



# Nannygoats



Vol. 21, Issue 2

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Spring/Summer 2023

2023 was a very special Memorial Day for Metuchen, as it was also the homecoming for Staff Sgt. Michael Uhrin (Serial #32459151). The weather was perfect, allowing the plans made by dozens of entities working together to come off flawlessly.

The fallen soldier's nephew, Mike Uhrin, served as Grand Marshall and rode in the parade with his immediate family. During the ceremony at Memorial Park, Sgt. Uhrin's casket was laid in state before being interred at Hillside Cemetery. Buried there are many of his family that predeceased him, including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Born on December 18, 1921, Michael was the fourth of seven children: John, Joseph, George, Michael, Mary, Helen, and Anna. His parents John and Mary had immigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1904 and lived at 235 Central Avenue when he was young. After the war the family lived at 173 Center Street and then at 96 Durham Avenue.

He had attended Edgar School and Metuchen High School and graduated from the Middlesex County Vocational School in 1939. He was unmarried and worked for the Celotex Corporation, makers of building materials, in Metuchen before entering the military in 1942 shortly before his 21st birthday.

In the Fall of 1943, the United States Army Air Force along with Britain's Royal Air Force was

conducting heavy bombing raids across Nazi controlled Germany. While the RAF executed most of their bombing at night, the Americans attempted precision attacks by day.

One important target was Schweinfurt in the

Bavarian region, with its four ball bearing factories. These factories were vital to the German war effort as they produced components critical to their tank and aircraft production.

The first Allied strategic raid over Schweinfurt took place in August 1943. While this first strike resulted in 60 bombers lost, it had reduced the ball bearing production by 40 percent. The Nazis, however, quickly rebounded and the Allies planned a second raid.

On Thursday, October 14, 1943, 291 B-17 Flying Fortresses were sent to Schweinfurt. Due to limitation in flight range of escort fighters, these bombers with their thin aluminum skins flew the final 200 miles of their mission without protection. This left them undefended and open to attack by the Luftwaffe's anti-aircraft artillery throughout the raid, as well vulnerable to the fighter planes that pursued

them all the way back to the English Channel on their return home.

Although many of the B-17s were able to hit their targets in Schweinfurt, by the time the Americans returned to the bases in England, 60 planes had been lost, another 17 were no longer salvageable, and more than 100 more were damaged.

## A Homecoming at Last



**Staff Sgt. Michael Uhrin  
(1921-1943)**

*Continued on Page 4*

## Local, Tri-County, and Middlesex County History Days

The Society's year kicked off with a bang at our Annual Local History Day at the Metuchen Public Library in February. It was hard to count how many attended, as every room was full for all three hours and we all had a wonderful time looking at photos, solving history mysteries, meeting corresponding researchers in real life, and so much more. Congratulations to our free door prize winners and goody-bag-getters! Special thanks to all those who renewed their memberships, joined for the first time, purchased merchandise, and donated to our special archives fund, too.



Tri-County History Day, serving Union, Middlesex, and Somerset Counties, was held at the Plainfield Library in early May. The Society had a table at this well-attended event, where we fielded a lot of questions about our area's historic cemeteries.

Middlesex County History Day, also in May, took place at East Jersey Old Town on River Road in Piscataway. Our coloring books were a big seller and we enjoyed socializing with fellow history organizations in such a wonderful setting.

## Nannygoats

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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, and make up 80 percent of the Society's photographic collection. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society dedicates this publication to Lloyd Grimstead, as a way of honoring him for preserving so much of our local history.

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

## Montford Point Marines

The Metuchen Branch of the YMCA hosted a program in February about the Montford Point Marines, two of whom, Cpl. Austin F. Banks and Sgt. Daniel Robinson, lived in Metuchen.

