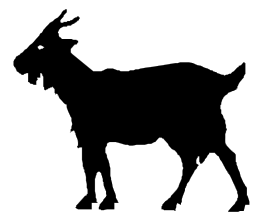


Nannygoats



Vol. 15, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2017

Many thanks to Society Director & Archive Committee Chairperson, Byron Sondergard, for the following article about one of his favorite childhood haunts. For many years Mr. Sondergard owned a

bookshop on Main Street, and has recently co-edited the Society's original publication, "Greetings From Metuchen and Edison, A century-long anecdotal adventure in postcards and ephemera."

To anyone of a certain age who grew up in Metuchen, the mention of Metuchen Center will bring a smile for the memories, and a tear because it is gone.

As a kid, I of course had no frame of reference, historical or otherwise, and just assumed that whatever good things I experienced in Metuchen would always be here, including Metuchen Center (located at 400 Main Street, the current location of Hailey's Harp & Pub). It seemed to me, a kid in the 1950s and early 1960s, that Metuchen Center had just about everything any kid (and many adults) could want, including, but not limited to, plastic models of cars, military vehicles, and airplanes made by Revell, Monogram, and probably others, art supplies, cap guns, dolls, games, model trains, athletic equipment and sporting goods, film and photography equipment, hunting and fishing supplies, etc., etc., ad infinitum. About the only

THE GLORIOUS, WONDERFUL WORLD OF METUCHEN CENTER

By Byron Sondergard



non-candy or ice cream thing a kid could want that they didn't have was comic books, but they did have magazines related to the items they sold, such as model railroading, and books teaching how to

draw and paint. Boys (I'm not certain about girls) got their high school "gym suit" here, consisting of blue shorts with lettering and a number, and a white t-shirt with lettering and a number. And Santa was here for a few Christmases, which really increased our chances of getting what we wanted, because Santa was also

available to listen to kids' wishes across the street at Morris Stores. In later years (1970s or 1980s?), I think the focus began to turn more toward sneakers and uniforms, and Metuchen Center still carries on, as Metuchen Center, Inc./Garden State Apparel in Sayreville.

Continued on Page 3



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.

Continued from "Metuchen Center" on Page 1

Thanks to a Facebook post that included a picture of Metuchen Center from the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, Martin Fishkin, the son of the owner, Joe Fishkin, supplied the following comments and picture,

"That's my brother Ken (left) and me in front of Mom (Zona) and Dad (Joe) in the picture. We more or less grew up in the store, straightening boxes when we were young then graduating to ringing up Instamatic film and flashcubes during the Christmas rush. My grandfather and his brother started Fishkin Brothers in Perth Amboy in 1920 or so (it only just closed in 2004, <https://www.photography-forums.com/.../fishkin-bros.../>). Metuchen Center would have opened not long after Dad got out of the Navy, 1945 or so, no later than 1950, and was owned by my Uncle Jack (Glaser) and him. I don't remember exactly when the store closed – it was certainly in business through the 70's and 80's. Metuchen Center started as a narrow slice of storefront selling liquor and cigarettes, then gradually expanded to adjacent space until it became the place you see in these photos. Here's a detail you might not remember: for a few years there was a Santa Claus

available for children's requests the second floor. My Mom and Dad lived upstairs in that space when they were first married. Contrary to the widely-held belief of our classmates, we did not get more toys than other kids. In fact, our recollection is that we never got any. The truth lies somewhere in between.

One of the perks of having a father in the sporting goods business was that we got to go to the annual sporting goods fair at the New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan. Hard to believe now, but Spaulding, Rawlings, Wilson, Adirondack Bats and others would set up suites in the hotel - you could wander from room to room and might find yourself face-to-face with Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, Roger Maris, Bart Starr, or Stan Musial. My Facebook profile picture, which I suppose should be updated, is me with Willie Mays and Yogi Berra, circa 1964."

