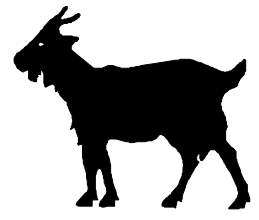


# Nannygoats



Vol. 18, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2020



2020 marks the centennial anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, leading history organizations throughout the state and country to use this opportunity to educate the public about the lengthy battle for women's suffrage. Many have noted that the amendment's passage was the largest expansion of democracy in United States' history, affecting half of the country's population by ensuring women's constitutional right to vote. One of those who helped drive the effort was Hester Martha Hunt Poole who lived for many years in Metuchen. For now, the house she and her husband, Cyrus, lived in still stands at 101 Rose Street at Rolfe Place. The house looks very different now, following a subdivision and extensive remodel in 1951, and years of neglect have rendered its future very uncertain. Included here is more about Poole and two other local leaders noted for their work as "ardent suffragists."

Hester Martha Hunt Poole (1833-1932) was an author, critic, and progressive agitator for women's rights. She was born in Vermont, taught school in the South. She married New York City lawyer Cyrus O. Poole in 1865 and travelled widely. By the time they moved to Metuchen, she was already an established and nationally known figure.

As described in the W.P.A.-funded history of Metuchen, "In 1889 Metuchen became the home of one of the country's outstanding feminists, Hester M. Poole, who was also a writer of standing. She, like the Aldens, immediately became active in local cultural affairs, helping to found the library and inaugurating the town's first literary club, the Quiet Hour Club... Hester Poole's interests were in social and economic matters as they related to women. She had worked through her life with Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Clara Barton in their fight for women's rights.



**Hester Martha  
Hunt Poole**

Her serious writing was in poetry and literary criticism."

It's rumored that Poole coaxed Metuchen's husbands to allow their young wives to come to her house to learn how to make jams and jellies and when they got there, she would press books into their hands as well.

Unlike many early "ardent suffragists," Poole lived to see the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. In 1925, she was one of 10 women – and the only still alive – to be honored by the Susan B. Anthony Foundation as one of the most important founders of the National Council of Women in 1888. The other nine were Susan B. Anthony, Francis E. Willard, Mary A. Livermore, Julia Ward

Howe, Lucy Stone, Clara Barton, Anna Howard Shaw, May Wright Sewall, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Poole died in Metuchen in 1932 and is buried in Glenwood Cemetery in Washington, DC.



**Helen Norris  
Prickitt**

She was the founding President of the Metuchen Equal Suffrage League, having previously led a campaign that secured in the Borough the largest favoring majority of votes for a constitutional amendment anywhere in New Jersey. She served as President of the Borough Improvement League and in State leadership positions for womens clubs, but is probably best known for her pioneering work towards eradicating the mosquito, which posed a

Helen Norris Prickitt (1871-1942) was born in Washington, DC, and came to Metuchen through her marriage to Charles A. Prickitt. Together they edited and published *The Metuchen Recorder* for many years, often times with her taking the larger role in its operations. They raised their two children at 76 Clive Street, the still-extant and stunning historic house built by George Waite in the 1870s.

Mary Stanahan Hart Pattison (1869-1951) was a "Domestic Engineer," singer, noted leader of the Progressive Party, and agitator for social justice. She served as President of the New Jersey State Federation of Women's Clubs, working to address Progressive Party issues such as poverty, working conditions, prison reform, abolition of child labor, and woman

suffrage. She also served as district chairwoman of the Women's Peace Party, Secretary of the New Jersey Branch of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (a radical wing of the national suffrage movement) and as Vice-chair of the New Jersey Woman's Party (NJWP). On the eve of President Wilson's second inauguration, Pattison was among a dozen other NJWP members who picketed the White House, later to be joined by



