

# GLEN ROCK HISTORY

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

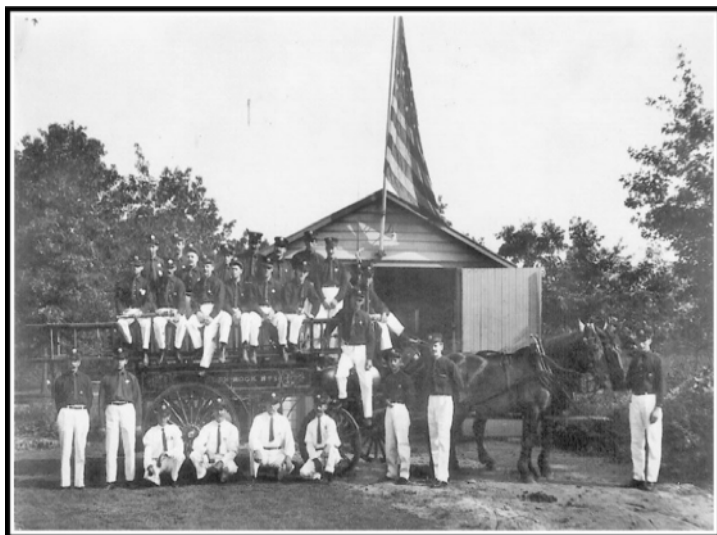
SUMMER 2017

## THE GLEN ROCK HOME FRONT, WW I

Continuing with our salute to 2017 as the 100th anniversary of the U. S. entry into World War I [see Volume 4, Issue 1 of *Glen Rock History*], we will look at life in the young borough of Glen Rock during the war years.

The local population was rapidly increasing as the land, previously farmland, was opened up for development. In 1910, there were 1,055 hardy souls living and, mostly, working in the area. This number doubles by 1920, and doubles yet again by 1930, when 4,369 Glen Rockers were counted for the Federal Census that year.

More people meant more modern services were needed. The Glen Rock Volunteer Fire Department had been organized in 1910 and the first fire wagon, a horse-drawn apparatus, was delivered in July 1911. This was housed on the grounds of School #1 on Maple Avenue (near today's intersection with Van Allen Road). The only problem was that the GRFD



GRFD fire house on Maple Avenue, 1910

did not own any horses so when the fire alarm was sounded, the men had to wait for horses to arrive. The race was on for any deliveryman

to bring his team of horses to the fire house (the winner was awarded \$5 on the spot). Usually it was either Barney Van Der Weert or Isaac Paxton who received the horse bonus. The situation was improved when the original fire wagon was motorized in 1917; it served the community's needs until 1927 when a Larabee Chemical Hook & Ladder truck was purchased.

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## IN MEMORIAM: LEO R. BROWN

The GRHPS mourns the passing of our Treasurer and friend, Leo Brown, this past April. Leo joined our group of weekly volunteers following his retirement from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. He was always willing to help with programs and projects and to lend his sage advice when the need arose. In his memory, the GRHPS has placed a bench outside our Museum at the Station and planted a dogwood tree to honor Leo's service during the Vietnam War.

In the 1960s, white dogwood trees were symbols of support for those fighting in Southeast Asia.  
Rest In Peace, Leo. We miss you.

## SAVING HALLOWED GROUND

The GRHPS has partnered with the Borough of Glen Rock to participate in the national program, Saving Hallowed Ground. This program is honoring World War I soldiers throughout 2017 - 100 years after the U. S. entered the War - by planting trees as a remembrance. The Glen Rock oak tree will be planted in Veterans Park. The tree will have a permanent tag featuring the names of the five Glen Rock men who died during The Great War: Peter Ebbert, Frederick Jensen, Mortimer Kerr, Jacob Phillips and Frank Squires. The original memorial tree program began in 1914, planting oak trees around the world to commemorate the sacrifices of soldiers and their families.

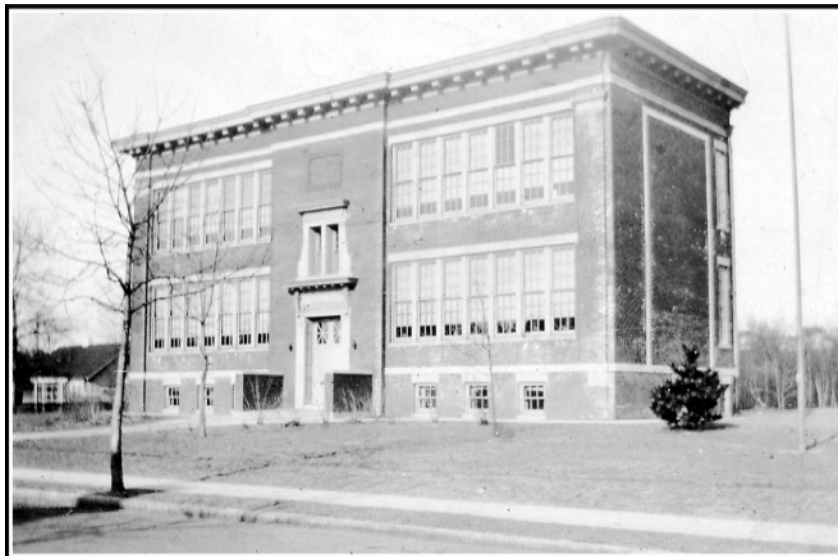
## THE GLEN ROCK HOME FRONT (cont.)

In October 1918, the Gas Defense Division of the Chemical Warfare Service requested that the following should be saved by everybody: peach stones, apricot pits, prune pits, olive pits, date seeds, cherry pits, plum pits, Brazil nut shells, and the shells of hickory nuts, walnuts and butternuts. "Any of these materials, no matter how old, can be used for Gas Masks. The carbon from these pits and shells is the only kind suitable for the masks. Pits must be dried before shipped."

