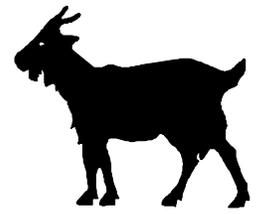


# Nannygoats



Vol. 18, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall 2020

Edison (Raritan) Township was incorporated on March 17, 1870. As 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Township, the Society is looking back at various aspects of its rich history.

Most know that Edison Township is named for the famous inventor, Thomas Alva Edison, whose Menlo Park Laboratory was located on Christie Street. What some may not know is how that came about.

Early European settlers in the second half of the 1600s named this area "Woodbridge" after Reverend John Woodbridge of Newbury, Massachusetts. Woodbridge at that time included roughly all of what is now Woodbridge Township, Edison Township, Highland Park, and the Borough of Metuchen.

In 1870 "Raritan Township" broke away from Woodbridge to include current-day Edison, Highland Park, and Metuchen. Metuchen Borough, in 1900, and Highland Park, in 1905, then separated from Raritan Township and the now smaller municipality remained with that name for the following 84 years.

How and why did it change? Largely because of the efforts of Mrs. Johanna Gerzanich Wira (1911-1991). Wira was extremely active in the local community. She assisted with establishing JFK Hospital and its Auxiliary, led and

supported Parent/Teacher organizations, worked with Scout groups, and did a great deal of charity work through local churches.

Her home was on Liddle Avenue in the

Clara Barton section of Edison, where the Village at Historic Clara Barton Condominium complex is now located. Johanna's husband, Charles Wira (1909-1992) owned the O.B. Fish Company, which operated a fishing tackle business near their home. The company is still in business in New Egypt. For years the Wiras even hosted post-Prom breakfasts at the "homestead," welcoming all high schoolers to come to her property after their big nights out to safely wind down and eat before heading home to sleep.

So, how is she behind the name "Edison", the effort for which she probably most well-known to long-time Edisonians?

*Continued on Page 8*



## The Woman Behind 'Edison'

by Tyreen A. Reuter

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

# The Historic Applegate House Hits the Market

By Tyreen A. Reuter

Perhaps by the time this issue of *Nannygoats* goes to press, the Applegate House will have found its new owner, but as of now it's still on the market. The property, located at 344 Middlesex Avenue, is a contributing resource in the Middlesex Avenue-Woodwild Park Historic District, listed in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places in 2017.

The home's first owners, James Arthur Applegate (1887-1981) and Adelaide Holms Thompson (1890-1971), were married in 1909 and lived in South Amboy and Cranbury before coming to Metuchen in 1925 with their daughters, Doris and Lenoir. J. Arthur was already an established and prominent businessman with his own automobile dealership.

Records indicate that they lived nearby on Elm Avenue while this house was being built. As noted in the local papers, the Applegates moved into the newly constructed home in June of 1927.

The 1930 Census provides a snapshot of the family soon after moving into the house at 344 Middlesex Avenue. J. Arthur is listed as working as an "Automobile Distributor," daughters Doris & Lenoir were ages 18 and 9, respectively, and living with them was a "servant" named Elizabeth Purint. Miss Purint had come to the United States from Budapest in 1928 and spoke Magyar in addition to English.

During their many years in Metuchen, the Applegates were extremely active in local society. Adelaide, or "Ada," served as President of the New Jersey Federated Womens Club, was an active member of the Borough Improvement League, First Presbyterian Church, the Metuchen Riding & Hunt Club, Metuchen Golf & Country Club, the Order of the Eastern Star, and Skytop Club (a resort in Pennsylvania).



Photograph taken on February 27, 1934.

In addition to his successful automobile dealership, J. Arthur headed the Chief Insurance Agency in Perth Amboy, served as President of the Commonwealth Bank of New Jersey, and Executive Vice-President of the South Amboy Trust Company. He was also President of the White Lakes Summer Homes and a Past Master of the St. Stephen's Lodge in South Amboy. He was a charter member of the Board of Directors of JFK Medical Center, a member of the Metuchen Rotary, and joined his wife in her engagement with the First Presbyterian Church and Skytop Club.

In 1968, the Applegates retired to Monroe and sold their home to Ernest and Grace Hammesfahr, who were very involved with local activities as well, including running for

public office. It was during their time in the house that it was featured on the Holiday House Tour, which highlights the Brainsy Borough's grandest and most historic houses for the benefit of charity.

Michael and Georgina Vastola bought the house from the Hammesfahrs in 1985, then sold it to the current owners of record in 2005.

I sincerely hope that home's future owners enjoy it as much as all the previous ones have.

*A 1970 article about Ernest Hammesfahr's Congressional bid.*



1937 Metuchen High Yearbook. Lenoir Applegate (later Mrs. H.I. Stewart) is wearing a white "M" sweater.

## Hammesfahr Wants Seat Held by U.S. Rep. Patten

By WARREN SLOAT  
Home News Staff Writer  
METUCHEN—Ernest J. Hammesfahr confirmed yesterday he is seeking the Republican nomination for the 13th U.S. Congressional District seat.

The candidate, owner of the E. J. Hammesfahr Electric Co. and an unsuccessful candidate for Borough Council last year, said he appeared before the GOP screening committee last Wednesday to "lay my credentials on the table."