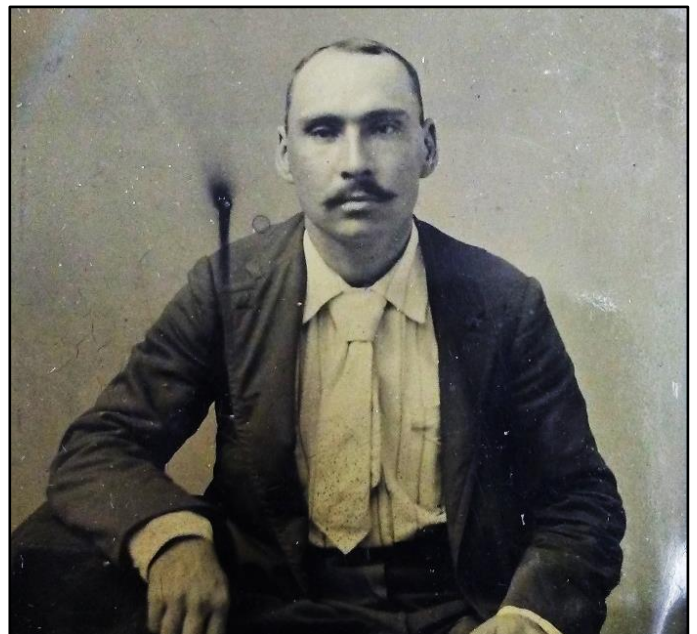
Only 15% Montford Point Marines have received the Congressional Gold Medal they deserve. If you know a Black veteran (or their family) who served in World War II, the National Montford Point Marines Association encourages you to contact Timothy Davis at 732-682-8175 at to see if they are eligible - even posthumously.



## ***New in the Archives***

Listed here are just *some* of our many recent acquisitions. While we cannot accept historic items that are unrelated to our local history, we are always interested in acquiring originals and/or copies of photographs, ephemera, books, etc. relevant to our collective past. If you don't want to part with an original item, we'd be delighted to either photograph or scan it. Contact us at [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) with any questions.

- 9 photographs of Grace Knox from 27 Sheridan Avenue and 1 photograph of Larry Sorenson, Nick Knox, and Harold Breen Sr. behind the bar at Knox's Tavern, ca. 1940s-1960s (donated by Sheila Tynday)
- *The Tuckerton Railroad: A Chronicle of Transport to the New Jersey Seashore*, 1st ed., written and signed by John Brinckmann, 1973 (donated by Marge Viquerat)
- Family photographs of the Steffen family and Venture Theatre in Metuchen, ca. 1940s-1960s (donated by Grace Shackney)
- 1973 newspaper clipping and swimsuit health notice for Morris Stores; Marmax Shoes shopping bag; Metuchen Citgo Service pen; 1956 Map of Metuchen, New Jersey including Clive Hills North, Vineyard Village, Menlo Park Terrace, Clara Barton Section; 1988 Metuchen Builders Supply invoice; Marmax and Metuchen Bicycle rulers; 1967 Class photograph for Edgar School Grade; 1977 Conrail train wreck in Metuchen newspapers; Menlo Coach Diner-Restaurant postcard (donated by Peter Kovalski)
- 1952 photograph of 43 Carson Avenue (donated by Michele Chapais)
- Newspaper article on Carol Trecolis, president of the Metuchen First Aid Squad, and photograph of the 1996 Metuchen Town Soccer Club featuring former Metuchen Councilman Peter Trecolis (donated by Nancy Zerbe)
- Photograph of the 1953 St. Francis CYO Basketball Team (donated by Barry Cotton)
- Amerchol (or CPC or Union Carbide) commemorative memorabilia including mugs, cap, letterhead, frisbee, ruler, paperweight, paper holder, clocks, badges, safety award, dish, bell, bag, 1995 Awards Dinner invitation, 1989 Profit Plan, and *Amerchol Lanolin Derivatives* (1964) with photograph of Alicia Parr's father (donated by Alicia Parr)
- *A Time Remembered: The Story of the R.T. Gang* written by Ted Weiss with photographs from the archives of Ruth Melko Macdonald (the R.T. Gang were schoolchildren who attended Clara Barton Elementary School in Raritan Township); and 1949, 1950, & 1951 Metuchen High School Yearbooks owned by Janet Godbout (donated by Judith Guzzi)
- Photocopies of the Clara Barton PTA Calendar from 1960-1961 (donated by Adele Pudner)
- Hand artist sketches and renderings for Metuchen Greenway 1998, Revolutionary War Cemetery 1994, Thomas Pond 1993, Metuchen Downtown at its Best, Metuchen Public Library 2001, Metuchen Borough Hall 1941 rendered by Michael Bellavia 1997, and program for "Desdemona" Music Concert by Bella Via Music Inc. (donated by Brian Tobin)
- Original copy of the Metuchen Recorder, July 28, 1894 (donated by Pat Dyremose)
- Photographs of 111 Woodbridge Avenue, mid-1950s and 2018 (donated by Douglas Mawbey and Byron Sondergard)



