Glen Ridge Historical Society

THE GASLAMP

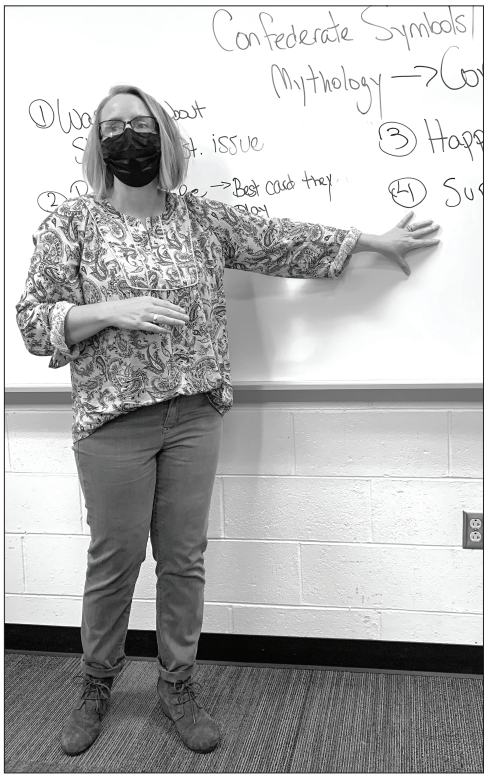
Illuminating Our Past

October 2021 Vol. XLIV No. 1

President's Letter

Demystifying Critical Race Theory

For the first time in two years, I'm back in the classroom. I'm starting this fall semester with excitement and enthusiasm tempered with a little bit of anxiety. This semester I am teaching "Topics in Public History." Those include: Confederate monuments and memorials, plantation museums, interpreting America's battlefields through the lens of indigenous communities, and LGBTQ history at America's historic sites. We started off the semester with a discussion of the 1619 Project and critical race theory.



This past summer, it seemed like you couldn't pick up a newspaper or turn on the news without hearing a debate around critical race theory. Angry parents packed school board meetings, states debated curricula, and teachers found themselves in the middle of a culture war. There remains considerable confusion about what exactly "CRT" is.

When I use CRT in my classroom, it means presenting all the voices of the past. For too long, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson dominated our classrooms, with no discussion of Ona Judge or Sally Hemings—two of the enslaved women who supported their lifestyles. On the Fourth of July, we hear much of Jefferson (as we should!), but how interesting also to hear Frederick Douglass's speech "What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Bringing balance to these conversations complicates our understanding of the past and allows us a deeper appreciation for today's conversations around race.

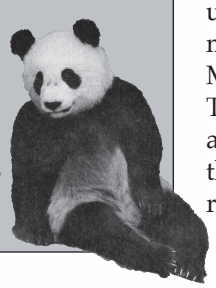
New Jersey has one of the most progressive history curricula in the country, but many states fall far behind, relying on outdated textbooks that don't reflect current historical scholarship. Both President Trump's 1776 Commission and Texas's 1836 Commission promoted "Patriotic Education," arguing America's children need to be taught about America's exceptional past. Indeed, America does have a history of exceptionalism, but that exceptionalism is complicated and tempered by its long history of racial oppression.

As a historian, these issues are important to me beyond the classroom. Our November 2020 issue of *The Gaslamp* tackled the long history of discrimination in Glen Ridge. It featured articles on minstrel shows performed at the Women's Club; the experience of Muriel Sutherland, the first Black valedictorian of Glen Ridge High School in 1934; ethnic intimidation against Jewish families; and the sometimes challenging experience of raising a Black family in Glen Ridge. I am pleased to announce that the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey has awarded us "special mention" for this issue. I'd like to thank the contributors to the issue, Sally Meyer, Christine Brennan, and David Lefkovits. I'd like to especially thank our editor, George Musser. George puts in countless hours for every issue to provide Glen Ridge the very best historical research and writing.