Martin Fishkin also supplied the photograph at right with the following caption; "A red letter day at Metuchen Center. Joe Fishkin (store owner and my Dad), second from the right, entered a contest for Agfa photo dealers and won all the things you see on the sidewalk - golf clubs, bridge table and chairs, stereo console, a white fox stole, an outboard motor, a 1960 Studebaker Lark (bright yellow), and more."



A friend of Martin Fishkin's commented "My God. You grew up in "Leave It to Beaver." Metuchen Center is one of the key reasons that I consider that to be a perfect compliment, and close to the truth.

To my knowledge, Martin Fishkin's photograph relating to the AGFA contest and the other two shown here from the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society are the only ones available of Metuchen Center. If anyone has any others, of the exterior or the interior, please consider sharing them with the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society.



Images: Page 1 top, late 1950s/early 1960s Frey-Sen photograph in the Society's archives. Page 1 bottom, advertisement from The Metuchen Recorder. Page 3 middle, as supplied and described by Martin Fishkin. Page 3 bottom, 1970s image of Main Street in the Society's archives.

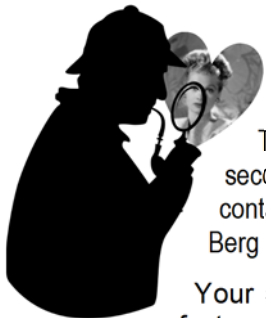


On The Streets Where We Live



The Society has begun compiling a list of the origins behind the street names in our area. This is a work in progress, so if you know the story behind the meaning of your street name, please contact us at info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org.

- **Alden Avenue** – named for 19th century resident Henry Mills Alden, the editor of Harpers & a close friend of Mark Twain.
- **Amboy Avenue** - was the road to Perth Amboy, and was once called Le Grande Avenue.
- **Buchanan** - named for the Buchanan family; Dolly Buchanan's oral history is in the archives.
- **Durham Avenue** - likely named for a Reverend Durham mentioned in Dr. Hunt's 1870 history of Metuchen.
- **Eggert Avenue** – named for a large property owner.
- **Grove Avenue** - was once called Dark Lane.
- **Hampton Street** - most likely named for the large property owners, the Hamptons, who owned a great deal of the Metuchen area in the eighteenth & nineteenth centuries.
- **Herold Place** - possibly named for local surveyor Walter J. Herold, father of Cpt. Richard Herold (1944-1972), killed in Laos.
- **Hofer/Hoefer Court** - named for the Hoefer/Hofer family who later lived in the 18th century house on the court.
- **Inn Place** - named for the former Hillside Inn/Metuchen Inn (not to be confused with the current Metuchen Inn on Middlesex). Built by Nathan Robins, it was a large Italianate Estate bounded by Main, Hillside, Highland, and Robins Place.
- **John Street** - as with Hampton Street, most likely named for the large property owners, the Hamptons, who owned a great deal of the Metuchen area in the late 1700s.
- **Kempson Street** - named for Dr. Kempson who lived on Woodbridge Avenue near the intersection with this street.
- **Library Place** - was originally named "Walnut Place." When the library was built, it was changed to avoid confusion with the Walnut Street off south Main Street.
- **Linsley Place** - named for former property owner G.H. Linsley.
- **Mason** - named for the Mason family, one of whom was the Rev. Dr. James G. Mason.
- **Moraine Road** - named for the terminal moraine near that street.
- **Norris** - named for the Norris Family, one of whom was Helen Norris Prickitt, an early editor of *The Metuchen Recorder*.
- **Pierson Avenue** - likely named for the large and notable Pierson family. Aylin Pierson and his father John Noble Pierson were prolific architects. Truman Pierson was a writer, among other things, and self-described at one point for having nicknamed Metuchen "The Brainy Borough."
- **Robins Place** - named for the Robins Family, particularly Nathan Robins (see Inn Place); his large residence, built 1896, still stands at 443 Middlesex Avenue.
- **Rolfe Place** - named for landowner Isaiah Rolfe.
- **Rose Street** – named not for the flower, but for property owner William Rose.
- **Spear Street** - named for the owners of "Uplands," Ezra Holden Spear and Emma Fennell Spear.
- **Talmadge Avenue** - named for an early property owner & family.
- **Upland Avenue** – (see Spear Street)
- **Volkmar Place** - named for artist & ceramist Charles Volkmar.
- **Woodbridge Avenue** - the road to Woodbridge, which was named not for a crossing but for a Reverend Woodbridge...so, neither is named for a bridge made of wood.



