



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

October 2019 Vol. XLII No. 1



President's Letter

Keeping Up With History

ACROSS THE STREET from our house is a beautiful, old weeping willow tree. Every spring its branches explode with brilliant white flowers. Every fall its gracious limbs are flooded with orange, red, and yellow leaves. It is stunning. Fall is a wonderful time in Glen Ridge. When walking around town, I love to hear the echoes of the marching band at Hurrell Field and the cheering soccer parents at Carteret Park. It truly is a great time of year to get out appreciate our beautiful community.

Speaking of walking, join us October 13 for our walking tour of Highland Avenue (see below). And if you're looking for another place to explore this fall, I encourage you to check out the Bloomfield Cemetery on Belleville Avenue. The *Gaslamp* editor, George Musser, and I had the wonderful opportunity to tour the grounds this past summer. Sections of the cemetery were designed by one of the most important landscape architects of the 19th century, Alexander Jackson Davis. The cemetery is the final resting place of some of the first families of Bloomfield, such as the Dodds, Baldwins, and Davises, as well as many veterans, including one from the United States Colored Troops. Uncomfortable with the idea of visiting a cemetery? Don't be! These cemeteries were designed to be visited. When we visited I spotted many varieties of birds

including a large hawk. Friends tell me they've even seen foxes. The cemetery welcomes visitors and even dogs as long as they are leashed.

Our most recent "pop up" exhibit in February saw over 300 people visit and share their own stories, and even on a

cold and rainy night in April, over 50 of you turned out for our annual meeting. Your continued support motivates us to continue to offer fun, engaging activities for the whole community. These events are supported not only by your memberships and contributions but also by Essex County's Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs. Every year the New Jersey Historical Commission's County History Partnership Program provides funding to counties throughout the state to support local history organiza-

tions. Our application has been submitted for 2020 and we look forward to hearing from them.

Many of you have found your way to our Facebook page, @GRHistoricalSociety. It's a great way to keep up with upcoming events and enjoy pictures from the collection. Now you can keep up with us on Instagram! Thanks to board member Susan Link for coordinating these posts. Find us at [gr_historical_society](https://www.instagram.com/gr_historical_society). We hope you have a great fall and we look forward to seeing you soon!

Jennifer Janofsky



News and Goings-On

Annual walking tour. This year's tour, "Stylish Glen Ridge," will be centered on Highland Avenue, one of the oldest streets in Glen Ridge. As the neighborhood grew, so did the variety of house styles. Please gather at the grassy triangle at the corner of Highland and Glen Ridge avenues at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 13. Refreshments will be served after the tour at the home of Megan and Ryan Blank, 43 Wildwood Place. For more information please contact glenridgehs@gmail.com.

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.

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 Other Golf Course

ON OCTOBER 10, 1894, a nameless golf club opened in Glen Ridge, with a nine-hole course laid out on Ridgewood, Forest, and Bay avenues. In 1900 it redesigned its course around a small clubhouse built on Oxford Street. As the town population grew, so did membership, and in 1911 the organization was incorporated as the Country Club of Glen Ridge. The following year, it opened an 18-hole golf course and the present clubhouse farther north on Ridgewood Avenue.

Not everyone, of course, had the means to belong to a country club. But for a short time during the Depression, a new golf course in Glen Ridge was open to everyone, the Glen Ridge Garden Golf Course—a miniature-golf course built on an empty lot at 718 Bloomfield Avenue, where Bottle King and Starbucks are located today. It was promoted as the “sportiest and largest 18-hole miniature golf course in the vicinity,” which was not an idle brag at the time, where in Bloomfield alone there were 12 mini-golf courses!

The borough had prevented the owners of the property from developing their land for several years. The Board of Adjustment had denied applications from Guy Gabrielson and Adolph Olson to build an apartment house and a gasoline station. But in July 1930 it approved their variance request to build

a mini-golf course when the mayor suggested that turning them down again might lead to expensive litigation.

The Glen Ridge Garden Golf Course opened on August

2. The startup costs were \$7,500 and receipts averaged \$50 to \$100 a day. It operated six days a week from 10:00 a.m. to midnight and on Sundays from noon to midnight. To placate the Clark Street neighbors, the property was beautifully landscaped, and parking was available in the rear. “Hoodlumism” was not permitted. While bright lights and loud music were a frequent source of complaint, Saturday night door prizes seemed to ease the pain.