The Historical Society is starting to get back to normal. We've settled into our new space at the Glen Ridge Congregational Church and we've been busy planning our fall walking tour. This year's tour will be "From Herman to Sherman" and will feature our municipal buildings, mills, Hurrell Field, and the oldest extant house in Glen Ridge. The tour will take place on Saturday, Oct. 30. Participants will meet at the plaza in front of the Municipal Building at 1:30 p.m. The event is free and families are welcome! I hope to see you there to enjoy some great history and a beautiful fall day.

Jennifer Janofsky

In This Issue



News From the Town Historian

Pot, Pans, Poetry

On May 27, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared an unlimited national emergency in response to Nazi threats of world domination. Some in government pushed for direct public participation in the effort. They believed significant psychological advantages would result from a broad voluntary endeavor. Soon after, the National Aluminum Salvage Drive was organized as the first communal appeal for help. Federal agencies estimated that a national effort could collect 10,000 tons of aluminum, enough for 2,000 fighter planes and 500 four-engine bombers. The drive ran from July 21 to July 28.

July 1941 aluminum drive at the Glen Ridge Police Department

The Glen Ridge Defense Council judged the scrap campaign "an ideal medium for the borough ladies to provide their oft-expressed interest in the defense program." Twenty-one district captains, each with 10 assistants, were appointed by leaders Mrs. S. Ward Stanton and Mrs. I. J. Townsend to canvas door-to-door. (As was the practice at the time, all but one of the women were identified in the newspaper by their husbands' names.) They accepted only items that could be spared without being replaced. Boy Scouts and 4-H girls helped to unload and sort the goods as they were delivered to the lawn in front of the police headquarters on Herman Street.

A caption for a photo in *The Glen Ridge Paper* described the pile as "an airplane in the raw." The 2,450 pounds of scrap included soup pots, frying pans, coffee percolators, double boilers, cake tins, kettles, cocktail shakers, ice-cube trays, fishing reels, hair curlers, hub caps, and ice-cream molds. The largest item, at 69 1/2 pounds, was a fireless cooker; the smallest, at a tenth of an ounce, was a 35mm film case. The collection was delivered to Camp Edison in Sea Girt on Aug. 3. A piece of verse by Lyda C. Delano, Glen Ridge overseer of the poor, was tied to the handle of a frying pan: "Dear old frying pan, we're going to part. Glen Ridge is calling, so you'd better start. You've cooked us chicken for many years but, pannie, I'm not shedding tears."

Some in the country questioned whether the nation really faced an aluminum shortage. The director of the Office of Production Management issued a statement that it did, but the national campaign was not as successful as hoped. Only about half the intended tonnage was collected. Scrap dealers were bypassed in favor of smelters who were ill-equipped to clean, sort, and compact the materials. Piles of aluminum sat on many village greens for months. The cleanup was not completed until March 1943. **Sally Meyer**

THE GASLAMP

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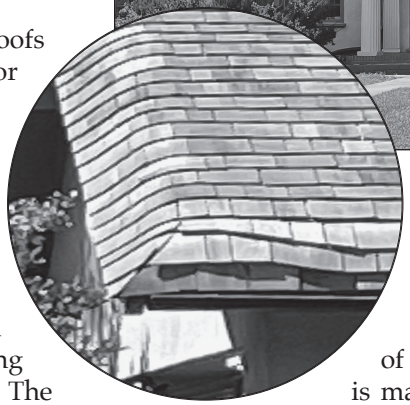
Our Favorite Houses

There's a Catch to This Thatch

One of my favorite houses in town is 388 Ridgewood Ave. It has the only remaining "shingle-thatched" roof in Glen Ridge. The roof was recently very carefully reshingled so it remains true to its original design. There were once quite a few such roofs in town, but all the others have been replaced or covered with different materials.

388 Ridgewood Ave. was designed by the prolific Montclair architect Dudley Van Antwerp in 1910, just as shingle-thatched roofs were coming into style. The intent of the roof design was to recreate the texture and look of a British reed-thatched roof and followed the growing interest in suburban Tudor-style houses. The technique was further popularized by American wood-shingle manufacturers in the '10s and '20s.

