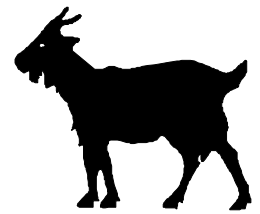


Nannygoats



Special Black History Month Edition

Vol. 10, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2012

Welcome to a special edition of *Nannygoats* dedicated to the area's rich local Black History. While we have neither the space within one issue nor the comprehensive resources to provide a complete history of African-Americans in the Edison and Metuchen area, we have chosen to highlight some of the items and facts the Society has recently acquired. We actively seek additional historical items and facts to add to our archives that will help us document the events and people that comprise our community. Please contact us if you have anything you would like to share with the Society. Many thanks to historian Gordon Bond for sharing his recent extensive work on Thomas Peterson by allowing us to excerpt the article below from his forthcoming book, "North Jersey Legacies - Hidden History from the Gateway to the Skylands" due out March, 2012. The full text is posted on our website.

To Cast A Freedman's Vote

How a Handyman from Perth Amboy Made Civil Rights History - by Gordon Bond

The night Barack Obama gave his acceptance speech following his election as the forty-fourth President of the United States, among those who paused to listen to the President-elect were those old enough to remember a time when men and women who looked like him couldn't drink from the same water fountain or eat at the same lunch counter. In the audience were people who marched on places like Selma and Birmingham. Commentators evoked the names of martyrs to the cause, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Others still, called up the less distinct memory of the masses of humanity who had toiled their lives away as slaves.

The historic nature of that election rises above the partisanship of politics, regardless of one's political persuasion or opinions of his administration. But while his achieving the highest office in the land might be a high-water mark in the Civil Rights movement, it was, ultimately, just the latest chapter in a long and ongoing story of how humans in America deal with race. Still, it did provide an organic moment to pause and consider the journey thus far.

The face that came to my mind that night was that of a handyman from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, who cast the first African American ballot under the auspices of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870.

The Fifteenth Amendment

Do a Google search on "Thomas Mundy Peterson" and it is his historic vote that comes up again and again, but scant little else. While that bit of trivia may be important, the real interest lies in the convergence of all that had to come together to make that moment possible—and everything that came after. And, of course, Peterson was more than an event. Who was he as a man? How did that moment change his life?

Obviously, in order to become the first voter under the Fifteenth Amendment, there had to be a Fifteenth Amendment in the first place.

Slavery had been part of New Jersey history right from the very beginnings. When Lords John Berkeley and George Carteret were enticing settlers to their new property, they

promised an extra seventy-five acres for every slave someone brought along. The wharves of Perth Amboy saw ships direct from Africa unloading human cargo, shuffled off in clanking chains to barracks on the corner of Smith and Water Streets, awaiting sale in the town square—in front of the same city hall where Peterson would eventually cast his vote.

The issue of slavery has been likened to a sleeping snake, metaphorically coiled under the table, as the founders fussed and fought over the Constitution that would define the nation they were creating. Unresolved for various reasons, it would, in less than a century, indeed come back to bite the country.

Westward expansion at last brought the question to a head—would these new territories be brought into the Republic as slave states or free? Reaching critical mass, the struggle to answer those questions exploded in the four-year spasm of violence that we call the American Civil War.

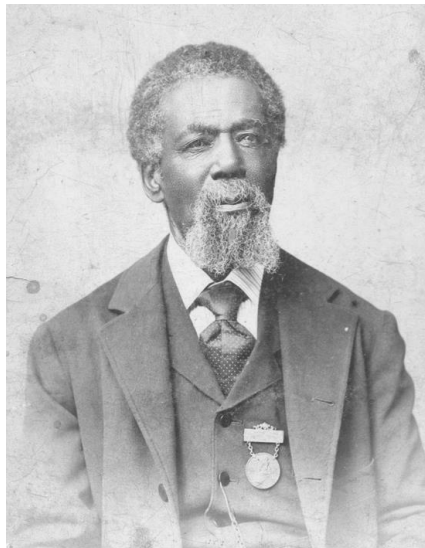
President Abraham Lincoln is often referred to as the man who freed the slaves. This laudable title usually refers to his Emancipation Proclamation—his executive order of January 1, 1863. In truth, this was more of a declaration of intent. For one thing, it only applied to the ten states in rebellion. While it nevertheless translated into freedom for slaves found on Rebel territory taken by Union soldiers, it did not specifically outlaw

slavery in the nation as a whole.

A true transitioning away from slavery, however, would require more work even after the Union's victory. In considering the Fifteenth Amendment, one must take it in context with the Thirteenth and Fourteenth, a three-piece set known as the Restoration Amendments.

Considering the bloody war that gave it birth to, the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution seems rather stark, with a straightforward simplicity of language: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Continued on Page 4



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.

