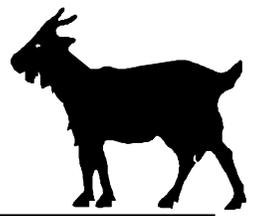


# Nannygoats



Vol. 19, Issue 4

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2021



*The following remembrance was written by Society Director & Archives Chair Byron Sondergard, and is accompanied by the photographs he took that day. Then only 20 years old, the event clearly left an indelible impression, as it did for many. A photographer from the Netherlands, Rein Jelle Terpstra, has been collecting and exhibiting photographs of the RFK Funeral Train as a flashpoint in our collective memory, and the second edition of his book on the subject will include Sondergard's photographs.*

## A Somber Day in Metuchen

by Byron Sondergard

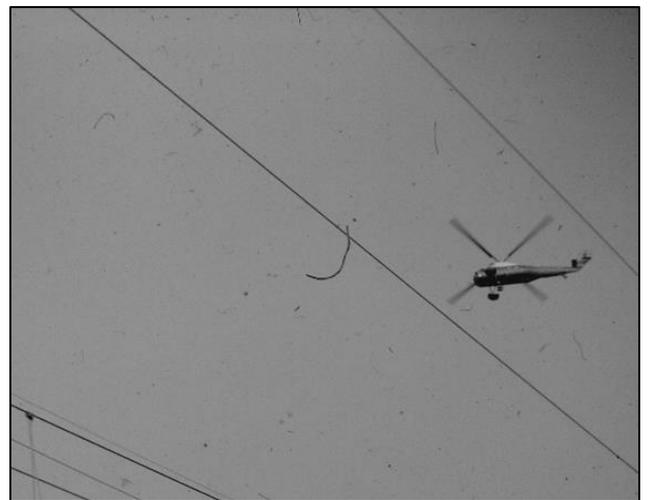
June 8, 1968 was not a sunny day in Metuchen. I remember it as being warm and cloudy, a dreary, bleak sort of day, befitting the event documented in the accompanying pictures. Robert F. Kennedy, former United States Attorney General, Senator, and current candidate for the Democrat Party presidential nomination, had been assassinated on June 5. RFK's coffin was being transported by private funeral

train from New York to Washington, D.C., to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Many thousands lined the tracks along the 225-mile journey, including hundreds in Metuchen. What little talking there was, was mostly done in the hushed tones appropriate for such an occasion. The mood was somber and respectful, and crying and saluting the train as it passed were not uncommon.



*Continued on Page 4*



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 the Township of Edison.

## Thomas Mundy Peterson Park Opens in Perth Amboy

At the end of September, Middlesex County opened its 19<sup>th</sup> and newest park along the Perth Amboy waterfront. The 10-acre park includes playing fields, a comfort station, benches, and walking paths along the water.

The park is named in honor of Thomas Mundy Peterson (1824-1904), first African American to vote in U.S. after adoption of 15th Amendment. Peterson was born in Metuchen to a formerly enslaved mother and a father who labored on the Ezra Mundy farm; his parents had been married at the First Presbyterian Church four years earlier. The family then moved to Perth Amboy, where Peterson cast his historic vote in 1870.

Peterson then embarked on a lifetime of civic engagement and wore the medal he was awarded in commemoration of his vote proudly. He died at the age of 79 and is buried in Perth

Amboy's St. Peter's Episcopal Church. In 1998, the New Jersey Legislature passed a resolution that March 31 be known throughout the state as Thomas Mundy Peterson Day.



## Middle Passage Port Marker Unveiled

The City of Perth Amboy has an incredibly rich history and has been working hard to share all aspects of it. Working with several organizations, notably the Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Marker Commission (MPCPMC), the City unveiled a marker at the Perth Amboy Marina on Front Street this summer that honors the 2 million souls who perished during – and the 10 million people who survived – the Middle Passage of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

This location in Perth Amboy was where enslaved Africans disembarked during the 17th and 18th centuries before being auctioned nearby. As New Jersey didn't charge a tariff on enslaved cargo at that time, slavers were incentivized to use this port. In 2019, Perth Amboy was designated a "Site of Memory" by the UNESCO Slave Route Project.

## Nannygoats

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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, and make up 80 percent of the 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 tax-exempt charitable organization.*

## ***Preservation Update: The Nathan Robins House***

Readers and members may remember that Metuchenite/Preservationist/Society Member Nancy Zerbe and her husband Peter Materna have been working to acquire the historic Robins House at 443 Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen. Good news is that they recently closed on the property and are moving ahead on multiple fronts.

While it may not look like much is happening right now, a lot of planning and prep work is underway... architectural plans to create five beautiful apartments are being finalized, an application for federal historic preservation tax credits is being prepared, electricity is being reconnected, and major debris clean-up (interior and exterior) is underway, but - due to the onset of cold weather - exterior siding repairs and painting will need to wait for the Spring. And, just as preservation and environmentalism go hand-in-hand, arrangements have been made for apiarists to safely and carefully move to a new home a honey bee hive currently affixed to the cornice.

