



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

February 2012 Vol. XXXIV No. 3

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

www.glenridgehistory.org



President's Letter



I'd like to thank Sue and Sean Cullinan for sharing their house with us for our annual holiday party. It was the perfect setting for the season as well as a great backdrop for Sam Joseph's presentation about 138 Ridgewood Avenue, Henry Blank, and the sinking of the Titanic one hundred years ago this April. Special thanks go to Sam for sharing his wonderful collection of Henry Blank and Titanic-related treasures with us.

With the start of 2012, we are revising and reprinting our Directory of Restoration Resources. All members in New Jersey have been sent forms to list exceptional home improvement services and businesses that are worthy of recommendation to other Historical Society members. A list of categories, from air conditioning to wood refinishing, is included. Please take a few minutes to complete the form and return it to us--we know that the booklet has been extremely useful to members in the past. If you have any questions or did not receive the mailing, please let us know.

We are also beginning our annual Preservation Award program in which the Historical Society recognizes Glen Ridge residents who have undertaken especially thorough restoration work on their houses. We look for projects of all sizes that seek to rebuild historically

accurate design and construction. If you would like to nominate your own project, the project of a neighbor, or just a house in town that you have seen and admired, please contact me at karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net and I will drop off an application form. The award, along with a slide show about the house, will be presented at our annual meeting in April.

Karin Robinson

Save the Date

Winter Public Meeting

"When We Were Bloomfield"

**Sally Meyer will present
a talk on the period before 1895
when Glen Ridge was a part of
Bloomfield**

Thursday, February 16, 2012

At 7:30 pm

**Glen Ridge Congregational Church
195 Ridgewood Avenue**

Open to the public

From A Raging Stream to a Gentle Flow – Toney’s Brook

News from the Town Historian



Who’s Toney? The brook which runs through the Glen uses his name, but Toney’s identity remains a mystery. Some have surmised that he might be Anthony Ohuil, whose property appears on an early map near the headwaters, but historians are not sure. The brook originates in Upper Montclair. It then winds its way through Anderson, Edgemont, and Glenfield Parks into Glen Ridge. Continuing east to Watsessing Park in Bloomfield, it joins the Second River, a tributary of the Passaic River.

Prior to 1856 Toney’s Brook was a deterrent to those wishing to travel between the northern and southern sections of town. Carriages were confined to a small bridge on Gallagher’s Lane (Clark Street) as a means to cross the water. The inconvenience ended in 1856 when the Surveyor of Highways laid out a new road called Prospect Street (Ridgewood Avenue) which included the erection of a wooden bridge over the new railroad bed and Toney’s Brook.

The railroad was originally a single track line. Early commuters in Glen Ridge stood on a

wooden platform next to Toney’s brook and hailed the engineer as he approached from Montclair. James Moffett, who operated a mill in the Glen west of Prospect Street, built a foot bridge over his mill pond for passengers to reach the platform.

During the nineteenth century, Toney’s Brook was a reliable source of energy for several manufacturing mills in Montclair, Glen Ridge, and Bloomfield. The watercourse was an impressive stream that generated enough power to drive the water wheels of saw mills, a brass rolling mill, paper and pasteboard mills, and a calico printing mill. As the three towns along the brook were developed, construction fill was dumped along its banks, causing the water flow to diminish. With the addition of a series of retaining walls, the former raging stream was reduced to the gentle brook we see today.

With the closure of the mills at the end of the nineteenth century, the land in the Glen was preserved as parkland. One student, Donald Murdoch of the Class of 1934, was inspired to write an essay in *Pegasus*, the quarterly literary magazine, called “Tony’s Brook.” In it, he reminisced about the boyhood pleasures of sailing birch bark canoes, scaling flat stones, jumping across rocks, and performing various juvenile feats of daring that often resulted in a wet procession home. Murdoch’s lifelong hobby of bird watching began in the Glen. His widow, Elizabeth Murdoch, recently gave us a small journal filled with 72 different hand-drawn and colored wild birds that he made as an eight year old at Central School.