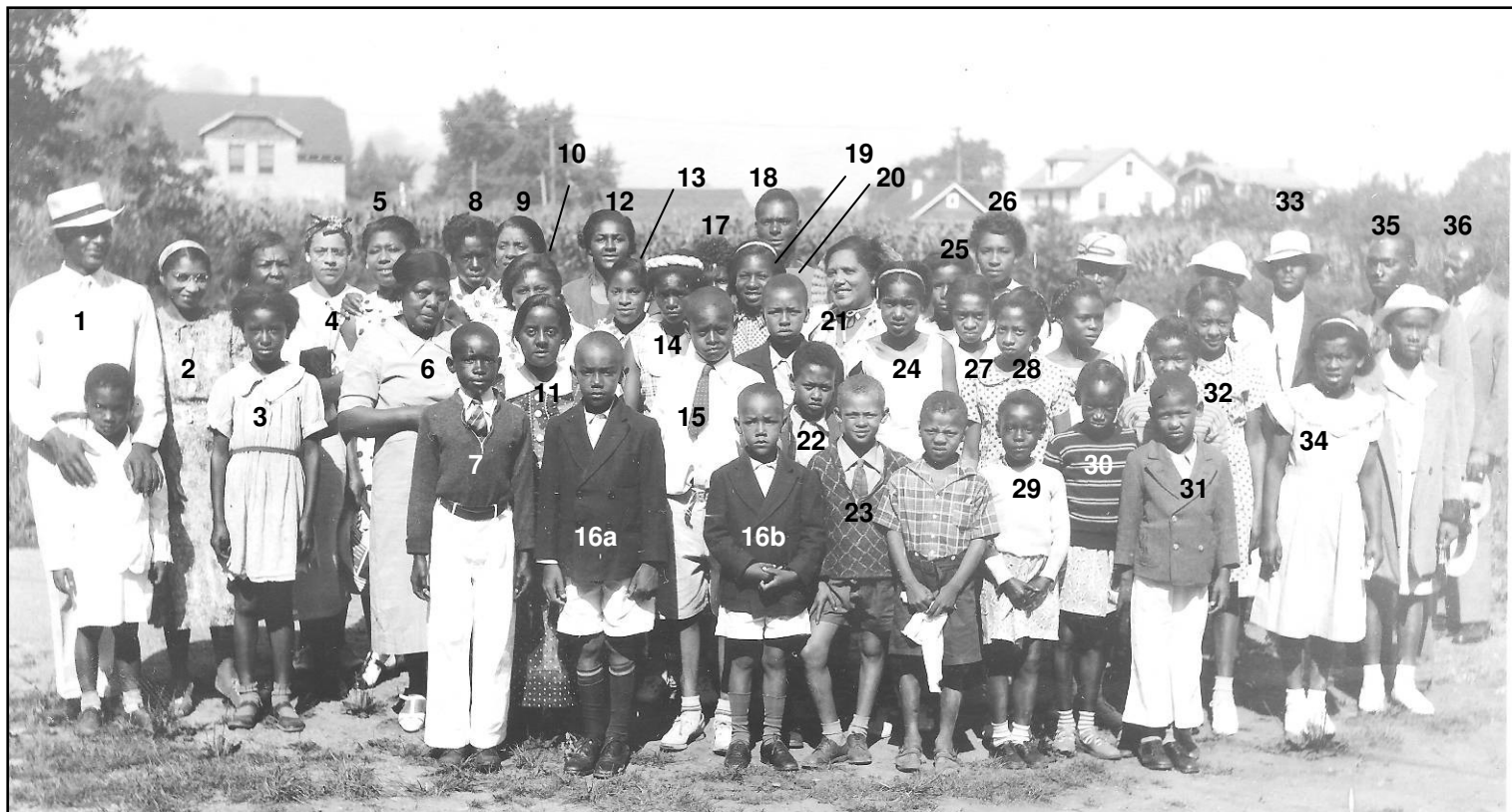
HISTORY MYSTERY SOLVED: PHOTOGRAPH IDENTIFIED

By Tyreen Reuter

Several years ago, I found an original print of the photograph below for sale at a booksale and postcard show, and purchased it because it had "J.L. Grimstead" stamped on the reverse along with the date "Jul 29, 1937." Without any other information, it was guessed to be a group picture possibly from the Potter's Crossing section of Edison.

However, last year a local resident spotted a copy of the image I had reproduced within a paper written for a history course and contacted me to let me know that I had incorrectly labeled the image and it was in fact of a group of congregants from Metuchen's Second Baptist Church going on a church outing, probably a Sunday School picnic. Not only were both her father and grandfather in the photograph, but knew the names of many of the others. This long-time resident has humbly declined to be named, but has generously provided the names of those she was able to identify. Sincere thanks for reaching out to me and for her efforts to provide names for the faces below.

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Clarence Tate | 13. Lottie Miller | 25. Harriet Scruggs |
| 2. Katherine Tate | 14. Marynetha Chisholm | 26. Virginia Scruggs |
| 3. Josephine Scruggs | 15. Nelson Tate | 27. Margaret Scruggs |
| 4. Rose Wright | 16. a&b: Mrs. Jewels' grandsons | 28. Jeanne Tate (Simpson) |
| 5. Ms. Alma (?) | 17. Viola Scruggs | 29. Mildred Letsinger |
| 6. Mary Bradshaw | 18. Raymond Scruggs | 30. Ester Letsinger |
| 7. Perry Letsinger | 19. Ann Tate Lassiter | 31. Leroy Tate |
| 8. Thelma Butler | 20. George Tate | 32. Marguerite Tate (Wareham) |
| 9. Musa Curry | 21. Mrs. Ethel Clements | 33. Nelson Tate |
| 10. Mrs. Chisolm | 22. Nicholas Tate | 34. Frances Kearny (Heavens) |
| 11. Lily Hopkins | 23. Raymond Nelson | 35. Perry Letsinger |
| 12. Ruth Johnson (Keaton) | 24. Doris Tate | 36. Reverend Nelson D. Tate |



Partial Congregation of the Second Baptist Church, Metuchen, taken on July 29, 1937 by J.L. Grimstead.