The Independent Press commented that “we should feel grateful for the miniature golf course craze which has given employment to many.” A local sheet metal factory, for example, made all the structural framework. The newspaper also remarked that “the miniature golf courses are at least cleaning up a lot of rubbish besmirched vacant lots.” But the craze was short lived; most of the courses closed after less than two years. Profits were negligible, hours of operation long, and the outdoor activity season short. *The Independent Press* quipped in March 1931: “An example of frozen assets—a miniature golf course in winter.”

Sally Meyer



Raymond Grace, age 4, of Bloomfield scored 56 at the Glen Ridge mini-golf course circa 1930.



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE GASLAMP

Editor George Musser

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House of Tudor

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 36 Sherman Ave. Built in 1913, its façade is a perfect set piece of Tudor design.

The post-industrial Tudor style is a reimagining of early English building traditions. Though named for the House of Tudor, the British monarchy of Henry VII in 1485 through Elizabeth I in 1603, the original architectural style belongs to the shorter period from 1500 to 1560. Its most recognizable feature is a timber-framed exterior filled with wattle and daub, composed of small woven wood branches (wattle) daubed with a mixture of clay, animal dung, mud, and sand, which dries to a hard finish and is whitewashed for water-proofing. This technique is the precursor of the plaster-and-lath interiors we see in our houses in Glen Ridge.

We know the original Tudor houses from Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon and other thatched-roofed cottages portrayed in storybooks. In reality, they weren't particularly enchanting places to live.

But a revival of the Tudor style in England in the latter half of the 1800s adopted charm as the essential ingredient. It was, in part, a reaction to the growth of industry in England. Tudor themes were a mainstay of the Arts and Crafts movement, which celebrated hand-crafted decorative arts. Designers sought to stop the corruption of traditional craftsmanship caused by rapidly developing mechanization. Half-timbered buildings were appropriated as the epitome of Ye Olde England.

These were not wattle-and-daub Tudor houses. Despite the best intentions of the Arts and Crafts purists, new Tudor houses were built using standard construction methods. The half-timbering was an applied veneer. In the early 20th century, this Neo-Tu-

dor style became extremely popular in the U.S., where it projected power and pedigree. A house may be new, but it appears to have been on that site for centuries. The use of Tudor motifs expanded rapidly with the growth of American suburbs in the 1920s.

36 Sherman has all the right elements to evoke charm. The front door, with its leaded glass window in the shape of a Tudor arch (a flattened Gothic arch), is set in a delightful small-scale alcove seemingly supported by heavy timbers. Carefully proportioned brackets frame the alcove from the front and

jut forward to support the porch eaves. Large wooden brackets are an important symbol of rough wood framing. Originally used to support cantilevers, they are completely unnecessary for modern construction, and I love them. They imply structural strength despite their intricate curves and steps. 36 Sherman also has them on the second floor—paired!—on each side of the gables, supporting the eaves as well as large wood arches and doing their best to look indispensable.

The pattern of the half-timbering is a simple grid, except at the top of the gables. A house of this size could easily be overwhelmed by elaborate half-timbering patterns. A grid provides the best representation of the post-and-beam construction of a Tudor house.

The beams spanning the windows on the first floor have a slight peak at the center to make long beams sturdier. It's of no need here, but it is a great detail showing a little extra effort by the designer.

Having always admired this house from the front, I was surprised to notice the side walls of the house. They are clad in wood shingles from the second floor up to a gambrel roof. The double-hung windows are exactly the same as those in the neighboring houses. I was initially disappointed, hoping for more characteristically Tudor details, but I came to see just how special the front of the house was in the history of Tudor revival buildings. It was a façade—here a literal façade—and the builder wasn't afraid to let it show. A relative of the Old West false-front building, it says it all upfront. Here it is done with exceptional care and attention to detail and, ultimately, more thought-provoking. Sherman Avenue is more interesting for it.

Karin Robinson



36 Sherman Ave.



Glen Ridge Radium Site

Carteret Clean-Up

KIT SCHACKNER and her husband, Kelly Conklin, bought their house on Carteret Street in 1987 knowing that it was part of a radium-contaminated site. It was what they could afford. Although the contamination was limited to their garage, it was plenty hot. When she first had it tested privately, the contractor “freaked out at how radioactive it was,” Schackner says. The core sample they dug up “triggered their sirens and everything.”

Many Glen Ridgers today may not even realize that Carteret Park and its neighborhood were once a Superfund site. Radium contamination was first identified in an aerial gamma-ray survey in 1981, one year after passage of the Superfund law. It came from the U.S. Radium Corporation in Orange, which produced fluorescent watch dials between 1917 and 1926, poisoning many workers, as recounted in Kate Moore’s book *The Radium Girls* and dramatized in a play by the same name.