**Mary Stanahan  
Hart Pattison**

*Continued on Page 2*

**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.**

*Helen Norris Prickitt:*

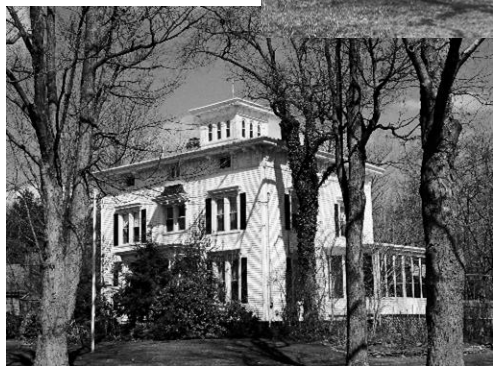
serious public health risk in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through her persistence and leadership, she was able to effect the establishment of county and state commissions to eradicate the pest. She predeceased her husband in 1942 and is buried in Metuchen's Hillside Cemetery. Norris Avenue, near her former home, is named for her family.

*Mary Stanahan Hart Pattison:*

nearly one thousand women from around the country. Pattison's work as a Domestic Engineer arose from a desire to make housekeeping more efficient so as to allow time for women to pursue careers and support social causes. She moved to Colonia in 1908 and used her new home as a "Housekeeping Experiment Station" where she tested concepts of scientific housekeeping with modern machinery. In 1914, she authored *The Principles of Domestic Engineering* outlining many of these techniques.

Locally, Pattison was instrumental in the founding of the Borough Improvement League and the "rescue" of the Old Franklin Schoolhouse, as well as the establishment of the Metuchen Public Library and High School. Her house in Metuchen still stands at 96 Rose Street, very close to that of Poole's. Her home in Colonia, named "The Four Winds," is also still extant at 1 Devon Road.

*Right:* Hester Poole's house at 101 Rose Street, at Rolfe Court, in 2010.



*Left:* Helen Norris Prickitt's house at 76 Clive Street in Metuchen, 2001.

*Right:* 96 Rose Street in Metuchen in 2018. *Right:* 101 Rose Street in 2010.



## 1901 Directory, Columns 14 & 15

Below is the fourteenth and fifteenth column of entries in the sections relevant to our area of the 1901 *Polk's New Brunswick City Directory*. The Society began reprinting the entirety of this directory in the Winter/Spring 2016 issue. This concludes the serial reproduction of this year's Directory.

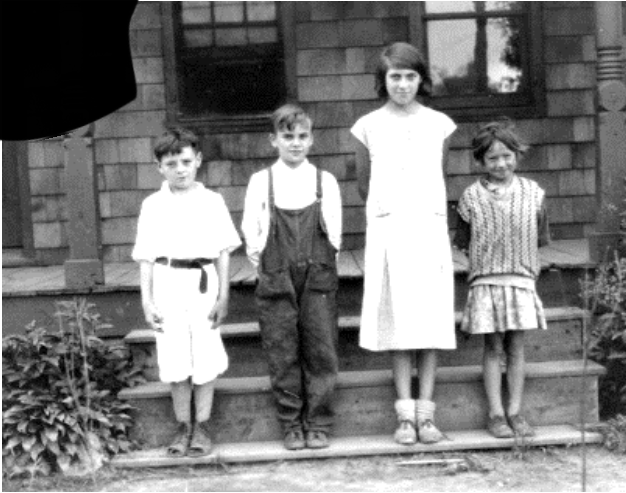
Van Siclen L. dressmaker, h Main c New  
 Van Siclen T. F. clerk and bookkeeper, h Middlesex ave  
 Van Siclen William C. assessor, h Main c LeGrande ave  
 Vennett Henry, h Middlesex ave  
 Volkert E. J. h Main  
 Voorhees Benjamin C. emp P. R. R. h Main c Durham ave  
 Voorhees Willroy, butcher, h Middlesex ave. c Pearl  
 Waite C. B. h Clive  
 Waite T. F. Mrs. widow, h Clive  
 Waite Parker, clerk, h Clive  
 Waite S. E. Mrs. widow, h Clive  
 Waldron Thomas, emp L. V. R. R. h New Brunswick turnpike  
 Walker David A. bus. N. Y. h William  
 Watson Charles A. carpenter, h High  
 Weber C. C. h Main  
 Weinshenk Ernest, retired, h Main  
 Weisman Albert  
 Welsh James, h New Brunswick ave  
 Welsh Thomas J. emp L. V. R. R. h New Brunswick ave  
 Welsh William T. h New Brunswick ave  
 Welsh William F. h New Brunswick ave  
 Wendover Benjamin, retired, h Main  
 West John G. retired, h Durham ave  
 Whalen Daniel, saloon, New, h do  
 Whalen Joseph, bartender, h New Brunswick ave  
 Whalen Martin, hostler, h Woodbridge ave  
 Whalen William sr. gardener, h Woodbridge ave  
 Whalen William jr. gardener, h Woodbridge ave  
 Wheeler Harry, laborer, h Robinvale  
 Wheeler William, laborer, h Robinvale  
 Whitman John M. bus. N. Y. h High  
 Whitman John S. (Rev.) retired, h High  
 Whittier P. P. retired, h Main  
 Wilkinson C. B. bus. N. Y. h Homer  
 Wilkinson C. W. bus. N. Y. h Homer  
 Williamson Garrett h Main  
 Williams Henry, h Central ave  
 Wilmot Robert, bus. N. Y. h Middlesex ave  
 Wilson George, insurance, h High  
 Wilson Richard H. insurance, h Graham ave

