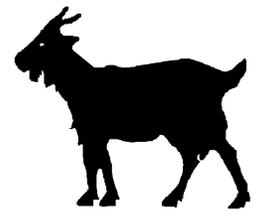


Nannygoats



Vol. 2 Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter 2004

Jerome Lemelson: Local Inventor & Visionary

Many widely used technological conveniences originated in the mind of Jerome Lemelson working in the attic of his house on Rector Street, Metuchen.

by Peter Materna

The association of Thomas Edison with the Metuchen-Edison area is well known. It is probably less widely known that another significant and relatively recent inventor lived and worked in Metuchen. Jerome Lemelson (1923-1997) holds more than 500 U.S. patents, which in terms of number of patents, makes him one of the most prolific U.S. inventors after Thomas Edison.

Lemelson envisioned applications for technologies such as automation and computers far ahead of their time.

Lemelson had an early interest in building model airplanes and obtained degrees in aeronautical engineering and industrial engineering. Some of his early patented inventions were for toys and games. (A later invention was a motorized car toy on a flexible track similar to Mattel's Hot Wheels®.) In the early 1950s, he invented a robotic system and introduced "machine vision" (the use of computers to analyze digitized images from a video camera). That work led to bar codes and to sophisticated automated manufacturing systems. It is that patent which Lemelson has described as his favorite, and which most contributed to his wealth.

Lemelson often applied advances in one field of technology to other fields of technology.

While researching patents at the main patent library in Washington D.C. (on the way home from his honeymoon), Lemelson came to appreciate how cumbersome it was to handle large numbers of documents. This led him to invent and patent a video filing system to store documents on magnetic or video tape. From this work, Lemelson eventually licensed an audio cassette drive system which was the basis for the well-known Sony Walkman®. His work has had applications to fax machines, camcorders, and VCRs. It is said that his first patent application for a camcorder was rejected by the U.S. Patent Office because the Examiner did not believe that the apparatus could possibly be miniaturized to the point of being portable. Some of his inventions are medical devices, including ideas he worked on while being treated for cancer near the end of his life.

Lemelson concentrated on further inventions and patent-related activities, while making his living from royalties on his inventions.

Except for a short while at the beginning of his career, Lemelson did not directly conduct any significant amount of laboratory work or manufacturing work, in contrast to Thomas Edison. He was not affiliated with any university or other major institution, and he did not have any significant corporation or staff to carry out his work. He was an idea person. Especially in the early part of his career, Lemelson did much of his own writing and filing of patent applications.

In the later part of his career, he received significant royalties from U.S. and foreign companies, including major electronics and automotive companies. One group of these licensing fees, amounting to several hundred million dollars, was at the time the largest ever negotiated by an independent inventor. To date, his group of patents related to machine vision and bar codes has brought in over \$1 billion in royalty payments from hundreds of semiconductor, software, computer, and retail companies.

Some of Lemelson's patent applications spent decades in the process of being examined by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which is not necessarily unusual for ground-breaking patents. Some Lemelson patents will remain in effect until 2011, while relying on information contained in a patent application filed in 1954. This is, in part, due to the length of the patent applications and to the complexities of patent law. However, this also has had the effect of providing Lemelson with patent rights for an unusually long time after the filing date, to the time when the technology had finally come into wide use and was highly profitable.

(Continued on page 5)

Lemelson lived at 85 Rector Street, Metuchen, shown here as it looks today.



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.

From the President...

The trustees of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society have had a very busy fall. As some of you know, we've initiated a project to make one of our most valuable assets available to the public--36 hours of interviews of "ordinary" local residents (see "Society Receives County Grant..." below).

We've also been working on a less exciting, but just as vital of a project--call it "mid-winter housekeeping." With several new trustees and officers, it seemed a good time to review our administrative structure and policies. I have, therefore, created an *ad hoc* committee to look at these issues. Although this type of work is invisible to members, it's very important to the long-term health of the Society.

So, what are we working on? As you know already, we've aligned the membership year with the calendar year. We're updating the Society's bylaws, and reviewing insurance coverage and financial operations.

To enable us to share the material in our archives more widely, we're addressing issues such as the most effective way to handle requests for copies of material while ensuring

that the material is used appropriately and that the Society receives proper acknowledgment and reimbursement.

To complement the administrative house-keeping, Curator Marie Vajo has been reorganizing our collections room at the Metuchen Library and creating an electronic database of the material in the archives.

