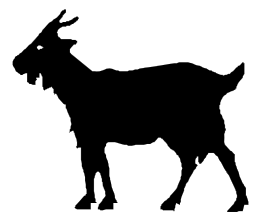


# Nannygoats



Vol. 13, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2015

The following article was written by Janet White-Elder about her father. Although submitted to *Nannygoats* last year, delays on our end prevented us from publishing it as quickly as we had hoped. White-Elder's submission included many more images than we are able to include in these pages, but we hope that if you are interested in seeing more, you will visit the Grimstead Room where we have archived the entire document or view its entirety online at our website ([www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)).

On October 16, 1984, a dedication was held by members of the North Edison Civic Improvement Club to honor James D. Elder, a long-time activist who spent many years working for the good of the North Edison community.

Elder Park, located on Grove Avenue and Firethorn Drive is the only park named to honor one of the township's African American citizens.

Mr. Elder moved to Potters Crossing from Hempstead, NY in 1935 with his wife, Viola. Mr. Elder came to the community with valuable assets, a Bachelor of Law Degree from City College in New York City and a Juris Doctor Degree from Brooklyn Law School.

The couple immediately joined Mt. Zion Freewill Baptist Church where he became a trustee and was appointed chairman. As chairman, James Elder helped the church buy land and build a modern facility in Potters Crossing. A groundbreaking ceremony for the new church was held in 1967.

Mr. Elder was one of the

founding members of the Potters Civic Improvement Club, later renamed the North Edison Civic Improvement Club. The North Edison Civic Improvement Club received full support from then-Edison Mayor Anthony M. Yelencsics and the Township Council. An urban renewal program was begun and the

Mayor appointed Mr. Elder as one of the commissioners of the newly created Housing Authority of the Township of Edison.

James and Viola had two children, Eric and Janet, and also had custody of two grandchildren, Eric Jr. and Sheila. They were also blessed with many other grandchildren, great-grandchildren and even several great-great grandchildren.

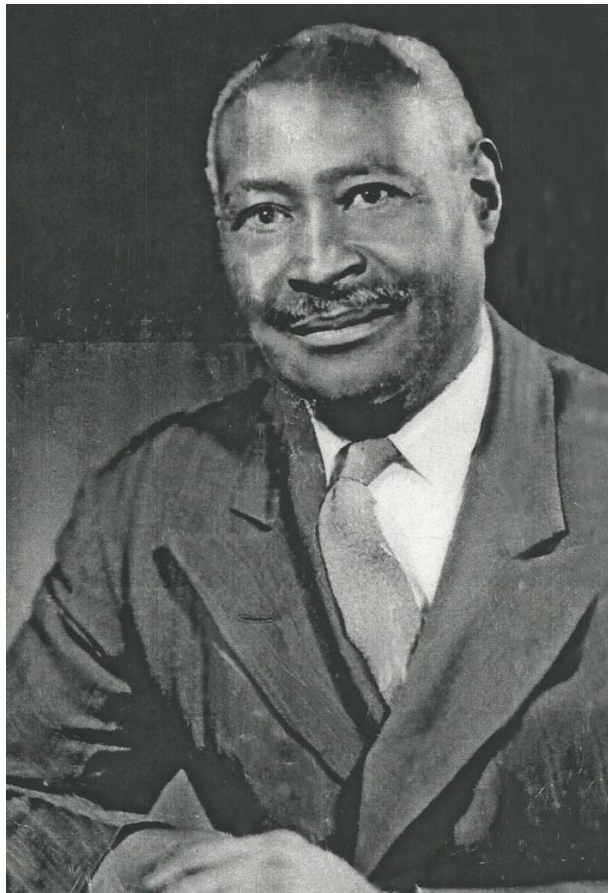
James Elder died in 1983, one year before the dedication. Viola Elder attended the dedication with family and friends. Viola died in 1997. Their son, Eric, died in 2012.

The family would like to thank Edison Township and its residents for remembering the origin of Elder Park and what it represents; the dedication

of Mr. Elder's contributions to the economic growth of his community.

