



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

September 2018 Vol. XLI No. 1



President's Letter

## Finding a Place in History

IT'S HARD TO believe that this past August marked two years since my family decided to move from the Philadelphia suburbs to Glen Ridge. My husband had accepted a job in the City and we did our homework to find the best possible town for our family. I still remember our first drive through town with kids in the backseat yelling "Wow!" every time we passed an older, cooler amazing house. Like most of you, we were drawn here for the schools, transport, and spectacular architecture. Glen Ridge welcomed our family and we now consider it our home.

I'm a professor of history at Rowan University, where I teach classes in early American History. As a professional historian and museum curator, I'm familiar with the crucial role that local historical societies can play in their communities. Sadly, many have shuttered their doors because of a lack of interest. Through the Glen Ridge Historical Society, I found my place in town. I met like-minded history souls who love this town and its rich history. They dedicate countless hours to ensure our history is preserved and reaches everyone through an array of public programs. I'd like to extend a special thank you to our outgoing president, Sally Meyer, who has taken me under her wing and offered wisdom, knowledge, and kindness in welcoming me.

Speaking of public programs, our upcoming walking tour on Sunday, October 14, explores the central area of town developed by Asabel Darwin. Not only did Darwin line our streets with beautiful Queen Anne houses, such as those along Snowden Place (*photo*), he successfully lobbied

the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western to provide regular train service with the promise of financial assistance for building a train station. His office building at Glen Ridge Hall (now Boiling Springs Savings Bank) temporarily housed the public library and municipal offices on its second floor. For further details about the tour, see below.

Looking past fall, we have many other wonderful events, including our annual members' holiday party, gingerbread-house decorating, and a pop-up exhibit highlighting the buildings and homes that have been lost to time.

I hope you can take a minute to join the hundreds of town residents who are members of the Historical Society. A household is only \$20, or \$10 for senior citizens. Just head to our website at [glenridgehistory.org](http://glenridgehistory.org). If you are already a member, thank you for your continued support! The best way to keep up with our activities is through Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety](http://www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety).

Jennifer Janofsky



## News and Goings-On

**Walking tour.** Our upcoming walking tour on Sunday, October 14, will include many of the 26 houses built in the late 19th century by local developer Asabel Darwin on Ridgewood, Hillside, and Woodland avenues, Snowden and Appleton places, and Clark Street, predominantly in the Queen Anne style. The tour will begin at 1:30 p.m. at the train station on Ridgewood and conclude at the corner of Hillside Avenue and Washington Street. The tour features a children's scavenger hunt for architectural details.

Refreshments will be served on the porch at 34 Hillside Avenue at the end of the tour.

**Museum hours.** The Terry S. Webster Museum is open the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. to noon or by appointment with Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674. It maintains an architectural and historical file on every house in town, including old documents and photographs. The museum also features exhibits of town history.

## Homes for the Brave

WITHIN MONTHS OF the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945, it was evident that a shortage of housing for veterans was a critical postwar problem for the United States. Though small in population, Glen Ridge was not immune. Housing options for veterans returning here were slim. Nearly all existing homes were occupied, undeveloped land was scarce, and multi-unit apartment houses were not yet built.

In December 1945 a survey by the Veteran's Service Committee found only 16 rooms available for rent. By this time the committee had received nearly 50 appeals for housing. Families were at a particular disadvantage, as landlords preferred single men or couples without children and did not permit tenants to cook.

The following spring a plan emerged to create housing at Sherman Avenue School, which had closed in June 1943 due to low enrollment. In July 1946 the Board of Education deeded Sherman Avenue School to the Borough Council for five years. Hundreds of dissenters attended a rowdy public hearing on the proposed conversion, complaining about lowered property values and overcrowding at Forest and Central schools—to no avail. On October 22, the Borough Council passed a resolution to remodel and equip Sherman

Avenue School to accommodate eight families. At the same meeting, the council announced the approval of additional temporary housing west of Clark Street. While many communities were using military barracks for veterans housing,

these 10 units would be prefabricated homes. The cost was borne by the N.J. Department of Economic Development.