Sally Meyer

Officers and Trustees

President	Karin Robinson	Trustee (2013)	Herb Addison
Vice President	Sarge Gardiner	Trustee (2013)	Nelle Jennings
Treasurer	Alden Provost	Trustee (2013)	Robin Westervelt
Secretary	Margot Macdonnell	Trustee (2014)	David Doernberg
Town Historian	Sally Meyer	Trustee (2014)	Andrew Grisafi
Trustee (2012)	Margo Garrison	Trustee (2014)	Lana Keppel
Trustee (2012)	Terese Broccoli-Bourscheidt	Ex-officio – Past President	Marc Levinson
Trustee (2012)	Jon Russo	Ex-officio – Library Director	Jennifer Breuer
		Ex-officio – Delegate LHSNJ	Gerry Addison

Editor’s Note... This issue of the expanded *Gaslamp* features an article by Sally Meyer on the history of the historic district. The district was created just long enough ago that it might seem like ancient history to those who have moved here since the 1980s. I personally owe Sally a debt of gratitude for researching issues of *The Glen Ridge Paper* in the mid-1960s for stories relating to the decision to build a high school for the expanding school-age population of Glen Ridge. The result is an article by your editor in the series Vanished Glen Ridge on the three Ridgewood Avenue houses that were demolished to make way for the school. **Herb Addison**

The History of the Glen Ridge Historic District

Groundwork for the establishment of an historic district in Glen Ridge was laid during the American Bicentennial celebration of 1976. During that year, while Glen Ridge citizens expressed pride in the nation's heritage with a series of patriotic events, they discovered a new appreciation of the history of their own town. The year ended with the publication of the *Glen Ridge Heritage* book and a presentation by members of the Bicentennial Committee to the Glen Ridge Forum on the concept of an historic district.

In January 1977, committee member Jo Ann Dixon told the *Glen Ridge Paper* that "Historic districting helps to stabilize land values in communities...where taxes are high. We are completely surrounded by densely urbanized communities. We are a suburban island. Historic districting can help to maintain the tenor and character of our borough as it has in many other communities".

The following month, the Glen Ridge Historical Society was incorporated with about seventy-five members. Under the guiding hand of Terry Webster, its first president, the fledgling group made historic districting its first priority (see the September 2010 issue of *The Gaslamp* dedicated to Terry for more on her innumerable contributions to Glen Ridge history). In September it received unanimous approval from the Town Council to proceed at its own expense with a town wide inventory. Glenn Morrow was appointed Chairman of the Historic District Committee.

Some Glen Ridge homeowners were vigorously opposed to the creation of an historic district. The committee began a concerted effort to convince them of the merits of such a designation. It arranged forums for discussion, wrote articles for the local paper, and mailed informational brochures to each residence.

In July 1978, the committee hired preservation specialist, Dennis Bertland, to prepare a historic district survey. The estimated cost was \$11,000. The historical society held an auction of donated goods and services to raise the majority of the money, but also sold quarts of raspberries and other locally raised produce. In an

effort to assure residents that the project was inclusive, Bertland stated that "...the scope will be broad, and will not include just the major landmarks but every physical characteristic from the best to the worst of the old and the new".

Members of the historical society worked with Bertland and his team to gather data on every structure in Glen Ridge. Appointed captains asked neighboring homeowners to submit old photographs and relevant information about the history of their homes. Terry Webster, Barbara Mulhern, and others spent countless hours at the Hall of Records in Newark verifying the age of the oldest homes in Glen Ridge. Finally, in December 1979, the formal application was ready for submission to the Historic Sites Division of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

While awaiting a decision, visionary members of the historical society set up a small archival museum in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church to preserve all the information that had been gathered. Files were created for every house in Glen Ridge for the purpose of research.

On October 2, 1980 the Glen Ridge Historic District was accepted for inclusion in the New Jersey Register of Historic Places with about 1200 buildings. On August 9, 1982 it was accepted for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

In the spring of 1985, Mayor Edward Callahan asked the historical society to help write an historic district ordinance. After reviewing several such ordinances from other communities, John Payne, a law professor at Rutgers University and vice president of the Glen Ridge Historical Society, submitted a draft to the Town Council in December 1986. The ordinance passed in April 1987. To implement its directives, the Historic Preservation Commission was established at the same time.

