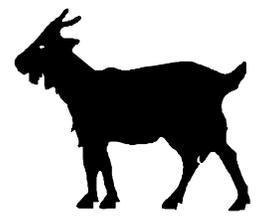


# Nannygoats



Many have heard Metuchen referred to as the “Brainy Borough.” There is the “Brainy Boro” Post Office on Central Avenue, and there was even once a “Brainy Borough Building and Loan Association.” But do you know how and why Metuchen acquired the title?

There are several stories about who might have first used the nickname for the borough, but information in the Society’s Grimstead Room Archives confirms that by 1915, Metuchen and Glen Ridge were locked in a battle for the rights to call itself “The Brainy Borough,” each pitting their lists of editors, authors, magnates, engineers, lawyers, and artists against the other in a skirmish to determine the winner.

The April 25, 1915 edition of the *New York Press Sunday Morning* featured the conflict in an article entitled “Jersey Towns in Lively Contest to See Which Is More ‘High Brow.’”

As we know, Metuchen eventually won out, and shown here are some of the illustrious personages upon whose fame the borough made its case. Although the ‘official’ battle was won in the press, it is probably Henry Mills Alden who should be credited with the birth of the “Brainy” title for the borough. A long-time resident and vestryman at St. Luke’s, Alden was the managing editor of *Harper’s Weekly* for

50 years and often referred to as the “Dean of American Magazine Writers.”

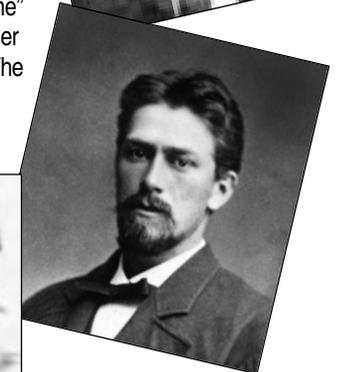
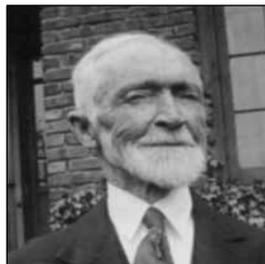
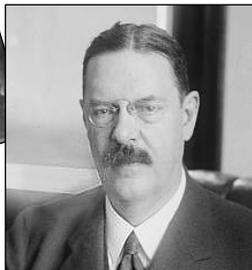
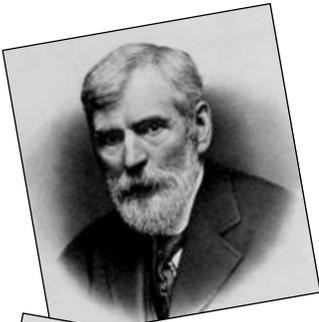
*Continued on Page 5.*

## The Battle of 'Brainy Borough'



*Glen Ridge and Metuchen Carving Their Rolls of Fame.*

**Left, top to bottom:** Henry Mills Alden (managing editor of *Harper's Weekly*), George Silzer (jurist, politician, Governor of NJ from 1923-1926), Charles Volkmar (renowned ceramist and painter). **Right, top to bottom:** Mary Wilkins Freeman (prominent and prolific author), William Dinwiddie (journalist and a war photographer, famously photographed Roosevelt's Rough Riders), Gustav Lindenthal (bridge engineer, notably of the Hell Gate Bridge). **Bottom, left to right:** Lewis Nixon (naval architect), Rev. J.G. Mason (clergyman and Temperance politician), and F. Marmaduke Potter (principal of Vorhees College, Vellore, India). Also listed in 1915 as contestants in the “Rival Halls of Fame” on Metuchen’s side are Walter Williams (director of Woolworth, Co.), S.S. Carvalho, (manager of Hearst’s publications), William D. Stevens (illustrator), A. Clarke Hunt (sanitation expert), The “McCulloughs” (child artist and poet), C. McKnight Smith (artist), William W. Crehore (expert consulting engineer), and Charles S. Edgar (clay merchant).

