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GLEN ROCK SPLITS FROM RIDGEWOOD
Borough evolved from farming to today's suburban community

There's a tremendous contrast between the affluent, well run, delightful suburban community, with its fine school system, its public buildings, parks, charming homes, which we know today as Glen Rock, and the tiny farming community that was born 95 years ago, Sept. 14.

That was the date when Glen Rock was formally organized as a borough and the first borough council met just one month later, Oct. 11 in the little red schoolhouse at the corner of Rock Road and Ackerman Avenue.

Until that date, Glen Rock had been a part of Ridgewood [township] although town lines in those days were somewhat loosely drawn. But the thrifty Dutch people who made up much of the population of what is now Glen Rock had begun to feel that Ridgewood was getting a bit too ambitious. They just couldn't see all these new improvements the Ridgewood people were demanding. They especially had no patience with the idea of building a big brick school at the astronomical cost of $50,000.

And so they petitioned for and were granted the privilege of seceding and forming their own community.

The unevenness of the border today lend credence to the amusing tale of how the border was finally determined.

The question arose – just where should the line between Ridgewood and Glen Rock be drawn? It was settled by simply letting every homeowner decide individually. A group of Glen Rock men, armed with surveying lines, went from house to house in the general area of where the border was to be and asked "Do you want to be in Ridgewood or Glen Rock?"

If the answer was Ridgewood, they drew the tape in front of the house. If the answer was Glen Rock, they went in back thus pushing the house, one might say, into the new town. The story has it that it was long after nightfall before they finished, the weary men working on the last homes by light of lantern.

The result was that the boundary line wound here and there following no direct course and anyone who today attempts to find just where one town ends and the other begins has little trouble believing the story. Glen Rock pokes a peninsula into Ridgewood here, and Ridgewood invades Glen Rock there. There's little rhyme or reason to it.

However the history of Glen Rock begins far before that date when its acres were a part of Paramus. Even before the "Rock in the Glen" had been known to the Indian tribes who inhabited the country as a meeting place, tradition has it that it was the site of council meeting of the tribes and that many a signal fire must have blazed from its summit. The chiefs, the stories say, sat on the rock's eminence while the ordinary tribe members clustered on the nearby hillsides and around the base.

In many early deeds the rock appears as a marker to set boundary lines or indicate distances. It was small wonder that the people of the area chose to use it in the town name for it remains today as a landmark. It was on the rock that a tablet bearing the names of Glen Rock men who died in World War I was affixed.

The earliest road through the area was Cherry Lane, now Lincoln Avenue which formed the highway from the Passaic River to the upper part of the county.

Maple Avenue is another of the old roads, the route connecting with Paterson. It was a famous coaching road in early times as well as the supply route for the entire area.

Two streams run through the town. Diamond Brook, which was in earlier times known as Bass Brook, and the Hohokus Brook. In early days farming was the chief occupation but after the railroad arrived, a few small businesses sprang up and some of the men rode the railroad to work at Paterson mills.

It was the railroad which gave the first real impetus to the town's development. The first railroad was built in 1832 and for a long time the section at the foot of what is now Ferndale Avenue boasted a turntable where the trains remained overnight. People boarded them at this point for the trip to Paterson.

The railroad, however, extended farther north and around the turn of the century it became the practice to stop the trains at Rock Road. The first station, really just a small shed, was built at that time at what is now the main line crossing. The Bergen County shortcut was a later development.

When the borough was organized in 1894, Richard Snyder was elected its first mayor. Members of the first council were: D. J. Marinus, J. A. Ackerman, G. T. Hopper, J. H. Terhune, Alfred DeBaun and H. Demarest – all of them good old Dutch names, since the whole area had, of course, been settled by the Dutch.

The first assessment for taxes the following year (1895) was $3,006 and the entire cost of running the town that year, including the school, was $2,200. There were 85 children and one teacher in the little red brick schoolhouse, and the teacher must have had her [sic] hands full. It is doubtful if there is anyone left in town who attended that school. One former well-known Glen Rocker who did was the late Mrs. Adolph Hubschmitt who recalled sitting on wooden benches there and playing at recess time on a swing hung from a small tree in the schoolyard.

There were two mills in town in those early days, the Marinus saw mill on Diamond Brook near what is now Oxford Place, and the Snyder mill on Harristown Road between Lincoln and Maple Avenues. A very old house stood near there and was used for several years by the Glen Rock Athletic Club as a clubhouse. It burned down about 1935.

The first real development of the town was started as the Glen Rock Company about 1900 by Charles Van Allen, Nelson Cubberly, Judge Cornelius Doremus and Peter Ebbert. They built houses on Doremus, Hamilton, Ackerman and Highwood Avenues.

This was quickly followed by the Smith-Singer Co. which was really responsible for the bulk of the early development. Headed by Henry Smith, later mayor of the town, the company opened up Rodney, Bradford and Wilson Streets, and a bit later Birchwood Road, Bedford Place, Harding Road, Central Avenue and many more.

Until after World War II, however, the area below Harristown Road, the area west of Doremus Avenue and all the section south of Ferndale Avenue along Maple Avenue and out Prospect Street was either farmland or undeveloped fields.

As the houses came, the business district along Rock Road began to develop. Bye 1910 a number of stores were doing business. The Smith-Singer building was the first business building in town and was considered very handsome indeed. Smith-Singer Hall on its second floor was the meeting place for most of the organizations in town, including for some years, the Borough Council.

The firehouse, a little white building, used to stand on Maple Avenue just south of Bedford Place, next door to the old wooden school, School No. 1, which had replaced the little one-room schoolhouse.

The fire siren, however, was in the cupola on top of the school and was hand-operated. The custom was to leave the key of the school in a box at the door so the first firemen who got to the scene could go in, climb the stairs, and set off the siren.

Later they decided this wasn't such a good idea so the siren was connected with the municipal building which by that time had been erected, and from there was electrically operated.

When the fire occurred during the school hours the blast of the siren practically knocked the kids out of their seats, so they eventually shifted it to the municipal building.