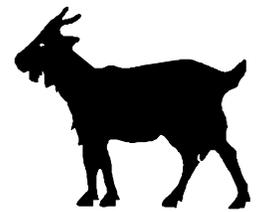


Nannygoats



Vol. 17, Issue 2

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Summer 2019

The Society recently exhibited a selection of images from its collections at Transformations Gallery within the Old Franklin Schoolhouse in Metuchen. This show hung from January until May of 2019, and included nearly twenty black & white historic photographs specially reproduced on ready-to-hang canvases. Most of the pieces featured residents and groups of people in recognizable locations around Metuchen. Although some of the images had been in the collection for decades, others were acquired only a few months prior to the exhibit; the archives may be a

repository of the past, but they are by no means frozen in time. "New" images enter the collection all the time, to our great delight.

Several of these canvas prints were sold during the exhibit and the Society is making the remaining pieces available now (ranging from \$85 to \$165), with all proceeds of these canvas prints benefiting the Society, a 501(c)3 non-profit charity, and its mission to "Preserve the Past for the Future." For more information, or to see the canvases available for sale, contact metuchenedisonhistory@gmail.com or 732-261-4807.

AN EXHIBIT OF HISTORIC IMAGES

PEOPLE IN PLACES

CANVAS PRINTS AVAILABLE FOR SALE



See Page 4 for the captions for these images as well as additional canvases available.

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society was founded in 1974 with the primary purpose of promoting an interest in and appreciation of the history of the Borough of Metuchen and of Edison Township.



#ThisPlaceMatters
**Edison Memorial Tower and
 Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park**

The most important historic site in Edison, well, possibly all of Middlesex County – and some might argue for an even larger range than that – is clearly Menlo Park. As the birthplace of so much that makes up our modern lives, its significance cannot be over-stated. People come from literally all over the world to visit this near-sacred spot.

At one point in the not too distant past, the site did not have the wind beneath its wings like it does now... but since it's been the lucky beneficiary of some dedicated individuals who worked with government and business partners to set the site on the course to have a very 'bright' future. This site's preservation and interpretation isn't just about documenting the past; the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park also seeks to inspire current and future generations.

If you have not yet been, you really must go... current Metuchen-Edison Historical Society President Kathleen Carlucci is the Director of the Museum and incredibly dedicated to making sure that visitors take away from their tour the scope of this place's enormous importance. And, if you can't go, check out their website to learn more about this amazing historic site: <http://www.menloparkmuseum.org/>



1901 City Directory, Column 12

Below is the twelfth column of entries in the sections relevant to our area of the 1901 *Polk's New Brunswick City Directory*. The Society began reprinting the entirety of this directory in the Winter/Spring 2016 issue.

Rice William jr. h Cedar
 Richardson H. C. supt. Central Electric Co. h Middlesex ave
 Robins Nathan, retired, h Middlesex ave
 Robinson John, grocer, LeGrande ave c Main, h do
 Rogers James H. emp P. R. R. h Rose
 Rolfe Ira B. emp L. V. R. R. h William
 Rommell W. Scott, photographer, h Clive
 Ronan James, mason, h Sheridan
 Ronan Michael, plumber, h Sheridan
 Ronan William N. gardener, h Sheridan
 Rowland Edward A. bus. N. Y. h Highland ave
 Rowland Lewis, retired, h Amboy ave
 Rowland Thompson, tailor, Amboy ave. h do
 Rowland William M. h Durham ave
 Roxbery Jackson, h High
 Roxbery Lewis, h High
 Roxbery Robert, h Main
 Rule Winfield, emp P. R. R. h Main
 Schenck Charles, baggagemaster P. R. R. h P. R. R. station
 Schenck Joseph B. ticket agent P. R. R. h Woodbridge ave
 Schenck Nathaniel, telegrapher, h Woodbridge ave
 Seaman Edward, bus. N. Y. h Main
 Searle Edward
 Shaw Alexander, h Main
 Shelly John, huckster, h Shelly lane
 Silzer George S. lawyer, New Brunswick, h Graham ave
 Simmons C. A. confectioner, Main, h do
 Simmons Theodore, h Maple
 Smeltzer George, h Maple
 Smeltzer Joseph sr. h Maple
 Smeltzer Joseph jr. h Maple
 Smeltzer Titus, h Maple
 Smith A. G. h Middlesex ave
 Smith Amet G. h Middlesex ave
 Smith Ezra N. h Centre
 Smith Frank B. barber, Main, h Pearl
 Smith George, gardener, h Spring
 Smith James, h William
 Smith Jasper, bus. N. Y. h Durham ave
 Smith Oscar T. clerk, h Centre



The Historical Society Board is working on some plans for a big fundraiser this October. We don't want to let the ghost out of the bag just yet, but it's going to be fun! And, MEMBERS will be given a special discount and the first crack at tickets, so make sure to join if you haven't!

