



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
**THE GASLAMP**



**Illuminating Our Past**

February 2019 Vol. XLI No. 3

*President's Letter*

## The Lost Houses of Glen Ridge: A Special Exhibition

THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY party, hosted by Jane Francisco and Colin Faulkner, brought together members and friends who appreciate Glen Ridge's history and architecture. Our thanks to Jane and Colin for welcoming us into their beautiful home for a great evening!

The annual gingerbread decorating activity was also a resounding hit, even though Mother Nature threw us a curveball. A special thank you to the Glen Ridge Congregational Church for hosting our event after a pipe burst at the Linden Avenue School the day before. Dozens of families decorated spectacular houses with candies, gummies, and more. The event would not have happened had it not been for the hard work and dedication of Megan Connolly—thank you, Megan!

Building on the success of last year's fashion exhibit, we are excited to offer another exhibition this month. *Glen Ridge Then and Now: Fire, Fashion, Finances* highlights the buildings and homes no longer standing in town. Our exhibit committee, comprising Megan Blank, Toni Murphy, Ann Nicol, Karin Robinson, Sally Meyer, and me, had great fun digging through our archives to select the photographs. The exhibit will be on display at the Terry Webster Museum, just upstairs from the Boiling Springs Savings Bank, on Feb. 22, 23, and 24. We

have evening hours on Friday, Feb. 22, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Coming home on the train? Stop by before heading home.

Don't forget to nominate an exterior restoration project for our annual Preservation Award. It could be your own project, a neighbor's, or a home you have seen and said: "Wow! That looks amazing!" Winners receive a plaque to display on the front of their house. We have offered the award since 1985. Curious about past winners? Stop by our tent at the annual Arts Festival and Eco Fair, where we display pictures of them. Nominations can be emailed to Karin Robinson at [karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net](mailto:karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net).

With spring approaching we're sure to be getting new neighbors in town. We would love it if you spread the word about our museum, house files, and events. It's such fun seeing new residents learn about their home's history. The best way to keep up to date with Historical Society activities is on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety](http://www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety). Each month we post great photos from our collection and remind everyone of our museum hours.

Lastly, I am pleased to announce that the Essex County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs has awarded the Historical Society a grant for \$1,625, which we will use for general operating support in 2019. **Jennifer Janofsky**



### News and Goings-On

**Photography exhibit.** Come view (and mourn) the architectural gems that burned down or were torn down before the Historic District was established. The exhibit will be open on Friday, Feb. 22, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 23–24, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Note the date change from previous announcements.)

**Preservation Award.** We will announce the winner of the 2018 Historic Preservation Award at our annual meeting

in April. If you or someone you know has completed a historically significant project in preserving or restoring their home exterior, please contact Karin Robinson at [karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net](mailto:karinrobinson.arch@verizon.net) for an application. Judging takes place in March.

**Seeking writers.** Interested in researching and writing a short article on local history for *The Gaslamp*? Please contact the editor, George Musser, at [georgejr@musser.com](mailto:georgejr@musser.com).

News From the Town Historian

## Not on the Parkway and Not a House

SINCE 1895 GLEN Ridge has upheld the dream of then-mayor Robert Rudd that the town “be a residence section second to none.” For many years, that meant building only single-family homes. Any talk of rooming houses or other multiple-family dwellings was quickly dispelled.

That began to change in the waning months of World War II, as people realized the postwar period would bring demographic changes. The multiple-family zoning issue was given a full airing in February 1945 at a meeting of the Battalion Forum, a discussion group founded by members of a local World War I defense battalion. At its conclusion, there was still little support for any zoning changes. Some houses in town were nonetheless converted to multi-family residences in the mid-’50s. By August 1961, the idea of adding apartment buildings to the landscape had begun to attract some adherents. Of particular interest was an area on Bloomfield Avenue between Freeman Parkway and the Montclair border, which the Federal Urban Renewal Administration had recently designated as blighted because of a growing number of junkyards.

*The Glen Ridge Paper* invited residents to submit opinions on the issue. Feelings ran high on both sides. Those in favor of rezoning saw an apartment building as a source of increased tax revenue and a progressive way for empty-nest-

ers to remain in Glen Ridge. Those opposed worried about the increased costs of fire protection and more children in the schools. Harold Brown, the township municipal judge who lived nearby on Woodland Avenue, hoped the editor of the newspaper would “see through the glamour involved in this selling of a birthright for a mess of pottage” and write a persuasive piece opposed to the proposal. He did not.