Fifty-five applicants for these 18 new units filed applications with the local Citizens Emergency Housing Committee. Rents were set at \$40 a month for houses, \$48 for the seven three-bedroom apartments at Sherman Avenue School, and \$58 for the one four-bed-

room apartment. All were occupied by the end of April 1947. In a surprise announcement the following month, the state Department of Economic Development approved five additional prefabricated houses in the triangular park at Baldwin Street and Highland Avenue, which were ready by August.

By 1954 all of the veterans housing in Glen Ridge was gone. Most occupants moved out of town. Today the town swimming pool sits on the Clark Court housing site. Medical buildings at 123 Highland Avenue and 230 Sherman Avenue replaced the Baldwin Street prefabs and Sherman Avenue School.

Sally Meyer



*"Veterans Village" on the site currently occupied by the community pool. From The Glen Ridge Paper, Jan. 10, 1947. Reprinted with permission from Worrall Community newspapers, Inc./ The Glen Ridge Paper, as agreed Sept. 16, 2018*



# GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Queen of the Queen Annes

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 85 Hillside Avenue. It is located in a neighborhood filled with Queen Anne-style houses. You can find beautiful Queen Anne houses on Snowden, Clark, and Winsor, as well as Hillside. There are so many that matching houses were often built in twos and threes. But 85 Hillside isn't lost in the crowd. It has distinctive details that aren't found in that—or any other—part of Glen Ridge.

The architect, Wilbur S. Knowles of the firm Thorpe and Knowles in New York, is known to have designed two other houses in town, 79 Ridgewood and 61 Douglas. 85 Hillside was built circa 1888 on a large property that extended down the hill to Thomas Street. There was (and still is) a carriage house in back, which at the time had quarters for a coachman.

The most prominent and eye-catching features of the house are the two dormers. Each consists of a single window with a very steep, faceted roof. This shape is described in the Historical Society archives as “monk’s hood” dormers. While I can find no definition of the term either in my architectural books or on the Internet, I do find that the term “monk’s hood” is a very evocative and appropriate description. (You can see a variant of monk’s-hood dormers at 391 Franklin Street near Montgomery Street in Bloomfield.)

The visual impact of the attenuated roof is reinforced by the very narrow side walls of the dormers. Each window fills almost the entire

face of its dormer. A decorative panel below the windows has a bead detail that appears in other locations on the house, under the window sills on the second floor and along the edges of the south bay window.

These dormers have an interesting history. Sometime early in the 1900s a fire destroyed the attic, dormers, and

windows. The scalloped shingles are also used as a border along the line of the second floor. Originally many of the first- and second-floor windows had shutters, but they did not have mullions dividing the glass.

The house has a broad wraparound porch. Such porches were common on Queen Anne style houses and fre-

quently served as a room like any other in the house. There are elaborate turned posts with spheres reminiscent of the bead details elsewhere on the house. Very closely spaced square handrail supports form a traditional balustrade. The handrails on the front steps do not appear in the earliest photos of the house, but today it is clear that, though new, they were designed with great attention to turned details that complement the porch posts.

The bulk of the house is a simple block. Shallow bay windows extend the wall surface on the north and south sides of the house, and the main roof wraps around and bulges out over the bays. The bay window on the north side is a little different. It intersects with a gabled roof on the porch below and has four small square windows instead of the large double-hung windows seen on the other bays.

The gable face of the porch room has the most unusual detail on the house: a decorative surface pattern laid out using hemp rope that has been painted to match the wood behind. The rope curls in loops across the surface of the wall in a symmetrical but fanciful pattern. Built in the midst of fascinating and eccentric Queen Anne-style houses, 85 Hillside is extraordinary.