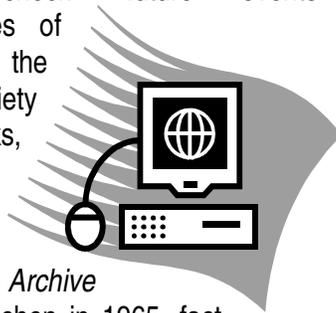


**The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society was founded in 1974 with the primary purpose of promoting an interest in and appreciation of the history of the Borough of Metuchen and of Edison Township.**

## Society Upgrades Website

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

Earlier this year the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's website was remodeled. Since then we have been adding items from our archives, photographs, and links to other historical websites. We also added a section where you can check future events and a page with all back issues of *Nannygoats*. Plus, included is the Metuchen -Edison Historical Society Store, in which you can order books, postcards and other items that the Society offers for sale.



This month we added to the *From the Archive* section a list of gas stations in Metuchen in 1965, fact sheets about the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground, and photographs of the new Raritan River Trail interpretive panels. We also added links to the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the Sayre & Fisher Brick Co., and the Jersey Central Railway Historical Society. To find out more about our local history, go to our website: [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).

## Interested in Becoming a *Nannygoats* Contributor?

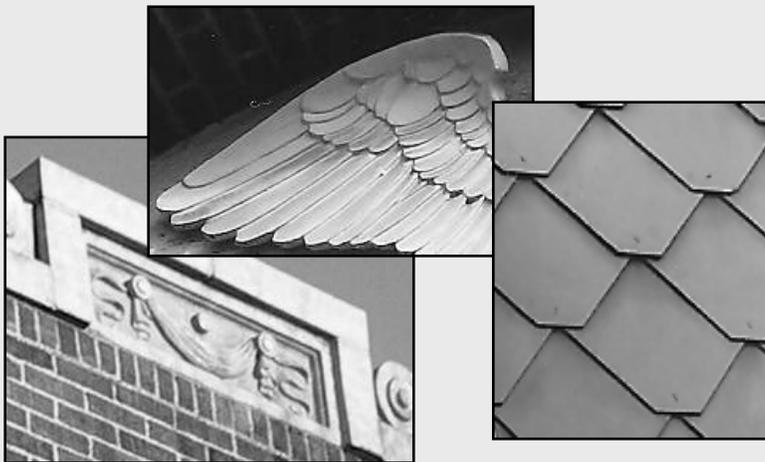
Do you have an interesting story, fact, or image that you think would make a good addition to a future issue of *Nannygoats*? If so, please contact the Editor, and if your submission is published, we'll send you a complimentary copy of the 1888 "Crumbs of Comfort" history and cookbook! The submission deadline for the Summer 2011 issue is **May 15, 2011**.

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## ARCHITECTURAL "SCAVENGER HUNT" PLANNED

In honor of National Historic Preservation Month, the Borough of Metuchen's Historic Preservation Committee is developing a Main Street Scavenger Hunt, in which residents and visitors will be invited to attempt identifying a series of architectural details and elements found along Metuchen's historic Main Street. Winners will then be drawn from the completed, correct entries.



Planning is still underway for the "hunt," which will take place during May, 2011. The objective is to increase awareness of Metuchen's rich architectural heritage and the value of its preservation. The Committee hopes to partner with other local organizations in this effort in order to make it available to the widest audience possible, including the Borough's students.

## Come Visit the Grimstead Room Archives!

The Society's Grimstead Room archives, containing thousands of local history images and documents, are located in the basement of the Metuchen Public Library and guided access to the collections is available from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on the following upcoming Saturdays in 2011: **March 5, April 2, May 7, and June 4**. For more information, contact us at 732-906-0529 or [wstochel@earthlink.net](mailto:wstochel@earthlink.net).



# EXCITING YEAR AHEAD FOR MENLO PARK

By Nancy L. Zerbe

2011 will be an exciting year at the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park. Our two main resources, the 1938 Edison Memorial Tower and the 1940s museum structure, are both undergoing their first-ever capital improvement projects. The museum is currently being renovated and improved to provide better access for persons with disabilities, and new professional exhibits are being developed. In addition, the long-awaited restoration of the Edison Memorial Tower is currently in the bidding process and will get underway by this summer.

