



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

November 2013 Vol. XXXVI No. 2



President's Letter

Come Enjoy Our Annual Holiday Party!

SAVE THE DATE! Our annual holiday party is on Friday, December 6th. Our hosts will be Eva and Frank Reda, owners of 142 Ridgewood Avenue. Their house is an exquisite example of Queen Anne style architecture and was constructed in about 1894. The interior has meticulously restored wood trim, from the Philippine mahogany paneling to the elaborately carved built-in sideboard in the dining room. The front staircase is a tour de force of sweeping rails and turned balusters. Look for your invitation in the mail.

It was good to see so many of our members (and guests) at the opening of the Terry Webster Museum Room on October 26th. Current exhibits include displays about the local chapter of the Red Cross, train stations, school spirit, Christmas ornaments, and Nathan Russell, a realtor whose office was once located just below our new space. Between the exhibits and the refreshments, everyone seemed satisfied.

And congratulations to the Capra family for winning our architectural scavenger hunt! They located building elements such as cast iron cresting, sawtooth shingles, a brownstone foundation, and a Palladian window. The Capras received a gift card donated by Fitzgeralds. If anyone would like to try the scavenger hunt, we can supply all of the information you need. It's guaranteed to take you on a beautiful walk through Glen Ridge.

The next step for the Historical Society is to make our archive more accessible to the public. Starting December 14th, the museum room will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on the second Saturday of every month. It's a great opportunity to look through your house file. We have a file on every house in town, many containing old photographs, architectural plans, and bi-

ographies of famous residents. It's a valuable resource for learning the history of your house and we'd like to share it with you. Your house might once have had an indoor

rifle range, commercial greenhouses, or a bomb shelter!

As always, we will also be open by appointment. Contact our town historian, Sally Meyer, at 973-239-2674 for more information.

If you happen to have an account at the Boiling Springs Savings Bank or are considering opening one, you can help the Historical Society through the bank's Community Alliance Program, or CAP. Simply let the bank know that you want to support the Historical

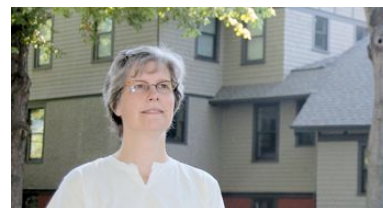
Society, and your name will be added to a list of other account holders who also support the Historical Society.

Once that list has 20 supporting accounts, the bank will begin making donations to the society. The donations are distributed quarterly, and the size of the donation is based on the number and size of the accounts pledged to the Historical Society. No account information is made public, and all types of accounts at any of the branches are eligible. The donations can be a substantial benefit to the Historical Society, so if you have an account, we encourage you to support us through the CAP program.

I hope to see all of you at the holiday party or in the museum room in the next few months.

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.



142 Ridgewood Avenue, circa 1910

News from the Town Historian

Preserving the Town's Character in Hard Times

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE of *The Gaslamp*, Beatrice Schmidt reminisces about growing up in Glen Ridge during the Depression years. While many such families in the borough struggled to make ends meet, the larger issues of preserving the residential character of Glen Ridge and stabilizing real estate values were also of concern. With these ends in mind, the Borough Council set up a Home Owners' Committee in the spring of 1932 under the direction of Frank Scheffey.

One of its first efforts was a student letter-writing contest. The high-school participants were instructed to cite the advantages of Glen Ridge as a place to live and describe an available house for a new resident. From among nearly 600 submissions, junior Jean Pentz was awarded the grand prize.

That same year, the Bloomfield Avenue Association was organized with the sole purpose of rezoning the avenue as a business district. Denigrating the idea at a fall meeting of the Battalion Forum, Francis Lloyd, president of the Home Loan Bank of Newark, warned that "anything can be done in a business zone, short of murder." He added: "Gaudy gasoline filling stations, automobile junk yards, factories, skyscrapers, apartments, cheap stores with cheaper tenements above them" would all be possible.

With zoning threats to the residential nature of the borough and the plummeting of house sales and rentals, the need for a formal watchdog group was imperative. In October 1932 the Home Owners' Committee was reorganized as the Glen Ridge Home Owners' Association. At its first annual meeting in February a promotional booklet entitled "A Pleasant Place to Live" was given to the 500 attendees along with a binder of detailed listings

of twenty-two houses on the market. 250 copies of these materials were later distributed to real estate firms in the New York metropolitan area.

