

HISTORY OF METUCHEN

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by

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2. SNAPSHOT

Middlesex County's Boroughs, those political creations suspended midway between the township with its villages and cities such as New Brunswick, Perth Amboy and South Amboy are as a pack of parvenue. They started as township hamlets and through the accidents of geography, of the course which railroads took, and of the economic development of the country and state, grew larger than their brothers and sisters.

_____ Most are the products of the railroad era, rather than of primary settlement, and by 1870, having grown larger and richer, they raised a great to-do about supporting their less favored relatives in the township. To still their clamor the State created the borough form to give these overgrown villages some measure of political autonomy. Many have seen their first bright hopes and aspirations fade and dissolve in disillusionment. Jamesburg and Spotswood, for example, were left high and dry when the Camden & Amboy Railroad declined to a third-rate sub-branch line. Others were similarly affected when new roads divided the traffic from old, or when the one industry decided to move further south in search of more favorable labor conditions, leaving the borough politically independent but economically impoverished.

Metuchen for some reason, is an exception to the general rule. True, the strongest impetus to its growth was the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Middlesex and Essex Turnpike (Lincoln Highway), but prior to either of these developments Metuchen had been something of a village. It was, in fact, a distinct locality with the Indian name Metuchen as early as 1669 when Woodbridge settlers divided Metuchen's farm lands among themselves and began to send their sons and friends and relatives to settle there. By 1717 it rated the creation of a separate meeting house.

But the principal way in which Metuchen differs from its fellow-boroughs in the county is this: the other boroughs saw in the railroad a chance to become great manufacturing cities and fought fiercely among themselves to bring manufacturing enterprises within their boundaries. But Metuchen held aloof from such antics; Metuchen was a mature, first-settlement community. It had a long tradition, its ways and character were set by almost 200 years of development. Metuchen decided to let him who would produce the world's goods, but she would be good and beautiful.

As a result Metuchen maintained in the midst of the industrialized Raritan valley, with its polyglot population, the pure undefiled Puritan character with which its first New England settlers endowed it. Metuchen was, and still is to some extent, more New England than many New England communities. An unusually large proportion of first families still reside in the borough and its vicinity upon original ancestral lands. Its first

church, the Presbyterian, the sparkplug of the community during its formative years, is still a power in the borough, numbering most of the old families among its members.

Having refused one of the boons which the railroads could confer--industrial development--it benefitted doubly from the second gift which the railroad brought, that of becoming a residential commuting town. And Metuchen worked this latter possibility for all it was worth, deliberately setting its cap for the higher economic brackets, urging, cajoling and flirting with New York's bankers, brokers, business executives and successful practitioners in the arts and sciences.

Today 11% of the town's total population of 5,748 are commuters; counting their families, the proportion must be nearer 25%. Back in 1906 when Metuchen was in an uproar over the recently published Mary Wilkins Freeman novel, "The Debter" in which Metuchen appeared life-size, the town inn-keeper told a *New York Times* reporter "After the morning trains leave, the women run the town." He had good reason to be cynical for he and his fellow-dispensers of liquor were the special target of Metuchen womanhood organized in its might as the Borough Improvement League. The complaint is little less valid today than it was forty years ago; the Borough Improvement League composed predominantly of women has, through the years, become the kitchen cabinet of the borough government. For with its economic roots divided among New York, the local business section and the county industrial establishment, the town has been unusually steady financially and therefore politically. Steadiness in the later phase stems, too, from the absence of any large foreign population. Metuchen is a comfortable, upper middle-class community with both feet on the ground; it knows what it wants and what it wants to be, and has always shown the necessary discrimination to achieve its will.

The railroad spans its Main Street upon which two blocks of stores, the two banks, and the motion picture theatre are arranged. Frame construction slightly outranks brick or stone, and the average size is two-stories; the banks and one or two other office buildings are exceptions, raising to three stories. Modernization of store fronts and interiors is far from unanimous; many establishments, unabashed by the proximity of sleek, stream-lined facades, still present in their simple, rustic, general-storish faces to the street.

Just off Main Street is the railroad station, an important institution in a commuting town, furnishing a natural gossip center for husbands waiting for trains, and an appointment-making opportunity for wives who bring them there in the family cars. Twenty-seven miles to New York, the mileage marker says and six to New Brunswick.

This modern center coincided with the original historic center of the town, for close by is the intersection of Main Street and Woodbridge Avenue, the latter the original road to Woodbridge built in the seventeenth century. Near this intersection was erected the first meeting house, and its cemetery is still there overlooking the gleaming tracks of the Pennsylvania right-of-way. Its successor, the Presbyterian church, stands close to the station grounds.

This coincidence, by the way, was no accident. When the railroad placed its first station in town it did so near the intersection of the Amboy and New Brunswick turnpikes

where it appeared (1836). Metuchen's business section was developing in the shape of two taverns and the town's only store. Metuchen, however, brusquely informed the railroad that the intersection of ancient Woodbridge Avenue and almost equally ancient Main Street where its church was located, was the center of town. The railroad company honored local feeling by opening a second station at Metuchen's emotional center. Every attempt to move it thereafter brought the community down on the neck of the company.

If, due to Metuchen's stubborn determination to regard this section as its center, one of the two turnpikes constructed in 1810 did not become the business center of the town, they did eventually become the main residential arteries. The Middlesex and Essex Turnpike, now Middlesex Avenue and part of the Lincoln Highway, runs parallel to the railway about three blocks north. Upon its broad tree-lined length are the town's largest and most luxurious houses. Each has spacious grounds, with trim lawns, spreading trees and massed shrubbery attractively landscaped. Although architecture varies from house to house along the archway of foliage, the ranks of sturdy tree-trunks and continuity of lawn and masking shrubbery gives a rich pleasant uniformity to the street.

West of the intersection with Main Street however, the economic level descends progressively until the borough limits are approached and the street ends amid miserable shacks clustered about the equally miserable remains of Metuchen's first tavern and here a small colony of negroes live. Close by is the imposing bulk of Metuchen's one large factory, the Celotex plant, employing about 70 local workers. The negro colony continues over to Durham Avenue, one block north of Middlesex. Originally the main road to Piscataway Town, it starts at Main Street and runs west to join Amboy Avenue just outside the borough limits, crossing the Lehigh Valley tracks near which are located a few small manufacturing shops. Beyond this point Durham Avenue abruptly becomes a country road which cuts through a grove of trees at its junction with the main road. Along its brief course several of the town's older houses are located; and two of the negro churches stand and The Church of Jesus Christ.

Woodbridge Avenue, while a cut below Middlesex on the economic scale, has history and antiquity to give it social standing in the community. The other turnpike, the Amboy-Bound Brook, now Amboy Avenue, has also become an important residential street. Its broad concrete roadway is shaded by large trees, and by the solid shadows of two rows of solid middle-class homes. In general the northern and central portion of the borough are given over to the characteristic suburban cottage and villa developments designed for middle-income groups, while the southern portion, called Dublin, after the large Irish component of its population, is predominately an equally characteristic working-class district composed of small neat frame houses in which dwell clerks, small store-keepers, and workers in the factories and business establishments of Perth Amboy and New Brunswick.

Just barely touching the southern tip of the borough the recently constructed four-lane super-highway sweeps by carrying its burden of cars between New York and Philadelphia, thus keeping Metuchen's streets serenely quiet and clear of unnecessary traffic.

Metuchen, the suspicion arises, does not really belong in Middlesex County--it seems more like a misplaced bit of the Oranges or Maplewood. But a glance at its 271-year old history dispels the doubt--Metuchen is the memory of Middlesex County's youth recaptured.

3 THE INDIANS

As the history of Metuchen unfolds it will become evident that the arteries of transportation--roads, turnpikes, railroads--played a decisive part in the development of the community. There were other important factors, too, the principal one being geographic: Metuchen is located in the exact center of that part of Middlesex County north of the Raritan, and lies also on a straight line between New York and Philadelphia upon which the majority of New Jersey's large communities are located.

The influence of roads, however, was operative long before the geographic effect was felt, for one of the state's principal Indian paths, the Minisink path connecting northern Pennsylvania, New York and northern New Jersey with the shore and south Jersey, passed directly through Metuchen. Many Indian relics and graves in the neighborhood attest to the popularity of Metuchen as a stop-over place during the trek to the shore, and indicate also some more permanent settlement of Indians within the present borough limits.

The local natives were doubtless a group of the Raritans who belonged to the Unami tribe. Philhower, an expert on New Jersey's Indians, describes them as "a quick-witted, modest, fine looking people, black-haired and of a dark copper color" who spoke the Lenape dialect.

In 1646 the tribe consisted of 1200 warriors and twenty chiefs, among whom tradition has it was Matouchin, chief of the Indians in this section. In keeping with Indian custom in the matter of nomenclature, Chief Matouchin had been named after the nature of the country in which he lived--a rolling upland. Whether the land of the Indian bore his first name is open to question.

The spelling of the name, too, is disputed, various authorities advancing different versions--Matouchin, Metuchin, Matousheon, Metoachen, and other variations. An Indian deed of 1677 in which the Indians sold some land in the district of Carteret gives the name as Mateckshoning. Certainly the Indians must have known the proper name of the land; so, it may be assumed that the other names are Anglicized versions.

Alfred M. Heston in his *Jersey Wagon Jaunts* tells a story concerning chief Metouchen. When Christopher Billop was sailing around Staten Island to determine whether it could be circumvented in 24 hours and thus become the property of New York, he got into difficulties in the treacherous shoals in the Kill van Kull opposite Perth Amboy. Three Indians set out from shore in a canoe, and approached Billops vessel. "One of them, Metouchen (whence the town of Metuchen), could speak a few words of

Dutch, and to him Billop managed to make known his plight. Metouchen agreed to serve as pilot, and his knowledge of the channel and shoals made it possible for Billop to finish his course within the twenty-four hours.”

But this must have been one of the more unusual adventures of Chief Matouchen. He and his braves’ normal daily life consisted of hunting, fishing and sleeping, while the women cooked, gathered firewood, raised the children, cultivated the crops, and gathered berries and nuts. The peaceful routine was occasionally varied, it seems, by wars with other tribes.

In later years historical-minded Metuchenites puzzled their brains over the derivation of the name of their town and evolved several theories, some fanciful, some amusing and some ridiculous. The *Metuchen Recorder* of June 24, 1927, inspired by Ezra M. Hunt, offered this:

“There is a story told of how Metuchen got its name. After the turnpike was opened from New York to New Brunswick (1810), there was a theft of a horse and carriage near New Brunswick. While walking along the road the victims met a Frenchman and inquired if he had met a man driving a horse and carriage, the Frenchman could only understand ‘met’, and he replied ‘Met dieux chiena’ which in French is ‘Met two dogs.’ They tried to make him understand, but his constant reply was ‘Met dieux chiena.’ Upon coming to a store they saw a similar sign and at once concluded this to be the place about which he spoke. But it is certain that Metuchen is neither dog French nor dog Latin, but Indian in origin.”

David T. Marshall playfully offers the suggestion that Metuchen is a corruption of two words, mud and touchen “the word touch in this case denoting something that sticks to one as does a friend who wishes to ‘touch’ one for a loan of a five dollar bill.” As for the word mud, Marshall recalled that as a boy there wasn’t a paved road in Metuchen. “The sticky mud was everywhere. Later on the mud became tough and sticky. I have no doubt that strangers, seeing the red shoes and the mud-besmeared clothes of the inhabitants of the region, dubbed them mud-touchen-ites” which appellation stuck like mud to them, and the region from whence they came.

As for Chief Metuchen’s life-span, most local historians give it as 1630-1700, a most eventful period in which to have lived, for it saw the beginnings of the white civilization in New Jersey. When Metuchen came to manhood in 1651 he must have made a pilgrimage to Staten Island to the tepee of Chief Mattame to see the marvellous treasures of the island the chieftan had received from the Dutchman Augustine Herrman in payment for a tract of land extending from the Raritan northwards to the Passaic River. Among those treasures were 11 ells of gaudy cloth, five hatchets, kettles of all kinds and sizes, and strings of wampum.

This business of selling land must have appeared to Mattamo as something of a racket. Here he was richer by a great pile of trinkets and wampum, and still apparently in possession of the land, for the Dutch had made no effort to take physical possession. Mattamo was still on the scene in 1664 when the English took New Netherlands from the Dutch and established English sovereignty over all New York and New Jersey. He was

on the scene and, uninhibited by considerations of real estate ethics, was able to sell the very same tract to a group of Englishmen: Daniel Denton, Luke Watson and John Baily. For which Mattamo added to his Dutch kettles and hatchets, “Twenty fathom of tradyn cloth, two made cotes, two gunnes, two kettles, ten barres of lead, twenty handfulls of powder, four hundred fathom of white wampom, or two hundred fathom of black wampom.”

Governor Carteret and one John Ogden bought out the rights of Denton and Baily and became the partners of Luke Watson. On December 11, 1866, in consideration of 80 pounds sterling, these three transferred to Daniel Pierce and a number of associates the tract of land now comprised by Woodbridge, Raritan and Piscataway Townships. This grant is confirmed by a deed issued on December 3, 1867 which Price endorsed with the names of his associates interested in settling the “Towne now called Woodbridge.” Those names were: Joshua Price, Kohn Pike, John Bishop, Henry Jaques, and Hugh March (or Marsh) of Newbury, Massachusetts, Stephen Kent of Haverhill, Robert Dennis of Yarmouth and John Smith of Barnstable.

Pierce was immediately commissioned as deputy-surveyor to lay out the boundaries of the town, and the proportion of the land belonging to each individual. A week later the Woodbridge associates sold one-third of their tract to John Martin, Charles Gilman, Hugh Dunn and Hopewell Bull to settle the town of Piscataway.

The line of demarcation, as shown on John Reid’s map of 1683 ran north to south about two-thirds of a mile west of the present western boundary of the borough. But this was later changed so that on the map of 1850 it appeared as running from Kent’s Neck northward along the eastern stretch of what is now the Vineyard Road, then along the western border of what is now the borough line ending along the line between South Plainfield and Raritan Township.

The limitations of space prevent this history from detailing the settlement and history of Woodbridge. Significant phases of that history are treated in sections of this book. Speculation as to the reason for the group of New Englanders coming to settle Woodbridge leads to the familiar economic interpretation: the opportunities for getting ahead and getting rich quickly seemed more numerous in this newly acquired territory than in New England where the land was closely held and strictly administered by the predominant Puritan group.

Once arrived in New Jersey, 10,000 acres were set aside for the town and its house lots and streets, and the balance of the 20,000 acres was divided in a series of land divisions among the members of the corporation of Woodbidge. The divisions were planned to give each freeholder a just proportion of farm-land, meadow-land and up-land. Groups of two to ten were allowed to have adjacent lands if they wished it, consequently it is found that the same series of names recur in the deeds and patents to adjacent lands through the township. With more land in his possession than each man could conveniently use, a brisk real estate business ensued, with land changing hands frequently and rapidly.