388 Ridgewood Ave.



Thatched roofs have been used for well over a thousand years and are found all over the world. Stalks of reeds, rushes, wheat, straw, or heather are bundled together and laid in rows along the roof supports. The thatch sheds water and keeps the interior of the building dry. Thatched roofs often bring to mind English cottages. In fact, thatch was the only roofing material available to the majority of the rural population of England until the late 1800s.

A shingle-thatched roof aims to express the woven, organic detail of a true thatched roof. The rows of shingles are not straight and even, but rather undulate in both wide and narrow courses, which range in size from 2 to 5 inches. The sides of the shingles are cut at slight angles, so the curves appear as smooth as possible. This technique is best used on steep roofs, where the sinuous lines of shingles can be readily seen. Those waves of uneven shingles are easy to see at 388 Ridgewood Ave.

388 Ridgewood Ave. has other features of a shingle-thatched roof. The most notable are the rolled eaves, which soften the appearance of what would otherwise be a rigid wood frame. The eyebrow-shaped eaves over the front windows push the idea even further; this roof can imitate whatever natural shapes could be formed using straw.

The structural support of a shingle-thatched roof is made up of standard rafters that are cut into curves for the shingles to follow. The eaves typically have a radius of 22 inches; the rolled ridge, between 8 and 12 inches. The rafters make a complete turn back to the walls at the edges, so that the framing can be completely concealed by shingles.

The wood lath is flexible enough to form a curved nailing surface. The cedar shingles, on the other hand, do not bend naturally. They must be steam-bent or steam-curled to the correct shape. The shingles are soaked in water for 24 hours and then steamed for 30 minutes. After the shingles are softened and molded on a metal brake, a machine tool for bending, they are immersed in cold water to harden and fix the shape.

The style became popular enough by the '20s that several shingle mills were set up to sell precut and prebent cedar shingles. One company, Creo-Dipt, located near Buffalo, N.Y., would even take your architectural drawings and provide framing diagrams to suit the design. They sold the custom-curled shingles for that framing.

The desire for shingle-thatched roofs died out quickly in the late '20s with the introduction of asphalt shingles. Some homeowners chose to overlay asphalt shingles on the curves of the cedar roof. Many examples can be seen in Glen Ridge today, including 89 Ridgewood Ave., also designed by van Antwerp. The real-estate records on file in the Historical Society archives document the change to the roof. Listings from 1910 to 1960 all indicate a cedar roof, but a listing in 2000 indicates an asphalt roof.

339 Ridgewood Ave. once had a shingle-thatched roof with rolled ridges and eaves. Listings from 1934 to 1949 make note of a cedar roof, but a 1966 listing describes the roof as asphalt over thatch shingles. In 2014 the roof was redone in slate. Unfortunately, slate cannot be molded into smooth curves, and the resulting roof has folded shapes and sharp edges, unlike the original.

One last note about 388 Ridgewood Ave.: The house has a beautiful entry porch with exposed rafter tails and two very minimalist fluted columns paired with matching pilasters. It is not at all appropriate for a house that evokes an English cottage, but I strongly believe that some varied and unpredictable designs, if well executed, are always welcome.

Karin Robinson

First Asian Family in Glen Ridge

From Linden Avenue to the Himalayas

In 1937 a giant panda—the first ever seen in the Western world—created a sensation at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo. He was named Su-lin, after Adelaide Su-lin Chen Young, who grew up at 190 Linden Ave. in Glen Ridge.

My brother met Su-lin in 1995 when she walked into his medical practice in Spruce Pine, N.C., north of Asheville. He always seeks to establish common ground with his patients, and he mentioned that I was working on an exhibit about China for the Memphis Zoo that would feature pandas. She replied: "I know a little something about pandas." Astounded by her story, he introduced us via email. Su-lin and I began to correspond and finally met at my brother's home in 2001. She brought with her an album with over 200 photos of her 1934 expedition to the eastern margins of the Himalayas, and she enthralled our family with her adventures.

