



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

October 2022 Vol. XLV No. 1



President's Letter

Finding a New Community

AS THE NEW PRESIDENT of the Historical Society, let me start by giving you my own history—my “house file,” if you will. I grew up in the Throggs Neck area of the Bronx, a neighborhood with a dense mix of single-family houses and apartment buildings. It was along the fire-truck route and under the flight path for LaGuardia, so there was always a lot of noise and action around that made me feel part of a larger community. My paternal grandparents lived in Co-op City, the largest cooperative housing community in the nation, a city within the city. To get to high school, I took two public buses. I studied architecture at Carnegie Mellon University and then moved back to New York, where I intended to live the rest of my life, if not for falling in love with a Jersey Girl.

I met Kate in college; she was studying architecture, too. We reconnected a few years after graduation when a mutual friend threw a party celebrating St. Barbara, the patron saint of architects. We got engaged, moved to Jersey City, and started a family. We lived on a main thoroughfare where my infant son loved to watch the buses go by. But the two-bedroom apartment began to feel claustrophobic.

My in-laws live in West Orange, so that area is where we started looking for houses. We kept revisiting this quaint house in Glen Ridge. The owner had already moved out, so we were looking at a blank slate and had many ideas of what could become of the weathered, circa-1899 house. Our home inspector commented, “Well, you could live here,” implying perhaps we shouldn’t want to. He did not see the charm or the potential as we did. (In a syndrome that many homeowners will recognize, much of our vision is still on the to-do list even after 10 years.)

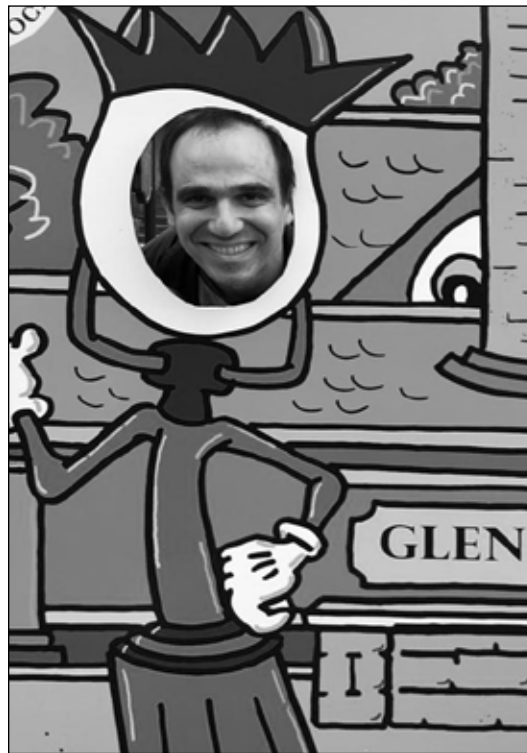
The quiet Glen Ridge street was very different from the hustle and bustle of the Bronx or Jersey City. My kids won’t need to take the bus to high school; they will have a five-minute walk. We do live close enough to the N.J. Transit tracks that trains replaced buses as entertainment for my son.

As an architect, I was fascinated with my house as well as the historic nature of the borough. Kate and I went to the Historical Society and looked at our house file. We made copies of historic photos and the original architectural drawings, both of which now hang proudly by our front door.

Years later I met with the Historical Society to discuss taking photographs of houses in town. That effort morphed into a coffee-table book that the Historical Society published, entitled *Glen Ridge: Living in History* (available on Blurb.com). During the making of the book, I signed on to the board of trustees and led some of the walking tours. During this time, I switched jobs from an architecture firm in the city to one in Montclair, and focused on local projects. I also dedicated my time as a Cub Scout leader and am currently on the Glen Ridge Historic Preservation Commission (which is distinct from the Historical Society). These activities make me feel I am part of the larger community and contributing to its well-being.

In April, I was honored to be nominated president of the Historical Society. After studying the past, I am ready to look toward the future. As Doc Brown says in *Back to the Future*: “Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one!” I am looking forward to the upcoming year and presenting wonderful programs to you, the members, as well as the community as a whole.

Nicholas Colello



*Local architect and new Historical Society president
Nicholas Colello at the Arts and Eco Fair in May*

IN THIS ISSUE

- Walling in the brook
- Frank Lloyd Wright
- Unearthing hidden bricks
- Fall walking tour—details on page 5

Toney's Walls

THE NATURAL BEAUTY of the Glen at the end of the 19th century was a source of local pride and tranquility. Other than railroad tracks and the remains of Moffet's Mill, there was no evidence of human intervention. The heavily overgrown underbrush and a canopy of trees and bushes held onto rainwater, so flooding and erosion were not a concern. But by the late 1920s, thousands of new buildings and miles of paved streets shed water into Toney's Brook and overflowed its banks. Erosion caused trees to weaken and topple.