## ***Learn About the Tower History and Observe the Restoration!***

February 11, Thomas Alva Edison's birthday, has long been celebrated by his followers. In 1937, on what would have been his 90th birthday, a group of his former employees known as the "Edison Pioneers" held a luncheon in New York where Edison's widow Mina and his children Charles and Madeline approved

the design of the Edison Memorial Tower and the Pioneers announced that construction would begin "as soon as the earth thaws." ("New Edison Tower to be Erected Soon," *The New York Times*, 12 February 1937: 25). One year later, on February 11, 1938, construction was complete and the Tower was officially dedicated.

So what happened in that construction year between Edison's two birthdays? As with any construction project, there were both successes and setbacks. In honor of the upcoming restoration, the EMTC will use the next year to chronicle the history and construction of the Tower, including the original groundbreaking ceremony, the burial of a time capsule, a setback due to a lightning strike, the excitement of the 14 foot high 6000+ pound light bulb arriving, and even a surprise visit by Henry Ford and his son Edsel!

In addition to the Tower history focus, the EMTC will hold both ceremonial and educational events during the restoration, including a new groundbreaking ceremony, opening up of the old time capsule and dedication of a new one, and "behind-the-scenes" talks with the design team and the contractors.

## ***Museum Re-opening***

In May/June, 2011, the museum at the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park will re-open, following the renovations and development of new exhibits. The EMTC will host two events: a re-opening preview party for paid guests and a public opening celebration.

## ***Join Us!***

EMTC hopes you will join us for a very exciting year at historic Menlo Park. To ensure that you get the word, please call or email our office to get on our contact list: 732-494-4194 or [info@menloparkmuseum.org](mailto:info@menloparkmuseum.org). Notices of upcoming events and our chronicles of the Tower history will be sent to you via our electronic newsletters.

*Ms. Zerbe is a past-president of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society and the current president of the Edison Memorial Tower Corporation.*

Left: *The tower, during a September, 2009 examination.*



Continued from Page 1

It was through Henry Mills Alden that famed figures such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Helen Keller, Ogden Nash, and Joseph Pulitzer visited Metuchen. Others made a more permanent connection to the town as well; Poet Joyce Kilmer married Alden's stepdaughter, and the famed writer Mary Wilkins met and married Dr. Freeman here.

From there, the rest - as they say - is history. The borough continued to live up to its well-earned moniker throughout the remainder of the early 20th century, as evidenced by the list of dozens of more talented and accomplished residents listed on the insert. And this list is by no means complete: we seem to find out more about our talented residents all the time. So, if you know of a notable someone we may have missed, please contact us!

Right: Excerpt from the 1915 article, describing Metuchen's position and odds of winning the contest against Glen Ridge.

Metuchen counts on eventually winning because of its wonderful organization. It is the most organized town in America. Even the public schools have self-government, their own Mayor and Council.

The two volunteer fire companies, with their automobile apparatus, each with its own clubhouse, land on a blaze so swiftly that a pyromaniac with seven-league boots could not escape. The Shade Tree Commission has put out more than 600 trees in the last two weeks. The Borough Improvement League, seven hustling churches, twelve fraternal orders, three literary societies, the Metuchen Club—all these zip along at high speed, ever with an eye to keeping Metuchen in the brain van. Name your odds.

## THEN and NOW

Can you guess the Metuchen street where these two houses are located? Many of the Borough's Kindergarteners probably do! Both are remarkably unchanged since the 1930s when the pictures on the left were taken. Probably the most noticeable change along this street over the past century has been the growth of the street trees.



Except for the removal of the awnings, addition of the shutters, and minor changes around the entranceway, this home has changed little from how it looked almost 80 years ago.



This home has also changed very little since it was photographed in 1932, with the only major alteration being the removal of the second story porch.



