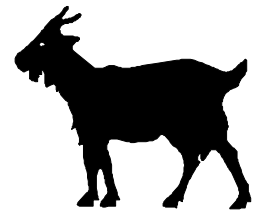


# Nannygoats



Vol. 19, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Summer-Fall 2021

In July 2020, a recently retired historian from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office reached out to the Society to inquire about what, if any, 18th century buildings may have stood near what is now Middlesex Avenue and Center Street. Unfortunately, we had to tell this historian, Bob Craig, that we know of none, and that those lots weren't built on until the mid-late 19th century. Craig then shared with us details about a mysterious and peculiar stone that he believed may have been discovered there, but was currently at a home belonging to an Alexandra Zolton in Raven Rock, Hunterdon County.

The previous owner of Zolton's home in Raven Rock, Nancy Kay Anderson, had once lived in Metuchen at 584 Middlesex Avenue (the corner of Middlesex and Center, now part of the Costello-Runyon Funeral Home). Craig had rented the Raven Rock home from Anderson for a few years, and remained in touch with her afterwards.

When Craig stopped by to visit the Hunterdon County house last year, he met Zolton, who then showed him the stone, inquiring as to its origin. Craig, unable to connect the stone to the house in Hunterdon County, struck upon the idea that perhaps it had been transported there from Metuchen by Anderson, the home's previous resident.

Reaching out to Anderson, Craig was told that in the mid-1980s, she had been digging in her garden and found a cornerstone-sized stone inscribed with "1711." Unaware of its origins, she later moved to Raven Rock in Hunterdon County, taking the unusual stone, peculiar for having raised numerals rather than incised ones, with her. When Anderson sold the house a few years ago, she left the stone behind, later to be (re) discovered by Zolton, the home's current resident.

Now Craig knew it had been in Metuchen at one point many years ago, and where it had been found, but what was it? That's where the Society became involved. We investigated the early residents of the home at 584 Middlesex Avenue – perhaps the ancestors of the 19th century house builders had brought it with them from an earlier property? Could it be a simple grave marker for a lost loved one that they couldn't bear to leave behind? All early records regarding the early European landowners of that area were searched in relation to the year 1711, but no leads proved fruitful.

In reviewing the 19th century maps of the area, the Society soon realized that the neighboring house at 576 Middlesex Avenue predated the house at 584 Middlesex, and – most importantly – it had at one point belonged to the Grimstead family. Even more interestingly, the

house at 576 Middlesex Avenue had once been part of a much larger lot encompassing most of the block, including the area that would become 584 Middlesex Avenue.



## No Stone Left Un (re) turned



*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 the Township of Edison.

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 **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.*

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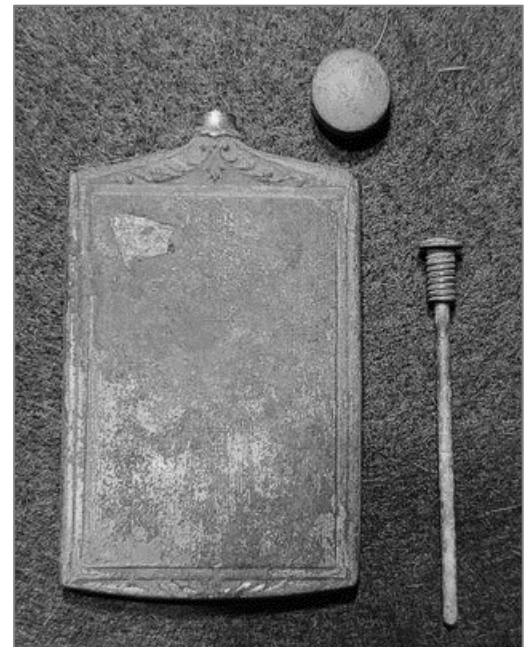
# History Hunt: Detectorists' Day Benefits Historical Society

On Saturday, August 7, approximately two dozen members of the Deep Search Metal Detecting Club (DSMDC) gathered at the Old Franklin Schoolhouse in Metuchen to begin a day of metal detecting at four historic sites around the Borough. Organized by Donna and Bob Funk, the DSMDC's leadership, these members registered to detect on four local properties throughout the day. While the Schoolhouse was a detecting site in addition to the gathering place for refreshments, door prizes, and finds displays, the Detectorists themselves spread out around to the borough, detecting at the Ayers-Allen House on Durham Avenue, the rear of the Robins Estate on Middlesex Avenue, and the Colonel Houghton House on Amboy Avenue.