Finally, in reviewing the Society's operation, it is clear that we need more volunteers. A few dedicated members do the majority of the work. One of my main goals is to develop committees to involve more of the Society's members. I ask that as a member, you give serious consideration to becoming more active in the Society. The committees that are looking for members are: Public Outreach (programs, public relations, and the newsletter), Membership (expanding membership), and Fundraising (finding creative ways to financially support the Society). If you can join one of these committees, please call me at 732-549-6798. I'd love to hear from you.

Nancy Zerbe



Society Receives County Grant To Aid Local History Project

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society has received a \$2,000 grant from the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission to begin the transcription of 36 hours of interviews conducted with Metuchen residents in the 1970s. The interviewees represent a wide range of residents, including African-Americans, women, shop owners, and public officials. Many of the groups represented are often overlooked in traditional histories.

Once the tapes are transcribed, the public can learn about the lives of "ordinary people" in the early 20th century, including details that are often lost in written records, such as personal accomplishments, tragedies, and a healthy dose of humor.

In 1975, Metuchen Librarian Ruth Terwilliger was concerned that Metuchen had good histories of the churches, but lacked information on the people and their lifestyles around the turn of the century. Mrs.

Terwilliger organized an oral history project utilizing a federal grant. The project was coordinated under the auspices of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society which owns the tapes.

Many of the tapes can be borrowed from the Circulation Desk at the Metuchen Library. Transcription will make it easier to understand the interviews and help preserve the contents.

(For a list of tapes available, see pages 3 and 4.)



Alexander Litterst and daughter Louise

"Listening to the Past: Oral Histories from the Archives"

In November 2003, the Historical Society and the Metuchen Borough Improvement League (BIL) co-hosted an exciting program focusing on oral histories obtained from three Metuchen area women in the 1970s. The program featured excerpts from audio cassettes that are part of the Society's collection of oral histories and a slide presentation of related photographs.

The first excerpt was from an interview with Ruth Mook, where she described her college and graduate school education in science. Mook later served as president of the BIL and president of the Metuchen Board of Education, and was a founding member of the Metuchen Girl Scout Council.

The second interviewees, the Litterst sisters, were daughters of Metuchen's second mayor and the proprietors of the Ramble Inn (a tea room and luncheon restaurant in Metuchen). In their interview, they spoke about running the tea room and read from

a letter written by their father soon after moving to Metuchen (see page 5).

The final interviewee, Dolly Prickett Buchanan, was the granddaughter of Judge Prickett, who was murdered by a disgruntled defendant he had sent to jail. In her interview, she spoke about her work at her family's newspaper, the *Metuchen Recorder*, and meeting her husband at one of the parties traditionally held after Borough Council meetings.

Oral History Tapes Available

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society has audio cassettes of interviews with the former and current local residents listed below. Information about the interviewee and/or the subject of the interview is given where it is available. The dates of the interviews follow each entry in parentheses. Most of the cassettes can be borrowed from the Circulation Desk at the Metuchen Public Library. For access to tapes of people whose names are preceded by an asterisk, call Society Curator Marie Vajo at 732-985-3217.

Eleanor Bloomfield: Growing up in Metuchen as a "proper young lady": social clubs, private dance lessons, calling cards. (1978)

*Horace & Mildred Boyd: Horace's experiences as a mail carrier in 1910 using a horse and wagon. (1978)

Harold Breen, Sr.: Former Metuchen Fire Chief; history of Fire Department. (1978)

Dolly Prickett Buchanan: Granddaughter of Metuchen Methodist minister. Father was the owner of the *Metuchen Recorder*. Descriptions of Prickett family who came to New Jersey in early 1600s. (Late 1970s)

W. Franklin Buchanan: Metuchen Borough Engineer for 51 years. Growth of Metuchen from the 1900s. Road development, zoning, sewage treatment. (1977)

Charles Butler: African-American local resident. Well-known high school football player; later an amateur boxer. Served in the U.S. Navy. One of his sons attended Annapolis and became a career serviceman. (1997)

Major Charles Carman: Turn of the century life in Menlo Park-Metuchen area. Father worked with Thomas Edison, and sister did first Edison recording. (1973)

Paul Dorf: Managing the Metuchen Inn, which was a hotel during his time there, and famous guests, including Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, and Arthur Treacher. (1978)

Otto and Mrs. Drews: Otto was former financial officer for the Metuchen Board of Education. (1977)