Fortunately, the seriousness of the circumstances coincided with the first local effort to provide work for the unemployed in the Great Depression. In November 1931, the town fathers proposed a relief program that included construction of 1,525 feet of stone retaining walls. Avoiding the disparaged moniker of "make-work," they described the project as "work that must be done." It was completed without public commentary.

In March 1935 the Borough submitted a proposal to the Federal Works Progress Administration for five more projects, including the construction of additional stone walls in the Glen. This time, several residents challenged it.

Luther Price, a noted Boy Scout supporter, asked that a landscape architect be consulted to avoid creating an artificial character to the brook. Councilman



The Glen in 1913, before the retaining walls

Alexander Elder stood up for commuters: "Too much masonry will only reproduce New York rather than get away from it." Nonetheless, the project was accepted and completed, along with additional wall work in 1938 and

1940. The entire length of the brook was now walled in from Montclair to Bloomfield.

On July 12, 1937, an unidentified malcontent whose humorous doggerel makes the firebrand style of opposition today seem meanspirited, read the following at an executive session of the town council:

I wish that I could live to see
Old Toney, as he used to be.
A brook that babbled through the Glen
To feast the eyes of businessmen.
They loved to watch him from the trains,
Swelled with the pride of April rains.
He taught the little tots to swim,
He was so mild, they trusted him.
Their homemade boats around the bend
Rode Toney's back, the children's friend.
And visitors would never cease
To praise Dame Nature's masterpiece.
But time moves forward on its way
We must make work for the W.P.A.
So, Toney trudges on alone
Imprisoned by those walls of stone.
His heart is sad, his soul oppressed,
O'er laden by our neighbors, West,
And never more will he be free
To live the life that used to be.
Poems are made by fools like me,
God knows who makes our masonry.

Sally Meyer



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Officers

President	Nicholas Colello
Vice President	Tom Coleman
Secretary	Megan Blank
Treasurer	Sandra Lefkovits
Town Historian (ex officio)	Sally Meyer
<i>Gaslamp</i> Editor (non-voting)	George Musser

Trustees

Jean Boland (2023)	Karin Robinson (2024)
Toni Murphy (2023)	Jennifer Janofsky (2025)
Michael Sagges (2023)	Rebecca Hughes (2025)
Christine Brennan (2024)	Susan Link (2025)
Tiffany Ludwig (2024)	

THE GASLAMP

The Gaslamp is normally published four times per year (twice in 2020 and in 2021) by the Glen Ridge Historical Society, P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028-0164. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Glen Ridge Historical Society, P.O. Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028-0164.

Except where noted, images come from the article author or the Historical Society collections.

© 2022 Glen Ridge Historical Society
glenridgehistory.org
glenridgehs@gmail.com
facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety

Our Favorite Houses

The Wright Stuff

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 63 Chestnut Hill Place, referred to locally as the Frank Lloyd Wright House and officially known as the Stuart Richardson House. This choice certainly isn't a surprise, but I do like this particular Frank Lloyd Wright house amid the 350 or so houses that he built. It's not Fallingwater or the Robie House. It's part of a different set of houses Wright designed in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s for homeowners of more modest means.

These houses are called "Usonian," a term borrowed by Wright and derived from "Usonia," referring to the United States (versus "America"). Wright sought to create Usonian architecture that reflected the American landscape and had no references to historic architectural styles.

63 Chestnut Hill Place, like other Usonian houses, came with a new approach to domestic life. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of these houses for people today. Wright used the constrained designs of these houses to reinforce—or enforce—his ideas. He wrote in his autobiography that owners "must themselves see life in somewhat simplified terms." He started by eliminating the attic and basement, paring down the house to essential living spaces. Living spaces are combined and bedrooms are very small. Within this economical style of living, he created expansive spaces and views to unite the house with nature.

Wright spoke to unexpected design details. The flat roof: "visible roofs are expensive and unnecessary." The garage: "no longer necessary... a carport will do, with liberal overhead shelter and walls on two sides. Detroit still has the livery-stable mind. It believes that the car is a horse and must be sta-

bled." No paint or plaster: "Wood best preserves itself." No window and door casings: "unnecessary."

63 Chestnut Hill Place follows these ascetic rules. The carport was converted into a lovely but unauthorized screened porch, but has since been restored to its original form. The roof is flat with no gutters or downspouts, just minimally sloped roofing with small cylindrical openings near the

ments, but at that time even traditional houses did not have insulation.

This house is more complex than earlier Usonian houses. Wright chose to base the layout on hexagons instead of squares. The floor plan has hexagonal and triangular rooms, so that adjacent walls meet at angles of 60 or 120 degrees instead of 90 degrees. The exterior of the house, with its typical low overhanging eaves, has a more dynamic form with extended pointed wings.

