

News From the Town Historian

Highway Hijinks

In 1949 THE WILLIAM A. STICKLE Memorial Bridge opened over the Passaic River between Newark and Harrison. It was to be the linchpin of the new Essex Freeway, running from the New Jersey Turnpike in Hudson County to U.S. Route 46 in Morris County, roughly paralleling Route 10. During the early months of 1953, articles in *The Glen Ridge Paper* covered a surge of civic activism when the public learned that 11 tentative alignments ran through Glen Ridge.

An eight-lane raised roadway would pass through the Forest Hill section of Newark into Bloomfield and Glen Ridge, then head north of Rosedale Cemetery through a corner of Montclair into West Orange. It would destroy 63 houses in Glen Ridge: 16 on Willow Street, 13 on Ridge-wood Avenue, 19 on Carteret Street, and 15 on Midland Avenue. The total loss of assessed value of \$264,000 would add eight or nine points to the tax bills of every property owner.

Mayor Lionel Reid and the Borough Council sent a fervent resolution expressing opposition to the chair of the Turnpike Authority, Paul L. Troast. Joining the fray, the Glen Ridge Taxpayers Association urged citizen support of legislation that would require highway construction agencies to reimburse municipalities

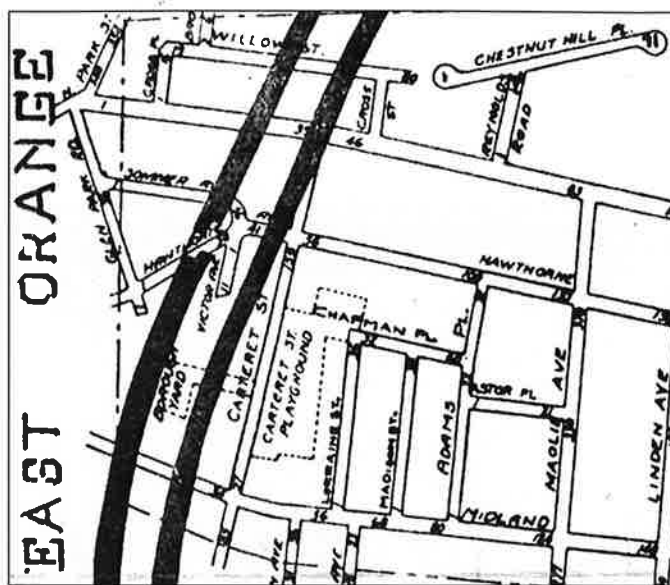
for loss of ratables. But the most effective effort was undertaken by a group of eight women.

In March 1953 they traveled to Trenton to request legislation preventing the construction of the highway until an adequate explanation of its necessity could be given. Shortly after, Troast invited the women to lunch at his Clifton home, where they made plans to hold a townwide meeting. Eight hundred people from Glen Ridge and surrounding towns listened as Troast answered a list of prepared questions. Unfortunately, his opening remark that “indefiniteness will appear when I attempt to answer your questions” proved all too true.

On May 11, 1954, *The Glen Ridge Paper* reported that “work on plans for the controversial proposed East-West turnpike... have been discontinued at least temporarily.” It took until 1957 for the Federal Bureau of Public Roads to authorize construction of the \$157 million Essex Freeway,

renaming it I-280 the following year. The western section opened in 1973, the eastern in 1980. Although Glen Ridge, Bloomfield, and Montclair had been spared, the highway still cut a swath through East Orange and West Orange and devastated downtown Orange.

Sally Meyer



Original plan of I-280 cut through the south end of Glen Ridge. Map by Andrew Eshenfelder, Glen Ridge Town Engineer at the time



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THE GASLAMP

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