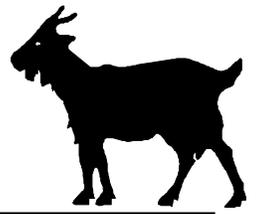


Nannygoats



Vol. 20, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2022

This summer marks 45 years since what is perhaps the most memorable disaster in Metuchen’s history; the June 22, 1977 derailment of 17 freight cars traveling past the Metuchen Train Station on the Northeast Corridor line. Miraculously, no one was injured when an overheated axel failed and led to the cars, many loaded with toxic chemicals, tumbling off the tracks and onto Main Street. ConRail reported that the nearly 90-car freight train, carrying 55-tons of liquid chlorine gas, a DuPont fuel additive, and sodium hydroxide, was travelling at about 27 miles per hour when the derailment occurred.

According to Todd DeFeo of Railfanning.org, the “derailment was one

of 10 in New Jersey between April 1, 1977, and June 30, 1978, involving railway cars containing hazardous materials. The Metuchen mishap represented the greatest potential for a loss of life, according to state records.” With two overturned cars of chlorine gas, the Brainsy Borough was lucky indeed to have escaped with no casualties.

Many locals remember the event, either because they witnessed it, responded to the disaster, or knew someone who did. Included here are some of the many photographs, donated to the Society in the subsequent years, which show the wreckage and crew. We welcome physical or digital images readers may have to add our collection.

Continued on Page 4

DERAILMENT! The Wreck of ‘77



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.

Remembering Chief Joseph Perrino (1919-2021)

by Metuchen Mayor Jonathan Busch



In December 2021, the Borough was incredibly saddened to announce the death of former Metuchen Police Chief Joseph Perrino, at the age of 102.

Born on July 8, 1919, Chief Perrino was born in Metuchen and lived here for his entire life. During World War II, Chief Perrino served our nation in the Army and in 1944, he was shot by a Japanese sniper while rescuing an injured soldier when he was stationed in Guam. He spent 15 months recovering in various military hospitals around the world. For his heroic efforts, Chief Perrino earned the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

In 1946, upon the completion of his military service, Chief Perrino was appointed to serve as an officer in the Metuchen Police Department. He was promoted to the ranks of Sergeant in 1953, Captain in 1965 and served as Chief from 1976 through 1985.

I was privileged to spend some time with Chief Perrino during the last few years and in my conversations with him, I was struck by his devotion and love for the Borough and for our nation.

Chief Perrino was also an artist. His paintings adorn the walls of his home and, in fact, Chief Perrino painted the now famous portrait of our Borough namesake, Chief Metuchen in 1965, which hangs in the office of Metuchen's current Police Chief. A couple of years ago, Chief Perrino showed me a photograph of an apparent life sketch of Chief Metuchen from 1693 which inspired the painting.

Chief Perrino's legacy of service to our Borough and our nation was simply extraordinary and he will long be remembered by his family, friends, and all that knew him.



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.

New in the Archives

Listed here are just some of the many recent archives acquisitions. While we cannot accept historic items that are unrelated to our local history, we are always interested in acquiring originals and/or 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.



- 29 negatives of the 1977 ConRail Freight Train Derailment at Metuchen (donated by Mark Elberger).
- Historic Edison newspaper presented by the Jerseyman of Edison High commemorating the Edison Tercentenary Celebration, 1664-1964 (donated by Robert Kentos).
- Metal tankard commemorating Edison, NJ: A Century of Light (1879-1979) and two photographs for the Edison Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, Menlo Park, NJ, ca. 1924-1941 (donated by Morris Kaplan).
- Letters to Metuchen Police Commissioner Peter Trecolis from Metuchen Police Chief Frederick E. Hall and the Metuchen Commission on Civil Rights, 1992 (donated by Nancy Zerbe).
- Piscatawaytown Burial Ground GPR Project Report by the Edison Greenways Group (donated by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.).
- Set of black & white photographs from the files of the Metuchen Department of Public Works.

First Woman Elected 100 Years Ago

By Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

February 2022 marks the centennial of the first woman being elected to office in Edison (then Raritan) Township. In August 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote. Two years after New Jersey ratified the 19th amendment (February 1920), women were on the ballot in what was then Raritan Township, but after hundreds of years of male-dominated voting, would they win?

Before 1922, School Board elections were a sleepy affair in Raritan Township. Held in the middle of winter in February, at only one polling place, Bonhamtown School, with a "preferred" slate presented to the few male voters who attended.

The 1922 Raritan Township School Board election was to be different. The 19th Amendment made sure of this. The women of Raritan ran a well-organized campaign to propelled a woman to victory. At a February 6 citizens meeting in Piscatawaytown, two male candidates from that neighborhood were proposed, but a delegation of women from Oak Tree and Menlo Park presented Millicent Telfer as a candidate.