We Love Lucy, Now More Than Ever!

There is nothing more thrilling than chasing a case for years, and then suddenly... a break! And not just a solid second-hand witness, but a firsthand account! Upon reading our Fall 2016 issue of *Nannygoats*, the Society was contacted by Leonard "Lenny" Berg, and he shared the following story. Lenny was half of the Real Estate firm, the Berg Brothers. Many longtime residents remember well both Lenny and Kenny Berg.

Your story is close but not on target. The facts are as follows - Lucy was separated from Desi at the time and was my brother Kenny's girlfriend. They were spending the weekend at my home and I decided to get some Chinese food for dinner. My brother was out somewhere so Lucy opted to take a ride with me. Since Ted Eng and I were partners in Soo San (Lucky Coin) it was obviously the place to go. We were sitting at a table waiting for our order when Bill came in. We were friends so he came directly over to our table. I introduced him to Lucy and told her who he was (owner of *The Criterion* newspaper) and without skipping a beat he said, as closely as I can remember "I can't tell you what a pleasure and thrill it is to meet you. I don't mean to intrude but it would

really make my day if you would allow me to interview you and you have my word it will be off the record." Lucy looked at me for comment and I said, "it's up to you but he's really a good friend. Bill conducted one of the best interviews I've ever witnessed. When he was finished, she complimented him and jokingly asked "what are you doing in a small town like Metuchen?" Our order then came and so we said goodbye and left. On the way home Lucy commented that the "off the record" interview would probably be front page of *The Criterion's* next issue. I said I hoped so but that knowing Bill and the importance of his word to him that he'd probably settle for the accomplishment and the memory and so he did.

- Leonard (Lenny) Berg



Dive Right Into 1967...

The Space Race, Summer of Love, Cold War, and Vietnam. Humans had not yet walked on the Moon, Lyndon B. Johnson was President, Jimmy Hoffa went to prison, and Stalin's daughter defected to the United States.

Muhammed Ali declined military service, Elvis Presley & Priscilla Beaulieu were married in Las Vegas, The Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the first issue of the *Rolling Stone* was published in San Francisco, and Jimi Hendrix released *Are You Experienced*. Closer to home, JFK Memorial Hospital opened, there was violent racial conflict in Plainfield and Newark, and the Metuchen Municipal Pool opened.

Based on a review of back issues of *The Recorder* and records in the archives of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, it appears that push for a municipal pool in Metuchen began in earnest in the very early 1960s.

Advocates formed the Metuchen Municipal Pool Association and lobbied the public and Borough Council to pass an ordinance for the pool's creation as a safe, healthy, and wholesome space for local youth to spend the summer. A number of undeveloped tracts in the Borough were considered as potential sites, but eventually a site in Edgar Woods was chosen as the preferred location. In 1963, a large, two-page insert was included in *The Criterion* outlining the benefits and support by the Metuchen Recreation Commission.

However, the proposal was met with opposition, organized by a group called "Citizens for Sound Government." These opponents feared high construction and operating costs, potential crime risks, and increased traffic. However, support for the

initiative was just as strong and over the next four years the number of advocates continued to grow. The Race Relations Council, Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce, and a variety of Borough leaders spoke publicly in favor of the pool's benefits, and it was touted by many businesses as an amenity for the community. This support was buoyed along the way by successful and financially solvent municipal pool efforts in New Jersey towns such as Springfield (1962), Millburn (1962), Hillside (1964), and Cranford (1965).

