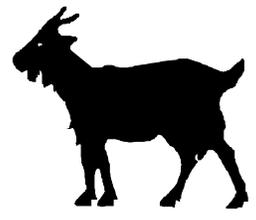


Nannygoats



Vol. 1 Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter 2003

Welcome to "Nannygoats"...

a newly created publication of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. We hope that you will learn about our local history and about the work of the Historical Society through this newsletter. The name "Nannygoats" is taken from the title of a collection of anecdotes, reminiscences, articles, and letters compiled over a lifetime by J. Lloyd Grimstead. Mr. Grimstead also 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.

We dedicate this publication to Lloyd Grimstead, as a way of honoring him for collecting and recording so much of our local history.

Stories from the Archives...

Robins Hall

(The following is an excerpt from hitherto unpublished reminiscences of Ruth Eby. Phyllis Boeddinghaus collected the story and Bob Collins transcribed it in 1995 when Ms. Eby was 99 years old. Ms. Eby describes Robins Hall located on Main Street in what is now Metuchen in the late 1800s. The Robins Hall building still stands at 401 Main Street, and the name is inscribed above the entrance to the building.)

A wide hall ran from the front door through the middle of this building, with wide stairs leading up to very important matters: but ere we venture there we should consider the South exposure on the street level which housed McAdams' Grocery Store. Mr. McAdams sat at an enormous oaken roll-top desk and ignored what went on at the counter behind his back. His only clerk, Will Craig, was elderly and totally deaf. People wanting to buy, leave, and get on with their lives were consistently put through a tough time to accomplish the errand in mind. The first stage would be Mr. Craig adjusting an enormous, hideous



Robins Hall, circa 1883. Frank Smith's Barber Shop is shown to the right.

ear trumpet and asking "What's wanted?" The would-be customer would say and repeat--several times--the answer; but to no avail. Finally, those who simply left, for easier trading would be the usual solution to the bad situation; but sometimes, a few from the more adventurous cults would use the rational form of settling the seemingly unsolvable fix--they, he, or even she--would climb over the counter and pick out their needed articles, throw money

at a non-concerned clerk, and leave for pastures more soothing. It was an odd scenario--played repeatedly in McAdams' Grocery Store, Robins Hall.

Continued on page 2

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society was founded in 1974 with the primary purpose of stimulating and promoting an interest in and appreciation of the history of the Borough of Metuchen and of Edison Township.

Stories from the Archives...

(cont.)

Robins Hall (Cont.)

The second floor dealt in serious matters. The town clerk had an office there. People paid taxes; shotgun and regular marriages were celebrated; local laws were passed, and the need to hire a single night watchman for the community was discussed. A lawyer should be hired? A magistrate had fined a new-fangled car driver \$1.50 for driving at 8 m.p.h. speed. Should the town build a jail? All very serious items on the second floor agenda, but oh

boy! Oh joy! Up a narrow, dimly lighted stairs which even turned back on itself to form a fire trap of horrible implications--all the way with hearts getting lighter en route--one could get to the auditorium. Plays by amateur casts were produced; minstrel shows by town teenagers were rehearsed and played; the firemen held their annual Ball on Washington's birthday each year; the whole third floor shook with fun and frolic.

Chicken Roasts in Bloomfield's Woods

(The following is an excerpt from hitherto unpublished reminiscences compiled by Lloyd Grimstead in his "Nannygoats." Grimstead attributes this story to James F. Riddle, February 6, 1960. Bloomfield's woods were probably located east of Metuchen toward the Heights of Edison, and Mine Gully is the Coppermine Brook in Menlo Park.)

Back in the 1890's Trumbull Marshall used to get together a number of his friends and they would go to Bloomfield's woods and have a chicken roast....Mr. Marshall was a great Naturalist, Botanist and lover of all things enjoyed in God's great out-of-doors. It occurred [sic] to him in the autumn of 1903 that a Chicken Roast on a large scale for certain foremen and Lab. assistants [of the Edison Lamp Works] would be most enjoyable.

He set the date for Saturday Oct. 31 (Halloween) 1903. He arranged with his friend Chas. A. Bloomfield, of Fords, to use his woods. At 2 P.M. that day he asked his new lab assistant James F. Riddle to help him gather an enormous pile of brush and logs out of the woods. Also about a dozen saplings were cut down. Each sapling was Y shaped so that two or three stuffed chickens could be squeezed in and bound with iron wire ready for roasting.

About 40 men who had been invited from the Edison Lamp Works arrived in Metuchen on the 5 P.M. train.... Mr. Marshall and his assistant met the men, and paraded them to Mr. Marshall's home on Hillside Ave. and gave each man a bundle to lug to the woods almost two miles distant. On the way Alec. G. MacAndrew lost a chicken and was threatened with "starvation" by his friends. A big bright full moon came up over the landscape just before the men entered the woods. They took to singing,--hymns surprisingly enough predominating,--and soon a roaring fire 35 feet long and 8 feet wide was in full blast.