In 1962 the urban renewal plans were scrapped and the area rezoned to permit luxury high-rise apartments, offices, and professional buildings. The Underwood Mortgage and Title Company of Irvington bought the land soon after. The last house on the property, 918 Bloomfield Ave., was demolished in August 1963. The Lehigh Construction Company of Plainfield began construction of what they named Parkway House in



*Parkway House, shown on cover of Lehigh Construction Company sales brochure*

January 1964. Costs were projected at \$1.8 million. The word “House” may have been a deliberate choice to play down the size of the structure.

Parkway House opened for occupancy on Jan. 1, 1965. The eight-story high-rise included four penthouse suites with terraces, 24 two-bedroom apartments, 69 one-bedroom units, underground parking for 64 cars, and deck parking for 60 cars. The renowned local landscape architect Ethelbert Furlong, who previously designed Freeman Gardens, drew up the landscaping plan.

**Sally Meyer**



## GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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### THE GASLAMP

Editor	George Musser
Columnists	Sally Meyer Karin Robinson

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Except where otherwise noted, photographs come from the Historical Society collections.

## All in Perfect Proportion

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 66 Highland Ave. Built in 1905, it could be classified as either Dutch Colonial or Shingle Style. The architects, Davis, McGrath, and Shepard of New York, were known for rustic retreats and family-camp compounds in the Adirondacks. This house is clearly an anomaly in their portfolio. It has many of my favorite architectural details, and I find it very impressive that those details were assembled in moderation. The architects avoided building a house that looked like a catalog of construction opportunities.

The first such detail is the gambrel (“broken gable”) roof. It was the hallmark of houses built by Dutch settlers in New Jersey and the Hudson River Valley in the 1600s. The originals were extremely simple, typically consisting of a single volume with two rooms and a sleeping space in the attic. The gambrel roof re-emerged with the development of the Shingle Style in the late 1870s. The shape put the focus on the roof as the primary surface of the house, starting at a high ridge and sloping continuously to the first floor.

At 66 Highland, the roof has an unusually steep slope, which to my eye is very refined. The main volume of the house is simply two intersecting gambrel volumes. It is asymmetrical and eye-catching, but straightforward at the same time. The attenuated shape is, of course, very practical, as it provides broad spaces on the top floors.

As originally built, the entire house was clad in wood shingles. There was no delineation between the roof and wall materials. Today Shingle Style houses typically have new asphalt shingle roofs, which make the continuous shingle shell difficult to visualize.

The smaller details are used with restraint, avoiding the visual noise of a

typical Victorian or Queen Anne-style house. The second-floor windows, for example, are divided between the dormer and the gambrel front. Yet they are all exactly the same size and placed in a perfect horizontal line with no further variation. Even the shutters maintain a perfect rhythm while adding texture and shadow.



66 Highland Ave.

The first-floor windows are Cottage Style double-hung windows, meaning that the upper sash is smaller than the lower sash. It is a minor visual variation on the window you would expect to see. The third-floor windows on the three gambrel ends are Serliana or Palladian windows, named for Andrea Palladio—a brilliant architect who worked in Italy in the mid-1500s and is credited for popularizing a window style with a center arch and two smaller side windows. They make the house look historical and sophisticated—this isn’t a country colonial. The center arch has linked pointed panes of glass and a wood keystone. The side windows have panes that align perfectly with the center window sash.

The third floor also has a row of five tiny awning windows under a shallow shed dormer. I really like the way a shed dormer works on a Shingle Style house. The roof is folded upward just

enough to fit the horizontal windows. It’s a completely different look from a colonial doghouse dormer.

The plain posts around the side porch are perfect—no decorative columns required—and used in groups for visual impact. Those posts support the roof and porch brackets, which are cantilevered to the edge of the eaves and finished with a simple curve.

Large curved brackets support a very broad, shallow overhang protecting the entrance. The roof is shallow enough to require copper cladding—another small detail adding to the richness of the house. The way the overhang extends as a curve over the porch is especially charming. Early photos of the house show a simple landing with side rails and broad steps with no rails. The renovation, though perhaps a little fussy, is nonetheless a collection of more of my

favorite details. The sculptural benches bring the substantial presence of the house down to the scale of the people who live there. The handrails, which builders often erect as a functional afterthought, are tied to the graceful curves of the built-in benches as a single composition, all fitting neatly underneath the original overhang.