Hammesfahr said he is not interested in running without the GOP endorsement. "I wouldn't want to go against the party," he said, "and I wouldn't get the vote anyway."

The screening committee, he said, is "giving everyone a chance—I was deeply impressed by the reaction I received."

Hammesfahr joined Charles Wiley of Sayreville, also seeking the GOP nomination to run



ERNEST J. HAMMESFAHR

against Rep. Edward J. Patten for the district seat. Several

other names also have been mentioned as possible candidates, including Assemblymen Peter Garibaldi and Robert Haeleig.

After graduating from Bucknell University with a degree in electrical engineering, Hammesfahr, the son of an electrician, began as an apprentice. He organized his own firm nine years ago.

He has been on the Board of Christian Education and has been a church school teacher at the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen for 10 years, helping to organize various youth activities, including a coffee house and teen center.

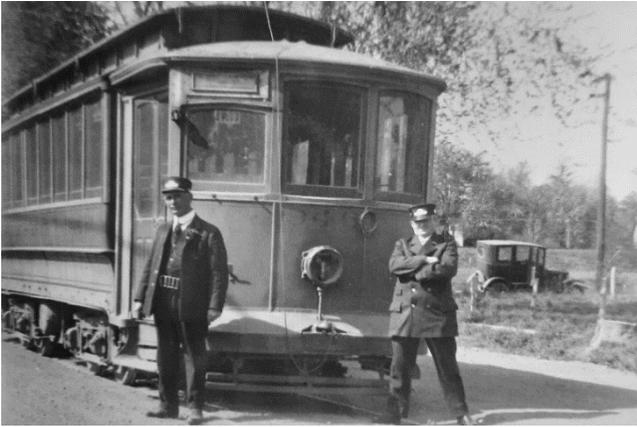
He is present of the Metuchen Rotary Club, and chairman of Metuchen's Community Christmas Appeal and is active in professional organizations.

He and his wife live at 344 Middlesex Ave. and have four children.

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

The following list of recent acquisitions was compiled by Archives Chair Byron Sondergard.

- Various photographs, mostly Lehigh Valley & Pennsylvania Railroad-related, train schedules, a copy of the "Public Service Fast Line" booklet, by John H. Brinckmann, Jr. and Edward F. Gardner, a *News Tribune* article and a few pictures of the 1977 train derailment in Metuchen, and other print items (donated by David Hutchinson).
- 1930s and 1940s photographs of Knox Tavern and Grace Knox, a long-time Metuchen resident (donated by Sheila Tynday).
- Postcard views of the Edison Auto Wreckers at 244 Mill Road in Edison, the Van Court Coal Yard (Lehigh Valley Railroad) at Oak Tree Road, and The Castle Agency (realtor).



- A book of clippings regarding early 1920s Metuchen, compiled by Helen Anderson Moran (Logan) (donated by her niece, Suzanne W. Rowland).
- Two copies of "St. Luke's 1868 - 1968, A History of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Metuchen, N.J." (donated by Suzanne W. Rowland).

- Postcard views of the Old Franklin Schoolhouse and Franklin Schoolhouse (donated by the Borough Improvement League).
- Two file cabinets; one donated by Michael Firestone, Jr. in Memory of his mother Janice (Stochel) Firestone, and the other donated by Russell Gehrum. If you are downsizing and have a file cabinet to donate, please contact us.



*Top:* Trolley photograph donated by David Hutchinson. *Above:* Postcard view of The Castle Agency.  
*Below, left to right:* Knox Tavern employees Harold Breen Sr., Nicholas Knox, and Larry Sorenson.

# Eastern Potash

## *A Chimney in the Woods*

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

As you travel on the New Jersey Turnpike and cross the Raritan river on the Basilone Bridge, look to the south along the Edison riverfront. You will see a large masonry chimney sticking up out of a forest. How that chimney got there is the story of an ambitious industrial project that started during World War I and was never completed as planned. Then World War II took the plant in a new direction.

In 1917 the lower Raritan River in Edison (then Raritan Township) had not changed much since the first settlers arrived in the 1660s. It was still mostly salt hay marshes that flooded twice a day with the tides and a few docks, for clay and sand mines to ship their excavations to brick plants in Sayreville, Woodbridge, and elsewhere.

World War I changed the riverfront in Edison forever. In the winter of 1917/18, the US Army acquired thousands of acres along the Raritan, and built the Raritan Arsenal. The Arsenal property was diked and ditched. A huge dock was built so that munitions could be loaded on barges and ships and sent to France for the American Expeditionary Forces.

Upriver, a proposal to build a large industrial complex was announced in 1918 to great fanfare by the New Brunswick Board of Trade. The Eastern Potash plant was to be located off of Meadow Rd on former Callard farm, a 55-acre tract of land in the Piscatawaytown section of Edison.

The Eastern Potash plant was huge. A barge canal 100' wide and 1600' long was dug on the north bank of the Raritan to access the site. A \$150,000 traveling crane was built over the canal so barge loads of greensand could be scooped out and moved to the plant for processing. The main building was 2 stories tall, 300' wide, and

600' long. A powerhouse was built along with 12 digesters. The biggest kilns in America would be in the plant.

A brick plant was built on the site to produce bricks for the plant's other buildings and for sale. Waste sand and clay from potash production would be used to make bricks.

