

Nannygoats



Vol. 11, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2013

Those familiar with the Society's archives, mostly stored in the Grimstead Room in the Metuchen Public Library, know that it contains a wealth of information; a veritable treasure trove of local history from the last two centuries. Early residents, including Dr. Ezra M. Hunt in the 1870s and Lloyd Grimstead in the 1930s, played a large part in preserving our history for today's residents and students of local history. To a lesser extent, the Society has played a part and if you have visited the cramped room in the basement of the library, you know all about the packed shelves and the boxes stacked upon boxes. What you may not know is that the significant overflow is stored in a temperature controlled storage unit, and rarely available to be viewed by the public.

Because of the cramped space in archives, Archivist Marilyn Langholff (and her predecessor Marie Vajo) have had to work extra hard over the years to keep things organized. And it's becoming more and more crowded all the time; we gratefully receive several items per month from donors anxious to see a piece of local history preserved. Not only have we gotten donations from private individuals, but for the last year we've regularly been receiving packets of images

regularly been receiving packets of images and clippings de-accessioned from the Home News Tribunes' "morgue," or photograph files. Featured in this issue are just some of the items we have accepted over the past year, as well as some of the gems we have pulled out and rediscovered as we search through the collections.

The Society receives numerous requests for information both from residents wanting to learn about the history of their homes and from local organizations and newspapers working on history related projects (for example, providing information to the Borough Improvement League for their annual House Tour, or assisting the Borough of Metuchen's Historic Preservation Committee with Middlesex County Cultural & Heritage Commission grant-funded projects). Some of the Society's Directors have dreamed of a local history room where we could make these resources more available to the public on a regular basis; a reading room with historic maps and ephemera on display, and a place from which we could assist homeowners and local history researchers.

Maybe someday we will have a local history room where we can make these resources available to the interested public

rather than being in boxes and cabinets. But, for now, we do the best we can with what we have. Right now, in the display cases at the Metuchen Library, some of these new items are on display. They, along with many other items, will be on display at Local History Day on Saturday, February 8, 2014 from 2 to 4:30pm. The Society will keep working on solutions and ideas, because

working on solutions and ideas, because these are wonderful things we are caring for, and it is the privilege of the Society to properly archive these items and to share them with our friends, neighbors and fellow historians.



Top: One of the hundreds of historic postcards in the Society's collection. We have so many images that the Society is actively considering publishing a book devoted to postcard images of area, similar to the *Images of America* series. This recently donated image depicts the Veterans Home Menlo Park in the "Spy" story on page 6. *Left:* A set of tiles made by renowned ceramist and artist Charles Volkmar, donated in the Fall of 2013 by Barrie Tait Collins of Bethany, Connecticut. Collins' grandfather, Charles Rollinson Lamb, was a friend of Volkmar's and four of this same set were donated to the Newark Museum. *Middle Left:* The Elster Home on Amboy Avenue, one of four historic homes featured on the Borough Improvement League's Holiday House Tour in 2013. The Society archives contain historic images of all four historic homes, and also provide a great deal of information about their construction and residents. This home first appears on historic maps in 1868 as the home of George H. Linsley, for whom the neighboring street is named. Linsley was born in 1821, by 1849 was the "Assistant Superintendent of the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York." The house was later home to Gade Family. *Middle.* A copy of longtime Metuchen resident Grace Knox's 1985 Christmas card, showing her the previous year at the Waldorf Astoria on New Year's Eve. Donated by Gwen Roseman, along with several Knox items as well as 1939, 1940, 1941, & 1943 Metuchen High School yearbooks. *Middle Right:* Another home featured on the Holiday House Tour, this time on Hillside Avenue. Society records show the house was likely built in the mid 19th century by Manning Daniels, a name well known to local historians. Longtime Society member Phyllis Boeddinghaus lived there in the mid 20th century and was able to provide insightful reminiscences about the home to its current owners. *Right:* Some of the many documents in the John Ciardi Collection, donated to the Society by the poet's daughter in early 2013

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.

