



GLEN RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GASLAMP

Illuminating Our Past

February 2024 Vol. XLVI No. 3



President's Letter

Architecture Is Frozen Music

I WOULDN'T RATE my house as one of the historic marvels of Glen Ridge, but it is still filled with interesting details that the architects and builders clearly gave some thought and effort to. Just looking at the staircase, I see the curve of the bottom stair tread, the profile of the baluster that matches the newel post, and the built-in bookcase under the stairs. I find similar flourishes in every house I visit in town.

These details give our houses character, something that, as an architect myself, I feel is missing from much modern construction. I have seen this phenomenon with new construction at the Jersey Shore or in developments where all the houses look alike. New construction can be boxy and is justified by building the maximum floor area and volume allowed on a site. The builders give less attention to interesting details and are concerned with gaining the most area. This is usually a function of time and money. Clients may not have the flexibility or resources; architects are pressed to reduce fees, thus curtailing their ability to design and draft unnecessary construction details; and builders may not have the resources or the incentive to add special details, as they may have done decades ago.

Goethe, the 18th century German writer, said: "Music is liquid architecture; architecture is frozen music." Architecture, music, and all the arts have the power to evoke emotions, a worthwhile goal of any creative type. Have you ever stepped into a room and been awe-inspired? It has happened to me where I can't help but look around trying to take it all in. One instance I felt this was when I visited St. Peter's Basilica. I was blown away by the immense

size of the space. The scale is amazing and it is mind-boggling to think how it was constructed in the 16th century. On my return trips, I still gape in amazement. I can only imagine the grandeur of commuting through the original Penn Station, the demolition of which is one of the universally understood reasons that historic preservation is important.

Say what you will about the process to get approval from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), which I am also a member of, the commission helps to guide new construction to complement the original character of a house,

which in turn keeps the town looking uniquely interesting. During my time on the HPC, I have seen a variety of house styles and house sizes throughout our borough and am constantly reminded that good design belongs to everyone regardless of social and economic class. My first job out of college was with a firm where a majority of work was in affordable multi-family housing. Some projects were in existing buildings that were renovated and others were new construction, but the common goal was to create dwelling units for tenants



not just to survive in or live in, but to be happy in, to grow in, to call home. The firm's goal was to create a good design as opposed to a passable design or an affordable design. The projects that I was involved with at this firm are still the most rewarding architecture of my career.

Glen Ridge is special because it is a series of houses, each with character being pulled together along a streetscape. Like a cast in a variety show or notes in a song, they all work together to create something special for visitors or inhabitants to enjoy.

Nicholas Colello

IN THIS ISSUE

- Our local Civil War hero
- Is it Queen Anne or is it Shingle Style?
- Sometimes crime does pay
- Public lecture on Feb. 29—see page 5

News From the Town Historian

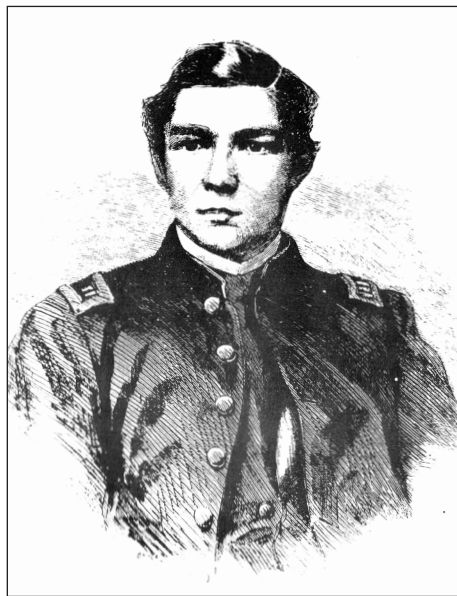
Sherman's Favorite Artillerist

SOMETIMES, WHEN PAGING through the house files in our Museum Room, I'm rewarded with very surprising information. Such was the case for the file on 79 Forest Ave.

In 1871 Capt. Francis De Gress, a veteran hero of the Union Army, borrowed \$3,000 from the venerable Gen. William T. Sherman to build a house in Glen Ridge. He had seen the property while visiting friends in Bloomfield and was impressed by the view. De Gress had secured the admiration and friendship of the general through his effective leadership of Battery H, 1st Illinois Light Artillery, in dozens of Civil War battles as part of Sherman's division. Sherman mentioned him several times in his memoirs.

