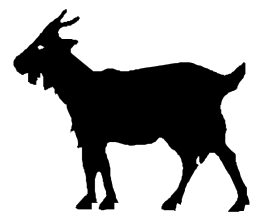


# Nannygoats



Vol. 16, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2018

On August 16, 2017, the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society conducted an oral history interview with 96-year-old Paul Lowman Jr., a former resident who was born in Menlo Park and grew up in Metuchen during the Depression. Lowman was forthcoming about many aspects of his life and shared his interesting connection to Thomas Alva Edison. Lowman's father, Paul Lowman Sr., was working as a signalman for the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) when he applied for a part-time job in ca. 1918-1919 as a caretaker of the abandoned Thomas Edison laboratory in Menlo Park. The family lived in an empty farmhouse located adjacent to Edison's former residence, and Paul Lowman Jr. was born on the farm table of that house on August 29, 1920.

Thomas Edison was a frequent visitor of the Lowman family and he even brought Paul Lowman Jr. a cup of ice cream for his second birthday party. The following are excerpts from the transcribed interview with Paul Lowman Jr. in which he recalls how his father came to work for Edison as well as his own memories of living on the Edison estate:

## MEMORIES OF MENLO PARK

...Menlo Park had a little railroad station there on the main line...and...for some reason or other he [*Paul Lowman Sr., father*] got off there one day to see what was, the place was like because he had time. And he was just, walk up around and he saw that Edison had a place up there and Thomas Edison had a sign on the main gate that he was looking for a caretaker. And so dad said that would be a nice extra job for him and he had time off, you know, from the railroad because he could, he was working different shifts on the railroad.

So he came and they made an application and Mr. Edison I believe hired him. Now when I say hired him, he took him on and paid him and I'm not sure whether dad was put on his payroll or whether Mr. Edison just took care of that himself personally as a personal caretaker of the estate. And the estate consisted of a farmhouse and two, well medium-sized, laboratories...

But anyhow, mother and dad lived in the farmhouse because the farmhouse somehow years later, a couple years later, two years later I guess it would be, 1918.



**Paul Lowman Jr.'s  
oral history interview  
by Jennifer Warren**

No, it would...yeah 1922, when I was about two years old, a man, now I can't tell, mother tell me that this was Mr. Edison, but I can't tell. I know a gentleman came and brought me a little ice cream, a little cup of ice cream, for my birthday, my second birthday. And mother said, "Mr. Edison brought the ice cream." Well, he, Mr. Edison, used to come once or twice a week and he always stopped in at the house and asked mother if everything was ok. And I got to see the man two or three times, so now I know I'm sure that it was Mr. Edison who brought me the ice cream...

And let me see now, well dad used to put me in his backpack, knapsack on his back and take me, because he had to walk around the farm, and check the...labs up there, everything was ok. And he used to put me in the backpack on his back and I walked around with him, or he carried me around. Cause we lived there then until I was about 4 years old, and dad got...well before that, we had a bad fire in that farmhouse, had a bad fire. The stove, the stove pipe or something got plugged up and dad was a great man for save...he was

*Continued on Page 4*

# David Graham Thomas House (1850-2018)

By Tyreen A. Reuter

The Society regrets to share the very sad news that the David Graham Thomas House at 59 Graham Avenue passed into memory this September, 2018 after a short battle with a bulldozer. Many of its long-time friends had been seriously concerned for its fate when it was put up for sale earlier this year, but had been heartened to hear of new owners interested in its longevity. However, that was not to be, and the iconic Victorian residence was swiftly and inelegantly removed from the neighborhood and street named for its builder. There was no chance to document it before it was gone, nor any chance to salvage a few architectural items by which to remember it.



Sadly, it was recently predeceased by the home of Thomas family members at 59 High Street, a Second Empire residence that also lost a short battle with new construction.

Thomas Park, named for the family and the site of Tommy's Pond, had no direct comment about the recent destruction, but did say "no one should be surprised now that the Graham Avenue bridge over the Greenway has suddenly taken ill and is now unusable; the first crossing there was constructed by David Graham Thomas many years ago and I believe his ghost may be having a bit of revenge."