The first division of the 20,000 acres which had been set aside as common lands occurred during 1669 and 1670. Metuchen and its environs were included in the lands divided among the members of the Woodbridge Corporation. From the various patents and deeds it appears that the district roughly approximated by the present borough, Roosevelt Park, and as far east as the junction of the Woodbridge Road and the Woodbridge-Piscataway highway was known as Langster's or Langstaff's Farm or Plain. To be more exact, the location was called "north of Langster's Farm or Plain" the name referring to John Langstaff's farm in Piscataway. This name alternated in the deeds and patents with Crane Plain, and in 1688-9 one deed gives "Crane Plain or Metuchings." Both of these names gave way about 1695 to Matuching, Matutching and Metuching. Langstaff's Farm or Plain survived fitfully until 1703, and then the variations of the Matouching theme ran the gauntlet of half a dozen versions until it settled down to Metuchen after the Revolution.

4. First Landowners and Settlers

Metuchen was settled and grew like many of New Jersey's secondary settlements, such as Woodbridge and Elizabeth were founded immediately upon English possession of the province and were laid out according to the New England plan of settlement which was designed to achieve the maximum security from Indian and other attack. This plan provided for a central stockaded settlement in which the settler's house lots were assigned and houses built, with farm lands in the territory immediately surrounding the stockade and pastures, wood lots and meadows beyond.

When the outmost lands, such as Metuchen, were assigned they were much too far away from the dwellings of the owners to be worked regularly and usually were sold to friends, relations and newcomers or given to sons and sons-in-law when they were ready to set up their homes. This pattern characterized the development of Metuchen.

From the descriptions of boundaries and neighbors contained in the deeds and patents it has been possible roughly to approximate the location of Metuchen's first landowners. Most of the records mention the road to Woodbridge for they were all located along that road, now Woodbridge Avenue. Whether the road was actually completed at that time cannot be ascertained. If it was, it was a primitive sort of road full of rocks and holes.

Beginning at what is now the intersection of Main Street and Woodbridge Avenue, Joshua Bradley was granted 120 acres on the north side of the road. Bradley soon sold it to Robert McClelland who, in turn divided it into three parcels of 40 acres each and sold them to John Compton (March 4, 1688-9), Owan Lockhart (April 20, 1689) and the Rev. Archibald Riddell (May 3, 1689), minister at Woodbridge.

Lockhart sold out to John Compton in 1692, and Riddell sold his portion to Samuel Ayers in the same year. In 1715 John Compton sold half of his 80 acres to Israel Thornall.

East of the Bradley tract, and still north of the road, Obediah Ayers was granted 180 acres, most of which was within the present borough limits. Fifteen years after receiving the land Obediah gave the lower half to his son John, and in 1693 he gave the other half to his son Samuel, who as noted above purchased the Riddell 40 acres adjoining. The Ayers remained to be counted among the first actual settlers of Metuchen. John being referred to in a deed of 1695 as "John Ayers of Matouching."

Obediah Ayers' neighbor on the east was Richard Worth who also received 120 acres which were just outside of the borough limits in Roosevelt Park. Like Ayers he divided his farm between his two sons, Joseph and John. Joseph sold the western half to his brother-in-law, John Shippy, in 1698 who in turn sold it to Joseph Crowell in 1699. Brother John kept his half of the land and settled upon it. In 1716 he gave half of his half to his son, Richard. The deed reads "...one equal half of my farm where I now live in Woodbridge at the place commonly known by Metouchion the whole being 200 acres." Apparently he added to his original 60 acres, possibly by securing more land in the commons north of his farm.

Samuel Hale was next on the east with 120 acres on the Metuchen side of what is now the Parsonage road. The patent to his land describes it as being bounded east by Peter's Wigwam (somewhere in the neighborhood of Sage's Spring in Roosevelt Park.), or where two streams meet to form the south branch of the Rahway River.

Hale's land was bounded on the east by the more easterly of the two streams. No deed has been found for any further transfer of this land, but a new owner, Josiah Holden or Helden is shown in a road return of 1705.

The next plot on the east was William Compton's 60 acres "lying at a place called Peter's wigwam.." On William's death the land passed to his brothers, John and Jonathan. North of the Comptons, John Ellis had a lot of unspecified size.

Returning to the intersection of Main Street and Woodbridge Avenue, John Pike, Jr. was granted 60 acres south of the road. He sold the land in 1688 to Richard Smith Jr.

East of Smith, Nathan Webster was granted 60 acres. This tract passed rapidly through a series of transfers until finally it came into the possession in 1703 of Elisha Parker and Joseph Ayers (who owned 10 acres of the original 60).

South of the Pike and Webster tracts was 120 acres patented to Isaac Tappen who in 1696 gave half to his son Isaac. The deed for the transfer tells that Abraham Tapping owned the adjoining land which went over to the Piscataway line. A road return of 1705 gives Jonathan Compton as their southern neighbor.

East of Nathan Webster, Elisha Elsie was granted 120 acres. What happened to the Elsie tract is not quite clear. It seems that it passed into the hands of Elisha's brother William, who sold it to Samuel Moore prior to 1686, for in that year a deed shows that Moore sold the tract to Richard Dole Jr. There is a suspicion that Dole is an alias for the Moores so, apparently, it remained in the Moore family. Subsequent returns, however, refer to it as belonging to William Elsie. Samuel Moore owned the adjoining tract of 160 acres "being his portion due to him for four heads." In 1694 he divided his farm

equally between his brothers John and Thomas, the latter receiving the half adjoining Elsie's. In 1701 Thomas sold half of his share to Robert Gilchrist, who, it seems certain, settled on the land and became one of Metuchen's first settlers. A few months later John sold his entire plot in equal parts to George Morris and John Lee, both of whom seemed to have settled upon the land.

Moore's land stretched along the Woodbridge road from the eastern boundary of Elsie's farm, part of which was the borough limits, to the junction of the Woodbridge road and the Parsonage road. Beyond were Thomas Bloomfield, Samuel Dennis and Stephen Kent. But these were far outside the scope of the borough and cannot be considered as first settlers of Metuchen.

Another important sphere of settlement was the western boundary of the township on the Piscataway side. Eliakim Higgins owned 55 acres on the line, bounded on the north by Dismal Swamp. He sold the land in 1683 to Richard Smith Jr. who in turn sold it to John Fitzrandolph who owned the adjoining 60 acres on the west. Fitzrandolph's patent supplies the information that Nicholas Mundy and John Martin were his neighbors. Mundy had 60 acres there and in 1689-90 he transferred part of his land to his son, Nicholas. The deed states: "for two lots in the Vineyard...the first of 17 acres...the second of 56 acres, adjoining the first" the boundaries consisting of Dismal Swamp and neighbors Samuel Hull and Widow Fitzrandolph.

John Martin had "80 acres at the Vineyard" and his son John was granted 110 acres adjoining on the south, and running all the way over to the Woodbridge line, where it seems to have met the land of Abraham Tappen. At least part of Martin's 110 acres must have passed to Benjamin Martin, for he is mentioned in a road return during the early years of the eighteenth century.

Further north, but still touching on the western boundary of the borough, was Hugh Dunn whose neighbors were William Frost and Thomas Higgins. John Loofborrow, the miller, also owned 60 acres near Dismal Swamp, but on the Woodbridge side of the line, and the deed states he adjoined Archibald Riddell on the east. Riddell had been granted 120 acres of upland there by the township for coming to Woodbridge to act as a minister in the meeting house. Loofborrow sold this plot to "Elverton Crowell" in 1897. Riddell, who returned to Scotland, may have sold his 120 acres to Thomas Cordon when he sold him a small plot on Beld Hill near Woodbridge.

These names account for the early ownership of a great deal of the land within the present borough limits. From 1705 on when the county kept a record of road returns, the picture can be filled out somewhat. From this source Elverton Crowell and William Sharp can be placed in the northern part of the borough, north of the Ayers and Compton. The difficulty arises in trying to establish which of these were actually the first settlers in the town. "John Ayers of Metuching" places him on the land by 1695. Gilchrist and Morris must have settled upon their farms soon after their purchase in 1701, for the subsequent road returns consistently mention them. John Worth specifically mentions his farm at Metuching "where I now live" in 1766. And a road return in 1705 for the Woodbridge road mentions "Josiah Hollins his house" where the original Hills tract was granted near the Parsonage road. From road returns it is obvious that the Tappens took

physical possession of their lands quite early, probably before 1700. However the road records from 1705 to 1780 give a quite complete roster of the residents in the district.

The construction of the roads was a vital necessity and was among the first things taken up by the council. The Woodbridge minutes of December 11, 1668 record the fact that “the Inhabitants by their free Votes have Made Choice of Robert Dennes, Thomas Bloomfield Senr., Joshua Pierce and Sam’l Moore to Lay Out All Highways Belonging to this Town of Woodbridge for the benefit of both Town and Country.” These four laid out the more needful roads such as the Woodbridge-Piscataway road, a road to Amboy, a road towards the Kill van Kull, the Metuchen-Woodbridge road and others. But it was not until the county took over the function of road-building in 1705 that accurate records with intelligible measurements, landmarks and directions were kept.

Among the first recorded returns of the Middlesex road commissioners was one which connected the Metuchen-Bonhamtown road. This was four rod wide (about 66 feet) and began “at John Compton’s corner.” From there it ran south between Elisha Parker and Richard Smith, through Jacob Tappen’s and “Jonathan Compton’s land” over a bridge formerly made and so across the country road that leads to Piscataway, quite down to the Raritan meadows....” The formerly made indicates that there was a road to Bonhamtown some time prior to the official return. However, this was usually the case: roads arose out of the need for them, and the need was manifested by travel, consequently the surveyors usually had well-worn paths to follow in laying out the official roads.

“...then laid out another common road from Metuchen to Woodbridge” the return of 1705 continued. This was merely a reworking of the original road and began at Parker’s corner lot “and John Compton’s corner” and ran east between the lots of Parker and Compton; William Ilsley and John Ayers; John Lee and John North: George Morris and John Herd, and goes along by Josiah Hollins, his house and directly to the northerly end of John Curtice his field...and so direct as may be to the south of Mr. Hales his addition: from thence as the way now runs to the country road (Piscataway road), by John Bloomfield’s corner....” Heard appears to have taken over the holdings of John and Jonathan Compton, and became the first settler in that section of the township.

At the same time a short, narrow road called a “driftway” was run from William Ilsley’s corner down past Gilchrist’s land to join the Bonhamtown road at the bridge. Still another road which was an extension of the Bonhamtown-Metuchen road northward, was described as running from John Compton’s corner, striking the west side of Joseph and Samuel Ayers “and so extending along between William Sharp and Elverton Crowell into the commona(?)” The latter, it will be remembered, purchased the Loofborro tract which was described as being near Dismal Swamp, which would indicate the Bonhamtown-Metuchen road, still another clue indicating that road is the fact that the Riddell tract which was north of Compton’s was purchased by John Ayers.

It is much more difficult to place many of the other roads because the landmarks were identified by names of contemporary owners whose lands cannot be located. One such seemed to be Durham Avenue, the return for which is dated January 23, 1712-3:

“ A common highway of four rod wide...beginning at a stake standing near the line between Woodbridge and Piscataway on the land formerly belonging to Nathaniel Campbal deceased. Easterly forty rods between Thomas Martin’s land and so over ye brook between ye said Thomas Martin’s land and his brother Benjamin’s land into ye common, and through ye common into Metuchen road.”

The property lay north of the Woodbridge road, and was bounded on the northeast by the stream which was Samuel Hale’s eastern boundary and which formed one side of Peter’s wigwam. The western neighbor is given as “Jonathan Rowland deceased” and George Morris is shown as having extended his farm north of the road into what was Samuel Hale’s tract. Samuel Harriot has become the owner of Bloomfield land to the east and Benjamin Thornal and Joseph Freeman were neighbors on the northeast and north. A return of 1774 adds a few names to the inhabitants of that section. Stephen Carmen, Ruben Evans, Timothy Bloomfield, Benjamin Alward and Ebenezer Ford are all mentioned.

A 1772 return for the Bonhamtown-Metuchen Road gives the names of all the inhabitants along that thoroughfare from down beyond Bonhamtown all the way to Oak Tree. Between Bonhamtown and the Metuchen meeting house there were Samuel and Gabriel Compton and Jeremiah Manning; from the Woodbridge road north there were Thomas Eigar, James Ayers, James Manning, John Compton, Zebulam Ayers, all on the east side of the road: Benjamin Drake, Samuel Kelly, David Crow and Widow Goddin on the west side.

Eight years later the return for what is obviously Grove Avenue fills out the names of the Borough residents. Campyon Cutter, Benjamin Ayers and James Rowland all seem to fall within the Borough limits. Further north were Benjamin Soper, John Conger, and Moses Frazee.

A road described as running from Metuchen to Piscataway appeared in a road return in 1791 and began at the township line at Peter Mundy’s corner and ran south to join the Vineyard road. Among the new names along the Vineyard road there were Walter Martin, Thomas Combs, Dr. Nathaniel Martin and Nathaniel Martin Jr.

Luckily for the historian a very complete and accurate map of the central portion of Metuchen was made upon the occasion of the division of Daniel Hampton’s extensive lands among his family. The map shows the meeting house on the west side of the Bonhamtown road just south of the junction with Woodbridge avenue. Directly across the road the house of Robert Rose is indicated, and his land surrounds the meeting house. The eastern side of Main street from Woodbridge road to Durham avenue belonged entirely to Hampton and only three houses indicated; one at approximately the location of the present Burroughs building on land labeled John Hampton, the second seemed to be a barn nearby and the other was the parsonage house directly opposite the junction with Durham avenue. Beyond the John Hampton land on the east side of Main Street was the property of Colonel Ross and further east was Israel Thornal. On the west side of Main street opposite John Hampton (the Burroughs building) was a small house mysteriously labeled Chair House. A little north was an old barn. At Durham Avenue and Main Street opposite the parsonage house was the home of Jacob Ayers, and just off

Main on Durham, which was the road to Picataway and Raritan Landing, was the Catherine Allen house, a tavern which served a rendezvous for both British and American soldiers during the Revolution. This section, in fact, was long known as Allentown. A third house was on the corner of Main and Durham and seemed to belong to Sarah Wilt. Nearby was the land of Samuel Ayers, Jesse Vanderhoven and Robert Ross Jr. On the other end of Durham Avenue near the Piscataway line, was the house of Nathan Ayers. South of Durham Avenue at the Piscataway end of town was John Ross's land and next to his, Dr. Martin's. In all there were in 1800 11 buildings in the central part of the borough, seven of them dwellings.

5. Beginning of the Village

The manner in which Metuchen was settled and grew is characteristic of many of New Jersey's secondary settlements. The first settlements, such as Woodbridge and Elizabeth, were settled immediately upon English possession of the provinces and were laid out according to the New England plan of settlement which was designed to provide the maximum of security from the Indian or other attack. This plan provided for a central stockaded settlement in which the settlers' house-lots were assigned and houses built, with farmlands in the territory immediately surrounding the stockade. Beyond the farmlands were pastures, woodlots, and meadows. In the case of Woodbridge, even though the province had made the erection of a stockade mandatory, it does not seem ever to have been built. Which bespeaks the good relations enjoyed locally between the whites and the Indians.

When the outermost lands, among which was Metuchen, were assigned they were much too far away from the dwellings of the owners to be worked consistently and usually were sold to friends, relations and newcomers or given the sons and sons-in-law when they were ready to set up their own homes. All of these developments occurred at Metuchen.

