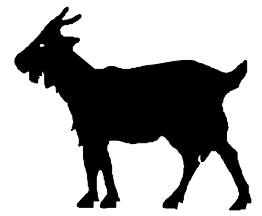


Nannygoats



Vol. 8, Issue 2

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Summer 2010

The following letter and article were submitted by former resident George M. Muha, whom readers may remember from his previous contribution in our Summer 2009 edition, "Tending a Grave Site." The Society is once again a thankful beneficiary of Mr. Muha's very interesting local history research.

Metuchen's World War II Aircraft Observing Tower

by George Muha

January, 2010

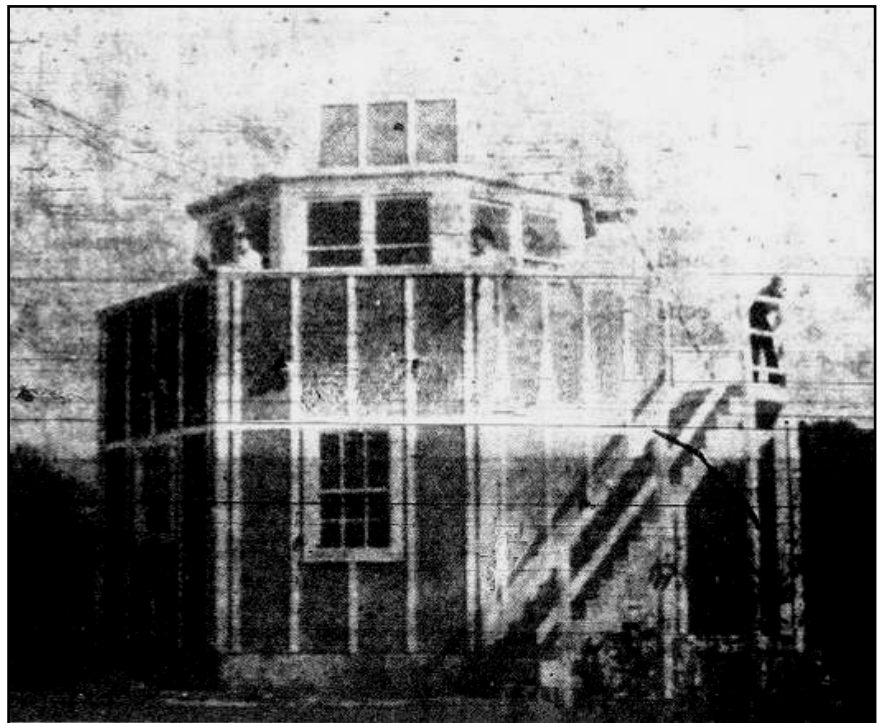
Dear Editor,

Some years back while seeking information for a family history that I was compiling, I spent a morning at the Metuchen Public Library searching their microfilm copies of the local newspaper, *The Metuchen Recorder*. As I scanned the headlines of the 1941-1945 editions I became distracted from my search for I started to recall quite clearly people and the march of events as if the intervening 60+ years had never run their course. These were the years of World War II and I had just turned ten years of age at the war's onset ... a very impressionable age.

Most all were pleasant recollections for me but of little interest to anyone else. Yet at the time I wondered if one recollection, perhaps my clearest of all, might be of some general historical interest - that of the WW II Metuchen Aircraft Observation Tower. Several years later, my family project completed, I set about searching for factual information about the Tower. Eventually this information was combined with my personal recollections of the procedures used at the Tower and the enclosed manuscript came into being.

*Sincerely yours,
George M. Muha*

To an appreciable extent, the perspective and attitudes of many of the young growing up in Metuchen in the early 1940s were conditioned by the entry of the United States into World War II in late-1941. At the war's onset I had just turned ten years of age and like most of my patriotic male classmates I longed to join the Boy Scouts for they wore uniforms (!) and were quite active in the civilian war effort, e.g. the collection of scrap metal and tires for recycling. At the time I was too young to join the Scouts but a year or so later my youthful fervor was somewhat satisfied when I accidentally became involved in another part of the civilian war effort – I occasionally served (in a loose sense) as a "dispatcher" at the Metuchen Aircraft Observing Tower. *Continued on Page 4*



Above: An image of the Metuchen Aircraft Observing Tower atop Beacon Hill. This picture appeared in the February 3, 1943 edition of the *The Metuchen Recorder*. At least three "spotters" are visible: one on the steps, and two in front of the windows on the deck.