### **National History Day Showcase**

Society President Kathleen Carlucci and *Nannygoats* Editor Tyreen Reuter attended the JP Stevens High School and Woodrow Wilson Middle School National History Day Showcase in April, and were extremely impressed with the exhibits, videos, and presentations created around the theme of "Frontiers in History." The future of history is indeed bright with these young scholars!

### **??? History Mystery ???**

Society Director Gerry Rice, a descendant of the Moss family, has come across this image in his personal archives. Do you know who this man is? Contact us if you know or have any clues.

Continued from Page 1

The number of air crew killed, wounded, or missing in action was more than 600, totaling almost 20 percent of those sent on the mission. This later became known as "Black Thursday."

One of the sixty B-17s lost that day had taken off from Thurleigh in Bedfordshire that morning in hazy conditions with a crew of 10 on board. They had made it almost 150 miles without armed escort and had only 50 or more to go to reach their target, when at about 2:30 in the afternoon, they were hit in the nose.

The plane caught fire and all four engines were knocked out. Seven of the ten crewman, including the pilot and co-pilot, parachuted out at about 27,000 feet and were later taken as Prisoners of War.

Three of the crew did not survive; Flight Officer Philip D. Anderson, First Lieutenant Jack A. Kelly, and Staff Sergeant Michael Uhrin. It is believed that although Sergeant Uhrin had trained as a radio operator and had only been in Europe for one month before the raid, for this mission he had volunteered to fill in as a gunner, providing one of the few defenses that the bomber had against the Luftwaffe's attacks. Sergeant Bill Oliver, one of the crew's survivors, gave a witness account that he had seen Sergeant Uhrin killed instantly before he himself had bailed out.

The bodies of Flight Officer Anderson and First Lieutenant Kelly were never recovered, but it was later discovered that four days after the crash, Sergeant Uhrin had been removed from the wreckage in the woods of Langenbergheim by German civilians and buried with a modest cross in the village cemetery.

How these German civilians knew to mark his temporary grave we may never know, but this provided important clues that would help finally bring him home several decades later.

Back in the United States, little was known right away about what had happened. On the 25th of October, the Uhrin Family received a telegraph from the War Department stating that Staff Sergeant Michael Uhrin was reported Missing in Action over Schweinfurt, and eventually they learned he was presumed killed, but not recovered.



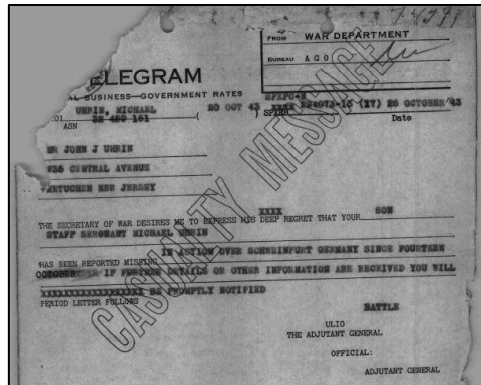
Only nine months earlier the Uhrin Family had received a similar telegraph from the War Department, informing them that their older son, Corporal Joseph Uhrin, had been killed in a training accident while serving with the Army in Florida. Corporal Uhrin had been the first of Metuchen's 31 soldiers to die in that war. Another of the Uhrin's sons, George, was also serving and was stationed in India at the same time.

Following the end of the war, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC) was tasked with investigating and recovering missing American personnel in Europe. Sergeant Uhrin's remains were recovered from Langenbergheim but were unable to be positively identified given the available scientific methods accepted at the time.