By 1985 many additional Glen Ridge houses had reached the fifty year criterion necessary for eligibility. Dennis Bertland was rehired to prepare an application for an expanded historic district. In February 1988 the Glen Ridge Expanded Historic District was accepted for inclusion in the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. In November 1988 it was accepted for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Currently, the entire historic district comprises over 80 percent of Glen Ridge. An application to expand the historic district further with the addition of 250 more buildings is pending at the state preservation office.

Sally Meyer

VANISHED GLEN RIDGE

Three Houses to Make One School

VANISHED GLEN RIDGE is intended to preserve the history of some of the borough's important buildings that no longer exist.

By the beginning of the 1960s school enrollments in Glen Ridge were straining the limits of the four school buildings at the time – the original school on Ridgewood and Bloomfield Avenues, Forest Avenue School, Central School (now the Wells Fargo Bank), and Linden Avenue School.

The Post World War II baby boom – that by most definitions included babies born from 1946 to 1964 – had been working its way through Glen Ridge schools since the beginning of the 1950s. By 1960 the total enrollment in the town's schools was 1,609. By 1965 it was 1,937 and could be expected to continue rising when the last of the boomers would start Kindergarten in 1969. So it was that the first mention of building a new high school appeared in *The Glen Ridge Paper* in the issue of April 15, 1965. The Board of Education was to present committee reports on the subject on the following Monday.

This set in motion a planning process that was long and contentious. Expected cost, of course, was key to its feasibility. And cost would depend partly on where the school would be located and how much it would cost to secure the land on which to build it. In addition, no matter where it might be located there would be some community opposition to the site.

A Citizens Committee of 14 members was named in June 1965 to help the Board of Education in preparing plans for the new high school. Eleven possible sites were considered over the next six months. Among these were:

- 1) Hurrell Field plus all the houses on Herman Street and houses on west side of the field along Bloomfield and Highland Avenues
- 2) Number 204 Ridgewood Avenue, then used as Sherwood School, and adjacent properties
- 3) Area bounded by Central School and Belleville Avenue and High Street including 16 houses

The Board of Education announced on January 6, 1966, that it had chosen the three houses on Ridgewood Avenue – numbers 196, 204, and 216 – to be demolished for the site, together with several adjacent lots. This was essentially

alternative 2) that they had been considering. The board balanced the cost of purchasing properties, the space needed for the school, and the suitability for a large building in a largely residential town. The chosen site was appropriate for a school building in an area that included banks, the railroad station, the post office, the Women's Club, and the Congregational Church – all larger in scale than typical Glen Ridge residences. Even adjacent residences were larger than houses that adjoined other possible sites where the building would have loomed over its neighbors.

Nevertheless, there was considerable controversy when the decision was announced, especially from the site's neighbors. It took two referenda in 1966 before the (reduced) site and building were approved at a cost of \$2,790,000 by a vote of 2,644 to 1,435. The building was completed in time to receive its first students in the fall of 1968. By that time total school enrollment was over 2,000.

Here are, in effect, the obituaries of these houses.

196 Ridgewood Avenue

Records don't give a date for the construction of the original house on this lot for Rev. D. Temples but it appears on the Oakes map of 1865. It was a simple house in what we now would call a "vernacular" style – meaning that it fit no established style at the time. In 1904 the house was extensively renovated and expanded by Joseph D. Gallagher, a lawyer and vice president of American Brake Shoe & Foundry Company, New York, and a charter member of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. It now had a two-story entrance portico with columns and wide columned porch that gave it a neoclassical look but it would be a stretch to call it a pure neoclassical design.



196 Ridgewood Avenue

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

Nevertheless, the house presented an elegant face to Ridgewood Avenue and was in keeping with nearby houses.

By the time the house was purchased by the town in 1967 to make way for the high school for \$59,000 it was owned by Patrick J. Whelan.

204 Ridgewood Avenue

Next to 196 to the north was 204 Ridgewood Avenue. In 1886 Asabel G. Darwin (1827-1892), the first developer in the area of what is now Glen Ridge, bought about 40 acres of farm land from the heirs of Joseph S. Gallagher bounded now by Ridgewood, Woodland, and Hillside Avenues, and along Snowden and Appleton Places, and Clark. For the next six years he cut down trees, plowed through streets and built 26 houses, including 204 Ridgewood Avenue in 1886 (see Mark Wright's article in *The Gaslamp* of February 2010 for more details on Darwin's development).