*See Pages 4 & 5 for more about Mr. Elder.*

## James D. Elder



***The Fellow Who  
Got Things Done  
(1903-1983)***

**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.**

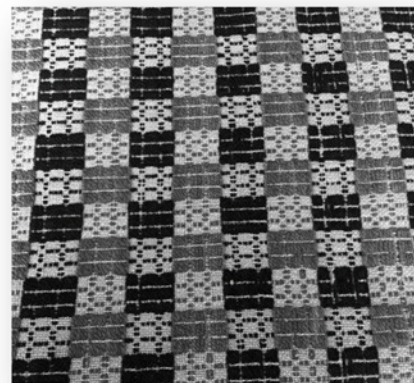
## New In the Archives



Many thanks to Metuchen resident Tina Pirro for spying this commemorative plate at a rummage sale in Somerset County and donating it to the Society. Dated January 28, 1965, the item is bound to be a must-have for Mustang collectors.

Who was "N.W. Barber," and how many of these plates were made? These are questions still to be answered, and maybe there are still a few people locally who remember – or better yet, were at – the dinner. One article we've located (from Mustang Monthly magazine) mentions a similar plate, with the name "J.R. Rummel," found at a Rancocas flea market. Contact us if you have any further information you can share about this piece of mid-century history.

Sometimes items with local history significance come back from faraway places, in this case Alaska! James Nelson Kenworthy (the son of June Cone Kenworthy) donated a Linsey-Woolsey coverlet, made by the Thornal/Thornall family from wool grown on their farm at Menlo Park. It is a truly beautiful piece of work, and according to the information provided with the item, it belonged to the donor's mother-in-law June Cone Kenworthy (originally from Colonia). She was related to the Thornal family on her mother's side, and she left a note with the coverlet that says it was woven from the sheep's wool of her "great great grandfather Thornal."



The Society regrets to announce the recent passing of long-time members, Vivian J. Hight, Louise Stochel, Tom Clark, and Stanley Lease.

Vivian was born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1920 and for many years worked as a secretary for both private companies and in the military while stationed outside of New Jersey with her husband. After retiring, she wrote a genealogical book, *The Hight and Hunter Heritages*, as well as a memoir *A Charmed Life – or was it?* She was also known to many for her paintings of landscapes, Letters to the Editor, and her hats for every occasion (see left).

Louise was born in Jersey City, New Jersey but lived most of her life in Edison. She graduated from Metuchen High School and Panzer College with a degree in physical education. She worked as a counselor at Kiddie Keep Well Camp and also taught in Rahway and Plainfield for many years. She was a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen for 66 years.

Tom Clark was a lifelong resident of Metuchen and many will remember the many donations of local history ephemera he donated to the Society over the years.

A former councilman and 50-year resident of Metuchen, Stanley Lease was active in various veterans and civic organizations, and served for many years as President of Kiddie Keep Well Camp.

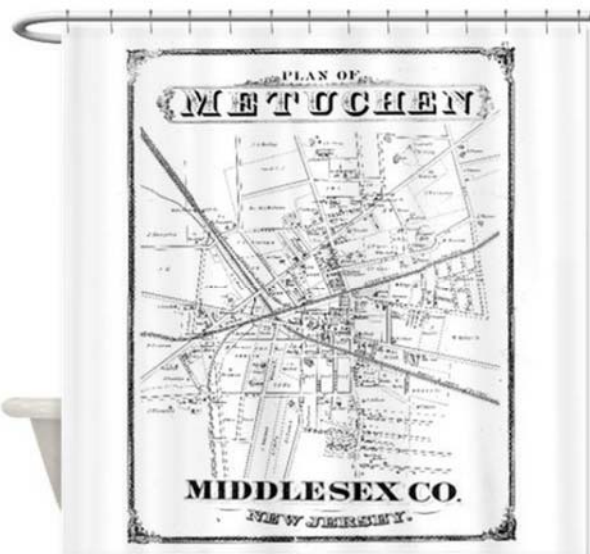


On Facebook? Join the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's Facebook Group and keep informed about history-related news, participate in our weekly "Grimstead Guesser," and connect with other local history fans.

## Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Online Store

Thanks to CafePress.com, the society sells a number of products with unique graphics on them, all online! Browse and buy from the comfort of your home or office any time... and, as with sales at the Country Fair and Local History Day, all net proceeds go to support the society's mission. One of the many, many items available is the 1876 Fulton Plan of Metuchen Shower Curtain...