The election was held at Bonhamtown School on February 14, 1922 for 1 hour beginning at 8:00 p.m. Nominations were called for, and a slate chosen at the citizens meeting of Frank Miller, Otto Will, Max Fochtman, and Millicent Telfer was presented; an opposing slate of Hovey Cook, Ida Mae Smith, Fred Dumas, and Andrew Nogrady was also presented.

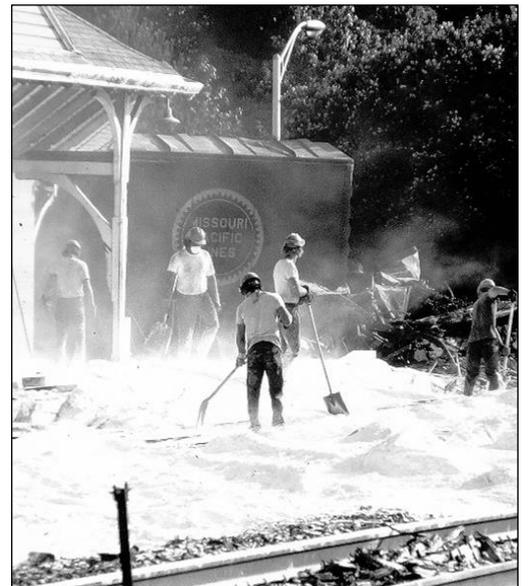
Mrs. Firman of Menlo Park and Mrs. Hesse of Oak Tree organized touring cars, trucks, and buses to get their voters to the polling place. Voters of Potters Crossing also took buses to and from the school. Mrs. Hesse visited every house in her neighborhood and when she found out that one of the buses could not make the trip she arranged for another bus.

When the polls closed, 564 people had voted. According to the *Home News*, in 1921 only 1 voter from Menlo Park voted, but in 1922, 36 did.

The vote counting lasted until almost midnight, Millicent Telfer received 303 votes the second highest vote total, and became the first woman elected to office in Raritan (now Edison) Township. Mrs. Ida Mae Smith received 236 votes, and there were 4 write-ins for Mrs. Bloomfield.

Millicent Telfer was born Millicent Fehr in Germany. In the 1920 census she lived on a farm with her husband Thomas, who was a herdsman. She was active in parent-teacher group at Oak Tree School, and was a member of the Borough Improvement League in Metuchen. She served on the Raritan School Board for 2 years, but did not run for re-election in 1924. She moved to Totowa when her husband got a job as farm supervisor for the North Jersey Training School and died in Frankfort in 1961.





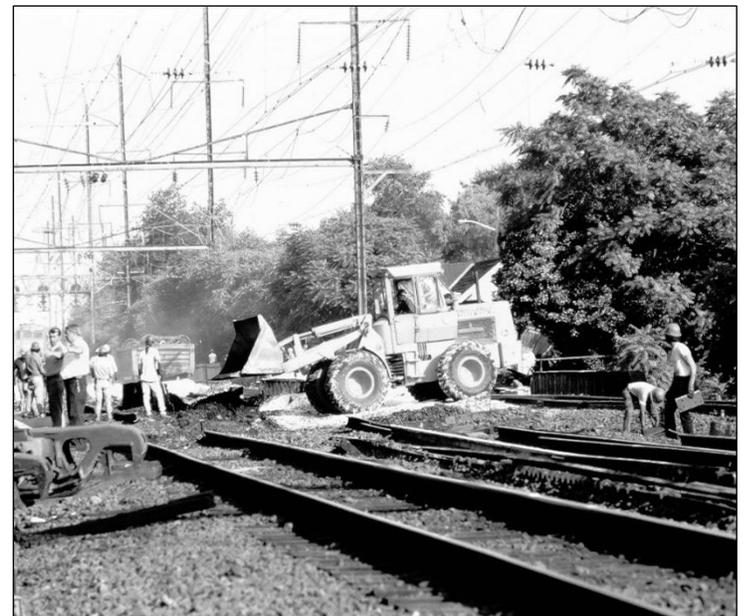


The train wreck, which one resident called the most exciting thing to happen locally since the St. Louis Cardinals came to town for an exhibition baseball game in 1936, brought out a certain spirit of festivity, in spite of the elements of disaster.

Crowds thronged the streets during the day, bringing local business owners an unexpected bonanza. The Cottage Restaurant on Main Street said it served 480 meals and 40 gallons of ice cream.



Images donated by Mark Elberger appear on the front page, bottom left of Page 4, and top left of Page 5. Images donated by George L. Wasser appear on the top of Page 4 and middle right of Page 5. Images from the Home News Tribune photograph morgue appear on the middle left of Page 4 and top right of Page 5. Images donated by David Hutchinson appear on the middle and bottom right of Page 4 and bottom right of Page 5. The text excerpt above is from Page 1 of the June 24, 1977 *Central New Jersey Home News*.



Preservation Update: *Metuchen Colonial Cemetery*

Metuchen's Colonial Cemetery is a local history treasure, and thanks to the many volunteers committed to its preservation and maintenance, there is a lot happening with this wonderful historic site.

