



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

February 2013 Vol. XXXV No. 3

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

www.glenridgehistory.org



Nominate a House for the Preservation Award!

President's Letter



ONCE AGAIN WE are planning 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 send an application form to the homeowner. The award, along with a slide show about the house, will be presented at our annual meeting in April.

My thanks to Mike and Anne Alix, who graciously opened their house to us for our holiday party. It was a wonderful evening and our best attended event in recent memory.

I also want to give special thanks to Herb and Gerry Addison for the many years they have worked with the Historical Society. Gerry has been our delegate to the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey since the early 1980s, attending meetings across the state and returning with news of other towns and their preservation

efforts. She worked on the Historical Society project to investigate street names in town, preparing a lengthy report on Sherman Avenue. Herb has volunteered in many capacities, from photographer to researcher to trustee. In 2008 he took over as editor of our newsletter, *The Gaslamp*. He redesigned and expanded it to include more articles and photos to much acclaim.

Now the Addisons are moving out of Glen Ridge. They will be missed as members of the Historical Society as well as citizens of our town. We have awarded them a permanent honorary membership in the Historical Society and hope they will keep up with our efforts in the years to come.

Karin Robinson



The winner of the 2012 Preservation Award was the restored Benson Street Station. We all remember the sad condition it was in before it was carefully and accurately returned to its original state.

From Fireman to Police Chief to Dog Warden – to Borough Clerk

News from the Town Historian



Immediately after seceding from Bloomfield in February 1895, Glen Ridge began the task of setting up essential government services. One of the first to answer the call for volunteer firemen in May 1895 was John A. Brown. From this earliest involvement with the fledgling community, he went on to serve Glen Ridge in various roles for nearly half a century.

Brown was born December 26, 1866 in New York City. He finished public school at the age of 13, and through the intercession of a faculty member who was a personal friend applied to and was accepted at Hunter College. He was married and employed in a lumber business when he moved his family to Glen Ridge in 1894 just a year before secession.

Three months after signing on as a fireman, Brown applied for an opening in the Police Department. After successive promotions from patrolman through sergeant, he served as Police Chief from 1902-1909. During those years he also

acted as registrar of vital statistics, inspector for the Board of Health, and dog warden.

In January 1910, Brown was appointed Borough Clerk, a position he would hold for 31 years until his death on October 12, 1941. Along with his duties as clerk, he also served as building inspector, superintendent of the Water Department, secretary of the Zoning Board, purchasing agent, bookkeeper, chief of the Fire Department and president of the Exempt Firemen’s Association. His obituary claimed that “his combined services totaled perhaps 150 years.”

As one of the earliest and most versatile public servants in Glen Ridge, Brown “was a walking storehouse and unqualified authority on municipal affairs.” He was the unofficial master of ceremonies at the annual reorganization meetings of the Borough Council and filled scrap books with stories of the growth of Glen Ridge from a town of 1,040 in 1895 to nearly 8,000 at his death.

John A. Brown and his wife, Emma Stewart Brown, lived at 117 Midland Avenue. They were the parents of two sons and three daughters. James S. Brown succeeded his father as Borough Clerk after his death.

Sally Meyer

The Museum Room of the Glen Ridge Historical Society is located in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church. If you wish to visit please call Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674.

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Editors’ Note... This issue of *The Gaslamp* is the result of the combined editorship of George Musser – who was co-author with his wife, Talia Schaffer, of the article in the September 2012 *Gaslamp* about their house on Glen Ridge Avenue – and Herb Addison. George was responsible for most of the issue, while Herb was primarily concerned with the Nolen Report that begins on Page 5 (please note that the original Nolen Report included many pictures that are mostly omitted in *The Gaslamp* for reasons of space). Henceforward, George will be the primary editor and Herb will act more as a contributing editor.

George Musser – gmusser@gmail.com Herb Addison -- herb.addison@verizon.net

Asabel G. Darwin and the Creation of Glen Ridge

Darwin's Estate, Darwin's Town

GLEN RIDGE, AS a distinct community within the large town of Bloomfield, began with the vision of one individual. Between 1877—when he first rented a house, no longer extant, near the corner of Clark and Ridgewood—and his death in 1892, Asabel G. Darwin planned and built much of what we think of as the heart of Glen Ridge as an estate under his personal control.

Darwin began his building campaign in 1882 with a mansion house for his family. In 1885–1886 he organized and helped fund the construction of a new train station. Between 1885 and 1892 he built at least 18 houses of

various sizes and styles for lease as a speculative business venture. Some of these houses, such as 76 Hillside, share the curved eave detail Darwin used at his own mansion.