Ruth Eby: Metuchen social life in early 1900s with rigid structure of afternoon calls. Stage coach route through Metuchen, local visits by gypsies. (Undated)

Gardena Emanuel: African-American local resident. Worked as housekeeper for well-known local families, including the Craigs and the Mooks. Designed her own home. (1978)

Joseph Fater: Born and raised in Bonhamtown, family farm, life memories. (1993 and 1996)

Paul Fenton: Pastoral Metuchen in early 20th century. Son of pastor of St. Luke's Church. One of first Democratic councilmen. Metuchen Public Library built by WPA in 1935 under his direction. (1974)

J. Lloyd Grimstead: Lifelong Metuchen resident. Employee of NY Edison Lampworks. Local photographer. (1975)

*Nathan Gross: Memories of local residents: Dr. Hofer, Mayor Washington Wilson, Judge Weber, Hanemann family. Hillside Inn on Main Street a family-owned business. (1978)

Ted Haas: Retired postal worker. Growing up in "Radio Section" of Metuchen. Many nostalgic stories. (1993)

Grace Halsey: Lifelong Metuchen resident. Metuchen librarian 1920-1969. Speaks of library activities from original building on Washington Place to current location, and of former librarians Ruth Thomas and Julia Bogert. (1976 and 1994)

*Martin Jessen: President of Arnolt Bros. Construction Co. Growing up in Metuchen in the 1930s: Monday washday, coal furnaces, feeding itinerants during the Depression, boyhood mischief. (1978 and 1996)

Roger Johnson: Metuchen High School alumnus; active on Board of Education; teacher's strike in 1960s. (1995)

Mary Kramer: Member of the Mayo family who moved to Metuchen in 1914. Father was original owner of Metuchen Hardware Store on Main Street. Father-in-law Ed Kramer worked for Thomas Edison and later started a dry goods business with \$2.00 borrowed from Edison. (1978)

"Pete" Harry Kramer: Happy and active childhood in Metuchen. Donated a cherrywood table to the Borough Improvement League building. Grandfather owned Kramer's Department Store. (1995)

Ed Leis: Moved to Metuchen in 1911. Metuchen Chief of Police 1964-1975. Describes police work in Metuchen from 1936. (1993)

Perry Letsinger: Deacon in Second Baptist Church. Experiences of raising an African-American family in a community where few African-American families resided in the 1930s. (1977)

Litterst Sisters: Proprietors of the Ramble Inn, a Metuchen tea room and luncheon restaurant. Daughters of Alexander Litterst, second mayor of Metuchen. (Late 1970s)

Emily Madison: Traveled extensively as a member of the military. Later worked in a local pharmacy. (1978)

(Continued on page 4)

Oral History Tapes Available *(Continued)*

Harriet Molineaux: Growing up in Metuchen in early 1900s. Mother was first female member of Metuchen Board of Education. (1978)

Ange Monek: Known for beautiful wardrobe made by her mother. Worked at the National Bank of New Jersey for many years as a teller and retired as vice president. Remembers many popular businessmen and activities at the bank. Father was a respected mason who built many homes and other buildings in the area. (Undated)

Ruth Mook: Historical details about the Mook family who settled in Metuchen in the 1880s. (1974)

Sherwood Mundy: Local lawyer from 1933 to time of interview. Ancestors settled in New Jersey in 1665. Describes Revolutionary War skirmish in which ancestors participated. (1977)

Dorothy Peck: Life during the Depression of 1930; reminiscences about the "Radio Section" of Metuchen. (1978)

Chief Joseph Perrino & Capt. Charles Reeder: Perrino - Metuchen Chief of Police; designed first Indian logo for uniform patches. Reeder - police detective. (1977)

"Chet" Peters: Retired postal worker, well known in Metuchen. Colorful reminiscences of Metuchen residents. (1996)

*Elsie Potter: Active in the Reformed Church of Metuchen. Elsie and husband traveled to India as missionaries. Brother Ed Burroughs was pharmacist at Metuchen Pharmacy. (1977)

Marie Bruno Pratcher: Father was a sculptor with offices in New York City. She modeled for some of his statues that were used in churches, office buildings and schools. Marie and husband Phil had a florist shop in Plainfield. Stories of travel in Europe. (Undated)

*Walter Qualls: First African-American councilman in Metuchen (1974). Stories of growth and development from the son of a migrant worker to a leader of the International Chemical Workers Union. (1978)