Waste from the factory was used as landfill in nearby areas, including Glen Ridge, West Orange, and Montclair, with the preponderance of the fill in the park now known as Carteret but identified on early EPA maps as “Barrows Field.” Solid radium decays to gaseous radon, and both substances are known carcinogens. Soil analyses found a radioactivity level of as high

as 3,000 picocuries per gram; the background level is 1 picocurie per gram.

For her first year and a half in Glen Ridge, Schackner didn’t hear much about what was going to happen, even

Both the late Senator Frank Lautenberg and Representative Bill Pascrell, then representing Glen Ridge, were instrumental in pressuring EPA to remove radium from all affected properties, including the park, Schackner says.

Did it help, I asked Schackner, that Glen Ridge was preponderantly white and wealthy? Yes, she says, but the effort also benefited Montclair and West Orange, which were included in the full remediation.

That began in 1991 and, for five years, as radium was removed from 300 properties, residents endured backhoes, trucks, orange fencing, mounds of contaminated dirt, and

constant noise. The four most contaminated houses had to be supported by structural underpinnings as contractors dug 30 feet down to remove all the radium underneath. An astounding 5,000 truckloads of soil were hauled to a disposal site in Clive, Utah. The sycamore trees on Carteret Street bordering the park were removed. After the houses were done, EPA began remediating the park, finishing in 2000. In the end, the full 250-acre cleanup in the three towns cost \$220 million.

Since then, Carteret Park has been the center of other, less grave, controversies, mostly concerning the state of its playing fields. But in early September, the park that EPA had once considered sealing off and declaring unusable, looked green and lush and was full of people.

“I learned that one person can make a difference,” Schackner sums up. “And I realized that was a really powerful and beautiful thing.”

Debra Galant

Author, journalist, and Baristanet co-founder Debra Galant covered the radium clean-up for The New York Times. She recently moved from Glen Ridge to West Orange.

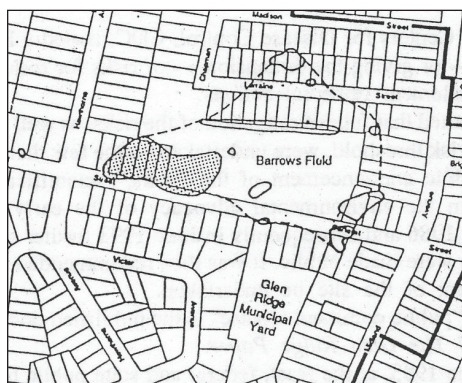


Excavations of contaminated soil behind Carteret Street. Photograph by Will Rogers

though she knew the Environmental Protection Agency was involved. Neighbors weren’t talking about it, and this was before the Internet was widely available. She kept her toddler away from the contaminated garage.

Then, in 1989, EPA announced its plan for the site. It would clean up the few houses that were absolutely riddled with radium and then create barriers to seal off the rest. “They were going to just bury it,” Schackner says. “That created a blowback. I think it was the largest response to an EPA Record of Decision at the time.”

That’s when Schackner and some of her South End neighbors, notably Carl Bergmanson and Ruby Seigel, began to organize. They started a group, Lorraine Street for a Radium-Free Glen Ridge, using the tools of the era: talking to neighbors, organizing meetings, and calling congressional representatives.



Map by engineering firm CDM Smith shows original dump (crosshatched area), redistributed material (dotted outline), and localized radioactive hotspots (solid contours).

Dead-End Kids

WHEN I WAS born in February 1942, we lived in a three-family house at 210 Baldwin Street, two doors from the intersection with Sherman Avenue. Because Sherman dead-ended at the Erie Railroad tracks, you could play catch or running bases or touch football in the street for hours without moving for a car. At that time a wooden footbridge spanned the tracks. We played on those tracks and on their embankments covered with sumac—good for spears and arrows, but only so-so for bows. A penny placed on the rails would be flattened to the size of a quarter by a train. Engineers waved at you from the coal-burning steam engines. If you stood on the bridge, you would be enveloped like a classical god in a cloud of smoke, cinders, and steam.

People on the dead end didn't seem to mind your playing tackle football or Hide and Seek in their backyards. Ring a Lario—some said Ring a Leveo—was another game of capture and freedom, this one with teams. In Red Rover ("Red Rover, Red Rover—let Diane come over!") the summoned one had to break a chain of joined hands or join the chain.

