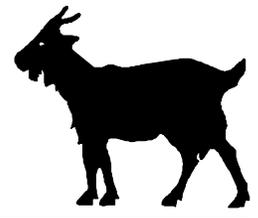


Nannygoats



Vol. 19, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Spring 2021

During these last several months of the Covid-19 pandemic, accessing online resources remotely has become more important than ever. We at the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society responded by adding as much information as possible to our website and providing assistance remotely. Summarized here are some of the many resources our members can access easily – free and at any time – on our website, www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org. Our members can both browse through the collections, and find most of our items fairly easily through a simple search engine query as well.

Newsletters

All back issues of our *Nannygoats* newsletters are available on our website.

As our readers know, these contain a variety of original research and lists of new acquisitions that can be extremely helpful to researchers.

Nannykids, the childrens newsletter, are also housed on the website and aren't just for kids, as they often contain historic information and images as well.

City Directories

The "city" directories for this area, listing most residents and businesses, are scanned and text-searchable. The dates range from 1899 to 1961, and the earlier directories include much of what is now Edison Township today. These directories provide details such as address, occupation, spouse's name, and more.

Cemetery Lists

This section contains information, often including histories and listings of burials, about the Stelton Baptist Church Graveyard, the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground, the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery, the Dunham

Just a Click Away!



Family Burial Ground, and the Smalley Family Burial Ground.

Maps

Dozens of local maps unavailable elsewhere are scanned and included in this section, and links are also provided to other key repositories. The Rutgers Cartography Lab has a wealth of state, county, and local maps, including the 1876 maps of

Metuchen. The Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, in color, are available from 1903, 1910, and 1920 through Princeton University. Historic aerial photography (from 1931 to 2017) and topographical maps (1888 to 2019) are accessible on HistoricalAerials.com, and although a paid service, they are free to view with watermarks.

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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.

History Gems from the "Metuchen Recorder"

Back issues of the *Metuchen Recorder* have always been a goldmine of information for local history fans, but for years were only available to view on microfilm at a select repositories.

However, the Library applied for and received a grant from Middlesex County in 2017 to digitize all available issues, so they are now searchable and accessible for free through the Library's website. Nearly a century of issues to search and read at any time! Shown here is an image from the February 19, 1953 issue (page 9) reflecting upon the passing of Metuchen's second Mayor, Alexander Litterst. The article discusses Litterst's role in and the reasons behind the separation of the Borough from Raritan Township, as well his last-minute effort to ensure his – and the first Mayor's – property were within the new boundaries.

At right is an excerpt from the *Metuchen Recorder* article about his passing, and to view the entire article, go to our website and choose the "Archives" page, then select "Newspapers" and it will bring you to the search link for the Library's local history digital archives where you can read issues or run a search for names and topics. Litterst's daughters' oral history is also available on the Society's website and is a wonderful read. They discuss their father's 1882 purchase of the former Mundy/Hunt farm and about operating The Ramble Inn.

One of the men most responsible for Metuchen's independence as a borough, Alex C. Litterst, died last Wednesday (February 11, 1953) in his home at 36 Middlesex Avenue.

Mr. Litterst, Metuchen's second mayor, died six days before his 98th birthday. Funeral services were held Saturday from the Hillpot Funeral Home. Interment was in the Rosehill Cemetery, Linden, following cremation at the same place. The Rev. Harold W Dunne conducted services.

He is survived by two daughters, Elizabeth R. and Louise Litterst. The three of them operated Ramble Inn at the Middlesex Avenue address for many years.

Mr. Litterst was on the committee that drafted the bill to separate Metuchen from Raritan Township, and set the borough's boundaries. He served as mayor of Metuchen from 1902 to 1904.



Nannygoats

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

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

Founding Father Dies

Litterst Put Boro on Map, Changed Map So Home Would Be in Metuchen

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Made History

When Metuchen celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1950 Mr. Litterst recounted some of the borough's history and his connection with it.