“Black Firsts” in Middlesex County

Listed below are some “Black Firsts” in Middlesex County, and specifically the Metuchen and Edison areas, excerpted and condensed from a project originally compiled by Chandra M. Hayslett for the NAACP Metuchen-Edison Branch through a grant from the Middlesex County Cultural & Heritage Commission. A copy of the complete project is on file in the Society’s archives.

Emmy-Award winner **Gail Fisher** (1935 - 2000) was the first black to have a speaking role in a television commercial (for All detergent) and first black added to the cast of “Mannix.” But before ever attaining stardom, she was the first black hired to work as a sales clerk for Seldow’s General Store in Metuchen. Although born in Orange, she grew up in the Potter’s Crossing section of Edison.



Harry J. Russell (1930-) was the first black to be elected to the Edison School Board. He also was a founder of the Edison Sheltered Workshop, a member of the Middlesex County Human Rights Commission, a board member of the Metuchen-Edison YMCA, and chairperson of the New Jersey Black Achievers Commission. In addition, he received many awards including the Humanitarian Award from the Central Jersey Chapter of the National Council of Christians and Jews, the NAACP’s President’s Award for Community Services, New Jersey Outstanding Social Worker of the Year and Outstanding Citizenship Award from Middlesex County College. After graduating from high school in White Plains, Russell attended Champlain College in Plattsburg, N.Y. and graduated in 1953 with a double major in sociology and psychology. He then worked as a youth counselor before being drafted into the United States Army. After serving for two years, he worked at a children’s shelter in New York City and then Rockland State Hospital as a psychiatric social worker. While there, he received a master’s degree in social work from Columbia University. He moved to Perth Amboy in 1961 to help open the city’s first mental health clinic, for which he served as assistant director for nine years. In 1970, John F. Kennedy Hospital reached out to Russell to create the position of vice president for Mental Health and Community Services at its new mental health facility; a position which he held with distinction for 26 years. Russell served on the Edison School Board for 10 years in the 1970s and 1980s, and in his honor of his many contributions, the auditorium at J.P. Stevens High School was dedicated to him on January 24, 2000.



Walter Qualls (1938 - 1987) was the first black to be elected council member in Metuchen. Born in Louisiana, he worked as a sharecropper at a very young age, but at age seven came to north to live with an uncle in the Port Reading Railroad Camp. There he was the first black child to integrate his school. An excellent student, he had dreams of becoming a lawyer but was told by a guidance counselor that no one was hiring “Negro lawyers.” After serving for two years in the Air Force, he worked at the American Agriculture and Chemical Co., where he was the first black to integrate his carpenter shop. He began to build his experience with labor unions and became the first black president of the International Chemical Workers Union (Local 434) and eventually earned a bachelor’s degree in Urban Studies and Labor Studies from Rutgers University. In 1970, he and his wife, Tyrene, moved to Metuchen and soon after then-Mayor Don Wernik approached him to run for council, which he did successfully with John Wiley as his running mate. After his time on the council, he served as a staff aide to former Commissioner of Labor

and Industry Joseph Hoffman and ran the statewide campaign among black voters for President Jimmy Carter. He later became a lobbyist, working as a consultant for organizations such as Group Health Insurance of New Jersey, and when he died of a heart attack at age 48, he was still working as a consultant and taking classes toward a Master’s Degree in Labor Management at Rutgers University.

Minnie Bell Veal (1907-1985) was the first black teacher in Edison. She and her husband, Frank, were friends of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s parents when they lived in Atlanta, but moved to north Edison in the 1950s. She had studied Social Work at Spelman College, and soon after moving to Edison became very involved in the community, especially the youth. She was the recreational director at the township’s North Edison Playground and was the founder of the former Potter’s Crossing Community Center, which established itself as the headquarters for all social, recreational, civic and cultural activities in the northeast section of the township. She was also a member of the Northeast Civic Empowerment Club and the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, where she served as Sunday School Superintendent for 23 years. She was also vice president of the church’s Willing Worker’s Club and Flower Guild. She served as a hostess and assistant teacher of the Good News Club, a weekly Bible ministry for children, and was a member of the Metuchen-Edison Race Relations Council. The Minnie B. Veal Recreational Center in Edison was named in her honor in 1990, with a plaque in the center bearing these words she as known to tell children: “Go to the top. Don’t stop,”

Mildred S. Scott (1946-) is the first black elected to the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and was also the first black woman elected to the Piscataway Township Council and the first black to serve as chief of the Middlesex County Sheriff’s Department, and the first black candidate for sheriff of Middlesex County, a position which she currently holds. In addition to the council and freeholder board, Scott is a former Piscataway Zoning and Planning board member. She’s currently a member of the Piscataway Democratic Club, State Democratic Committee Woman, and a trustee on Piscataway Senior Citizen Housing Board.