### Shower in Local History Style!



Order yours today at  
**[www.cafepress.com/mehs](http://www.cafepress.com/mehs)**



Note the entrance for "Wernik," the druggist that was at that location on Main Street until only a few years ago.



## Got 'Goats'?

Want to order a copy or two of the Society's most recent publication? Look for the order form inserted in this issue or download one at [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org). The book is a 275+ page compilation of the first ten years of this newsletter (30 issues), reproduced in chronological order with a comprehensive index to the photographs, original research, and historical items. Much of the content comes directly from our archives and is not available anywhere else, and comes with a bonus CD-ROM packed with extras.

## 1928 Directory of Metuchen, Column 15

Below is the fifteenth column of entries from a 1928 Directory of Metuchen that includes both addresses and telephone numbers of local residents. The small "r" after the name indicates the entry is for a "residence." The Society began reprinting the entirety of this directory in the Winter/Spring 2010 issue.

Thom Wm M r 101 Hillside av...Metuchen-434-W  
Thomas G E r 105 Hillside av...Metuchen-119-J  
Thompson F O r 267 Woodbridge av...Metuchen-212  
Thompson Geo H r Pleasant av...Metuchen-499  
Thompson J E r 252 Durham av...Metuchen-530  
Thompson Wm M r Eggert av...Metuchen-246-M  
Thornall Manning r Parsonage rd...Metuchen-167-M  
Thornall W M r 335 High...Metuchen-531-J  
Thornall Wm R r 913 Middlesex av...Metuchen-9  
Thorn H T groceries S Main...Metuchen-671  
Tierce E Miss r Delta av...Metuchen-535-W  
Tilbor J r 170 Main...Metuchen-156-J  
Titman Geo B r Walnut pl...Metuchen-608-W  
Toth John r Millville rd...Metuchen-241-J-1  
Toth N Amboy av...Metuchen-564  
Town Restaurant Middlesex av...Metuchen-496  
Treat Right Concrete Block Products Co  
Nixons...Metuchen-611-J  
Tremblay Samuel r Howell...Metuchen-547-W  
Trout W M r 427 Main...Metuchen-42-M  
Tucker E W r 28 Plainfield av...Metuchen-203-J  
Tucker Wm r 398 Grove av...Metuchen-416-J  
Tyrrell Van Vert H r McCoy av...Metuchen-453  
Uchin H W r 68 Durham av...Metuchen-207-R  
Underwood A E r 43 Linden av...Metuchen-205-R  
Urffer Jos r 4th av...Metuchen-244-R  
Utasz J genl store Fords...Metuchen-583  
Vanderpoel E T r 680 Main...Metuchen-95  
Van Derveer F Mrs r 214 Main...Metuchen-764  
Van Doren W W r 51 Charles...Metuchen-431  
Van Kirk T G r 93 Highland av...Metuchen-48-J  
Varga Jos r Lafayette rd...Metuchen-475-M  
Veghte C B r 34 Rector...Metuchen-8-W  
Venett E r 75 Carson av...Metuchen-7-W  
Vincent Arthur C confy 174 Main...Metuchen-745  
Vincent H L r 27 Bounty...Metuchen-768  
Vincz Geo genl store Phoenix...Metuchen-572  
Vincze K r 60 Charles...Metuchen-610-R  
Vineyard Poultry Farm Inc Vineyard rd  
Metuchen-667  
Vogeler R ser sta 932 Middlesex av...Metuchen-748  
Von Daggenhausen C Mrs r 51 Kempson pl  
Metuchen-30-R  
Von Hartz C r 207 Lake av...Metuchen-237  
Vreeland Anna Mrs r Nixons...Metuchen-241-R-2  
Wachter E r Iselin...Metuchen-288-M  
Wagoner J W r 259 Main...Metuchen-396-W  
Wanwright M B r Lafayette rd...Metuchen-1-M  
Waldmann M Mrs r Dartmouth...Metuchen-537-R-1  
Wale J M r 16 Durham av...Metuchen-291-J  
Walker S r Menlo Pk...Metuchen-400  
Walsh A r 23 Hillside av...Metuchen-512  
Walton H H r Newman...Metuchen-531-R  
Waring D H Mrs r 419 Grove...Metuchen-416-R  
Wathne Thos r Fords...Metuchen-432-R  
Watson Geo C r Oak Tree...Metuchen-69-J  
Watson L Du B r 4th av...Metuchen-29-R  
Watson S P r 59 High...Metuchen-45-M  
Watson Shonberg C r Thomas...Metuchen-196-M  
Weber Chas C r 61 Hillside av...Metuchen-560  
Wedin Anna J Mrs r 156 Plainfield av  
Metuchen-44-W  
Weeks E J r 251 Woodbridge av  
Metuchen-418-W  
Weigle E r New Durham rd...Metuchen-157-W  
Welker A C r Albourne...Metuchen-345-J  
Wendover J Miss r 315 Main...Metuchen-224-W  
Wernik A P drgst 412 Main...Metuchen-123  
Residence 55 Highland av...Metuchen-786  
Westcott W dentist 52 Linden av...Metuchen-180  
Westcott Wm r Nixon...Metuchen-21-M-2  
Wester J N r 320 Amboy av...Metuchen-401  
Western Union Telegraph Co 396 Main  
Metuchen-109  
Wallace J r 239 Amboy av...Metuchen-266-M  
Wetzel A M r 215 Main...Metuchen-375-J  
Whalen D C r 55 Elm av...Metuchen-208-R  
Whalen Jos r 64 Center...Metuchen-330-M  
Whitaker Fred A r 64 Linden av...Metuchen-14-R  
White A L r 1 Tulsa av...Metuchen-202-R  
White J F r Bonhamtown...Metuchen-285-J  
White R r 158 Maple av...Metuchen-756  
Whitney H M Jr r 23 George...Metuchen-761