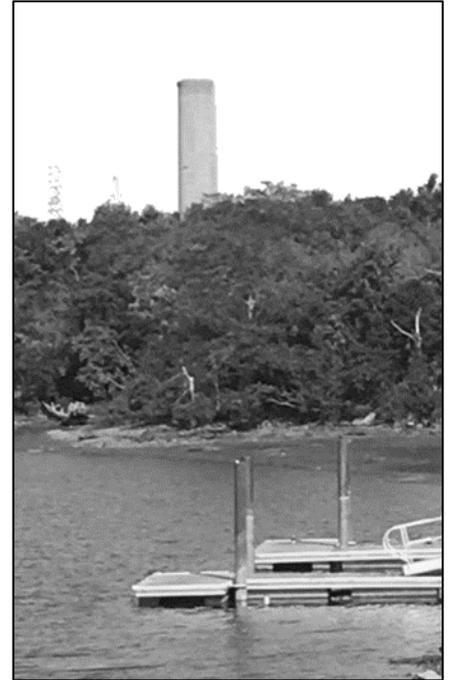
The plan was to produce 1,000 tons of potash daily, using 2,000 tons of lime per day. In October the company expected operations to start by the first of the year in 1919.

To access the plant, the Lehigh Valley Railroad laid two miles of track. The freight station at the plant was named "Greensand".

Greensand is a natural soil amendment also known as glauconite and is a great source of potassium that helps plants grow. The greensand that they were going to mine in the Matawan area contained 7-9% potash.

Why build this plant at all? Prior to WWI, Germany shipped large amounts of potash to the US. With this supply cut off, American potash sources needed to be developed.

In March 1919 ground was broken for the \$2,000,000 plant. A man named C.R. Blood was placed in charge of plant construction. Excavators began digging out the canal on the north shore of the Raritan River.



### What is "Potash"?

**Pronounced "pot-ash," it is a potassium-containing salt fertilizer that increases water retention in plants, improves crop yields, and influences the taste, texture, and nutritional value of many plants. Originally made by leaching tree ashes in metal pots, the process left a white residue on the pot, leading to its being called "pot ash." It can also be used to make soap, paint, and other substances, but non-fertilizer use is only accounts for only about 15% of its production. Interestingly, on July 31, 1790, President George Washington signed the first patent ever issued in the United States for a new process and apparatus for making potash, making it America's first industrial chemical.**

Due to the war and shortages of materials work was slow on the plant. It was not until July 1919 that building supplies started to arrive, and in November 1919 Bethlehem Fabricators were hiring laborers to build the plant at .60 per hour.

Little did they know, that the plant was doomed from the start.

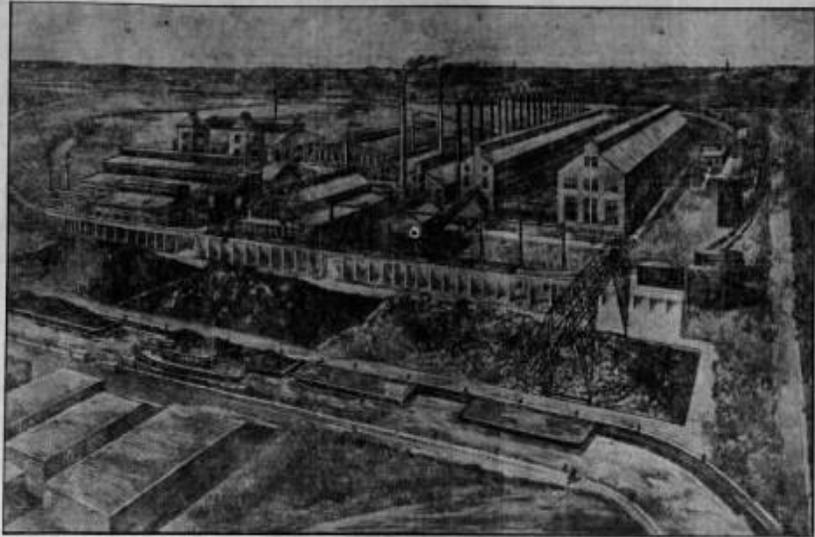
World War I ended in November 1918, much earlier than American military planners anticipated. When the conflict ended, trade between the warring nations resumed. By 1921 Germany had started shipping potash to the United States at a much lower cost than it took to produce it here.

Potash production at the Eastern Potash plant along the Raritan River required a massive effort of transporting tons of greensand by barge from downriver and tons of limestone by rail from North Jersey, then unloading and processing all of it. When the process was complete, bricks would be made from the tons of waste from the potash production process.

A powerhouse with a large chimney was built in order to power potash production. The original plan was to bring in tons of coal, but the new rail line lacked the capacity to move the coal to the site, in addition to the limestone, and ship back out the finished potash. So, the developers of the plant came up with the idea of using oil to power the plant. An oil tank farm was built further up Meadow Road behind the plant and tankers full of oil from Mexico would dock at the plant and unload. This operation became known as the Raritan Refining Company, a subsidiary of Eastern Potash. However, the Raritan River was not deep enough for the tankers. So, they had to dock at Bayway on the Arthur Kill, and oil was to be barged to the plant.