Nancy and Pete are still very eager to see any and all photographs from this wonderful building's past, so if you have any to share, contact the Society at [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).



## ***New in the Archives***

Listed here are just some of the many recent archives acquisitions. While we cannot accept historic items that are unrelated to our local history, we are always interested in acquiring originals and/or copies of photographs, ephemera, books, etc. relevant to our collective past. If you don't want to part with an original item, we'd be delighted to either photograph or scan it.

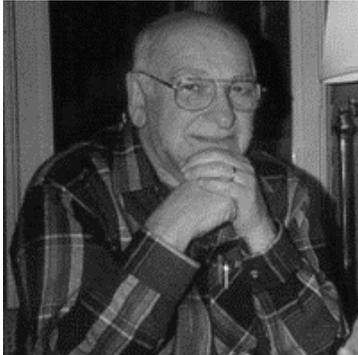
- Framed copy of Franklin School watercolor, signed by the artist Edward Wetzel and *Homes in a Box: Modern Homes from Sears Roebuck*, 1998 (donated by Donna Trembley Fulton, former Metuchenite).
- Autographed copy of *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, edited by Brent L. Kendrick, 1985 (donated by Byron Sondergard).
- Ticket of Admission for Class of 1980 Commencement Exercises at Metuchen High School and Front page of *Raritan Independent*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1/16/1925.
- Polyconic Projection Map of Middlesex County, NJ, undated (donated by Daniel Granato).
- *Metuchen Recorder* Scrapbook containing 1945 reprints of 1899-1919 articles, compiled by James A. Moran (donated by Suzee Rowland).
- Photographs taken by John Brinckmann of Metuchen trolleys and Lehigh Valley Depot along Durham Avenue (donated by Janie Baker of Lewisberry, PA).
- *Tile Heritage Magazine: A Review of American Tile History*, Spring 2021 (donated by Linda LaStella).
- Port Reading Railroad Fact Sheet and local newspapers about local people and events including Conrail freight train wreck (donated by David Hutchinson).
- Digital copies of newspaper clippings, photographs, artifacts, and history of the Mintz brothers (Michael Mintz & Joel Mintz), their invention called the Hemochronometer, and their company International Technidyne Corporation (ITC) in Edison (donated by Claudia Campbell-Matland).
- 1876 New Historical Atlas of Middlesex County, New Jersey Illustrated (donated by Robert John Kentos).
- Program for "Always Remember -- September 11, 2001" by Edison Township (donated by Walter Stochel, Jr).



The accompanying pictures are largely self-explanatory. With the exception of the last photo, all were taken from the woods at the end of Laureldale Avenue. The helicopter was accompanying the train, perhaps as a measure of security. The last photo was taken soon after the train

had passed. People who had driven to Laureldale Avenue were returning to their cars. I recognize my mother and several Laureldale Avenue neighbors, walking to their homes.





### ***Dom Walker***

**Dominic Thomas Walker, a longtime resident of Metuchen, passed away peacefully at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, on September 3, 2021 at the age of 99. Born in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, he studied Chemical Engineering at Pennsylvania State University, Bucknell University, and Johns Hopkins University. He was stationed in Asheville, Kentucky, serving from 1944 to 1945 to aid the wartime effort at Ashland Oil & Refining Co. In 1949, he married schoolteacher Phyllis Shrader and moved to Metuchen to raise their family in the house where he remained for the rest of his life.**

**He worked for many years in Chemical Engineering Research & Development at National Lead Company and American Smelting & Refining. After retiring from his chemical engineering career in 1972, Dom taught high school chemistry at St Joseph's in Metuchen and Morris Knolls High School in Morris Township.**

**Dom discovered photography at an early age and his sisters were his first subjects, but as his interest continued it extended beyond family to train "portraits": he shared his interest in trains with railroad fans by developing and offering collectible train photographs at many train shows. He proudly served as a member of the Jersey Central Chapter, National Railway Historical Society since its inception, for over 40 years.**

**Additionally, Dom extended his community service efforts as a member, director, and officer of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Board of Directors and as the Membership Chair of the Friends of the Metuchen Library. His always-positive attitude, enthusiasm, and willingness to help out in as many ways as possible were inspirational. Dom will be missed greatly.**

**In his memory, the Society has made a donation to the Phyllis Walker Memorial Fund which supports the school library which his beloved wife had established at St. Francis Cathedral School.**

# Piscatawaytown Burial Ground GPR Project

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

A recent Ground Penetrating Radar Study (GPR) has solved some mysteries in the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground on Woodbridge Avenue in Edison. The Edison Greenways Group, Inc., a local non-profit land trust, has been doing tours and cleanups of the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground since 1995. Unable to continue those activities during the COVID-19 shutdown, the group applied for a 2021 grant from Middlesex County to conduct a Ground Penetrating Radar Study of 10 areas of the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground and Commons.