De Gress's role in the Battle of Atlanta in 1864 was the highlight of his military career. He is one of the more prominent of the thousands of figures depicted in the Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama, an enormous painting of the event. On July 22, 1864, his battery fired the first shots of the battle with their four 20-pound Parrott guns. In spite of the barrage, Confederate troops charged through a railroad cut and counterattacked. Sensing defeat, the 23-year-old De Gress spiked the guns

to deter enemy use and retreated to the Federal line, where Maj. Gen. John A. "Black Jack" Logan of the 15th Army Corps reassured him that they would prevail. In the Cyclorama, Logan is shown hat in hand, galloping furiously to the rescue, with De Gress riding close behind. In the actual encounter, they rushed towards the breach, unspiked and fired the Parrott guns, and saved the day.



Francis De Gress, from Harper's Weekly in 1864

An evocative article by Theodore R. Davis describing the event in *Harper's Weekly* (Sept. 3, 1864) was responsible for the decision to include De Gress in the Cyclorama. Davis later served as an advisor to the team of Milwaukee artists in its creation. It opened in 1886.

Shortly after the war, De Gress moved to Houston, where he met and married Isabella ("Belle") Greene. Family lore describes a visit from Sherman, when a parade was planned in his honor. When Sherman asked Belle whether he could ride her horse to lead the parade, she responded: "No one rides my horse but me; besides, he'll throw you." Sherman responded that he'd never been thrown by a horse. Belle relented and Sherman was thrown. He remounted and the parade began.

De Gress opened an arms and ammunition business in Mexico, dividing his time between there and Glen Ridge. He later carried out government contract work. He died in Veracruz in 1883 at age 42, three years before the completion of the Cyclorama, and is buried in the Mexico City National Cemetery. Three generations of the De Gress family continued to live at 79 Forest Ave. and its former carriage house at 90 Baldwin St. until 1967. **Sally Meyer**



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THE GASLAMP

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Our Favorite Houses

Queen Anne Meets Shingle Style

ONE OF MY favorite houses in town is 53 Wildwood Terrace. It sits on a broad, flat corner lot at Sherman Avenue. The design of the house intrigues me because it is balanced between the Queen Anne and Shingle styles.

Built in 1911, the house was the creation of New York architect Charles H. Detwiller, known for several civic buildings in Jersey City. It has a large gabled roof that faces the street and covers both the second- and third-floor rooms. A long gable that slopes down low to the ground is an important feature of Shingle Style houses. The roof was originally covered in wood shingles, creating a large plain surface that matched the broad shingled walls. Unfortunately, the uniform appearance was lost when the wood shingles were replaced with asphalt ones.

A second, smaller gabled roof is connected asymmetrically to the main roof and is set forward to cover the porch. Nested gables are often found on Queen Anne houses and break the volume of the house into multiple sections. The small gable has a decorative diamond shape made of small pointed shingles, a detail seen on both Queen Anne and Shingle Style houses.

The center line of the large gable is emphasized by three aligned windows, one on each floor. The attic window has an ornate version of the Palladian (or Serlian) style framework, with a central arched window and a small rectangular window on each side. The individual panes in the center window are subdivided into pointed arches that abut and overlap in different combinations. The wood trim around the arched window is very unusual. It has what looks like a keystone block at the top center, as well as two additional blocks on each side

of the arch. Is it five keystones or five pieces of playful ornamentation? This kind of imaginative use of traditional design elements is at the heart of the Queen Anne style, whereas the Palladian windows on Shingle Style houses are more basic.

The large first- and second-floor windows are lined up below the attic window. Each has three windows arranged in a shallow bay. Dramatic bay windows, including box bay windows, are more common on Queen Anne style houses; flatter bay windows that seem

a small half-circle divider, a pattern that is repeated around the first floor.

On the right side of the second floor, beside the long gable roof, is a standard simple dormer. Small single dormers are often found on Shingle Style houses, which have long expanses of roof. On Queen Anne style houses the small dormers can have very quirky windows, such as arches and triangles. The dormer at 53 Wildwood is a replica of the central section of the bay window, with 12 panes over one pane. Though completely separate from the large gable, the side window's design and location provide both a contrast and a balance to the rest of the second floor.

The east façade of the house, facing Sherman Avenue, has a side porch that is cut out of the large volume of the house rather than being added on to the house. The long roof that slopes directly from the roof ridge becomes the ceiling of the porch. A large gable-end dormer on the second floor is centered on the long roof. This kind of symmetry is unusual in each style.

The west façade of the house, facing the driveway, has a cross gable with a gambrel shape. Gambrel gables are perhaps the most common feature of Shingle Style houses.

One very small part of the house is my favorite: a small vertical arched window, much like an arrow slit, to the left of the bay window on the second floor. It has three small square panes and one small semicircular pane. It is located on a broad wall of siding, which makes it look even smaller.

When I look at 53 Wildwood, I see a colorful Queen Anne house. But then I think that if you put back the wood shingles and stained the shingle walls a dark color, it might just be Shingle Style after all.