The plant was highly touted in the New Brunswick newspapers with 58 articles mentioning the plant in 1920 alone, including large advertisements asking New Brunswick residents to invest, and promising their investment would yield heavy returns on stock. Artistic renderings of the plant were shown. Shortages of

### Work on Largest Potash Plant in World Nearing Completion; Operation Will be Well Advanced by Middle of This Summer



housing for workers were projected. Construction of the plant was progressing, with opening promised in mid-year, then late year.

1921 began with continued positive news about Eastern Potash. In February there were prospects for early operation of the plant, and work on the refining plant continued. In July the refining plant was ready for operation. The powerhouse generated electricity which was sold to Granton Chemical next door. By August there were complaints about oil pollution from the plant at the Tea Pot Inn beach just up the river.

By the end of 1921, the lime kilns were completed and the plant cost \$4,000,000. It has been three years since the plant was proposed, and not one ounce of potash had ever been produced.

The end of the Eastern Potash Plant began in 1922, with the appeal and non-payment of property taxes to Raritan Township. Contractors began to sue to get paid, and finally large stockholder sued, calling Eastern Potash a "stock swindling operation."

In 1923 Eastern Potash went bankrupt. One lawsuit by a stockholder said that the plant never "turned a wheel" and the president of the company was making over \$100,000 per year. C.R. Blood, the construction superintendent of the plant, resigned and moved to Florida. Eastern Potash went into receivership, and a successor company called Building Materials Corporation acquired the plant with the plan to make bricks.

*Continued on Page 6*

### **Bricks Will Save the Plant**

Brick making operations started on August 17, 1925 at a rate of 100,000 bricks per day, with the bricks being used for buildings on the plant site. *The Home News* reported that the plant produced 150,000 bricks per day in 1927.

The Aero Corporation announced in 1928 that they would be making airplane engines in the old potash plant, but this did not happen.

Aerial photographs from 1931 show a barge in the canal, pile of material on the dock, a loop railroad track around the plant. The powerhouse and chimney are also visible.

### **Thomas Edison Company Steps In**

In 1932 the plant was bought by Metropolitan Concrete Co., a subsidiary of Edison Portland Cement. Plans were to use the plant to make 1,000,000 barrels of Portland Cement per year. In 1933, Edison estimated it would cost \$500,000 to adapt the buildings for the manufacture of cement.

In April 1935 it was anticipated that the plant would open in 3 months, but it never did. Despite nine years of planning work, the company did not produce any cement at the plant. In 1941, it was announced that the plant would be sold to the Chilean Trading Company for \$134,000, who had plans to dismantle the plant and ship it to Chile.

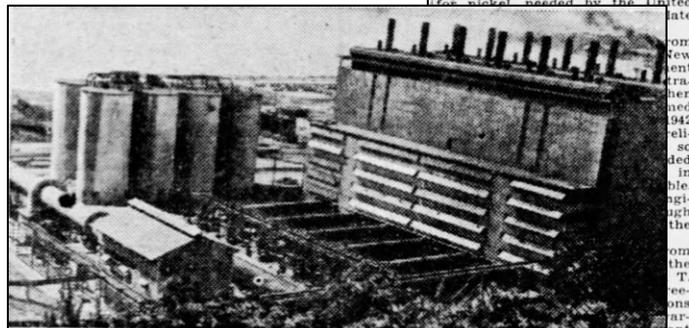
### **Sailing away to Cuba**

America entered World War II on December 7, 1941. Suddenly, there was a great need for steel and nickel for the war. The main source of nickel for US war industries was in Canada, but it was not enough. In 1942 a new source was developed in Cuba, but there was no plant to process the nickel. The Defense Plant Corporation financed Nicaro Nickel Corporation to build a processing plant in Cuba, but there was no steel available.

Along the Raritan there was the abandoned potash plant with over 1400 tons of structural steel in it and a large gantry crane. So, the Defense Plant Corporation bought the old potash plant for \$71,000, dismantled it, transported it by rail to Florida, and then shipped it to Cuba where it was used in the nickel processing plant. Even the giant gantry crane was moved to Cuba.

### **Raritan Twp. Plant Moved To Cuban Site**

Nicaró, Cuba—It's probably news to the citizens of New Jersey that a landmark of their state has been transplanted down here and transformed into the backbone of a huge industrial plant which has become, barely a year after construction, an important second source of supply for nickel needed by the United



**'DEAD' PLANT LIVES AGAIN**—Steel from a "dead" cement plant in Piscatawaytown, Raritan Township, abandoned in 1919, is leading a new life as part of the \$33,500,000 mining plant (bottom) of the Nicaro Nickel Company, Nicaro, Cuba, which today is supplying the United States critically-needed nickel for its armament program, giving this country a second substantial source of the metal for the first time. Salvaged material from the cement plant was dismantled and shipped to Cuba for the rush job when other steel was unobtainable.

The new plant produced nickel, a material vital in armor plating in ships, tanks, and airplanes for the US war effort, and remained in operation until 2012.

While back in Raritan the only thing they did not take was the chimney, which is still visible today sticking out of the woods along the Raritan River, a silent memorial to an industrial dream of the early 20th century.

To view a movie of the construction and operation of the plant, including the gantry crane in Cuba, go to: [https://archive.org/details/nicaró\\_nickel\\_company](https://archive.org/details/nicaró_nickel_company).