That's all it took—in theory anyway—to set into motion the once-and-for-all end of slavery in the United States. Of course, that bit of paperwork wasn't going to change the ingrained racial attitudes of those who had just defended that “peculiar institution.” And, what did it really mean to those it claimed to release from bondage? What did it mean to be “free”? What was the legal status of the millions of men, women and children those words affected? Were they citizens, with all the rights and responsibilities that status conferred?

The Fourteenth Amendment, passed in 1868, was intended to answer those questions, and is perhaps necessarily a longer text, consisting of five sections, mostly dealing with how to proportion representation after this overnight surge in citizens. But the first section is what was pertinent to all those now-ex slaves:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Individual colonies and states had long ago established bans on importing slaves from outside nations not out of any desire to curb the institution as much as protect the interests of slave traders at home. So by 1868, pretty much all the people freed by the Thirteenth Amendment had been born here. With one broad, inclusive stroke, the Fourteenth Amendment conferred citizenship on the entirety of that population. The Fourteenth Amendment was a direct repudiation of the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sanford Supreme Court decision that established that Negroes were not citizens.

Resistance, of course, would be inevitable. People who held tight enough to principles—racist though they may be—to actually fight, kill and die for them, were hardly going to be swayed by laws passed by a government most viewed as illegitimate occupiers. A range of tactics were employed by those seeking to prevent Negro inclusion in civil society—from the outright brutal intimidation of the Ku Klux Klan to the restrictive legislative loopholes of the so-called Jim Crow Laws. State constitutions still asserted the right to limit suffrage based on race or on having been a slave—or even having been the child or grandchild of a slave.

Race, however, wasn't the only issue. Women would be denied regardless of race or other status for another fifty years. Even acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior was a criterion for a handful of states—the establishment clause of the First Amendment notwithstanding. And, when race was the central issue, it wasn't always specifically about dark skin—some wanted the recent influx of Irish and Chinese immigrants kept out of voting too. Of course, the tools of exclusion worked both ways. Southern Republicans had been using loyalty oaths to stem the influence of ex-Confederates.

Images included in this article

Front Page: Photograph of Thomas Peterson, scanned from the original print in the collections of the Perth Amboy Public Library.

Right: Detail of a photograph in an 1896 booklet of a large house on High and Commerce Streets in Perth Amboy, showing a small section of the rear of Thomas Peterson's home on Commerce Lane.

Page 5: A portion of the transcribed records of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, showing the entry for the marriage of “Thomas” and “Lucy.”

Nevertheless, by March 30, 1870, enough states had ratified the Fifteenth Amendment to make it the law in another remarkably straightforward piece of language: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

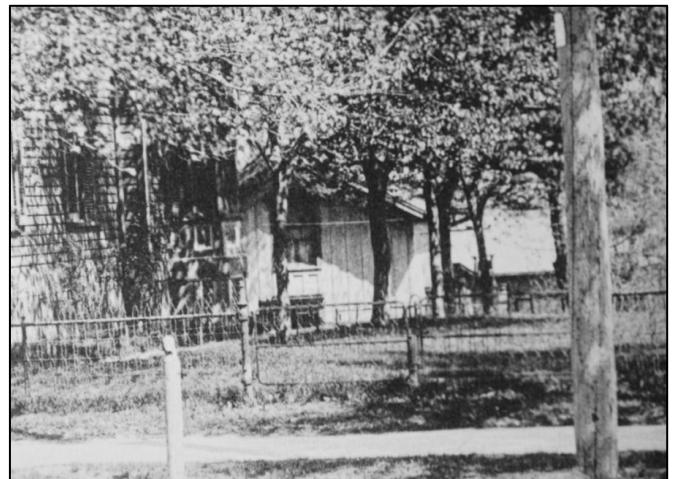
It isn't known how closely Thomas Peterson had been following the debates that preceded ratification. But certainly others in Perth Amboy were watching.

Eagleswood

“I was working for Mr. J.L. Kearny on the morning of the day of the election, and did not think of voting until he came out to the stable where I was attending to the horses and advised me to go to the polls and exercise a citizen's privilege,” Thomas Peterson later told a reporter. The question of the day was whether the city of Perth Amboy should revise their existing charter or abandon it to return to a previous township form of government. “When I went home to dinner at noon I met Mr. Marcus Spring of Eagleswood, a place about a mile out of town, and he, too, advised me to claim the right of suffrage at the polls.”

It probably wasn't mere coincidence that Marcus Spring (1810-1874) was there to encourage Peterson to go vote. In 1853, with his wife Rebecca (1812-1911), they established the Raritan Bay Union, a sort of progressive cross between a boarding school, artist colony and utopian community. Not only did male and female students share the classroom, but black and white, as well as other races. Girls were encouraged to do things like public speaking, to engage in sports and perform plays—things any respectable young lady would never be taught in most schools of the day. The Raritan Bay Union attracted an impressive array of progressive liberals, artists and reformers to Perth Amboy. Angelina and Sarah Grimké—the abolitionist and women's suffrage activist sisters—taught classes while Angelina's husband, Theodore Weld—considered the father of modern American abolitionism—ran the school. Among those who lived or worked at the Raritan Bay Union were the influential author Caroline Kirkland; Kentucky-born abolitionist, politician and jurist James Birney; American landscape painter George Inness; portrait artist William Page; social reformist Edward Palmer; teacher, writer, philosopher and reformer Amos Bronson Alcott; and, Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau enjoyed surveying land and indulged his interest by surveying Eagleswood's 260 acres.