Wilson Theodore S. clerk, h Hillside ave  
 Wilson Washington, bus. N. Y. h Hillside ave  
 Winegar John, h Middlesex ave  
 Winegar Joseph, h Middlesex ave  
 Winegar William H. h Middlesex ave  
 Wooden George, carpenter, h Main  
 Woodruff Rowland, h Main  
 Woodward C. F. bus. N. Y. h Graham ave  
 Wycoff Frederick,  
 Wyley Daniel, h Amboy ave  
 Yingling Charles sr. bus. N. Y. h Rector  
 Yingling Charles jr. bus. N. Y. h Rector



# History Mystery **SOLVED!**

When Society member Sherry Pitcher spotted this image of four previously unidentified children in the Summer 2019 issue of *Nannygoats*, she knew



exactly who they are, as one of them was her mother-in-law. From left to right are Elwood Gray, Russell Gray, Evelyn Gray, and Betty Jensen.

The first are three of Ed & Rose Gray's children and the fourth is their cousin (the child of Ed Gray's sister, Clara). The house was located on a section of Park Place that was demolished to make way for Route 287. The former Gray house used to stand where the interchange immediately west of the Bridge Pointe Office Park is now.

## ***New in the Archives***

The following list of recent acquisitions was compiled by Archives Chair Byron Sondergard.

- Photographs of Grove Avenue & Floyd Street, Edison during the 1990s and photographs of Herbert Hoover Middle & Ben Franklin Schools from 1995.
- Edison political flyers & materials, Charles Kavcsak correspondence, and a 1972 Campaign button for Metuchen Republican candidates.
- Soo San and Buck's Auto Parts matchbook covers, several obituaries, three postcards of Oak Tree, Hight Family genealogy information, articles on the Civilian Conservation Corps, and an Indian bowl.
- *A History of the First Presbyterian Church* by William Henry Ayers (1947), histories of St. James Episcopal Church, and electronic copies of the Trojan Sporting Club newsletters (1943-1945).
- A newspaper article on George Campbell, a 1947 *Newark Sunday News Magazine* featuring Camp Kilmer soldiers, a Resolution for Edison's World War I Remembrance, and a 1995 Edison resolution for Earth Day.
- A 1910 postcard and a photograph of the July 4th, 1919 parade, both on Main Street, Metuchen.
- Several obituaries and information on the Royal Arcanum from 1954.
- Two ca. 1954 maps of Camp Kilmer (donated by Alfred J. Bauman).
- A Morris Stores shopping bag and 30+ business cards of local businesses (donated by Elisabeth Oliu).
- A box of Rotary Club of Metuchen materials (1929-2018), including officer lists, meeting minutes, newsletters, banners, programs, finances, etc. (donated by Michael Hart).
- A postcard of Mario's Mirror Room on Main Street (donated by Jacquie Zuvich).
- A drinking glass commemorating the 1979 Metuchen Fire Department Competition Day (donated by Lisa Schwalje).
- Four Metuchen High School saucers, various photographs that include images of S. Elliott Mayo Jr. and the old Clarkson store at corner of Main Street and Middlesex Avenue, a 1968 Metuchen Country Fair Day envelope, and a 1907 Metuchen Gas Light Company receipt (donated by Darlene Dupre).