# The Man Behind Elder Park

James Dolphos Elder was born in Memphis, Tennessee on July 30, 1903. His parents, Minnie and James Sr., had two children: Emma and James. James Sr. was the first black man to become founder and editor of a newspaper published in Memphis. James, his Mother, and sister left Memphis when James was nine years old and moved to Hempstead, NY. He graduated from Hempstead High School and was Sr. Editor of the Patriot Staff, the school newspaper. During his high school years, James was an excellent student who enjoyed learning. This caption was written under his yearbook photo:

"Whence is all thy learning? Hath thy toil O'er books consumed the midnight oil?"

Latin was his favorite subject. Also written in the yearbook: "James Elder! How that name rings through the Latin room. When Miss McDermott

has almost given up all hope of our ever learning Latin, she turns to James to console herself. James always has a cheerful smile that greets us when we feel blue. Undoubtedly Irving Berlin will never attempt to compose a song entitled "The James Elder Blues." Having established for himself a reputation in scholarship, James will be especially missed in the classes where the students leave it for the "other fellow" to do the work. He will be a valuable asset to the freshmen class of City College next year."

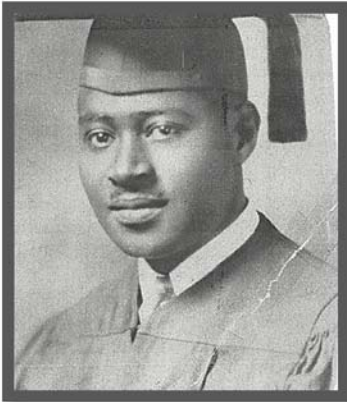
Those words reflect the Father I knew. My

father was the *other fellow who got the job done*. After graduation, James decided his career would be in law. He attended City College in New York City where he spent two years studying Pre-Law. After four years attending Brooklyn Law School, James received his Bachelor of Law Degree, the only black man in his class.

However, my father's dream of becoming an attorney didn't occur. As I remember my father's statement, and I quote: "After I graduated from law school, black attorneys were starving, there was no work." During his college years, he was employed with the General Post Office in New York and after graduation from law school worked there full-time until his retirement after 35 years.

I remember the stories my father told us about his work and his accomplishments. He never allowed his skin color to hold him back. There were several African Americans employed at the Post Office but it was James who was determined to be promoted to work behind the Registered Mail cage. He was turned down several times even though he had the training and skill to perform the job efficiently. After several more attempts, he was promoted, the first and only black who worked in that position until his retirement. He was a very determined man who believed in a good education and fair treatment of people. He knew things would not be easy, but with his drive and determination things were accomplished.

