of Glen Ridge were filled in for good. My aim is to

Connor Rush

Connor Rush is a graduating senior at Glen Ridge High School. He appeared on the cover of a hobbyist magazine in May 2012. (Courtesy of the publisher, John Pastor, americanglassgallery.com.) If you have a home built in the 1800s and are interested in seeing whether it had a privy (and thus potential for artifacts), email him at connor.rush23@gmail.com.



The Nolen Report: Part 2

A Plan for Downtown Glen Ridge

In 1909 Glen Ridge commissioned landscape architect John Nolen to chart a future for the town. The Gaslamp has been reprinting the text of this report in its entirety.

Herb Addison

THE BOROUGH CENTRE

THE COLLECTIVE LIFE of Glen Ridge is very conveniently and appropriately centralized at the intersection of Bloomfield and Ridgewood Avenues. These are the two most important streets—the former the main artery for electric cars and through travel to Newark in one direction and to Montclair, and over the Mountain, in the other; the latter, the most important residence street and pleasure drive. On one corner of this intersection is the attractive Lackawanna Railroad Station, containing the Post Office, and, adjoining it, the Library; opposite, on the other side of Ridgewood Avenue, is a continuation of the Glen Park with the Glen Ridge Club House near by; diagonally from the Station is the Public



SUGGESTIONS FOR A RURAL STORE CENTER

What might have been downtown Glen Ridge on Herman Street

School, a modern and complete educational plant covering all grades from the kindergarten to the high school. The fourth corner is at present privately owned and, although not now out of harmony with this natural centre of the Borough life, it may at any time become so. There should be no uncertainty as to its development and future; no graver mistake could be made than to leave it to chance. For it is quite possible that a use might be made of this corner for private or selfish reasons that would seriously conflict with the public good and destroy forever the essential character and attractiveness

of the Centre. Nothing, therefore, is clearer than that this corner should be owned or controlled by the public. Just what the best use of it would be is not so clear, nor so important. A small hotel or inn, a club house, a Borough Hall, a building for art, education or recreation interests,—the site might be properly used for any one of these purposes or something akin to them. There need be no fear as to a use for the property; the developments of the next decade in Glen

Ridge will bring forth demands for many such sites. Therefore, I unhesitatingly advise the acquisition of this property, for I am of the opinion that the public ownership or regulation of its use is as important as any public improvement now under consideration in Glen Ridge.

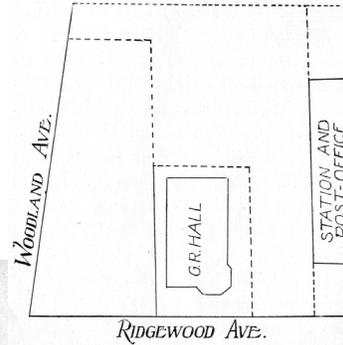
Some of the features proposed as a method of utilizing this northwest corner of Bloomfield and Ridgewood Avenues—a Borough Hall, or an Inn, for example—will have to be provided for sooner or later, and if they are not placed on the property referred to, they should be located somewhere convenient to the so-called Centre. It has been suggested that a small hotel be built on the corner referred to, a store centre on Bloomfield Avenue just beyond it, and a Borough Hall (and fire house) on the south side of Bloomfield Avenue opposite Herman Street. This program appears sound from the point of view of convenience, and, if undertaken by those who have the public welfare at heart it promises to protect from injury the beauty of the Borough,—an essential element of its prosperity. At present there are no stores whatever in Glen Ridge, but it is only a question of time when an increased population will demand them. These village stores should be given a village aspect by surrounding them with trees and grass; they should be built of permanent material, convenient in arrangement, attractive in design. If thus conceived and executed, in harmony with the homes of Glen Ridge, this provision of certain indispensable social necessities may actually add to the charm as well as the convenience of life in the Borough. The proposed double tracking of the

Lackawanna Railroad will not only be an important improvement in itself, but it will also give opportunity to make at least four other important changes:

(1) The provision of very much more adequate facilities for carriages in the approach to and departure from the Station. At present there is no proper place except the street for either public or private vehicles to stand, and room for only a single carriage or automobile to deliver or receive passengers at one time. This situation is already intolerable and will become steadily worse unless proper action is taken. It is desirable, I should almost say imperative, that the property back of the Library building, which fortunately is still available, should be utilized in connection with the Railroad property, and a driveway opened to Woodland Avenue. The easy circulation of traffic will thus be provided for, as well as a convenient stand for both public and private vehicles.

(2) The widening of the bridge over Ridgewood Avenue. While the Avenue has a width of eighty feet, the bridge at this point—naturally the most used part of its entire length—contracts it to forty feet. The new bridge should be the full width of the Avenue and decidedly more attractive in character.

(3) The Lackawanna grade crossing at Hillside Avenue should be eliminated. Hillside Avenue is an important thoroughfare and the changes required by the double tracking of the Railroad should include the most satisfactory solution possible of the problems involved in a rearrangement of grades at this point.