## National Register Status Awarded to Mary Wilkins Freeman House

Local history fans will have undoubtedly heard the news by now that the Mary Wilkins Freeman house at 207 Lake Avenue in Metuchen has been listed in National Register of Historic Places. The effort to honor the property was initiated by homeowners Rebecca and

Robert Seely, but completed by their friend and Historic Preservation professional Nancy L. Zerbe. Zerbe has extensive state-wide experience in preparing National Register nominations and was aided in her efforts by the Seely's research. Following news of the successful listing of the property, which has been featured in heritage guides and previous House Tours, Zerbe shared with the *Nannygoats* editor more about recognition received by the famous author who lends her name to this historic property:



- An 1897 poll indicated that her short story, "The Revolt of Mother," was among the twelve best American short stories, along with Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Snow Image." Her short story "A Humble Romance" was voted in the second-best list among a similarly luminous group.
- In 1890, a British publication wrote "There is something like a craze in England over Mary E. Wilkins." A year later, she received a letter from her publisher in England, tell her that author Henry James "has lately been taken with an enormous enthusiasm for your stories. He has been reading them all one after another—both volumes—and has the greatest opinion of them."
- Her 1894 novel *Pembroke* was praised by the English press by stating that "George Elliot had never done anything finer." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle described it as "the greatest piece of fiction in America since *The Scarlet Letter*."
- In June 1902, a Boston newspaper held a contest by offering prizes to readers who could correctly identify all twelve photographs of prominent women. Among the twelve were Mary Wilkins Freeman, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Julia Ward Howe, and Clara Barton.
- In December 1905, a banquet at Delmonico's was held to honor Samuel Clemens' (Mark Twain's) 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. As reported in *The New York Times*, when it was time for the 170 guests to proceed into dinner, "Mr. Clemens led the way, with Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman on his arm." Of the many tables at the event, Freeman was seated at Clemens' table and to his immediate right.
- In 1908, Freeman wrote *The Shoulders of Atlas* as part of the *New York Herald's* "Anglo American Competition." The newspaper printed installments of Freeman's novel as well as English writer Max Pemberton's novel *Sir Richard Escombe*, with the goal of having the public vote for their favorite novel. Freeman won by over 14,000 votes, receiving \$20,000 in prize and book rights.
- From 1913-1921, she served as an Honorary Vice-President of the Authors' League of America.
- In 1917, the Committee on Nominations of the National Institute of Arts and Letters nominated her for membership. The

nomination was a noteworthy honor; however, she was not elected due to the Institute's hesitancy to elect a woman.

- In a 1919-1920 book of prominent New Jersey residents, she was described as having for many years enjoyed the distinction of being the leader among the country's short story writers.
- In 1925, the American Academy of Arts and Letters honored her by awarding her the first William Dean Howells Gold Medal for distinguished work in fiction.
- In 1926, the Academy elected her as one of the first women in the Academy's Department of Literature, National Institute of Arts and Letters.
- In a 1927 anthology of *The Best Stories of Mary E. Wilkins*, the editor apologized for having to remind his audience who the author was, stating "Indeed, to one who was a reader in the nineties, it seems almost ludicrous to 'introduce' Mary E. Wilkins. (Just a little like introducing Babe Ruth anywhere in the United States, in these latter days!)"
- In 1938, eight years after her death, the

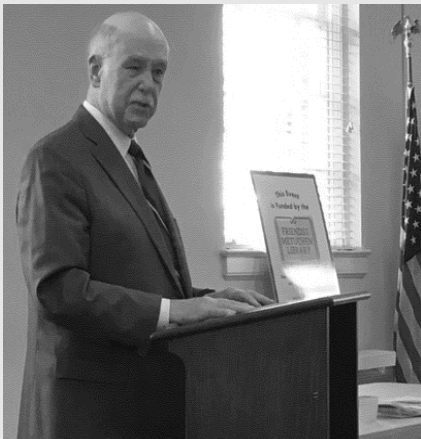
Academy honored her by installing at its 633 West 155 Street, New York entrance new bronze doors (still extant) bearing the inscription, "Dedicated to the Memory of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and the Women Writers of America."