Barbara Moss Rice: Relatives in Metuchen fought in the Civil War. She was a scout leader. Family had summer cottage in Morgan, NJ. Describes tragic death of Mr. Crowell who was trampled by a horse that had been frightened by a train whistle. (1992)

Gershon Robinson: Russian immigrant, 1904. Insights on an immigrant's arrival in America: Statue of Liberty, processing at Ellis Island. Shopkeeper in Perth Amboy area around 1917. (1978)

Grace Rolf: Details of the forerunner of the Metuchen Country Club called "The Metuchen Club." Reminiscences of Governor and Mrs. Silzer and of the Rev. Behrenburg (former pastor of the Presbyterian Church). (1978)

Alberta Ross: Memories of early Metuchen. Father, Frank Smith, operated a barber shop on Main Street in Robins Hall. Knew Thomas Edison. (1978)

Elsie Salaki: Daughter of local baker in early 1900s. Describes bakery life. Reminiscences of Metuchen Mayor Washington Wilson and Chief of Police George Hutchinson. (1976)

Katherine Schveninger: Lifelong Metuchen resident from early 1900s. Community-oriented activities including senior citizens bus and senior citizen housing. (1978)

*Beulah Stahl (1978)

Ray Suart: Reminiscent stroll down Main Street, Metuchen. Growing up in Metuchen; many colorful residents. (1994)

Jay W. & Blanche Thornall: Details of many long-established local families: Thornall, Edgar, Freeman, Campbell. Metuchen during the Depression. Blanche's father, Fred Bates, established one of the first real estate offices in Metuchen. (1978)

*George Verbel: Active in community affairs, including the Metuchen Board of Education and the Metuchen Housing Authority. (1995)

James Wallace: Metuchen Fire Chief. History of fire department from 1882 to time of interview. Organization of Eagle Hook and Ladder Co. and the Washington Hose Co.; duties of the fire chief; types of equipment; training. (1977)

Donald Wernik: Mayor of Metuchen 1970-1979. School years, family business, marriage, politics, reflections on office of Mayor. Valuable resource on a minority family's search for recognition and identity in Metuchen 1930 to time of interview. (1978 and 1996)

*Myrtle Woerner: Teacher at Piscatawaytown School. (1978)

*Richard Ziegler: Raised on Charles St. and attended local schools. Fought and captured in Germany during World War II, walked to safety. (1993)

Morris Zutz: Owner of Morris Stores, long-time business in Metuchen, with his brothers. Emigrated to U.S. first and sold produce, making enough money to send for the rest of his family. Eventually opened Morris Stores. (1995)

Jerome Lemelson: Local Inventor and Visionary (Continued from page 1)

Lemelson was a staunch advocate for the independent inventor.

Lemelson was involved in more than 100 lawsuits concerning patent infringement and other matters, with varying degrees of success. The earliest of these concerned a cereal box cutout that Lemelson believed was used without his permission. He lost the case, and this helped create a recurring concern in his career, namely, the disrespect for independent inventors by large corporations and the tendency of corporations to use those inventions, assuming that the independent inventor could not afford to litigate in defense of his patent. Some of Lemelson's lawsuits took as long as two decades to resolve. Some are still pending, six years after his death, or have only been filed since his death.

In later life, Lemelson became a philanthropist.

Later in his life, Lemelson devoted his resources to philanthropic causes relating to education and the promotion of technological innovation. He felt passionately that these were essential to America's future economic success. He started activities at his son's college, and funded a program at MIT which annually awards the Lemelson-MIT Award of \$500,000 --the world's largest single award given for invention and innovation. He funded a professorship at MIT which was held by prominent economist Lester Thurow. He also donated substantially to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. He was interested in civil rights and promoting invention and entrepreneurship among young people and people of all backgrounds. Among many other honors, he was voted the 1995 Engineer of the Year by *Design News* and is listed in the New Jersey Inventors Hall of Fame.

Dr. William Ainslie of Edison has been made an HONORARY MEMBER of the Society in recognition of his years of service. Only seven others in the Society's history have received this recognition.

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

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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, reminiscences, articles, 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.

Many local residents knew Lemelson and his family.

Jerome (Jerry) Lemelson was born in 1923, grew up on Staten Island, attended New York University, and served in the military during World War II. His wife Dorothy (Dolly) was a childhood friend from Perth Amboy. They settled in Metuchen, attracted by its intellectual reputation and its proximity to the laboratory of Thomas Edison, one of Lemelson's heroes.