After an hour or so the fire settled into a huge bed of red-hot embers and the prepared [sic] saplings with chickens wired into them were placed over rails and kept turning until done. About 9:30 P.M. every one "Fell to" with half a chicken each. The flavor was wonderful.

A chicken roast in Bloomfield's woods, circa 1909.



The night was sharp and clear and a heavy frost set in. The men sang hymns and popular songs until time to go for the return train at 11:45 P.M. At least a third of them caught [sic] the "grippe" or some kind of ailment that kept them at home for 1 or 2 days.

But it was a wonderfully successful gathering. As the men boarded [sic] the train for home Mr. Marshall repeatedly said "I'm mightilly [sic] pleased, I'm mightilly pleased."

The men soon organized a club at first called "The Edison Lamp Works Outing Club," and every June and October held an outing. In June they would go to West Point, Glen Island, Atlantic Highlands for a shore dinner, etc. Every October they would go on a chicken roast in either Bloomfield's woods or in Mine Gully. Mr. Edison attended one in 1905 in Mine Gully. These meetings continued steadily until 1922. On New Years Day 1910 Mr. Marshall died in Bermuda.

Riddle's reminiscence includes this description of an Edison visit to a Chicken roast: I happened to be in Menlo Park at the time and I saw Henry Ford driving Thomas Edison past Edison's old laboratory in a little Ford runabout on their way to the affair.

From the President...

It has been my thrill to see how the Society has grown since I joined as an 18-year-old in 1978. We now have more than 3,000 photographic mages in our collection and thousands of printed pages. We have produced books, maps, and a video about our local history. In the past few years, we have brought local history to the residents of our communities through projects such as the restoration of the Colonial Cemetery in Metuchen, the Revolutionary War Battle of The Short Hills Reenactment in Edison, and Local History Days.

As our communities grow and change, we see an increasing interest in preserving our local history. For example, citizens worked to place sites such as Roosevelt Hospital on the National Register of Historic Places. Local governments created the Edison Historic Preservation Commission, and championed restoration of the "Light Dispelling Darkness" fountain in Roosevelt Park.

In 2002-2003, we saw great growth in the membership of the Historical Society. We now have close to 100 members! Thank all of you who have joined us in our historic efforts in the past, and we look forward to an active and productive new year.

Walter Stochel, Jr.



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

Curator's Notes

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's archives include approximately 7,000 items of local historical value, and a photographic collection of over 3,000 images. These historical items reside in the *Grimstead Room* at the Metuchen Library, 480 Middlesex Avenue. The Society is currently creating an electronic record of the archives to further preserve them and to make them more accessible to the public.

In 2002, the Society received several generous donations, including:

- ◆ Photos of the former Roselawn Estate, circa 1960 (on Plainfield Road, Edison); the fire at the Reformed Church (originally on Amboy Avenue, Metuchen), 1948; the 1977 train wreck in Metuchen; and more. *Donated by Audrey Dana.*
- ◆ Map and photos of the Oak Hills housing development, circa 1930; and a Revolutionary War cannonball. *Donated by Marion Stone.*
- ◆ Photos of parades in Metuchen, circa 1930; scenes around Metuchen; and more. *Donated by Helen Farley.*
- ◆ A compilation of photos, articles, and advertisements related to the 1964 beautification of the Metuchen railroad station. *Donated by Dennis Friel.*
- ◆ Postcards and photos around Metuchen and Edison collected by the late Chuck Peters. *Donated by Irene Peters.*

The Society also recently acquired several postcards of Metuchen scenes from the first half of the 20th century, a Metuchen Marshall's badge, a badge from the Eagle Hook and Ladder Company, and two uniform patches from the Oak Tree Volunteer Fire Company.

The Society gratefully accepts photographs, documents, personal histories, or other artifacts. If you prefer to retain the original, the Society will make a copy for the archives, recording your name as donor. It is only through your contributions that the archives can truly represent the vibrant and unique history of the area.

Call 732-985-3217 if you would like to donate materials or visit the archives.

Where was it?



THE CHINA CLOSET was supposedly located on Route 25 (now Route 1) between Metuchen and New Brunswick. It sold glass, china and pottery. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society needs your help in gathering information about this business, for example, its specific location, owners and operators, when it operated, product manufacturers, and anything else you know about the China Closet.

If you can help, please call
Curator Marie Vajo at 732-985-3217.

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

Upcoming Programs

“The Shady Rest Country Club, a Black NJ Cultural Oasis in the Age of Segregation”

Thursday, March 6, 2 p.m.

Metuchen Senior Citizens Center,
15 Center Street, Metuchen.

Speaker: Lawrence Hogan, Ph.D.

“A Visit with George Washington”

Sunday, April 6, 2 p.m.

Metuchen Library, 480 Middlesex
Avenue, Metuchen.

*Presented by the American Historical
Theater.*

**“The Effects of World War II on
American Women”**

Friday, May 2, 7:30 p.m.

Centenary United Methodist Church,
200 Hillside Avenue, Metuchen.

Speaker: Dee Garrison, Ph.D.

For information, call Walter Stochel
at 732-906-0529.