Karin Robinson



53 Wildwood Terrace

to warp the wall surface are central to the Shingle Style approach.

The center windows of the bay have 12 panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash. The flanking windows have nine panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash. Small window panes are common in both Queen Anne and Shingle Style houses, although windows on Queen Anne houses often have inventive arrangements of panes. Rather than a simple grid, a Queen Anne window might have a border of small panes around a central large pane. The first-floor windows at 53 Wildwood, however, have a unique pattern of window panes. The center of the upper sash has

The Strange History of Local Counterfeiters, Part II

When the Fake Is Better Than the Real Thing

IN THE OCTOBER *Gaslamp*, Christopher Faulkner brought to your attention the long-forgotten coining activities of brass-rolling firms in Essex County. As a native of Belleville and a professional numismatist, this peculiar history has absorbed my intellectual curiosity since I first learned of its existence just over a decade ago. By exploring surviving contemporary accounts and scattered archival sources, as well as closely re-examining the surviving coins themselves, I've slowly been able to build a picture of these enterprises. Faulkner shared the Canadian connection with you. I've been exploring other foreign ties.

In 1829, English-born manufacturer Thomas Uffington declared bankruptcy. His mill in Bloomfield, today Glen Ridge, was acquired by James G. Moffet, while his Belleville mill, located near the mouth of the Second River at the site of the old Bellona Powder Mill, went to his apprentice William Stephens. Stephens joined Thomas Thomas and Robert Fuller in business.

Both firms appear to have added coins to their production in about 1832. These first issues, possibly ordered through contacts in copper importation, consisted of Brazilian coppers in the 20, 40, and 80 réis denominations. Though nothing prohibited their manufacture in the United States, they were regarded by Brazilian officials as counterfeits, and the smugglers who brought them into the country were punished accordingly. Identification of these coins, both for contemporary customs officials and modern numismatists, is complicated by the fact that the quality of the counterfeits was exceptionally high—arguably even surpassing that of the official Brazilian mint in Rio de Janeiro. Newspaper accounts from Rio name two firms responsible: Stephens, Thomas, and Fuller, in Belleville, and Moffet and Wolfenden, either in Bloomfield or in New York.

Stephens, Thomas, and Fuller followed up this success with another copper coinage, this time wholly official and legal. In 1822 the American Colonization Society established the colony of Liberia on the coast of West Africa, just south of Sierra Leone. Ten years later, the colony had grown and the settlers were clamoring for a metallic currency to promote trade and commerce. After extensive discussion, the Board of Managers settled on an issue of 100,000 copper cents, struck to the same standard as those circulating in the United States. The Board initially approached the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia, but the Society found that Stephens, Thomas, and Fuller could fulfill the order at a lower price. The contract was secured by Thomas Bell, the Society's purchasing agent in New York and likely the grandson-in-law of Belleville scion Josiah Hornblower, who built one of the first steam engines in North America.

In this period, the Belleville mill, possibly joined by Moffet also produced counterfeit coins for export to Haiti. The pieces in question were 100 centimes bearing the portrait of the Haitian president, Jean-Pierre Boyer, struck in copper with the intention that they would be silvered by the smugglers after their arrival in Haiti. Like the Brazilian series, these counterfeits were likely of exceptional quality. When I come across a Haitian coin from this period, I often recognize it as counterfeit, but can't tell whether it came from a New Jersey mint.

In general, identifying the coins produced in Essex County is difficult. The Liberian coinage has only been confirmed by exploring archival sources. Letters from Bell, the purchasing agent,

reveal his discussions with Thomas Thomas, while lawyers' notes from a counterfeiting trial identify a local man as the engraver. Numismatists can also glean clues from close examination of the coins. By comparing the letter forms, we can surmise that the same punches were used to create different dies, indicating that the dies were likely produced by the same engraver. This method is not foolproof, however, because other factors may alter the shape slightly. Also, the letter punches could have been purchased from other engravers or even mass-produced.

We also look for coins with overlapping patterns, indicating that the design intended for a coin was struck on an already existing coin. These so-called overstrikes were likely produced to test the dies without wasting a good blank. We have found Brazilian 80 réis and Haitian 100 centimes that are struck on U.S. cents, clearly indicating that they were produced in the United States.

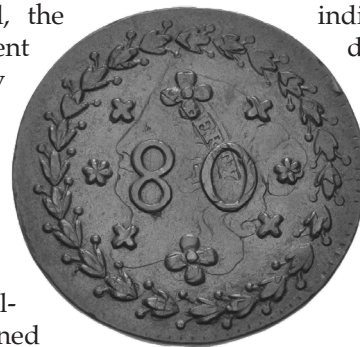
These serve as a sort of Rosetta stone, linking various series together and providing a catalog of letter punches that can be linked to eventually define the entire original coinage.