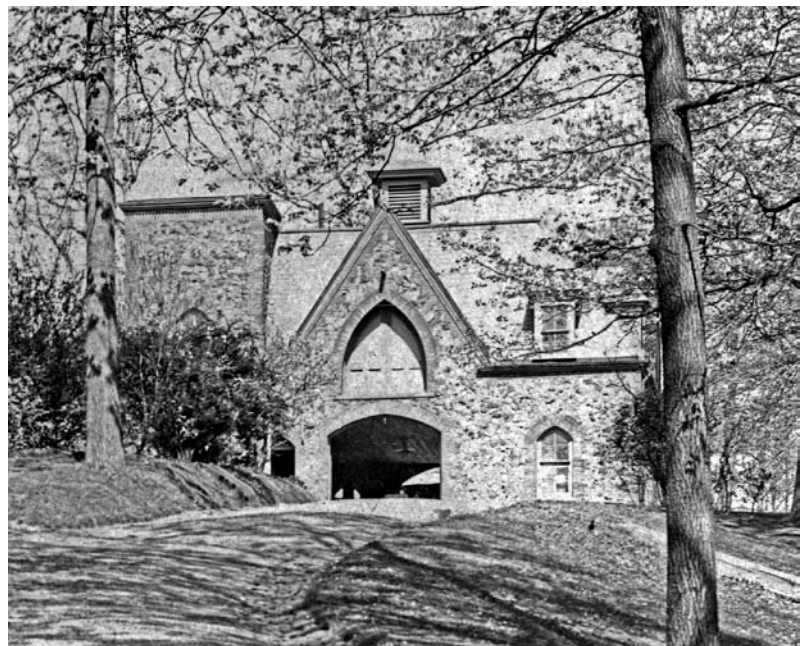
His house, his stable, and the station were all built of matching gray rubble stone trimmed in brick, with monochromatic patterned slate roofs. The fourth masonry building, Glen Ridge Hall, was built in a more sedate—and more up-to-date—Richardsonian style to provide secular social space for the growing town. From his office in the ground floor bay of the Hall, Darwin

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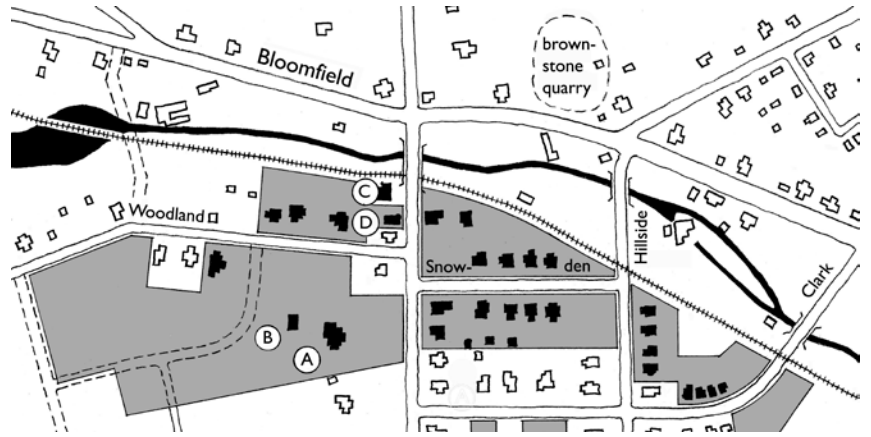


The Darwin family home was a large, eclectic structure mixing rural French and Victorian Gothic forms. The gray rubble stone of the walls was quarried in the Oranges. The rubble walls are reinforced with brick at corners and at openings. The roof was a mix of rectangular and hexagonal slates of uniform color, organized into subtle horizontal bands. The dormer gables were ornamented with wood shingles.

Darwin's handsome stable was built in 1882–1883. This photo shows the front of the building as seen from the street. Hay and fodder would be lifted from wagons into the loft using block and tackle fastened to the protruding beam we see over a rather grand Gothic loft door. The shallow arch spanning the open carriage door below it is also slightly pointed, consistent with the eclectic Gothic mood of the estate as a whole.



Concentrated south of what is now Bloomfield Avenue, Darwin's estate consisted of his mansion (A), stable (B), train station (C), and Glen Ridge Hall (D). He also built many of the early houses south of the Glen. A brownstone quarry and small factories were scattered along the Glen and on what are now Hurrell and Clay fields.



Sometime before he died in 1892, Darwin added an observation platform atop the stable tower. There he could have treated sizable groups – of prospective investors, perhaps? – to idyllic views. Note the elaborate little masonry barn he built behind the stable to provision his household with milk and eggs, and what may be living quarters for servants at the back of the stable building.

The train station was built of brick, stone, and slate matching Darwin's house and stable. It also featured large areas of ornamental work in cedar shingles, which made it a formal bridge between the masonry buildings of his estate and the shingled Queen Anne houses under construction along Snowden. Notice that the porte cochère on the left is one bay longer than it is today. In addition, the metal ridge-rolls on the roof were neither as prominent nor as plentiful as they are now.



Continued from Page 3

could observe the comings and goings at the train station. From the enormous roof platform he added to the top of his stable, Darwin would have enjoyed long views in all directions, along with a paternalistic oversight of the surrounding houses and yards that we would find all but intolerable today.

Darwin's house and stable were demolished to make room for the high school, but the train station and Glen Ridge Hall survive in altered form. The latter is now occupied by Boiling Springs Savings Bank.

The photographs reprinted here were taken in the late 1880s by real-estate agent Nathan Russell. They are only a few of hundreds of 19th- and early-20th-century photographs – many from glass negatives made by Russell as the town's early dwellings changed hands.

