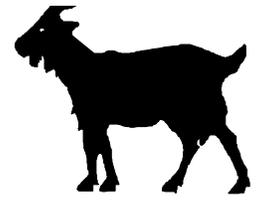


# Nannygoats



The Society has recently acquired a large collection of documents and items associated with the Litterst family. Readers may remember the fascinating oral history done by the Litterst sisters, Elsie and Lou, who ran a tea room known as the Ramble Inn from their home on the Lincoln Highway from 1933 to 1966. The donor, John Barton of Austin, knew the Litterst Sisters well before moving to Texas, and as a friend of the family came into possession of many of their personal and Ramble Inn related items. While Mr. Barton and his family visited Metuchen in June, they took time to meet with Society members to present the collection and discuss his recollections of the sisters. He described Elsie and Lou as "free-spirited" and "stately," respectively, and said they find any men as fine and respected as their father, Alexander Litterst. Mr. Litterst, among other ventures, ran a metal file company in Menlo Park.

## Litterst Legacy



The Society is extremely grateful for Mr. Barton's generosity, and is now in the process of cataloguing the items, a few of which are pictured above. We are also investigating future exhibition opportunities for the collection, which also includes an original oil painting by Charles Volkmar, three chairs and a table from the Littersts' home, an oil lantern used at the Ramble Inn, approximately 200 picture postcards sent to the Littersts, Elsie's and Lou's personalized silver napkin rings, souvenirs from the 1914 and 1915 NJ Bankers Association conventions, a pair of French binoculars, newspaper articles, and several archival boxes of late 19th and early 20th century pamphlets, catalogues, letters, receipts, and deeds.

Key to Images: 1. The Ramble Inn. 2. Undated photograph of the Litterst sisters. 3. & 4. Details of furniture embroidery. 5. One of two pine file boxes from the Litterst Company. 6. John, Diane, & Helen Barton, with the Volkmar painting. 7. Cane seat *klismos* chair. 8. A Litterst Company file and label. 9. Pearl-ringed pin with a lock of Elsie Litterst's hair. 10. One of the approximately 40 fancy paper greeting cards. 11. Map from a Ramble Inn promotional brochure.



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.

# Research Workshop Successful

by Nancy L. Zerbe

One of the most frequently asked questions for our historical society is "How do I learn more about the history of my house?" A homeowner who is proud of his/her older home is often intrigued by its history. On Sunday, May 7, 2006, the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society and the Metuchen Savings Bank teamed up to sponsor a workshop entitled Researching the History of Your House. To kick-off the workshop, Metuchen Council President Richard Weber and Edison Councilman Charlie Tomaro presented proclamations designating May as "Historic Preservation Month" in their respective towns.

Researching a building's history often requires some detective work, with the researcher piecing together clues from various sources. Workshop attendees learned about the major components necessary to piece together the history of a house: architectural style, deed research, and historic documentation. Janet Foster, Assistant Director of Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program, provided an excellent overview of New Jersey's architectural styles. By understanding when various styles were prevalent, a homeowner can better estimate their home's date of construction and appreciate the architectural features that represent a particular style. Ann Sardone, Title Searcher, spoke about conducting deed research in Middlesex County. By following the steps Ms. Sardone outlined, a homeowner can use the resources of the County Clerk's Office to trace their home's chain of ownership. The deed research and architectural style clues can then be supplemented by historic maps and documents, many of which are available in the Society's Grimstead Room. Society President Nancy Zerbe ended the workshop with an overview of the wealth of resources in the Grimstead Room.

The workshop talks were supported by a handbook, which serves as a "how-to" booklet and is currently available for sale (see right).

The Society would like to extend sincere thanks to the Metuchen Savings Bank for its sponsorship of the workshop and appreciation to all of the volunteers who worked to make the program a success.



Opening remarks featured (left to right) Metuchen Savings Bank President Katherine J. Liseno, Metuchen Council President Richard Weber, Society President Nancy L. Zerbe, and Edison Councilman Charlie Tomaro.

## Handbook for Sale

Due to popular demand, the Society is making the workshop materials available for sale. The fee for the 150+ page book, which contains the information listed below, is \$15 (plus \$3 if shipped media mail). Contact Tyreen at 732-452-1381 or [aversallenhouse@msn.com](mailto:aversallenhouse@msn.com).

- Introduction to Researching Area Properties
- Overview of the Grimstead Room Collections
- HPO's "How to Research the History of a House"
- List of Helpful Books and Publications
- Illustrated and Local Examples of Architectural Styles
- Identified Sites in Edison and Metuchen
- Nearby Local History & Genealogy Repositories
- Middlesex County Deed Research Information
- "New Jersey's Building Contracts & Mechanic Liens"
- List of 1930s Grimstead Photos Available for Reprint
- Lists of the Society's Oral Histories and Historic Maps
- Metuchen Savings Bank & St. Luke's Church Histories
- "Why Metuchen..." 1916 Real Estate Prospectus
- 1901-2 Heidingsfeld Directory of Local Area
- 1956 Reverse Directory of Metuchen
- Internet Research Tools

## In Memory of Donald J. Kahn

Long-time Society member and Metuchen resident Donald J. Kahn passed away on April 27, 2006 at the Haven Hospice of JFK Medical Center in Edison. Don was a key member of numerous community groups and a good friend to the Society. In recent years, Don worked hard to have the Graham Avenue pedestrian bridge reopened, and was subsequently honored for his efforts when it was named "Kahn's Crossing."