## Metuchen High School's Class of 1931 *History of Metuchen*

The following is continued from the Class of 1931's *History of Metuchen*, which is being reprinted in *Nannygoats* serially (beginning with Volume 5, Issue 2, Summer 2007). While the history contains some known factual & grammatical errors, the document is reproduced exactly as originally written. [ed: note the many Drake families listed in the excerpt of the 1928 Directory of Metuchen reprinted on page 3 of this newsletter.]

### ***Continued from SPORTS***

Baseball, the national game, and a rival of football in local interest, follows about the same course as football does. The first team was organized about 1901 and continued along regularly for a number of years. The lineup was Tommy Allen, catcher, Mike O'Brien and Seymour Barr, pitchers, Grover Lehlein, first base, Fritz Clarkson, second base, George Hancock, shortstop, Sam Glanfield, third base, Pierre Abry, left field, Walter Schenck, center field, and the pitcher, who was not twirling, place right field. Later Fred Starken and Billy Handerham came in. Sam Glanfield, third baseman, is generally considered to be the best ball player Metuchen ever had.

That team played a pretty consistent game of ball for a number of years but it finally died out and the next well known team

that represented Metuchen was the Metuchen Athletic Club which came into prominence after the war [World War I]. Among the players were Doc Morris, Troy Drake, Howard Drake, and Lester Smith, infielders, Cliff Drake, catcher, Ralph Noe, Bill Smith, Ardolino, and Elwood Drake, outfielders. Most of the pitching was done by Dick Ten Eyck and Lester Smith.

That, too died out after several years of playing, but was reorganized in 1928 and is

playing at present Morris, Potter, Rule, and Danford are infielders, Perkins, Randolph, and Walker, outfielders, Sabo and Potter, catchers, and Humphries, Ten Eyck, pitchers. In direct contrast to the old teams, this present team uses many substitutes and through the course of a season too many players to be mentioned appear in the games.

Several other teams have played in Metuchen, including the South Ends, the High School, and the Triangle AA. The South Ends have run along rather

irregularly much like the M.A.C. and the High School has been playing for many years. The Triangle AA is a more recent club only playing for the last year or two.

Metuchen has been prominent in another group of sports, those conducted by the Y.M.C.A. The Y

Tennis Team copped the county championship in the 1930 tennis tournament, coming

out above such strong teams as New Brunswick and Perth Amboy. The bowling team has been conspicuously successful. Twice they have won the State Y championship, and a third time they tied for it but lost in the playoff. Numerous seconds and thirds in state competition dot their record. Two other sports, basketball and swimming, have never flourished particularly.



The 1930 Metuchen High School baseball team, as shown in the 1931 yearbook, *The Blue Letter*. Captained by Cliff Wester, described as "absolute death to fly balls in his territory," the team included 'Bull' Dietz, Joel Tucker, and Al Gerlufson in the outfield, Al Jolly at first base, Joe Affierbach at second base, 'Shrimp' Karabinchak at short-stop, 'Red' Volk at third base, and Joe Leiss, Fred Koster, and Larry Kuntz as pitchers. Their record for the year was 10-0-2, winning only against South Amboy and Bound Brook.

**Next Issue: THE WARS**

## A Letter from the President...

Dear Society Members:

It is my pleasure to address you on the election of our officers and directors for 2011 at our annual meeting on Saturday January 8th. The nominating committee put forth the below slate to act, as officers for a period of one year. All were unanimously elected.

President:	Frederick Wolke
Vice President:	Andy Kupersmit
Corresponding Secretary:	Tyreen Reuter
Recording Secretary:	Marilyn Langholff
Treasurer:	Walter Stochel

At the same time, the nominating put forth the following slate to serve a Directors for a period of 3 years (all were unanimously elected): Russell Gehrum, Jim Halsey, Andy Kupersmit, Marilyn Langholff, and Walter Stochel. I would also like to extend a hearty welcome to our new Directors, Dominic Walker and Byron Sondergard.