Su-lin's father, Ming Tai Chen, moved his family to Glen Ridge from an apartment in New York's Chinatown in 1918. Doctors had told him that only fresh country air would improve the health of his sickly eldest child, 7-year-old Su-lin. Chen was part-owner of several stores, apartment buildings, restaurants, and a nightclub. Despite his business success, Su-lin's sister Eugenia Wing later wrote that he needed the approval of the immediate neighbors to buy the property. They were the first Asian family in Glen Ridge.

At Glen Ridge High School, Su-lin went by her first name, Adelaide, or just "Adie." In her senior yearbook, she called herself "the class enigma," bragged about her high grades, and commented, "She's very bashful towards anything but work." When she was a teenager, her father gave her a part-time job as a cigarette girl at his nightclub. On her first day, she left her cigarette tray and money for another cigarette girl to watch while she went on break, and when she returned, her tray with the cigarettes, the money, and the other girl were all gone. Chen fired his daughter.

Su-lin went to Wesleyan College for Women in Macon, Ga., the first women's college in the U.S., but returned home after only a year, possibly because of finances: As the Great Depression deepened, Chen's businesses began to fail.

Su-lin Chen's Glen Ridge High School yearbook photo in 1929, courtesy of Glen Ridge Public Library (top). Jack, Su-lin, and Quentin Young on their 1934 trek (above). This and the photo at right are courtesy of Jolly Young King.

She transferred to the Newark School of Fine and Industrial Arts and met the charismatic Chinese American explorer Jack Young at a church event. Young, 24, had been a guide for two of Teddy Roosevelt's sons in 1929, when they became the first Westerners to shoot a giant panda and brought back the skin as proof of the elusive animal's existence. (That was acceptable in those days.) In 1932 he was part of the first expedition to summit Mount Gongga Shan, also known as Minya Konka—thought at the time to be the highest peak in the world—although he did not reach the top himself.

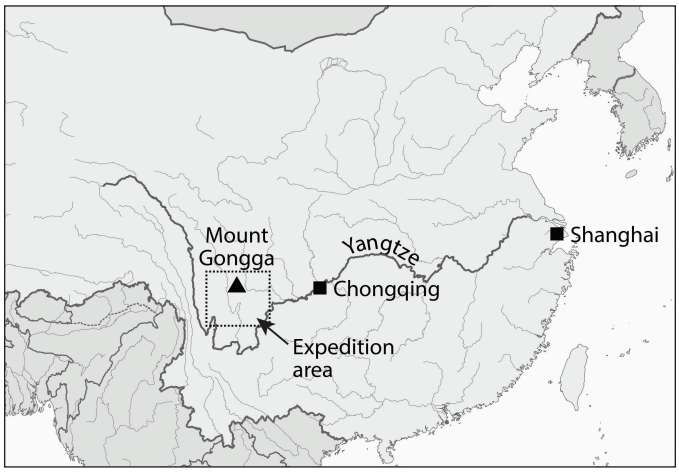
Su-lin's parents had been married in a traditional Chinese ceremony. They hoped for a similar service for their daughters, not the quick trip to the Essex County Hall of Records that Su-lin and Jack made before setting sail on their honeymoon, an eight-week freighter voyage to Shanghai. It was courtesy of Jack's friends, the Roosevelt brothers, who owned the shipping line.

Having spent most of her life in a wealthy suburb, Su-lin began a rugged nine-month trek through the mountains of western Sichuan province. She collected and preserved plant specimens, wrote newspaper stories, led supply-gathering trips, and did her share of the shooting. To the people they met along the trail, she was an unusual sight: a lone woman traveling with an otherwise all-male group, wearing pants, and riding a horse.

Returning to Shanghai in late 1934, the couple met Ruth Harkness. Harkness was a New York dress designer whose husband, Bill, was an explorer best known for capturing Komodo dragons. He had gone to China hoping to return with a live giant panda, but died of cancer while awaiting a permit. Ruth went to China to continue his quest, knowing nothing about hunting, or pandas. Jack had known Ruth's husband and

called to offer his advice. He was leaving for another expedition and couldn't accompany her, but suggested his brother, Quentin.