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.

New in the Collection...



The Society wishes to extend our sincere appreciation to those who have recently donated items of local history interest to the Grimstead Archive:

William Pastor, for donating a series of photographs of the Raritan Arsenal from the 1930s.

Gloria Forgione Groiss, for donating a photograph of her father, James Forgione, who served as Mayor of Edison in the 1950s and co-founded Forum Theater in Metuchen.

Nicholas DiBrino, for donating a Westinghouse Phonograph, that was manufactured at the Westinghouse Plant in Metuchen (see photograph at left).

Also, many thanks to Judy Pietrefesa, Metuchen High School Class of 1960, who helped identify photographs of the "Corner Confectionery."

Rita Halpin

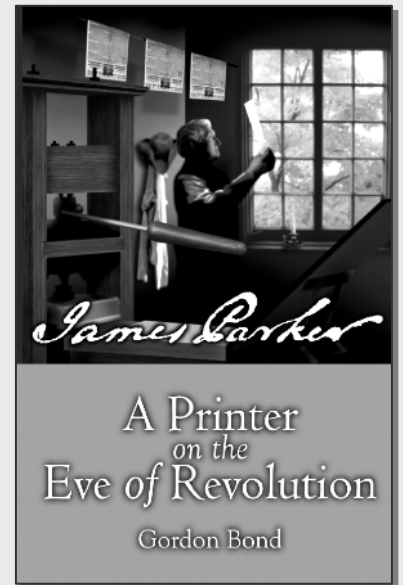
The Society regrets to announce the passing of long-time member Rita Halpin on June 9, 2010. Born in Englewood, Rita moved to Metuchen in 1952 upon her marriage to James Halpin. She worked as a telephone operator and then as a full-time homemaker, raising three sons (two of whom still live in Edison and are active in local history) and was blessed with eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Rita was a member of St. Francis Cathedral, the PTA, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Metuchen Genealogy Club, and the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. She was an enthusiastic researcher and compiled an extensive set of records on her family tree, and was well-known for assisting others with their research as well.

NEW ON THE BOOKSHELF

Gordon Bond's "James Parker, A Printer on the Eve of Revolution" will be re-released in September, 2010, as an expanded and revised edition.

Bond's in-depth biography chronicles the often difficult life of Parker (1714-1770), who is sometimes underappreciated but nevertheless remains one of the most well known colonial printers. He established the first permanent printing press in New Jersey, at Woodbridge, in the location of the current Parker Press Park. For more information, visit the Garden State Legacy's website at gardenstatelegacy.com.



Local History Mystery? Visit the 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: September 4, November 6, and December 4. For more information, contact us at 732-906-0529 or wstochel@earthlink.net.

Update on Metuchen's Historic Preservation Committee

On May 17, 2010, the Borough of Metuchen's Historic Preservation Committee presented the results of the recently completed report, "Evaluation of Historic District Potential in Metuchen, NJ" to the Borough Council. The study was prepared by Linda McTeague, a well-respected historic preservation planner with more than 25 years of experience, with grant funding from the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

Based on the background research, Ms. McTeague identified certain key areas within Metuchen that are the strongest candidates for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. The report outlines tentative boundaries of three potential districts, and provides an explanation of their historic significance, list of significant/noteworthy sites within the district, a description of the architecture in the district, which National Register criteria that might apply, and recommendations for next steps towards their preservation.



Over the next few months, the Historic Preservation Committee plans to focus on determining what the next steps should be and how best to address the recommendations made in the report. Complete copies of the report are on file at Borough Hall, the Metuchen Library, and in the Society's Grimstead Room.