In early 1967, Metuchen Municipal Pool Association doubled down on the campaign and it was finally approved by the Borough Council. The approval was challenged, and then subsequently sent to a special public referendum:

"Should the Borough of Metuchen construct a municipal swimming pool in a portion of Edgar Park owned by the Borough of Metuchen, the estimated cost of which would be \$305,000, which would be financed by a municipal bond issue and be paid for by seasonal and daily admission fees of Metuchen residents on a proposed self-liquidating basis?"

On March 6, 1967, 3,234 Metuchenites went to the polls and voted in the issue. The final tally was 1,748 in favor, 1,477 opposed. Councilman Donald Wernik said he was "never more proud of Metuchen than I am today" and that he was overjoyed that the community didn't "fall prey to the last-minute injection of racial and religious" arguments.

The architect selected for the project was John MacWilliam, and Paddock Pools, founded 1947 and still in operation today, was chosen for the construction. Work began soon after the vote and with the opening day scheduled for July 4th.

Membership Fees	
1. Family membership, Husband, wife and children .	\$60.00 per season
2. Members of household over 21, part of family membership	10.00 per season
3. Individual membership	35.00 per season
4. Senior Citizen membership	15.00 per season
DAILY ADMISSION RATE:	
Monday thru Friday	
Children 4 years thru 15 years	\$.75
Adults and children 16 years and older	1.50
Saturday - Sunday and Holidays	
All persons 4 years old and up	2.00

Season subscriptions for families were set at \$60 per year, or \$100 for two years. Daily admissions were \$2 on weekends, and 75 cents for children and \$1.50 for adults on weekdays.

Unfortunately, the Spring and

and Metuchen's Municipal Pool!

early Summer weather of 1967 was not cooperative and resulted in a delay in the grand opening of the pool from July 4 to August 1. But, as reported in *The Recorder*,

June was cold, July was showery, but August 1 dawned sparkingly warm — a perfect day to go swimming... a perfect day for the opening of the Metuchen municipal pool.

At 10:08 Tuesday morning, Mayor Thomas Weber cut the ribbon opening the pool to its first users — 1,500 kids from Metuchen's seven playgrounds. Sharing the ribbon-cutting was Councilman Eugene Haley.

In a short opening speech, Mayor Weber termed Haley the "man more responsible than anyone for this pool. No one has devoted more of his energy, more of his life to this project." Haley said later, "The faces of those kids were the payoff for all the work." Surveying the hundreds of people using the pool Tuesday evening, Haley said, "These are the people who backed us and withstood the five years of frustration with us. They're the type of people who say, if this is for the kids, then we're for it.' Metuchen is a kids' town, and the attitude of the people in supporting the school budgets and in supporting the pool shows it."

Haley added that pool users had complimented him the most on the large size of the pool and on its overall appearance. After months of delays due to rain, swimmers were greeted Tuesday with a sparkling L-shaped pool surrounded by green sod, and with a wading pool, complete with a fountain, for the small fry. More than 3,600 residents used

the pool the first day, Manager Ed Adams reported at the end of Tuesday's opening.

In 1968 efforts to construct the bathhouse ramped up, and in 1969 — following a change in Borough Government — daily admissions were eliminated, a move which was vigorously opposed by the Race Relations Council and those responsible for bringing the pool about.



But, despite that added restriction, it seems that compared with what was happening nationally at the time, the fact that municipal pools were being constructed at all in the 1960s in New Jersey was unusual. To try and put this in perspective, the Society contacted

nationally-renowned historian Jeff Wiltse, author of *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, to get a sense of where this fit into the story.

Wiltse graciously responded, and reiterated that, when viewed within the national context, it would have been unusual for white residents to support the funding of a public pool in 1967 that they intended to be racially integrated, and "that it occurred in Metuchen and other surrounding communities, there must have been a pocket of progressive-minded people and strong progressive leadership in the area."