They first lived in an apartment, and with the birth of their two sons in 1959 and 1961, bought a house at 85 Rector Street. Lemelson did much of his work in an office-laboratory in the attic. On the first floor, Dolly operated an interior design studio which sometimes supported the family during Lemelson's early years of inventing. Eventually Lemelson maintained an office outside the house. Metuchen resident Ingrid Kvam worked with Lemelson for many years, and remembers a long and pleasant relationship with Jerry and Dolly.

In the mid-1980s, concerned about pollution and traffic in Metuchen, Jerry and Dolly moved to Princeton, and still later to Nevada, where Lemelson spent his last years. He died in 1997.

If you knew the Lemelson family, the Historical Society would like to capture your memories. Please call 732-549-6798.

Editor's note: Peter Materna is an engineer, inventor, and patent agent. He has long admired Jerome Lemelson and was pleased to learn recently that Lemelson's former Metuchen residence is next to his own on Rector Street.

References:

Design News, March 6, 1995

<http://www.si.edu/lemelson/lemelson/jhl.html>

<http://web.mit.edu/invent/w-lemelsonbio.html>

http://www.lemelson.org/innovation/flash/lemelson_book.html

A list of titles of patents issued to Lemelson during approximately the last half of his career is given at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website at <http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph->

[Parser?Sect1=PTO2&Sect2=HTO&u=%2Fnetacgi/nph-adv.htm&r=0&p=1&f=S&l=50&Query=IN%2Flemelson&d=ptxt](http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO2&Sect2=HTO&u=%2Fnetacgi/nph-adv.htm&r=0&p=1&f=S&l=50&Query=IN%2Flemelson&d=ptxt)
(and subsequent pages)

Alexander Litterst writes...

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Alexander Litterst in 1930 at age 87, and read by one of his daughters during an oral history interview taped in the 1970s. Litterst was the second mayor of Metuchen.

I was a young man, born and brought up in NYC, all my friends and attachments were in the city, and my clubs and choral society there, my returns to the city were frequent and my friends could not get over the wonders that I moved and seemed to like to live in New Jersey. They said, "Anything except New Jersey, the land of the mosquito, malaria, chills and fever, how could you do it, Alexander?" My reply was, of course, I made a mistake choosing such a disease and insect-infested part of the country, where the couple that lived in our home celebrated their Golden Wedding two years ago, where the couple directly opposite celebrated their Golden Wedding a year ago, and the couple living on the next hill east of us enjoyed their Golden Wedding a year ago. The Carmans, the Freemans, and the Hunts. So of course, where I live now is a diseased and insect infected place, and a hell of a place for me to have selected....

Upcoming Programs

Metuchen Local History Day

Sunday, February 1, 1:00 p.m.
Metuchen Public Library
480 Middlesex Avenue, Metuchen

“The American Revolution in New Jersey”

Sunday, March 14, 2:00 p.m.
Metuchen Public Library
480 Middlesex Avenue, Metuchen
Speaker: Arthur Lefkowicz

“The House That Ruth Built & That Pops Opened: Negro League Baseball in Yankee Stadium”

Friday, April 16, 1:00 p.m.
Metuchen Senior Citizen Center,
15 Center Street, Metuchen
Speaker: Lawrence Hogan, Ph.D.

MEHS Takes the Prize!



At this past October's Metuchen Country Fair, the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society won 2nd prize in the booth contest sponsored by the Metuchen Area Chamber of Commerce for its decoration and displays related to the Fair's baseball theme. The Society received a \$100 check in addition to a spiffy red ribbon.

The Fall-Winter 2003 issue of *Nannygoats* distributed at the Fair tied in well with the baseball theme. It featured an article by Society Vice President Steve Reuter about the famous baseball game played between the Metuchen Baseball Club and the St. Louis Cardinals on the evening of July 20, 1936, in the fields where Campbell School now stands. The booth featured a reproduction scoreboard of the 1936 game, a map of the Campbell School fields, and an enlarged photo of the St. Louis Cardinals posing in front of the YMCA. The booth also displayed historic photographs of local baseball teams and a guessing game about famous baseball players from New Jersey.

Historic Coloring Book



Old Borough Hall

The staff of *Nannykids* is creating a coloring book depicting a variety of historic Metuchen and Edison sites. If you have any suggestions for sites or topics to be included, please send regular mail to *NANNYKIDS* Coloring Book, c/o the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, P.O. Box 61, Metuchen, NJ 08840, or email your suggestions to: ayersallenhouse@msn.com.

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