



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP



Illuminating Our Past

October 2023 Vol. XLVI No. 1

President's Letter

Back to School With the Historical Society

A MAJOR REASON my family moved to Glen Ridge was the excellent public schools, and they have not disappointed, even during the trying times of COVID. My son has just started seventh-grade, and my daughter second-grade. Both my parents were teachers. Driving through a town where you have never been before, you can always spot a school from the architectural cues: flagpole, typical brick construction, big front door, repetition of windows. I agree with Whitney Houston's sentiment that the children are our future.

The Historical Society is planning several programs that will tie into the schools of Glen Ridge, starting with the annual fall walking tour on Oct. 28, which will include a tour of Central School. Because of the pandemic, Central did not have the grand (re-) opening that it deserved. My daughter spent a year at Central, so I have been lucky enough to see some of the spaces inside. It contains typical school elements such as strong accent colors, as well as hidden architectural gems that the tour will reveal. For more information, see the events section of this issue on page 5.

On Nov. 17 we will co-host an event with the High School History Club, at which an actor, historian, interpreter, re-enactor, and impersonator will portray William Livingston, who was a member of the first and second Continental congresses and the first governor of our state. *Hamilton* fans will enjoy the many connections: Livingston hosted Alexander Hamilton when he first came to British North America, and Livingston was a cousin of Hamilton's wife, Elizabeth. The re-enactor will do a short presentation and then have a question-and-answer period.

On Dec. 2 at Central School, we are bringing back our gingerbread-house decorating event. We provide the houses and decorations; you provide the imagination. Some people create miniature copies of their own homes; others go wild. Space is limited and we will send members a sign-up form.

In the spring we are starting a lecture series related to education in Glen Ridge, culminating in an exhibition, probably the year after next. We would love to hear your stories about our schools. How have they changed over the years due to social changes, technology, and the passage of time? I think back to my own seventh-grade experience: my best friend, my crushes, school plays, fairs, my favorite science teacher (whom I am still Facebook friends with), and various events and assignments. Those are the memories we'd love to hear from you. Please send your thoughts to glenridge-hs@gmail.com or post them to our Facebook group [facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GRHistoricalSociety). Be on the lookout for more information in the new year.

We also want to encourage student projects. A great one is to look at the files we've collected on the history of your house. Visit us on the

second Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon at the Terry S. Webster Archives located at 195 Ridgewood Ave., on the third floor of the Glen Ridge Congregational Church.

What students learn and experience now will inform their decisions and behavior in the future. Glen Ridge schools are nourishing the next generation of residents, community leaders, preservationists, historians, architects, and more. Teach them well and we are confident they will lead the way.

Nicholas Colello



IN THIS ISSUE

- Moving houses—the actual houses
- Cryptocurrency of the 1830s
- Burglars with style
- Walking tour—details on page 5

News From the Town Historian

Houses on the Move

RELOCATING HOUSES IN the 19th century was a frequent if unlikely phenomenon. It could be cheaper than building a new house. The procedure was relatively straightforward. Screw jacks would be installed to raise a house from its foundation, and long wooden rollers placed underneath. Horses would pull the building along the rollers to its destination, and as each roller came out the back, workers would transfer it to the front.

Three of the oldest houses in Glen Ridge today began life at a different site. The John Rassbach house at 318 Maolis Ave. was built circa 1862 on Cadmus Street, now Midland Avenue. Sometime prior to 1890, Rassbach moved it to a larger property around the corner to accommodate greenhouses for the family florist business.

The Brower-Dodd house at 28 High St. was built circa 1829 on the site of the current Ridgewood Avenue School. In 1895 the Dodd family moved their Gothic Re-

vival-style house in anticipation of the building of the first Glen Ridge school.