Obediah Ayers and Richard Worth, both of whom never lived upon their holdings in Metuchen, divided the land among their sons who became the first settlers of Metuchen. Samuel Moore divided his 180 acres between his brothers who sold to Robert Gilchrist, George Moreis and John Lee who also became settlers by 1701-1703. John Compton who bought part of the Bradley tract at what is now the intersection of Main street and Woodbridge avenue, must have settled upon his land soon after the two purchases in 1680 and 1691, for he was named overseer of the roads in Metuchen in 1701. Other likely first settlers were Richard Smith who bought the John Pike, Jr. tract in 1688, Elisha Parker, purchaser of the Nathan Webster tract, and the Isaac Tapping a *pere et fils* and Abraham Tapping.

It was in this way that the outermost lands of the first settlements became the secondary areas of settlement in the State. Westfield, for example, was the western fields

of the Elizabeth settlement, and retained the name when a community began to nucleate there.

During the first 50 or 60 years of its existence, Metuchen, which comprised the territory which stretched from Bonhamtown to Oak Tree, and from the Piscataway line to the Parsonage road, was very much tied to the apron strings of mother Woodbridge, which was looked upon as the town while all else in the township was farmland, and that apron string was the Woodbridge-Metuchen road which led to the church, the jail, the court, the town meeting, and in many cases the mother and father and other dear friends and relatives.

But as time went on the district became more populous, both on the Woodbridge and the Piscataway side of the line. Local conditions and issues tended to give Metuchen's people common interests with their neighbors in the Piscataway, Bonhamtown, New Durham and Oak Tree districts. Which does not mean that Metuchen became entirely alienated from Woodbridge, for many Metuchenites continued for many years to hold township office, to serve as church officials, and to transact business in Woodbridge, but it serves to indicate the growth of an entirely different body of strictly local interests, ties, and issues connected with the agricultural community, and the transition of the Woodbridge relationship into a more or less strictly official one. Metuchen was beginning to become aware of itself as a separate locality and entity.

At which point the geographical location of what is now Metuchen began to exert its influence. For the first sign of the growing civic consciousness of the inhabitants of the area lying between Bonhamtown and Oak Tree and the New Durham and the Parsonage road was the erection of a separate meeting house at the junction of the Bonhamtown-Oak Tree and Woodbridge-Metuchen roads. No original records of contemporary accounts of this meeting house exist, consequently the circumstances surrounding its erection are a fair field for speculation. It has been said that the decision to locate the meeting house at that point was dictated by the fact that it was the center of the territory then known as Metuchen and fortunately was also located at the junction of the two roads. Which appears logical, since no other reason whatever can be found to account for the location of the meeting house there. It could not have been because the crossroads was the largest settlement in the section, because both Bonhamtown and Oak Tree were larger and more populous. If it had been decided to locate the meeting house at the most important settlement, Bonhamtown should have been chosen for it was directly on the King's Highway, the main thoroughfare from New York to Philadelphia, which passed through Elizabeth, Woodbridge, Piscataway and went on to New Brunswick, Princeton, and Trenton.

At any rate, the erection of the meeting house at the crossroads was the first event which acted to give the crossroads some importance beyond merely geographical convenience, and to establish a nucleus about which the emergent civic consciousness of the territory might crystallize. Thus the crossroads, in itself of no importance from the standpoint of population, became the central meeting point for all the inhabitants of this section.

The lack of contemporary records concerning the meeting house is somewhat ameliorated by a fragmentary record of the period written in retrospect by Reverend Henry Cook (1794-1824), the first settled pastor of the Metuchen church. According to Cook the meeting house was erected for the purpose of having the Woodbridge minister come once a month on a weekday to preach a service. Metuchenites, then, continued to attend regular church service at Woodbridge until 1756 at least when the Reverend Cook wrote in the record: "we incorporated ourselves into a church and united with New Brunswick and was supplied half of the time by the Rev. Cummings, and after his leaving New Brunswick we were supplied by the New Brunswick Presbytery until the Year 1770."

Except for the entry in 1753 stating that a larger church was built and the congregation "applied for part of the preaching on the Sabbath, but was refused," the period between 1717 and 1755 is a complete blank in Cook's record. It seems unlikely that the Metuchen inhabitants would have gone to the trouble of building a separate meeting house simply to accommodate the Woodbridge preacher for one meeting each month. More likely it was intended as a meeting place for social and political activities, and may have been used as a schoolhouse, although no records indicate it. Even if it were intended solely for a house of worship it must have been used more frequently than once a month. It is quite possible that itinerant preachers stopped there to hold impromptu services and later on it is known that certain members of the congregation would go to New Brunswick to try and find a preacher for the ensuing Sabbath. By 1753 services must have been conducted regularly enough to justify the erection of a larger church. Which indicates also that the congregation had grown so far by that time as to require larger quarters. Three years later, Cook records the fact that the Metuchen church united with the Presbytery of New Brunswick and were supplied half the time by the Reverend Mr. Cummings and others regularly until 1770.

Despite evidence of swelling population and growing self-sufficiency, the area now embraced by the borough made no appreciable progress toward becoming a community; it remained a group of farms. The growth occurred at Bonhamtown, Oak Tree and the Piscataway side of the line. Metuchen was destined to remain predominately agricultural for many decades. It was not until the first years of the nineteenth century which brought the turnpikes through Metuchen that the actual village began to form.

6. THE REVOLUTION

The forces which were acting to make Metuchen a separate entity during the eighteenth century were temporarily halted by the emergency of the War For Independence. When first the necessity for rebellion became obvious the entire township responded as one to resist the aggression of England.

The Sons of Liberty of Woodbridge were a large and influential group among whom many Metuchenites were active. When the infamous Stamp Act was passed in 1765, the Woodbridge Sons immediately sent a delegation to Philadelphia to inform William Coxe, Stamp Distributor for New Jersey that unless he resigned within a week they would forceably close his office. Coxe resigned in September of 1765 and the Stamp Act was repealed the following year.

As crisis followed crisis and tensions mounted the entire community was forced to support either one side or the other--the Rebels or the Loyalists. Both sides were strongly represented, for Perth Amboy was the Capital of New Jersey and a center of Toryism led by Governor William Franklin, son of Benjamin.

When a convention met at New Brunswick on July 21, 1774 to consider the state of the country, Woodbridge doubtless was represented and helped to elect representatives to meet those of the other colonies in Philadelphia on September 5.

The situation came to a head with the fight at Lexington on April 19, 1775, and Woodbridge, itching for a chance to get into action, grimly watched events unfold in Massachusetts. Meanwhile, it formed its Committee of Correspondence and kept in touch with the other colonies.

The first positive action concerns Nathaniel Heard. On February 12, 1775 he was commissioned Colonel of a battalion of minutemen, and in June he headed Heard's Brigade. On the 17th he was ordered by President Samuel Tucker of the Provincial Congress of New Jersey to march to Amboy to arrest Governor William Franklin, and to remain at the Amboy barracks to prevent an open alliance of Amboy's large number of Tories with the British on Staten Island.

Woodbridge, located on the main highway between New York and Philadelphia, saw a great deal of the troops, which passed in and out of the town.

During 1776 too, it was the scene of many of the minor skirmishes and actions in this territory. It is said that the Jersey Blues held secret meetings at Timothy Bloomfield's house at Ford's Corner and there planned their various escapades. On one occasion news was brought that a British warship lay at Perth Amboy. Whereupon the Blues resolved to throw a scare into the British seamen. They secured an old swivel cannon and transported it by night to the bluff near the Episcopal Church overlooking the bay. Knowing that the moon would rise at 11, they had the gun all ready loaded and waiting for the moon to show them the dark silhouette of the ship. Aiming their gun, filling the touch-hole with powder, they applied the torch and fired a shot into the British vessel. Then they waited quietly to see what would happen. In a short time they heard the crew raising anchor and then a ball came crashing into the nearby graveyard. The Blues expected a broadside to follow, and were making preparations for a speedy retreat when they saw that the ship was moving off, making for the open sea. The ruse had been successful. Apparently the British thought that an attack in force would develop from the first lone shot.

Woodbridge did not feel the full force of the war until 1777 when Washington's retreat across the State from the reverses in New York brought the triumphant British and Hessians in his wake. They immediately took possession of the State and commenced a reign of terror which was sustained until the end of June when the British forces were drawn off to another sector of the conflict.

New Brunswick and Perth Amboy became the main posts for the British, and minor encampments were established at Piscataway and Bonhamtown. From these points a constant series of raids upon the countryside was carried on. Cattle and agricultural produce were confiscated, houses commandeered or burned, and the inhabitants harried from pillar to post.

Although the famous raid on Spanktown (Rahway), during which American troops captured a thousand bushels of salt from the British garrison, occurs on January 6, resistance to the British occupation did not develop to effective proportions until March when the first of a series of skirmishes occurred. By that time the guerilla bands of American raiders had become a full grown menace to the British, and had cut communications between Perth Amboy and New Brunswick.

In March, General Howe was in Bonhamtown attempting to re-establish their communications. Having completed his business there and wishing to return to Amboy, 3,000 troops were called out to insure his safe return in view of General Maxwell's presence in the vicinity. According to a letter from Haddenfield dated March 1777:

"...the enemy had brought out all their troops from Amboy & supposed to be about 3,000 and posted themselves at Pumphill (Spunk Hill): They brought artillery and a number of wagons as if to forage: there was none left in that neighborhood worth notice. General Maxwell, with the troops under his command, was on rising ground to the northward, in plain view tho' at a good distance. The enemy were too well situated to be attacked: He sent a party off to the left to arouse them, but his real design was to the right on the heights near Bonhamtown: he sent a strong party that way to examine their lines. if they had any, & to fall in near the end of them: that night he fell on their flank; this was performed by part of Col. Potter's battalion of Pennsylvania militia and part of Col. Thatcher's...Cook of the Pennsylvanians had been ordered from Metuchung to come down on Carman's hill and keep along the heights till he met the enemy. On the first firing Col. Martin and Col. Lindly were sent to support them: they all behaved well, and kept their ground till they were supported from the main body..."

The British, it was reported, gave way in confusion, and were pursued by "our people" who took a prisoner and a baggage wagon. "By the quantity of enemy carried off in sleds, and wagons, it is supposed that they had near 20 killed and twice that number wounded."

The fact that Howe was the cause of all the trouble was unknown to the Americans until a few days later when they learned by a soldier taken...that Gen. Howe

was at Bonhamtown during the engagement till he saw his troops make the best of their way home, and then he thought it was time to go. That the enemy's real design in coming out that day was to secure the general's safe passage to Amboy..."

The British Encampment at Bonhamtown, which consisted of five regiments, became a provocative target for raids. The Colonel Cook mentioned above was stationed somewhere near Metuchen with a detachment of the Pennsylvania 12th Regiment. During April Colonel Cook launched several surprise attacks upon the enemy. One occurred at two in the morning of April 15th when Captain Alexander led a small detachment against the 25 British pickets stationed 400 yards out of Bonhamtown. "The whole of the guard", an officer present at the engagement reported, "were either killed or taken prisoners." Lieut. Frazer, of the 71st was killed on the spot. The enemy, though advantageously posted, did not attempt to support their guard, but retired with persipatation to their works. Our officers and soldiers behaved with greatest coolness and courage on this occasion."

On the 20th of April another surprise attack was sprung. Lieutenant McCabe led the night attack and drove in the pickets, killing one and wounding two. "The enemy were soon reinforced; but our party kept up their fire, maintained their ground until daybreak, and then made a regular retreat."

The following night the raiders were at it again. Lieutenant Lodge led the party, but found that the guards had been doubled. He was to call for reinforcements, and then he succeeded in driving in the pickets once more. "Our party sustained no damage, and with only 32 men, we kept their troops in Bonhamtown under arms all night."

Similar raids were executed upon the guards at Amboy and New Brunswick, so that the British occupation was made exceedingly uncomfortable. A more serious engagement occurred on May 10th, and it is interesting to contrast the reports of the British and the Americans on this occasion. The American version is taken from a letter of an officer at the "Post, near Bonhamtown."

"I have the pleasure to inform you that yesterday part of Gen. Stevens' division attacked the Royal Highlanders and six companies of light-infantry. It was a bold enterprise--they being posted within two miles of Bonhamtown and about the same distance from New Brunswick. The action continued for about an hour and a half. The continental troops behaved well, drove in the piquets at Bonhamtown, attacked and drove the Highlanders out of the wood they had taken possession of near Piscataqua town. The enemy were reinforced, but they were again forced to give way. They were reinforced a second time, then, due to consideration of percipitation with respect to the enemy's different posts, (of New Brunswick, Raritan Landing and Bonhamtown) it was judged advisable to retire. The retreat was made in excellent order, and our loss inconsiderable...The Highlanders, obstinately brave, were too proud to surrender--which cost many of them dear."

The *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* expressed the British view of the affair:

“...a body of 2,000 rebels which had been collected from neighboring posts of Quibbletown, Samptown, Westfield, Chatham and commanded by Brigadier Gen. Stephens and Maxwell, attacked the piquets of the 42nd Royal Highland regiment at Piscataway, commanded by Lieut. Colonel Sterling. The picquest, which was in a short time supported by two companies, advanced into the wood where, notwithstanding the very superior number of the Rebels, they maintained their ground until joined by the rest of the Regiment, when a very heavy fire commenced, which obliged the Rebels to retreat in the greatest confusion to the left, where they fell in with the light infantry, quartered between Piscataway and Bonhamtown, who were advancing to support the 42nd. The whole of the Rebels now gave way, and fled with utmost precipitation, our troops pursuing them close to their encampment (on the heights near Metuchen Meetinghouse) which they began to strike with the greatest terror...in this affair we had two officers and 26 men killed and wounded. The loss of the Rebels must have been very considerable, as upward of forty men were found the next morning in the woods, besides an officer and 36 men taken prisoners.”

Ten days later the Bonhamtown forces were tricked into pursuing a rebel force into Dismal Swamp where an ambush was sprung upon the pursuers. On this occasion 800 men mustered at Colonel Cook's quarters, “about nine miles from Metuchin meeting-house.” In the afternoon they advanced over the swamp and engaged the British who had collected 300 men at Bonhamtown. “Making a feint retreat over a narrow causeway (we) turned suddenly upon the enemy, and repulsed them with considerable slaughter. By this time we were reinforced with 8 companies of light infantry and other troops, when the skirmish became general, was pretty warm for some time, and the enemy gave way, but being reinforced with a large body of artillery from New Brunswick we at last deigned to retreat to a hill, and not daring to pursue us...”

The last engagement on Woodbridge soil occurred towards the end of June. It was no mere skirmish between guards and guerillas, but was part of a really large-scale action between the main British and American armies. Before he left New Jersey, Howe was determined to lure Washington down from his encampment in the hills near Plainfield. When various stratagems failed, he evacuated New Brunswick on June 22 and retired to Perth Amboy. Washington promptly sent several detachments to harry the retreat. Upon learning that the American force had descended to Quibbletown, Howe decided upon a movement that might lead to an attack. He sent four battalions with six cannon to take up a position at Bonhamtown. The right column under Lord Cornwallis took the road to Woodbridge and continued through Scotch Plains. Howe himself commanded the left column which proceeded from Amboy to Bonhamtown and continued up through Metuchen to Oak Tree. The plan was to meet near Oak Tree, and then separate again and fall upon the American left flank. Soon after leaving Woodbridge, Cornwallis fell in with Morgan's Rangers, numbering about 700. The firing warned Washington that the British were at hand and he retired to the hills, leaving Major General William Alexander and 3,000 men as a rear guard. By retreating into Oak Tree, Morgan led Cornwallis into

battle with Alexander's forces. But the approach of the left column under Howe compelled the Americans to withdraw.