In 1917, the Glen Rock Home Defense League undertook to locate all of the automobiles and telephones within the borough. Frank Evans, the borough engineer, drew a detailed map pinpointing the 85 autos and 57 telephone exchanges. Most of the cars and phones were clustered along Maple Avenue and in the new Prospect Park and Rodney-Bradford-Birchwood sections of town.

Miss Elizabeth Robinson ably headed up the Glen Rock branch of the American Red Cross during the War. She and her volunteers sewed refugee and hospital garments; knit sweaters, socks and hats; collected pledges; sold Liberty Bonds; and provided surgical dressings (9,445 in the month of August 1918 alone). The ladies (and a few gentlemen) met several times a week in the Smith-Singer Building on Rock Road. They also provided packages for soldiers at Camp Merrit. Each package contained a cake of soap, a package of cigarettes, a handkerchief, a box of matches and a bag of candy.

November 5, 1918 local vote for Prohibition: 141 against the sale of liquor, 131 for. Glen Rock went dry.



*Byrd School is the oldest building in the Glen Rock Public School system. It was built in 1915 as School #2 on Doremus Avenue.*

The growing local population required a new school to be built, so in 1915 School #2 was dedicated on Doremus Avenue. The four-roomed building opened its doors in September to 29 students. Several additions were soon necessitated, and in 1931, School #2 was rededicated as the Richard E. Byrd School in honor of the famous explorer. In a letter dated 31 October 1931, Admiral Byrd wrote:

"To the Pupils of Glen Rock Schools, I have just learned that your school has been named after me. I greatly regret that I will be unable to accept the invitation to be there at the dedication. I appreciate this honor more than I can express and, although I do not deserve it, I am immensely pleased."

## LUDOVICUS VAN IERSEL: MEDAL OF HONOR, WWI

Although his name does not appear on The Rock's Memorial plaque, Ludovicus van Iersel's name and service should be known by all Glen Rockers. Van Iersel, a Dutch citizen born in the Netherlands, lived for a brief period of time on Doremus Avenue, enlisting in the U. S. Army from Glen Rock, NJ. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1919 (possibly the first non-citizen ever awarded the nation's highest military honor) for his bravery under fire at Mouzon, France. He received his Medal directly from General John "Black Jack" Pershing.

Ludovicus Maria Matheus van Iersel's life was the stuff of movies. On his first voyage from the Netherlands in 1917 to America, while employed by a Norwegian shipping company, he was instrumental in rescuing the victims of a British vessel that had been torpedoed by a German u-boat in the English Channel. For his actions, van Iersel received a medal for lifesaving at sea, in the name of King George V. This would be the first of many honors. Van Iersel's obituary in the Los Angeles Times on June 16, 1987 states that he was believed to have been the most highly decorated surviving veteran of World War I. Once his ship docked in New York, Ludovicus decided to stay and he settled in New Jersey, renting space in a house on Doremus Avenue. He went to work driving a coal truck for D. Vanderbeck in Ridgewood.



When the U. S. declared war on Germany in 1917, Ludovicus signed on as a volunteer, filing his intention for U. S. citizenship at the same time. Although he spoke fluent German and French, as well as his native Dutch, he spoke no English. This was not a big drawback for working in Bergen County with its significant Dutch population at the time, but it made it difficult to follow orders in the Army so he was assigned to work in the kitchens. After four months in the kitchens, he had picked up enough English to be promoted to corporal and was reassigned to the 2nd Infantry Division serving in France. His unit would see battle at Verdun, Belleau Forest and the Meuse-Argonne region. Van Iersel earned the first of his two Croix de Guerres by retrieving 17 wounded men from "No Man's Land". He earned his second one by using his language skills to convince a German officer to surrender with 60 of his men; van Iersel would later say that he probably would not have attempted this if he had realized how badly his own men were outnumbered. He was promoted to Sergeant.



On November 9, 1918, at Mouzon, France, on a reconnaissance mission at night, he led a party across a damaged bridge in the face of heavy machine gun fire. He fell through a trap and ended up in the fast-flowing river. Still, he swam to the German side and completed his mission, returning to convey the valuable information to his commanding officer. He is credited with saving the lives of 1,000 men as his unit was relocated away from an impending attack as a result of his intel.

Ludovicus M. M. van Iersel received his U. S. citizenship six months after receiving the Medal of Honor. He returned to New Jersey for a short period, changed his first name to Louis, and then moved to California in 1920. At the start of World War II, Louis and his three sons signed up to serve. He showed up to enlist in his old uniform bedecked with the 14 medals he had earned. He is buried at Arlington.

## G.R.H.P.S.

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"Glen Rock History" is edited by S. Tryforos

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### The GRHPS Mission Statement:

To heighten the public's awareness of, and  
appreciation for, the history, growth and  
development of Glen Rock, Bergen County,  
New Jersey

Meetings are held on the THIRD Thursday of  
the month at 7:30 p.m., September through  
June, at the Main Line Station

Please support us through the Amazon Smile program  
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THE GRHPS IS A 501(c)3 ORGANIZATION. DONATIONS ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE.

### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please join us today  
Membership levels: Regular \$10; Supporting \$25;  
Sustaining \$50; Patron \$100

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Send your check payable to GRHPS to:  
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Come visit us-  
MUSEUM AT THE STATION SCHEDULE  
We will be open from 1 - 3 pm on the  
following dates:

July 30, 2017  
Sept. 24, 2017

Aug. 27, 2017  
Oct. 29, 2017