The Doremus-Wakeman house at 15–17 Sherman Ave. was originally located on the south side of Bloomfield Avenue just east of present-day Freeman Parkway. It is possibly the oldest extant house in Glen Ridge. For generations its inhabitants kept a logbook with deeds and other records. Alice J. “Rusty” Hines, who owned the house in the 1970s, was the last to see the logbook; she lent it to a college student doing a project and never got it back. She told the Glen Ridge Bicentennial

Committee that she recalled seeing the year 1782 as the year of construction. Hines also said the logbook told a dramatic history. An early resident, Edwin Downs, was “shote by a musket” by his wife and killed. In 1905 a later owner, Augusta Wakeman, was murdered with a hatchet by her mentally unstable 20-year-old son, Richard, as she was darning socks in the living room.

The borough purchased the property in 1903, probably in anticipation of constructing Freeman Parkway. By then the house had been converted to a two-family house. Augusta’s widow and another family paid rent until 1908, when local resident Carl Sack purchased and moved the house to its current location. The kitchens and dining rooms on the lower level were left behind, so at the new site he built rear additions to provide kitchens for each side of the house. The Bicentennial Committee reported that 15–17 Sherman Ave. and 28 High St. both still have their original hand-hewn framing. **Sally Meyer**

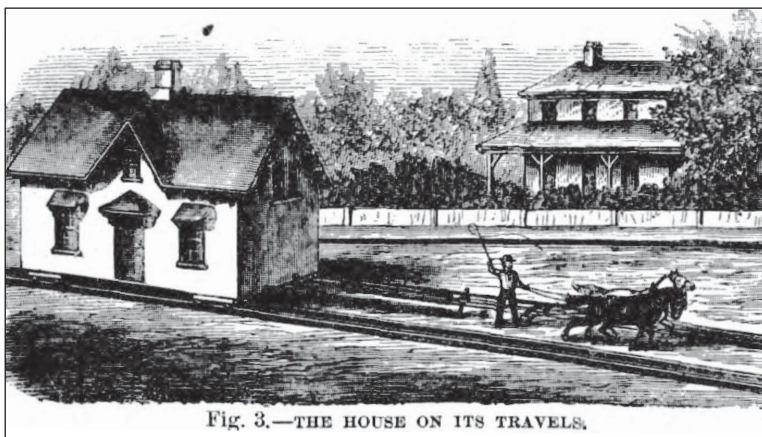


Fig. 3.—THE HOUSE ON ITS TRAVELS.

From “How to Move Houses,” *American Agriculturist*, Vol. 23, No. 11, November 1873, pages 417–418



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE GASLAMP

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This Wasn't Altogether Legal

Making Money by Making Money

BY MOST REPORTS, James Moffet was a respectable businessman. He built and ran the brassworking mill on Toney's Brook depicted on the front page of *The Gaslamp*. On his death in 1887, the local paper eulogized him as "well-known and highly respected," and a biography of leading figures in Essex County praised his "great discretion, keen foresight, untiring energy and strong determination." They neglected to say he was also one of the country's foremost money counterfeiters.

Moffet's mill, as well as a rolling mill on Mill Street in Belleville run by John Gibbs and Joseph Gardner, was in the button-making business. Buttons at the time were made of metal, usually brass, and required engraving and die-sinking skills. These businesses could easily adapt to striking coins.

In 1835 Gardner was arrested for counterfeiting Brazilian and Haitian coins, but released because there was no law against making counterfeits as long as they were not legal tender in the United States. The *Newark Sunday Call* of June 2, 1895, published a lengthy reminiscence by an old-timer who worked for one or both factories:

Yes sir, counterfeiting was the most lucrative work in the place sixty years ago or thereabouts.... There was old James Moffit and T.G. Moffit and Joseph Gardner, all engaged in the business.... The coins were struck in dies from base metal and were plated and packed in bags containing fifty or seventy-five pounds. These were packed singly in wooden cases and marked as general merchandise. It was taken to Elizabethport [sic] and Amboy on a small sloop and transferred to a big sailing vessel.

The business gained semi-respectability during the Panic of 1837, a finan-

cial crisis that triggered a years-long international economic depression. New York banks suspended paying out precious metal coins against their paper notes, concerned that a run would exceed the reserves of gold and silver in their vaults. Gold and silver coins largely disappeared from circulation. The U.S. Mint was not striking enough copper cents to make up for the shortfall.