But to get a real sense of the Springs and the strength of



the ideals that underlay their vision, one needs to look at Rebecca Spring's reaction to John Brown's famous raid on Harpers Ferry. Between October 16 and 19, 1859, the white abolitionist John Brown attempted to incite a slave uprising by leading a group of sixteen white men, three free blacks, one freed slave and one fugitive slave to seize the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. They were defeated by U.S. Marines and militia, under the perhaps now prescient command of Robert E. Lee. When the smoke cleared, ten of Brown's men were dead. Four managed to escape but were later captured. Seven were seized immediately, including Brown himself. All would be hanged.

Rebecca Spring came to Brown's Charlestown, Virginia, jail cell and tended to his wounds. She also administered to Aaron Stevens and Absolom Hazlett. The bodies of some of the executed men would be claimed and brought home. Two apparently ended up as teaching cadavers at medical schools. But when no one claimed the bodies of Stevens and Hazlett, she was determined that they would be buried in free soil. She would bring them back to Perth Amboy to graves on the Spring's Eagleswood estate. That was a strong abolitionist statement. But the men were also convicted of treason and when Perth Amboy's citizens got wind of Rebecca Spring's intentions, they were outraged. So the bodies of the two men were landed instead at Rahway and, under the cover of darkness, brought to Eagleswood, where they would remain until 1899 when they were transferred to a cemetery at North Elba, New York.

John Brown's two now-fatherless daughters would find an education with Theodore Weld at the Raritan Bay Union. It is little wonder that Eagleswood became a stop on the Underground Railroad.

The Raritan Bay Union disbanded in 1860, but was replaced by the Springs with the Eagleswood Military Academy. It tried to carry on the same kind of progressivism, but perhaps with some irony, the Civil War ended the experiment. Many of the teachers and students went off to serve, leaving a less economically viable institution behind them.

By the war's end, their school no longer existed, but the Springs were still committed to the ideals it had taught. Indeed, there was a generation of Perth Amboy's leading citizens who had graduated, infused with such ideals—including James Lawrence Kearny.

It was dumb luck that the first post-ratification election in which any black person could vote happened to be in Perth Amboy. But now there was a Fifteenth Amendment and a community influenced by a zeal to see Negro suffrage become reality. All that was needed was a black man to step up meet that destiny.

Slave or Free?

When Thomas Peterson came into this world on October 6, 1824, deep within his cells, somewhere between just four and six genes determined what the rest of his life would probably be like. They regulated the amount and type of something called "melanin"—a pigment that would shade his skin. His DNA, handed down through his African ancestors, gave him other distinctive physical traits—the color and texture of his hair, the shape of his nose and lips. In the eyes of much of the society into which he was born, such features marked one as an inferior creature. Inferior enough, in fact, that for over 7,500 men and

Oct. 19	Oliver Martin	
	Mary Ayers	
Dec. 20	Solomon Freeman	
	Isabella Martin	
1820		
Jan. 27	Thomas	a black man of Ezra Mundy
	Lucy	a black woman of John Smock
Feb. 9	Philip Morris	
	Ann Noe	
Feb. 12	Bloomfield F Randolph	
	Eliza F. Randolph	

women in New Jersey alone, it justified their being held in involuntary bondage and servitude.

Relatively speaking, Peterson was lucky. A "gradual emancipation" law had been passed in New Jersey twenty years before he was born. It didn't help those already held as slaves, but it meant that, since he was born afterwards, he would never have to personally know what it meant to be the property of another. But that reality was only as far away as his parents and in the lingering attitudes of some of his white neighbors.

The story of Peterson's childhood is sketchy at best, though not for want of trying by local historians. He was born in what is now Metuchen (then part of Woodbridge) and local historians Tyreen Reuter and Walter R. Stochel, Jr. have been researching that part of his life. His parents were Thomas and Lucy, and their story is something of a muddle if you go by the various subsequent articles and histories that mention them. When Thomas Peterson died in 1904, the Newark Evening News described his parents as having both been slaves owned by the same Mundy family. This was repeated in a 1959 Perth Amboy Evening News article. In his History of Perth Amboy, William C. McGinnis says the elder Thomas was "employed" by the Mundys, while Lucy's parents were slaves of Monmouth County's Newell family. A 1977 Perth Amboy Evening News article, however, says Thomas Sr. was born to free parents while Lucy was born to slaves.

Why the ambiguity?

Well, at least in the instances of newspapers, it can likely be put down to harried reporters looking to make a deadline and not having time to check facts too deeply. But there is also something alluringly melodramatic in the image of the son of slaves casting that first vote as a free man. The reality is a little more complicated.