The British advanced to Westfield, and then marched back to Amboy, burning and pillaging as they went. The return trip was harried by Morgan and Alexander who hung on the rear and flanks of the British column.

The *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* of August 4, performed its duty as a British propogandist with a comment upon the battle, purported to be taken from a letter written from one in the Blazing Star Ferry (Carteret) to a friend in New York:

“---the generality of the people through the Jersies expresses great dissatisfaction at the Washington's Behaviour when he was last attacked at Metouching Meeting-House, for retreating in such a manner, and leaving the inhabitants to be plundered; that they began to suspect Mr. Washington is treacherous, and going to sell their country. This they are induced to believe from the great disruption of the Rebel Army in their Retreat, which was so great that they did get together again in 7 or 8 days.”

When the British troops left New Jersey soil in the possession of the American Army on the last day of June, a large exodus of Tories from this section began. The New Council of Safety ordered that “the wives and children (under age) of John Herd, Ellis Barron, Wm. Smith, Isaac Freeman and Samuel Moore, late inhabitants of the Township of Woodbridge, but now with the enemy, be immediately apprehended and sent over to Staten Island, & that Col. Fred Frelinghuysen be directed to carry this order into execution.”

This by no means indicates that these families were loyalists in every branch--the division between loyalist and rebel frequently split families and communities. Nathaniel Heard has already been mentioned as one of the outstanding local heros in the Revolutionary cause while John Heard is listed above as a Tory. Eight members of the Freeman family served as soldiers under Washington to offset the one who remained loyal to the King. Of other well-known Metuchen families, seven Ayers, three Bloomfields, three Kelleys, two Rosses, two Thornals, and a Leonard, Munday, Fitzrandolph, Martin, Carman and Frazer, all fought to win independence.

One hundred and fifty years later, when the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated a tablet to their forefathers who had fought in the revolution, they honored 31 men from within the borough limits.

7. AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The period after the Revolution was a period of rehabilitation and readjustment. The country was in a post-war depression and Metuchen did well to hold its own and make up what it lost during the war. The frequent mention of Metuchen Meeting-house during the war period contrasts favorably with its oblivion during the first 50 years of its existence. It is an indication that Metuchen had attained a separate and distinct individuality--it was an important place in Woodbridge Township, not just part of the vaguely defined farmlands surrounding the town of Woodbridge.

The meeting house itself, after a series of unions and separations with the Woodbridge church, in 1793 became a distinct and separate Metuchen Church, calling itself the Second Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge. Woodbridge, too, recognized the budding personality of the community by setting up a separate voting district there in 1797:

“Voted that the selection for members of the Legislature Council and General Assembly, Sheriff and Coroner for the Township be opened and held open first day at Ezekiel Ayers in Mottuchin & the second day held and closed at James Jackson.”

Ezekiel Ayers kept a tavern at what is now Pumptown and did a thriving business there. But Oak Tree was the really large community in the northern part of the section then known collectively as Metuchen. There Major Carman operated what seems to have been a super-general store which was, according to Ezra Hunt's history, a depot between the up-country and river trade, “to which came the great farm wagons of the upper countries laden with grain, butter, wool, flax etc., and received in return the various articles of merchandise.” No doubt the balance of Major Carman's business consisted of carting the farm produce down to Raritan Landing and selling it there.

Near Bonhamtown were two grist mills which ground Metuchen's grain. One was what is now known as Eggert's Mill, then in possession of James Colyer, and the other, nearby, was Ephriam Compton's. Scattered through the surrounding Township were sawmills, other gristmills, and at least one fulling mill.

Road returns for the period 1780-1791 supply the names of Campyon Cutter, Benjamin Ayers and James Rowlands along Grove Avenue within the borough limits. Farther north were Benjamin Soper, John Conger and Moses Frazee. Along the Vineyard road lived Walter Martin, Thomas Combs, Dr. Nathaniel Martin, and Nathaniel Martin Jr.

As for the central part of the borough, a complete and accurate map was made when Daniel Hampton divided his extensive lands among his family in 1790. The map shows the meeting-house on the west side of the Bonhamtown road just south of the junction with the Woodbridge road. Directly across the road the house of Robert Ross is indicated, and his land surrounds the meeting house. The eastern side of Main street from Woodbridge road to Durham avenue belonged entirely to Mr. Hampton and only three houses are indicated: one at approximately the location of the present Burroughs building on land labeled John Hampton, the second seemed to be a barn nearby, and the other was the parsonage house directly opposite the junction with Durham avenue.

Beyond the Hampton land on the east side of Main street was the property of Colonel Rose; and further east was Israel Thornal. On the west side of Main street opposite John Hampton (the Burroughs building) was a small house mysteriously labeled "Chair House."(used to house the "Riding Chair" or carriage, of later days.)

A little north was an old barn. At Durham avenue and Main Street opposite the parsonage house was the house of Jacob Ayres, and just off Main and Durham, which was the road to Piscataway and Raritan Landing, was the Catherine Allen house, a tavern which served as a rendezvous for both British and American soldiers during the Revolution. This section, in fact, was known as Allentown. A third house on the corner of Main and Durham seemed to belong to Sarah Wilt. Nearby was the land of Samuel Ayers, Jesse Vandehoven and Robert Ross Jr. On the other end of Durham Avenue near the Piscataway line was the house of Nathan Ayers. South of Durham Avenue at the Piscataway end of town was John Ross's land, and next to his Dr. Martin's. In 1800 there were 11 buildings in this central portion of the borough, seven of them dwellings .

The only thoroughfares were the Bonhamtown-Oak Tree road (Main Street), the road to Piscataway and Raritan Landing (Durham Avenue), the road to Amboy and Woodbridge (Woodbridge Avenue), and Dark Lane (Grove Avenue), which was a secondary road to the Oak Tree district.

Up to this point the only incentive to the formation of a community at this particular locality were the junction of the Woodbridge Road with the Bonhamtown-Oak Tree Road and the presence of the meeting house. Within ten years the simple fact of the intersection of two important turnpikes were to change the entire situation.

8. THE EFFECTS OF THE TURNPIKES AND THE RAILROAD

_____ Prior to 1810 when the turnpikes were completed, Metuchen's situation may be compared to the vacuum in the center of a whirlwind. Business activity and traffic passed all around but rarely through it. Only two miles to the south through Bonhamtown went the King's Highway, the main road between New York and Philadelphia, upon which a heavy traffic of coaches and horseback travel passed. To the north was Oak Tree, attracting the farm wagons with their loads of produce. Towards the west was New Durham on the road to Raritan Landing, through which another stream of traffic passed to the Raritan and New Brunswick. All the roads in Metuchen seemed to lead out of the village--to Bonhamtown where mail was doubtless left by the coaches, to Woodbridge where the seat of government of the township was located, to Oak Tree to the store of Major Carman, to Raritan Landing and the busy grain market it was at that time.

But the first decade of the nineteenth century saw the first of the two events which completely reversed the situation.

The State, recognizing one of its important functions to be that of a highway between New York and Philadelphia, the North and the South, began the construction of a road better suited to the exigencies of the swelling traffic than the old King's Highway. That section of it which passed directly through Metuchen was called the Middlesex-Essex Turnpike. A second turnpike to meet the needs of local cross-state traffic was built between Perth Amboy and Bound Brook, and intersected the first at Metuchen, thanks to the accidents of geography. Both were complete by 1810 and focused at Metuchen all the traffic and travel that had formerly passed around it. In effect Bonhamtown and Metuchen changed places--Bonhamtown's growth was immediately stunted, and Metuchen immediately began to grow.

The first concrete result of the turnpikes was the opening of taverns in Metuchen to accommodate the coaches and other travelers on the new roads. Harriet's Inn opened on the site of the present Borough Hall, and two others located directly at the intersection of the turnpikes. John Hampton's was at the foot of the hill just beyond what is now the Celotex plant, and Lewis Campbell's tavern was just across the road. Soon after, Metuchen's first store was opened nearby by Lewis Thomas who became the first postmaster about 1832.

By 1837 Harriet's tavern had closed, and George B. Stelle had purchased Campbell's Tavern. Thomas F. Gordon, in his history of New Jersey noted that "Metouchin" consisted of a Presbyterian church, a store, two taverns and ten or twelve dwellings, surrounded by a fertile country of red shale.

Then came the second development which was to prove the most powerful force in changing Metuchen from a sleepy little agricultural hamlet to a busy shopping and commuting center. The New Jersey Railroad which had commenced construction several years previous was completed through to Metuchen by the latter part of 1836, and was opened through from Jersey City to Philadelphia in 1839.

At this point it looked as if the crossroads with its taverns and store would be the business center of town, consequently the railroad placed its station nearby, calling it Campbell's Station. It is one of the mysteries of Metuchen's history that one of the two turnpikes did not become the town's "main street." In all reason a main road leading from Perth Amboy to Bound Brook, or one leading from New Brunswick to Elizabeth should have had the honor. Instead, a road leading from one hamlet to another--Bonhamtown to Oak Tree--became the Main Street. True, the Bonhamtown road had over a hundred years start on the turnpikes and has the force of habit and tradition behind it--the meeting house had been located there from 1717--but when the turnpikes were considered, the two taverns and store opened and railroad placed its station at the intersection of the turnpikes it should inevitably have become the business center, but it didn't. The only explanation is that in the minds of Metuchen's inhabitants the center of their community remained the meeting house--new-fangled inventions notwithstanding.

In four years the railroad company shrugged its shoulders and yielded to the peculiar desire of Metuchen to have its railroad station on an empty little country road instead of the business center of the town. The company must have felt that Metuchen

would outgrow its unreasonable prejudice in favor of the Bonhamtown road, for it continued to operate Campbell's Station too.

Incidentally, this early victory must have been the first taste of public utility blood which gave Metuchen its voracious appetite for scrapping with the large private service corporations. Its later history is dotted with disputes with electric, water, light, gas, trolley and railroad companies. Which simply indicated the god-fearing incorruptibility of the town's public officials--no utility company had enough money to smooth the way for dirty work in Metuchen.

With the railroad and the main turnpikes concentrated at this point, it became an irresistible magnet for all the future growth and business development of the larger Metuchen district. Reaction to the railroad was slow to start, but it did start and continued steadily to count. By 1841, with the opening of the Main Street railroad station, two more stores were in operation: Ross Freeman's at the corner of Middlesex turnpike and the Bonhamtown road, and Ezekiel Merrit's near the railroad.

But the development was not restricted alone to the economic front. A map of the country at the mid-century mark geographically presents Metuchen's progress in every phase of its life. The map definitely shows a community; Metuchen was no longer simply an indistinguishable part of a farming territory. The greatest concentration was along Main Street between Amboy Turnpike and Durham avenue where there were 14 buildings, including the depot, a Sunday School, Clarkson's general store at the corner of Middlesex and Main, Alex. Ayer's wheelwright shop just below the Woodbridge road and LaForge's smithy at the corner of the Amboy turnpike. The religious center of the community was still the intersection of the Woodbridge and Bonhamtown roads, but the church had been moved to its present location on Woodbridge avenue, with the parsonage nearby. The Sunday School was indicated on the Amboy road near the railroad intersection.

On the Bonhamtown road south of the Amboy road to the present borough limits were five dwellings, all on farms; north of Durham avenue there were four.

The original center of development at the intersection of the turnpikes had not grown at all. The depot and the store, now in possession of a Mrs. Cansfield, were still there, but no taverns are indicated.

Some development is indicated as beginning to take place along the Middlesex turnpike near the Bonhamtown road where the school house is shown approximately at the location of the Borough Improvement League's house, with the dwellings of Dr. Decker, T. Grimstead and Mrs. Dunham nearby. Other schoolhouses of the larger Metuchen district are shown at Bonhamtown, on the Woodbridge road at the southern tip of the poorhouse tract and at Oak Tree.

The population of the section now embraced by the borough was about 37 families or 150 persons. The official census of the entire township showed a total of 5,141 in 1850 divided almost equally between males and females, with 309 colored persons.

As to the character and standing of the town in the country, this may be judged from the fact that by 1854 a county convention of the Sons of Temperance was held in Metuchen, and three years later it was made the headquarters for the local branch of the county agricultural society. Metuchen had undoubtedly won its place in the sun.

All in all the forty-odd years since the arrival of the turnpikes and the railroad had seen forty times the growth of the preceding 150 years. It was a far cry to the first decade of the nineteenth century which Ezra Hunt described in this way;

“...farming had not become an antiquated homespun thing; butter was nine pence a pound, eggs six pence a dozen--and a bakers dozen at that--and buckwheat cakes and honey didn't give old-fashioned stomachs the dyspepsia. The great brick oven burned up all the old posts and rails on the farm, and furnished homemade bread not baked in a pan; milk was too cheap to sell; farmers, unlike doctors, did their own killing and curing, and lamb from the flock or a calf from the stall was easily changed about among the neighbors, so that neither baker, mailman or butcher needed to make their daily rounds; the wide fire-place, which would take in half a tree for a back log, blazed away without any thoughts as to the price of wood or coal, and gas-burners had not yet been reported. Linen was cheap, and collars high enough to reach up to the hat and keep out the cold; linsey-woolsey had partly disappeared, but many a farmer's daughter curtsied in her becoming calico, and many a successful sparking was had by the embers of a Franklin fire and the dull light of a tallow candle: nuts, apples, doughnuts, pie, and a mug of cider being passed around between ten and twelve o'clock. One did not then have to bow in 'tights,' at an angle of over 45 degrees, and study up the latest novel, and know the difference between a piano-forte and a melodeon, in order to be considered intelligent enough for matrimony, and was not in so much danger as now of being considered familiar because of a smacking salutation.”

Politically, Woodbridge remained the center of the township, and all political, legal and government matters were transacted there. At election time Metuchen had its separate polling place, however, and Metuchenites frequently held office in the township government.

9. THE CIVIL WAR

The swift pass of development continued from 1850 until the outbreak of the Civil War, at which time a survey of business activity showed four stores, five blacksmiths, two carpenters, three hotels, a carriage maker, florist, harness maker and a hay press serving the community. A very noticeable lull, however, occurred during the war years. With the outbreak of the Rebellion, Metuchen responded immediately with the formation of a “Home Guard for the defense of our homes, and the support of the

Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws.” The names of 46 men appear on the muster roll of the guards, among them many descendants of Revolutionary soldiers.

But the Home Guard was definitely interested only in defending their own Metuchen homes. When Lincoln’s call for volunteers came, the response was most disappointing; and when the draft threatened, a special township meeting was called and went on record as approving “voluntary aid in preference to drafting men.”

As an aid to “Voluntary Aid” the township decided to offer a bounty of \$60 “for each and every man enlisted to the credit of the township” and set about raising a fund by tax for the purpose.