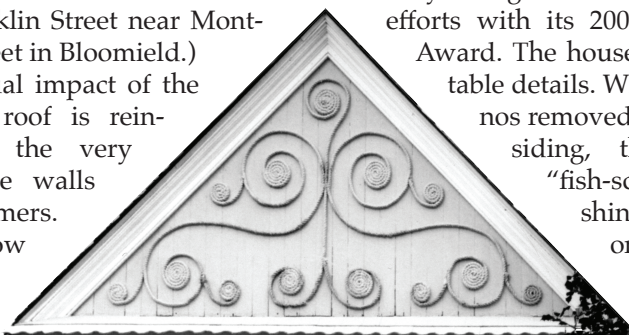
**Karin Robinson**



roof. Afterwards, the owners replaced the charred roof and built standard doghouse dormers in place of the originals. The dormer roofs were not as steep as before, and each dormer had a small gable facing the street.

Richard and Giovanna Cipriano bought the house in 1999 and undertook a major restoration. As part of the project, they rebuilt the dormers in their original form. The Historical Society recognized their meticulous efforts with its 2006 Preservation Award. The house has other notable details. When the Ciprianos removed the aluminum

siding, they revealed “fish-scale” scalloped shingles on the second-floor walls in the band between the





UPON ENTERING THE ceremonial wrought iron gates of Freeman Gardens, visitors are welcomed by 300 plant rose beds. A wide range of tea, floribunda, and shrub roses makes for a spectacular show in late spring. Following the axis of the rose garden and looking west, the viewer finds a high brick wall topped with lattice panels. In its center is a bronze sculpture of a dolphin spitting water into a pool.

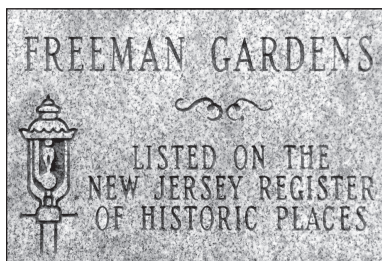
Freeman Gardens was opened to the public 50 years ago this past summer. Clayton and Winifred Freeman bought the plot in 1929. (Clayton was a business executive and politician, best known as head of the state's Republican Party in the late '30s.) In 1935 they hired local landscape architect Ethelbert Furlong to design the gardens. Furlong specialized in English-, French-, and Mediterranean-style gardens and eventually added Japanese-style elements to his repertoire, which brought him wide acclaim. He would go on to collaborate with the famous architect Philip Johnson on a sculpture garden for the Museum of Modern Art. Furlong was partial to long, axial paths that lead from one area to another, a style influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. He employed this approach to the Freeman's property, designing its many "rooms" so visitors could explore each area. Furlong also included a Japanese pond that was once home to koi and aquatic plants.

Clayton Freeman died in 1959 and Winifred in 1967. The following year their heirs bestowed the gardens on the town. On June 16, 1968, Mayor Herbert Johnson signed the resolution dedicating the land. The Freeman Gardens Association was formed as a nonprofit association responsible for


*Freeman Gardens in 1935 (below left) and Ethelbert Furlong's revised design drawings from 1970 (right). Images courtesy of Kevin Sherry*

overseeing and maintaining  
this gem for public use.

The association strives to be true to the original design



as much as possible. This includes replacing those trees that have aged out or been damaged by storms. Although the hemlocks are almost all gone, five rare American chestnuts are thriving. So are oaks and American redbuds, as well as a Japanese pagoda tree, ash, sweetbay magnolia, and dogwood. Two Mulberry trees provide a delicious treat to squirrels, birds, and sometimes children. Three apple trees were planted in an area that was once an orchard and should bear fruit within the next few years. We have also introduced raspberries, strawberries, and blueberries and recently restored the lattice panels to their 1935 specs.



The moist wooded area of the gardens is currently being replanted from a list of original specimens such as Solomon's seal, trillium, lenten rose, ferns, and an array of hostas. Each spring we plan to line the new woodland paths with wood chips to suppress weeds and make for a more inviting stroll. Although not original to the design, a rustic gazebo would make a lovely addition as a place to sit and enjoy the surroundings.