**Want to write an article for Nannygoats? Have a History Mystery you need help with? An intriguing photograph to share? Contact [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)!**



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

## ***Sylvia Taylor***

Sylvia Halvorsen Taylor, 98, of Metuchen, passed away peacefully on Friday June 19, 2020 at JFK Hospital in Edison.

Born in Perth Amboy on November 13, 1921, she lived in Nevada, West Virginia, Norway, and Italy before moving to Metuchen in 1928. She worked for many years as a Principal Lab Technician at Rutgers University in New Brunswick before retirement. She was predeceased by her daughter, Dr. Lyn Taylor and is survived by her son, Fred Taylor and his wife Deborah of Edison; her grandson, James Haefner and his wife Karen; and her great-grandson, Jesse.

Sylvia became a member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church when she moved to Metuchen in 1928 and for many years was also active with the Friends of the Metuchen Library. She was not only a long-time member of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, but had also served on its Board of Directors. She was very interested in genealogy and

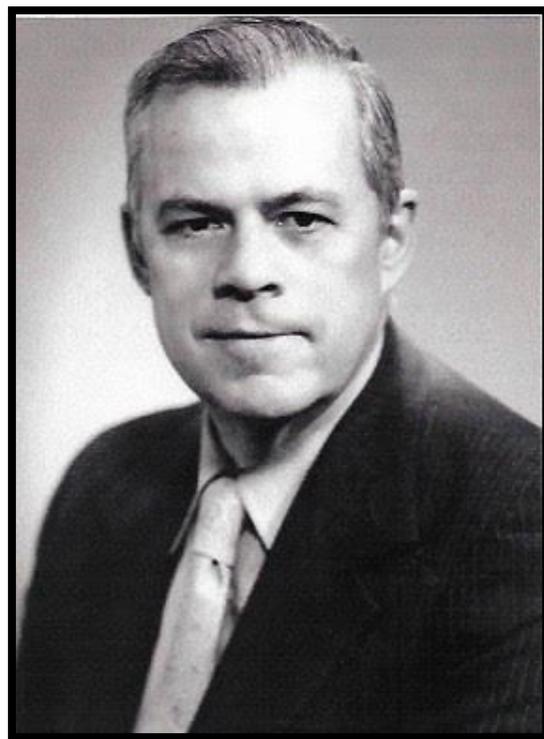
family history and was proud of her Native American ancestry and her ancestor, Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.



## ***Robert Collins***

Robert Louis Collins, 91, a long-time resident of Metuchen, died in the early morning of Monday, June 8, 2020 at JFK Hospital in Edison. Born in the Bronx on January 12, 1929, he graduated from DeWitt-Clinton High School then enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps near the end of World War II. Between 1946-1948, he qualified as a sharpshooter, participated in amphibious maneuvers in the Caribbean, worked in intelligence on a peacekeeping mission in the Mediterranean, and attained the rank of corporal. He later earned a bachelor's degree at Rutgers University while working at McGraw-Hill, and retired from McGraw-Hill as vice-president and controller after 31 years.

Robert married his beloved wife Carmen D'Andrea in 1952, with whom he shared a passion for history and community service. He volunteered with and served on the board of the Society as well as with Metuchen Senior Housing, Recordings for the Blind, JFK Hospital, the Menlo Park Veterans Home, the Metuchen Seniors Commission, the Metuchen Chapter of AARP, the American Italian Civic League, and the Metuchen Senior Center. Robert was predeceased by his wife Carmen and son Paul, and is survived by his daughter Marie, sister Evelyn, niece Michelle, three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and many in-laws and extended family members.



The municipality had been unable to get a "Raritan Township" post office designation due to other towns in the state already being named "Raritan." If they were to get a Post Office, they needed to change the name. Suggestions were entertained. In 1954, Mrs. Wira organized "Women for Edison" to assist in the effort. Wira's group felt that Edison, whose inventions were so critical to every aspect of modern life, should be the namesake.

However, a group in the southern part of Raritan Township felt that "Nixon" was a better name, after the Nixon Nitration Works (a large employer in that area).

So, Wira got to work. She and her volunteers canvassed, called, gathered signatures, debated, wrote letters, and even prayed.

The issue was brought to a referendum on November 2, 1954 and passed - although narrowly, with 3621 in favor of "Edison," and 3033 against.

So, next time you tell someone you live in or near "Edison," you can thank Johanna Gerzanich Wira and her team of volunteers for not having to say "Nixon."



### 'Nixon' lost referendum to 'Edison,' so township named after famous son

By LAURA SANDERS  
Home News staff writer

EDISON - If it hadn't been for the efforts of Johanna Wira 25 years ago, Edison today might be called "Nixon Township."

Now honorary chairman with her husband, Charles, of the Edison Centennial Ball, Mrs. Wira in 1954 organized "Women for Edison," a volunteer group which set out to convince the voters that Raritan, as the township was then called, should be renamed for its most famous son - inventor Thomas Edison.

The women expected hard work, but they weren't prepared for the fierce opposition which came from residents along the township's southern tier, where the name lighting up eyes was not "Edison," but "Nixon."

The fight began with petition drives but quickly escalated into a court suit, a check of voter registrations and a radio debate, Mrs. Wira remembers.

