

[Old Glendale]

September 1, 1938 Reporter: Willaim Wood Supervisor: A. Hartog Sub-project: Folklore
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[1420?] [md] Note: Mrs Rose Williams, the narrator, is about seventy years of age. She is
the owner of a fleet of buses, and was interviewed outside the office of her garage at the
corner of 70th Avenue and 67th Place, Glendale, L.I.

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[Reminiscences of old Glendale and Ridgewood

As told by Mrs Rose Williams to William Wood

When I was a young girl, all this district was farm land. Most of the people living here
were either Irish or Dutch. The streets in this vicinity, now lined by rows of two, four, and
six-family houses, were not then in existence. Our roads, and the lanes leading to the
scattered farm houses, were unlighted at night. When we went out after dark we used
to carry lanterns, burning coal oil or candles. On Central Avenue, where the Grover
Cleveland High School Annex now stand, there was a little country school house - a frame
building.

In those days we used to have the old-time square dances; the Polka, quadrilles, the
Virginia Reel and several others. There was one dance in particular that gave us a great
deal of fun. It was called the "Nine Pins."

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The part of the [Nine-Pin?] was played by one of the men, who would be either a volunteer or a chap who yielded to persuasion. He had to fill the role for the duration of one dance, after which he was relieved by some else. [Usually?], he was a very happy man when relief came. The [Nine-Pin?] had to stand in the center of the floor, within close range of the dancers, who would get as near to him as they possible could. The caller would yell out, "Take hold of the Nine-Pin's nose," or, "Take hold of the Nine-Pins's ear," or "Take hold of the Nine-Pin's right hand," or of his left hand, his thumb, his shirt-collar, his beard- if he had one, or any part of the chap which might embarrass him the most and afford the greatest amount of merriment for the dancers. If a conceited fellow, or a fellow the dancers wanted particularly to tantalize, happened to be the Nine-Pin, he got pulled almost to pieces.

Number 10 Volunteer Fire Department was situated about a mile from here, on Fresh Pond Road. Whenever a fire occurred that was too large for them to handle, they had to get assistance from the nearest City Fire Department. On such occasions there was displayed a great deal of rivalry. Each of the two groups wanted to be in charge of the fire and direct operations. Sometimes their arguments became 3 quarrelsome, and they would almost come to blows. Despite these personal exchanges, the boys always worked hard until the fire was under control.

Not far from Number 10, there was a beer saloon that was patronized by the volunteer fireman. I have forgotten the proprietor's name, but I shall always remember the name by which the establishment itself was known. It was called, "The Sunday School." The 'boys' used to congregate there, evenings, to drink a social glass of beer, relate their experiences, and tell stories. The Irishmen used to carry red lanterns to tease the Dutchmen, and the Dutch used to carry green lanterns to annoy the Irishmen.

Once, the news leaked out that two of the fireman intended to get married on the same day. Rudy Smith and Henry Backus were their names, and they both were members of

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Number 10. As the time of the wedding approached, their comrades asked them if they intended to stand treat for the crowd. They both declined.

After the ceremonies each of the couples went to their own house, where relatives had made preparations for the festivities. In each house were good things to eat and drink, including plenty of beer. Very soon the members of the fire station, divided into two groups and accompanied by all the acquaintances that could be gathered together, armed themselves with 4 pots and pans and saucepans, and every other device they could think of for making noise. The homes of the newly-weds were soon surrounded, and the fun commenced. What a serenade! Rudy Smith was the first to tire of it. He came out and offered the gang five dollars to buy beer if they only would go away and leave him and his bride in peace. Henry Backus still refused to treat, and pretended to pay no attention to the crowd of people yelling like demons around his house. Among his quests was the minister who had married him.

One of the serenaders, a young man, climbed into the kitchen through an open window and took a large piece of limburger cheese from the table. As soon as he joined the crowd again he put the cheese into his coat pocket. Suddenly the tin cans ceased to beat, and a spokesman knocked at the front door and asked Henry if he was willing to buy beer for his friends; but Henry still declined. "All right the spokesman said, "I guess we have given you enough serenading for one night. We'll all shake hands, wish you and the bride good luck, and go home."

Henry and his male quests, including the preacher, came outside to join in the hand shaking, and each one of them got his hand well smeared with limburger cheese. The smell was awful!

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A gang of young hoodlums used to infest a part of central Avenue, the other side of Ridgewood. They ranged between ten and fifteen years of age, and were known as

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“The Little Potatoes.” They used to refer to themselves as the “The Little Potatoes - hard to peel.” Some very bad boys were among their member. Not content with playing mischievous pranks, these young ruffians frequently were guilty of acts of downright maliciousness. No doubt their parents were to blame. The neighborhood they terrorized was a hotel of bigotry and race prejudice. A Jew could not pass through the streets unmolested.

One day they set upon a poor, inoffensive peddler, whom they easily overpowered. They robbed him of his pack of notions, and after dividing the wares among themselves threatened to stone him if he didn't “beat it.” As he retreated, the unfortunate man shook his fist at his tormentors, saying: “Some day we shall stone [you?!]”

Of course, no Jewish peddler familiar with the district would run the risk of attempting to do business there, but occasionally an unsuspecting stranger would walk into a peck of trouble. I remember the case of one of them who entered the danger zone and ran directly into the clutches of the “Little Potatoes.” He escaped with his bundle of merchandise - but not before he had been deprived of his beard. One of the young desperadoes snipped it off with a pair of shears.

The words of the first pedler [md] the one who was robbed of his jack [md] may not have come to be literally true. Nevertheless, they were not altogether unprophetic. The part of Central Avenue that once was overrun by juvenile gangsters is now the center of a large Jewish population.

Every age, as well as every locality, has its own peculiarities and customs. To-day, the girls smoke cigarettes, even out on the street, and think nothing of it. When I was a young woman, such a practice was unheard of. In fact, we never heard of cigarettes; to say nothing of women smoking them. But don't think for a moment that the girls of those days did not have habits of their own. One of these was snuff! They used Scotch snuff, which they carried about with them in little boxes. Some of the girls sniffed it up their nostrils.

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Other ones carried a small stick which they used to dip into the snuffbox and then rub against their teeth and gums.

Styles for women's hair are constantly changing. Short hair and boyish bobs are not by any means of recent vogue. Longer than fifty years ago a fad started among women, for short hair. It did not last for a great length of time; but, during the time it did last, 7 a great many women made themselves appear hideous. Their hair was cut as short as a man's and they looked anything but womanly. The practice soon became unpopular: A few years ago it was revived in a modified form, but the permanent waves of to-day look much nicer than the short-crops that were worn during my girlhood.

I can remember a haunted house, a very old frame building where the tenants never remained long. It was owned by a brewer, Frank Eberts, and was a said to be the scene of a murder that had been committed years earlier. Many people who sneered at superstition, and voiced their defiance of ghosts, occupied the premises from time to time. They were awakened at night by weird noises and uncanny sounds. Some claimed that they heard shrieks and moans. Those who had most blatantly mocked the supernatural usually were the quickest to seek another residence. Eventually, Mr. Eberts had the house renovated from basement to roof. The old doors and windows were covered up by new lumber, and new doors and windows were made in other places. The effect seemed magical. The "ghost" apparently had found repose, for the next occupant of the houses made no complaint. Finally, Mr. Eberts himself moved in. Two years afterwards, he died; and people said the ghost had returned.

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