Left: Excerpt of a map of Potential Historic Districts as identified by Linda McTeague, April 2010 (overlaid on a 1989 Hintz/Nelessen map).

1928 Directory of Metuchen, Column 2

Below is the second 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 previous (Winter/Spring 2010) issue of *Nannygoats*.

Hogert N I M Rev r 23 Graham av. Metuchen-45-J
 Bohlke W C r 220 Amboy av. Metuchen-81-R
 Bohnhoff H W r Harvard av. Metuchen-208-W
 Bond H A r Bounty. Metuchen-131
 Bonham M A Miss r 344 Amboy av. Metuchen-220
 Bonis J H r 160 Plainfield av. Metuchen-299-W
 Booker J Mrs r Weston. Metuchen-236-J
 Borgfeldt A E Miss r 276 Main. Metuchen-732
 Borum B r 20 Pearl. Metuchen-3-W
 Bouverot A r 28 Maple. Metuchen-386-R
 Bowen F r Iselin. Metuchen-570-J
 Bowers John C garage 503 Midlxs av Metuchen-201
 Residence 27 Washn pl. Metuchen-243
 Bradstreet & Woolever, Printers. Metuchen-870
 Bradstreet M Mrs r 127 Main. Metuchen-436
 Bramhall F B r 83 Lake av. Metuchen-473-R
 Breece Wm F r 628 Amboy av. Metuchen-25-R
 Breen H R Miss r 63 New. Metuchen-106-R
 Breen J Jr r 608 Amboy av. Metuchen-25-J
 Green J W r 68 Pearl. Metuchen-130
 Breen Wm A r 24 School. Metuchen-259-J
 Brehmer's Taxi Svc 545 Middlesex av Metuchen-64
 Brems A r New Brunswick av. Metuchen-253-W
 Brendel George r 45 Charles. Metuchen-691
 Brinckmann John H r 44 Charles. Metuchen-67
 Britton G H r Iselin. Metuchen-556-W-2
 Broadfoot J L r Menlo Park. Metuchen-377-J
 Broeckert H r McCoy av. Metuchen-643
 Brody Saml r 102 S Main. Metuchen-285-M
 Browell F A r High. Metuchen-693-W
 Browning D G r 427 Middlesex av Metuchen-154-M
 Brueggeman A Mrs confc Iselin. Metuchen-216
 Brunner W L r 24 Clarendon ct. Metuchen-48-M
 Bruno L V r 76 Main. Metuchen-498
 Buchanan W Franklin r 76 Clive. Metuchen-488
 Buchanan W O r 31 Washn pl. Metuchen-519
 Budnarik J genl store. Amboy av Metuchen-537-R-2
 Bullwinkle Geo L r 1 Central av Metuchen-379-W
 Burglin Jos pntr 115 Center. Metuchen-51
 Burke D I r 31 Hillside av. Metuchen-37-R
 Burns F J r 59 Eggert av. Metuchen-553
 Burr Roy C r 141 Chestnut. Metuchen-108
 Burroughs E A r 435 Middlesex av. Metuchen-404
 Burroughs Edw r 407 Middlesex av. Metuchen-24
 Byrne Thos r Middlesex av. Metuchen-117
 California Fruit Mkt 428 Main. Metuchen-663
 Camastra J confc Main. Metuchen-268
 Camastra J r 263 Lake av. Metuchen-282
 Campbell A R r 875 Middlesex av. Metuchen-19-W
 Campbell D J r Grove av. Metuchen-598
 Campbell E F rl est Penna av. Metuchen-657
 Residence 72 Hillside av. Metuchen-459-R
 Campbell H A r 103 Central av. Metuchen-122
 Campbell Howard I r 267 Amboy av Metuchen-81-J
 Campbell M A r Oak Tree. Metuchen-264-J-1
 Campbell W T r 76 Rose. Metuchen-171
 Campbell Wm J r Carson av. Metuchen-343-J
 Carkhuff H r Oak Tree. Metuchen-31-R
 Carkhuff Wesley r Plainfield rd. Metuchen-144-J
 Carman C B Capt r 68 Linden av Metuchen-114-W
 Carman G E r 33 Clarendon ct. Metuchen-48-R
 Carman Wm r Maple av. Metuchen-44-R
 Carney M C r 88 Highland av. Metuchen-153-J
 Carroll P J r 76 Highland av. Metuchen-557
 Cary Wm E r 312 Middlesex av. Metuchen-4-W
 Caulfield O J r 92 Rector. Metuchen-310
 Cekeke E r Bonhamtown. Metuchen-535-J
 Central Garage Iselin. Metuchen-688
 Central Service Station Iselin. Metuchen-478
 Cheche P r 3 Central av. Metuchen-581
 Cheche R r 585 Main. Metuchen-226-M
 Christensen A G r Albourne. Metuchen-537-J-1
 Christensen C C r Fords. Metuchen-244-W
 Christensen C L r Fords. Metuchen-475-R
 Christensen W r Albourne. Metuchen-70
 Christensen Wm r 2 Park pl. Metuchen-342
 Christon Marion Miss r Iselin. Metuchen-258-W
 Clapham A R r Chestnut. Metuchen-169-J
 Clare C H r 28 Graham av. Metuchen-90-W