Many meetings among Harkness and the Youngs ensued, reviewing maps and equipment. One evening, Jack brought Su-lin along. Ruth was impressed. She felt that if Su-lin, a woman of small build like herself, who had set off with no experience, could withstand the rigors of a lengthy expedition, then she could as well. Su-lin loaned Ruth her fur parka.



Area of 1934 expedition to mountainous western Sichuan. Base map from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:China_LCC_administrative_map.svg, licensed under Creative Commons

Ruth and Quentin succeeded. Only a few weeks into their trip, they found a live baby giant panda. Ruth wrapped him in Su-lin's coat and fed him formula from a baby bottle. She named the cub after Su-lin.

Su-lin and Jack did not settle down to a normal married life. Jack continued his mountain-climbing and specimen-hunting expeditions for a few years, but China was being torn apart. Japan saw its opportunity and invaded, while bombing China relentlessly. Nationalist Chinese soldiers fought the Communist Chinese for control. Jack was drafted into the Nationalist Chinese Army in 1937, rising quickly through the ranks to become a colonel and a top aide to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. When China joined the Allied forces during World War II, Jack joined the U.S. military and soon was serving as an intelligence officer and aide to prominent U.S. generals.

Meanwhile, Su-lin worked as a journalist, a disc jockey, and assistant to the vice-president of China National Aviation Corporation, while raising the couple's three daughters. They often hid in caves to avoid the Japanese bombing. She moved with Jack as his work took him from Shanghai to Beijing, Nanjing, and Chongqing. Su-lin and their daughters underwent two emergency evacuations from China, until her final and third one with Jack in 1949.

The family spent time in Taiwan in the mid-'50s, where Jack worked as an aide to General George Marshall, attempting to mediate between Chiang and Mao Zedong. Jack remained in the U.S. Army until his retirement in 1968 with the rank of colonel. The couple divorced in 1965. Su-lin began to work for the Social Security Administration and, on retiring, moved to North Carolina, where she met my brother. She gave me permission to showcase her exploits in an exhibition at the Memphis Zoo called "The Explorers' Trail," which opened in 2003. Sadly, by then, Su-lin was no longer able to travel. But I sent her photos, and she told me how pleased she was. We continued to correspond until her death in 2008, at 96.

Kathy Haaga

Kathy Haaga (below, left) is a designer and writer of zoo and museum exhibits in Memphis, Tenn. She is working on a book about Su-lin Young (below, right). The panda image on the first page of the newsletter is from the Field Museum.

Book Excerpt

October 1934, Himalayas, along the Tibetan border:
Adelaide Su-lin Chen Young [*right, foreground*] lay prone on a hillside in southwestern China, elbows propped on the ground, supporting a heavy Savage Model 99 rifle in her hands. At only five feet two inches, she wasn't much taller than the rifle was long. Head cocked to the side, she closed one eye, sighting along the rifle's barrel, taking aim at an adult Himalayan brown bear. She fired. Her bullet found its mark, plowing into the enormous bear, killing it. Her second shot killed the cub.

After Su-lin came down from the adrenaline rush of her first kill, it began to sink in that she had shot a mother bear and her cub. Her bravado evaporated. She vowed never to shoot another animal.

Washington Probably Really Did Sleep Here

Reflections on the Thomas Cadmus House

A few doors down Washington Street from the Glen Ridge line, on the corner of Ashland Avenue, is one of the most historic houses in Bloomfield, the Cadmus house. My mother, teenage brothers, and I moved there in 1976. I bought the house seven years later and owned it until 2015. For four decades it was not just my mom's home, but also her pride and joy. She loved its unique architecture and history. In the early 2000s, I began to research our family's deep New Jersey roots, and soon learned that Lt. Col. Thomas Cadmus, the Revolutionary War officer who greatly expanded the house in 1763, was her fourth-great granduncle.

