



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

February 2009 Vol. XXXI No. 3

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past



President's Message

Where History Is Stranger than Fiction

Glen Ridge has many claims to fame, from our iconic gas lamps (supposedly the largest collection in any U.S. town) to our abundance of Victorian architecture to a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. But one unique aspect of our town's history is known to only a small circle of connoisseurs: Glen Ridge is one of the places where science fiction got its start.

Edward Page Mitchell (1852-1927) spent much of his adult life in a home on Ridgewood Avenue, and was active in the movement to separate Glen Ridge from Bloomfield in 1895. In his professional life, he was one of the best-known journalists in America, rising to become editor of the prestigious *New York Sun*.

He also had a secret sideline. Starting in the early 1870s, he began writing stories about strange events in strange worlds. Today, those stories, all published anonymously, are recognized as among the earliest examples of the sci-fi genre.

Joan Hayes, a founder of the Glen Ridge Historical Society and one of my predecessors as president, first learned about Edward Page Mitchell when she was sorting unsold books at the Glen Ridge Congregational Church's rummage sale. No one had purchased *The Crystal Man*, a collection of Mitchell's stories published half a century after his death. She spotted Mitchell's Glen Ridge connection, read his stories, and dug into his past. On Tuesday, February 24, all sci-fi fans – and all Historical Society members – are invited to an 8 p.m. program at the Glen Ridge Women's club to hear what she learned.

Some of Mitchell's topics, such as suspended animation and travel by pneumatic tube, are recognizably science fiction, but readers of the modern genre are likely to find Mitchell's work

unusual. Each of his stories was short enough to be published in its entirety in a single issue of the *Sun*, and the plot and characters did not carry over from one story to another. The stories were not collected in book form during Mitchell's lifetime.

Mitchell's authorship was a closely held secret, and he never received public recognition as an author. His purpose in writing stories was not to produce literature, but to fill space in the newspaper while amusing readers. "He would come up with just enough fact that someone would say, 'This could be true,'" Hayes says. "He wrote things way ahead of a lot of other people who became noted."

Marc Levinson

Mark Your Calendar

Winter Public Meeting

(Open to all)

February 24, 2009

8:00 PM, Women's Club

"A Science Fiction Pioneer Who Lived in Glen Ridge"

Joan Hayes will describe the life of Glen Ridge founder, Edward Page Mitchell, who was a New York newspaper editor and also one of the first authors of Science Fiction

News from the Town Historian



The first newspaper in Glen Ridge was aptly named *The Glen Ridge Original*. It was published monthly from November 1890 to October 1891 by two local teens. Edward (Neddy) S. Mitchell and Roger T. Dodd put out the news with editorial guidance from Neddy's father, Edward Page Mitchell, the renowned chief of *The New York Sun*.

The *Original* included two pages each of news and advertisements. It cost five cents a month and was delivered as second class mail. The news items, brief and breezy, covered social events, sports contests, real estate transactions, home improvements, vacation plans, petty crime, church mission projects, and student activities at Miss Northall's School. Light poetry, humorous anecdotes and aphorisms filled in the gaps between the reports. Letters to the editor were somewhat snarky, not unlike the comments posted daily on our local blog Baristanet.

One of the big news stories of the year concerned "the Mountain Side Hospital scheme". The desire for a local healthcare facility became a reality in July 1891 when the original hospital building on Highland Avenue opened with rooms to accommodate nine patients. An appeal in the

newspaper for furniture, kitchen utensils, beds and bedding was generously met by its subscribers.

The publishers reported the doings of a wide range of organizations: the Ladies' Musical Club, the King's Daughters, the Harry Wadsworth Club, the Glen Ridge Wheelmen, the Young People's Club of Christian Endeavor, the Clio Club, the Brownie Guild and the Glen Ridge Needlework Guild. But the hub of social life in town seemed to be the Glen Ridge (Men's) Club where men, women, and children gathered for seasonal parties, lectures, tennis, bowling, and dramatic spoofs.

Perhaps the most significant impact of *The Glen Ridge Original* was its editorial bolstering of the cause for secession. After calling attention to the "slenderness of the tie that binds" Bloomfield to Glen Ridge and suggesting that it was better to discuss the subject of independence "with good nature than to get angry over it", the editors went on the attack with a series of feisty articles about the need for water and sewer lines, establishing a town center, maintaining a post office, and electing a strong delegate to the Bloomfield Council. One article ended with the sarcastic observation "that one of the most difficult things in the world is to make water run up hill. But that does not seem to be half as hard as to make appropriations for local improvements flow back up hill towards the source from which they came."

On February 12, 1895, a little more than three years after the final edition of *The Glen Ridge Original*, the campaign for independence came to a successful conclusion at the polls.

Sally Meyer

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Editor's Note...The feature article on the Ridgewood Avenue train station in this issue is by Glen Ridge resident and distinguished historian, Paul R. Baker, Professor Emeritus of New York University. Among his books are biographies of architects Richard Morris Hunt and Stanford White.