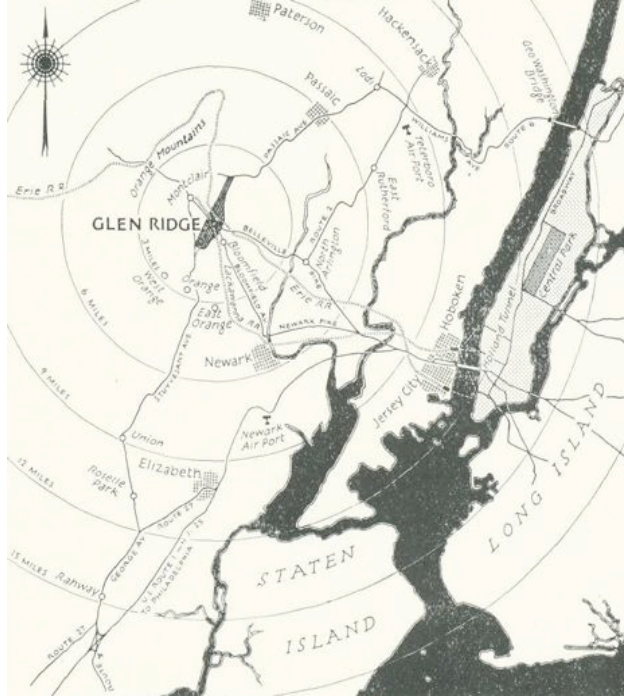
The booklet is a public relations tour de force. Photographs and text present the borough in a positive light from every angle including its geographic accessibility, apolitical form of government, public schools with private school advantages, churches and social life, public services and attractive houses. It touted "a neighborliness that is neither strained nor superficial, but genuine in its cordial hospitality."

The subtitle on the first page suggests that the "Borough of Glen Ridge, New Jersey, a Residential Community adhering to American traditions, has created an environment that is consistent with the highest ideals of modern suburban life." It is interesting to note, however, that in spite of those "highest ideals" there is no mention of a synagogue when identifying by congregation the spiritual

opportunities "offered by all denominations within easy access of the Borough."

The Glen Ridge Home Owners' Association continued its efforts until 1935.

Sally Meyer



Regional map from a 1933 promotional brochure by the Glen Ridge Home Owners' Association

The Terry Webster Museum Room of the Glen Ridge Historical Society, newly relocated above Boiling Springs Savings Bank, 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 (2015)	Meghan Labot
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Glen Ridge During the Great Depression

When “Darn” Wasn’t Just a Swear Word

This past summer, former Glen Ridge resident Beatrice Schmidt donated a copy of her self-published memoirs to the public library and high school. It offers a fascinating account of life during the hard times of the 1930s. An excerpt follows.

George Musser

THE GREAT DEPRESSION started on October 29, 1929 and all of us children knew something really serious had happened. We heard of neighbors who worked on Wall Street taking the train to New York City in the morning and never coming back at night. They were depressed by the thought that they had encouraged people to invest in a rising Wall Street economy, only to see all those investments wiped out. Their solution was to raise the window in their Wall Street office and jump out.

My parents were worried and tried to find a way out of the problem. We were living in our beautiful house on the corner of Linden and Ashland Avenues in Bloomfield, NJ. My father immediately began trying to find new ways to make money. He made a kitchen on the second floor and rented out four rooms up there. We children moved to the third-floor bedrooms.

Mr. and Mrs. Hofstetter moved in. They were bakers for the Downey Flake Doughnut store in Bloomfield. They were a young couple, always dressed in immaculate white uniforms. They left for work very early in the morning and then came home about 8:00 p.m. When they came home, they brought lovely treats for us—chocolate eclairs, doughnuts, whatever was left over. We loved that.

When the Depression began, my father thought it would only last for about six months and then he could go back to building new houses in Glen Ridge. He would complete a new house in three months and sell it for \$10,000. Sometimes the people had some savings and would take a mortgage out for the rest of the money. A first mortgage was about \$1,000, while the second mortgage was \$500. Mother would hold the second mortgage. She never had to ask my father for money. She had her own second-mortgage income.