223 Ashland Ave. circa 1910, viewed from the southeast. Russell Collection photo no. 58B, courtesy of the Glen Ridge Public Library

The original house was actually two distinct houses: a classic colonial Dutch design and an earlier cabin. Both were disassembled in 1913 and their stones reused to make the current configuration. Among the recycled brownstones was a tablet engraved with the year 1763, thus dating the main house. One vintage picture clearly shows the cabin, which undoubtedly predated the main house by one or two generations, and might have been a logging cabin. It had shorter walls, smaller windows, a Dutch oven built into one wall, and probably no basement.

The estate originally covered most of Glen Ridge south of Washington Street. Cadmus also acquired large swaths north of what is now Bloomfield Avenue; Herman Street is named for one of his sons. The *Gaslamp* editor, George Musser, has extensively researched colonial deeds and wills, but has not yet found how Cadmus acquired the land. His grandfather Johannes had relocated from present-day Jersey City to Belleville in the early 1700s, but how, when, and why part of the family came to Bloomfield and Glen Ridge may be lost to history.

The present-day house is an early-20th-century front-hall colonial. Only three original features survive: the roughly foot-thick brownstones, 1763 foundation, and first-floor structure. The fieldstone foundation sits only under about two-thirds of the current house. Not built for aesthetics—the stones were used pretty much in the shape they came out of the ground—it is nonetheless exceptionally sturdy. The foundation includes casement windows and a short staircase with steps of solid single stones, the centers now curved with wear after centuries of use.

The first-floor structure is timber, probably oak. The beams are enormous by modern standards—on the order of 12×12s, where 2×12s would be used today. They are hand-hewn with coarse tool marks and 18th-century joinery. In some places, you can still see ancient whitewash and the work of long-vanquished termites. Atop the timbers sit original floor-boards, roughly sawn in random-width planks, some wider than 16 inches. Those floor-boards now serve as subflooring for the first-floor hardwood.

The claims of George Washington's visit to the house are perhaps the most universal topic of interest in the house. The 1925 volume *Municipalities of Essex County* quoted Cadmus's great-great-grandson Eugene on a story passed down through the family. Musser has researched this, too, and found archival records that Washington indeed visited Bloomfield on July 9, 1778, having marched north after the Battle of Monmouth. He might have stayed at any number of houses in town, but one soldier's diary placed the army's campsite at "Crab Orchard," which, judging from other records, corresponded to Cadmus's estate.

My mother thought there was evidence of a tunnel connected to the basement, either for security during the Revolutionary War or as part of the Underground Railroad. Stories of tunnels and Underground Railroad stations are not uncommon for houses of that era, so I'm skeptical. But it is true that the house does have some strange spaces. One of the original casement windows appears to have been enlarged to give access to a crawl space under the circa-1930s wood-framed addition. In the late 1970s, one of my brothers dug up some stones in the eastern yard. After some discussion of whether those stones might have been part of a tunnel connected to the former window, we reasoned instead that they were from an old water well. **Chris Schopfer**

Chris Schopfer is a Bloomfield native and historian now living in Wilmington, Del.

Events Calendar

curated by Tom Coleman

Glen Ridge Historical Society

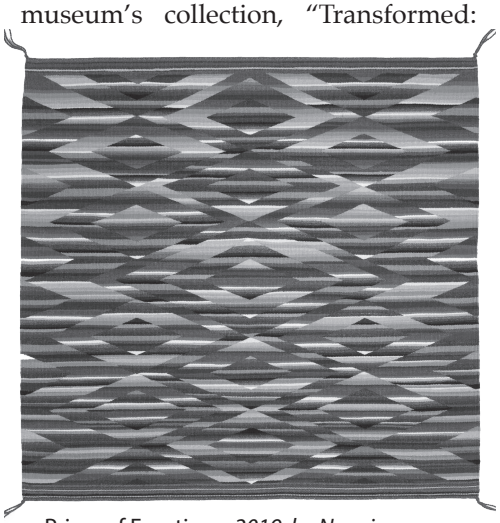
Annual walking tour. This year's tour, "From Herman to Sherman," will explore the historic heart of Glen Ridge, including mill sites and the oldest extant house in town. Gather at the Municipal Building plaza at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 30. Families welcome.