And for that leadership, founding Metuchen Pool Association Members, Metuchen's children and families from the past fifty years thank you *very, very* much.

Compiled for the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Metuchen Municipal Pool (August 1, 2017) by Tyreen A. Reuter in July 2017. All errors and omissions are solely the responsibility of the author, not the Society.



METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (VII)

The following is the seventh 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.

In the house, since enlarged, and now occupied by the Misses Deborah and Eunice Bonham Ayres, lived a Mrs. Allen, and on it was a sign, "Allentown'—Cake and Beer Sold Here." Between the long meeting which, according to New England custom, was held morning and afternoon, with half an hour or an hour intermission, it was not unusual for the young men to get a ginger cake and a glass of beer at this famous restaurant. Some, however, of the older people brought a lunch with them, and at a little later period someone took up the plan of driving to the meeting-house, just as the first meeting was out, with some plain refreshments. In these days women as well as men sometimes rode to church on horseback, and now and then voted at town elections as was their privilege.

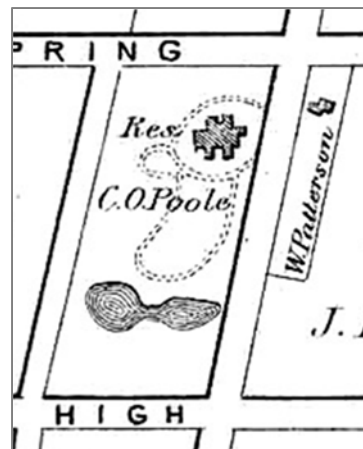


Miss Deborah Ayres, our oldest inhabitant, was born in 1780, near where Mr. Christol's house now is, and where her grandfather then lived. He built there a blacksmith shop, that her father might learn the trade, which he did, and after a time moved the shop to where John Talmage now resides, and lived there until his death, in 1836.

Benajah Campbell occupied the house where Samuel Durham now lives, but it then stood over in the field a little to the south-west of that point. He was trustee of the Vineyard school, and Ezra Ayres once told me that, having finished his arithmetic, and being a fair penman, when about fifteen years of age, in the scarcity of teachers, Mr. Campbell invited him to take charge of the school, but not thinking he had learning enough for that, he declined.

Doctor Melancthon Freeman, who lived on the Ezra Mundy place beyond Pumpton, was the chief doctor, and Dr. Nathan Martin, the grandfather of Gershom Martin, who lived near the present residence of C.O. Poole, also shared the practice.

With these items as to roads, church, shops, stores, school-houses, and a few residences, and with the addition of a half dozen small farm-houses within the circuit of a mile, and mostly reached by lanes or short roads, you can easily picture to yourself the Metuchen of 1800 in its undeveloped infancy—having a good character, but not very much of it, and though having some germ of its future, not as yet having started into any very demonstrative development.



Images

Top: 1930s Grimstead photograph of the Ayers-Allen House in Metuchen, home in 1870 to Deborah & Eunice Ayers. Left: 1794 tavern license on file at the New Jersey State Archives. Bottom: Knocker on the Dutch door of the Ayers-Allen House. Right: Excerpt of an 1876 map of Metuchen showing the residence of Cyrus O. Poole, which is still extant on Rolfe Place.

To the Honourable the Court of General Quarter Sessions
Held at New Brunswick in and for the County of
Middlesex
The Humble Petition of
Ezekiel Rogers
We the Subscribers Inhabitants of the Bridge
and County of Middlesex do hereby humbly recommend
P. Ezekiel Rogers as a fit suitable Person to keep a
Publick House or Inn where he now lives and has
for Years past occupied it for that Purpose
Therefore We the Subscribers Humbly Pray
your Honours Will grant him the said Petitioners
Petition to Continue to keep a Tavern for the year
Ensuing as he is provided With two good Horse
fitted With Saddles and every other necessary
agreeable to law
and We as so Duty Bound Shall here
October Term 1794 Pray
Melancthon Freeman
Joseph Randolph
Eugene Campbell
Daniel Compton
Ezra Ayres
Shelton Compton
Thomas Freeman