Shown here are the properties searched and some of the finds of the day – none of them a chest of pirate's gold – nevertheless, by all accounts the detectorists had a good day. The real treasure was meeting a wonderful group of like-minded people and the amazingly generous donation of \$1000 by DSMDC to our historical society. None of this would have been possible without the property owners who allowed the detecting – thank you to them most of all!



Above: A 1945 half dollar and one of many toy cars. Above right, from top to bottom: The Robins House, the Colonel Houghton House, the Old Franklin Schoolhouse, the Ayers-Allen House, and a gold-plated perfume bottle found at the rear of the Robins House. Below: coins and hardware found throughout the properties.



Continued from Page 1

Searching for “Grimstead” and “1711” hit gold, or, well, stone. A 1940 newspaper article described Lloyd Grimstead’s talk about the early history of Metuchen to the local Rotary Club. This presentation, which took place at the Oak Hills Manor (most recently Charlie Brown’s on Plainfield Road in Edison), was based largely on Grimstead’s WPA-funded research. At the end of the article, it was reported that Grimstead showed the audience a stone dated 1711. Eureka!

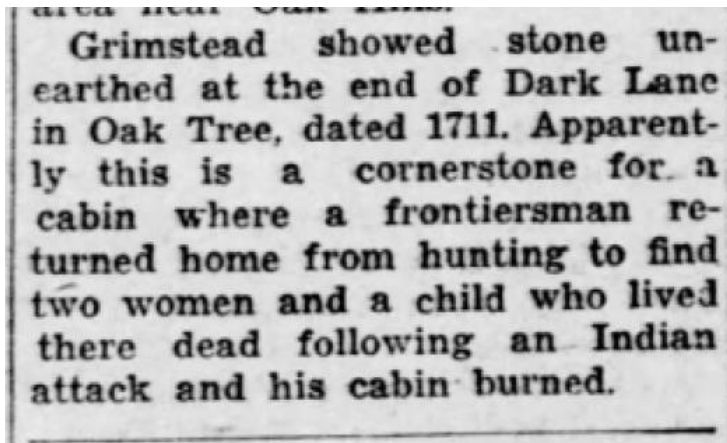
Another news article, 25 years later, includes a photograph of Grimstead actually with the stone, which was to be one the artifacts exhibited at the World’s Fair in 1965. Double eureka! All roads eventually do lead to Grimstead!

From this, the Society concluded that Grimstead must have kept this stone at the family’s property on Middlesex Avenue and it somehow ended up back in the ground. Years later, along came Anderson, who unearthed it and later transported it with her to Hunterdon County, whereupon Zolton came across it.

This past June, Society Director Walter Stochel travelled with Craig to Raven Rock to bring the stone back to the Edison-Metuchen area. Zolton graciously donated the artifact to the Society, and it is now safely housed in an archival box in our archives.

One might think this history mystery had now been solved. But, exactly how did Grimstead come into possession of this stone? Where did he learn of its supposed history? In 1940, he certainly could not have been in direct contact with the owner/builder of a house constructed in 1711. We continue to search for clues, scouring Grimstead’s notes and anecdotes - or, his *nannygoats* as he called them - to answer these remaining questions.

Regardless of the remaining mystery, we are sincerely thankful to Craig for so doggedly chasing the stone’s provenance and Zolton for donating it to the Society. We will continue to search, and we invite you all to join us at Local History Day in 2022 to view the stone!