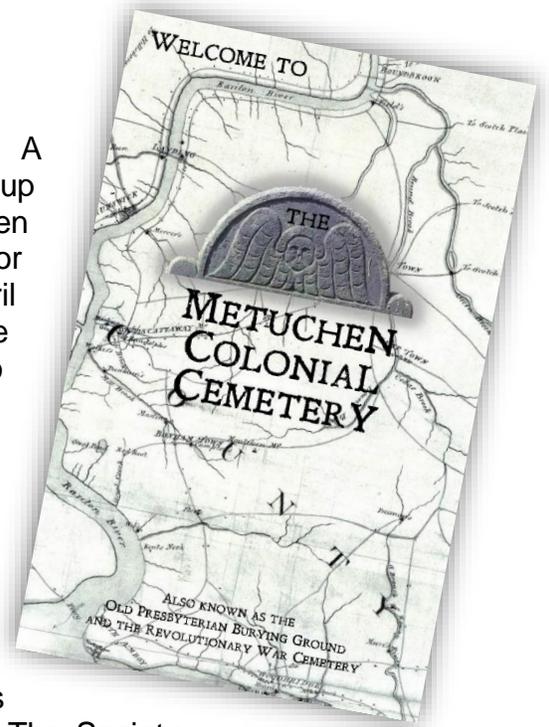
In September of last year, the family of long-time Member Dr. William Ainslie made a significant donation towards the Society's Colonial Cemetery projects in his memory. This funding allowed the Society to apply for a matching grant from Middlesex County to conduct ground penetrating radar at the site during this coming year. This work will hopefully determine the location of the early 18th century Meeting House at the site and determine its exact location for both interpretive and stabilization purposes. We also hope to identify the location of any unmarked graves in the cemetery. In January we received news that our grant application was approved and we plan to begin work during the summer. The Society will host a public program about the project in the Fall to present the findings.



In November of 2021, Society Member Charlie Leckenby organized a Fall cleanup of the site. Nearly 50 volunteers, many of them scouts, raked, pruned, and cleaned about 95 percent of the property and left an awe-inspiring pile of leaves for the Department of Public Works to pick up the following week. A dead tree noted at the center of the property was reported to the Borough Administrator and is now on the list to

be removed. A Spring cleanup has been scheduled for Saturday, April 30 and all are welcome to come lend a hand.

Visitors don't need to wait until a tour, program, or cleanup to visit this historic site. The Society developed a short guide to visiting and has made it available on our website at metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org. If you want to get involved in work at the cemetery, please email us at info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org. We also gladly accept any donations towards the cemetery fund.



Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Metuchen Colonial Cemetery
Spring Cleanup
Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue

Saturday, April 30
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Come for an hour - or the whole day!

BYO Tools!
Rakes, Loppers, Clippers, Gloves, etc.

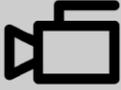
RSVP to Charlie
cgleckenby@gmail.com, 303-520-5818

Scouts & Student Service Hours Welcome!

Many Thanks to our Newsletter Supporters



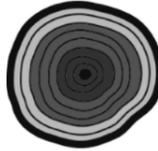
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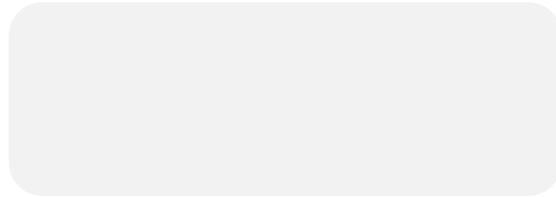
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P.O. Box 61
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Help the Society *Save the Past for the Future* by becoming a member! Visit www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org to download a membership form or join online.

Upcoming Events

ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, March 12, 2022

The Society's Annual Meeting will be held at the Edison First Aid Squad at 848 New Dover Road on Saturday, March 12, 2022 at 1:00 p.m. Following a short business meeting and elections, a program about the History of Radio in New Jersey will be presented by NJ Antique Radio Club. Contact: info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org.

CEMETERY CLEANUP

Saturday, April 30, 2021

Calling all volunteers to a Spring Cleanup of the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery (Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue) on Saturday, April 30 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Scouts & Student Service Hours Welcome! BYO: Rakes, Loppers, Clippers, Gloves, etc. Come for an hour – or the whole day! Contact cgleckenby@gmail.com, 303-520-5818.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORY DAY

Saturday, May 14, 2022

History lovers of all ages are invited for a site-wide celebration filled with demonstrations, displays, performances, and other family-friendly activities at East Jersey Old Town Village, 1050 River Road in Piscataway, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Local History Tent will feature exhibits and displays from 20+ historical organizations. For more information, please call 732-745-3030, ext. 311.

LOCAL HISTORY DAY

Sunday, June 5, 2022

Come view our photo albums and special exhibits, order reprints, purchase Society merchandise, and commune with fellow history fans at the Metuchen Public Library (480 Middlesex Avenue) on Sunday, June 5 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Have photos or documents to share? Bring them with you and we can scan them on site while you wait.