Raritan Township, he said, was formed in 1871 from parts of Woodbridge Township and Piscataway Township, both of which were founded in the state's earliest days. Metuchen and the populated area along the Raritan River, now Highland Park, were part of the township.

There was constant friction in the township committee. The populated areas could never get along with the surrounding rural parts of the township.

Mr. Litterst was elected in 1895 to the Raritan Township governing committee. He was the first Republican in official township history. He served three years.

Why Boro Broke Away

Two important disputes led to Metuchen's breaking away from Raritan Township. One argument arose over Metuchen's desire for sewers. Another came over the type of franchise that should be granted to a company that wanted to build a trolley line.

The friction led a group of Metuchen residents to agitate for the creation of an independent borough.

Mr. Litterst served in the State Legislature in 1897. When the agitation for separation grew more acute, he joined a committee that drafted the separation bill and worked for its passage.

Had Map Changed

The committee also drew up a map of the proposed borough. Mr. Litterst had the map changed when he found out the proposed boundary lines would have left his home in Raritan Township.

The night before the committee was to go to Trenton for final action, it met at the home of its

local advisor. Here is how Mr. Litterst described what happened that night:

"That night I learned that the



ALEX. C. LITTERST

Raritan boundary was to be the Port Reading Railroad. That would have left my home in the township. So at that session William Thornall, who became the first mayor, joined with me and we changed the map.

The line was moved 800 feet the other side of the railroad, to include the Litterst home, and a title on the other end of the borough to include the Thornall home, which was near the end of High Street.

The following day, the map was accepted by the state legislature and the borough's boundaries were set.

Started Groups

While serving as mayor, Mr. Litterst helped found the Metuchen National Bank and was cashier for 30 years. In 1897, he was one of the founders of the Me-

tuchen Building and Loan Association.

Mr. Litterst was a graduate of Cooper-Union. He came here in 1882 with his two brothers and father. They were engaged in the manufacture of dental files.

RESOLUTION

The Borough Council Monday night passed this resolution:

WHEREAS, in His all-wise providence, God has removed from our midst one of our most outstanding citizens, former Mayor Alex C. Litterst; and

WHEREAS, he has most ably served the State of New Jersey and the Borough of Metuchen, lending his talents to all offices for the public good; and

WHEREAS, in his passing the Borough of Metuchen has lost one of its leading citizens and one who has served his fellow citizens in public office as Mayor of the Borough of Metuchen,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Metuchen, in meeting assembled, do hereby express our sincere sorrow in this great loss; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution be spread in full upon the minutes of this body as a permanent memorial of public service so well and ably performed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to the family of the deceased as an expression of our deep sympathy.

Besides the other organizations he founded, he also started the Vigilance Society, and was the aided member of the Washington Hose Company.

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

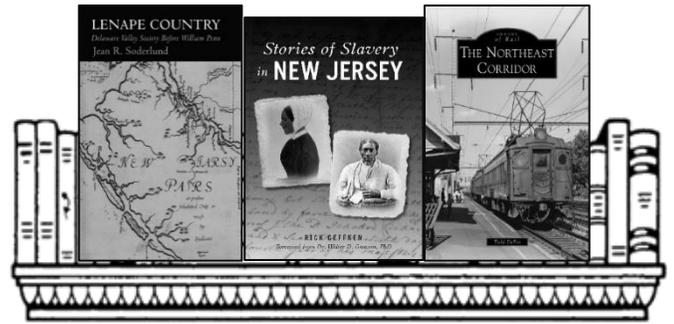
New to the Bookshelf

Some wonderful new books of interest to local history fans have been released in recent months, including Jean Soderlund's *Lenape Country* (265 pages, \$26.50 paperback), Rick Geffken's *Stories of Slavery in New Jersey* (206 pages, \$21.99 paperback), and Todd DeFeo's *The Northeast Corridor* (126 pages, \$21.99 paperback).