- In 1991, Mary Wilkins Freeman was honored for her literary contributions at a New Jersey Literary Heritage Celebration. The New Jersey General Assembly proclaimed November as Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Month, urging "the citizenry of this state to participate fittingly in the observation of the life and works of one of New Jersey's most illustrious literary figures."
- In October 2019, the town of Brattleboro, Vermont, where she lived as a young woman, honored her as part of their annual literary festival, dedicating a plaque to her memory and reading a proclamation from the Governor of Vermont declaring October 17, 2019 "Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Day" in Vermont. Following the Governor's proclamation, a letter from Metuchen Mayor Jonathan Busch was read sharing in their enthusiasm for honoring Freeman.

*Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*

To read the full National Register Nomination, visit the "From The Archives" section of the Society's website.

**Want to write an article for Nannygoats? Have a History Mystery you need help with? An intriguing photograph to share? Contact [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)!**



## ***Society's Annual Meeting***

The Society met on January 12, 2020 at the Metuchen Public Library for its annual meeting. In addition to a short business meeting consisting of committee reports, the election of officers and directors for 2020 was held. Following the business meeting, the group enjoyed a short talk by author and historian Donald Johnstone Peck regarding the year 1776 and its importance to New Jersey and the United States. Mr. Peck's fresh take on the subject was well received and we look forward to hosting him again sometime soon.



## METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (XIII)

The following is the next installment of Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt's "Metuchen and Her History," written in 1870, which we began reprinting serially in issues of *Nannygoats* beginning with the Winter/Spring 2015 edition. Many thanks to Former Society President and current Board Member Dominic T. Walker for transcribing this document.

During these years the Rev. Mr. Hunt was still pastor of the church, and had built the house now occupied by E.F. Ayres.

Mr. Smith Bloomfield returned here from New York in 1839, and became a prominent citizen

Dr. Wm. Martin, who had so long practiced here, died in 1839, and Ezra Mundy and Lewis Campbell within a year or two after. The loss of all these was severely felt by this community. Dr. Hall, who had resided here from about 1830, had removed to Newark, N.J., but a little time previous.

Dr. Nelson Stelle settled here in 1835, but removed to New York about 1838. I knew him as a noble-hearted and successful practitioner, and, with numerous friends, mourned his death in 1864. Dr. Crane succeeded him, but only remained a year, and then removed to Orange, where he still resides. Dr. C.H. Schapps then settled here, and after practicing for six or seven years, removed to Perth Amboy, and afterward to Williamsburgh, N.Y., where he is still an active and efficient physician.

I cannot account for these frequent medical removals, except that the peculiar healthiness of the place, while it was sustaining to others, made it quite impracticable for doctors to attempt to survive and make a living. "To live and let live," you know, is reasonable even for a physician.

During most of this period Dr. Jacob Martin resided here. He was a man of good medical education, but devoted himself to practice only to a limited extent. In his old age he has recently removed to live with his son, at Elizabethport.

We are now brought to the period which may be included in a decade reaching from 1840 to 1850. These years afford little so marked as to require particular and extended notice of the chronicler, and yet are easily recognized as characterized by steady and substantial increase in real and material prosperity.

In the whole neighborhood round about there was a gradual improvement of lands, and of buildings upon them; of roads and facilities of access; of the people, as to intelligence, and of the immediate village, by the addition of a few houses and the repair and adornment of those already erected.

A new railroad station was made at the road crossing by the old grave-yard, in 1841, and two or three houses built between it and J.J. Clarkson's store.

The Post-office was changed from Upper Metuchen, and R.R. Freeman appointed Postmaster, July 23d, 1841. He was succeeded, July 3d 1845, by Ezekiel Merritt. The appointment since to date has been successively held by J.J. Clarkson, Thomas Van Siclen, Freeman Edgar, Ezekiel Merritt and J.E. Van Geisen.