## HISTORY MYSTERY?



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 Metuchen or Edison history, contact us at [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) with as many details as possible.

Although our archives are not conducive to browsing, if we have any relevant information we will be pleased to arrange, by appointment, for one of our Board members to assist you with your search.

## Planning Begins for the RARITAN TOWNSHIP SESQUICENTENNIAL 150th Year Anniversary Celebration

The year 2020 will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Raritan Township in 1870, the municipality that once encompassed areas which are now Edison, Highland Park, and Metuchen. Representatives from these municipalities will be seeking assistance from the Middlesex County Arts and History Division to help make a yearlong celebration to remember.

Planning yearlong events requires the support and insight of our three communities, and they are looking to form a committee of individuals from each community to plan and coordinate activities. If you are interested in possibly being involved, please reach out to the Society President, Kathleen Carlucci at [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).





# More Sand Hills of Bonhamtown!



Several readers have expressed how much they enjoyed George Muha's article about the Sand Hills of Bonhamtown in our last issue of *Nannygoats*. Even though we devoted a significant portion of that edition to his submission, we were unable to print all of Mr. Muha's images. Visit our website at [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) to see all of the text and accompanying images.



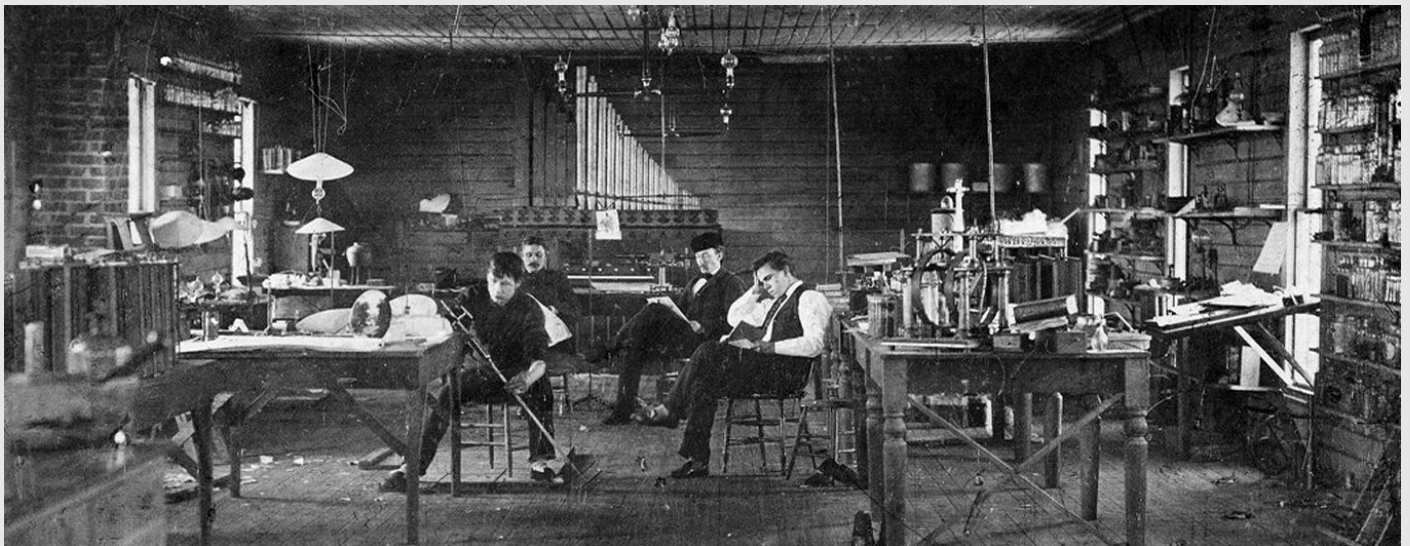
*"New" Society Publication Coming in 2019*

## *Boyhood Days & Recollections of Edison*

For many years the Society has sold reprints of Dr. David Trumbull Marshall's *Recollections of Boyhood Days in Old Metuchen* (or simply, *Boyhood Days*) and as we've reached the end of the inventory of the current printing, we discussed reprinting more. We decided to add an index and brief biography of the author, and in the course of the project realized that also including his *Recollections of Edison* would make the reprint a much more interesting and valuable local history resource. We plan to have this "new" combined edition available by Local History Day 2019, to be held at the Metuchen Public Library on February 10, 2019.