Herb Addison herb.addison@verizon.net)

The Metamorphosis of the Ridgewood Avenue Train Station 1887-2009

On July 1, 1856, the Newark & Bloomfield Railroad Company inaugurated the newly constructed single-track line eastward from Montclair. Near Prospect Street (Ridgewood Avenue) a cut eighteen feet deep had been dug from the sandstone hillock to provide track space. Four years later, a simple platform was built beside the track for the convenience of passengers, and, in 1872, the Morris & Essex Railroad, which had taken over the local line, erected a small wooden station close to Prospect Street. Most trains making the trip to and from Montclair, however, did not stop at "Ridgewood."

By the mid-1880's, it was recognized that the small structure was inadequate for local needs. The Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, which had taken a perpetual lease on the Morris & Essex line, planned a new station.

Asabel G. Darwin, a real estate developer, made a fortune in railroad equipment companies, and he purchased a substantial amount of land close to the old depot. Believing that a handsome new railroad station might help attract residents to the area, he offered to pay a part of the cost of a "more tasteful and elaborate structure," provided that all trains on the line stopped at Ridgewood Avenue. The railroad agreed to his terms and shared the cost with him and other residents. To design the station, Darwin employed Jesse Harvey Lockwood, a prominent local architect and the first city building inspector in Montclair.



The Glen Ridge Train Station about 1890

From its completion in the spring of 1887, the Ridgewood Avenue station has been used for a variety of purposes. A post office had been located in the previous station and it was reinstalled in the new building, remaining until the 1920s. For a time, a small restaurant dispensing beverages "of an innocuous character" was set up in the station. The Glen Ridge Congregational Church used the new facility for services and a Sunday school, as

well as for meetings to plan the new church building erected on Ridgewood Avenue at Clark Street and completed in 1890. The stationmaster even served as a town barber. Later in the 20th century, as we shall see, the station continued to be adapted to new uses.

Lockwood utilized the popular Queen Anne style for the new station, using local building materials and emphasizing the rugged quality of the rubble stone contrasting with the rich rust-colored brick. He created a building of a highly picturesque character with a subtle interplay of varied forms and textures.

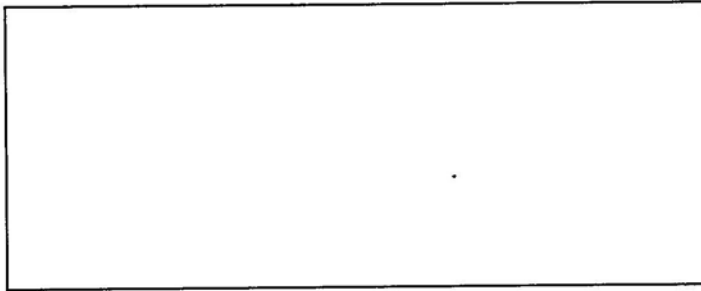
Especially noteworthy are the sweeping, slightly-splayed roof, the intricate dormer gable, with the careful placement of fanlights and small (originally colored) glass surrounds, and the handsome asymmetrically-placed oriel on the projecting bay overlooking the tracks. The front porch originally extended to the left to form a porte-cochere. Inside, three striking wood beam ceiling trusses with decorative pendants support the roof. A freight hoist with exterior access was installed in the station. Passengers originally descended on an inside staircase to the track-level platform. When the Montclair Branch was expanded to double track in 1912, the hillside was cut back farther, a good part of the platform was removed, and the track-level canopy was rebuilt. Recognized from its completion as one of the most attractive stations in New Jersey, the century-old structure remains today a striking building and a remarkable evocation of the past. It has been placed on the State Register of Historic Places and the National Register as part of the Glen Ridge Historic District.

During the 1970s and 80s it served as a real estate office and then an antiques shop. In the late 1990s a group of citizens formed the Locomotion 2000 committee to raise funds to rehabilitate the station – by then unoccupied and in deteriorating condition – into a center for seniors and teens. On June 15, 2002, the town celebrated the completion of the renovation, and today it lives on as a vital part of the life of Glen Ridge.


Paul R. Baker



The Glen Ridge Train Station Today



Non Profit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Glen Ridge, NJ
07028
Permit No. 710

 GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO Box 164
Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

Coming Events

February 24, 2009 – Winter Public Program; Joan Hayes will discuss the career of E.P. Mitchell, Glen Ridge Founder and New York newspaper editor. The meeting is open to all.

April 22, 2009 – GRHS annual meeting, Glen Ridge Congregational Church, 7:30 pm. We'll announce the winner(s) of our annual Historic Preservation Award and enjoy a presentation on the church's newly restored stained-glass window, made by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

News Briefs

If you would like to submit your renovation project for the GRHS Preservation awards program, applications are available from Karin Robinson by phone at 973-566-9826 or e-mail at karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net. Applicants need to submit a written description of the renovation and photographs of the project before, during, and after the construction. If any historical research was undertaken as a part of the project that should be submitted as well. The deadline for submission is Thursday, April 2, 2009.

The fate of the 1962 Eero Saarinen building for Bell Labs in Holmdel, NJ, is still undecided. Now standing empty, the building has been scheduled for demolition and the site redeveloped for several years. Thirty-six design and planning professionals have written a "Charrette" plan for preserving this major building for new uses. If you want to read the report send me an e-mail and I can send back their complicated link. herb.addison@verizon.net