The controversy began with the township's longing for a post office to

call its own. Already split into small sections (Nixon, Piscatawaytown and Clara Barton, among others), the township also had been sliced into several postal districts served by post offices in surrounding towns.

Despite repeated pleas, the U.S. Postal Service was adamant: no central post office for Raritan until the township changed its name, Mrs. Wira said. For the Postal Service, the two already existing Raritans were confusing enough.

Mrs. Wira, one of many citizens interested in the post office issue, was appointed by Mayor James Forgione to head a committee to organize a referendum on a more-individual name for the township.

Getting the issue on the ballot would take 3,500 signatures, and putting the name "Edison" on it would take another 3,000, Charles Wira recalls.

So Johanna Wira and 40 other members of her "Women for Edison" committee began the tedious process of door-to-door canvassing.

"It was a lot of legwork, believe me," she says.

Meanwhile, however, a group of residents organized by August Nelson and Margaret Calamoneri was also knocking on doors, arguing that the township should be named for the Nixon Nitration Works, a major employer for which the Nixon section was named.

Nelson, now deceased, worked for the company many years and believed that as a local employer, Nixon and its president, Stanhope Nixon, were more important to the township than Thomas Edison had been, explained Nelson's sister, Ada Nagy.

While Richard Nixon was Republican vice president at the time, no thought was given to that connection. In fact, Mrs. Wira noted, many of the Nixon Township supporters were staunch Democrats.

Mrs. Wira, for her part, believed that Edison, who invented the electric light 100 years ago in Menlo Park, was important to the world.

"It was a God-given gift he had. If it weren't for a man like him, we wouldn't be where we are today. Everything stemmed from his discoveries," she explains.

Mrs. Wira won't speak much of old bitterness, but she acknowledged that as the fight escalated, tactics ranged from a court suit to a check of voter registrations to praying. "We even had the Catholics lighting votive candles," she recalls.

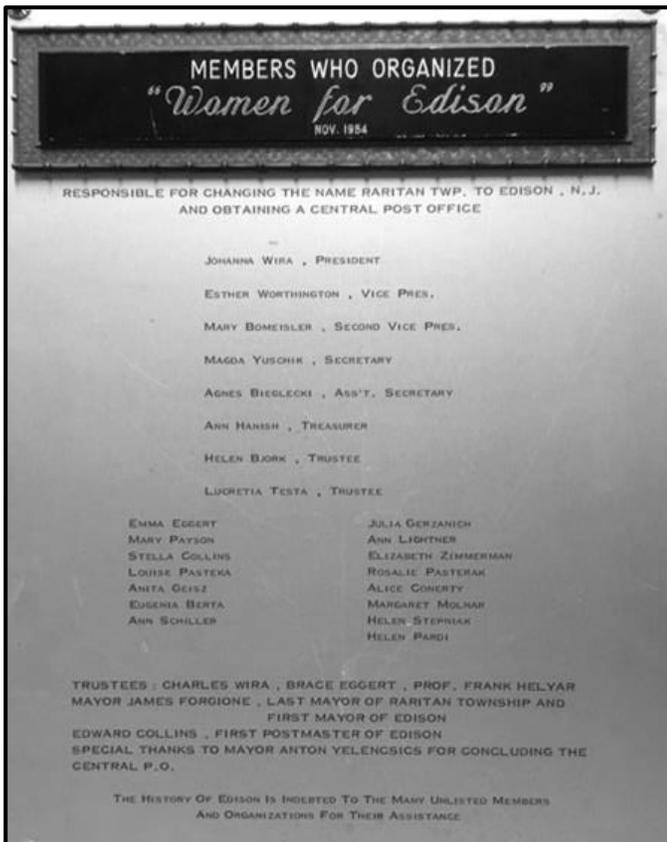
The worst moment came shortly before the referendum, when the township was informed that New Jersey already had an Edison, in Sparta Township.

In an 11th-hour save, the Edison committee elicited a letter from Sparta on Oct. 30, which noted that while its Edison section existed, it was without a post office designation.

Finally, on Nov. 2, 1954, Oscar Kaus, township clerk, announced the results of the vote: Edison, 3,723; Nixon, 3,060.

With the name change accomplished, "Everything started coming in - the post office, the Pennsylvania Railroad sign (from Stelton to Edison)... I guess it was just meant to be," Mrs. Wira says.

She is quick to add that while she organized the Edison drive, it was the work of the volunteers that accomplished the change. She says one disappointed Nixon backer told her, "I guess we just didn't pray hard enough."



Edison Township Hall plaque commemorating the "Women for Edison" members and effort.

### Hope fading for blackout to cite Edison

EDISON - Hopes are dimming for a national moment of darkness in commemoration of Thomas Edison's invention of the electric light in Menlo Park 100 years ago.

The township's Edison Centennial Commission, spurred by Johanna Wira, has been pushing Rep. Edward Patten, D-19th Dist., to introduce legislation calling for a national "Lights Out" in Edison's honor.

Patten introduced the legislation in the spring, but he can't bolster enough power to get the bill out of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee and the Subcommittee on Census and Population, according to Susan Mannina, a Patten aide.

The legislation is left somewhat grounded by a dearth of representatives with enough concern over the centennial to co-sponsor the bill, she said. In fact, Patten has only eight co-sponsors, Ms. Mannina said. The anniversary of the electric light "just isn't a burning issue, I guess," she said.