North on Sherman were some vacant lots for climbing trees and building forts. On the east side near Bay was a big, overgrown lot—site of former tennis courts and useful for underground houses. Across the street was a baseball diamond and backstop. Mountainside Hospital's Hospitality Shop served as an ice-cream parlor after innings.

Baseball in those days meant hardball with gloves. You could play a variant called One-a-Cat with as few as three kids—hitter, pitcher, and fielder—if you allowed imaginary runners. Everyone had a glove and most had a bat, but balls were hard to come by. They slowly deteriorated until the leather came off and their string packing unraveled in the air. Once, we unwound the yarn completely and were surprised to find a hard, pink ball at the center. Our repertoire of now-lost games also included a variant of basketball called "OUT." Players all had

to match someone's successful shot or earn a letter until you were O-U-T of the game.

Our neighborhood was classic mid-20th-century suburban melting pot. Among my friends were Italians (Ernie Durino, Eddy Durino, Billy DiFuria), Germans (Prast, Keagher, Huber), Scandinavians (Sandberg, Hesterfer), English (Stevens, Samuels, Price), Polish (Tomasko), and Irish (Corcoran, Dugan, Devany).

We lived on the second floor of 210 Baldwin, a house owned by Mr. Prast, the janitor at the Glen Ridge Library, who lived on the third floor and raised turkeys in a coop next to the garage. The family of one of his children was on the first floor. Most of the rest of the neighborhood consisted of single-family, detached houses, then as now. The people were working-class strivers, paying off a mortgage or saving up for a down payment, with steadily employed dads and full-time moms. My father was a firefighter (later chief), as was Jim Corcoran's. The Durino men were both plumbers, and Mr. DiFuria made penny candy in East Orange. The Dugans and Devanys were policemen, Denny Price's father was a municipal clerk in town, and Freddy Schmidt was a mailman, later postmaster. The father of my lifelong friend John Sandberg worked in the Union Carbide factory in Bloomfield. Just before the end of the war, the Sandbergs bought a house on Sherman two doors from the field for \$6,500. When my father bought a comparable house a bit south at 168 Sherman in the early 1950s, he paid \$13,500. So, house appreciation is hardly a new phenomenon in our town.

For years the Samuels next door had their milk brought by horse-drawn wagon. An old man with a horse and wagon came by periodically to sell vegetables and sharpen knives. The 1800s were only the day before yesterday, and the newspapers carried interviews and obituaries featuring people born into slavery and Civil War veterans.

A radio console adorned the living room where I listened to *The Lone*

Ranger introduced by the "Victory" movement of *The William Tell Overture*: "Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear when the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains and his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, led the fight for law and order in the early southwest. 'High-O, Silver—away!' Tonto is played by Jay Silverheels." *The Flight of the Bumblebee* introduced *The Green Hornet*. His faithful Japanese valet, Kato, quickly become a Filipino after December 1941.

Gangbusters came on like gangbusters with sirens, shots, and squealing wheels. "While traveling in the Orient, Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man about town learned the secret of INVISIBILITY. Now he walks abroad, the terror of evildoers everywhere. Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows! Heehahahaha!" (Voice by Orson Wells.)

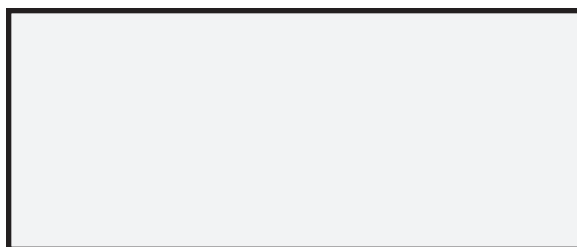
But best of all: "Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's SUPERMAN, that strange visitor from another planet who (disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper) wages a never-ending battle for Truth, Justice, and The American Way!"

The Children's Hour on the weekend with Big John and Sparky (introduced by The Teddy Bears' Picnic) provided more child-oriented fare. I also listened to the nightly news with my parents, as my mother knitted, and remember my first political indignation when John L. Lewis led his coalminers out on strike in the fall of 1945 to make up for wartime pay freezes. We also listened to *The Make-believe Ballroom* ("one hour of sweet romance") where I learned the standards of Tin Pan Alley. Rock and Roll was still in the womb of time, waiting to be born kicking and screaming into the neighborhood when we all became teenagers in the 1950s. But that is another story.

William Vesterman

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

Address Service Requested



WALKING TOUR
OCTOBER 13, 1:30 P.M.
HIGHLAND AVENUE

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. 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. 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 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.