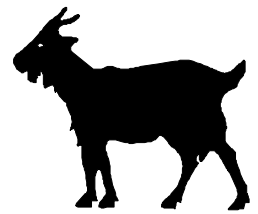


# Nannygoats



Vol. 2 Issue 4

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall-Winter 2004



Undated photo of horse-drawn mail delivery wagons in front of the former Metuchen Post Office on Main St.

A locomotive and two passenger cars of Thomas Edison's experimental electric railway at Menlo Park. (from the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Edison National Historic Site)



## A Glance at the Past

While these modes of transportation from our past are still used in some parts of the country, the automobile is our area's vehicle of choice!



Wood Brook Farm was at the intersection of Talmadge Rd. and Park Ave. where the Woodbrook Corners Development is now located. The dairy was started in 1906 and, by 1922, it was delivering milk to 150 cities and towns.



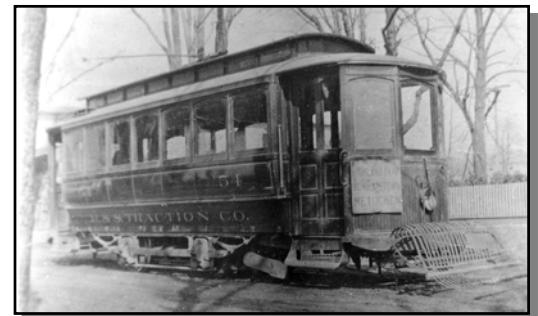
Undated photo of woman with pony and cart outside a farmhouse on the west side of Tingley La. (from "Images of America: Edison," by Stacy Spies.)

Visit the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society archives to see more photographs from our past. Call Curator Marie Vajo at 732-985-3217.



Edith Mook (Craig) in her baby carriage, circa 1897, on Amboy Ave. looking toward the Presbyterian Church on Woodbridge Ave. in what is now Metuchen.

Middlesex & Somerset Traction Co. Car 54 at Christol St. terminus on Main St., Metuchen, circa 1900.



Undated photo of the Washington Hose Co. fire wagon, circa 1900.



Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Richardson in the first automobile in what is now Metuchen, circa 1899.



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

# 125th Anniversary of Edison's Incandescent Electric Light Bulb

Working collaboratively with more than 200 artisans, craftsmen, and professionals at his Menlo Park laboratory from 1876 to 1884, Thomas Alva Edison received more than 400 patents, earning him the nickname, "The Wizard of Menlo Park." Traditionally, October 21, 1879, is considered the date when he perfected the incandescent electric light bulb, making it a practical and inexpensive light source.

For Christmas 1879, Edison and his workers placed electric lights on Christie Street and else-



Edison's Laboratory, circa 1910

where on the 45-acre laboratory site to demonstrate the viability of incandescent electric lights. One of Edison's workers even decorated an indoor Christmas tree with electric lights. Mrs. Jordan's Boardinghouse, once located on the north side of Christie Street between Monmouth Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue (now Tower Drive) and home to many of Edison's workers, was the first residence to be illuminated by incandescent lights.

For many years, up until about 1950, October 21 was celebrated as "Edison Day." On October 19, 1979, a "Century of Light Ball" was held to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the perfection of the incandescent light bulb, and the 25th anniversary of the renaming of Raritan Township as Edison Township.

Edison Day was reintroduced in 2002 with a ceremony at the Edison Memorial Tower, and is now celebrated with assembly programs at Edison Township middle schools.

Visit the Edison Memorial Tower Museum on Christie Street, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, to see exhibits related to Edison's life and work at Menlo Park.

Excerpted and adapted from *A Guide to Edison Township: Its History and Community Resources*.

# Edison Township Turns 50

In 1954, on the 75th anniversary of the perfection of the incandescent lamp, Women for Edison, Inc., with 31 members and led by Joanna Wira, organized a drive to change the name of Raritan Township to Edison Township in honor of Thomas Alva Edison, "The Wizard of Menlo Park." A counterproposal was made to name the township "Nixon" in honor of Lewis Nixon who had moved into the township in 1913 and developed nitration works here. Nixon also founded the Crescent Shipyard in Elizabeth that built ships for the U.S. Navy, including the first submarine used by the Navy. The vote was close, but the name change to Edison Township won in the election of November 2, 1954.

Even with the name change, it took another 14 years for the name "Edison" to gain universal recognition as a township. On October 9, 1968, the Edison Post Office was dedicated, after a 10-year struggle by municipal government officials and citizens, including a personal appeal to President John F. Kennedy from Joanna Wira.



Excerpted and adapted from *A Guide to Edison Township: Its History and Community Resources*.

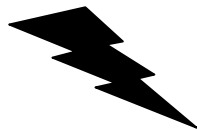
## Dr. Myra Biggs Dies at 102

This summer, trustees of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society were privileged to conduct an oral history interview with Dr. Myra Biggs. Dr. Biggs worked in the Raritan Township and Edison Township Public School systems for 40 years, retiring in 1964. Most notably, she was a teacher and principal at the old Oak Tree School, which now houses the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute on Oak Tree Road.

While living in what was then Raritan Township, she purchased the building that had served Raritan Township as an early one-room school house (Oak Tree School #6) at the triangle formed by Oak Tree Road, Plainfield Road, and Marion Street, and converted it into her home. The building is now a real estate office.