James Elder and Viola Taylor were married in June 1931 in Hempstead, New York. They moved to Potters Crossing in May 1935. Through this union they had two children, Eric and Janet. They immediately became active members of Mt. Zion Baptist Church where James served on the Board of Trustees and later was elected Chairman. James and Viola loved the country atmosphere of Potters Crossing after moving from New York, but James knew improvements had to be made to improve the quality of life for his family and friends. James was always the type of person who made friends easily. As stated in the Hempstead High School Yearbook: he always has a cheerful smile. He and my mother made others feel welcome because of their natural personalities.



James organized the Potters Civic Improvement Club, Inc. and through the efforts of the Club the name of the community was changed to North Edison. The North Edison Civic Improvement Club, Inc. received full support from Edison Mayor Anthony Yelencsis and the Township Council. An Urban Renewal Program was started and the Mayor appointed James Elder as one of the Commissioners of the newly created Housing Authority of the Township of Edison.

Improvements started to happen. Before the Civic Improvement Club was organized there was no public service bus transportation to and from North Edison. My Father, along with the



club members, had the bus route extended to include North Edison. A new Mt. Zion Baptist Church was built on grounds selected by James Elder and Bishop Anderson Adams, Pastor of Mt. Zion. An appreciation dinner was held by members of Mt. Zion Baptist Church December 1981 for James. What he wanted to obtain through the committee was to have better housing that could be afforded by the residents of North Edison. Many problems and disagreements arose but the program developed and the problems were resolved.

Whenever James had leisure time, he would play the piano, listen to music from the big band era or read books. Reading was his favorite past time. Volumes of Bible literature, law books, and mystery novels lined the bookshelves

that he built himself. We had multiple sets of encyclopedias, always had up to date dictionaries and all sorts of literature to use for school projects and research. He was a devoted family man who spent a great deal of time with his wife and two children – and the community's children; for nineteen years he also served as a school crossing guard.

### Park Dedication Honors James Elder

This newspaper headline was printed in the News Tribune Wednesday, October 17, 1984: *The late James D. Elder, a man who spent many years working for the good of the North Edison community was honored yesterday as a park was renamed for him on Grove Avenue.* The former Groveland Park was chosen by members of the North Edison Civic Improvement Club who urged the township to change the name to James D. Elder Park. Mr. Elder served as a commissioner of the township housing authority and was remembered yesterday for his work in the community. The park site is located where Mr. and Mrs. Elder had their home built when they first came to the community. The money for the park didn't come easily for the members but they wanted something to last in the memory of James D. Elder. Part of the funds was derived from the sale of the organization's building located on Inman Avenue, which was demolished for urban renewal.

*Page 4, top right: Minnie, James, Sr., and Emma. Page 4, left to right: Graduation, with classmates. Page 4, bottom left: With his wife, Viola, and family. Page 5, top right: Serving on the Housing Authority. Page 5, top left: Groundbreaking at a new Mt. Zion Church. Page 5, middle right: With fellow crossing guards. Page 5, bottom right: Dedication ceremony for Elder Park.*



## A black and white portrait of a man, likely a historical figure, wearing a dark coat and a high-collared shirt. The portrait is oval-shaped and set against a light background.

*Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt,  
physician and author*

Before our village shall have arrived at dimensions which would complicate the work of tracing its history, and ere the statements and traditions of those in whose memories many of the reminiscences of the past are treasured have been forgotten, it seems proper that what is authentic, interesting and valuable should be gathered in such form as to be available to those who come after us and serve to gratify that laudable inclination which most individuals and communities have to recall and perpetuate the historic associations of the vicinity in which their lot is cast.

Lord Carteret having obtained grant and power over this part of the Jerseys, sent hither his brother, afterward Governor Carteret, to manage the same in his own way.

§ § § § § § § § § § § § § § § §

Have you paid your dues for 2015 yet?

\$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

Many of the settlers had come the year before, but titles for lands within the bounds of the township were given “principally in the year 1670”-- just two hundred years ago.

These original settlers were therefore from New England, and most of them from the town of Newbury, Mass., thirty-four miles north-east of Boston. The graves of the ancestry of the Ayres, Toppans, and others may still be found there. Our township was named after the Rev. John Woodbridge, of Newbury.