The bay window to the right of the front door also fits precisely under the curved edge of the second-floor overhang. Called a shingle “kick,” this detail gives life to an otherwise static wall. The bay window works similarly on the horizontal wall below: the window folds forward very slightly to interrupt the shadow line across the face of the house.

You can find many examples of each of these details on houses in Glen Ridge, but 66 Highland is outstanding in the way that all of the details are used on one house.

**Karin Robinson**

Central School

## A Shut and Open Case

LAST APRIL, THE Glen Ridge Board of Education announced its acquisition—or, perhaps more accurately, reacquisition—of the former Central School from Wells Fargo for \$5.1 million, which it financed via municipal bonds. The school district is upgrading the facility to conform to prevailing building and occupancy codes, with the aim of welcoming new pre-kindergarteners in September and eventually K–2 students as well.

The backdrop to this situation is interesting unto itself. It concerns the past life of Central School and its closing and decommissioning by the Board of Education in 1983 after years of debate, a story that I got swept up in and that dramatically changed my own life.

For most of its history, Glen Ridge has run smoothly and well. A unique political arrangement called the Civic Conference Committee obviates contested elections. Volunteerism has been strongly encouraged and all manners of organizations have contributed meaningfully to the borough, including the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary, the Glen Ridge (Battalion) Forum, Freeman Gardens, sundry drives and fundraisers for school activities, and a very active Home and School Association.

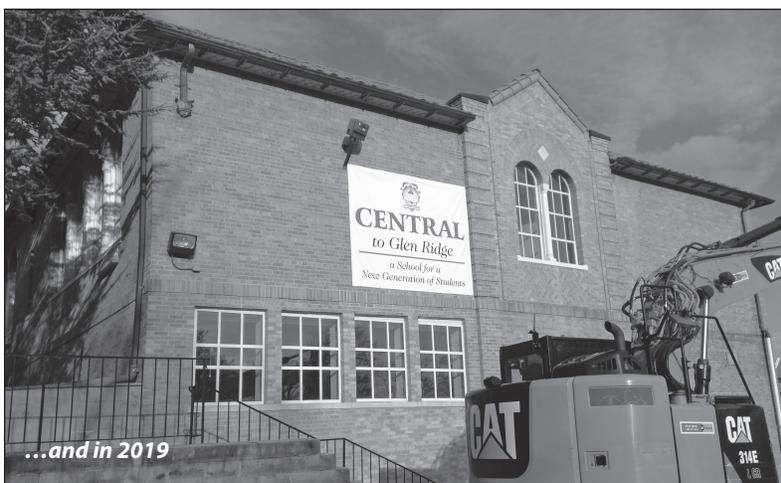
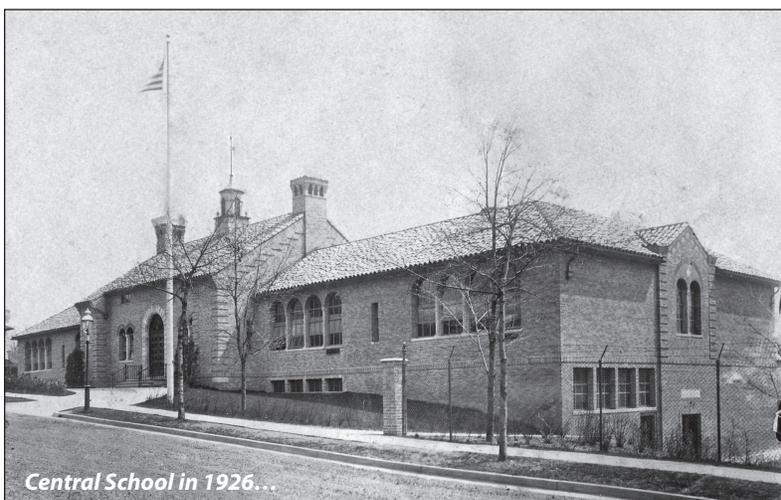
As with most small towns, citizens here have tended to leave the operations of their local government to their elected officials. While always concerned with taxes and election-year issues, we pay less attention to other questions. Town Council and Board of Education meetings are sparsely attended, as most working folks have no

shortage of family matters to address. Glen Ridge largely empties out during the daytime as a substantial portion of the adult population commutes.