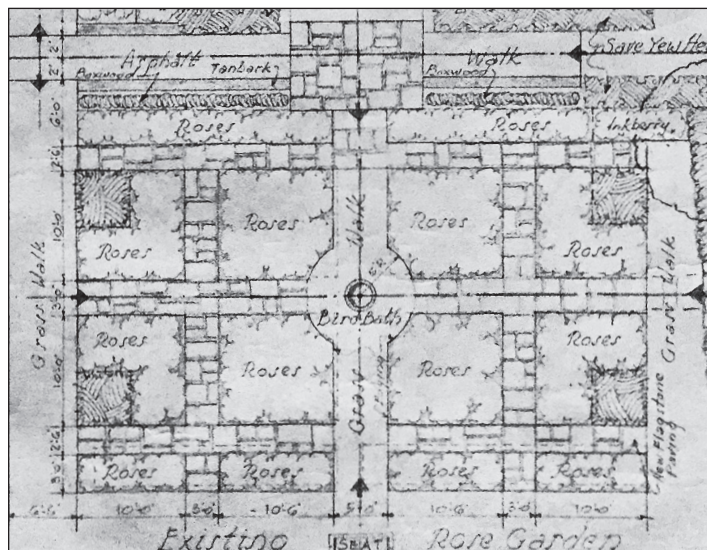
On the north side of the garden is a low brick kick wall where a cherub once stood guard, surrounded by an upright spray of water. That site is currently planted with hostas, but we hope to restore it to Furlong's original vision one day.

Today the gardens host Girl Scout ceremonies, band concerts, graduations, and weddings throughout the year. The association also sponsors fundraising events such as an annual Halloween family fun day, which includes a pumpkin festival, arts and crafts, and live music. Thanks to generous donations and community support, the Freeman Gardens Association continues to care for this community treasure to ensure it remains a beautiful sanctuary to be enjoyed by all for generations to come.

**Kevin Sherry**

Kevin Sherry

*Kevin Sherry is the president of the Freeman Gardens Association.*





*Pet Petronaci's Campus Luncheonette*

## "The Store"

ONE DAY IN the late 1940s or early '50s when I was about 8 years old, I visited my father at the Glen Ridge Fire Department, then housed in that part of the Municipal Complex where now only the Ambulance Squad remains. We walked across Herman Street to see the new ice-cream parlor rumored to be opening soon. In a narrow, one-story building—since torn down for the parking lot—we met Dan and "Pet" Petronaci, the new owners working on remodeling the interior.

It became a town institution. Dan sold out after a couple of years, but Pet Petronaci ran the place until well into the late 1960s. While there were two grocery markets and some other shops in the center of town, everyone called Pet's place "The Store," as if it were a Platonic ideal—although Pet toned things up in ads in the high-school yearbook, the *Glenalog*, calling it "The Campus Luncheonette." There was no municipal pool or other place in town for hanging out or finding your wandering friends in the days before cellphones. You always found people you knew at The Store.

Near the door on the right when you came in was a glass case full of candy bars for a nickel. Behind it on the wall was a rack with a full range of cigarettes for a quarter. Next came a lunch counter with revolving stools that fronted ice cream tubs, a soda fountain, milk-shake mixers, and a grill. At the back wall was the jukebox—5 cents a play, eight for a quarter—that saw the birth of Rock and Roll in the mid-'50s.

Down the other wall ranged some booths, with tables and benches for more multiparty conversations than the side-by-side counter stools encouraged. Bob White (GRHS 1960) recalls: "In the booths you could push aside

the ashtrays and play Match Football by flicking a matchbook lying flat to slide across the table. If it ended hanging over the other side, you scored."

Juniors and seniors with cars or access to cars would cruise Ridgewood Avenue and pick up younger acquaintances. All boys hitchhiked on Ridgewood after the age when it became *infra dignatum* to ride a bike unless you were delivering newspapers. (Girls were too refined to hitchhike.) "Where are you going?" "The Store." Once I was picked up at Washington Street by Freddy Alworth (GRHS 1959). By the time he pulled in front of The Store, the radio was tuned at full blast to



*The Campus Luncheonette at 24 Herman Street, from the 1961 high-school yearbook. Used by permission of Glen Ridge Board of Education*

Alan Freed, the first self-styled "King of Rock and Roll." Fred wouldn't leave his convertible before singing along for three whole three minutes of "Why Must I Be a Teenager in Love?"