In addition, we have the following Directors returning to the board: Phyllis Boeddinghaus, Lynne Braine, Catherine Langholff, Steve Reuter, Tyreen Reuter, Marie Vajo, and Frederick Wolke.

Two Directors, Fred Primich and Bob Takash, have decided for personal reasons to leave the board at this time. They have assured me they will remain as active members and will assist the Society when possible. We thank them for all of their efforts on behalf of the society and look forward continuing our association.

Lastly, I would like give my and the Society's special thanks to Walter Stochel, who through his hard work, knowledge and enthusiasm has enabled the society to attain its goals. We thank you for your past support and look forward to your continued support during the coming year.

*Sincerely, Frederick Wolke*

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**Interested in reading previous issues of Nannygoats? All of our back issues are available online at the Society's website at [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).**

### Borough Improvement League

Founded in 1901, the "BIL" is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, affiliated with the GFWC and NJSFWC Womens' Clubs, devoted to community service & preserving the ca. 1807 Old Franklin School on Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen.



#### Old Franklin School Rentals

Our charming & historic 200-year-old schoolhouse with full kitchen is available for fine events of up to 65 seated guests. For more information or reservations, please call 848-250-1258.

[www.boroughimprovementleague.org](http://www.boroughimprovementleague.org)

**Would you like to become one of Nannygoats' advertising supporters? Your advertisement reaches local residents who are interested in supporting their community, and your contribution helps the society to gather, preserve, and improve public access to the photographs, books, maps, and other artifacts that tell the story of who we are and how we have grown. And, your advertisement becomes a piece of history itself, by living on our archives!**

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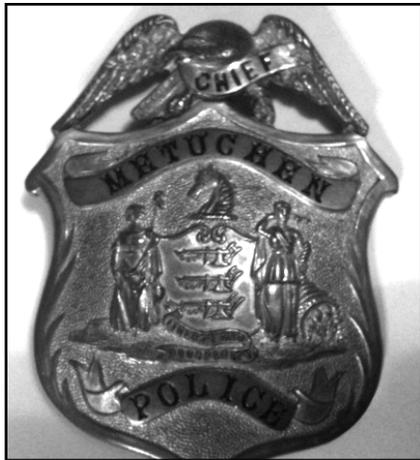
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Jim Halsey	
Marilyn Langholff	
Byron Sondergard	

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.

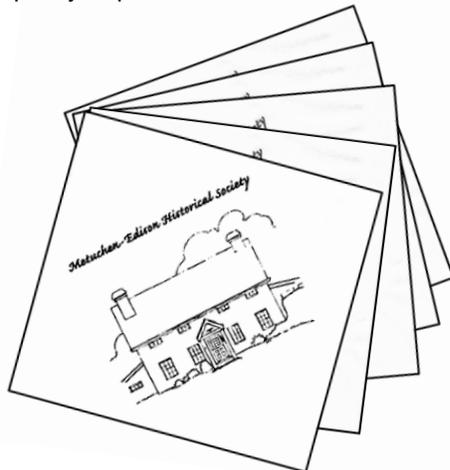
## What's New in the Grimstead Room



Many thanks to G. M. Cameron for the donation of a Metuchen Police Chief's badge (pictured above) from the March Field Air Museum. Also, thanks again to frequent contributor George M. Muha for his article on the Metuchen YMCA Radio Club, which will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Nannygoats*.

### New Society Item for Sale!

Perfect for your next gathering, we have just released cocktail napkins imprinted with the Society's name and a sketch of the ca. 1740 Ayers-Allen House, listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Sets of these high quality napkins are available for \$5.



## FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH



**Thomas Mundy Peterson was born in Metuchen in 1824 to parents who had been slaves owned by the Mundy Family. He was the first African-American to vote in an election under the just-enacted provisions of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution. He cast his vote on March 31, 1870, while a resident of Perth Amboy.**



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

Have you renewed your membership in the Society for 2011? It's never too late! Renew now and receive program notices, information about special events, and a continued subscription to this newsletter. Visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) or contact 732-906-0529 for more information.