September 15, 2013



I hope someone can help me. I am trying to find out the history of a house in Menlo Park, when it was built, etc. The house was a big white manion on Route 27 between Terry Avenue and Elizabeth Avenue. It was owned by Phil Pollen during the 60s, 70s, and 80s. It had four massive columns and looked like it was a southern plantation. I lived on Terry Avenue as a kid and used to play with his grandkids there

all the time. It is gone now and I believe condos are there now. And information you could give me would be very appreciated. Thank you.

-Richard Brodean, 1319 Oxford Lane, Union, NJ, 07083

Does anyone have any information or photographs to share with Mr. Brodean? We've heard that the mansion may have been called "Menlo Hall" and was associated with the Carman Family. Some remember it being torn down in the 1980s. If you do have any information, please contact the Society or Mr. Brodean directly.

October 17, 2013

I grew up in Metuchen and graduated from Metuchen High School in 1966. Yesterday I was casually looking up information on Gail Fisher. She was one of the first black actresses with a regular role in a TV series (Mannix) and a Metuchen High graduate... I decided to go online and look her up. I knew she that she lived in Potter's Crossing so I went to Google and started my search there. Much to my surprise I stumbled upon "History Mystery Solved: Photograph Identified" authored by you [Volume 10, Issue 1, Winter/Spring 2012]. For me and my family I want to say Thank You!

Josephine Scruggs is my mother, Raymond Scruggs my godfather and uncle, and all of the other Scruggs were aunts and one second cousin. Mildred Letsinger is also an aunt. She married my father's brother James. Rose Wright lived across Central Avenue from us and early on was our baby sitter. The Tates parents also lived across the street. The Letsingers share what was probably the shortest street in all of Metuchen, Sampson Street near the Campbell School, with my grandparents Pauline and John Scruggs. It was great fun to see this. Thank you again. I've sent it to all the remaining family.

-Ray Hooper, New York City.

Letters like this make certainly our day!!

The Society regrets to share the news about the passing of two long-time members, Jadwin Sortore and Louise Stochel.



Jadwin F. Sortore

Captain Sortore was born in Metuchen and graduated from Metuchen High School in 1955. After attending Lafayette College, he entered the Navy and eventually rose to the rank of commander and served as the captain of the Navy warship USS

Fairfax County for 2-1/2 years. After serving in Vietnam, he earned a Masters from Brown University and then taught navigation. Upon retiring, he taught ROTC in Linden. He later moved to Aiken, South Carolina, where he continued to be an active volunteer and golfer. Predeceased by his wife, Marian, he passed away at age 75 in July, 2013, leaving behind three daughters and four granddaughters.

Louise A. Stochel

Mrs. Stochel, a longtime resident of Edison, was born in Jersey City and graduated from Metuchen High School in 1951, then served as a counselor at Kiddie Keep Well Camp. She received her B.A. in physical education from Panzer College of Physical Education and Health in 1955, and worked as a physical education teacher for Rahway public schools in the 1950s and St. Mary's School in Plainfield, N.J., in the 1960s before leaving teaching to concentrate on raising her family. She was a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Metuchen for 66 years, and was a member of the Edison Memorial Tower in addition to her Society involvement. She was predeceased by her husband, Walter R. Stochel Sr. in 1992. She passed away at age 80 on December 13, 2013. Surviving are her children, Walter R. Stochel, Jr., Douglas Stochel, Janice Firestone, and four grandchildren.

A Leap Year Calico Party in Metuchen in 1872

by Andy Kupersmit

As some of you know, this author earns his living as a professional philatelist. Philatelist is just a fancy word for postage stamp collector.

One of my prized collections is a collection of old letters and envelopes from Metuchen in the 19th Century. One particular favorite is a letter from February 4, 1872 mailed from a woman resident of Metuchen to her cousin Norman O. Wheeler in Hornellsville New York. Hornersville is a small town in southwestern New York State, approximately 125 miles west of Binghamton and approximately 85 miles west of Ithaca. Google and Bing searches for the recipient of the letter yielded a small piece in a Fall 1888 edition of the *Corning Journal* recording the passing on Sept. 4th (1888), "in Hornellsville, Ida, wife of Norman Wheeler and youngest daughter of Jesse Everett of East Campbell, aged 35 years".