I don't know how Pet made a living. Municipal workers tipped, but kids never did. Parental allowances formed a bell curve, starting around 50 cents per week and ending around \$5. Cutting lawns, shoveling snow, or babysitting brought in a dollar, maybe two. Six days of paper delivery, mornings or afternoons (there were both kinds of newspapers then, and lots of them), paid \$3. Pet never pushed

a customer, although some stayed all day spending very little. You could get either nickel or dime cokes. Ice cream was 10 cents per large scoop, a bowl of soup was a quarter, milk shakes a quarter, and big hamburgers were 30 cents. If times were really tough, Pet let you nurse a "Pine Tree Float"—a glass of water with a toothpick.

In those innocent days, Italian food was usually known only to Italian families at home. Even pizza was still new to the general public—available only in shops on the Newark border of Bloomfield. Pet gave many of us our first taste of garlic on wonderful, breath-spoiling meatball sandwiches on hard rolls.

His grill also provided other delicacies. Jean Evans, née Lange (GRHS 1964), recalls: "Pet knew the best Italian bakery around. He never let us down. When you ordered a roll, he sliced it lengthwise and you got half for 10 cents. You never knew if you were going to get the top half or the bottom half—slathered in

butter from a tub and toasted on the grill. Pet was a big friendly easygoing fellow who seemed to love kids. We were loud and raucous, but nothing seemed to faze him."

The neighbors finally persuaded the Borough Council to shut him down for noise and parking problems. Pet found another spot at the end of Edgewood Road in downtown Bloomfield, near Christ Church. I was away from town by then, but I heard things were never the same. Still, Pet came to our class reunions until he died. Like The Store, he lives on in many happy memories.

**William R. Vesterman**

*William R. Vesterman (GRHS 1960) is an emeritus professor of English literature at Rutgers University in New Brunswick*

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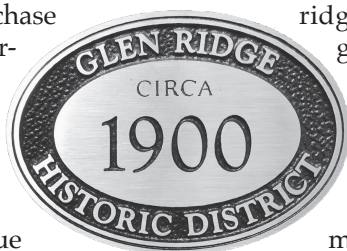
**FALL WALKING TOUR**  
**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14**

## Glen Ridge Historical Society Catalog

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for Glen Ridge history by making a purchase from our catalog of Historical Society items.

**Historic District house plaque.** Celebrate your home's history with a custom cast-bronze plaque denoting the Historic District of Glen Ridge and your home's circa construction date. The order form is available on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety](http://www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety). Plaques take approximately six weeks for delivery. Member price \$180

**Holiday ornaments.** A beautiful custom brass ornament featuring the iconic image of the Glen Ridge gas lamp is available for \$15. Each ornament comes in a red presentation box and includes a brief town history. The order



form is on our website at [www.glen-ridgehistory.org/glen-ridge-gas-lamp-ornament/](http://www.glen-ridgehistory.org/glen-ridge-gas-lamp-ornament/). You may also purchase ornaments at the Glen Ridge Public Library. We also offer the older gazebo and train-station ornaments for \$15.

**1906 maps.** Reprints of the famous A.H. Mueller Atlas of Essex County are available for both the north and the south ends of town. Member price \$80

**Glen Ridge Memory and Matching Game.** A classic handcrafted memory game with 48 tiles showing historic sites

and buildings in Glen Ridge. The storage box includes a description of each image. Suitable for all ages. \$15

**Gas lamp postcards.** Full-color 4x6 postcards showing a Glen Ridge gas lamp in spring, summer, autumn, and winter. \$1 each



To make a purchase, email us at [glenridgehs@gmail.com](mailto:glenridgehs@gmail.com) or mail your order and payment to P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028-0164. Purchases may also be made by visiting our museum during open hours on the second Saturday of each month. It is located above Boiling Springs Savings Bank at 222 Ridgewood Avenue.