THE LEWIS THOMAS HOUSE

The historic Lewis Thomas house at 280 Grove Avenue in Metuchen was listed for sale earlier this year, and hopefully has already or will soon be matched with its new owner.

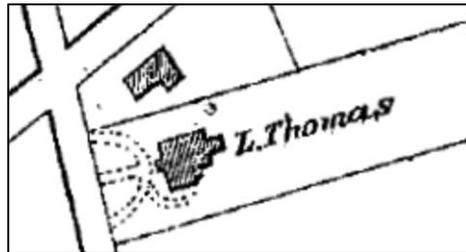
According to Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt's 1870 history of Metuchen, Lewis Thomas (1807-1893) and David Graham Thomas (1808-1893), brothers, moved to this area from Woodbury, Connecticut in 1831. Lewis, who later built this house, opened a dry goods store at the corner of Main Street and Amboy Avenue, on property owned by his younger brother.

Soon afterwards, Lewis Compton became Metuchen's very first Postmaster – a very prestigious position at the time. Historic maps and census records indicate that Lewis and his wife, Rachael, and their several children lived on Middlesex Avenue in the early nineteenth century. Shortly after 1850, they built this stunning Italianate Victorian estate for the prosperous and growing family.

Members of the Thomas family continued to live in the home for the next century, at which point it was sold to the Corrente Family in the 1940s. During their twenty years in the house, they



modernized the home, and it is probably at this point that the front gable configuration was altered. Later residents included the Whitehills – who ran a silk flower business from the former carriage house (since demolished) and a German couple living here while employed at Siemens. In the late 1980s, a developer subdivided property into four lots.



The Donkersloots then purchased the house and constructed the two-car garage on the property. Gary and Marion Price were the next owners of the home and it was featured on the Holiday House Tour during their ownership. Gary was a municipal judge and Marion served on the Metuchen Borough Council.

Subsequent owners have exposed & refinished the hardwood floors, renovated bathrooms, removed wallpaper, replaced missing molding and wainscoting, and finished the attic space to make it a master suite with a full luxury bathroom and walk in closet.

The home was identified in 1975 by the Borough of Metuchen as a historic site in its Environmental Resources Inventory, and has been featured several times on the Holiday House Tour sponsored annually by the Borough Improvement League.



Top: 19th century view of the Lewis Thomas House. Middle: 1868 map of Metuchen. Bottom: 2018 photograph of the house

Images from Page 1, Clockwise from upper left:

Metuchen Football The 1911 Metuchen High School football team gathered in front of the Franklin School on Middlesex Avenue for this photograph. The gentleman in the suit, on the right, is Principal Thomas VanKirk. Several years ago at a historical society program, the young man sitting cross-legged on the right was identified by his nephew as Lester Scruggs {\$115}.

Eagle Hook & Ladder Volunteers of the Eagle Hook & Ladder Fire Company pose with their equipment outside their headquarters, built 1885, on Main Street. Metuchenite George Silzer, who later became Governor of New Jersey, is wearing a top hat in the open garage doorway {\$165}.

Franklin School Class of 1890 The Class of 1890 sits for a photograph outside the Franklin Schoolhouse. This building, not to be confused with the Old Franklin Schoolhouse or Franklin School, was in service for about 30 years at the end of the 19th century. It was then moved from Middlesex Avenue & Center Street to New & Pearl Streets, and later demolished {\$165}.