- LAURA SANDERS



JOHANNA WIRA  
...led fight for 'Edison'

Top: 1954 newspaper article about the vote. Above: 1979 newspaper article looking back on the name change.

# Menlo Park Provides Inspirational Experience

*By Dr. Paul Israel, Vice Chair of the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park and Kathleen Carlucci, Society President and Museum Director*

More than any other inventor in history, Thomas Edison, the 'Wizard of Menlo Park,' is responsible for many technologies still enjoyed and highly valued in today's global societies. Of particular note, he innovated three major and fundamental industries: electric light and power, sound recording, and motion pictures that remain central to modern life. He also made significant contributions to the telegraph and telephone, to innovative storage and primary battery technologies, and to improved manufacturing processes for producing cement and low-grade ores. By the time of his death in 1931, at age 84, Edison held 1,093 U.S. and 1,250 foreign patents in 34 countries across the globe.

One-fourth of Edison's U.S. patents were results of the five and a half years when he developed and operated his state-of-the-art laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey. During this astonishing burst of genius and creativity Edison, and his team, also produced a series of major innovations, including the electric lamp and electrical system, the first phonograph, and the carbon-button telephone transmitter... but his most important innovation at Menlo Park was one that could not be patented—his Research and Development Laboratory and his "team approach to invention!"

The Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park is now committed to providing an enriched, interactive and inspirational educational experience for all who come to visit, to learn, and to take inspiration from Edison, the Great Inventor. Our current visitors come from all over the world to see, firsthand, this world-famous historic site.

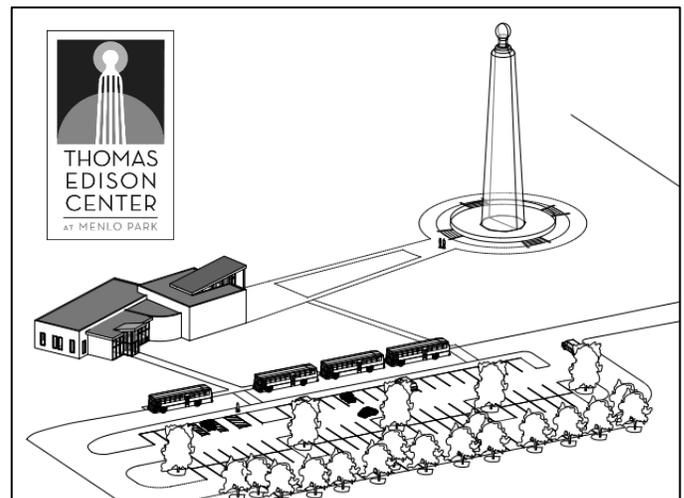
The existing site has a small, two-room museum containing a wealth of precious artifacts and photographs. Each guest receives a personally escorted tour, with demonstrations of original phonographs and other Edison related-technologies. ...But our knowledgeable docents are limited in their ability to tell the breadth and depth of the Edison story because of these physical space limitations.

Under present conditions we are accommodating the high demand for on-site visits with educational programs for students and life-long learners in rented tents. While these tents accommodate demonstrations, with hands-on activity



programs, they have their own limitations, as they cannot be used during inclement weather, summer heat and humidity or cold winter conditions. Adequate public restrooms are also lacking.