Look for the Society's photos, which are featured in the *Star Ledger's* special "Middlesex Ledger" section published on Thursdays.

## Were You There?

In one of only two Middlesex County appearances in a 30 year career, the Grateful Dead played at Middlesex County College on November 22, 1970, with opener New Riders of the Purple Sage. Although live tapes of Dead shows abound, there is no known recording or setlist for this show. Contact the Editor if you have any more information about this show.

## In the Archives...

Thanks to the hard work of Jeanne Gelling Romano and Joe Roman of Burna Park, California, the Society is now in possession of an electronic collection of the 1960 through 1993 Edison High School yearbooks and the 1965, 1967, 1970 to 1978, 1980, 1982 to 1986, and 1993 to 1998 JP Stevens High School yearbooks. Thanks also to Sue Hume of Eatontown, for her donation of scrapbooks kept by her parents of local Fresh Air Fund projects and events.

For on-line access to Metuchen-Edison Historical Society newsletters, membership information, program announcements, historic photographs, and merchandise, visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)

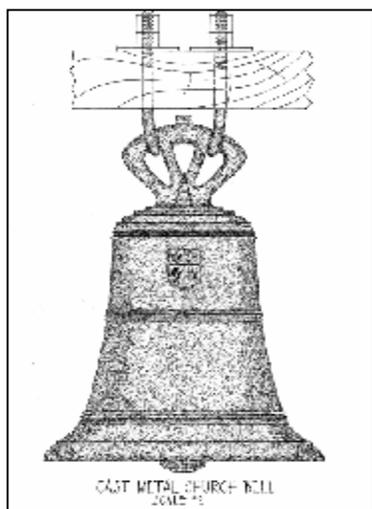
# From Whom the Bell Tolls?

## The Mystery of the St. James Bell Deepens

by James Halsey

In a past issue of *Nannygoats*, we reported that the bell in the steeple of St. James Episcopal Church in the Piscatawaytown neighborhood of Edison may have been cast in Leeds, England in 1702. If true, that would make it the oldest English bell in the eastern United States according to Geoff Pick, an English bell historian.

Since our last report, we have obtained dimensions, sketches, and clear photographs of the bell and its inscriptions and passed this information on to Mr. Pick. After checking with his colleagues, he has advised us that the inscriptions on the bell give no clues as to its true origin. He further stated that the dimensions and shape of the bell are definitely not English, but appear to resemble bells found in old Spanish Missions in the American Southwest. He also stated that there were no bell foundries in the Leeds area until the 1740s.



The sketch above is from the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of St. James Episcopal Church in Piscatawaytown, Edison.

When St. James was built in 1724, it was a parish of the Church of England and remained so until the American Revolution. Although the Church was destroyed by a tornado in 1835, it was rebuilt with some of the original materials and there is no record of the bell being replaced at that time. Although local legend and a history of the church written by a former St. James Pastor both maintain that the bell was cast in Leeds in 1702, we do not know the basis of the claim and it does not appear likely, according to Mr. Pick.

If the St. James bell is of Spanish origin, the mystery deepens. How did a Spanish bell get into the steeple of an English Church in Piscatawaytown in the Province of New Jersey?

Does anyone know of any good Spanish bell historians?

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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.

## Edison Memorial Tower Site to Receive International Honor

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society is honored to join the Edison Memorial Tower Corporation in celebrating a very important honor for the Menlo Park site. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), Inc., an international professional organization with more than 365,000 members, has selected the Edison Memorial Tower site as *one of only 70 worldwide Milestones*. This honor recognizes sites that are significant in the history of electrical engineering and computing.

The Edison Memorial Tower Corporation will host a Dedication Ceremony at the site on Saturday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006, at 1:00 p.m. All Historical Society members are encouraged to attend this important event when the IEEE will present the site with a plaque in honor of the designation. The Keynote Speaker will be Dr. Paul Israel, Director of Rutgers University's Edison Papers Project, an undertaking to edit five million pages of documents that chronicle the extraordinary life and achievements of Thomas Alva Edison.

If you would like to join the celebration of this honor by attending the Dedication Ceremony, please R.S.V.P. via email to [menlopark1876@yahoo.com](mailto:menlopark1876@yahoo.com), or by calling the Menlo Park Museum at 732-549-3299.

### *Did You Know...?*

The Menlo Park site has had a tremendous impact on our modern lives, as it is the location where Thomas Edison:

- Established the world's first organized industrial research lab.
- Created and tested the first practical incandescent lamp.
- Constructed the first electric railroad in the United States.
- Invented the phonograph, giving birth to recorded sound.
- Developed a complete system for generating and distributing electric current.

**Metuchen-Edison Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 61**  
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**Make sure to visit the Society's booth at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Metuchen Country Fair on October 7, 2006 to see our displays, pick up your next issue of *Nannygoats*, and get a list of our upcoming programs and events.**