We do know that Thomas Sr. was indeed associated with the Mundys, an old Metuchen family dating back to 1665, when Nicholas Mundy came over from England and called the place home. The specific member of the family who evidently owned or employed Thomas Sr. was Ezra Mundy (1772–1841). Whether it was an owner-slave or employer-employee relationship isn't yet entirely clear. It is certainly possible it could have been both—that Thomas was a slave but manumitted and stayed on as paid labor.

Lucy is a little easier to follow. She had been a slave of Hugh Newell (1744–1816) of Freehold Township. Some historians go out of their way to point out that this is the same Newell family that had also produced William Augustus Newell (1817–901)—New Jersey's delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives (1847–1851 and again 1865–1867), state

governor (1857–1860) and even governor of the Washington Territory (now Washington State, 1880–1884)—and author of the Newell Act that created the United States Life-Saving Service (a precursor to the United States Coast Guard).

Hugh Newell, however, is the one that's important to our story. He settled in Freehold Township from Ireland and saw service in the War for Independence. Evidently, he had other servants, as he is found in 1767 advertising a reward in the Pennsylvania Gazette for the return of an Irish servant by the name of John M'Cullough. Newell died in 1816, but on April 24, 1822, his executors officially manumitted the twenty-two-year-old Lucy.

How Lucy—who is sometimes identified as Lucy Green—found her way from Freehold in Monmouth County to Woodbridge in Middlesex County isn't entirely clear, but she obviously did as she is found marrying Thomas Sr. on January 27, 1820. The event was included in a list of marriages performed by Rev. Henry Cook in the records of the Second Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge (now the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen) and offers a clue as to how she might have gotten to Woodbridge.

The list records the marriage between “Thomas, a black man of Ezra Mundy,” and “Lucy, a black woman of John Smock.” What's striking is that the marriage took place two years before Lucy was freed, yet she is identified as being “of John Smock.”

Assuming we're talking about the same Thomas and Lucy—and there isn't any reason to believe we're not—we can make some reasonable speculations. It wasn't unusual for slaves to be “lent” to others, who would be responsible for them, though legal ownership remained technically with the original master. It is plausible that when Newell died, the family didn't need her and so sent her off to someone who did—either a friend, relative or someone who paid them for her services. The relationship between the Newells and Smock is still being explored.

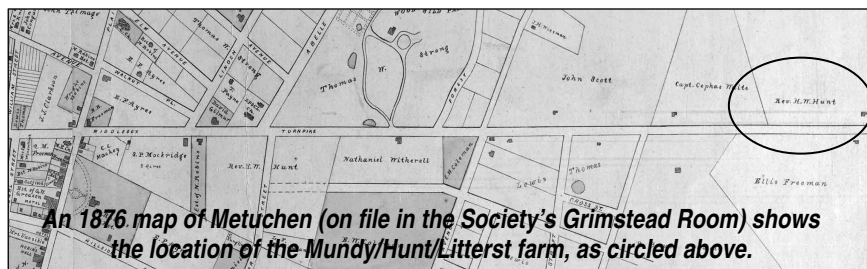
If Lucy was twenty-two in 1822 when she was freed, she was born around 1800—too early to fall under the 1804 Gradual Emancipation Act in New Jersey. So she was, as far as the law was concerned, a slave until the Newells emancipated her. Nevertheless, there may have been an arrangement that she would be freed after age twenty-one—the age girls born to slave mothers were to be freed under the act. While the exact circumstances are not known, Lucy may have understood that she would not need to return to Monmouth County and so could marry and set down roots in Middlesex County.

In any event, four years after they were married, Thomas Jr. came into the world—the son of a free mother.

Want to read the rest of the article, and find out about the circumstances of Mr. Peterson's historic vote, his marriage, later life, and much more?

Visit our website at www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org for the complete text of this chapter from Mr. Bond's forthcoming

“North Jersey Legacies - Hidden History from the Gateway to the Skylands.” For more information, contact the author at gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com.



"So, where in Metuchen was Mr. Peterson actually born?"

Good question, and one that has Society researchers and other historians, like Mr. Bond, very busy! No birth certificate has been found yet for Mr. Peterson, but it is not unusual that such a document would fall through the cracks - if it ever did exist - for a person of color at that point in history. But we know that Mr. Peterson identified the location of his 1824 birth as Metuchen, and we have his parents' marriage record from 1820 which seems to indicate father was owned by (or at the very least worked for) Ezra Mundy. His mother, Lucy, was freed by the time he was born, and we can surmise that she perhaps lived with her husband on the Mundy farm, given the reported identification with that family and Mr. Peterson's later apprenticeship with the Mundys. So it our best guess at this point that Mr. Peterson was in fact born on the Ezra Mundy farm. Research is on-going to attempt to clearly establish the birth location, but it is possible no definitive documentation may exist or ever be found.

So where did Ezra Mundy live? Luckily that is an easier question. This particular Ezra Mundy (1772-1841) was married to Catherine Prall and had several children, one of whom, a daughter named Henrietta (1812-1890), married a Presbyterian minister. Henrietta and her husband, the Reverend Holloway Hunt (1800-1882), acquired her father's property in two deeds (dated 1831 and 1839), and apparently lived there until Reverend Hunt's death in 1882, when it was sold to Alex C. Litterst.