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.

"Aircraft Observing Tower," Continued from Page 1

The Tower, now long since demolished but then located atop Beacon Hill, had replaced a rotating beacon light serving as a pre-war aircraft navigational aid. Beacon Hill, reportedly the highest point in the Metuchen area, lies within the confines of the present-day Metuchen Centennial Park off of Grove Avenue in the northeastern quadrant of Metuchen.

Exigencies in early-1942 had caused the US Army Air Force to issue a nationwide call to local civic groups to undertake Air Warning Service (AWS) operations. The task of AWS operations was to aid in the monitoring of the sky for the appearance of hostile aircraft. Such was considered necessary to help guard against the destruction by aerial bombing of cities within the continental United States, a fate that had already befallen many Asian and European cities. (In retrospect, we now know that the fear of such bombing was unwarranted.

However at the time the general public held this threat to be quite real. Indeed, I recall my troubled anxiety when on several occasions I heard my parents and our neighbors discuss the distinct possibility of a reign of airborne terror upon the NY/NJ metropolitan area.)

The Army asked local groups to both fund the construction of necessary facilities and to organize and staff the operation. The Metuchen response was rapid for within six weeks after Pearl Harbor, the 22 January 1942 issue of *The Recorder* reported that an organization had been formed under the chairmanship of Mr. DuBois Thompson, then Borough



Attorney, and a call for volunteer observers had been issued. The initial list of volunteers indicated an enthusiastic response to this call for it contained a representative cross-section of Metuchen's citizenry – clergy, school teachers, doctors, attorneys, pharmacists, businessmen, shop keepers, housewives, high school seniors, boy scouts, and more.

Of wood frame construction and unpainted, the Tower was built with funds raised solely by local subscription; no federal, state, or borough contributions were involved although the last provided aid in the form of site preparation. In March 1942 *The Recorder* reported that \$200 had been quickly raised for construction with more pledges yet to be redeemed. Two months later the amount raised had risen over five-fold, to \$1100, a quite large sum in that era. Also much donated construction material had been received. Actual Tower construction began in early June 1942 when federal approval of the site selection and tower design was finally received. Spotting operations began the next month.

The AWS operations conducted from the Metuchen Tower and elsewhere were those of the Army Air Forces Ground Observer Corps, an organization that at its peak in late 1943 had upwards of 1.5 million civilian volunteers serving in observation stations spread at approximately fifteen mile intervals along the Atlantic coastline from Maine to Florida with a similar set of stations along the Pacific coast and also inland surrounding major

Do you remember the observing tower? Were you a volunteer? Have a photograph of it? Send us your story, and we'll include it in an upcoming issue of *Nannygoats!*

cities and military installations.