One of the areas studied under the grant was the "Colored Burial Ground" in the southwest corner of the cemetery (it was common practice in the 19th century to refer to the segregated section cemetery where Black residents were interred as the "Colored Burial Ground"). This area is open with few gravestones. Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt (1830-1894), a resident of the Metuchen section of Raritan Township, recorded all gravestones in the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground in 1880. This is the earliest inventory of burials in this cemetery. He identified the southwest corner as the "Colored Burial Ground" and recorded 5 gravestones in that section. He also recorded the gravestones in the old Presbyterian Cemetery in Metuchen as well as the cemetery at Stelton Baptist Church, but he did not identify any of those as marking Black graves. Dr. Hunt was a medical doctor who served in the Civil War and was later active with the NJ State Board of Health. He was also a local historian who collected information about the history of the Metuchen area and wrote a booklet called *Metuchen and Her History*, which has been reprinted serially in *Nannygoats*.

The area of the "Colored Burial Ground" is 98.42 feet east/west along the southern boundary and 65.6 feet north/south (6456.352 square feet). The GPR identified 98 graves in this section, 87 of which are unidentified. There may be more than 87 people buried there, as GPR only detects the disturbed soils of the graves, and not the number of people potentially buried in the graves. These graves are in 14 rows that run north/south, with



the burials east/west. Like the rest of the cemetery, the rows are not all straight; there are gaps in the rows where there are no burials. These do, however, appear to be organized burials, and not randomly placed graves.

Were any of those buried in the "Colored Burial Ground" enslaved persons? In 1804 New Jersey adopted the Gradual Emancipation Act, with the last enslaved people being freed by the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. Therefore, it is possible that enslaved people were buried here although the research has not yet yielded any specific information, nor has it identified when the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground was segregated. Previous studies of the area show that there is no chronological pattern to the burials. The oldest burials are on the east side, then in 1790 they begin on the west side. The southern, and far western side do not have any 18th century burials, so this corner may have been empty when the first burials occurred there.

The oldest gravestone in the "Colored Burial Ground" is of 19-year-old Mary Dunn who died on December 18, 1831, meaning the segregated section was established by then. Those gravestones in this section that was identified by Dr. Hunt in 1880 were not grouped together in a row, nor were

they on the edge of the section, but were on two adjoining rows near the southern boundary. This may indicate that there were burials before Mary Dunn was buried. The last recorded burial in this section is for Elizabeth Campbell in 1910.

Now that there is an established number of known graves in the African Burial Ground, the Edison Greenways Group has recommended to Edison Township that a proper memorial for those buried there – both named and unnamed - be created.

## Identified People Buried in the "Colored Burial Ground"

Mary Dunn (1812-1831)  
Yorkus Martin (1764-1839)  
John Demund (1813-1843)  
Margaret (1789- 1844)  
Gifford Dunn (1823-1845)  
Joseph Campbell (1829-1882)  
Peter Dunham (1844-1887)  
Rosanna Green (1811-1898)  
Walter L. Dennis (1879-1898)  
Peter Rayn (1853-1909)  
Elizabeth Campbell (1830-1910)

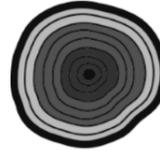
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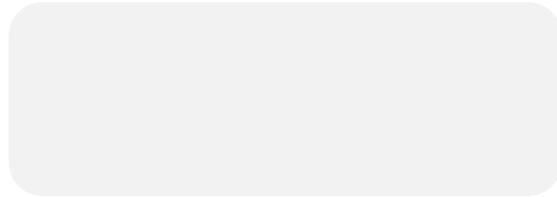
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## **Upcoming Events**

### **CEMETERY CLEANUP**

**November 13, 2021**



Volunteers welcome to the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery Fall Cleanup (Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue) on Saturday, November 13 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Scouts & Student Service

Hours Welcome! BYO: Rakes, Loppers, Clippers, Gloves, etc. Come for an hour – or the whole day! Rain date is November 20. Questions? Contact [cgleckenby@gmail.com](mailto:cgleckenby@gmail.com), 303-520-5818.

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

**January 15, 2022**

Save the Date! The Society's Annual Meeting will be held at the Edison First Aid Squad at 848 New Dover Road on Sunday, January 15, 2022 at 1:00 p.m. More information about the program and speaker will be sent with membership renewal notices.

### **HOLIDAY BAZAAR**

**December 4 & 5, 2021**

Here's a "shop-portunity" to pick up some Historical Society merchandise for the holidays! The Borough Improvement League, Breaking the Chain Through Education, and The Friends of the Metuchen Library will all be there with gift items. Stop by the Old Franklin Schoolhouse at 491 Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen on Saturday and/or Sunday from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.

### **LOCAL HISTORY DAY**

**February 20, 2022**

Come view our photo albums and special exhibits, order reprints, purchase Society merchandise, and commune with fellow history fans at the Metuchen Public Library (480 Middlesex Avenue) on Sunday, February 20 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. *Have photos or documents to share?* Bring them with you and we can scan them on site and return them to you immediately.