Mark Wright is a Glen Ridge architect and architectural historian.



A Seminal Document in Glen Ridge History - Part 1

*In 1909 the forward-looking elders of Glen Ridge commissioned landscape architect John Nolen to chart a future for the growth of the town that has become known as the Nolen Report. It has existed up to the present in fragile booklet form that few have read. In this and the next several issues of *The Gaslamp* we will reprint the text of this humanistic and visionary document in its entirety.*

GLEN RIDGE

The Preservation of its Natural Beauty
And its Improvement as a Place of Residence
By John Nolen
Landscape Architect

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

MR. JOHN NOLEN, the author of this report, has won a high place among landscape architects. In dealing with the problems of communities rural in character or surroundings he has been notably successful. When, therefore, the Municipal Art Commission of Montclair recently employed him to prepare plans for them, an easy opportunity presented itself to obtain for Glen Ridge the benefit of his suggestions. There was no time to form a regular public organization; so a few citizens of the borough, hastily assembled, took upon themselves the responsibility of engaging him. Some of the recommendations he here makes are new; some merely confirm the wisdom of action already begun; for all of them he furnishes illuminating reasons.

We should realize that, although Glen Ridge is not a large place, our position is similar to that occupied a generation ago by communities now grown large, and that by taking thought we may still avoid many of the difficulties and much of the expense that larger places must now meet. The time has come when we should understand that skill and foresight should control whatso frequently has been left to chance; that there is a real art in the making of a town; and that it behooves this generation to master and practice it. With a desire to awaken such interest in our borough as to lead to concrete achievements this report is presented to its people.

THE PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

GLEN RIDGE

GLEN RIDGE occupies a site which is naturally well adapted for suburban residence. Furthermore the street plan has the charm of irregularity, and the Borough has all the ordinary public facilities of modern town life,—paved and shaded streets, sidewalks and sewers, an ample supply of pure water, gas, electricity, and other conveniences.

To the natural loveliness of its situation, Glen Ridge has added much by an enlightened public policy and a united civic spirit that are seldom found in such a highly developed form in so small a place. Foresight, generous public expenditure, and wisdom have given to the present generation and insured to the future certain public advantages of very great value. In the first place, the most characteristic and most beautiful natural feature of the Borough —The Glen—has been nearly all secured for a public park. This is a valuable asset, one that could not be duplicated. Yet its character and situation are such that in private hands it probably would have become an eyesore. The people of Glen Ridge cannot be too highly commended for making this acquisition in time. Then the Borough, acting, I presume, with the railroad officials, has given what appears to be, on the whole, the best locations for the railroads and the stations. There are only two grade crossings within the borough limits, the stations are central and their surroundings attractive. There has also been displayed a tenacity and foresight as fine as it is unusual in controlling certain outdoor features which tend in a high-grade residence town to become nuisances. I refer particularly to unsightly poles and wires, ill-placed and inappropriate stores, apartment houses and tenements. Other illustrations of Glen Ridge's discriminating attention to public matters could be cited, especially in the support given to education, the Borough schools possessing at once the most marked merits of both public and private equipment and teaching. The present movement in Glen Ridge, therefore, cannot properly be called an awakening, as in the case of some other places; it is simply a new expression or a new application of a sound method of procedure heretofore followed with such striking success.

(To be continued)



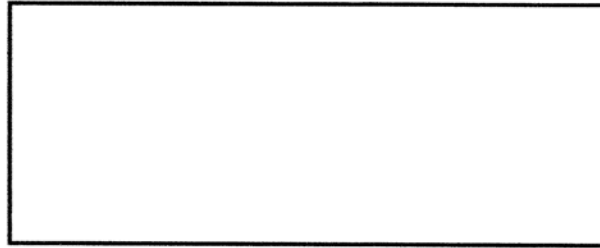
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Current and Coming Events

Through March 25, 2013 – 9 + 1 Ways of Being Political: 50 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urban Design. Museum of Modern Art. This installation of architectural works from MoMA's collection offers a series of fresh perspectives on the ways in which, over the last half century, architects have responded actively to the ever-evolving conditions of the polis. The display engages a range of media in MoMA's collection.

Through March 2, 2013 – Ezra Stoller: *Beyond Architecture*. Yossi Milo Gallery, Chelsea, NYC. An exhibition of iconic photographs of mid-century modern buildings by a master of architectural photography. The New York Times argues that "almost as much as those buildings, Stoller's pictures helped to fix modern design in America's consciousness." "The bottom line is that Stoller's pictures enshrine an era and aesthetic that still speak to us."

How the Future Looked Back Then

Through March 31, 2013. Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s. Museum of the City of New York. The exhibition showcases six Depression-era expositions that brought visions of a brighter future to tens of millions of Americans. As many Americans still waited on bread lines, fairs in Chicago (1933/34), San Diego (1935/36), Dallas (1936), Cleveland (1936/37), San Francisco (1939/40), and New York (1939/40) foretold much of what would become commonplace in postwar America--from highways and the spread of suburbia to modernist skyscrapers and products such as electric toasters, nylon stockings, and television.