By 1864 the ante had been raised and the township was offering \$400 “to all persons drafted and accepted and to all who have or may volunteer to furnish or may have furnished a substitute towards filling our quota under the present call for Five Hundred Thousand Men.” The township committee was also careful to resolve that “no person shall receive a greater amount than he has actually paid for a Substitute and he shall be required to make oath to the amount paid for the Substitute before a Justice of the Peace.” This meeting’s business concluded with the appointment of a committee “to Secure Volunteers and Substitutes.” Apparently the committee did its work well for the next meeting’s minutes recorded the fact that “we had an overplus of about 26 men after filling our quotas.”

But things were not so easy when the time came to meet the 1865 quota. The committee was then forced to report that “it was impossible to fill our quota with substitutes and asked permission to put in volunteers. It was voted that said committee make the best bargain they could for the Township either in volunteers or substitutes” whereupon the committee entered the open market to compete with other communities for volunteers and substitutes, and offered in addition to the regular county bounty, “500 dollars for one year men, 700 dollars for two year men and 900 dollars for three year men.”

Three hundred men were bought in Elizabeth toward filling the Woodbridge quota, 22 in Clinton, Hunterdon County and no doubt a great number were secured through H. W. Abbet & Company of New Brunswick, a concern which dealt exclusively in substitutes and volunteers for the duration of the war.

Despite which difficulties, Metuchen came out of the War with a sizeable roll of veterans among whom were Calvin Drake, wounded at the battle of Fredericksburg, Colonel Joseph Lafayette Mess who served through the war, David W. Martin, wounded at the battle of the Wilderness who became a commander of the Metuchen post of the G.A.R., Theodore A. Wood who served for over four years, and William T. Edgar.

10. THE FORMATION OF RARITAN TOWNSHIP

At the close of the war Metuchen welcomed home its sons and settled down immediately to the business of living and growing. Each year saw its new business and new dwellings created, and gave the Woodbridge town committee an added burden of administration.

If the committee could have looked ahead one year in 1869, perhaps it would not have taken so much trouble in laying out the Metuchen polling district and appointing Nathan Robins, R. Bruce Crowell and A.F. Kellogg as Judges of Election and William A. Lane as Clerk of the Metuchen District. The committee met on March 11, 1869 at the Poor House “to decide where the line should be between the Polling Districts of Woodbridge and Metuchen....(and) decided...that the boundary line should commence at the Grist Mill formerly owned by David Crow (dec’d)....in the center of the road leading to the Turnpike road; thence across the same in the center of the road leading to the Old Stage Road leading from Woodbridge to New Brunswick, then across the said Road to the East side of John Richard’s House, thence in a direct line to Mine Gully bridge under the Railroad bridge; thence North along THE CENTER OF THE ROAD TO THE Road to the road leading to Plainfield; thence across the road in a straight line to Union County as a boundary between the Poling Districts.”

The laborious task was in vain, for exactly one year later both Woodbridge and Piscataway gave up territory for the formation of a new township--Raritan, of which Metuchen became the chief community. Followed was a series of triangular meetings among the other townships and their newborn child to apportion the family’s wealth. On June 6: “We the undersigned Township Committees of the Township of Woodbridge and Piscataway having been appointed by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey by an act established a New Township in the county of Middlesex to be called the Township of Raritan, approved March 17, 1870 to allot and divide between all of Said townships all personal Property and Moneys on hand or to become due in proportion to the taxable property and ratables as taxed by the assessors with their respective limits at the last Assessments and the inhabitants of each of the Said Townships shall be liable to pay their proportion of the debts and support the porpers and insane persons whose Settlements are or may be within the boundaries of those respective Townships and a decision so a majority of those present shall be final and conclusive; do agree to the following divisions and apportionments.”

The stiff and involved phraseology of the “following divisions and apportionments” boiled down to the two townships paying Raritan about \$2,730.00 and magnanimously allowing it to keep the road tools within the districts which customarily used them. Also, Woodbridge agreed to send a bill for the care of three paupers and Piscataway for the care of one, at the rate of \$3.00 week.

From Metuchen’s point of view this occurrence was a most fortunate development, for it made Metuchen a large frog in a small pool and gave it the one thing it had lacked as part of Woodbridge township--political power and control of its government. Metuchen then immediately took a leading part in organizing the new government, shaping its policies, and administrating the territory and its inhabitants. A large majority of the township meetings were held at one or the other of Metuchen’s hotels. It now became almost, but not quite, a completely rounded and self-sufficient

town. It was not until 1900, when the borough was forced, that Metuchen became a completely independent political entity.

Soon after, a new impetus to growth came in the form of the town's second railroad, the Easton and Amboy, now called the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Its most important contribution was the bringing of Irish and Italian laborers and their families, some of whom, after construction was completed, settled in the southern portion of the town. A mild building boom resulted from the influx, and *The Fredonian* of January 23, 1873 reported that the "new residences in the neighborhood of Bonham will soon be ready for occupancy. Few, whose business does not call them to travel over the Bonham Avenue, have any idea what a large population is gradually settling on each side of it. The grade of houses now erected there is also better than those built at first, and they present a very neat and comfortable appearance."

The new section, thanks to the large Irish component of its population, soon was popularly referred to as Dublin, a name which has persisted to the present day.

Metuchen was also beginning to attract quite a different type of resident. New Yorkers of affairs--bankers, brokers, journalists, artists--were discovering the quiet charm of the town, its nearness to New York via the Pennsylvania Railroad; and a few came to Metuchen, bought homes and commuted to the city. Within the next two decades this trend was to swell to gratifying proportions and win for Metuchen the label of "The Brainy Borough."

All of which was most pleasing to the real estate fraternity who immediately began casting about for ways and means to accelerate the various streams of immigration. One of these plans drew the comment of *The Fredonian*: "It is said that a number of parties interested in the sale of Real Estate are moving again to change the name of our city. They say that Metuchen has an old-fashioned and homely sound which hinders the disposal of property. People say Metuchen "Te-Muchen", "Me-two-chins", "I aint-a-touchin-you", "Who ever heard of such a name, or of such a place before?" "Why don't you have a better name for it? Call it Riverside, with no view, Glen Air or Glen Doyle, though there may be no glen there, or Lake View, though there may be no lake within miles, and I'll buy your farm and villa plots." Others say that they like a homey sounding name, that our old Indian titles ought to be cherished and not discarded, that it is a great advantage to live in a place that had no other rival in the way of a Post Office with the same designation, and that the innovation would be useless. So many are the minds of many men, and how they will decide cannot be foreseen. Possibly, as we have four Washingtons in New Jersey already, and perhaps four hundred in the United States, they will "split the difference" and call the place Washington. Then every white-washed cottage can be a "whitehouse," every blacksmith shop a "patent office," each grocery a "treasury building" and every rum mill a capital. "Hurrah for River-side, Glen-side, Glen-cabbage, or Washington!"

The name remained Metuchen.

The business section of town, centered on Main Street between Amboy Avenue and Middlesex Avenue, grew phenomenally. By 1865 the New Jersey gazetteer and

Business Directory listed 37 names composing Metuchen's business establishment. Among them were four grocers, two butchers, three physicians, two blacksmiths, four lawyers, two dry-goods stores, two hardware stores, a barber, druggist, coal dealer, baker, restaurant, hotel, shoe store; and most indicative of the stature Metuchen had attained, a newspaper.

The first attempt to establish the borough form of government for Metuchen occurred early in 1869. Although no record of the fact exists, it would seem logical that the drive originated with the Village Improvement Society, for the proposal was pushed on the basis of reducing the expense of government. The first indication of the movement appeared in the news column in March, and by May the New Brunswick *Daily Times* remarked that "many people who had opposed are now in favor of borough government." Figures were presented which showed how much cheaper borough self-government would be. Metuchen voted upon the question during the same month and the proposal was defeated by the slim margin of 45 votes: 250 to 205. It seems that the determining factor was the proposed borough limits, which the dissenting 250 voters disliked.

Street lighting also entered into the pros and cons of the borough incorporation. That question came up before the town committee during the borough controversy. It seems that the town was being lighted with oil lamps provided and maintained by the Village Improvement Society and that the township committee determined to lay out lighting districts and illuminate the township itself. Accordingly it laid out the districts and advertised elections to be held on May 7 in each district to determine the amount of tax to be raised in each district to support the system. Apparently District No. 1 which included Metuchen refused to vote and the township committee carried a motion that \$500 be raised in that district.

Whereupon Metuchen stood up on its hind legs. First the Improvement Society removed its lamps from the streets, which accomplished nothing but inconvenience for Metuchen's residents. However, it was a satisfying gesture of defiance. Next A.L. Corbin obtained a writ of cartorari from the court to carry the proceedings of the township committee to the Supreme Court. Corbin claimed the Committee had no legal right to undertake the supplying of light to the township.

The committee responded by giving notice to the assessor to raise a special tax of \$550 in lamp district No. 1 and entering "said notice...on the book of minutes of the Township," and packed the book of minutes off to township council E.B. Willis to help him prepare a defence against Corbin's suit.

Apparently Corbin was right, for in 1894 the State passed the necessary legislation and "We, of the Township of Raritan undersigned," respectively requested "that the Township Committee should divide the Township into Lamp districts...in order that the people of Metuchen or any other village...desire to have their streets lighted at their own expense, an opportunity may be offered to them to vote on the subject." The committee enacted the desired legislation and official kerosine lamps replaced the volunteer apparatus of the Improvement Society in Metuchen.

11. PUBLIC UTILITIES

As the century drew to a close, however, the impending technological twentieth century began to dump its gifts and its problems into the lap of the township committee. No sooner had the kerosine been amicably disposed of than electric light companies besieged the committee for franchises to erect poles and light the township and on their heels came water, trolley, telephone and gas companies.

By the end of 1898 Metuchen was connected with Bonhamtown and New Brunswick, and with Perth Amboy by 1901. On June 5, 1899, as evening fell, Metuchenites blinked at the sudden unaccustomed glare of electric bulbs in the streets. The township had finally contracted with the Middlesex Electric Company for power. In 1900 the Middlesex Company was merged with a number of others to form the Central Electric Company which built its main plant in Metuchen and supplied the surrounding territory including Perth Amboy, New Brunswick, Rahway, Bound Brook, Dunellen and Woodbridge. The company finally became the Public Service Corporation of New Jersey and the Metuchen plant continued as the main generating station in this section until 1922.

The telephone came to town in 1897. The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company petitioned for permission to install the necessary poles, wires and apparatus late in '96, and a few months later the ordinance was passed. By February 1900 an exchange was established in the Metuchen Pharmacy to serve the town's 50 subscribers. Six years later the number had more than doubled and it was necessary to rent a room for the exchange in the post office building. At about the same time, according to the *Home News*: "Telephone Company Wants Metuchen"

"The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company last night applied to the Metuchen Borough Council for a blanket ordinance to lay subways and conduits and to erect more poles and wires in the town.

"The Company asked for the right of way on every street on the map and a lot of streets the mayor and council never heard of...

"Two years ago the company applied and the borough council turned it down. For five or six months the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company has been dunning the borough for small telephone bills of 40 cents, 50 cents, 65 cents and like amounts for police calls and last night Mayor Litterst grabbed several of these, tossed them to the clerk, angrily saying something like this 'Lay these over here with that telephone ordinance until these telephone people come asking us to give them the town.'"

Through 1893 and 1894 the New Brunswick papers repeatedly commented on the lack of telegraph service in Metuchen. Apparently one could send messages from the "railroad tower" but none could be received. No doubt the newspaper items were a reflection of the sentiment in the town. The campaign was renewed during the latter year

when an office was opened at the Pennsylvania Railroad station and “a young lady operator” placed in charge. A single isolated reference in the township minutes of 1896 mentions the application of the Postal-Telegraph and Cable Company which “was read and referred to the council for instructions.” Nine years later the *Home News* reported that “For many years A.B. Cornish has represented the Western Union in Metuchen. Friday night Mr. Cornish fired the Western Union out of his place of business and Metuchen has nothing but the telephone.” But by 1909 the Western Union was again doing business in town.

The question of water supply came up early in 1897 when the Midland Water Company applied for permission to lay mains and install fire hydrants. The necessary formalities were quickly disposed of and in June the town voted and approved the arrangements. Thirty-four two-way hydrants were installed for the benefit of the recently formed volunteer fire companies. Later there was the inevitable row with the water company over rates, but it seems that Metuchen was not rich enough to carry on a prolonged fight. As early as 187? a Metuchen Gas Light Company was incorporated with Truman Pierson as Agent. During the controversy over the kerosine lamp districts the company offered to light the town with gas, but nothing was ever done about the proposal. Nothing, in fact, seems to have been done about gas until 1905 when mains were laid, and connections made with the houses. Four years later Metuchen was in court concerning rates, and again in 1914 it complained to the Public Utilities commissioners, pointing out that Metuchen paid \$1.25 per 1,000 cubic feet while Raritan Township paid 90 cents. Strangely enough Truman Pierson is found leading the fight against the gas company and he is credited by the *Metuchen Recorder* with winning cheaper rates for the borough.

So, by the end of the century, Metuchen, grown in population to over 1,000, was supplied with every modern convenience. The roads, thanks to the efforts of Metuchen’s bicycling fans who banded together as the Metuchen Wheelmen, had been considerably improved, and the town generally was in a flourishing state. Metuchen was honored by its own separate section in the New Brunswick Directory of 1899 where 91 businesses were listed for the town.

The *Home News* of 1895 took a moment to poke some fun at what it called “Raritan

Township’s Metropolis”:

“They had an entertainment in Metuchen recently and some fellow who sleeps there and didn’t mind a joke, not even on himself, got off the following description of the pleasant little village. ‘Metuchen is two miles north of Bonhamtown and two miles south of Pumpstown and two miles east of New Durham and two miles west of Menlo Park. Metuchen is very centrally located. The people of Metuchen make their living selling groceries to each other. There are no industries in Metuchen except church fairs and concerts and a bicycle repair shop. There are a great many girls in Metuchen. Too many, I think. Once in a while one of them gets married, but that only makes it worse. Metuchen grows very fast. My grandfather says he can remember when there weren’t more than nine-tenths as many houses as there are now. We have a club in Metuchen.

Parker Wait belongs to it, Ralph Corbin belongs to it, Nat Wilson belongs to it, Charles Yingling belongs to it, I don't belong to it. We don't have any lights in Metuchen. We have a light Commissioner. When they get through deciding, we are going to have them. They will decide before long, I don't think. We have two newspapers in Metuchen. One is only for medicines and Amboy news; the other is for baseball. The girls in Metuchen ride bicycles and wear bloomers; some of them are out of sight. I can't think of anything more to say about Metuchen.”

But in 1900 the *Home News* put itself out to the extent of sending a special reporter to the “metropolis” to interview John L. Sullivan who had come to Thomas Allen's house in Metuchen to restore his health. Allen was owner of the Coleman house on Broadway in New York and Sullivan was managing “Dante's Inferno”, the restaurant in Allen's hotel.

“Mr. Sullivan was discovered on the rear veranda of the house with a party of young men around him chuckling over an article in the *New York Press* which said he had gone to Metuchen to reduce weight with the idea of re-entering the ring. The big fellow said that whoever wrote the item must have had an extensive imagination. He is very stout and would not be able to get anywhere near a fighting weight if he worked all summer...