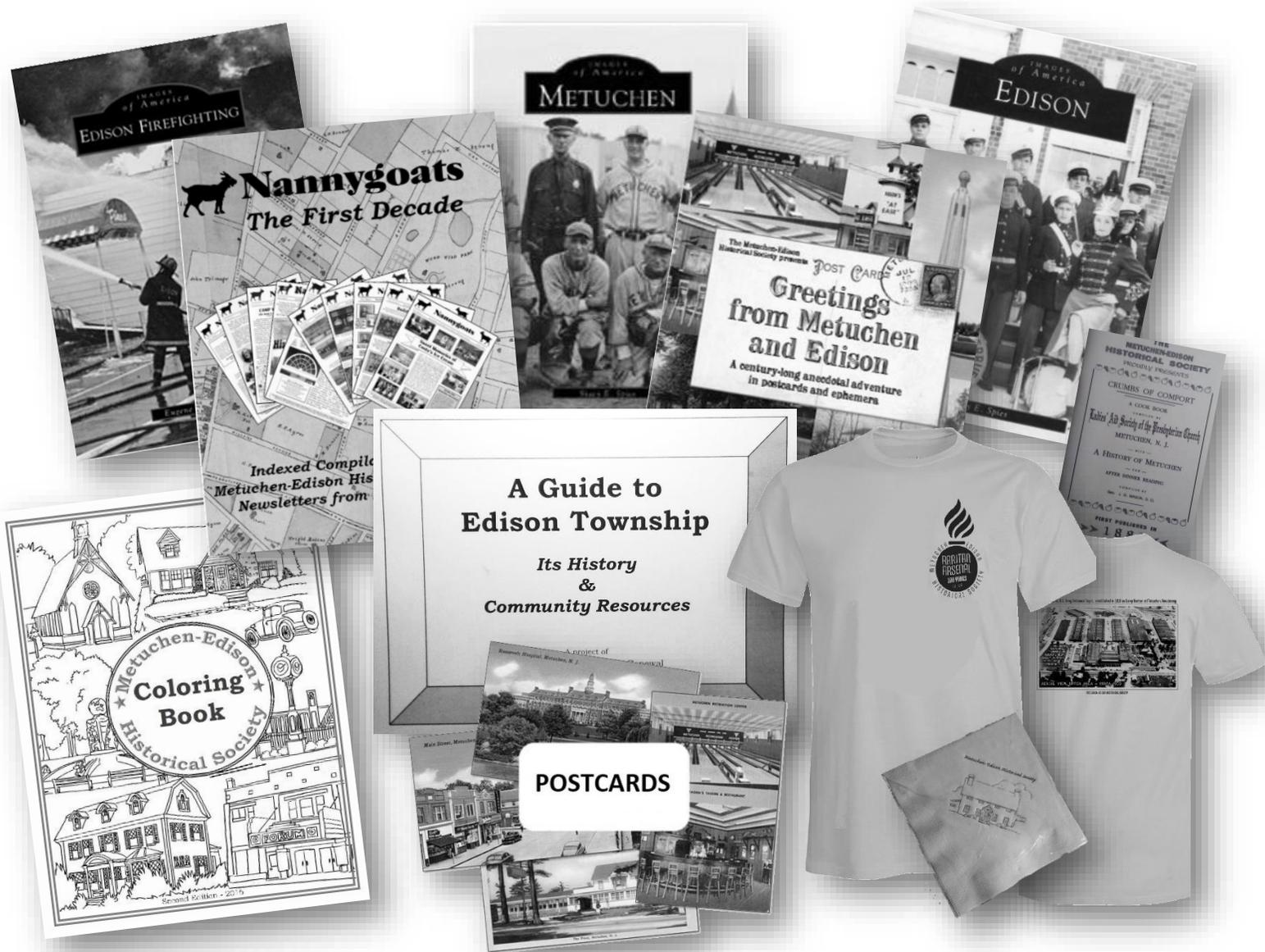
Although the original buildings no longer exist, the iconic landmark light tower, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, remains at the center of the Menlo Park site. We are committed to building on the foundation of the 'Invention Factory' of Thomas Edison and his world-renowned Menlo Park Laboratory. Our current facilities do not do justice to the significant and enduring value of the work of the Great Inventor and his team. This site is deserving of a Center which can more appropriately honor the legacy of the 'Wizard of Menlo Park and his men, the Menlo Park Edison Pioneers.



*Top: Aerial photograph by Arthur Yam, DDS. Above: schematic by SSP Architects showing ideas for a new and larger museum.*

# Visit Our Local History Store – Online!

Although due to the pandemic we have not been able to host any events or provide access to our archives, our Board volunteers can provide contactless delivery of Society merchandise. We carry postcards, map reproductions, imprinted napkins, books by the Society and on local history topics, magnets, prints, tee shirts, a coloring book, and more – all very reasonably priced. The easiest way to order is through our online store located on our website. Visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) and look for the “Local History Store” page.



**New! Magnets, only \$8 each!**  
**Show your support for Local History by sporting one of the Society's new magnets!**  
**Full Color, 5" High, 8" Wide**  
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# Nannygoats



*Published by*

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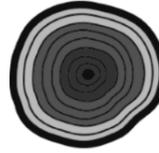
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The name of the newsletter, "**Nannygoats**," is taken from the title of a collection of **anecdotes**, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area,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

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

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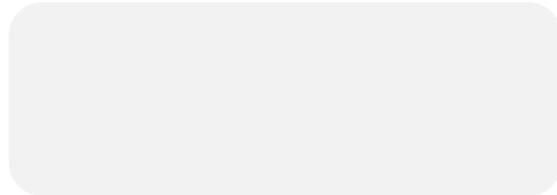


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**Metuchen, NJ 08840**



**Help the Society *Save the Past for the Future* by becoming a member! Visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) to download a membership form or join online.**

## **Grant Received**

In September 2020, the Society was delighted with the news that we would be receiving a \$2000 grant from the Manasquan Bank Charitable Foundation for archives work, specifically with the Oral History collection. Many of these interviews were conducted in the 1970s with minority small business owners, women, immigrants, and community leaders.

Members of the Society were invited to a Grantee Breakfast in early October at the bank's headquarters in Manasquan, and were able to meet dozens of other non-profit charitable organizations that also received awards. Manasquan Bank is the parent company of Metuchen Bank, a local institution that has been a supporter of the Society for decades.



**MANASQUAN  
BANK**  
*Charitable Foundation*

## **Tappen Farm**

The Tappen Farmhouse and Barn at 158 Durham Avenue, near Central Avenue, have been demolished to make way for new construction. The barn was one of the last remaining agricultural outbuildings in the Borough, therefore - despite their poor condition - the property owner graciously allowed the Society to photo-document the property prior to demolition. A complete history of the property, along with the photographs, is being placed in the Society's archives. The house was built by 1850 by members of the Tappen, Campbell, and Edgar families - all of whom have deep ties to our area's history. In the 1920s it became home to the Rehfluss family, several of whom served in the military during World War II.



***"The honor we enjoy of being known as 'the brainy borough' is principally due to the brilliant women who adorn our community." - Metuchen Recorder, 1910***