But these smooth waters were roiled in January 1979 when a citizens' advisory committee appointed by the Board of Education issued a preliminary report on declining enrollment.

small town, few things arouse stronger feelings than school closures. Audiences filled Board of Education meetings and spoke up not about the scheduled agenda items, but about the disposition of the schools. I think that national events had something to do with people's reactions. Glen Ridge, like the rest of the country, had been unsettled by the Vietnam War, Watergate scandal, and Iran hostage crisis. People were uneasy.

The board's position, initially, was that it was doing no more than assessing the prospective K–12 enrollment and preparing for prudent actions. It insisted it had no plans to initiate any closings, although the declining enrollment was a clear and present problem that needed addressing. Despite these reassurances, the prospect of closures became the overarching topic of discussion in town. In June 1979, after many spirited meetings, the citizens' advisory committee released the final version of its enrollment report. It projected the number of students to drop below 900 and sanctioned the closing of Forest Avenue and Linden Avenue schools. But the board did not act on this



It concluded that the school system would be left with excess building space that could be put to a better use: "to provide for unmet needs of senior citizens," for instance. The report attracted an uncommon amount of attention and discussion.

Small groups began to emerge with a spectrum of questions. Why did the report come out? What were its ultimate objectives? Some suggested it was a prelude to school closures. In a

recommendation, and the controversy seemed to simmer down.

The following March, however, the board voted to close Central School at the end of that school year. On May 24, it had to put this plan on hold after a serious fire broke out at Linden Avenue School. Many regarded the fire as suspicious and feared it would hasten the closing of the school. The suspicions proved unfounded—the fire was a bizarre accident involving a student

and a can of glue—but the fears were vindicated when, on Feb. 25, 1981, the board voted to close Linden and Forest. It planned to retain the high school, the middle school, and Central School, to be renamed Glen Ridge Primary School—all centralized near the busiest intersection in town.

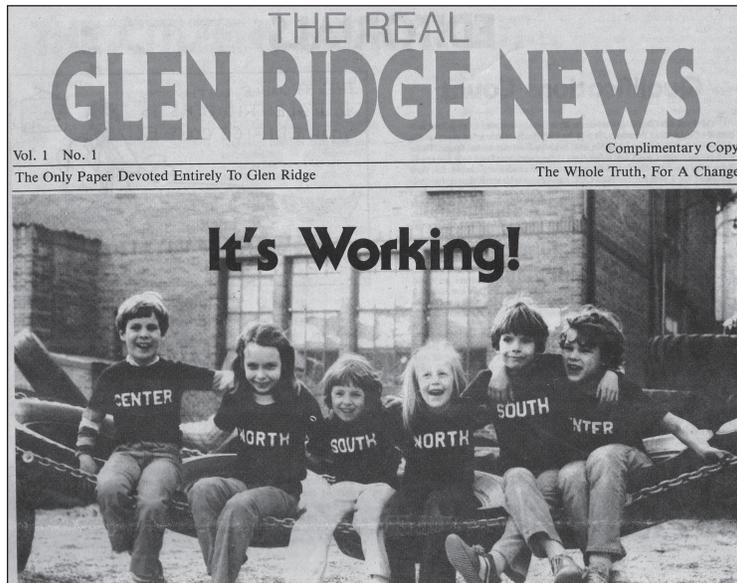
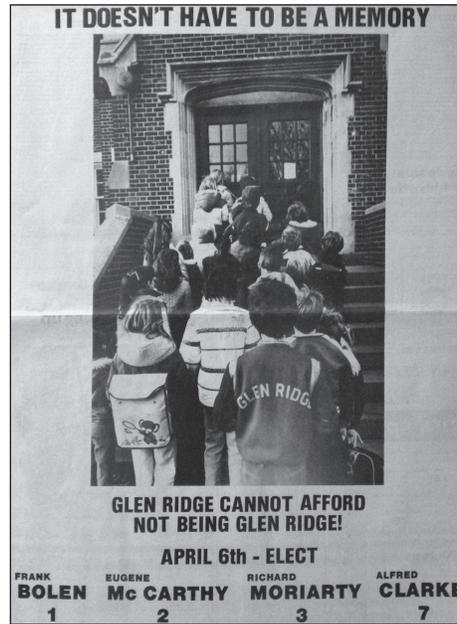
Protest groups sprung up and raised money for legal representation through a variety of neighborhood fundraisers. A petition opposing the plan gathered 2,000 signatures. *The Glen Ridge Paper*, which had done a commendable job of reporting local matters, enjoyed a couple of record years as the latest issue flew off the shelves each Thursday. This was the biggest thing in Glen Ridge.