As the German civilian identification made at his initial burial could not be verified, the remains were reinterred as "X-1660" at the Lorraine American Cemetery at St. Avold in France. He was officially declared non-recoverable in 1955 and his name was included on the Walls of the Missing at Cambridge American Cemetery.

This could have been the end of the story, were it not for another Staff Sergeant, fifty years later, named Danny Keay. An Army training instructor stationed at the time in Darmstadt, he is bilingual with a German mother and British father and also worked to track down American soldiers declared Missing in Action.

Sgt. Keay specialized in those presumed killed in aircraft over Germany and in 2014 he rediscovered the original crash site and learned about the case of Sgt. Uhrin. In 2015, Sgt. Keay contacted the Metuchen-



Edison Historical Society hoping for help in obtaining more information about Sgt. Uhrin and potentially reaching any living family members. He felt that there was a strong case to be made that the grave marked "X-1660" in St. Avold was the missing soldier's and hoped that modern DNA analysis could provide confirmation. We spent a great deal of time speaking on the phone and researching and were eventually able to get in touch with his youngest sister, Anne, who still lived in New Jersey.

From there, the slow and careful process of finally being able to formally identify and return Sgt. Uhrin home to his family began. DNA samples were obtained from his brother's son, Mike, and his son, Michael, and in June of 2021, his remains were brought to an Air Force Base in Nebraska for the

scientific analysis that hadn't been possibly several decades earlier.

Based on this DNA evidence, and all the other documents gathered, on May 12, 2022, he was officially determined as "accounted for." Now he has finally returned to his hometown, to be buried near his family. Although she passed away before final confirmation, I believe his youngest sister Anne felt that this was indeed her brother, and she was relieved to know he would finally be returned.

And on May 29, 2023, he was in fact returned, with all the honors and respect he deserved, especially after eight decades away from home.

-Tyreen A. Reuter



## ***ARE THERE MORE MISSING SOLDIERS?***

Following the return of Staff Sgt. Uhrin, the Society was asked by several people if he was the only, and therefore final, soldier from our area to be identified after being killed in action.

Sadly, the answer is no. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) lists more than 81,500 Americans who remain missing from WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars/other conflicts. Out of the more than 81,500 missing, 75% of the losses are from the Indo-Pacific, and over 41,000 of the missing are presumed lost at sea. However, when historic records are paired with modern scientific methods such as DNA analysis, it is still possible for some of these missing soldiers to be accounted for. At the end of May 2023, the DPAA announced it had begun a multi-year project to disinter the remains of more than 400 Unknowns associated with the Enoura Maru, a "Hellship cargo vehicle used by the Imperial Japanese Navy in World War II to transport prisoners of war (POWs). Nearly 1000 service members are unaccounted for from this incident alone.

There are others from our area who have not yet been accounted for and returned, but as shown with the case of Staff Sgt. Uhrin, there is still hope and the DPAA has not forgotten.

### *Images*

**Page 1**, Staff Sgt. Uhrin, as provided by his family.

**Page 4**, Top: Michael Uhrin when he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Edgar Middle School. Middle: The 1943 telegram to his father. Bottom: a December 1943 article from *The Metuchen Recorder*.

**Page 5**, Left: Staff Sgt. Uhrin's casket arrives at Newark Airport (photograph by Mayor Jonathan Busch).

Right: Staff Sgt. Uhrin's casket lies in state at Memorial Park on Monday, May 29, 2023 (photograph by Ernie Agtarap).

# GEOPHYSICAL STUDY PRESENTED TO METUCHEN OFFICIALS

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

At the May 8, 2023 Metuchen Borough Council meeting, members of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society presented the results of a Geophysical Study of a portion of the Colonial Cemetery on Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue in Metuchen.

The study, using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), was done in late December 2022 on the eastern side of the cemetery. This study was funded in part by a grant from the Middlesex County Board of Commissioners and matched with a private donation.

The GPR identified 425 potential burials, 3 archaeological features, and 1 disturbed area. Two of the archaeological features appear to be the foundation remains of the Colonial-era "Meeting House." The Meeting House existed from 1717-1836 and was used as a church by the Presbyterian congregation. During the Revolutionary War, the British smashed the windows in the Meeting House on June 26, 1777. The Meeting House is the only known documented structure built on the cemetery property. The surrounding cemetery was established in 1730 with the last burial in 1897. The Society believes the discovery of the foundation remains of a Colonial-Era structure is the most important historical discovery in the Borough in recent memory.