In 1891 one of Glen Ridge's great benefactors, Henry Stanton Chapman, bought the house and its substantial carriage house from



204 Ridgewood Avenue

Darwin who had been living in it since he built it in 1886. Either Darwin or Chapman named it Sunnycrest and Chapman expanded it into an impressive Gothic style structure.

In the 1930s the house remained in the Chapman family but in 1932 it was leased to the Sherwood School for Girls – a private school from Kindergarten through high school. Beginning in 1940 and continuing after WW II there were several schemes floated to demolish the house and

replace it with a number of smaller houses but none came to fruition. Instead, in 1949 Irving A. Chapman sold the house to Marion A. and Florence N. Borden, the proprietors of the Sherwood School – co-educational since the mid-1930s. It was they who sold it to the town for \$98,000 in 1967.

216 Ridgewood Avenue

Next to 204, and on the corner of Ridgewood and Woodland Avenues, was 216 Ridgewood Avenue. Records don't show when it was built or who was the first owner but it appears on *Robinson's Atlas of Essex County* of 1890 with the owner's name as "Mrs Walsh." By 1965 it was owned by Kathryn A. Russell, president of Nathan Russell, Inc., Glen Ridge Realtors, and widow of Nathan Sr.'s son, Arthur. The house was described by architect and lifelong Glen Ridge resident Kenneth Underwood as "probably the most perfect Queen Anne example in town" though by the 1960s it had deteriorated through neglect.

During the negotiations over the purchase price Kathryn Russell died in April 1967 and her estate agreed to a price of \$36,000. Most of her land became the parking lot for the new high school, though the curved entrance to her front walk in the stone retaining wall was kept for an entrance to the grounds of the high school.



216 Ridgewood Avenue – showing still existing retaining wall

What was gained in this process was much needed space for an expanding school population. What was lost were three fine historic houses and their spacious grounds that were a part of the architectural legacy of Glen Ridge. **Herb Addison**



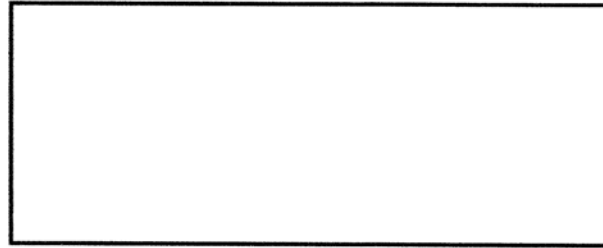
GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 164

Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

NONPROFIT
ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 710
CALDWELL NJ

Address Service Requested



WINTER PUBLIC MEETING
FEBRUARY 16, 2012

Current & Coming Events

Duncan Phyfe: Master Cabinetmaker in New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, through May 6, 2012
-- In the early 1800s, furniture from the workshop of New York City cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe (1770–1854) was in such demand that he was referred to as the "United States Rage." This exhibition—the first Phyfe retrospective in ninety years—re-introduces this artistic and influential master cabinetmaker to a contemporary audience.

April 16, 2012 – Glen Ridge Historical Society Annual Meeting – Marc Levinson, past president of the Glen Ridge Historical Society, will speak on his book, *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America*. Named by the *Wall Street Journal* as one of the ten best business books of 2011, the book describes the turbulent history of A&P as it relentlessly cut prices to gain market share.

News Briefs

The Greatest Grid: The Master Plan of Manhattan, 1811-2011; Museum of the City of New York, through April 15 -- celebrates the 200th anniversary of the Commissioners' Plan of 1811, the foundational document that established Manhattan's famous street grid. Featuring an original hand-drawn map of New York's planned streets and avenues prepared by the Commission in 1811, as well as other rare historic maps, photographs and prints of the evolution of the city's streets, and original manuscripts and publications that document the city's physical growth, the exhibition examines the grid's initial design, implementation, and evolution. *The Greatest Grid* traces the enduring influence of the 1811 plan as the grid has become a defining feature of the city, shaping its institutions and public life.