“...presently Mr. Allen's hopeful son, a boy of about sixteen, rushed out of the house and commenced hostilities. His mode of attack upon Mr. Sullivan would have been a revelation to Tom Sharkey for he stood upon the veranda and threw himself at the big fellow on the ground below. The combat ended with Mr. Sullivan chasing the boy about the yard until he sought defense with a garden rake and the fight was a draw...”

12. METUCHEN BECOMES A BOROUGH

Apparently the defeat of 1889 did not extinguish the sentiment for the borough form of government. It must have smoldered beneath the surface, for in 1899 it gave forth a sullen glow when attempts to revive the movement were again killed on the basis of the proposed borough limits. But in 1900, with limits extended, the drive to establish the borough burst into full flame. So strong did the feeling grow that the *Home News* was led to comment: “It looks as if Metuchen was going to be a borough. Do the people want it?”

Which seems to indicate that “the people” did not know just what was going on. The *Metuchen Recorder* of January 15th announced quite suddenly that “METUCHEN WANTS TO BE A BOROUGH”. “A bill is ready to be Introduced In the Legislature” and “although the sentiment in the village is not unanimous, many of the best citizens have signed for it as may be judged by the following names: John W. Connor, W.V. McKenzie, Jr., J.L. Moss, Jr., E.C. Roland, E.B. Johnson, Chas. Ayers, F.E. Barnard, J.E. Ayers, J. A. Grimstead, Thorfin Tait, R.L. Mallory, F.C. Ayers, Wm. Carman, R.B. Corbin, E.B. Dana, Jr., S. Francis Hay, G.M. Beck, E.C. Moss, George E. Carman, A.

Clark Hunt, Francis M. Mulin, Edw. M. Clark, H. Campbell, J.B. Schenck, R.O. Arnold, J.G. Mason, C.F. Underwood, H.C. Richardson, J.J.W. Reynolds, Geo. W. Litterst, Charles A. Simmon, Geo. Wilson, Chas. S. Edgar, L.R. Edgar, C. Tingling, E.F. Potter, Walter F. Meck, C..A. Priskett and Alex. C. Litterst.”

The Recorder pointed out “the advantages of a borough government are many and its disadvantages are only a few, but may all be prevented by a proper use of the powers conferred upon us.” It appeared, however, that many Metuchenites did not want a borough and were repairing to become vocal about it.

The opposition, according to the *Home News* consisted principally of Charles Toole. “...who sees no need for Borough government there, because he thinks its advocates are principally the members of the Presbyterian Church and the Metuchen Club, and, as he goes to neither...he argues bitterly against the borough government. It is hard to believe that any intelligent man would make such pleas. Mr. Toole appears to have done most of the talking for the opposition. His contentions as one are ridiculous enough to carry the borough scheme to success. We would be so impolite as the *Newark Evening News* as to suggest that Metuchen needs a first-class funeral, but Mr. Toole certainly seems to be talking through his hat.”

On the 20th a large open meeting was held with R.E. Wilson in the chair. Arguments for and against were heard and a resolution in favor was finally passed by 73 to 50 and then made unanimous. The bill was introduced into the legislature soon after and, according to all reports, had a lively time “owing to the fact that no member of the legislature was a resident of this vicinity.” It finally passed the House early in March by 49 to 1 and went to the Senate, which quickly passed it by 11 to 2. The official date, therefore upon which Metuchen became a borough was March 20, 1900:

“The inhabitants of that portion of the township of Raritan, in the county of Middlesex and State of New Jersey, hereinafter set forth and described, are here constituted and declared to be a body politic and corporate by the name of the Borough of Metuchen, and shall be governed by the general laws of this state relating to boroughs.”

Whereupon the County Board of Registry set May 1 as the date upon which Metuchen’s 450 voters might choose their borough officials. During the intervening period the Republicans and Democrats waged their campaigns. When the ballots were counted on May 2nd it was found that Metuchen had gone Democratic in its first election. William Thornal was elected Mayor, and the councilmen chosen were: Thorfin Tait, Edward Kramer, Frank E. Fisher, George E. Kelly, D.F. Van Sielen, and F.W. Clarkson. W.T. McAdams was Collector, William Van Sielen, Assessor; Thomas Rowlan, Justice of the Peace; and the Commissioners of Appeal were John Bree, William F. Walsh and Samuel La Forge.

The first meeting of the new government was held in Robins Hall on May 7th, and Mayor William Thornal called the meeting to order at 8:20 pm. The business of organizing the government was attacked briskly. The Mayor nominated John Robinson for clerk and Frederick W. Clarkson for President of the Council; both elected

immediately. Then a number of committees were appointed to attend to the various phases of borough government; a Finance Committee, Ordinance Committee, Street Committee, Water Committee, Light Committee, Poor Committee, and a Miscellaneous Committee. George S. Silzer was appointed Attorney; John T. Gedney, Marshall; Francis S. Behl, Overseer of the Poor; Lewis Pohl, Street Commissioner; and Joseph J. Moss, Sr., Recorder.

With the government neatly departmentalized, immediate problems were taken up. Regular meeting times were set for alternate Monday evenings at 8 p.m. in Robins Hall. Kelly, Kramer and Tait were appointed to meet a committee from Raritan Township to “appraise, state and account of, allot and divide...all the moneys on hand, property, assets and loans of every kind, and all the indebtedness of said municipality...And to take all other and further steps necessary and proper to carry into effect the provisions of an act entitled ‘An Act relating to newly created Municipalities.’...”

The committees of the two governments met and an amicable division of liabilities and assets affected.

With the loss of one of the most populous and wealthy areas the Raritan Township minutes book hit a note of sadness for several meetings thereafter. The entry of March 28 recorded the resolution “that The Committee deems it wise and necessary because of the separation of Metuchen from the township to limit expenditures on road account for the current year to the sum of \$2,300.” And Mr. Soper was appointed a committee of one “to look for a suitable room, outside of the Borough in which to hold meetings...” Despite which, many of the township’s meetings continued to be held at the borough’s several halls.

Subsequent meetings of the Metuchen council plunged it headlong into the problems of light, power, and transportation which had come up in the Raritan Township committee. In addition it was faced with the task of quickly establishing a framework of law and order. The fourth meeting saw passed the borough’s first ordinances dealing with the regulation of bicycles, peddlers and hawkers, the licensing of shows, circuses and the establishment of “Peace and Quiet and Good Order” in the borough.

The zeal and enthusiasm for getting the borough government under way was by no means confined to the officially elected members of the government. The women of Metuchen immediately rallied to form the Borough Improvement League which became in effect a “kitchen cabinet”, initiating much of the enlightened legislation and reforms which have characterized the government of Metuchen.

So well did the first mayor and council do its job that Metuchen re-elected them for a second term. Mayor Thornal’s message of thanks and welcome reviewed the accomplishments of the past year and pointed the borough council’s policy for the coming term. The mayor emphasized the importance of a certain and dependable income and exhorted the council to give its “earnest attention” to the collection of taxes. Raritan Township was cited as an object lesson in leniency in financial matters “where they have a delinquent list of about \$10,000.” The matters of next importance were the condition of

the street paving and the necessity for making the trolley company toe the mark in living up to its obligations in the matter of maintenance of streets. The mayor concluded his address with, "when the history of Metuchen Borough comes to be written it shall be said that its first Council was rarely equalled and never excelled."

In this history of the Borough of Metuchen let us pause to make Mayor Thornall an inspired prophet. He was right; the men who were elected on that first day of May thirty-nine years ago, faced with the difficult task of creating and establishing the foundations of government in Metuchen, did their job so well that the borough has flourished and grown since the first day of its birth. Metuchen knew what it wanted--to preserve in every way the essential character of the community moulded through 200 years by its fathers and fathers' fathers. It wanted its streets and houses to be attractive, its neighbors to be sober, industrious and law-abiding. It did not want to be hemmed in by huge factories nor crowded with the foreign workers and lower standards of living which factories would inevitably bring. It did not aspire to be a second Paterson or Camden, nor even a New Brunswick. It speaks well for the founders that Metuchen has realized its desires--Metuchen is today exactly what it wanted to be thirty-nine years ago when it started on its career as a borough. This is no mere sour grapes, for nowhere in the record of Metuchen's activities is there any mention of organizations to bring industries to Metuchen or to make attractive to any group or class except that which Metuchen considered desirable as neighbors. Consequently during the early 1900s there were campaigns sponsored by the town and its real estate agents to urge business and the higher-paid white collar workers of New York to establish their homes in Metuchen.

The drive to bring desirable residents to Metuchen was successful beyond the wildest dreams of the most sanguine for it resulted in a large flux of writers, artists, editors and journalists who in a very short time earned for Metuchen the sobriquet of "The Brainy Borough."

13. THE BRAINY BOROUGH

Metuchen had brains before it was a borough. However, it produced distinguished sons and had its noteworthy residents while it was still nothing more than a crossroads hamlet. Ezra M. Hunt for example, the local horse and buggy doctor, became one of the founders of the State Board of Health in 1877 and was its first secretary. Early Metuchenites to attain "Who's Who in America" were two local boys who made good in the field of education--Theodore Witfield Hunt and Henry Dallis Thompson. Both were born in the middle years of the nineteenth century, both attended Princeton, both pursued conventional careers as scholars and pedagogues, became professors at Princeton in Literature and Mathematics respectively, and both wrote books and articles on their specialties.

For a monopoly of brains and talent in one family, however, the Aldens have never been surpassed in Metuchen. Henry Mills Alden, descendent of John ("Courtship

of Miles Standish”) Alden, came to Metuchen 1867 for a sojourn of 44 years. At that time he was managing editor of Harper’s Weekly and soon became editor of Harper’s Magazine, a post which he held until his death in 1919. In addition to his editorial duties in New York he devoted much of his time toward the cultural improvement of his adopted hometown, aiding in establishing the liberty and actively participating in liberty and dramatic activities.

Both his talented daughters shared his interests in promoting local cultural activities. Harriet Alden became a critic and teacher of literature. She taught in Metuchen Schools for a short time, then taught psychology in Trenton Normal School. During her residence in Metuchen she entertained such writers as William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Edward Markham, Lafeadio Hearn and Owen Bruster. Which doubtless helped to spread the name of Metuchen in artistic circles.

Harriet’s sister, Annie Fields Alden, was a talented artist but did not achieve fame in her field. The New Brunswick *Home News* listing Metuchen’s celebrities of 1898 could find nothing better to say of her than that she had the “finest collection of dolls in the world.”

The Alden literary menage was augmented by Ada Foster Murray, a minor poetess of the day who became Alden’s second wife in 1900. Mrs. Alden contributed verses to magazines and newspapers and her work was collected in a slender volume called “Flower O’ The Grass.” One of her daughters by a former marriage, Aline Murray, married Joyce Kilmer of New Brunswick, author of “Trees.”

In 1889 Metuchen became the home of one of the country’s outstanding feminists, Hester M. Poole, who was also a writer of standing. She, like the Aldens, immediately became active in local cultural affairs, helping to found the library and inaugurating the town’s first literary club, the Quiet Hour Club. The *Metuchen Recorder* of April 25, 1896 listed her “recent contributions to periodicals as ‘Cut Glass and Chrystol’, and ‘Housekeeping, Upstairs, Downstairs, and in the Lady’s Chamber’ which appeared in the March *Decoration and Furnisher*, and the April *Household News*, respectively.” But these were obviously potboilers, for Hester Poole’s interests were in social and economic matters as they related to women. She had worked through her life with Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cody Stanton and Clara Barton in their fight for women’s rights. Her serious writing was in poetry and literary criticism.

One of the most amusing episodes in Metuchen’s history was the way in which Mary Wilkins Freeman came to town. Charles Freeman, a local physician, was courting the novelist, then Mary E. Wilkins, and it seems that the path of true love was not very smooth. The ins and outs of the various ramifications of their tortuous affair furnished local and metropolitan newspapers material for a number of funny feature stories.

The *Home News* was obviously in a fog and very nervous about it: here was a national celebrity about to marry a local boy and the New Brunswick paper did not want the story to get away from it. On June 14, 1901 it reported that there was “a renewal here of the rumor that Dr. Charles E. Freeman and Miss Mary E. Wilkins, the novelist to whom he had been engaged for some time, had been married recently,” and were about to

set up housekeeping in Metuchen. The rumor, the *Home News* pointed out, was undoubtedly caused by the fact that Miss Wilkins had just concluded a visit at the Freemans and the doctor had accompanied her when she departed. The Freeman sisters “denied vigorously that there had been any marriage.”

Three days later the *Home News* sneeringly commented that the New York papers “have had the couple engaged, married, and separated several times,” and quoted from the *New York World*:

“Is Mary E. Wilkins, the novelist, going to marry Dr. Charles M. Freeman or isn’t she? His friends at Metuchen N.J. do not know and her friends at Randolph, Mass. do not know either. The wedding that was set for the first week in June didn’t take place and neither Miss Wilkins nor Dr. Freeman would tell the reason.

“Metuchen society has long since lost interest in the wedding that was to have been. Metuchen whispers about Miss Wilkins’ surrender of her heart was not altogether unconditional. She wanted to finish a book first and she wanted Dr. Freeman to prove his undying regard.

“The physician was ready to promise anything, but Miss Wilkins was not satisfied. She visited Metuchen and heard how Dr. Freeman smashed a photographers show frame which contained pictures of him and herself. Her brow knitted when the gossips told her how much of a commotion it made in Quiet Metuchen.

“In refutation the *Home News* pointed to the fact that the doctor was going ahead with improvements ‘which he is making to his recently purchased house where he intends to live when married. Metuchen folks scout the idea that the wedding is off.’”

Taking it’s cue from the *World*’s bantering article, the *Home News* captioned its next story (July 24) with “PLEASE MISS WILKINS, MARRY DR. FREEMAN, and spare the Nerves of Many of Your Friends.” The text of the story, however, merely quoted the *New York Morning Telegraph*:

“Miss Mary F. Wilkins still delighting her New England audience with her great continuous performance of holding her fiance at arms length. Dr. Charles Freeman is an impetuous lover, fiery and filled with ardor, but he cannot break through Miss Wilkins’ icy indifference.”

The *Telegraph*’s idea was that the whole thing was a publicity stunt for the forthcoming Wilkins book, with the good doctor aiding and abetting. The *Telegraph* concluded that “the public is really tired of the love affairs of the literary old maid, and the sooner she marries the doctor and takes him out of the public view the more highly will the action be appreciated.”

Which was in July. And in October the *Home News*, tired of the whole thing by this time, captioned a social item concerning the doctor’s visit to the Wilkins home with a laconic, “Dr. Freeman Still At It.”

It was not until January 2, 1902 that the papers were able to report the marriage. What had finally brought the two to a decision is nowhere stated, but the 21-pound cake the doctor had won at the Borough Improvement League fair might very well have been the deciding factor, for it took a prominent place in the festivities.

The *Home News*, meticulous reporter to the end, was careful to include in its story the fact that on the following morning “Dr. Freeman was out bright and early...on a spirited mustang. In front of the postoffice the animal became skittish and tried to throw the rider. Dr. Freeman got the animal under control and kept his seat. Then he went to his office where he conducts his coal and wood business.” Or did the *Home News* actually appreciate the symbolism of the event?