METUCHEN’S YESTERDAYS--J. Lloyd Grimstead, Metuchen’s unofficial historian, shows souvenirs of the borough’s past to members of the historical committee for Metuchen Day at the World’s Fair. Left to right Mrs. William McLaughlin, Grimstead and Mrs. Kenneth Fisher look over the Revolutionary War cannonballs and stone marker, dated 1711, which will be included in the exhibit at the Fair.

### Images

Page 1, Top: A recent photograph of the stone. Bottom: A 1930 photograph of 584 Middlesex Avenue (on the left) and 576 Middlesex Avenue (on the right).

Page 4, Top: Excerpt from the July 26, 1940 *Courier-News* article about Grimstead’s presentation to the Rotary Club. Bottom: Photograph and caption from the July 22, 1965 issue of *The Metuchen Recorder* showing Grimstead with the stone.

**Help the Society Save the Past for the Future by becoming a member! Visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) to download a membership form or join online.**

# *New in the Archives*



Listed here are some of the many recent archives acquisitions. While the Society cannot accept historic items that are unrelated to our local history, we are always interested in acquiring 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, and with the recent donation of a film & slide digital converter, we can now scan and return film negatives and slides!

- Two antique shoes found in the boiler room of the "The Carriage Inn" at 756 Middlesex Avenue; the shoes may date to the late 1700s-1800s. (donated by Jack Scarpelli).
- Two posters featuring works by Mary Wilkins Freeman (donated by Rebecca Seely).
- Documentation for the Pennsylvania Railroad "Jump Over" Bridge at Camp Kilmer and track maps of the Public Service trolleys (donated by David Hutchinson).
- Two Metuchen Savings Bank pens and a Metuchen Savings Bank wooden nickel (donated by Byron Sondergard).
- A 1974 Edison Township Talon High School Yearbook (donated by Michael Smoliga).
- Ceramic mug labeled "Hometown U.S.A. Metuchen - Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" (donated by Tyreen Reuter).
- Picture postcard of the St. Joseph's Cemetery (acquired on behalf of the Society).
- Bulldog Deli Menu (donated by Gerry Rice).
- 1984 Advertising Map of Metuchen (donated by the Estate of Carl E. Pedersen).
- A copy of "Home Sweet Home: A Memoir of My Cherished Experiences at NJ Veterans Home," published in 2019 (donated by the author, Dianne Burke, the Home's former Director of Recreation).
- Obituaries and newspaper clippings about the Ford Plant shutdown in 2004 (donated by Walter Stochel).
- A 1711 date stone (see cover story, donated by Alexandra Zolton).
- A Thomas Edison Commemorative Decanter and a Berg Agency lawn sign (donated by Steve Reuter).



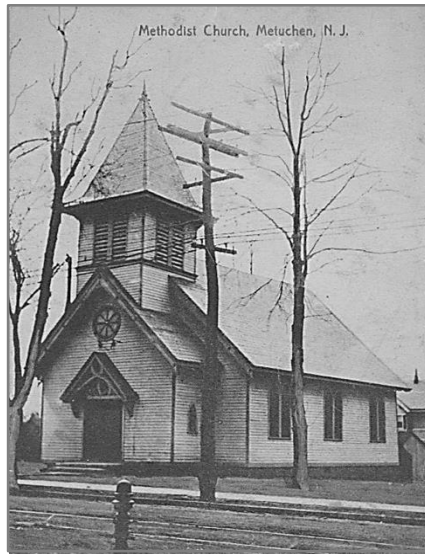
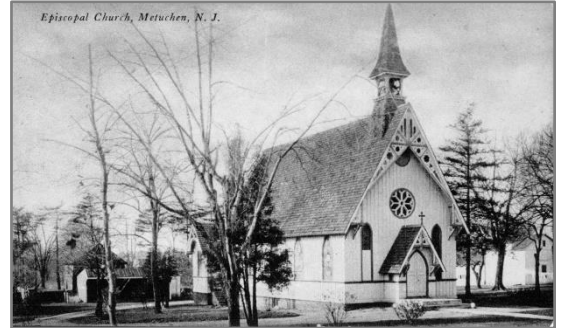
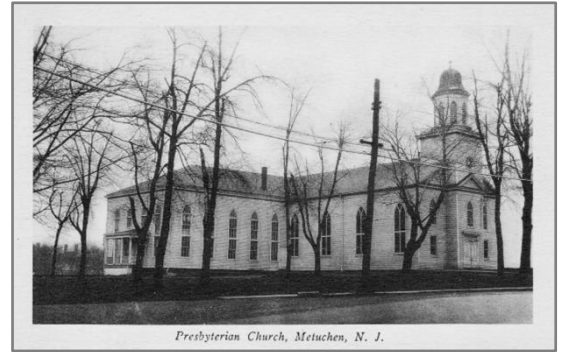
# METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (CONCLUSION)