In an oral history conducted by the Society with Mr. Litterst's daughters, Elsie and Lou, in 1976, the sisters discuss how their father bought the farm in 1882 and their years growing up there. They later ran a tea room known as The Ramble Inn from the home from 1933 to 1966. Although the house and all of the farm buildings have been since demolished, they were located along the north side of Middlesex Avenue (the Lincoln Highway) in the northeastern section of Metuchen, approximately where the current Coldwell Banker office is now at 40 Middlesex Avenue, close to the Edison border.

The original property, totaling 99 acres, stretched back from Middlesex Avenue to include much of the current Levinson Axelrod and JFK hospital tracts today. A current Society director remembers stumbling across the ruins of various foundations while salvaging items on the property prior to its redevelopment - possibly one of these was the Peterson's home? The Summer 2006 *Nannygoats* issue (Vol. 4, Issue 2) includes more information about the Littersts and The Ramble Inn.

The hope is that someday - with all avenues of research exhausted and our very best educated guess formulated - that a marker can be placed honoring the birthplace of Mr. Peterson.

Looking for the “Class of 1931 History of Metuchen”? We decided to include more of Mr. Bond's article in this edition, but will continue reprinting the chapters serially in the Summer, 2012 *Nannygoats*.

The following reminiscence was written by Leroy Smith, who was born in 1942 in his home on Central Avenue in Metuchen. He moved to Barnstable Street when he was eight, and left Metuchen in 1987. Readers may recall him as the owner of Perry's Deli (where the current Bulldog Deli is) or from his home improvement company which built homes on Central & Plainfield Avenues.

Metuchen was the greatest town for anyone to live and grow up in. Our family, my mom, dad, and seven kids, had lots of family and friends all over town. My grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were very close. Being a family of color we had no or very little problems. We went to school together, worked and played together. My dad and uncles played in a Black Baseball Team where teams came from Potters Crossing and other towns. Most were very good at it but could only play in a league of their own. It was late 40s and 50s. My brother and I got to play in the first Little League games playing for Rossmeier's Giants. We did have some people who made it like Charlie Butler, a great boxer, Gail Fisher who worked at Seldow's store and made in T.V. and my uncle Luther Owens, the first person of color to get a Master Plumber's License in the State of NJ, and my nephew Rodney Smith's Shut Skateboards™. Today I am who I am because of a great town to grow up in.

-Leroy Smith, February 2012

Some of the Transcribed Oral Histories in the Society's Collection

Gardenia Emanuel: Widowed mother who worked at The Ramble Inn and as a maid for several families. Remembers the Milligans, and how she built her house on Central Avenue in 1928.

Perry Letsinger: Deacon in Second Baptist Church. Discusses his experiences raising a black family in the 1930s.

Walter Qualls: First black councilman in Metuchen, relates stories of growing from the son of a migrant farmer to a union leader.

Charlie Butler: Noted Boxer who almost made the Olympic Team in 1952, Navy man, and Rahway Prison Guard.

Roger Johnson: Although white, he reminisces about several black friends, including Charlie Butler, Percy Milligan, & Henry Brown.

1928 Directory of Metuchen, Column 7

Below is the seventh 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.