Museum closed. Our new space is too small for standing exhibits. For research requests, please contact Sally Meyer at glenridgehs@gmail.com or (973) 239-2674.

Neighboring Towns

Women of the American Revolution. The Montclair History Center will feature a virtual presentation "'Remember the Ladies'" on Dec. 2, 2021, focusing on Abigail Adams and other key women of the early days of the Republic. It dovetails with a new themed tour at the Crane House. Pre-registration required. montclairhistory.org

Montclair Art Museum. MAM reopened Sept. 11, 2021, following an extensive reinstallation of the collection. In addition to its famed George Inness and Native American art collections, MAM's new featured exhibits include "Color Riot: How Color Changed Navajo Textiles" (through Jan. 2, 2022) and an eclectic new show drawn from the museum's collection, "Transformed: Objects Re-Imagined by American Artists." montclairartmuseum.org



Prism of Emotions*, 2019, by Navajo weaver Venancio Francis Aragon. Merino/mohair yarns, aniline and natural dyes. Image by Craig Smith, courtesy of the Heard Museum.*

Farther Afield

The Social Fabric: Black Artistry in the Fiber Arts. The Morris Museum in Morristown has an exhibit highlighting African American textiles, including quilts in the Gee's Bend tradition of Alabama. Closes Oct. 24, 2021. morrismuseum.org

Zimmerli Art Museum. The Zimmerli's art collection at Rutgers University in New Brunswick is strong in works on paper and has numerous temporary exhibits on display, including "The New Woman in Paris and London, c. 1890–1920," through March 2022. zimmerli.rutgers.edu/art

New Jersey Historical Society, Newark. The Society draws fascinating exhibits from its collections, currently including "Ebb and Flow: New Jersey and its Rivers," examining the history, industry, and ecology of major waterways, and "Send the Word: New Jersey in the Great War," featuring uniforms, equipment, posters, letters, and other personal items that recall New Jersey in World War I. jerseyhistory.org

Armour-Stiner Octagon House, Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. A visit to this astonishing eight-sided neo-Roman mansion would make for a great fall day trip. The 1872 home has been painstakingly restored by the current owners. House tours require prior registration and tickets. armourstiner.com

Glen Ridge Historical Society Membership Form

You can join at www.glenridgehistory.org/join or by clipping this form and sending it with a check to: Glen Ridge Historical Society, P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028. Your membership contribution is tax-deductible.

Please enroll me as a member in the following category:

☐ Senior $10 ☐ Household $30 ☐ Patron $75 ☐ Sponsor $125

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

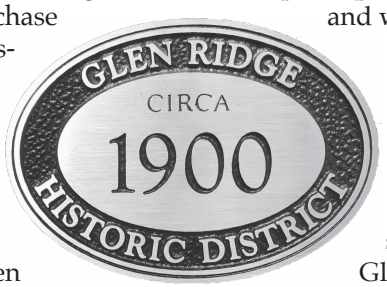
Phone: _____ Email: _____

GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 164
Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

ANNUAL WALKING TOUR:
OCTOBER 30, 1:30 P.M.

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 Glen Ridge Historic District and your home's year of construction. Delivery takes approximately six weeks. Member price $180

1906 maps. Reprints of pages from the colorful and detailed A.H. Mueller Atlas of Essex County are available for both north and south ends of town. Suitable for framing. Member price $80

Gas-lamp postcards. Full-color 4×6 postcards showing a Glen Ridge gas lamp in spring, summer, autumn, and winter. $1 each

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

Holiday ornaments. A beautiful custom brass ornament featuring the iconic image of a Glen Ridge gas lamp is available for $15. Each ornament comes in a gold presentation box and includes a brochure on town history. We also still offer the older gazebo and train-station ornaments for $15.

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. For house plaques, we will send you a form to enter your details. Purchases may also be made at our archives by appointment with Sally Meyer at (973) 239-2674. The archives are located on the second floor of the Glen Ridge Congregational Church at 195 Ridgewood Ave. You may also buy ornaments at the Glen Ridge Public Library with a personal check or exact change.