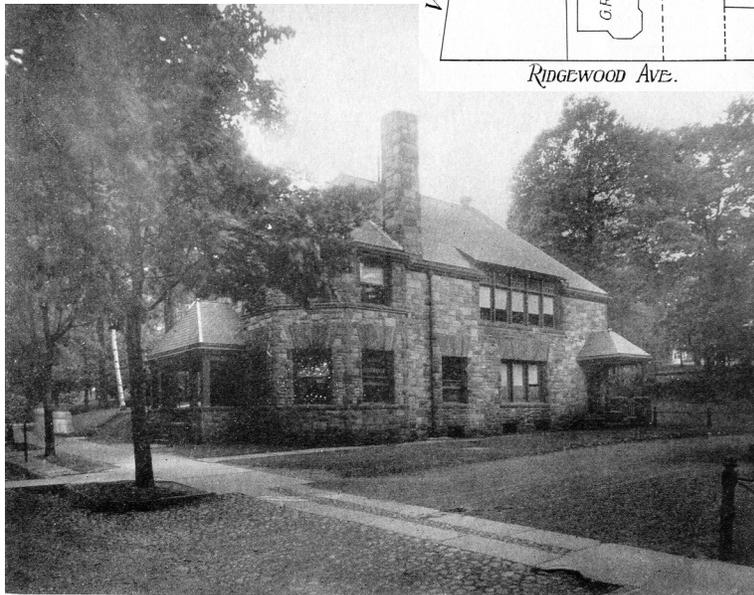


(4) The dangerous narrow passage under the railroad at Clark Street should be made the full width of the street. In addition to these improvements others of less importance, such as a trolley waiting station at Bloomfield and Ridgewood Avenues, should be included in the redesign of the neighborhood. One word of warning needs to be given. In all these changes along the Railroad, great care should be taken to protect as far as possible the integrity of the Glen and the beauty of this dominant park feature of the Borough.

It is appropriate to refer here to two improvements on the Erie Railroad which the growth of Glen Ridge has now made imperative, viz., the removal of the grade crossing at the Erie

station and the construction of a bridge over the railroad at Sherman Avenue. From the point where Wildwood Terrace now intersects the railroad, the topography and street grades happen to be such that it would be easy and inexpensive to readjust streets and railroad so as to remove this awkward and dangerous crossing. So simple is the change that it is surprising that it has not already been made. The need of a bridge at Sherman Avenue is equally urgent. North and south communication, the long axis of the Borough, becomes daily more and more important. The route suggested for a North and South trolley line (see page 23), and the location of a public school on the property at Sherman and Bay Streets, make it necessary for the Borough to require from the Erie Railroad the construction of a bridge in the immediate future.

(To be continued)



LIBRARY BUILDING AND BOROUGH OFFICES

Glen Ridge Hall, now occupied by the Boiling Springs Savings Bank. Nolen suggested the construction of what is now Darwin Place to improve traffic circulation at the train station.



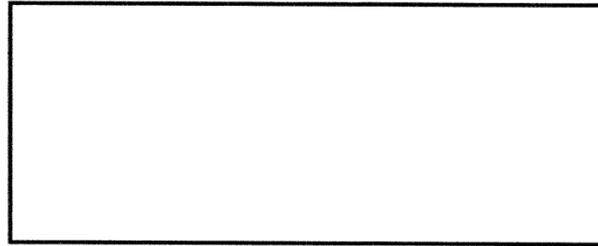
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Current Events-

May 19, 2013, 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm – The Histories and Mysteries of Montclair Heights – Montclair Art Museum – at the Israel Crane Museum. Montclair resident Helen Fallon tells the story of the history, the people, and the mysteries of the Montclair Heights area, including Bradford School, Montclair State University, and the whole northwestern section of Montclair. Helen shares the fruits of her multi-year research project. Suggested donation: \$5. Info at: 973-744-1796

March 10 to June 24, 2013 – Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light – Museum of Modern Art. The first solo exhibition of Labrouste's work in the United States, establishes his work as a milestone in the modern evolution of architecture. Labrouste made an invaluable impact on 19th-century architecture through his exploration of new paradigms of space, materials, and luminosity in places of great public assembly, particularly in library design.

A Major Exhibition of a Modern Master

June 9 to September 23, 2013 - Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes – Museum of Modern Art. MoMA presents its first major exhibition on the work of Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887–1965), encompassing his work as an architect, interior designer, artist, city planner, writer, and photographer. Conceived by guest curator Jean-Louis Cohen, the exhibition reveals the ways in which Le Corbusier observed and imagined landscapes throughout his career, using all the artistic techniques at his disposal, from his early watercolors of Italy, Greece, and Turkey, to his sketches of India, and from the photographs of his formative journeys to the models of his large-scale projects. His paintings and drawings also incorporate many views of sites and cities. All of these dimensions are present in the largest exhibition ever produced in New York of his prodigious oeuvre.