63 Chestnut Hill Place fits both low and tight to its lot. It's interesting to note that the house was not originally designed for this property. The Richardsons commissioned Wright in 1941 to design the house for a property in Livingston. It was to sit prow-like on a small hill. The war intervened and the Richardsons purchased a lot in Glen Ridge. Unfortunately, the flat property suppresses the dramatic sloped view of the house.

For further insight into the Richardson House—and what it was actually like to live in it—

read "When Home is a Frank Lloyd Wright House" in the April 2012 *Gaslamp*, which is available on our website at glenridgehistory.org.

I also recommend visiting the Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria, Va. It was given to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and relocated from Falls Church. It slightly predates the Richardson House. At 1,200 square feet with two bedrooms and one bathroom, it is surprisingly spacious. Wright cleverly articulated the spaces so each has its own character. The living room has a ceiling nearly 12 feet high with a frieze of small geometric windows. The dining room, which occupies one side of the living room, has a low ceiling with large windows. **Karin Robinson**



63 Chestnut Hill Place. Photo by Nicholas Colello

edges where water can drip onto concrete pads below. Usonian houses are typically constructed of cypress boards (resistant to insects and rot) and brick. Windows are either very large and open to the landscape or very small and incised with abstract decoration.

The houses also rely on a unique method of construction. The interior structure of the wall is a sheet of plywood covered with waterproofing felt. Cypress wood strips are attached with a tongue-and-groove method to the inside and outside of the plywood. The entire wall is less than 2 inches thick, whether interior or exterior. It doesn't conform to today's insulation require-

The Glen Back When

curated by the officers and trustees

If Bricks Could Talk

THERE ARE TWO stories being told in the early autumn of 2022. Both are unfolding at the plaza of the Glen Ridge Public Library. In the first, workers are constructing a kiosk to feature 39 outdoor lockers. These lockers will let library patrons pick up most reserved items if the building is closed. The library administration has been planning this amenity for several years and the project is being sponsored by the Friends of the Glen Ridge Public Library.

In the second, the preparatory digging to construct the aforementioned kiosk has unearthed the original brick foundation that supported a landscape wall, laid in 1918, the year that the library was built. From where did these bricks begin their journey to Glen Ridge? I was intrigued to find out.

The first clue to follow was the “WASHBURN” imprint on these nearly pristine 104-year-old foundational bricks. The trail led to one Uriah Washburn. His factories—and others in and around Haverstraw, N.Y., a town that in time housed 41 brick-making facilities—shipped hundreds of millions of bricks down the river to build the great cities to the south of the Hudson Valley. From the plaza site, I now have about a dozen of Mr. Washburn’s bricks.

Landscape wall at the Glen Ridge Public Library, where workers unearthed bricks from the early 20th century (right). One of the bricks recovered. (below). Brick mold at the Haverstraw Brick Museum (bottom). Courtesy of Gordon Leavitt



My wife, Ellen Eagle, and I took a trip to the Brick Museum in Haverstraw, where we spent two delightful hours with Steve Cobb, the Haverstraw historian. I saw, held, and took a picture of an original Washburn six-brick form in which the Glen Ridge bricks may, in fact, have been cast! The style of the lettering suggests they were made in the town of Glasco.

With the arrival of these bricks in Glen Ridge, our fledgling borough was forever connected with the immigrant communities along the Hudson who manufactured these building blocks. Men and women we never knew gave us these blocks of Hudson River clay, sand, and coal dust.

Gordon Leavitt

Gordon Leavitt is president of the Friends of the Glen Ridge Public Library. For more on 19th-century brick-making, see brickcollecting.com/hudson.htm.



Cock-a-Doodle-Do

ON RECEIPT OF a letter from the Board of Health declaring that although “the crowing of roosters may constitute an annoyance that threatens to disrupt good feeling among neighbors, but is

neither a nuisance nor serious menace to health,” members of the Borough Council proposed a resolution to take a census of the roosters in Glen Ridge with a view to enforcing a law requiring muzzling and licensing of the fowl.

Independent Press, May 9, 1921



How to Avoid Doing Chores

A SOUTH END man welcomed a police warning about 8:30 Sunday morning with a sigh and an expression of relief. The man was busily engaged in beating some rugs, when one of his neighbors called the police and complained about the noise at that early hour of the morning. The desk sergeant sent an officer to the scene with orders for the man to stop the noise.

“Thank God!” the man exclaimed, as he shouldered a dozen rugs that he had not yet beaten and took them into the house. Police suspect collusion.

Glen Ridge Paper, July 19, 1935



Send Us Your Stories

HAVE A STORY, memory, or thought to share? Email glenridgehs@gmail.com.