But we had never paid off our own mortgage. There was a balance of \$10,000 due on our Linden Avenue house. Daddy had invested all his money in building houses and buying a sailboat with his six brothers. In 1933 we were foreclosed.

That’s when we moved to Glen Ridge. Mr. Lear lived in the Glen Ridge house. He had lived there all his life. He didn’t want to move, but he was foreclosed, too. He built a fire in the second-floor bathroom. The neighbors saw the flames and called the Glen Ridge Fire Department. They came out and saved the house, but my father had to restore the bathroom to a usable condition.

Mr. Trivett owned our new house. He charged us \$8 a month rent, with the option to buy when we could afford it, and my father was to maintain and repair the house. The Victorian front porch was falling down, so Daddy took that down and replaced it with a Colonial entrance, much more durable.

There was no electricity in our house. There was illuminating gas, such as the street lights Glen Ridge had at the time. No radio, no ironing machine, no dishwasher, nothing electrical. It took a couple of years to get electricity installed in our house because we had no extra money for improvements.

Evelyn was in the 9th grade and I was in 7th grade. We walked the mile or so to high school. Classes were more difficult, and all the students were strangers to us. It wasn’t easy.

One of our difficulties was to cut up cardboard or old newspapers and fold them neatly and put them inside our shoes. When it rained, our feet got wet through and through.

We could only afford white ankle socks from the Five and Ten Cent Store. Our heels would wear holes in those cheap socks and then we would get blisters on the heels. The blisters hurt. I tried sewing a patch over the heel at first, but that didn’t work well. Then the lady I was babysitting for suggested I learn to darn my socks. She told me to buy a darning egg, darning needles, and darning thread. Then she taught me how to turn the sock inside out, slide it over the darning

egg, and weave the darning thread over the hole, going back and forth until the whole heel was renewed. That was a blessing. No more heel blisters. But the wonderful final solution was a little book Evelyn bought at the Five and Ten. It was printed by Coats and Clark, who sold thread. This wonderful little book showed us how to knit socks and sweaters. We were able to buy the wool and knitting needles at the Five and Ten and we learned to knit our own socks. These white woolen socks were so wonderful and *warm*.

We hated the Depression; it deprived us of so much we had before. But we learned to be problem-solvers. We didn’t have to ask our parents for money to buy clothing. We made our own dresses from patterns we bought out of our babysitting money. Now, babysitting during the Depression paid very little. We usually got paid 35 cents until midnight. If the parents stayed out after midnight, they paid us 50 cents. But we became good savers.

The kids we met in the high school were a mixture of poor, middle class, and very rich. One girl had her hair shampooed and waved every week. She soon left and attended a private school. Another girl said she and her



The author (far left) and her siblings outside their home on Midland Avenue in 1935

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The Nolen Report: Part 4

The Parkway That Might Have Been

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 CIRCUIT DRIVE

RIDGEWOOD AVENUE is perhaps Glen Ridge's best single claim to distinction and its beauty should be preserved inviolate; not only preserved, but enhanced. Realizing the future of this Avenue and the demands that will unquestionably be made upon it, may it not be well to widen it, where possible, from eighty to one hundred feet (certainly north of Bay Street), continuing it appropriately at both ends of the Town, as indicated on the map herewith, and so make it a part of the proposed Montclair-Glen Ridge Circuit Drive? The main part of this drive exists already. On the west in Montclair there is Upper Mountain Avenue, which can be connected at Van Vleck Street with South Mountain Avenue, and on the east Ridgewood Avenue in Glen Ridge. By making connections at the north and south ends, as suggested, a continuous parkway or drive twelve miles in length would be established, accessible from every section of both Glen Ridge and Montclair. The existing parts of this proposed Circuit Drive are of unusual beauty, seldom equalled, indeed in American suburban towns. The new parts should even surpass those already existing; they might with propriety be conceived as parkways rather than streets. This Circuit Drive, as a whole, should be perfected in paving, planting and distinctive street fixtures, and should have a bridle path as well as a drive and a foot-walk.