Louise Hollingshead Stochel Cabin Dedication

On September 9, 2017, the Louise Hollingshead Stochel cabin was dedicated at Kiddie Keep Well Camp. A cadre of campers greeted attendees with songs as Hollingshead & Stochel family members gathered on the porch of the cabin renamed in honor of former counselor Louise Hollingshead Stochel. Following her passing in 2013, the family asked that donations be made in her honor to the Camp, which she had supported and cherished during her lifetime. Following the ceremony, Camp staff and campers treated the group to a tour and refreshments.

For those not familiar with the camp, Kiddie Keep Well began as a Fresh Air Focused Camp in 1924, dedicated to providing summertime fun and enjoyment to the less privileged children of Middlesex County. Since then the camp has grown to serve over six- hundred children and seniors each year and over 50,000 youth since its origin. It is the only camp of its kind in NJ and one of the oldest in the nation.



Published by
The Metuchen-Edison
Historical Society
P.O. Box 61
Metuchen, NJ 08840

Board of Trustees
Dominic Walker, President
Steve Reuter, Vice President
N. Ann Walker, Treasurer
Walter R. Stochel, Jr.,
Corresponding Secretary

Additional Directors
Kathleen Carlucci
Russell Gehrum
Evelyn Grant
Andy Kupersmit
Tom McKiernan
Tyreen Reuter, *Nannygoats* Editor
Gerry Rice
Byron Sondergard
Frederick Wolke

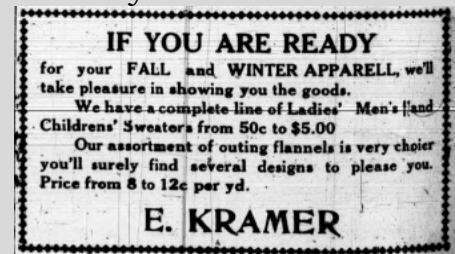
The name of the newsletter, "**Nannygoats**," is taken from the title of a collection of **anecdotes**, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area, mostly during the 1930s, which make up 80 percent 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.

New in the Archives

The Society continues to be the lucky recipient of wonderful local history documents and ephemera.

- This past summer we received an oversize file box of documents and clippings collected over the years by former Mayor Donald Wernik.



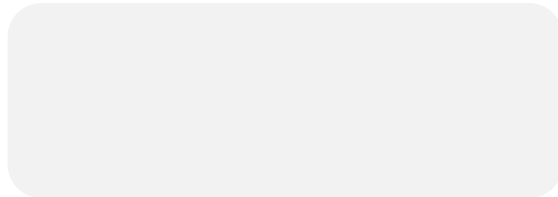
- Ernest Docs, Sr. donated a suitcase full of letters, receipts, photos, and cards that he had found many years prior in the attic of the former Kramer Department store on Main Street in Metuchen (now 439-443 Main Street, now home to Café Paris, Charming Nail, and Classic Travel).
- As the Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce prepares to celebrate its founding 100 years ago, Chris Crane unearthed and has donated files relevant to the organization's history.



- The Society recently conducted an oral history with Florida resident Paul Harry Lowman, Jr., born in August of 1920 in Thomas Edison's former house at Menlo Park. Excerpts from the document will be reprinted in a forthcoming *Nannygoats*.
- Another Thomas Edison - and Edison home - connection recently surfaced via Iselin resident Frank LaPenta, whose parents lived in the house as caretakers. A copy of his recollections are on file in the Society's archives.



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!

Clara Barton History Day

Saturday, November 4, 2017, 10am to 3pm
Come learn about Clara Barton at the Branch
Library, 141 Hoover Avenue, Edison.

Metuchen-Edison



LOCAL

HISTORY



DAY



February 11, 2018

(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.

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 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.