Lenape Country is the first comprehensive narrative history of the Lenape Indians and their encounters with European settlers before Pennsylvania's founding history. Drawn from a wide range of primary sources, Soderlund demonstrates that the Delaware Valley society's commitment to personal freedom, religious liberty, peaceful resolution of conflict, and opposition to hierarchical government derived from Lenape culture, and did not begin (as has often been asserted) with Quaker ideals or the leadership of William Penn.

Dutch and English settlers brought the first enslaved people to New Jersey in the seventeenth century, and by the time of the Revolutionary War, slavery was an established practice on labor-intensive farms throughout the state. Geffken's *Stories of Slavery* reveals details about this dark history of New Jersey, the last northern state to abolish slavery, by focusing on the stories of the enslaved people and those who enslaved them.

DeFeo, the featured speaker of our 2021 Annual Meeting, has filled *The Northeast Corridor* with hundreds of wonderful images of the rails, stations, bridges, and tunnels along the historic Northeast Corridor line. Sharp-eyed readers will recognize the photograph of Metuchen on the front cover. Copies of this book are available for sale through the Society.



Short Hills Battlefield Preserved

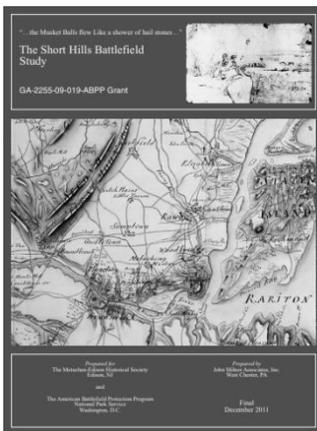
By Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

In 2020, Middlesex County purchased a 13- acre tract of land on Woodland Avenue in Edison from the Ferrante family for \$3,165,000. Using the Middlesex County Open Space Trust Fund for the purchase, the County then applied for a Battlefield Acquisition Grant from the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). In August the County received \$1,600,000 from the ABPP the largest grant they awarded in 2020.

In 2010, the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society had used a ABPP research grant to determine the location of the 1777 Battle of the Short Hills. Based on the research, the core area of the battlefield was identified and it was nominated for and then officially placed in the National and New Jersey Registers of Historic Places in 2015. Without this first step the site would not have been eligible for acquisition grant. This shows how historical research can lead to historic preservation.

The property is next to the Plainfield Country Club, and near the Stevens Preserve. So far, 130.29 acres of the battlefield have been preserved, the 3rd largest Revolutionary War battlefield preserved in New Jersey. The Society has applied to Middlesex County to have a Middlesex County Historic Marker placed on the Oak Tree Pond Historic Park to commemorate the 1777 Battle.

Even with so much research already done, there is always more to learn. Using Newspapers.com, more news articles were found from the early 20th century articles in the *Courier-News* about the location of the Battle of the Short Hills. The articles from October and November 1904 and William Kelly's obituary from 1916 indicate that the fighting took place on the Kelly Farm. The Kelly family- owned land at the corner of Oak Tree Road and New Dover Road (where Oak Tree Pond Historic Park is), and along Oak Tree Road to the west. These articles have tantalizing clues about a cemetery on the property where 50 Revolutionary War soldiers were buried, the location which is unknown today.



New in the Archives

Listed here are some of the many recent archives acquisitions. While the Society cannot accept historic items that are unrelated to our local history, we are always interested in acquiring copies of photographs, ephemera, books, etc. relevant to our collective past. If you don't want to part with an original item, we'd be delighted to either photograph or scan it, and with the recent donation of a film & slide digital converter, we can scan and return film negatives and slides as well!



- A 1964 play program from John Adams Junior High School, a 1943 *Blue Letter* Metuchen High School yearbook, a 1935 third grade class photo from Edgar School with names on the reverse, an original undated Metuchen Fire Wagon photograph, and an undated Metuchen Class photograph, taken by Muha Photo Service (donated by Todd Pagel, see above and below).