Locally, from mid-1942 through late 1943, the tower was manned by Metuchen-area volunteers, usually in groups of two or three, who served two-hour shifts on a 24/7 basis. In this pre-radar era, they reported the flight of all aircraft over the Metuchen/Edison area by a dedicated telephone line to one of the information gathering points of the US Army First Fighter Command. If I recall correctly, information about flights over the Metuchen area was reported to an Army Center at Mitchell Field on Long Island. Incidentally, even the cost of telephone service was paid for by funds raised by local subscription since no federal funds were made available.

Clouds permitting, during daylight hours binoculars usually afforded positive identification of the aircraft type (see the WEFT poster) along with its estimated altitude (low, medium, high), speed (fast or slow), and compass heading. On heavily overcast days or in darkness usually only the sound of the aircraft's engine(s) could be heard although infrequently at night the lights on the plane's wingtips might also be observable. If a visual sighting was not possible the spotters would huddle to try to reconcile their subjective observations for the report to the Army Center ... single or multi-engine, flying high or low, and the approximate heading.

A December 1942 article in *The Recorder* lists the names of 136 Metuchen/Edison individuals who were registered spotters and noted that by the first anniversary of the war they had collectively logged a total of 17,500 hours of continuous duty. At an awards ceremony that month, several individuals were cited for having contributed upwards of 750 hours of service since the Tower's inception. Those in this subset displayed truly remarkable dedication – 750 hours of service over a six month period averages to approximately 30 hours per week per individual.

In early 1943, as the tide of war started to change and as military radar and sound-ranging equipment became operational, visual observation stations began to be retired on a selective basis. In October 1943 the Metuchen Tower went on a part-time basis thereby keeping the local organization intact but by May of the following year, along with all remaining visual stations, it too was fully deactivated.

While the Metuchen Tower was operational, I would often accompany my father, Michael G. Muha, a registered spotter, while he served his early-evening tour, a two hour shift one night each week. Early on during one of these shifts, another of the adults present, a kindly local pastor as I recall, apparently noted my intense study of the aircraft recognition charts prominently posted about the interior of the Tower. He wondered aloud whether I might not “undertake some useful chore” to which I readily agreed.

Thereafter, during some of my father's shifts, I sat at a table illuminated by a small lamp in the otherwise darkened lower section of the Tower's cupola and recorded in the daily log the details of the identification report called to me from the spotters standing outside on the deck. Also, on occasion, I was permitted to make the required telephone report to the Army Command Center. While "on duty" I proudly wore my father's official AWS Observer armband on my left arm. This activity gave me a sense of importance of being a part of the war effort, albeit however miniscule, and as can be imagined was rather “heady stuff” for an eleven/twelve year old.

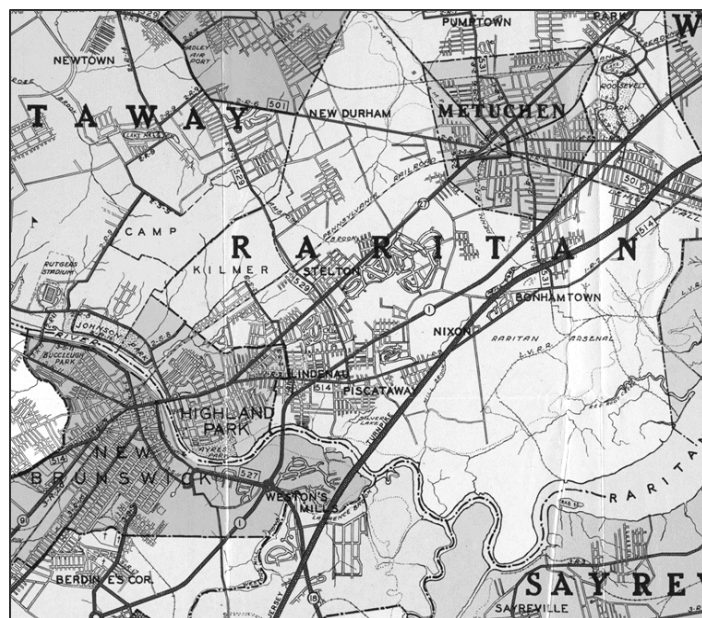


Image on Page 4: an Aircraft Recognition System Poster such as would have been used by the observers (Gov Doc W109 113 A 7/2 - War Posters, American - 1939-1945 - Airplanes – Recognition (<http://digital.library.unt.edu/permalink/meta-dc-247>).