That's when private "mints" such as Moffet's took it upon themselves to fill the need. The coppers they made were one-cent size but not as heavy or as well-made as the real thing—that's how they turned a profit. Some had lettering that said "NOT ONE CENT," evidently intended to evade the law against counterfeiting. Other cent-size coppers, referred to as tokens, were made for merchants and advertised their businesses. One token that is thought to have been struck in Belleville was commissioned by the American Anti-Slavery Society and sold at face value, 100 for a dollar. Note the backward 'N' in "UNITED" as a challenge to its meaning.

New Jersey mints also supplied Canada. The British government had failed to supply its colony with enough shillings and pence, and colonists imported their own copper tokens. These coppers were not strictly counterfeits, because they did not imitate English copper pennies and halfpennies. They had their own unique designs and circulated in the marketplace for as long as

they were tolerated by merchants and their customers.

One of the most plentiful copper tokens struck in New Jersey for Canada during the Panic of 1837 was known as a bouquet sou. It had a bouquet of plants on one side and a wreath on the other, with the value "Un SOU"—a halfpenny. These tokens were sometimes referred to as "Sous des Patriotes," or Patriot Halfpennies, because it was assumed they signified support for a rebellion that flared briefly in 1837 and 1838.

By 1860 the colonial government introduced decimal coins, bringing an end to token trade. In the United States, the tokens and counterfeit cents of 1837 gradually disappeared as gold, silver, and copper coins returned to circulation. Moffet, Gibbs, and Gardner went on to other things. Congress outlawed private coinage in 1864. For decades, though, local residents kept finding tokens and counterfeit coins in their seat cushions and elsewhere, as the 1895 report described:

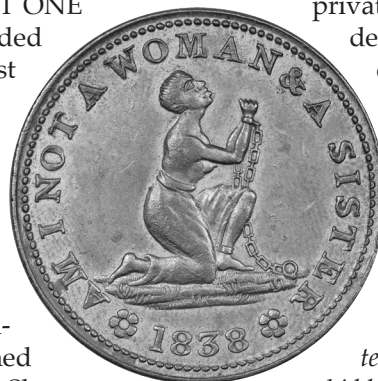
When a house or factory was pulled down in Belleville it was no uncommon thing to find counterfeit money which had been hidden away in secret corners.

I remember well that I went to Dan Rice's circus with a counterfeit half-dollar that I found in Second River, under the old DeWitt wire mill, and on another occasion when I was poking around in the cellar of a ruined stone house near the river I found a lot of blackened Mexican coins in a pocket in the foundation, which was stopped with a roughly fitted wedge of stone.

Christopher Faulkner

Christopher Faulkner is an emeritus professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. He approached the Historical Society while researching his forthcoming book on colonial Canadian coinage.

Token images are courtesy of Heritage Auctions in Dallas (HA.com).



The Glen Back When

curated by the officers and trustees

A Breakfast Crisis

MRS. HEALEY RENTED the big house at Ridgewood and Bloomfield avenues. It has a fine site, and is surrounded by beautiful grounds. It was announced that Mrs. Healey's boarding house was to be the most exclusive in Glen Ridge, and some of the best families in the town took up their residence there.

When the boarders went downstairs last Friday, they found no sign of breakfast. That was remarkable. Neither could they find any sign of Mrs. Healey, which was annoying. Nor could they find the cook, and that was tragic.

There was a council of war. One young woman announced that she thought she could cook well enough to get breakfast if someone would procure the materials. Her offer was accepted with some apprehension....

The feminine boarders agreed to take turns in preparing meals with the understanding that there should be no fault-finding. But this was not the only trouble.

Butchers, bakers, grocery, and other tradesmen speedily learned that something was wrong and they began flocking to the boarding house with their bills, clamoring for payment. All Saturday there was a constant stream of them, each demanding to know where Mrs. Healey had gone and none could tell them. Late in the day no one would answer the door bell.