If Metuchen heaved a sigh of relief and expected life to resume its normal course after the marriage, it might just as well have saved its breath. It was not long before the town was in an uproar again--Mrs. Freeman's novel “The Debtor” appeared and Metuchen lifesize appeared in it.

“METUCHEN AGOG OVER THE DEADBEAT GENT” chuckled the *Home News* of March 9, 1906. “Local Characters Linked With the Personages in Mrs. Wilkins Book--Even Their Pictures in the Herald Today.”

“How does she dare to call us snoopers?” is the indignant inquiry of every middleaged woman in Metuchen when anyone mentions the last novel of their neighbor, Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. One of them has already called on the authoress for an explanation. The town is in a turmoil and the “types” go about the streets.

“The grocer, the milkman, the leading liveryman, all eye each other askance as they pursue their vocations and salute each other by their names which they bear in “The Debtor”--for that is the much discussed book.

“They are rather gratified than otherwise, although the barber objects to the putting of a dumb canary in his shop and taken down the lambrequin. Nothing will agitate a feminine resident of Metuchen more than to address her as ‘Mrs. Lee’ or ‘Mrs. Van Dorn,’ or to remark in a stage whisper: ‘Oh! They must have elegant wardrobes and be very wealthy people indeed. This petticoat is real lace, don’t you think so, Mrs. Van Dorn?’

“Mrs. Freeman,’ said one yesterday, ‘had no call to say such things as that. I think it’s a perfect shame. Metuchen folks have always minded their own business and besides, they don’t take up with strangers unless it is for the good of the church.’”

And so forth. Metuchen for awhile was exceedingly self-conscious. Folks were afraid to ask “How are you?” for fear of being branded as snoops; women gave up using Russian Violet as a calling perfume, and forbore to clean their gloves with gasoline.

It was in a subsequent article on the Freeman book that the *Home News* assayed to classify Metuchen society which insisted, like all Gall, was divided into three parts:

“To begin with the topmost stratum, there are those who belong either by inheritance or absorption to the club set. For the purpose of classification they may be known as the first families.

“Next on the ladder of knowableness come those who only shine in sewing circles, debating societies and at church sociables, but have hopes of higher things. Tag them as Eminently Respectables.

“Finally there are those who depend, for the bread they eat and the roofs that shelter them, upon the work of their own hands. For them there is no social striving. Their place is fixed. They know it. Metuchen knows them as the working class, and their eyes have no uplift.”

The storm blew over, however, and with every new Freeman book Metuchen eagerly looked for itself--and was profoundly disappointed because it never again appeared in print. Mrs. Freeman continued to be a source of never-ending diversion in Metuchen and her death in 1930, seven years after that of her husband, was a profound shock to the community.

A year after the Freeman marriage this paragraph in the *Home News* heralded the arrival of “another interesting couple” in Metuchen:

“They are the Rev. Dr. George P. Herron, who represents the new type of socialist on the market, and his newly wedded wife, who believes all that the doctor says. They were married in New York last Saturday evening, and dispensed with the usual wedding vows and simply told their guests that they were in love and belonged to each other and decided upon a partnership for life. There were ministers present but they were entirely superfluous as part of the ceremony. It was all a very monotonous proceeding until Richard Le Gallnemne, the poet, called for whisky, and he got it. Dr. Herron and his wife are to settle down on a 30-acre farm near Metuchen, which is a wedding gift, so the papers say, from the bride’s mother. Between this couple and the Mary K. Wilkins-Freeman pair, Metuchen ought to be a very lively news center this summer.”

If the *Home News* attitude seems narrow-minded and provincial, let the blame fall on the large Metropolitan papers from which it took its cue. Herron had been a Congregational minister of unorthodox views and radical leanings in De Moines, Iowa, where he won the friendship of Carry Rand, a wealthy widow of liberal views. Herron, although married, fell in love with Mrs. Rand’s youngest daughter, Carrie and, after a long mental struggle, divorced his wife and married Carrie Rand. Then, as Morris Hilquit relates it in “Leaves From A Busy Life”:

“...the wrath of public opinion as represented by the yellow press broke upon the heads of the couple. The elder Mrs. Rand enabled her future son-in-law to make generous provision for his first wife and the children of his first marriage. The fact leaked out in the newspapers, eager for a ground of attack on the apostate minister as a radical revolutionist, launched a relentless campaign of persecution against him.

“The rich Mrs. Rand has bought the professor from his first wife for her daughter, was the burden of the charge, and it was reiterated with endless variations and elaborations in stories, editorials and cartoons. The newly married couple were followed at every step by hordes of newspaper reporters and photographers. Their union was publicly denounced from the pulpits. They were socially ostracized.”

The couple were finally hounded out of the country. Before he left, however, Herron was instrumental in founding the Rand School of Science in New York, naming it after his benefactress, Mrs. Carrie Rand.

It was during Mrs. Freeman’s early career in Metuchen, and principally because of the publicity she brought to the town, that it began to be called the Brainy Borough. Just who originated the tag or when it was first applied cannot be clearly established. The theme of Metuchen’s brains, however, began to figure in the news by 1908 when one who signed himself Commuter wrote to the editor of the *New Brunswick Times* a most enthusiastic letter concerning Metuchen’s virtues as a place to live. “The society here is particularly sophisticated and ‘up and coming’ and has a very decided literary, artistic and journalistic flavor.” The writer went on to name names and give details.

Which apparently gave the editor of the *Home News* an idea; he sent a reporter to do a story on the artistic colony. The caption was “FOR BRAINS YOU CANNOT BEAT METUCHEN”. “Geniuses, Particularly the Literary and Journalistic Kind, Flourish in the Pretty Town, Olden and Carvalho are contrasting types, Lots of Clever Women, Too.”

“‘The Brainy Borough’ is the name by which Metuchen is rapidly becoming famed throughout the entire State and while the fact that it is a center of intellectuality and culture is well known, few realize how extensive is the personell of that just renowned and aesthetic colony across the Raritan.”

This story also named names and gave details.. Mary Wilkins Freeman was conceded to be the “topliner” because her work “commands as high a figure as the product of any contemporary American writer.” Next on the *Home News* rating was Henry Mills Alden, followed by Dorothy Richardson, “one of the younger members of the literary set...a novelist, magazine writer and newspaper woman of no mean ability.” Miss Richardson’s fame at the moment rested upon the recent publication of “The Long Day?”, a story of “the struggles of a girl wage-earner in New York.”

William Dinwiddie, “a newspaper man of world-wide reputation” ranked next for having been editor of the *New York Herald* and for his work as a war correspondent. Apparently he was the John Gunther of his day for he was considered an expert on the Far East. “Just now again in the turmoil; his friends fear that he will be called to work in that part of the world.”

Alden’s wife, Ada Foster Murray, also received high rating, as did his daughters. Ann Lent, an editorial writer for the Ladies Home Journal, and Annie McCollough who was beloved “in the multitude of homes where the Youth’s Companion is a weekly

visitor.” Mrs. McCollough’s husband William McCullough was “an artist and his landscapes and pictures of children commanded a high price.”

Also in the colony Abbie Underwood busily designed “the wonderful lithsome creatures you see in the Sunday Son’s Fashion News” Charles Volkmer fashioned the pottery which won him “Considerable renown at the St. Louis Worlds Fair” while his son Leon gained “an enviable New York reputation” lecturing on art. Nearby lived Mrs. Harold Tait, “better known in Metropolitan artistic circles as Nina Hart, “one of the foremost miniature painters in the country and winner of numerous first prizes at the Academy. Julia Baers, too, painted in Metuchen. Her “The Birches” won first prize at the Academy and was a picture of a grove in Metuchen. A number of other painters of lesser caliber also practised their art in the borough.

In the years that followed, the literary and arts colony grew steadily. Peter Borroughs, lecturer and essayist, Herbert S. Mallory, author (“Tempered Steel”) and a host of lesser lights made their homes in Metuchen.

By 1914 the way in which Metuchen flaunted its title of “The Brainy Borough” seems to have gotten on the nerves of its neighbors. In that year the *Bloomfield Independent Press* challenged Metuchen to a fight to the death for the title of Brainiest Borough. Editor Charles R. Blunt considered the borough of Glen Ridge, Essex county, in which Bloomfield is located, had greater right to the title:

“A little hamlet called Metuchen, down on the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad just this side of New Brunswick, holds the proud title of ‘The Brainy Borough’. We believe that this borough christened itself thus on the day when Mary E. Wilkins Freeman first took up her abode there, and that the title has clung only as a result of the power of vociferation. Now if Metuchen’s able claim to the proud title is the fact that one day a moving van transported the household effects of a lady novelist there, the grounds for such claim are decidedly meager; but if a few lesser stellar luminaries of some degree of mental attainments have staked out their homestead claims in Metuchen, we will grant her the title by reason of first claim and present possession.

“However, there is a nobler title that might be bestowed upon a borough which shows symptoms of running to brains. This title, ‘The Braniest Borough’ we hereby bestow on Glen Ridge to have and to hold unless Metuchen can present better claims.

“Presumably, since we have dared to imply that Metuchen possesses less gray matter than Glen Ridge, the *Metuchen Recorder*, the only weekly journal of the mighty mental Metuchenites, will hasten to grab up the cudgels and engage us in a wordy conflict”

The formal terms of the contest called for the paper to publish each week the name and attainments of one of its mental celebrities, the loser to be the one which first ran out of names. The Recorder accepted the challenge and fight was on. It started in March and dragged on for almost a year until the Bloomfield paper ran out of names and Metuchen was declared the winner. The score on July 1914 stood:

Metuchen

Henry H. Alden, editor of Harper's Magazine

Charles Volkmer, ceramic artist (deceased)

F.M. Potter, principal of Voorhees College, Vellore, India

Gustave Lindenthal, consulting engineer and bridge builder

Walter Williams, director of Woolworth Co.

S.S. Carvallho, manager of Hurst publications

Mary Wilkins Freeman, authoress

William D. Stevens, illustrator.

Glen Ridge

Edward P. Mitchell, editor of the New York Sun

William T. Sampson, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (deceased)

Johnson Martin, general manager for South America, General Motors Export Company

Clemens Herchal, consulting hydraulic engineer

Robert Sterling Yard, editor of Century Magazine

George E. Pearons, general attorney, Western Union

Thomas L. Mason, Editor of Life

Frederick B. Williams, artist.

From this point on, however, Metuchen began to decline as a center of literary and artistic activity until today it has no more than its fair share of eminent personages. Metuchen's most recent celebrity was 55-year old Alfred Hates who in 1923 allowed himself to be towed by the teeth from New York to Philadelphia. Hates sat on a motorcycle with a strap between his teeth, an automobile pulled the other end. Metuchen turned out in force to cheer him on his way. Sic transit gloria Metuchen.

14. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY--POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

As for the town itself, it more than lived up to the highbrow colony in its midst. It elected its first Republican mayor in 1903, Alexander C. Litterst, who immediately set to work to show what his party could do for Metuchen. Hailed as Metuchen's "20th Century Mayor" he concentrated upon organizing police protection for the community, using the slogan "the tramps must go." The convergence of the three railroads in the borough had brought an epidemic of hobo jungles in which the ticketless travelers spent the time between train connections. How Metuchen rid itself of the unwelcome transients as well as how it handled the automobile problem is told fully in the chapter on the Police department.

The newly formed police department was plunged immediately into its first and only labor dispute which was reported in the *Home News* of October 12, 1904:

MANY NATIONALITIES GO ON STRIKE

"Skinny O'Brian Wields Pick and Small Sized Riot Ensues at Metuchen."

It seems that Negro laborers were hired by the Middlesex Water Company to lay mains through the borough. The men struck for more wages. "They wanted \$1.65 for a nine hour day" which superintendent Kellogg arranged to give them "but made no promises as to how long this scale would continue." The workmen kicked on the wages, and they kicked on having Clement K. Corbin for a superintendent, and so Kellogg and Corbin decided to "kick them out."

The kicking out having been completed, the Water Company immediately brought 35 Hungarians from Fords Corner to work for \$1.80 a day for 10 hours. "Five Metuchen Italians were also engaged at the same pay and 'Skinny' O'Brian and several others of the Yankee population were armed with pick and shovels."

It would have been well had not the water company decided to give the Negroes another chance, reemploying them at the rate of \$1.65 for nine hours. When the men compared notes the riot was on and "Superintendent Corbin looked around for the tallest tree." The different nationalities talked and yelled and things were very merry: 'Skinny' O'Brian had found some Hungarian Rum and it set him crazy. He grabbed rocks and threatened to hit every Hun in sight. All this rumpus was going on in front of the residence of Chief of Police Fouratt.

Foreman Farrell induced a couple of the men to start work again and soon cries of "scab" rent the air and superintendent Corbin wished the negroes had all been left in Africa. At this time the police took a hand and the strikers were dispersed. Monday night leader John Smith was still talking Strike.

Chief Fouratt lectured him and in a few minutes Smith was found guilty of disorderly conduct. The Chief locked him up.

Mayor Litterst spent the last year of his mayorship heckling the Pennsylvania Railroad about widening the street under the railroad bridge on Main Street. At the end of the year the Democrats recaptured the mayoralty, electing T.F. Van Sielen.

One of the first fruits of Van Sielen's term was the enacting of the Wilmont Ordinance, a blue law concerning Sunday closing. Everything but the drug stores were shut down and they were allowed to sell only medicines by prescription. It worked an unnecessary hardship upon the inhabitants, who complained bitterly. The ordinance was allowed to lapse after a short time.

During the ensuing years the government alternated between the Republicans and the Democrats and finally became almost exclusively Republican with no appreciable difference in the efficiency of the government. It functioned smoothly, always watchful of the community's interests and quick to call the railroad, the water company, the electric and gas companies to account when their services faltered. By 1908 the need for larger quarters in which to conduct borough business was manifest and a committee was appointed to explore the subject. The immediate solution was the transfer of borough headquarters from the Robins building to the new bank building, but eight years later first steps toward building the present borough building were taken with the purchase of the plot upon which the borough hall now stands.

Metuchen was rather disconcerted in 1909 when the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry published a chart showing the cost of living through the State. The tabulation was based on a bill of goods consisting of fifty articles, and Metuchen was shown to have the highest cost of living in the entire State--\$15.98 against \$11.17 which was the lowest figure. "METUCHEN MAD" the *Recorder* announced. "Prominent citizens protest against the State Board which has advertised Metuchen as a high-priced town for food supplies." Metuchen insisted that the reason was that the quality of food was higher than elsewhere in the State.

Despite or because of which the business section flourished mightily. The first five years of the new century saw the opening of the town's first bank (1905), the increase of the grocery business to five establishments and the arrival of two bakery shops. In spite of the onset of the automobile age there were five blacksmiths, two livery stables and two harness makers. The town also boasted of no less than four hotels in which an extensive social life was carried on. By 1910 the business establishment of the community was virtually complete--every conceivable type of business was represented and the town was completely self-sufficient economically.

In 1911 a movement was set on foot to secure the commission form of government for the borough. As the time for voting on the question approached "The highbrows and lowbrows" discussed the question and became so "hopelessly divided..that the decision of the ballot box is awaited with interest." The ballot box decided against the commission form--209 to 118. Both parties and all officeholders were against the change while the commuters were for it. "An eleventh hour exaggerated as the change, meaning a big increase in the expense of running the borough government...alarmed some of the inhabitants and they made haste to vote against it...It

also said that there was considerable money in use and that liquor was also used to get votes against government by commission.” So said the New Brunswick *Times*.