Marshall first published *Boyhood Days* in 1929, filling it with stories about his youth in the late nineteenth century in the village of Metuchen in Raritan Township, and remembrances of his family's contact with Thomas Alva Edison. Although Marshall was living in Queens, New York at the time, he made many of the limited run of 100 copies available in the Metuchen area. In 1930, he revised the text of *Boyhood Days* and reissued the book, again making it widely available in the Metuchen area. This revised version of the book had more text in certain areas and omitted much of what he had written about the natural environment of Long Island.

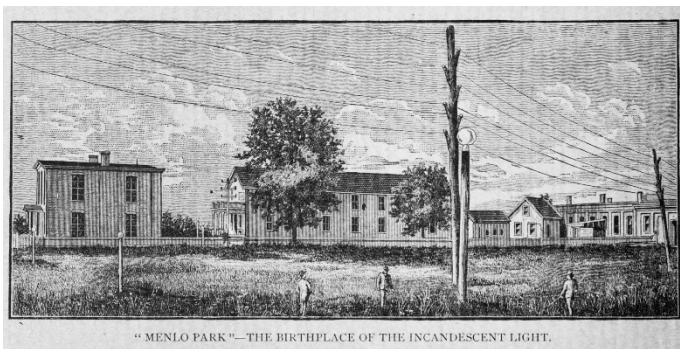
Around the same time that he was publishing his revised *Boyhood Days*, Marshall undertook another local history book project; *Recollections of Edison*, focusing entirely on remembrances of Thomas Alva Edison and his laboratories. For this new book, Marshall included several whole chapters that had already appeared in the revised edition of *Boyhood Days*, inserted new paragraphs of text into other chapters that had already appeared in *Boyhood Days*, and included several completely new chapters as well. He did not substantively alter any of the text reprinted from *Boyhood Days* in his *Recollections of Edison*; in many ways, the second book was simply an extension of the first, just focused much more on his contact with the "Wizard of Menlo Park." Marshall also included remembrances of Edison shared with him by former employees and local residents, and even a chapter about his 1930 visit with the famous inventor. Marshall died in 1931, just as *Recollections of Edison* was being released, and it has not been reprinted or available since, except through antiquarian booksellers.



Continued from "Memories..." on Page 1

great...he didn't like to hunt, you know he didn't want to shoot anything, but wouldn't like to go out with the dogs. So he raised little hunting dogs, you know. What do you call those little hunting dogs? Well anyhow, he had four little dogs, little puppies in a box in back of the kitchen stove and they wanted to go, he wanted to try and save them and the fireman told him no he couldn't go in, it was full of smoke and everything. And so he went over to the window and reached up and pulled the curtain down that was, which was on fire, and grabs the box and saved his four little puppies...

But in the meantime when he grabbed the light, the curtain, he burned his hand very bad in the center of his palm of his right hand and the neighbors thought it was just great. In those days, you put butter or grease or something on a burn and that was it, you know. So they put some butter on it and wrapped it up good and tight and it was three days later before he got to [unintelligible] the bandage off. And when he got it off, it was really in bad shape. So they're trying to paralyze his hand and he thought he was going to lose his job, but he could still maintain his job on the railroad. But they [*the railroad*] found out what happened to us and so they, his [*railroad*] boss felt sorry for him and he moved him up, transferred him from I think it was in the tower down in Rahway, it's either Rahway or Woodbridge, and he moved him up into the Metuchen tower.