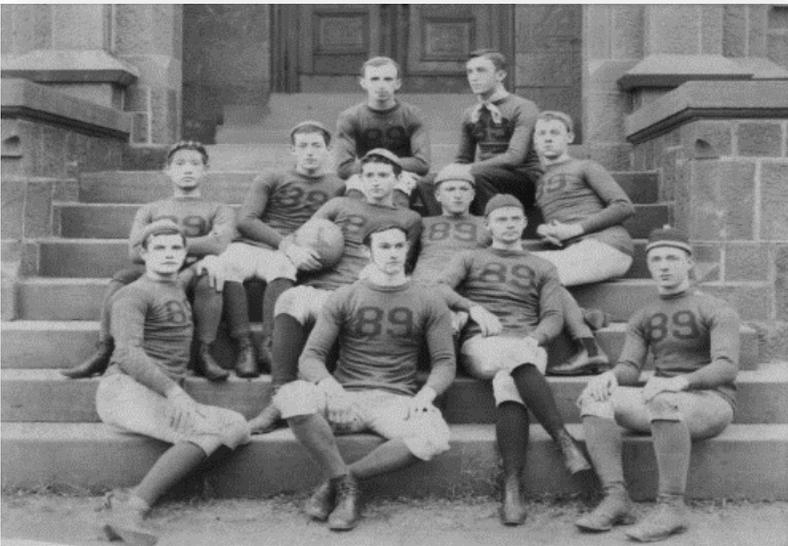
Main Street at Night Even late at night, lights burned bright to attract shoppers to Robinson's, Marmax, Hubble Appliances, Morris Stores, Metuchen Hardware, Drake's, The Hitching Post, and more during the 1950s {\$150}.



Gray Children This portrait, for which play was certainly interrupted, is not well identified in the Society's collection; it simply says "Mr. & Mrs. Gray, Park Place." Records indicate Gray family members living on Clarendon Court and Grove Avenue at that time, but not on Park Place. Other views of the house at the time show it to be a two-family building, which could explain the lack of resemblance between the children {\$100}.

Rutgers Football Rutgers' Class of 1889 freshman football team on the steps of Geological Hall, 1885. Team captain & lifelong Metuchenite Thorfin Tait is holding the football. Born 1870 to Scottish immigrants, Mary and George Tait, Thorfin married Grace Dana in 1894 and shortly afterwards moved into a newly built house at 64 Hillside Avenue, where they lived until her death in 1933 and his in 1935. He worked for the Perth Amboy Terra Cotta Company for many years, but was better known by his other pursuits; he was an active sportsman, Regent of the Royal Arcanum, President of the Middlesex County Poultry Association, a Councilman and Mayor of Metuchen, a Board of Education Member, President of the Metuchen Rod & Gun Club, founding member of the New Jersey Fish and Game

Conservation League, founder of Metuchen's first Historical Society, and member of the Borough Improvement League's Kitchen Orchestra (which, according to news reports of the time, consisted of banging pots and pans together in the kitchen of the Old Franklin Schoolhouse). One of his classmates (the young man in the second row, far left) is Kojiro Matsukata. According to Rutgers' archives, he was the son of Count Matsukata, married the daughter of Viscount Kuki, and became president and owner of the Kawasaki Dockyard Company, one of the largest shipbuilding plants in the world. Matsukata's acquired wealth enabled him to become a patron and a major collector of art from around the world, and the Matsukata Collection is the foundation of Tokyo's National Museum of Western Art {\$115}.



Sunday School Picnic In the early 2000s, this photograph was purchased by a private collector at a book sale & postcard show in northern New Jersey. As it was stamped "J.L. Grimstead" on the reverse, along with the date "Jul 29, 1937," a copy was later donated to the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. In 2011, a local resident saw the image and identified it as a group of congregants from Metuchen's Second Baptist Church on a outing, probably a Sunday School picnic. Not only were both her father and grandfather in the photograph, but she could identify by name 36 of the individuals shown, including members of the Tate, Letsinger, Scruggs, and Chisolm families. These identifications are archived on the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's website {\$165}.



Memorial Day Parade Frey-Sen Studios likely captured this shot of the 1952 Memorial Day Parade from an upper story of the Metuchen National Bank Building on Main Street. 2019 marks the 92nd year of Metuchen's Memorial Day Parade {\$140}.



March of Dimes Chilly but cheerful young ladies collect for the March of Dimes outside of Boyt Drugs on Main Street, Metuchen, ca. 1955. {\$85}



Metuchen Public Library One of a set of eight small photographs taken during the May 3, 1936 laying of the Metuchen Public Library's cornerstone. Construction began under the New Deal's Works Progress Administration (WPA) in late 1935 and was completed in 1937. Funding included nearly \$70,000 in federal contribution and an additional \$18,000 was raised by Metuchen Library Association and the estate of the late Professor Theodore Hunt {\$100}.

Get Out The Vote Civic-minded Metuchenites in the 1960s took position on the southbound station platform to reach commuters returning home for the evening {\$100}.