Above: a 1953 Map of Middlesex County (<http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu>) This image, included by the Editor, shows the proximity of Metuchen to the City of New Brunswick, the Raritan Arsenal, and the Raritan River.

Left: Armband picture courtesy of Paul Phillips. It was worn by his father, Ivan J. Phillips, an Air Warning Service Observer (AWS) during World War II.

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.

SOCIAL LIFE

The social life of Metuchen in years gone by differed from that of today. The Grosvener Dances, which were among the greatest social events of the day were held in Robin's Hall, and could be chaperoned by married women only. The dances were attended by people from Rahway, New Brunswick, and even New York, besides residents of Metuchen.

One of the large organizations was the Debating Society. Dr. J.G. Mason was the organizer of this club. Many young men were members, and debated the topics of the day.

The Metuchen club was one of the oldest of Metuchen organizations. It was originally located on Middlesex Avenue where the Masonic Building now stands. Dances were given for the benefit of the club, and dramatic plays and contests were also held for the amusements of the people.

The Social Club held its meetings in the Masonic Building. It gave plays at Robins Hall. Moving pictures in Metuchen were also given at Robins Hall. Often in the middle of the picture, the film would break, and cause much excitement among the on-lookers. A club that was well-known in those days was the Delphic Club, which staged plays for the benefit of charity.

Riding horses and playing tennis were the chief sports. Of course during the winter there was sleigh-riding. This was a great source of amusement and gave pleasure to both old and young. The Village Improvement Society was an organization which started in 1883. Through its effort the village became well lighted. In 1879 the Metuchen Book Club was formed, many people donating books. Two years later it owned about 620 books.



THE TREND TOWARDS MODERN IMPROVEMENTS

If it were possible for some of the residents of Metuchen during the Revolutionary War to return to town, it is needless to say that they would express unfeigned surprise. Great and numerous changes have taken place. For now, the business section of the town is located about midway between Pumptown and Bonhamtown, which were, at the time, the real centers. Instead of candles, we have electric lights; instead of a town pump, running water in every home; instead of wood fires, gas.

During the Revolution, mail and important messages were carried by a mounted post rider. This was the only method of carrying mail until 1835, when the first mail coach was put in service between New York and Philadelphia. This coach also carried passengers, for whom the fare for the entire journey was three dollars. The coach stopped at the Seventeen-Mile Post, where gingerbread and apples were sold to the passengers. The Seventeen-Mile Post was situated about where Birdsall's garage is now located.

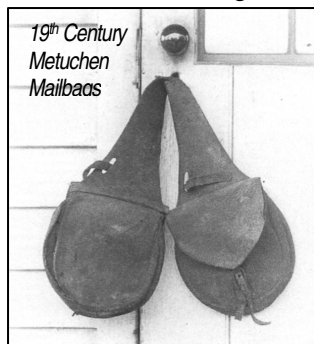
This stagecoach ran until about 1848, when train service was established. The passing of the first train through town was such an event that the children were dismissed from school to see it. (At that time school was held in the Franklin Civic House, now owned by the Borough Improvement League.) There were only two tracks, and only one train which ran between Jersey City and Monmouth Junction. The train went to Jersey City in the morning and returned at night. It stopped at the station, which was on the north side of the tracks, about where Crowell's Feed Store is situated, and sometimes at the freight station near Freeman's Lumber Yard. In 1872 the station was moved to Lake Avenue. At this time, the station master was required to be ticket agent, telegraph operator, baggage master, switchman, and signal operator.

