



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September 2010 Vol. XXXIII No. 1

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

www.glenridgehistory.org



Terry Webster

President's Letter



We are dedicating this issue of *The Gaslamp* to Terry Webster, who passed away last June. Terry epitomized the spirit of historic preservation in Glen Ridge. At a time when many houses in town were showing signs of age and architectural gems were considered difficult to maintain, Terry had a different vision of Glen Ridge. She was determined to preserve the history of our town, whether built, written, photographed or remembered. She gathered support and founded the Historical Society, and actively participated in the documentation and creation of the town's Historic District, which is listed on both the New Jersey and the National Register of Historic Districts.

Perhaps her greatest legacy was her work as Town Historian. Over 30 years ago she led the effort to gather, organize and maintain the Historical Society's Archives. The collection is truly the heart of the Historical Society. From picture postcards to school yearbooks, from maps to clothing, our past is preserved in the Museum Room in the Congregational Church. If you have never visited the collection please find time to stop by (call Sally Meyer for an appointment: 973-239-2674). We have information on every house in town so you are sure to learn something new.

As we start a new year of programs and activities, the Historical Society will continue to help us learn something new about the past. For this we owe a debt of gratitude to Terry Webster.

Karin Robinson

Photo Contest

The Photo Contest is in full swing.

Entries can be pictures of private homes, people, and public places and spaces. Contest rules are available at the Glen Ridge Public Library and the Ridgewood Avenue Train Station.

The deadline for submission is October 1, 2010. Winners will be announced and entries displayed at the end of the Architectural Scavenger Hunt (see below) at the Ridgewood Avenue Station at 3:00 pm on Saturday, October 23, 2010 (October 24 rain date).

Architectural Scavenger Hunt

Learn about architectural details on Glen Ridge buildings on Saturday, October 23, 2010 (October 24 rain date). Meet in front of the Glen Ridge Library at 1:30 pm where you will be given a sheet with pictures of the details and a map of the streets where they can be found. Then you set out to identify the buildings with the details and come back the Ridgewood Avenue Train Station no later than 3:00 pm to report your findings. There are prizes for those who found the most details in the allotted time.

A Surprise Invitation - and a New Calling

News from the Town Historian



I met Terry Webster in the spring of 1978. I was standing with my children in the front yard of 26 Forest Avenue when she arrived out of the blue on a bicycle. She was doing research to determine the oldest houses in town and thought mine might make the cut. She introduced herself, grabbed a clipboard and a magnifying glass from her bicycle basket, and asked to look at my basement. I said yes.

I was dressed in tennis whites that day. As she examined the warren of rooms in my basement we talked a bit about rubble stone foundations and beamed ceilings, and then, quite innocently, she asked me, "Do you like tennis?" I said yes. "Well," she said, "there have been quite a few tennis courts in Glen Ridge over the years, and it might be an interesting topic for a slide lecture. Would you like to do some research and give a presentation at the annual meeting of the Glen Ridge Historical Society in April 1980? That would give you two whole years.....and I would help you along the way."

I was completely flabbergasted. Who was

this zany person? What was the Glen Ridge Historical Society? How do you research tennis courts? The whole idea seemed preposterous, and yet... I said yes. With Terry as my mentor, the tennis project launched the start of my adventures with local history.

Terry tracked clues like a bloodhound. Her stint after college with the CIA was good training for her pursuit of historical accuracy. She spent countless hours in the Essex County Hall of Records tracing deeds on many of the earliest houses in Glen Ridge. She wrote numerous letters to former residents to gather information about their homes and families. She was a stickler for accuracy in news reporting, and wrote frequent letters to the editor to point out errors. She was passionate about the importance of ongoing historical research.

After Terry died I wrote to her husband, George. I closed my letter with the following thoughts: I love my work with the Glen Ridge Historical Society. I have met and helped countless residents who were curious about the history of their homes. I have visited school children and told them the story of their hometown. I have prepared exhibits, given slide talks, led walking tours, written columns, rescued documents, found answers to questions, and spread the gospel of learning from the past. Terry opened my door to all these opportunities. Glen Ridge owes much to Terry and so do I. I will miss her as I continue to follow in her footsteps.

Sally Meyer

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Editor's Note...

This issue of *The Gaslamp* is dedicated to a very special person who was the prime mover on historic preservation in Glen Ridge: Terry Webster. The articles describe her many contributions to research, preservation, and education about Glen Ridge's rich historical past.

Herb Addison -- herb.addison@verizon.net, or 973-748-5012.

The Right Person at the Right Time - Terry Webster



Terry Webster 1927-2010

The idea of starting a Glen Ridge Historical Society was born back in 1976 when we were celebrating our country's Bicentennial. In 1975 Mayor Jack Van Zoeren had appointed a committee to oversee the celebration of events here in the Borough. Pat Johnson was the chairman and we met regularly once a month. Terry Webster was on the committee and constantly noted that we should have a Historical Society to record and protect Glen Ridge's history.