It is also very desirable that agreeable and convenient connections be made between Eagle Rock Reservation and the Watsessing, Bloomfield and Branch Brook Parks. The reports of the Essex County Park Commission endorse in

Proposal for a tree-lined ring road comprising Ridgewood Avenue (extended through what is now Brookdale Park), Mount Hebron Road, Upper Mountain Avenue, South Mountain Avenue, Cedar Avenue, and Washington Street.

an unmistakable and whole-hearted way the complete and serviceable system of Parkways and connections recommended by its expert advisers. "To unify the various features; (Neighborhood Parks, Branch Brook Park, and outlying Reservations) above described," said the Essex County Park Commission in their Second Annual Report, "a system of Parkways has been determined upon which forms the final feature of park development." This Commission has done some notable park making since its organization fifteen years ago, and the system now includes more than thirty-five hundred acres of exceeding variety of landscape types, and is destined to become one of the finest park systems in the world. But for some reason unknown to me, the Commission appears to have made no headway whatever with the scheme of Parkways,—an absolutely indispensable feature of the system outlined. This is a grave mistake from every point of view, and particularly unfortunate and unfair to the smaller communities like Montclair, Glen Ridge, and Bloomfield, whose share of the County Park System was to be in the form of Parkways and not parks. This injustice is peculiarly apparent in the case of the communities just mentioned, whose local parks have been supplied largely at local expense. Moreover, to the people in the more densely settled sections of the County, no contribution could be made more quickly nor more economically than to open up by means of Parkways the beautiful suburban and rural districts which are naturally so parklike in character. I trust, therefore, that the local committees of Glen Ridge, Montclair, Caldwell, Bloomfield, Belleville, and others affected, will unite in an earnest appeal to the Essex County Park Commission to carry out with fidelity the original plan of Parkways, herein reproduced, modifying it only in such ways as subsequent study and experience may prove to be advisable. One practicable scheme, founded in the Commission's second Report, is shown in the sketch opposite. The Newark Avenue portion, 100 feet wide, is already provided, and the land needed in the Glen Ridge extension is not yet built up.

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Great Depression (continued from page 3)

parents had spent Sunday on a boat three miles off the coast. Her mother kept playing the quarter slot machine with no good results. I couldn't believe that someone would waste their money and feed quarters into a machine for nothing. That little girl soon left school for a private school.

We had an excellent school, and the teachers were mostly from New England. Some had been betrothed to marry soldiers who had died in World War I. Miss Arnold, our music teacher, was from Maine, had brownish colored skin and was very proud of her American Indian heritage. One day, during the middle of the Depression, Miss Arnold took us on the train to New York City to attend an opera. Bidu Sayao was a coloratura soprano visiting from Brazil. She sang *The Barber of Seville*. It was magical. For one afternoon we forgot about the poverty and problems of the Great Depression and we were magically entertained in the great Metropolitan Opera just because Miss Arnold wanted us to see that wonderful place and hear great music for once in our lives. We would not forget that great opportunity.

One thing I want to say is that most people we knew were going through trying times. We had one great source of comfort. We belonged to the First Baptist Church in Bay City. All the people there supported us

with their kindness and help and we, in turn, supported them. We had our strong belief in God, and my mother was so grateful for her Sunday School class, called the Bethel Bible Class. They used to send her get-well cards and do many kind things for her. Mother suffered from crippling rheumatoid arthritis. She couldn't walk for years, but her faith in God kept her going.

My sister Evelyn had a great desire to become a registered nurse. It cost \$100 to enter training. We didn't have any money to send Evelyn to nurses training. Evelyn took it upon herself to try to raise the money. She worked at a restaurant in East Orange where the diners were \$1.00 and the tip was 10 cents. She saved her babysitting money. She worked for four years to get the money to go to nurses-training school. Our wonderful Aunt Lois, a registered nurse herself, sent Evelyn a letter for her birthday with ten dollars inside. She wrote, "Five dollars may be considered a present and five dollars may be considered a loan." That money was ten percent of what Evelyn needed.

Evelyn had all the \$100 ready when her nurses training started in the fall of 1936.

Beatrice Schmidt, born in 1921, lived her teenage years at 193 Midland Avenue. She now lives in Kawkawlin, Mich.