Events Calendar

curated by Tom Coleman

Glen Ridge Historical Society

Fall walking tour. On Saturday, Oct. 29, join us for a walking tour of Summit, Hillcrest, and Woodland avenues. Meet at the corner of Lincoln Street and Summit Avenue at 1:30 p.m. Families are welcome. We'll view houses of nearly every architectural style from 1880 to 1950, several designed by notable local architects such as Herbert Davis, Frank Goodwillie, and Wilbur Knowles. We'll also imagine the three houses demolished to build the high school. The tour will conclude with free refreshments. Rain date: Sunday, Oct. 30.

Archives hours. The Terry S. Webster Archives are open the second Saturday of the month from 9 a.m. to noon. We are located on the third floor of the Glen Ridge Congregational Church on Clark Street. To visit at other times, make an appointment with Sally Meyer at glenridgehs@gmail.com or (973) 239-2674.

Neighboring Towns

Montclair History Center. The next tour of the historic Rosedale Cemetery will be Oct. 30 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. A free Zoom presentation on Nov. 10 will re-

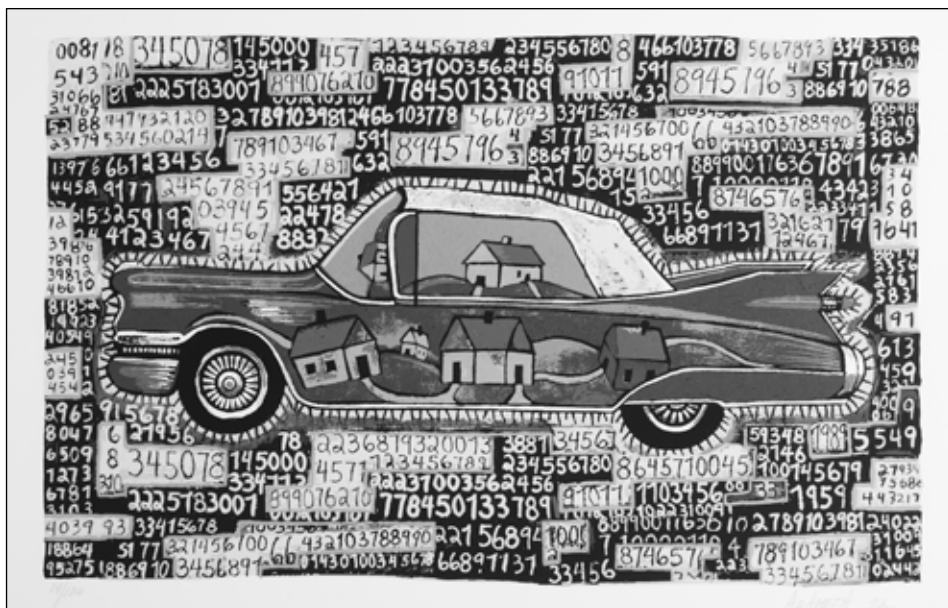
count the adventures of Yogi Berra, who lived half his life in Montclair. montclairhistory.org/all-events

Montclair Art Museum. "Lori Field: Tiger Tarot" is the first show for this Montclair-based artist, working in numerous mediums to create surreal, fairy-tale and animal-inspired imagery. Through Jan. 1. Also take time to see the brand new salon-style re-hang of the museum's world-class collection of paintings by George Inness, including a recent gift. montclairartmuseum.org

Farther Afield

Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick. "American Stories: Gifts from the Jersey City Museum Collection" features a wide range of works donated in 2018 and focused on artists working in N.J. over the past 50 years. Also, "The Roar of the Crowd in 19th Century Paris" is a show of works on paper that looks at Paris's transformation into a modern metropolis. Both through Dec. 30. zimmerli.rutgers.edu/art

Luis Cruz Azaceta. Lotto: The American Dream, 1992. Collection Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, Jersey City Museum Collection, gift of Jersey City Museum, museum purchase. © Luis Cruz Azaceta, courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York. Photo Peter Jacobs



New Member Form

You can join by visiting glenridgehistory.org/join or 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:

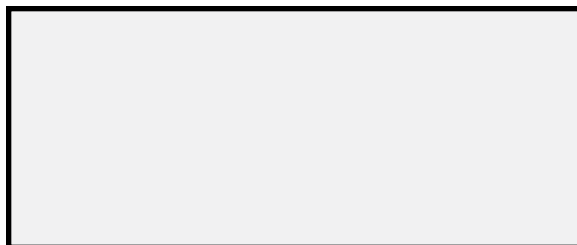
☐ Senior \$10 ☐ Household \$30 ☐ Patron \$75 ☐ Sponsor \$125

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address Service Requested



WALKING TOUR:
SATURDAY, OCT. 29
DETAILS INSIDE

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. 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 now located on the third 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.