**News clipping in our archives,
source unknown, circa January 1899**



Gentlemen Burglars

GEORGE ROSS AND James Mooney of Bloomfield, who were arrested by the police of Bloomfield for complicity in some of the robberies in Bloomfield and Glen Ridge recently, were arraigned before Recorder Smith in Glen Ridge Saturday night.... The young men confessed to having broken into the homes of Wilson D. Lyon in Hill-

side Avenue, Glen Ridge, and John B. Pitman in Ridgewood Avenue, that borough. Both robberies were committed last month. Ross and Mooney said they went into the Pitman house for the afternoon and they admitted having taken a bath. "I was as clean as a baby just washed," Ross told Recorder Smith. Ross, it is said, kept company with a nurse girl in the employ of Mrs. Pitman, and in that way, it is said, he learned the lay of the house and when the family would be absent....

Ross and Mooney are particular chaps, for after their bath they each declined to use the same towel. The young men said they went in to the Pitman house especially to take a bath, but after the wash decided to change their undergarments.

Newark Advertiser, July 13, 1906

THE FIRST BURGLARY on record [in Glen Ridge] occurred on Feb. 11, 1896, when the homes of Edward N. Bristol and Mr. Kirby on Ridgewood Avenue were robbed. The haul was quite heavy at Mr. Bristol's house, but Mr. Kirby seems to have fared better. Only a few articles were taken, but they gained access by cutting a panel out of the back door. While in the house, they smoked his cigars, made a meal in the kitchen, and then left, replacing the panel they had cut out of the door, acting like gentlemen, apparently in silent tribute to the character of the community.

Town Council meeting, April 9, 1945



Horsing Around

IT STARTED ON Saturday, according to police reports, with a call from Harold Hartman of 6 Chestnut Hill Place. At 8:57 p.m. the resident notified headquarters that there was a horse in his backyard.

Patrolmen were dispatched to the scene and the wandering horse was herded back to its stomping ground, Flint's Dairy, Montclair [now Canterbury Park]. That was Saturday night.

Dawn the next day, 9:19 to be exact, and police received a call from Mrs. Hartman of the same address, reporting the frisky horse had returned to the backyard area. Patrolmen were again dispatched to send the animal home.

Persistent, and finding the family's rose bush irresistible food fare, according to police, the horse again paid a call this time on Sunday at 3:27 p.m.... The police again arrived, herded him back to the dairy and notified the owner of a hole in the fence.

But it was only one day's lapse before another barnyard creature was reported off limits... within borough limits. Tuesday at 7 a.m. police received a call from ticket agent Norman Reddy of the Glen Ridge Lackawanna Railroad Station.

Upon opening the station, Reddy found himself confronted with a white leghorn rooster perched atop the cigarette machine.

Patrolmen were dispatched and returned to headquarters with the bird in a cage, where it remained peaceably before being transported to the Essex Animal Hospital.... A white, leghorn rooster, sporting a red band around his leg, is waiting to be claimed.

Glen Ridge Paper, July 13, 1961



Drone Picture of Your Home

FOR THE PAST seven years, John and Nick Steinmetz have spent their summer vacation taking drone photos of Glen Ridge, capturing wide areas of the historic district. They have shared their digital files with the Glen Ridge Historical Society for our archives. If you would like a drone photo taken with your family please contact John at jcs7@williams.edu.



Send Us Your Stories

HAVE A STORY or a thought to share? Email us at glenridgehs@gmail.com.

Events Calendar

curated by Tom Coleman

Glen Ridge Historical Society

Fall walking tour. “Let’s Take the High Road” on our fall walking tour—High Street, that is. Gather in front of Christ Episcopal Church at Bloomfield Avenue and Park Avenue on Saturday, Oct. 28 at 1:30 p.m. Join us as our docents tell tales of High Street history: a quarry and copper mine, the first athletic field, the beautiful houses that used to line this section of Bloomfield Avenue, the revival of Central School, the Brower-Dodd house at 28 High St., and the three iterations of 85 Park Ave. The tour will conclude with snacks and a tour of Central School. Families are welcome. Rain date Oct. 29.