In the previous issue of *Nannygoats*, we reprinted the fifteenth installment of Dr. Ezra Mundy Hunt's "Metuchen and Her History," written in 1870. We began reprinting this largely-unavailable history serially in 2015 and are now concluding.

Following the fifteenth installment, which consists of a summary of the decade between 1860 and 1870, is an extensively detailed history of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen followed by short summaries of the First Reformed Church of Metuchen, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church. We are choosing to *not* reprint these sections as they are now in text-searchable format on our website at [metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).

Instead, please enjoy these historic postcard images of the houses of worship in that section. You can view these images – and hundreds more in full color – in our "Greetings from Metuchen and Edison" book (see details below).

Many thanks to Former Society President and current Board Member Dominic T. Walker for transcribing this important document.



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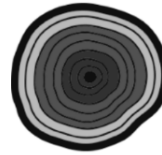
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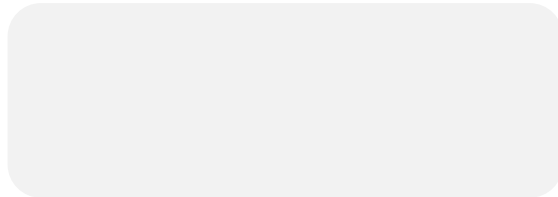


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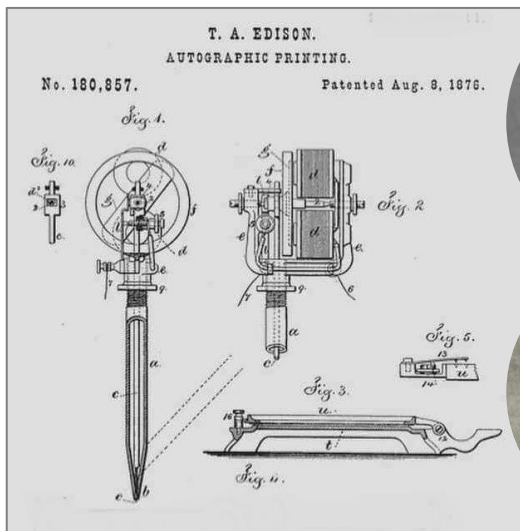
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## **TATTOO WHO?**

Did Thomas Edison invent the electric tattoo pen? Well, no, but Edison did receive a patent for his duplicating press device in August 1876, the year he moved to Menlo Park, NJ. It was tattoo artist Samuel O'Reilly who adapted Edison's invention into the first electric tattoo machine (patented in 1891). Come and learn all this and more about the amazing "invention factory" at Menlo Park any Thursday, Friday or Saturday (book in advance online at [www.menloparkmuseum.org](http://www.menloparkmuseum.org)).

# **SALE**

## **October 2, 2021**

Although there will be no Metuchen Country Fair this year, the Town Wide Garage Sale is happening on Saturday, October 2, 2021 and many non-profits are participating.

The Society will be set up at the Metuchen Public Library (480 Middlesex Avenue) and will have a variety of items for sale, including overflow items from the archives, deeply-discounted merchandise, Society publications, and reproduction maps. The Friends of the Metuchen Library will also be hosting their Annual Booksale, so it's a day not to be missed!

Stay tuned for additional details as they develop, and we hope to see you all there!