A major project of the celebratory year was the creation of a book of our town's history, *Glen Ridge Heritage*, edited by Ron Travisano. Terry was involved in amassing a good deal of the information to be included. She was tireless in tracking information such as determining the oldest houses in Glen Ridge. At each step she restated the need for a historical society.

As the Bicentennial celebrating wore down, Terry met with Jo-Ann Dixon, Percy Syd Wilson, Town Historian, and Annis Popoff, Library Director, all members of the committee, all sharing her dream. Joining the group were Jim Brydon, who had been doing research and was to present the first program on Dr. Joseph Dodd and serve as our first treasurer, and Terry Trimble, a lawyer living in Glen Ridge. On April 6, 1977, they officially launched their dream. On May 13th the first meeting was held and off we started. Terry made me secretary protem.

During our second year Terry continued as president. She was by nature very thorough and exacting and saw that the Society got off to a good start. She worked with the Bloomfield Historical Society since we shared a past history. Bloomfield had gotten one of its neighborhoods

registered on the National Register of Historic Districts and was a great source of information on the application procedure. Barbara Mulhern, Pru Borland and Glenn Morrow joined our Board. Having no funds, we held a big auction, run by Pru and raised enough money to hire Dennis Bertland, a graduate of Columbia School of Architecture, to survey our houses and streetscapes. He was impressed with the variety and caliber of the architecture of Glen Ridge's houses and buildings and determined that the center of town well qualified us for recognition. Glenn Morrow undertook this application spearheaded by Terry.

At the same time, Terry initiated other projects. She enlisted Sally Black, a Glen Ridge resident and member of the Bloomfield Historical Society, to research old local newspapers and cull Glen Ridge news that was printed back when we were a merged community. Terry arranged with Syd Wilson for us to look through the Nathan Russell collection of house pictures. Mr. Russell, a realtor in Glen Ridge at the turn of the century, had taken photos of houses he was listing for sale. They were on glass negatives which Syd had saved when the Russell house was being demolished to make room for the new high school. Terry and I determined if the houses still existed by going out on our bikes and looking for them. Terry wanted copies of these pictures for our house files, but it was expensive to have the glass negatives converted and prints made, so she suggested offering them to present homeowners at a cost that paid for their copy and one for our file. So started the permanent collection in the house file.

At one of the meetings while she was president, we honored two former mayors, Karl Honaman and Thomas Butler, in the council chambers. Mrs. Honaman came and was horrified to see how badly the Ballard Williams painting of the Glen had weathered. We undertook the fund raising for its restoration and it has added greatly to the attractiveness of the chambers.

Terry was president until 1980, when she passed the job along and I took over the helm. In 1988 she became our Town Historian until she and George moved out of town to a retirement community in Pennsylvania in 1999.

A non-native of Glen Ridge, Terry moved into the community with George and brought up their children here, considering it a special hometown. Today her vision of the town's importance is noted and enjoyed because of her foresight. It is with gratitude to her that we can appreciate what the past has offered and we will continue to enjoy knowing our history.

Joan Hayes



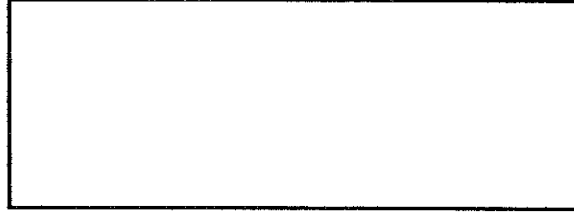
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A SPECIAL TRIBUTE

Coming Events

Sunday, September 19 - Middlesex County - DANE
Genealogy Program, "Who Do You Think You Are?"
Info: 732-287-6445, or danenj@aol.com

Friday through Sunday, September 24-26 -
Princeton Fall Antiques and Fine Arts Show;
Sunday afternoon Appraisal Clinic; Info: 609-921-
6748, or gbarbara.webb@princetonhistory.org

Saturday, October 2 - Monmouth County -
Old Wall Historical Society Fall Antique Fest;
Antique appraisals; Info: 732-449-7888, or 732-
682-1675

Saturday, October 2 - League of Historical
Societies of New Jersey meeting, Grover
Cleveland Birthplace, Caldwell; a chance to
attend a League meeting nearby. Info: Linda
Barth 908-722-7428, or barts@att.net

News Briefs

Faithful readers of past News Briefs know that there has been a prolonged debate in Holmdel, NJ, over the fate of the Bell Labs building designed by Eero Saarinen in 1959-62. The township of Holmdel has been in negotiations with a developer to preserve the main building while at the same time adapt it for commercial purposes. As of this summer, the parties are still short of an agreement on the appropriate use for the building and on the expected (and needed) tax revenues that can be derived from it. It's important because it's a significant work by a major architect. Stay tuned...

Ellis Island has received a grant of \$29 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The money will be used to help restore 5,500 feet of deteriorated seawall, upgrade communication systems between Ellis and Liberty Islands, and stabilize the baggage room and dormitory where incoming immigrants waited for entry into the United States. The immigration station was designed by the architectural firm of William A. Boring (1859-1937) and Edward L. Tilton (1861-1933), who also designed the Ridgewood Avenue School and the Arcade Building in Glen Ridge.