This detective work will likely take me a few more years. I hope it will make clear the connections between Moffet in Glen Ridge and Stephens, Thomas, and Fuller in Belleville. The history of the Essex County mints is complicated and obscure, but provides a wealth of information about our industrial heritage. I look forward to sharing more with you in the future.

Bill Dalzell

Bill Dalzell is a numismatist at the Classical Numismatic Group in Lancaster, Pa. He grew up Belleville. By remarkable coincidence, he approached the Historical Society shortly after we had published an article on local mints by Christopher Faulkner.

Images are from the author's collection.



Events Calendar

curated by Tom Coleman

Glen Ridge Historical Society

Public lecture. Richard Polton, whose book *Paterson's Industrial Age* came out last September, will speak on Feb. 29 at 7 p.m. at the Glen Ridge Train Station. He has been working on exhibits for the Great Falls National Historical Park visitor center, especially for the 50-year period when Paterson was one of the most dynamic cities in the nation.

Archives hours. The Terry S. Webster Archives is open the second Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon. It maintains an architectural and historical file on nearly every building in town, including old documents and photographs. You can also buy merchandise (see back cover). 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 Montclair History Center has too many great programs to list here, so keep checking the website. montclairhistory.org

Montclair Art Museum. The newest exhibit is *Century: 100 Years of Black Art at MAM*, a survey of works by African American artists collected by the museum. Through June 23. Also see an exhibit of noted photographer Joel Meyerowitz, *Photographs From Cape Cod (1976–1987)*, and the re-hang of MAM's world-class collection of George Inness paintings. montclairartmuseum.org

Farther Afield

Newark Museum of Art. *The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway* opens Feb. 22 and will examine Newark's impact on the world of fashion. Also, the historic Ballantine House has re-opened after two years of extensive

restoration and includes new installations of local art and artists. newark-museumart.org/on-view

Morris Museum. Current exhibits include a selection of paintings donated by W. Carl Burger, the noted N.J. abstract artist and teacher, who died a year ago at age 97. morrismuseum.org



Author Richard Polton will speak Feb. 29 in the Glen Ridge Historical Society lecture series.

Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ. *George Segal: Themes and Variations* is a broad survey to celebrate the centennial of one of the leading sculptors of 20th-century America. Through July 31. zimmerli.rutgers.edu

New Jersey State Museum, Trenton. A photography exhibit, *Discovering Grant Castner*, displays more than 200 images of everyday life in New Jersey from 1890 to 1910. They were derived from glass plate negatives of the little-known amateur photographer. nj.gov/state/museum/explore-exhibits.shtml

New York Historical Society. Hurry up to see *Acts of Faith: Religion and the American West*, which explores undercurrents of the U.S. westward expansion in the 19th century through more than 60 artifacts and artworks (through Feb. 25), and *Kay Walking Stick/Hudson River School*, which creates a dialogue between the art of a leading Native American artist and the Society's iconic Hudson River paintings (through April 14). nyhistory.org/exhibitions

New York Public Library. *The Awe of the Arctic: A Visual History* looks at how the Arctic has been portrayed and its hold on the Western imagination over 500 years. Opens March 15. Also be sure to see the ongoing Polonsky Exhibit, featuring an array of treasures from the library's staggering collections. nypl.org/events/exhibitions

Grey Art Gallery, New York University. The gallery is showing *Americans in Paris: Postwar France, 1946–1962*, a major exhibition focusing on the expatriate artists working in Paris during the post-war period. Opens March 2. greyartgallery.nyu.edu

THREE WAYS TO JOIN

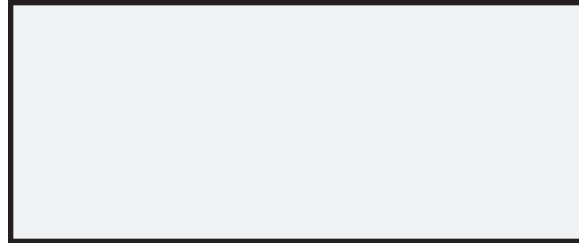
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Glen Ridge Historical Society Catalog

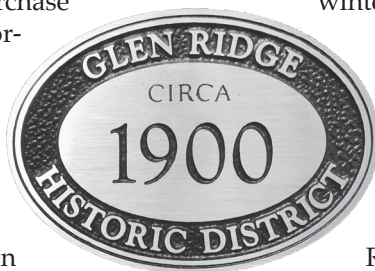
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for Glen Ridge history by making a purchase from our catalog of Historical Society items.

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, four for \$3



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.