Deed research indicates that the Lowman family had bought the farmhouse on August 4, 1922 for \$1,600 from Eva Elliott. Based on conversations with Mark Nonestied of the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Paul Lowman Jr. clarified that his parents did not live in Thomas Edison's mansion (sometimes called the farmhouse). His parents apparently lived and owned the caretaker's home, which stood to the right of Thomas Edison's mansion near Lincoln Highway. There is a newspaper article from the Metuchen Recorder that says that the Edison mansion burned to the ground ca. 1917-1918. It was ca. 1923 when the fire happened in the kitchen of the Lowman home (the caretaker's home). It is believed that the kitchen area in this building was rebuilt by Mr. Edison and the Lowmans continued to live there for a year or so before moving to Metuchen in 1924. The

*In another excerpt from the interview, Paul Lowman Jr. talks about the close relationship his father had with Thomas Edison:*

They were the best of friends...well that's how dad got the job, I guess. He just went up to him and spoke to him and Edison took him for a walk around, showed him what he would have to do. And dad said, "Yeah, that'd be fine," you know, and he was happy to find a place to live right there. He'd have a house to live. And Mr. Edison says that he was very happy to have somebody to come live in the house and take care of it, you know...

So, but he never had a bad word for Mr. Edison. He always had a good word for Mr. Edison. And mother did too because when he [*Thomas Edison*] used to come quite a few times, he'd come during the week when dad wasn't home or dad was at work. And he always made a business to stop at the house and see if everything was ok or if she needed anything, or if everything was ok or if she had any trouble with anything around the house, he would fix it for her or get it fixed. So he was very, very helpful as far as a caretaker goes. But no, him and dad were very good friends. And in fact, he was very unhappy with dad that he went and tried to get his puppies out and burned his hand and all like that. He said, "Let that place go." He said, "We can always build another house." Course he wasn't there at the time of the fire, he was back in [*West*] Orange, but when he came up the next day, then my dad, I guess mother and dad went and stayed with neighbors. Well she had two kids then, my older sister and me, and I think we managed...he had a visit... yeah I think it was about three days we had to be out of the house and he had carpenters come in and rebuild. It [*the fire*] didn't burn the house down, but it did a lot of damage inside so they just tore a lot of the inside and rebuilt the inside...



Lowman family sold the property in 1926 for \$100 to the Electrical Testing Labs, part of the Edison Pioneers.

In addition to his recollections on Thomas Edison and Menlo Park, Paul Lowman Jr. shared many stories of his time in Metuchen, where he lived with his family at 22 East Walnut Street from 1924 until his graduation from Metuchen High School in 1938.

As a young boy, Paul Lowman Jr. worked as a newspaper delivery boy for the New Brunswick Times. He won a local contest in south Metuchen to see who could get the most newspaper customers, and he received a new bicycle for his victory that he used to deliver the newspapers before school. He also used the bike to deliver meats from a local butcher named Paul Domokos at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Main Street.

As a teenager, Paul Lowman Jr. worked across the street from the Costa's Ice Cream factory at a printing place known as "Bradstreet & Woolever" (15 Pearl Street). Other jobs he had during this time included delivering bottles of milk before school from Thornall's dairy (run by Jim Heaton, grandson of William M. Thornall). His first official job was working for a German printer at a print shop near the corner of Main Street and Amboy Avenue. For about three years during high school, he caddied at the Metuchen Golf & Country Club along Plainfield Avenue during the afternoons when he wasn't working at the print shop. He used the money he earned caddying to buy his first car (1933 Chevy) for \$50.

Paul Lowman Jr. and his family were members of the First Baptist Church at Clinton Place. Lowman was also a long-time member of the Boy Scouts, starting out in the Cub Scouts at 8 years old as part of Troop 15 that met in the First Presbyterian Church. He and his Troop participated in many Memorial Day parades and completed numerous tests and activities at the nearby Roosevelt Park. One year, Paul got the most merit badges and won a free week at Camp Sakawawin, a camp rented by the Middlesex County Scouts, in Blairstown. Paul has fond memories of the camp and worked there during the summers as an activities director. The camp had a large lake that was used for swimming and it was there that he met his wife, Elinor Beegle, in 1938. Lowman would go on to become a scoutmaster for Troop 15, but he stopped working for the Boy Scouts following World War II.