This, you will remember, was not many years after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers (1622). I have not been able to ascertain that any of our forefathers actually came over in the Mayflower which, according to the claims of ancestry, seems to have been a very crowded boat. I doubt not, however, that some of the Newbury and Piscataqua people had seen some of the original immigration, and there is a little tradition that one cause of the settlements here was that some of our good ancestors became a little tired of the exacting strictness of their predecessors, and concluded to come where they could express themselves more freely.

**To be continued in the next issue...**

# History Mystery SOLVED

Three cheers for father and son history sleuths, Geoff and Byron Sondergard, who've done some great detective work in determining the location of the Modern Beauty Shoppe that appeared in the "Looking Back" show at the Old Franklin Schoolhouse. Based only on clues found looking through a second story window in the left side of the photo, they were able to find evidence leading to the conclusion that this shop was located on State Street in Perth Amboy in the 1950s. Look for the forthcoming issue of *Nannygoats* for more details!



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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 collecting and recording so much of our local history.

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

**Note: The Society published two issues in 2014 as a double issue; Volume 12, Issues 1 & 2. Generally the Society publishes three issues per year.**

October 8, 2014



Dear Editor:

I just got around to reading the Spring & Summer 2014 *Nannygoats*.

I really enjoyed the "Look Back @ Metuchen's Main Street" pictures. In my youth, I shopped at many of those stores.

I read the "Memories from the Mailbox" letter and would like to provide some more information regarding the two-story airplane spotting building. My father, Martin Jessen, wrote a story in his book, *Marty's Musings: Tales of the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and New Jersey*, titled "Airplane Spotting." He describes the location of the World War II airplane spotting post as being north of East Chestnut Avenue and east of Linden Avenue.

I mentioned the information that appeared in *Nannygoats*, and he further clarified the difference between the tower and the building. The airplane spotting building was located very close to the now-demolished Mook house that was located on East Chestnut Avenue. He mentioned that as a teenage airplane spotter, he and the other spotters enjoyed viewing the Mook family's daughter sunbathing in a swimsuit on a blanket she had laid out on the grass in their backyard.

There is another story in his book titled, "The Army Flies the Mail," which describes the tower located at Beacon Hill. This was a tall steel tower with a revolving search light. The next beacon was located outside of New Brunswick where U.S. Route 1 and U.S. Route 130 intersect. These aircraft beacons were used by the Army to fly the airmail at night. Since their biplanes only had magnetic compasses, the pilots flew from beacon to beacon at night. During the day, the easiest navigation method was to follow the "iron compass," which meant to follow the railroad tracks.

I hope this information is helpful.

Sincerely, *Nancy E. Jessen*

*From the Editor: Yes, this is indeed very helpful, Nancy! We love letters like these!*



**Metuchen-Edison Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 61**  
**Metuchen, NJ 08840**

***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!***

## ***Upcoming Programs and Events***



*Thanks to all of our members and friends that came out to the "Looking Back" exhibit reception in November 2014 at Transformations Gallery at the Old Franklin Schoolhouse. It was a lovely afternoon!*

### **Secrets of the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground** **presented by Michael Gall and Walter Stochel**

In November 2014 the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society began a survey and study of the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground. The cemetery was established in the 1690s and over the years there have been various recordings of the graves, but none since 1978. Using GPS technology, every grave existing in 2014 has been recorded and mapped. In addition, the various lists of graves have been combined into one database that will be placed on the MEHS website and a list of Veteran burials has been created. This program will shed new light on who is buried there, the history of the burial ground, and how to use the new maps and lists to find graves. Afterward, a walking tour of the cemetery will be conducted. For more information contact: Walter R. Stochel Jr. 732-906-0529 wstochel@earthlink.net. Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders through a grant provided by New Jersey Historical Commission a division of Dept. of State.

**Saturday May 9, 2015 at 2pm**

**St. James Church. 2136 Woodbridge Avenue. Edison**

**SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2015**

**10am to 4pm - FREE**

The Society will be participating in the Middlesex Country Cultural & Heritage Commission's History Fair at the East Jersey Olde Towne Village located in Johnson Park in Piscataway. This event will feature a variety of living history demonstrations including blacksmithing, furniture making, chair caning, decorative arts, and more.

### ***Save the Date***

The Edison Memorial Tower will reopen this year, after being closed for 77 years! The Edison Memorial Tower Corporation is planning a big celebration on Saturday, October 24, 2015.