Captain Nathan Robins, a merchant of New York, but formerly of Monmouth County, N.J., removed here in 1840 and the branches of his family as represented by N. Robins, Hon. A. Robins and Wright Robins, have ever since been prominently identified with us.



A ca. 1925 view of Robins Hall on Main Street, built by Nathan Robins in 1873. Over the years it has housed functions such as post office, theatre, ballroom, library, and meeting hall in addition to commercial spaces.

New stores were opened at the corner now occupied by J.J. Clarkson, another by Mr. L. Thomas, near where Mr. Gilmer now lives, and one by Ezekiel Merritt, at the station.

The old, unpainted school-house was moved away, to give place (1842) to the present one, long used both for a school and a lecture-room.

The Rev. Mr. Hunt preached in the Presbyterian church as before until his resignation in 1847, and in 1848 the Rev. Peter H. Burghart was settled here. The present Parsonage was built at that time.

***Continued in the Next Issue***



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](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org). Although our archives are not conducive to browsing, if we have any relevant information we will be pleased to arrange an appointment to assist you with your search.



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Tyreen Reuter, *Nannygoats* Editor

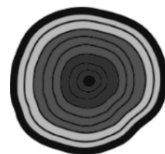
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The name of the newsletter, "**Nannygoats**," is taken from the title of a collection of **anecdotes**, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area, 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 preserving so much of our local history.

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

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Public Hours  
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37 Christie  
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The **Thomas Edison Center** museum offers guided tours to individuals, families, corporations, scout programs, schools, summer camps, and senior groups.

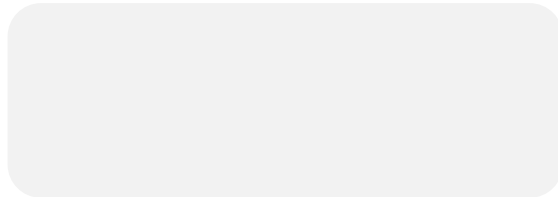
We book private tours for groups of 12 or more on other days in advance when available.

Visit our website for more information about other programs, volunteering, memberships, and much more.

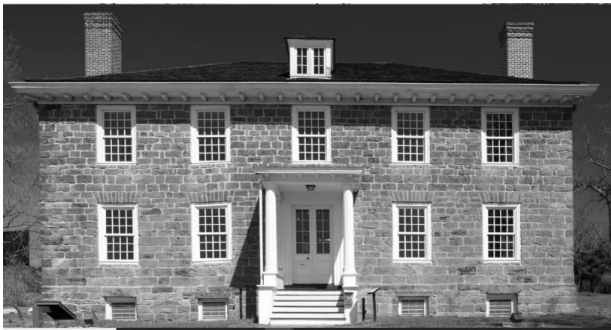
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**Metuchen, NJ 08840**



**Help the Society save the Past for the Future by becoming a member! Visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) to download a membership form or join online.**



Ever wanted to travel back in time? In Middlesex County, you can do just that, for free - no DeLorean required! The Cornelius Low House/Middlesex County Museum, built in 1741 for wealthy merchant Cornelius Low, is not only one of the best examples of Georgian architecture in New Jersey, but it also hosts rotating exhibits about New Jersey history. The current exhibit, running through June 28, 2020, is ***Mid-Century New Jersey: The Garden State in the 1950s***. So, you can visit the 1740s and 1950s all in one short trip!

The museum is located at 1225 River Road in Piscataway and admission to the site is free. They are open year-round excluding Holidays, Rutgers Football game days, and Rutgers graduation (they are located very close to Rutgers Stadium). For more information contact [artsandhistory@co.middlesex.nj.us](mailto:artsandhistory@co.middlesex.nj.us), call 732-745-3030, or text CULTURE to 56512.

## **SAVE THE DATES!**

### **MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORY FAIR**

**Saturday, May 16, 2020**

**10am to 4pm**

**at**

**East Jersey Old Town  
1050 River Rd, Piscataway**

### **METUCHEN COUNTRY FAIR**

**Saturday, October 3, 2020**

**10am to 4pm**

**in**

**Downtown Metuchen**