Iselin Garage Iselin.....Metuchen-91-J-2
Iselin Hardware Co Iselin.....Metuchen-381-J
Iselin School Woodbridge av.....Metuchen-655
Ives Needle Wks
544 Middlesex av.....Metuchen-369-W
Jackson Guert G r Amboy av.....Metuchen-115
Jackson J r John.....Metuchen-341
Jacobs F r Gross Cor.....Metuchen-239-R
Jaeger H J r Lincoln hwy.....Metuchen-622
James A B r 411 Middlesex av.....Metuchen-41-J
Janderup M C Miss r 254 Grove av.....Metuchen-413
Jennings D Leon r Menlo Park.....Metuchen-528-M-1
Jensen-Caron Builders Inc Iselin.....Metuchen-387
Jensen E r Fords.....Metuchen-345-M
Jensen F r 434 Amboy av.....Metuchen-334-W
Jensen Iver r 158 Amboy av.....Metuchen-486
Jensen J L r Amboy av.....Metuchen-630
Jensen Soren r Lafayette rd.....Metuchen-511-W
Jersey 5-10c Store 434 Main.....Metuchen-469
Jessen M r 91 Woodbridge av.....Metuchen-233
Jessen M r 343 Main.....Metuchen-639-W
Johanns O r Nixons.....Metuchen-241-M-2
Johnson A H r 49 Rector.....Metuchen-148-M
Johnson Boyd M r Maple ave.....Metuchen-39-11
Johnson F H r 24 Frnkln.....Metuchen-348
Johnson H B r 81 Hillside av.....Metuchen-581
Johnson J A r Fords.....Metuchen-332-M
Johnson J H r New Bruns rd.....Metuchen-218-W
Johnson R M garage 70 Pearl.....Metuchen-525
Residence 29 Charles.....Metuchen-323-J
Johnson R S r 6 Laurel Dale av.....Metuchen-38-R
Jones Phineas r 31 Oak.....Metuchen-104
Jones W D r 169 Lake av.....Metuchen-97
Jordan A L r 24 Holly.....Metuchen-795
Joworski A r Iselin.....Metuchen-133-J
Juelsen C r 64 Woodbridge av.....Metuchen-418-J
Juelsen P r McCoy av.....Metuchen-435
Juhnden F r Main blvd.....Metuchen-436
June C D fruits & veg 207 Main.....Metuchen-672
Kaczmarek S Mrs r 55 Plainfield av.....Metuchen-491
Kahree H r 74 Carson av.....Metuchen-7-R
Karl Frances C r 19 Charles.....Metuchen-285-R
Katen K r Iselin.....Metuchen-194-J-1
Keating M E Mrs nurse
Midland av.....Metuchen-677
Keating P W r Midland av.....Metuchen-677
Kelly Geo E r 223 Woodbg av.....Metuchen-246-W
Kelly Jos A r Maplewood av.....Metuchen-173-R
Kempson Jean A r
125 Middlesex av.....Metuchen-678
Kempson St George r
125 Middlesex av.....Metuchen-678
Kennedy G S Capt r 111 Lake.....Metuchen-383-R
Kentos Geo r 239 Main.....Metuchen-396-J
Kerr M Mrs r 46 Lincoln av.....Metuchen-187-M
Keyes T H r 87 Rose.....Metuchen-634
Kidd E Miss r Pleasant av.....Metuchen-278-J
Kiefer F r Lincoln highway.....Metuchen-320-R
King Jas H r 40 Newman.....Metuchen-485
Kish Jos r est & ins Nixons.....Metuchen-790
Kitinos C Mrs r Sand Hill rd.....Metuchen-527-J-2
Klaue E M r 23 Bounty.....Metuchen-548-J
Klein Chas A r 236 Main.....Metuchen-668
Kleine J J r 185 Amboy av.....Metuchen-398
Knol J r 8 Maple av.....Metuchen-224-R
Knox J r 27 Sheridan av.....Metuchen-156-R
Knudson Sofus r Eggert av.....Metuchen-310
Knudson P
refresh stdn Lincoln hwy.....Metuchen-763
Residence Pierson av.....Metuchen-156-W
Knudson Wm r 31 Cedar.....Metuchen-86
Kochek J grery Iselin.....Metuchen-419-J-3
Koester R W R r 205 Maple ave.....Metuchen-169-M
Kohn R butcher 415 Main.....Metuchen-164
Kohn Roy r 49 Robbins pl.....Metuchen-225
Kornblatt J Dr dentist 396 Main.....Metuchen-656
Kornblatt J Dr r Main.....Metuchen-226-J
Kornblatt M r Central av.....Metuchen-83-J
Koski J r Bonhamtown.....Metuchen-189-J-2
Koskinen O r Bonhamtown.....Metuchen-241-J-2
Koster A H r 1 Ely ct.....Metuchen-778
Koster E J r 75 Woodbridge av.....Metuchen-324
Kovach J r 116 Center.....Metuchen-423
Kovacs M W confs New Bruns av.....Metuchen-635
Koven Edw H r 40 Peltier av.....Metuchen-476
Krainatz R r Fords.....Metuchen-432-M



On Thursday, January 26, 2012, Metuchenites were sad to learn that Robert Hegyes had passed away that morning, after suffering a heart attack at his home on Woodbridge Avenue.

Although born in Perth Amboy, his

family moved to Metuchen and was known to many as "Chico" during his days at Metuchen High School. After graduating from Rowan University (then Glassboro State College) with a bachelor's degree in speech/theater and secondary education, he began a career in the theatre and soon after was cast as Juan Epstein on the ABC show "Welcome Back Kotter."

While probably best well known for that role, he also co-starred on "Cagney & Lacey," where he could be seen wearing his Metuchen High School varsity jacket, and afterwards continued to act, teach, and write screenplays.

Mr. Hegyes leaves behind three siblings, two children, two step-children, and many fond memories amongst the many who knew him. We were very proud to call him one of our own. *Photograph courtesy of Tricia Lee Brown Liberti.*

Coming Soon: Sporting History

The Society plans to focus on local sports history in the Summer 2012 issue of *Nannygoats*, and is looking for submissions from the public; photographs, recollections, ephemera, etc. Our hope is to include not only noted sports figures who hail from the Edison and Metuchen areas, but also to feature highlights from our local educational institutions. If you have anything to share, please contact Steve Reuter via phone at 732-713-9080 or via email at popopies@hotmail.com.

Published by
The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
 P.O. Box 61, Metuchen, NJ 08840
 Tyreen A. Reuter, Editor
 732-452-1381
ayersallenhouse@msn.com

Board of Trustees

Frederick Wolke, President	
Walter R. Stochel, Jr., Vice President	
Andrew Kupersmit, Treasurer	
Marilyn Langholff, Recording Secretary	
Tyreen Reuter, Corresponding Secretary	
Phyllis Boeddinghaus	Russell Gehrum
Jim Halsey	Catherine Langholff
Marilyn Langholff	Steve Reuter
Byron Sondergard	Marie Vajo
	Dominic Walker

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.



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

Interested in back issues of Nannygoats?

All back issues are available for download from our website at www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org.



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