The writer of the 1872 letter enthusiastically discusses family matters, sleighing in town, and participating in a "Leap Year Calico Party." These parties, which were very fashionable in the 19th



century, were held during a Leap Year, which 1872 was, on or close to Leap Day (February 29). The women would make clothes from the same fabric or related fabrics, and the events were often held to raise money for charity. The letter also references the formation of the New Dover Literary Society in 1871 or 1872. Any information that can be provided by our readers about the writer or New Dover Literary Society will be greatly appreciated. The letter ends abruptly and is not signed. It is possible there is another sheet of paper that no longer accompanies this letter and envelope. The letter reads as follows (grammar and spelling corrected to the best of the transcriber's ability):

Dear Cousin Norman, Feb. 4th (18)72

I reckon you will begin to think by and by that I never intend to answer your letter which I was very much pleased to receive. We had worried about you thinking that you had been frozen or something else and you were very fortunate to return home safe after such a long journey. It seems as though we can see and realize God's divine care and goodness when we are most exposed to danger. I know we ought to live like this very day for we are not safe at every time but then it is seems to come more forceful to our minds when we are in more dangerous positions. We were very much disappointed in your not coming here before you returned home but couldn't you make an extra trip down here? You may have an invitation between this and next Fourth of July what say you now do not contract your brow and look so puzzled time will explain. Oh Norman what a delightful journey you must have had, how I should like to see you and have a good chat.

We have had a delightful winter so far. We have had but very little snow only one day of sleighing the wagon runs as nice as summer and I do not know but better. We have got snow enough now for sleighing that fell yesterday. We went to church in a sleigh not many out but this afternoon the bells are jingling every few minutes. I hope we will have more snow so as to have a week or two of good sleighing, then look out for the straw rides. It has been a very lively winter in our neighborhood and round about surprises and parties. About two weeks ago, we ladies got up a Leap Year Calico party. The ladies asked the gents to come and take her there and bring her home. You understand the ladies were all dressed in calico and each lady made a gentleman's tie and sealed in a blank envelope then after the company had all assembled these envelopes were all thrown on the table mixed and each gent goes and picks up an envelope, opens it, and the young lady's dress that matched was his partner for supper and the rest of the evening. You may guess we had fun. Did you ever hear of this ever before? The gentleman furnished the refreshments and insisted in doing everything but were very willing to give up to the ladies after the fun with them wore off as they always do. They had Oyster Stew biscuit & butter crackers, cake cheese pieces, mottoes apples, tea and coffee. There were about 20 couples. Ma wishes to know if you saw Uncle Charles Sweet; if not where is he? Uncle Joseph and Aunt Byaney (?) were here visiting. They stayed nearly two weeks. We had a nice visit with them. They went back to the Drs. They talked of starting for home tomorrow. Gene, Mary & Master Willie went to church with us today and we all intend to go tonight. They say tea is ready and I must stop (writing).

Feb. 8th and I have not finished this letter yet. Dr. Freeman was here last Tuesday, made a visit of three hours. The first time he ever was here; he likes the place. I must tell you what the young people are upbeat. We have formed ourselves into a society called after our church New Dover Literary Society. We have a President, Vice President, Secretary (myself) and Treasurer (our minister). We are getting an exhibition for the benefit of our church. George has learned his part in two pieces -- one the Yankee Marksman, another The Miller





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Above: This large scroll photograph of the Franklin High School gradualing class was donated in October 2013 by Maria Mangleri, who found it at a yard sale in Perth Amboy. The man she bought it from said he'd come across it while clearing out an old house. Although it isn't dated, the names of the students are all listed on the reverse in pencil. These names match up with those in one of the yearbooks just donated this spring by Gwen Roseman, so it's very likely the Class of 1940.