The Towers' Pony Lloyd Grimstead took this photograph at "The Towers," a large country estate built ca. 1868 by Benjamin Case Paddock for use when visiting his elderly father and his two sisters who lived nearby. It sat at the corner of High Street and Lake Avenue and included a three-story Second Empire main house with multiple verandas, a carriage house, caretaker's cottage, and an extensive fruit tree orchard. It eventually fell into disrepair, was reputed to be haunted, then mysteriously burned in 1970. Only the caretaker's cottage remains, tucked away off Lake Avenue. Although identified as possibly a "Mrs. Simpson" and her children in the Society's archives, the

only Simpsons known to live in the area at the time actually resided on Rose Street. More likely these are members of the Kennedy Family, including Mrs. Kathryn Kennedy and her children Francis and Grafton. Captain Kennedy, their father, was stationed at nearby Camp Raritan during this time and they are known to have rented the estate while in the area. Research to confirm this identification is ongoing {\$85}.



METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (XI)

The following is the next installment of Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt's "Metuchen and Her History," written in 1870, which we began reprinting serially in issues of *Nannygoats* beginning with the Winter/Spring 2015 edition. Many thanks to Former Society President and current Board Member Dominic T. Walker for transcribing this document.

About 1832 a mystery occurred which has never yet been unraveled. A Mr. Randolph, then resident at Rahway, was within a few weeks to be married to an estimable lady of this neighborhood, and on his return from her house one Sunday evening about eleven o'clock, the discharge of a rifle was heard in the direction of the store now kept by Mr. Lewis Thomas. It did not cause any very particular inquiry until two days after, when it was reported that Mr. Randolph was missing from his store and had not been heard of since that (*These dates are taken from first pew rentals.) night. Search was made in the thicket which then covered the spot, and his saddle was found besmeared with blood.

That day his pocket-book was found, containing his papers but no money. It was said that he had received \$2000 the night before. A letter was found saying that the body was in "Mine Gully," about three miles distant; but search being made there, another letter stated that it was in a distant creek. His relatives mourned his death, and a funeral sermon was preached.

Report that he had been seen were freely circulated, and believed by some, but others regarded them as the devices of robbers who had followed him from his home and thus waylaid him. Whether it was a lover's freak or an actual murder has never been revealed. Neither horse or rider, living or dead, have ever been found, and the air of mystery has not been cleared by the lapse of years. Romance and Tragedy still dispute their claims to the occurrence, and some coming writer of "fiction founded on fact" may here weave a story wonderful as the Legends of Sleepy Hollow, and marvelous as the exploits of a headless horseman.

When I was a boy, a traveling merchant, distressed by his losses, had but lately been found suspended to a tree in the opposite woods, and some who looked as if they ought to be suspended frequently passed along that lonesome road. I often had occasion to walk that route alone, and many a time did I march through with the tread of courage and heart-throb of fear. Now the thickets have been domesticated, and woods and lawns and attractive homes give cheerful diversity to the landscape.

The period from 1785 to 1840 was more eventful in our history than any of the years which preceded.

In 1835 the antiquated Presbyterian church which stood in the old grave-yard lot was replaced by the present one, (40x60) without its additions but with a small cupola, and the first pews rented February 6th, 1836 were all taken. More detailed facts as to churches and those identified with them will be added in another connection.



The New Jersey Railroad from Jersey City to New Brunswick was finished to New Brunswick bridge in 1836 (the Viaduct at New Brunswick was not crossed until October 28th, 1837, but the track was extended in 1834 to Newark, in 1835 to Elizabeth, and 1836 to East Brunswick) and at once gave new incitement to all this section. Many of our farmers were busily engaged with their teams in preparing the grades, and Mr. Lewis Campbell was a prominent contractor. The first depot was that still known as Campbell's Station, and our people rejoiced to find themselves four or five times nearer to New York than ever before--reckoning by time tables.

I well remember the first locomotive and train that passed over the road. The event having been duly pre-noted, at about ten o'clock A.M., the village school, with its teacher, adjourned to the church grounds, and, there having been some detention, we awaited with others for an hour or more, the expected arrival. And then, for the first time in our lives, we saw the locomotive and the passenger-cars. Curiosity was on tip-toe--all were interested; some excited, some alarmed, and I have quite a vivid recollection of one stout young miss who screamed and ran quite a distance in her fright.

Soon one or two regular trains, and a short freight train, commenced daily trips, and the facility of access was found quite preferable to the stage-coach and post-road.

Continued in the Next Issue



The Grimstead Room at the Metuchen Public Library contains a wealth of local history information, including thousands of photographs, maps, oral histories, manuscript & subject files, postcards, and ephemera. If you have a specific interest in a particular area of local history, contact us with as many details as possible at info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org. Although our archives are not conducive to browsing, if we have any relevant information we will be pleased to arrange, by appointment, for one of our Board members to assist you with your search.