- A Metuchen High School saucer and other ephemera, a copy of *To Cast a Freedman's Vote*, back issues of the *Metuchen Mirror*, and a set of ca. 2000s photographs of Metuchen (donated by the Reuter Family).
- Four railroad photographs (donated by David Hutchinson, see right).
- A Metuchenopoly game, copies of *The Story of NJ's Deadliest Wreck/Main Failure* and *Wicked Woodbridge and Crazy Carteret*, two reprint sketches of the Metuchen Inn by Karen Rutherford, and miscellaneous newspaper clippings (anonymous donation).
- A Ramble Inn brochure (donated by Joanne Lennon).
- Three club yearbooks (donated by the Borough Improvement League).
- A 1929 Raritan Township letter, a 2001 Seldow's calendar card, an undated Parking Authority Guide, and a 1953 map of Metuchen (donated by the Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce).
- Photograph of Metuchen Train Station taken October 28, 1978 (photograph taken and donated by Dom Walker).
- Approximately fifty items including 1971 *Perth Amboy Evening News* posters, Martinizing calendar, miscellaneous photographs of Edison, Middlesex County maps, 1920 Women's Suffrage clippings, newspaper clippings of Edison & the police, Hawkeye & Advocate newsletters, obituaries, programs, and business cards, etc. (donated by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.).





- A set of ten Camp Kilmer Postcards (donated by the South River Historical & Preservation Society).
- A box of Woodwild Park Association documents (organization, membership, event, publicity, etc.) as well as photographs, calendar, banner, ruler, and miscellaneous Metuchen memorabilia (donated by Lynne Mueller).
- 100+ items including maps, directories, handbooks, programs, Metuchen High School yearbook (1951), and newspaper clippings primarily about Metuchen during the mid-20th century

(anonymous donation).

- Eleven photographs by photographer Louise Halsey, mother of Grace Halsey (donated by the Metuchen Public Library).
- A collection of photographs and plans of the house at 42 Norris Avenue in Metuchen, ten copies of The Bulldog's Bark from the 1970s, the 1973-1974 Metuchen High School Yearbook, and a Metuchen High School handbook from the 1970s (donated by Mr. & Mrs. Shyman, via Angela Sielski, see top left).
- A postcard of the Reformed Church of Metuchen and a postcard of Main Street that includes an image of a Costa's Ice Cream truck (purchased by the Society).



- Sixteen slides of Roosevelt Hospital and Light Dispelling Darkness (donated by Richard Miller, see left).
- A new Wolverine Titan 8-in-1 High-Definition Film & Slide to Digital Converter (donated by Tyreen Reuter, see right).



Oral History Grant Awarded

In February 2021, the Society was delighted to receive the news that we have been awarded a \$5800 grant towards work in our Oral History collection. Approved by the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners, the award amounts were determined based on scoring of the application and project by an independent panel of reviewers.

In recent years, the Society has focused on making our Oral History collection more accessible to the public, in large part because a significant portion were conducted with women and people of color who are not proportionally represented elsewhere in available historic records. With help from the County and donors, we have completed nearly 40 transcriptions. With these new grant funds, we can make good progress on finalizing the drafts and work on those not yet transcribed.



TRYING TO SOLVE A HISTORY MYSTERY?

The Grimstead Room at the Metuchen Public Library contains a wealth of local history information, including thousands of photographs, maps, oral histories, manuscript & subject files, postcards, and ephemera. If you have a specific interest in a particular area of local history, contact us with as many details as possible at info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org.

Although our archives are not conducive to browsing, if we have any relevant information, we will be pleased to contact you if we have any information that can assist you with your search.

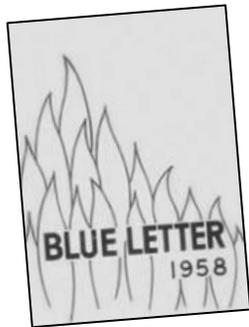
Continued from Page 1



Historic Newspapers

As referenced on Page 2 of this newsletter, nearly a century of issues of the *Metuchen Recorder* and the *Metuchen Review* have been scanned and are text-searchable online, thanks to the Metuchen Public Library and Middlesex County. As the

they were scanned from microfilm images of old issues, the text search isn't always 100% spot on, but quite helpfully you are also able to browse complete editions by date. Links are also provided in this section of our website to the New Brunswick Public Library's digitized editions of their newspapers, which covered our local news quite regularly. Those searching areas farther afield may want to consider a subscription to Newspapers.com, a link to which is also provided.