Left: Entitled "Metuchen Send Off August 27, 1942," the Society originally only had one half of this photograph in our archives, with no further identification. After receiving an inquiry about the names of those pictured, the Society posted the image on Facebook. To our surprise, many came forth with identifications of their relatives, and Betsy Birdsall Pajauis even produced the missing second half (which is stitched here to the first) and picked out her father, William Gedney Birdsall (as noted by the square). The second half even provides the additional information of being credited to Muha, Metuchen."

Metuchen High School's Class of 1931 History of Metuchen

The following is the conclusion to the Class of 1931's *History of Metuchen*, which we have 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.

POLICE

The police force, that second feature in the life of our town, has had a much briefer history. Formed in 1915 and composed of two members, it has gradually grown until now numbers eight men. Prior to 1915, two men, a sheriff and the constable, took charge of the town and handled the general police work. With the growth of the town, though, increased need for systematic protecting and regulation by laws finally resulted in the formation of the force, which has been operating ever since.

CONCLUSION

About 1895 other improvements began to take their places in the lives of Metuchenites. Trolleys ran into New Brunswick in 1897. The fair was 5¢, and the trolleys were not allowed to go faster than 10 miles an hour. In 1901, the trolleys began to run to Perth Amboy. If this fair was 5¢ also, and the traffic rate at which these "Speed Demons" dashed along the steel rails was 12 miles an hour!

Electrical lights were placed on Metuchen streets and in Metuchen buildings in 1899. Until this time, there had been oil lamps on posts, and a man, hired by the town, went around each evening to light them. One of the town's leading citizens vigorously opposed streetlights of any kind because as he expressed it all respectable people should be home in bed not running the streets after dark!

Other improvements followed; city water in 1894 telephones in 1900 and gas about 1904. When water and gas mains were being laid, laterals were put in as far as the foundation of most buildings without cost to the property owner.

Thus, we see, in this fleeting glimpse of our town's progress, how the citizens of Metuchen have kept abreast of the times, adding modern facilities as they became available.

This concludes the serial reproduction of the Class of 1931's History of Metuchen.

Spy Nest Discovered?

Digging through the Grimstead Archives recently, I found a letter written in 1995 by local lawyer William Eichling. He'd sent in a statement from an Irene Smith at the NJ DAR headquarters that details her discovery of espionage during World War II. This is not terribly surprising (it was war time after all), but the location of this nest certainly is. Her statement reads as follows:

I had an assignment to go to Menlo Park Veteran Hospital and while there, I was told that odd things were going on in the surrounding towns. German Bund Camps were springing up and they felt that there was one in Metuchen. The Red Cross was told to be careful on our headquarters there in the YMCA building; that there might be sabotage. A particular bakery in Metuchen was suspected so I was sent there to see what I could find out. I was told to buy baked goods and seem very interested in how everything was made. I did so and they invited me to see where the baking was done and how it was prepared. While going downstairs to the ovens, I lost my balance and leaned against the wall. It gave way and I caught a glimpse of contraband. The baker didn't realize I had stumbled, he was quite deaf. When we returned, he went first and I pushed the door and saw pens, flags, bunting, and pamphlets. I paid for my goods and went straight back to Menlo Park. The Major in charge gave me a police escort and told me to get out of town immediately. Lo and behold, they intercepted coded messages that were being sent to ships and submarines at sea and arrested the spies. Submarines were found off Long Island and many Nazi sympathizers were rounded up. I was awarded a citation for that work.

FBI records do reveal that some German Bund pamphlets were distributed in Metuchen in 1939, but the man observed doing so did not own or work at a bakery, nor did anyone in his household. Do any readers recall a story like this, or remember a bakery with ovens in the basement? Perhaps viewing old *Metuchen Recorder* issues could reveal some information, or maybe Ms. Smith was prone to tall tales. We may never be sure.

—Tyreen Reuter

Buried Treasure?

James McLaughlin, a local man interested in searching for buried treasure at historic sites with his metal detector, has been doing some scanning of the grounds at the Old Franklin Schoolhouse in Metuchen. In addition to lots of nails and modern metal trash, he has found some interesting items, including this coin unearthed in early September, 2013. is in very poor shape, but close up one can nearly read "ONE CENT." Our best guess so far is that it is an American "One Cent" coin, dating between 1793 and 1857.



shown approximate size.