In 1836 the railroad came through Metuchen and took the land next to the meeting house where the parishioner's tied up their horses. A new Presbyterian Church on Woodbridge Avenue was built, and the old meeting house was taken apart, and faded from the community's memory. In 1870, Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt

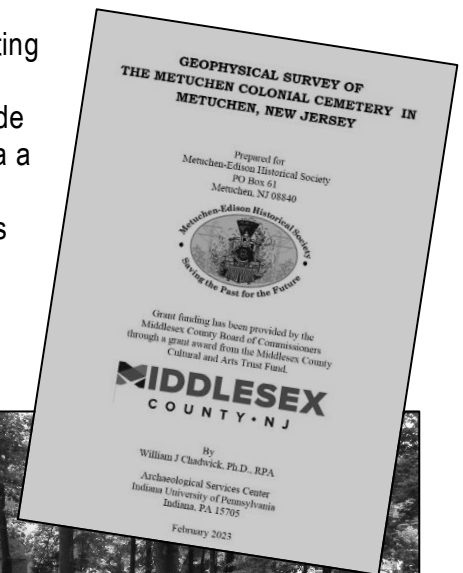
in his history of Metuchen wrote that the Meeting House was at the southeast corner of the cemetery. The First Presbyterian Church deeded the property to the Borough of Metuchen in 1974. In 1999, Dr. William Ainslie started the Colonial Cemetery

Committee of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, which raised thousands of dollars for cleaning up, removing dead trees, fencing, flagpoles, benches, and other items at the site. This work continues.

The GPR survey shows that Dr. Hunt's placement of the structure was incorrect, and the archaeological remains of the Meeting House are on the northeast corner of the cemetery, near the sidewalk to the train station. The GPR also showed many more unmarked graves than have been previously recorded. Previous inventories of the cemetery recorded 512 burials, the GPR results for less than 25% of the Cemetery identified 425 anomalies that are likely burials. This would indicate that there are many more unmarked graves in the rest of the cemetery.

The Colonial Cemetery and Meeting House site have the potential to yield artifacts from the Colonial and early American era and would be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. A future archaeological project to examine the foundation remains would be the next step in investigating the site.

A visitor's guide to the Cemetery and a full copy of the Geophysical Survey is available on our website at [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)



## Hippo Hunters

*In our last issue, we hid several hippo images in keeping with the Egyptian theme of the lead article. Congratulations and thanks to those who participated in the contest and watch your mailboxes for a special prize coming your way!*



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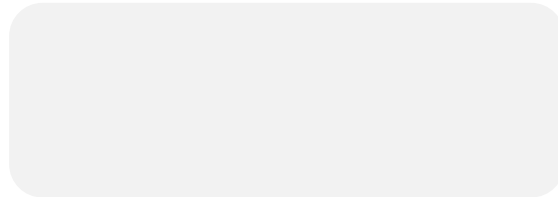
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### **Join the Society!**

If you haven't already, please consider joining the Society as a dues-paying Member... this income provides the primary support for everything we do and allows us to "Save the Past for the Future." Visit our website or scan the code below.



### **Join our Facebook Group!**

We have an active, informative, and carefully moderated Facebook group loaded with images and historical miscellany. Find us in the search bar or scan the code below.



## **CLARA BARTON HISTORY DAYS**

*Come celebrate the history of the Clara Barton neighborhood of Edison Township*

**Sunday, July 9, 2023 at 1:30 P.M.**

Edison Main Library  
340 Plainfield Avenue, Edison

**Saturday, July 15, 2023 at 11:00 A.M.**

Clara Barton Library  
141 Hoover Avenue, Edison

- Enjoy a 30-minute interactive presentation
- Browse old photographs of the area, local homes, and landmarks
- Discover our history through maps, displays, and other memorabilia
- Metuchen-Edison Historical Society members will be there to answer questions and share stories