I had been one of those people who never attended town meetings. I was much too busy with work. My wife, Mimi—born and raised in Glen Ridge, and one of the few who attended local meetings regularly—was the first person I knew who sensed the sea change.

Stirred to action, I assembled a 40-page document referred to as the “Ring Report,” which cast doubt on the board’s plans and urged reconsideration of what I thought could be an irreversible harm to the borough. In the report and its follow-ons, I concluded that enrollment would recover to the 1,500 level. I based this finding on simple regression analyses showing that the national, state, and local birth rates tracked one another quite closely. The decline in Glen Ridge showed every indication of being a cyclical trend that would reverse. Additionally, as senior citizens sold their homes, younger families would move in.

Yet even after I had debunked predictions of declining enrollment, the board shifted the rationale for its closure plans. These moving targets—an ever-changing, rather crazy quilt—included loss of state aid, threats of regionalization and loss of local control, unaffordable economics, and poor teacher-to-student ratios. Engaging the board became increasingly frustrating

as its reasons and responses changed frequently. Discussions became non-productive, even furious. *The Glen Ridge Paper* ran hundreds of letters ranging from clever and witty to downright



Full-page ad in *The Glen Ridge Paper* (top) and hand-delivered leaflet (above) expressed opposing views on proposed school closures in the April 1982 Board of Education elections.

hostile. A newly formed group known as ABE (Alternatives for Better Education) emerged and announced a slate of candidates to oppose the Civic Conference Committee nominees for Board of Education in the April 1981 elections. The ABE organization won three seats on the board, but the dispute persisted.

The next step was a lawsuit, *Ring et al. vs. Board of Education*, in the administrative court in Newark seeking an injunction to any school closings. The court welcomed the case and cited me and the other plaintiffs for our civic responsibility, but advised that it would prefer a local political decision.

In the April 1982 elections, three more ABE candidates won seats and the dissenters finally gained control of the board. The following month, the new board voted to maintain Forest and Linden and to divest itself of Central School. Many saw this action as a scorched-earth tactic to prevent the issue of school closings from ever reemerging, while other regarded it as bad policy in case enrollment recovered. Which, as I had predicted, it did.

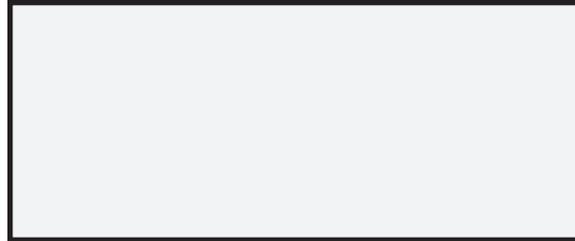
In the end, the matter was decided by geography. Two-thirds of the town’s population was served by the two neighborhood schools at the northern and southern ends of the borough, while one-third was domiciled in the center. As hardly a surprise, the two contested elections ran 2-to-1 in favor of Forest and Linden. The majority sentiment was to preserve neighborhoods anchored by local K–4 schools.

Thus it was that Forest and Linden lived on. Linden reopened in January 1983 after a heroic volunteer effort to clean up the mess and restore the facility to use. But was the sale of Central a smart move? Nearly 40 years later, Forest and Linden continue to be major assets—attractive assets—to our little town. They are extant owing to the work of some concerned and energetic citizens. Central will soon be back, and life goes on. The total (pre-K and K–12) enrollment is now pushing 1,900. Some things have a way of repeating. Quoth our much-beloved departed neighbor Yogi Berra, “Is this déjà vu all over again?”

**Carl Ring**

*Carl Ring is an investment banker and has lived in Glen Ridge since 1977.*

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**PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT**  
**FEBRUARY 22-24**

**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). Delivery takes approximately six weeks. 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. Order online at



[www.glenridgehistory.org/glen-ridge-gas-lamp-ornament](http://www.glenridgehistory.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 Ave.