Local History Mystery?

The Society's Grimstead Room archives are located in the basement of the Metuchen Public Library and may just have the answers to your local history questions! For more information, contact us at 732-906-0529 or wstochel@earthlink.net. Or, just stop by and visit during our open archives hours the first Saturday of most months from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.



The advertisement above is taken from a 1923 Library Association booklet on file in the Society's Grimstead Room.

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The name of the newsletter,
"Nannygoats," is taken from the title of
a collection of anecdotes, articles,
reminiscences, and letters compiled by
photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He
took more than 2,800 photographs of
the Metuchen-Edison area, mostly
during the 1930s, which make up 80
percent of the Historical Society's
photographic collection. The
Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
dedicates this publication to Lloyd
Grimstead, as a way of honoring him
for collecting and recording so much of
our local history.

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

1928 Directory of Metuchen, Column 12

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

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Fire Commissioners Dist 5 Oak Tree Metuchen-681	
Raritan Engine Co No 2 Gross Cor Metuchen-612	
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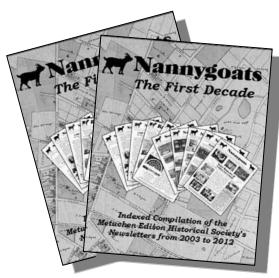
SAVE THE DATE!

Local History Day Saturday, February 8, 2014 2:00pm to 4:30pm

Since the Metuchen Public Library will be closed on Sundays starting in February, Local History Day has been moved to Saturday, February 8, and will run from 2:00 to 4:30pm. Many of the new items in our collections will be on display – many of which are mentioned here in this newsletter – as well our vast collection of Grimstead Photographs. The Old Colonial Cemetery T-Shirts and new Nannygoats, The First Decade books will be for sale, as will our regular merchandise. Questions? Contact Steve at 732-713-9080 or popopies@hotmail.com.

Looking Ahead:

The Edison Memorial Tower will reopen in June, 2014, after being closed for 75 years. Watch for forthcoming details about the celebration.



Got 'Goats?

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



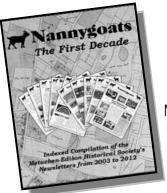
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Contact the editor at <u>ayersallenhouse@msn.com</u>; the next issue will come out in March/April 2014.



On Facebook? Join the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's Facebook Group!





Nannygoats, The First Decade Book & Bonus CD-Rom - \$25

Just-released 275+ page indexed compilation of the first ten years of our newsletter, Nannygoats. More than 30 information-packed issues are reproduced in chronological order, professionally printed and bound in New Jersey with a comprehensive index to the photographs, original research, and historical items. Much of the content comes directly from our archives and is not available anywhere else. Issues cover a wide variety of topics, including Costa's Ice Cream, Camp Kilmer, the Brainy Borough, Woodwild Park, Piscatawaytown, Thomas Mundy Peterson, the St. Louis Cardinals, and much more.

This compilation is ideal for those new to *Nannygoats*, as well as those who have found it to be an invaluable and interesting local history resource, and would like a complete, indexed collection for reference, browsing, and research. Copies are available through the Society for \$25 each (plus \$5 shipping, if applicable) and comes with a special bonus CD-ROM that includes:

- Why Metuchen is a Desirable Town, ca1898
- 1940 Census Metuchen Street Index
- Text-searchable issues of all *Nannygoats*, 2003-2012 1928 Directory of Metuchen complete searchable text transcription
 - 1954 Map of Raritan Township.

Old Colonial Cemetery T-Shirt



Custom-designed all cotton t-shirts in sandstone reddish brown, to reflect the color of the historic markers found in the Old Colonial Cemetery in Metuchen. Society name and "winged soul" icon, popular on 18th century gravemarkers, on the front. Back of shirt emblazoned with "As I am now, So you must be, Prepare for death & follow me." Available in sizes Medium, Large, & Extra Large for only \$15 each (plus \$3 shipping).



Place Your Orders Today!

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