No other political developments of consequence occurred until an attempt was made in 1930 to have a city manager govern the borough.

The World War proved a deep emotional experience for Metuchen: it was one of that group of committees which had actual contact with the war, for Camp Raritan was established just outside of the borough limits where Raritan Arsenal now is in Bonhamtown. Almost overnight the community's population had jumped by several thousand soldiers and workers. Metuchen plunged wholeheartedly into the organizing of hospitality, entertainment and welfare facilities and kept busy at its job of mothering the soldiers through the war period. Economically the camp proved a boon to the town, creating a mild sort of prosperity in which the entire business section and working population shared. It also caused the business district to over-expand somewhat; consequently the war years were followed by a period of retrenchment.

After the war, Metuchen welcomed home its sons and affairs quickly settled down to their accustomed tempo. The 1920s saw the installation of a sewage system, which opened up the way for the building up of the southern portion of the borough. The eastern side of Main Street, practically uninhabited up to this time, also began to fill with stores and buildings. That side of the street had long been part of the Ayers estate and had passed into the hands of Nathan Robins who had kept the tract intact throughout the balance of the nineteenth and part of the twentieth centuries. The old hotels had long since vanished and with them had gone the harness makers, blacksmiths and hackmen. The town had its automobile agencies and garages and service stations instead. A small moving-picture house at the corner of Highland Avenue and Main Street provided the town's only diversion.

The community's dream of having a separate and specific building in which to house its government was realized in 1925 when all joined in celebrating the opening of the trim brick borough hall set in its spacious landscaped grounds.

Borough government during this period, however, was slowly progressing toward a financial crisis. The tax rate rose and streets were in perpetual need of repair. Discontent with the handling of the government rose to the point where a strong reform government grew almost spontaneously. It finally channeled and organized as the Non-Partisan League for Borough Manager which was joined by the Taxpayers' Association.

The drive to reform Metuchen's government reached its height early in 1930 when the required 353 names to a petition for a special election were secured. From this point on a full report of the progress of the reform movement was carried in the local newspapers, the *Metuchen Recorder* aligning itself with the opposition to a borough manager. The Non-Partisan League, consequently, had to depend upon New Brunswick and Perth Amboy for an impartial presentation of its case.

The outside papers, unaffected by the heat of the internal struggle proved admirably impartial reporters. The New Brunswick *Sunday Times*, for example, summed up the situation in this way:

“behind Metuchen’s governmental unrest undoubtedly is the Borough’s high tax rate. While a...high tax rate may not be symptomatic of loose government, the 353 individuals who signed the petition, which calls for a referendum on the town manager form of government, probably feel they and other residents have not been given the improvements warranted by the rate.”

The Perth Amboy *Evening News* offered an analysis made by Walter J. Willard, field representative of the national municipal league:

“With its load of unpaid taxes, the practical exhaustion of its bonding capacity, and its tax rate which reveals a cost of government almost three times that of many larger places, Metuchen is naturally in a mood for self-examination. All the more because the quality of service, as shown by the small amount of paved streets, puts it low in the scale of administrative efficiency.

“Two of the questions voiced, the fear that if any change is made it would amount to a revolution, and that investment bankers might not look kindly on the bond issue shortly to be issued to replace the high interest temporary bonds now outstanding, that the bankers might get the impression that Metuchen was radical and not a stable community.

“The fact of the matter is that the introduction of business methods instead of political methods into the local government makes investment bankers more partial to the heads of city-managed cities. The universal experience is that such places can borrow money cheaper, for to a manager the budget and the obligation of years ahead are to him as the maps, charts and compass of a sea captain.”

During the months of March and April the reform forces busily held mass meetings, heckled the borough committees with embarrassing questions and rallied the public support behind the movement. Early in May petitions were filed with the borough clerk requesting him to call a special election on May 27. Naturally, the government officials and the Republican party, which was in power, wishing to protect their jobs and their political machine did all in their power to throw obstacles in the path of the reform group. Taking advantage of the state law which specifies that a special election may not be held within four weeks of a regular election, the borough clerk and the borough council announced that the special election requested for May 27 could not be held since primary elections were scheduled for June 17.

The Non-Partisan League countered by employing a lawyer and applying to the Supreme Court for a writ of mandamus. While the Supreme Court deliberated, the campaign went furiously on with statements and counter-statements, mass meetings for and rallies against. Finally, on May 16 Supreme Court Justice C.M. Parker directed the borough clerk to show cause why a writ of mandamus should be granted. Both sides appeared with their lawyers. Wesley Benner representing the borough, and attorneys A.L. Fine and George J. Miller representing the reform group. The court decided in favor of the Non-Partisan League and the election was ordered held.

As election day approached the campaign reached heights of bitterness never before aroused on any issue in the community. Kenneth Haley and Joseph Flynt, leaders of the borough manager drive, carried on a whirlwind campaign in a last desperate effort to put over the reform measure. The opposition, with a well-established and organized machine, countered by flooding the town with literature. On May 26, for example, the Perth Amboy *Evening News* reported:

“Active opposition on the part of the present municipal government to the request of the citizens of the Non-Partisan League for a change in the form of government was seen in a pamphlet which was circulated about town over the weekend. While that paper was paid for by the ‘committee opposed to municipal manager form of government’, it was common talk that the committee was made up of officials now in control of the borough government.

“The widespread distribution of that pamphlet has raised the question: Why should the borough officials or borough employees wage a campaign against the wishes of the electorate? The Non-Partisan League members believe that the active opposition will react in their favor, for it is one of the fundamental laws of the country that the power of government shall be in accordance with the voice of the people.”

And on the eve of election the opposition issued still another circular signed by Mayor Phineous Jones and Councilman F.O. Bohlks, J. Malcolm Crowell, Harry S. Flatt and Bernard Whittembert:

“It is indeed unusual for such a tyranic condition in a small peaceful community like Metuchen. Every citizen, voter and taxpayer will rise to the occasion and strenuously assist to protest the officers they have elected to represent them, by voting at the poles May 27, 1930, against the adoption of the act.”

And on election day; Metuchen’s six districts turned out in full force registering a vote which fell just short of the total of the last general election---1850 ballots.

Two districts voted for the borough manager and the balance defeated the measure by a margin of 54 votes--941 against and 889 for, which the Non-Partisan League hailed as a moral victory and which scared the incumbent office-holders into cleaning house and reforming the government structure. So Metuchen benefitted anyhow.

After the election there was talk among the reform ranks of carrying on toward another election two years hence, but the reforms instituted by the mayor and council headed off popular support and the borough manager group lapsed into inaction.

In the regular election which came in November, the Republican party was returned to power once more with Harry Kramer as the sole Democrat elected. In January an extensive reorganization was drafted and put in the form of an ordinance which replaced the 14 committees which had formerly carried on municipal business with three centralized departments: the Department of Public Works was put in charge of the work formerly handled by the Streets, Water, Light, Waste Disposal, Sewer and Borough Hall committees, the Department of Public Safety was given the Police and Fire Departments, and the Department of Administration handled the detail of the Finance, Poor and Ordinance committees. "Probably one of the most progressive steps ever taken by any governing body in the borough" commented the Perth Amboy *Evening News*.

But in 1932-33 the Democrats captured the government for the first time in about twenty years and Metuchen rallied behind the new mayor and committee to help get itself out of its financial difficulties. A group of the more wealthy inhabitants expressed willingness to subscribe to an initial loan, a plan for installment payment of back taxes was instituted and their payment spurred by a series of pep rallies in churches, halls and the moving picture house addressed by former Liberty Loan Minute Men. "Spirit of War Gets Metuchen Out of Financial Morass" the New Brunswick *Sunday Times* summed it up on February 7, 1932.

By this time the full weight of the depression and its attendant problems of relief and suffering and unemployment fell upon the shoulders of the borough committee. In 1931 the Metuchen Borough Council had been among the first governing bodies in the State to recognize its responsibilities and appropriate \$1,000 for direct relief. By the winter of 1932, 900 needy Metuchenites were on the relief rolls and the borough had contributed half of the \$15,000 needed annually ever since. In 1938 the borough contributed the full amount when the State ran short. A complete account of the relief problem is included in the chapter which deals with the social life and conditions in the borough.

The Republicans swept back into power in 1935 and remained during 1938, but in 1937 the Democrats gained four places on the council to two for the Republicans. In addition the race for the mayoralty was closely and bitterly fought, resulting in a victory for the Democratic candidate, Charles F. Giger, by the very slim margin of seven votes. In the official count the majority of seven, which the newspapers had reported, was reduced to two. John C. Stockel, the Republican candidate, immediately demanded a recount. When the Election Board went over the ballot 14 doubtful votes were singled out for judgment by the court, which made things look bright for the Republicans who

had visions of winning by 10 votes. When Judge Lyons finally settled the matter of the disputed ballots the count stood at a tie vote--1534 for each. As a result the office was declared vacant when the term of Mayor Arthur K. Hillpot expired on December 21. At that time the predominantly Democratic council appointed Giger mayor for a one-year term. In the election of 1938 Giger ran again but was defeated by Charles Taylor. Whereupon there arose a nice legal point as to who was Mayor of Metuchen--Giger, who had been appointed for one year from January 1, 1938, or Taylor who had been elected. After a brief impasse the dilemma was solved by Giger's resignation.

At this writing a balance of power has been struck. The council is almost equally divided between Democrats and Republicans. The following are the borough officials: Charles Taylor, mayor; Edmond F. Grimm, president of the Borough council; William Fraser, Edmond F. Grimm, George E. Kelly, Charles F. Lewis, Tyler Romand and John C. Stockell, councilmen; James F. Knox, clerk; A.T. Strong, George Hahm, John MacLauchlan, assessors; A.T. strong, collector and treasurer, Paul F. Fenton, recorder; W.F. Buchanan, engineer; Leon Semer, council; Rev. G.A. Humphries, overseer of poor; Mark McChesney, president of the Board of Health; Albert C. Gerber, president of the Board of Education.

Nineteen-forty finds Metuchen simply a larger version of the Metuchen of 1900, or even 1870. The town has grown tremendously--but in the same direction it took in the nineteenth century, that of a residential commuting community. No industrial development of any consequence has occurred or is likely to occur. The 400 commuters of the early decades of this century has grown to 650 today--11% of the total population.

This group and its families which, roughly, must be a quarter of the population of Metuchen has always been a prime factor in the economic development of the community, furnishing a solid block of consumers in the upper brackets upon which the retail business of the town could always depend. It would seem that the future growth and development of Metuchen depends upon the growth and economic health of this group. When Metuchen's commuters reach the 1,000 mark, then no doubt, Metuchen can add another block to its business section.

15. CHRONOLOGY

1630-1700 Metuchen was the chief of the Indians in this section.

1636 Daniel Pierce and associates purchases land for eighty pounds from Governor Carteret and associates for the settlement of Woodbridge.

1670 Jonathan Durham alies? Singletary set up a mill on Papiack Creek.

1705 Bonhamtown-Oak Tree road surveyed through Metuchen.

1717 First Metuchen meeting house is erected near the intersection of the Bonhamtown and Woodbridge roads.

1755 Metuchen Builds a larger church.

1764 First all-land stage route runs from Philadelphia to Jersey City via Piscataway(town), Bonhamtown and Woodbridge.

1776 The Allentown Tavern on Durham Avenue serves cakes and beer to British and rebels between skirmishes.

1778 Battle of Oak Tree: Washington vs. Cornwallis and Howe.

1784 Copper is discovered near Menlo Park.

1790 Ayers' blacksmith shop stands at Main and Christol Streets

1793 Metuchen church becomes independent at request of Woodbridge.

1793 Metuchen becomes a separate voting district.

1800 Ezekial Ayers' hotel pump in North Metuchen gives Pumptown its name.

1807 The original Franklin schoolhouse is built.

1810 Completion of Middlesex-Essex and Amboy-Boundbrook Turnpikes through Metuchen. Campbell's and Hampton's taverns begin at junction.

1832 Lewis Thomas establishes Metuchen's first store and opens Metuchen's first post office there.

1836 January 30. Present Presbyterian Church is dedicated. First train puffs through the village enroute to New Brunswick.

1855 Thomas van Sielen opens the Raritan Hotel.

1857 December 29. The Reformed church is organized in the morning; it's cornerstone is laid in the afternoon.

1866 October 2. The Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church organizes.

November 28. St. Luke's Episcopal Church incorporates.

1867 St. Joseph's, Metuchen's original Catholic church is built.

1870 February 22. Metuchen opens its library and reading room.

March 17. Raritan township is formed, including Metuchen.

1873 Mathias Robins builds Robins Hall.

The Lehigh Valley railroad passes through town.

1875 November. The Protective Association of Metuchen is organized to maintain law and order in the village.

1880 October 20. The Metuchen Inquirer, first local newspaper, begins publication.

- 1882 The Eagle Hook and Ladder Company begins fighting fires.
- 1886 May 25. Ice cream at reasonable terms brings Metuchen a new gastronomic era.
- 1888 Pennsylvania station is built at its present site. Main Street discreetly under the railroad.
- 1889 Metuchen votes not to become a borough.
- 1890 June. The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church becomes Metuchen's first Negro church.
- 1891 The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad adds Metuchen to its itinerary.
- 1894 The Metuchen Recorder begins publication and the Inquirer is discontinued soon after. A temporary policeman keeps the streets safe for women after dark.
- 1897 Metuchen gets its first telephone and water service. The Washington Hose Company is organized.
- 1898 The trolley comes to town.
- 1899 December 21. The Edgar Clays Corporation is founded.
- 1900 March 20. Metuchen becomes a borough.
- 1901 June 13. The Borough Improvement League organizes.

1902 November 17. The one-man police force is aided and abetted by a Vigilance Society.

1903 St. Joseph's College is opened.

1905 May 23. Truman T. Pierson distinguishes himself as the first depositor in the Metuchen National Bank.

1907 Metuchen encourages motorists to go slowly and moochers to go swiftly.

1908 April 24. The First Baptist Church organizes.

September. The new High School building is completed.

1909 The Second Baptist Church is formed. Movies in town.

1911 The borough acquires a regulated police department.

1914 Metuchen acquires a nickelodeon.

1918 The Edgar Memorial School is dedicated. The Empire Floor and Wall Tile factory (now used by the Celotex Corp.) is built.

1920 Metuchen acquires a postoffice building (Power) and delivery service.

1921 The Metuchen Review is started at Highland Park.

1922 September 17. The YMCA building is dedicated.

1923 December 11. The New Hope Baptist Church and the Christadelphian Church are organized.

1924 The Costa Ice Cream Company builds its factory.

1925 The Commonwealth Bank opens for business.

1927 The Washington School is completed.

1929 St. Francis Parochial School is opened.

August. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa established their only U.S. branch in Metuchen.

1930 The Church of Jesus Christ is organized.

1931 Metuchen becomes the first community to go to the rescue of the unemployed with direct work relief.

1936 The Celotex Corporation moves into town.

1939 Work is started on the new Metuchen Post Office.