New in the Archives

- Donation via the Metuchen Public Library of a Thomas Edison Museum & Tower Media Scrapbook, compiled by Art Browne starting in 2004.
- Donation from Walter Stochel, Jr. of photographs of 9 Lahiere Avenue, obituaries for Frank Suliman & Joseph Altavilla, & CD for South Edison History Day.
- Donation from Clark Ellison of 25+ items pertaining to Joseph Clark Ellison & the Lindeneau section of Edison, New Jersey.
- Donation from Betty Urbanik of 30+ items related to Charles Kavcsak, Edison officials, JFK Center, Metuchen Elks Lodge, JCC of Middlesex County, Edison police, Ford Plant, Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- Donation from Byron Sondergard of Metuchen Savings Bank pens.



Public Hours
Thur., Fri., Sat.
10 am– 4 pm

37 Christie
Edison, NJ

The **Thomas Edison Center** museum offers guided tours to individuals, families, corporations, scout programs, schools, summer camps, and senior groups.

We book private tours for groups of 12 or more on other days in advance when available.

Visit our website for more information about other programs, volunteering, memberships, and much more.

www.menloparkmuseum.org
732-549-3299

The Metuchen Mirror

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THE BOROUGH IMPROVEMENT LEAGUE OF METUCHEN



**ALL-VOLUNTEER, 501(C)3 NON-PROFIT CHARITY
FOUNDED 1901 AND DEVOTED TO PRESERVING THE
HISTORIC OLD FRANKLIN SCHOOLHOUSE, BUILT CA.
1807, AS AN INCLUSIVE PLACE FOR THE CULTURAL
ARTS & COMMUNITY SERVICE.**

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P.O. Box 61
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Tyreen Reuter, *Nannygoats* Editor

Board of Trustees
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The name of the newsletter, "**Nannygoats**," is taken from the title of a collection of **anecdotes**, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area, mostly during the 1930s, which make up 80 percent of the Historical Society's photographic collection. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society dedicates this publication to Lloyd Grimstead, as a way of honoring him for preserving so much of our local history.

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



Rare opportunity
to advertise in
our newsletter!

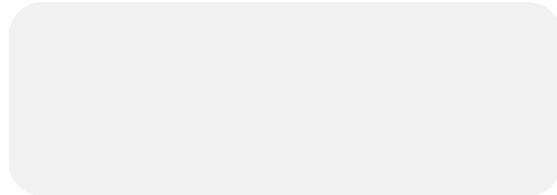
The Society is once again opening up the opportunity to advertise in our newsletter! There is only room for a select few advertisers and the size is standard business card (3.5" wide and 2" high).

The price is a very reasonable \$150 per year and we issue at least three issues per year. Copies are given out for free at public events, distributed to the Metuchen and all Edison branch libraries, sent to all Society members, and posted on our website. Copies are also sent to places like Rutgers University's Special Collections and other historical/genealogical societies. They will also end up in our next published compendium of newsletters, just like those from the first 10 years of *Nannygoats* did.

Contact us at metuchenedisonhistory@gmail.com to reserve your space and/or with any questions!



Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
P.O. Box 61
Metuchen, NJ 08840



Want to write an article for Nannygoats? Have a History Mystery you need help with? An interesting photo or memory to share? Contact the editor... we love submissions from our members and readers!

Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
Drake House Museum Field Trip
Sunday, August 25 at 2:00 p.m.

Meet up with fellow MEHS members at the Drake House at 2:00 pm August 25, 2019 for a tour of this fascinating museum, located at 605 West Front Street in Plainfield (\$5.00 donation per person requested). Originally constructed in 1746, the Drake House was used in June 1777 as his headquarters during the Battle of the Short Hills. It is now a museum operated by the Historical Society of Plainfield.

SPRIT
of the
JERSEYS

State History Fair

Saturday, September 14, 2019
(raindate 9/15/19)

11:00 am - 5:00 pm
Monmouth Battlefield State Park
Manalapan, New Jersey
historyfair@dep.nj.gov

Middlesex, Somerset, and Union Counties
TRI-COUNTY HISTORY FAIR
Saturday, September 28, 2019

11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Plainfield Public Library, 800 Park Avenue, Plainfield

Featured speaker Graham Hodges, Professor of History and Africana & Latin American Studies at Colgate University will discuss his recent book, *Black New Jersey: 1664 to the Present Day*.

Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce

Metuchen
Country Fair

Saturday, October 5, 2019
10am to 4pm
Main & New Streets

LOOK FOR THE SOCIETY'S BOOTH!