Dr. Biggs returned to her hometown, Palermo, NJ, in 1980 and passed away on Sunday, September 19, at age 102.

## Have A Blast In The Past!



The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society is looking for an energetic **volunteer to help the curator manage the Society's archives**. Call Curator Marie Vajo at 732-985-3217 if you are:

- Interested in local history
- Computer literate (Microsoft® Word and Photo Editor or similar software, email and internet)
- Have good verbal and written communication skills in English
- Can volunteer an average of 25 hours per month.

As the curator's assistant, you will:

- Catalog materials in an electronic database
- Organize historic materials
- Transcribe selected materials
- Answer research questions
- And more!

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

The name of the newsletter, "Nannygoats," is taken from the title of a collection of anecdotes, reminiscences, articles, 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 collecting and recording so much of our local history.*

4<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**Edison History Day**  
Sunday, October 17  
12 – 4 p.m.

**“Bring Us Your History”**

**WE WANT YOU...** to participate in the 4th annual Edison History Day on Sunday, October 17, at the Edison Main Library, 340 Plainfield Avenue, 12-4 p.m. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society will bring photos, documents, maps, and artifacts from its archives. Jack Stanley, curator of the Edison Memorial Tower Museum, will bring memorabilia from the museum. We're asking you to bring photos, documents, and artifacts from your "archives."

Look through those boxes in your attic and basement and your photo albums. Jot down your memories of life in what is now Edison and Metuchen. Bring photos of structures, businesses, and landscapes that exist today. After all, in another 50 years, they will be part of our history! Using a scanner and computer, we'll make copies of your photos and documents on the spot. With a digital camera, we'll photograph your artifacts.

**Special Features!**

**Revolutionary War Officer's Trunk** - On loan from the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, the trunk contains clothing, letters, official documents, and personal items that would have accompanied an officer in the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

**Tour of the Stelton Baptist Church cemetery** - At **noon**, Mark Nonesteid of the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission will lead a tour of the final resting place of our area's early European settlers, including members of the Stelle, Runyon, and Manning families. The tour leaves from the Edison Main Library; the cemetery is across the street.

**Bulletin Board**

Join the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society in celebrating the kickoff of *NJ History Archives Week* with a program that reflects this year's theme of "Amusement in Archives"! The Society invites you to enjoy **recently transcribed oral histories** from area residents on **Sunday, October 10, 1:30 p.m.**, at the Metuchen Public Library, 480 Middlesex Ave. The program will highlight some of the amusing anecdotes (or "Nannygoats" as Lloyd Grimstead called them!) told by the interviewees.

Author Ludwig Knapp will speak about **growing up under Hitler** at the Metuchen Public Library, 480 Middlesex Ave., on **Sunday, November 14, 1:30 p.m.** This presentation is sponsored by the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society.

The Metuchen Borough Improvement League (BIL) invites you to NJ Council on the Humanities program "**Over Here, Molly Pitcher**," presented by Stacy Flora Roth. The program will be held on **Thursday, November 18, 1:30 p.m.**, at the Old Franklin School, 491 Middlesex Ave. For information, call Phyllis Boeddinghaus at 732-548-1391 or Tyreen Reuter at 732-452-1381.

The Academy of Natural Sciences is recruiting volunteers for "**Lewis & Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition**," to be held at the Academy's Museum in Philadelphia from **November 6, 2004, through March 20, 2005**. For more information, contact Lois Kuter, Volunteer Coordinator, 215-299-1029 or email to [kuter@acnatsci.org](mailto:kuter@acnatsci.org). The exhibit features hundreds of rare and priceless artifacts, includes artwork that represents the landscapes Lewis and Clark saw and Native Americans they met, and explores the cultural contrasts between Lewis and Clark and the Native Americans.

## Upcoming Programs

### ***Oral Histories of Local Residents***

Enjoy recently transcribed oral histories of local residents, including amusing anecdotes from past life in our area.

Sunday, October 10, 1:30 p.m.  
Metuchen Public Library, 480 Middlesex Ave.

### ***4th Annual Edison History Day: "Bring Us Your History"***

Browse among photos, documents, maps, and artifacts from the archives of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society and the Edison Memorial Tower Museum. Bring photos and documents from your past in our area. **Tour the Stelton Baptist Church Cemetery at noon.**

Sunday, October 17, 12-4 p.m.  
Edison Main Library, 340 Plainfield Ave.

### ***Growing Up Under Hitler***

Presented by author Ludwig Knapp.

Sunday, November 14, 1:30 p.m.  
Metuchen Public Library, 480 Middlesex Ave.

## Books Available from the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

"A Guide to Edison Township: Its History and Community Resources"	\$ 6.00
"Boyhood Days in Old Metuchen" <i>by David Trumbull Marshall, 1930</i>	\$15.00
"Crumbs of Comfort" <i>(Reproduction of an 1888 Cookbook)</i>	\$ 7.00
"The Hole in the Donut" <i>by Allen C. Hansen</i>	\$20.00
"Images of America: Edison" <i>(Photojournalistic trip through historic Edison, by Stacy Spies)</i>	\$19.00
"Images of America: Metuchen" <i>(Photojournalistic trip through historic Metuchen, by Stacy Spies)</i>	\$19.00

Postcards, maps, notecards, and other books are also available.  
Call Curator Marie Vajo at 732-985-3217 for information.

Metuchen-Edison Historical Society  
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