This station was torn down in 1888, to make room for new west-bound tracks. There is a rather amusing incident connected with the tearing down of the station. Mr. Charles Mundy, so it was rumored, went to Trenton to obtain an injunction to prevent the razing of the building. When this rumor reached the railroad officials, two locomotives were immediately sent out, and with them came word that "if two were not enough, half a dozen more would be sent if necessary." Chains were put around the station and the locomotives pulled in opposite directions. The new, but temporary, station was built almost overnight. Where the station had been, an automatic signal and switch tower were built several years later.

About that time, the present station was also built.

While all this was taking place, other things were happening to change the aspect of Metuchen. Middlesex Avenue boasted macadam dressing instead of plain dirt, over which it was often necessary to place brush to prevent horse and vehicle from sinking hopelessly in Spring mud. It remained a macadam road until 1917 when it was concreted. Seeing that the United States was already engaged in war, the older boys from the Rahway Reformatory did all the work. It was rumored that a Thanksgiving banquet was promised them if the road was complete by Thanksgiving eve. They were so anxious for this treat that they worked long after dark, the last bit of the road being put in by lamplight.

When we consider the splendid road of today, it is amusing to think that one gentleman said, when Middlesex Avenue was macadamized,



"Bicyclists are doing this. They're taxing us to death!"

**Next Issue:
SPORTS**

Update on the Short Hills Battlefield Project

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

With funding from the American Battlefield Protection Program, the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society has hired John Milner Associates of West Chester, Pennsylvania to be the cultural resources consulting firm for the project.

Society volunteers have been working with the consultants to develop the Work Plan and Research Design, and have provided them with a great deal of research we had previously conducted.

As part of the project, the Society received Edison Township approval to conduct a metal detector search on five acres of Township property.

After only the first day of metal detecting, around the Smith House, three artifacts relevant to the Battle of the Short Hills had been located: a metal button, a 1717 British coin, and a fired American musket ball.

The musket ball was found ten feet northwest of the coin, and was slightly deformed, leading the archaeologists to believe it was fired and impacted the ground. Other items found, but not related to the battle, included a horse shoe, pieces of farm equipment, and a simple button with no markings on it.

Further information and a full report will be available to Society members and the public as the project progresses.

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

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.

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Upcoming Programs and Events

Visit us at the Fair! Saturday, October 2, 2010

Don't forget to stop by our booth at the annual Metuchen Country Fair, which will take place along Main Street on Saturday, October 2, 2010, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Our booth will include interesting historical displays, a variety of Society merchandise for sale, and the hot-off-the-presses Fall issue of *Nannygoats*, which will feature a history of Woodwild Park by resident Erick de Vries.

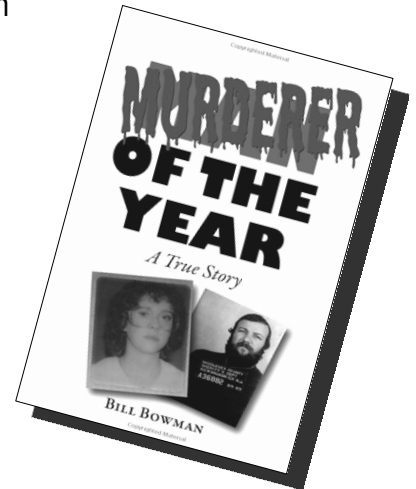
In case of inclement weather, check the Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce's website for rescheduling information (raindates are the following two Saturdays).

MURDERER OF THE YEAR

Sunday, October 24, 2010 at 1:30 p.m.
Old Franklin School

Society members and the public invited to attend a presentation by Bill Bowman of his new book, "Murderer of the Year," which brings you behind the scenes of an investigation and trial that rocked the small borough of Metuchen, New Jersey in the early 1980s. This free program will take place at the Old Franklin School at 491 Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen, and will be followed by a reception of light refreshments.

Parking is available across the street at Borough Hall and along Main Street. Please contact Steve at 732-452-1381 or popopies@hotmail.com with any questions.



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

Have you renewed your membership in the Society for 2010? 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 or contact 732-906-0529 for more information.