Yearbooks

Thanks again to the Metuchen Public Library, Metuchen High School yearbooks are available online from 1921 to 1989.

These provide information not just about students, but staff, current events, and businesses through the advertising supporters.

History Resources Links

On this page are links to search deeds and land records on the Middlesex County website, as well as links to many fellow history organizations and repositories (Ancestry.com, the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration).

Oral Histories

We have approximately seventy oral histories in our collection, ranging in date from the

early 1970s until present day. All of them are listed on the website, and those that have been annotated and transcribed are available to download. These invaluable documents provide information and perspectives unavailable elsewhere. Middlesex County has recently awarded the Society additional funds to bolster this collection (see Page 5).



Assorted Miscellany

Many items cannot be easily placed into the above categories. Building and organizational histories, images of commemorative plaques, military service lists are found here. Where else can you find a photo of Nancy Shevell's childhood home in Edison (she married Paul McCartney in 2011), the 1929 Metuchen Movie, and a history of local 1920s Klan activity? How about the NASA astronaut from Edison, a survey of the Dismal Swamp, a 1908 Raritan Township tax bill, and a history of the construction of the Metuchen pool? All this and more are available on this page of our website.



The website site also includes news and events, other miscellaneous items of historical interest, information about ordering reprints, how to become a member, and of course, like any good "museum," the "exit" is through the gift shop! No, we don't actually make visitors swing through the store before logging off, but we encourage everyone to check out the many publications and original items available for sale; all proceeds help us in our mission to "Save the Past for the Future."

Many Thanks to our Newsletter Supporters



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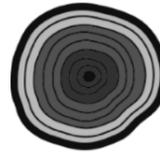
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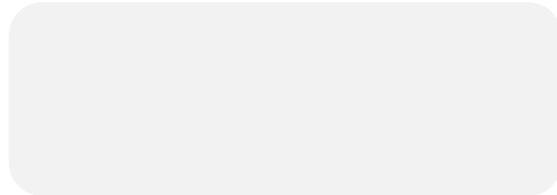


**Andrew Kupersmit
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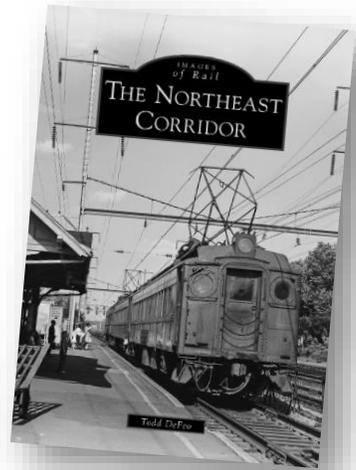
Help the Society *Save the Past for the Future* by becoming a member! Visit www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org to download a membership form or join online.

“The Northeast Corridor”

**Annual Meeting and Program
with Author Todd DeFeo**

Thursday, April 15, 2021

**7:30pm ~ Free ~ Online
Pre-Registration Required**



The Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington is perhaps the single most significant stretch of railroad in the country, connecting dozens of cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City. The line carries thousands of passengers daily on a line formed from a patchwork of some of the earliest railroads in America. DeFeo has studied railroads since growing up in Metuchen alongside the Northeast Corridor. He is editor of Railfanning.org and founder of The DeFeo Groupe. The images in this book come from some of the many libraries, museums, and organizations dedicated to preserving railroad history, the archives of Railfanning.org, and the author's personal collection. Copies of DeFeo's book are available for sale through the Society.

Online via Zoom – Free & Open to the Public - Advance Registration Required
To register, visit our website for the link or contact metuchenedisonhistory@gmail.com
Presentation will be preceded by a brief business meeting.