Nolen Report (continued from page 4)

SCHOOL GROUNDS, PLAYGROUNDS AND PARKS
 GLEN RIDGE has shown unusual foresight in the acquisition of land for parks, although none of it so far has been properly developed, nor have a sufficient number of small areas been secured for playgrounds and playfields. Notwithstanding the open character of the Borough and the fact that practically all buildings are detached, ample reservations should be made in time for parks and playgrounds. The very character of Glen Ridge's upbuilding becomes a danger if dependence for public recreation is placed upon private yards. These will prove inadequate and unsuitable. It is often true that villages and country towns offer less public opportunity for outdoor games and sports requiring big fields than the residence sections of large cities. The relation of outdoor recreation and play to happiness, to health, to all-round development, to character, need not here be dwelt upon. The people of Glen Ridge accept all this, have acted upon it, and intend to follow it to its logical conclusion. The children are a main concern of the Borough, perhaps the main concern. It is the intention to provide every child not only with the best possible schooling in the conventional sense, but also with ample opportunity to enjoy health-giving and pleasure-giving exercise in the open air amid appropriately beautiful surroundings. Glen Park with its thirteen or fourteen acres, and the public school playground with more than two acres, furnish a good nucleus for a system of pleasure grounds. These need to be developed and utilized to the full, both during the school term and in the long summer


vacation. They should be planned, improved, equipped where necessary, and supervised; they need to be developed for all the year round use, winter as well as summer. It will be a very simple matter by building a dam in the brook that runs through The Glen to provide a large and conveniently located skating rink. In this connection I suggest that the equipment and method of maintenance



Playground behind what is now Ridgewood Avenue School

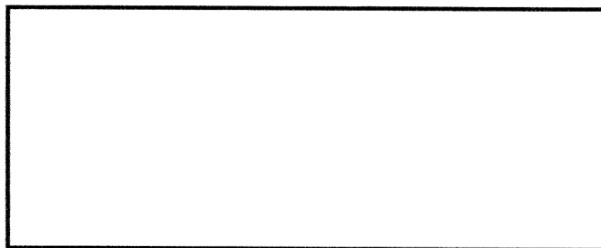
of the Cambridge (Mass.) Skating Club be investigated. But even when thus fully utilized the areas mentioned will not be adequate, I believe, even for the present: certainly not for the future, the demands of which it is desirable to anticipate. Therefore, I recommend that a committee with proper authority be empowered to survey the population of the Borough, estimate its increase and its needs for the next decade or two, and then make an equally careful examination of available sites. With this as a reliable basis for action, a well-balanced and adequate system of parks and play-grounds, including perhaps a small forest, should be selected, acquired, and, when necessary, improved. Such a committee, I believe, would certainly discover the advantages and necessity of utilizing as playgrounds some of the property already owned by the community, of acquiring in advance large grounds for future schools, and of securing tracts of ten or more acres at the outlying ends of the Borough, north and south, for use and development as country playfields,— as complete models in their way as the Chicago playgrounds (the best in the world) are for a large city.

(To be continued)

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HOLIDAY PARTY
DECEMBER 6, 2013

Current Events-

October 26, 2013 – July 6, 2014 – “Hoboken: One Year After Sandy.” Hoboken Historical Museum. The storm disrupted all our lives in one way or another, and the Hoboken Historical Museum has been busy collecting the stories and images of its impact on their community. The exhibit assembles a range of content—oral histories, images, videos, maps and scientific analyses—to help explain how Hoboken responded and learned new lessons about coping with major storm surges.

October 16, 2013 – February 10, 2014 – “Norman Bel Geddes: I Have Seen the Future.” The Museum of the City of New York. The first major exploration of the theater and industrial designer whom *The New York Times* dubbed “the Leonardo da Vinci of the 20th century.” Bel Geddes (1893-1958) played a significant role in the 1920s and '30s, shaping not only modern America but also the nation's image of itself as innovator and leader into the future.

New Jersey as a Laboratory of Experimental Art After WW II

October 5, 2013 – January 5, 2014 – “New Jersey as Non-Site.” Princeton University Museum of Art. Between 1950 and 1975, a host of innovative artists flocked to the state's most desolate locales. There, in its industrial wastescapes, crumbling cities, crowded highways, and banal suburbs, they produced some of the most important work of their careers. The breakthroughs in sculpture, conceptualism, performance, and land art that New Jersey helped catalyze are the subject of *New Jersey as Non-Site*, which features more than one hundred works by sixteen artists. Long considered New York's “other,” New Jersey was one of the first “other” places that artists explored in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, a period when many artists started to abandon the insular world of the studio for the environment at large.