After graduating high school, Paul Lowman Jr. worked for the Public Service in Piscataway, and got a night job at Cornell-Dubilier in South Plainfield. After he got married to Elinor Beegle on December 22, 1940, he moved back to Metuchen and worked at Squibb's & Son pharmaceutical plant in New Brunswick. He lived in an apartment owned by the mother of Walter Bradstreet (former employer) at 127 Main Street. His first child, a daughter Diane, was born in 1942.

Paul Lowman Jr. was drafted by the Army in September 1944, but he hurt his back on his way to Europe. He was transferred to Camp Shanks, New York for recovery. His service ended in 1946 and he moved to Blairstown, NJ. In Blairstown, he and his wife worked for Smith Hardware Store until taking over the company in 1960. He retired in 1985. Paul Lowman Jr. now lives in Palmetto, Florida.

We want to extend a large thank you to Paul Lowman Jr. for taking the time to share his recollections of Thomas Edison and Metuchen. The information he has provided has been an invaluable addition to our oral history collection. We would also like to thank his niece, Christine Beegle, for facilitating the interview and donating the enclosed images. The full transcription of Lowman's interview is available for viewing at the Grimstead Room Archives.



Images: Page 1, Mr. Lowman in December, 2016. Page 4, Menlo Park, ca. 1886. Page 5, Mr. Lowman in 1947 and Paul and Elinor (Beegle) Lowman, ca. 1985.

*Many thanks to Society Archivist Jennifer Warren for her work interviewing Mr. Paul Lowman, Jr last year and providing these excerpts from the transcription of the conversation. The full transcription is available in the Society's archives.*

# METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (IX)

The following is the ninth 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 Society President Dominic T. Walker for transcribing this document.



*Oak Tree School, before 1909*

## 1901 City Directory, Column 10

Below is the tenth columns 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.

Martin John C. insurance, h Spring  
 Martin Jacob C. h Spring  
 Martin Walter H. h High  
 Martin William sr. retired, h Martin ave  
 Martin William jr. laborer, h Lincoln ave  
 Mason J. G. (Rev.), pastor Presbyterian Church, h Wood-  
 bridge ave  
 Melick George T. bookkeeper, h Main  
 Melick W. bus. N. Y. h Main  
 Menzino Felix, pedler of iron, h Centre  
 Middlesex Water Co. Robert M. Kellogg supt. Main  
 Miliken John, h Middlesex ave  
 Moekridge M. P. bus. N. Y. h Main  
 Molinean L. E. bus. N. Y. h Main  
 Mook Charles E. bus. N. Y. h Amboy ave  
 Mook Milton C. bus. N. Y. h LeGrande ave  
 Mook Walter T. bus. N. Y. h Hillside ave  
 Morby Brazier, bus. N. Y. h Railroad ave  
 Morris Charles, teamster, h Main c Durham ave  
 Morris Edward, bookkeeper, h LeGrande ave  
 Morris Lebbens H. well driver, h William  
 Morris William A. (Campbell & Morris) h Main  
 Moss Eugene, bus. N. Y. h Homer pl  
 Moss Harry, clerk, h Homer pl  
 Moss Joseph L. sr. justice of peace, Main, h Homer pl  
 Moss Joseph L. jr. bus. N. Y. h Woodbridge ave  
 Mundy Albert, laborer, h Main  
 Mundy Benjamin T. h Main  
 Mundy Charles sr. lawyer, h New Brunswick ave  
 Mundy Charles jr. emp L. V. R. R. h New Brunswick ave  
 Mundy Enas, h Amboy ave  
 Mundy Ezra H. emp P. R. R. h William  
 Mundy Frank, carpenter, h Amboy ave  
 Mundy Fred. hardware and groceries, Main, h Linden ave  
 Mundy Isaiah, h Middlesex ave  
 Mundy Nelson, h Middlesex ave  
 Mundy Samuel, h Main  
 Mundy Whittfield, emp P. R. R. h Durham ave  
 Newman James, h Essex  
 Newton Charles L.