Archives hours. The Terry S. Webster Archives is open the second Saturday of the month from 10 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. On Oct. 22 our own Jennifer Janofsky will update the status of the Red Bank Battlefield archaeological project. The MHC also offers seasonal tours of the historic Crane House, notably with “spooky stories” in October. montclairhistory.org/home

Montclair Art Museum. Don’t miss *Taking Space: Contemporary Women Artists and the Politics of Scale*, including large-scale politically inspired works, and Siona Benjamin’s new mythology-based mural, *Lilith in the New World*. montclairartmuseum.org

Farther Afield

Montclair State University. MSU’s accomplished theater department will stage a variety of plays and musicals this fall, including *Seussical*, *Spring Awakening*, and, in December, *Macbeth*. montclair.edu/theatre-and-dance

Newark Museum of Art. The museum hosts the Newark Arts Festival’s fall

works in other media. Through Dec. 22. zimmerli.rutgers.edu

Morven Museum and Garden, Princeton. Tour the permanent collection and gardens of the colonial home of Gov. Richard Stockton. A current exhibition *Striking Beauty* features more than 50 exceptional New Jersey tall case clocks. Through Feb. 18. morven.org

New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. In addition to the ongoing *Treasures* exhibit of the NYPL’s phenomenal collections, see *Max Beerbohm: The Price of Celebrity* (opening Oct. 20) and *ERA: A Century of Speaking Out* (through Jan. 7). nypl.org/events/exhibitions



Birth Marked by M'Nard Derosena (detail), 2022. Courtesy of the Newark Museum of Art

exhibit, *Cross Cultural Perspectives*, featuring more than 90 notable local artists. Through Oct. 29. Also on display is an outstanding group of glass and ceramics from New Jersey. Through Jan. 10. newarkmuseumart.org

Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick. *Surface Tension* presents a cross section of its paintings, sculptures, and

American Folk Art Museum. *What That Quilt Knows about Me* shows 40 of the museum’s vast collection of antique and modern quilts. Through Oct. 29. folkartmuseum.org/exhibitions

Sunnyside, Sleepy Hollow, New York. Explore Washington Irving’s historic home, including an exhibit on the legend of the Headless Horseman. Advance tickets required. hudsonvalley.org/events/home-of-the-legend

THREE WAYS TO JOIN

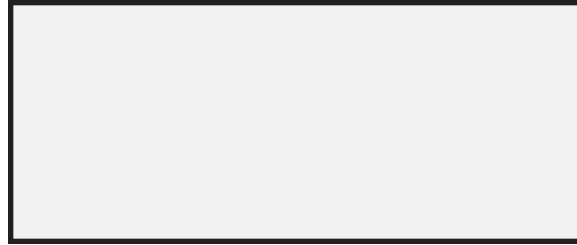
MAIL YOUR CHECK TO Glen Ridge Historical Society, PO Box 164, Glen Ridge, NJ 07028

or JOIN ONLINE AT glenridgehistory.org/join

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Address Service Requested



**FALL WALKING TOUR:
SATURDAY, OCT. 28**

Glen Ridge Historical Society Catalog

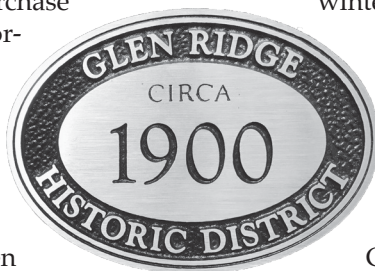
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for Glen Ridge history by making a purchase from our catalog of Historical Society items.

Historic District house plaque. Celebrate your home's history with a customized cast-bronze plaque denoting the Glen Ridge Historic District and your home's year of construction. Delivery takes approximately six weeks. Member price \$200

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 4x6 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 red 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 is 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.