Bethune Duncan, the brother of Chief Justice Duncan of South Carolina, and so well remembered by many of us, commenced teaching school at Oak Tree October, 1819, and continued his service there for forty-five years. He was born in Boston June 6th, 1786, and is therefore now in his eighty-fourth year. As a clerk in counting-houses in Philadelphia, New York, Savannah and Charleston, he had added to a good English education excellent business training. The house he served sent him to India, and after mercantile employment there for a year, he returned to find his father dead, his employer broken and himself without funds. "But," says he, in a letter to me, "I did not despair. The world was all before me. I had all my limbs in good order, and left Jersey City in good heart, with two shillings and three pence in my pocket."

Seeking employment of some kind, he came to the house of Major Frazee Ayres, who directed him to Mr. Henry Campbell, with whom he staid [sic] until Mr. Ayres secured him an appointment as teacher. He had found his place, for he loved books and children, was competent in all he undertook to teach, and many a man and woman of this vicinity received from him thorough knowledge and impress of character, which has done much to make them valued and efficient citizens. Elegant in penmanship, exact in reading, spelling, arithmetic and bookkeeping; a good disciplinarian, and devoted to his work, he could not but succeed. All the money he could spare he spent in flowers and in books, giving presents, circulating his library, and delighting to ornament the gardens of his patrons with slips and bulbs from his choicest selections. He was ever welcome at the homes of his pupils; at every wedding was always a favorite guest, and in single blessedness enjoyed his life among us until increasing years made rest and recreation desirable. To his pleasant home in the family of his sister, Mrs. Dr. Adams, of Waltham, Mass, he is followed by the grateful good wishes of hundreds of scholars and friends.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century occurred our second war with Great Britain, which, by the high prices prevailing for many articles raised by our farmers, was, in a pecuniary point of view, an advantage to our community. I remember well hearing John Hampton, Sr., who was then a leading and successful farmer, tell how he made money very fast by selling wood at fourteen dollars a cord; and other things were somewhat in proportion.

***Continued in the Next Issue***





## Colonial Cemetery Cleanup

During the summer of 2018, some much-needed tree maintenance work was completed by the Borough of Metuchen in the "Old Colonial Cemetery" on Main Street. This allowed the Society to host a volunteer cleanup day on Sunday, September 23, 2018. Approximately 75 volunteers participated in raking leaves, pulling weeds, and hauling away dead branches. Next up are repairs to the stones vandalized in August 2016 and additional maintenance work done in cooperation with the Borough. If you would like to volunteer or donate to the restoration fund, contact: [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).

*Photography courtesy of Mayor Jonathan Busch, who joined the cleanup team with his family and several Metuchen Borough council members.*

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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 organization.*

## WWI Merch!

Looking for that perfect ensemble to wear to your next Armistice soiree? The Society has the answer...

**Front**



**Back**



## \$15 Tees

*Army Tan with Khaki Green ink*



## Postcards 50¢

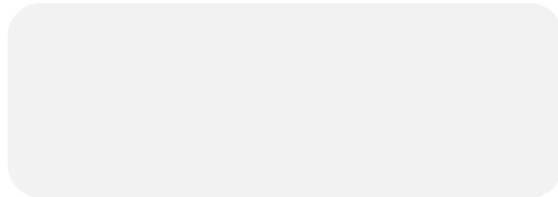
*Reproduction Arsenal postcard with history on the reverse.*

**To order online, visit**

**[www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)**



**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!*

## **ARMISTICE DAY CENTENNIAL**

**Sunday November 11, 2018**  
**10:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m.**

**Fugle-Hummer American Legion, Post #65,**  
**17 Calvin Place, Metuchen**

- Browse Raritan Arsenal photographs
- View WWI maps, artifacts, & displays
- WWI Howitzer exhibit
- Ceremony honoring residents of Metuchen & Edison (Raritan) who were killed during the *War to End All Wars*.
- Bell Ringing at 11:00 am

*On the Eleventh hour on the Eleventh Day  
of November 1918 World War I ended with  
an Armistice.*

**Save the Date!**

**ANNUAL MEETING**  
**Sunday, January 13, 2018**

**Metuchen-Edison**

## **LOCAL HISTORY DAY**

**February 10, 2019**  
**(Sunday)**

**Come view our photo albums and special  
exhibits, order reprints, purchase Society  
merchandise, and commune with fellow  
history fans at the Metuchen Public Library.**