



Nannygoats



Vol. 23, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society

Winter/Spring 2025

2024 marked the 50th Anniversary of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, and marked many other notable milestones as well, including the 150th Anniversary of the founding of Metuchen's Mt. Zion Masonic Lodge. "Dual Citizen" William Bodycombe, both Society Member and Lodge Historian, spoke about the Lodge's history at a special celebration held at The Pines Manor on June 28, 2024. Here are his humorous and learned remarks from that evening, reproduced for posterity. Bodycombe also produced an incredibly well-researched written history now available in bound copy format for \$20. We hope you enjoy learning more about the Masons, and please keep in mind while reading that this address, since edited slightly, was delivered orally to an auspicious gathering of Free and Accepted Masons.

Worshipful Master, Most Worshipful Grand Master, Right Worshipful Grand Officers, Brethren and Guests... The opening music was *Mission Impossible*. Let me explain in part of the 20 minutes I have been given here today before I self-destruct.

In 1924, fifty years of Mt. Zion Lodge were celebrated with a 15 minute speech given by Brother Charles Weber, the Lodge Secretary. In 1974, one hundred years were celebrated with a 30 minute speech given by Most Worshipful Arnold Neilsen, Past Grand Master. In 2024, 150 years..... well....you do the math. Suffice it to say that vehicles have been wheel clamped and the doors will be secured till I have finished or till 10 o'clock, whichever comes the soonest!

So, let's begin. *Bereshith Bara Elohim eth Ha Shamayim w eth Ha arets*. In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. (Genesis, Chapter 1, Verse 1). On the sixth day, God created Mankind, and in Genesis Ch 5 the first man is referred to as Adam.

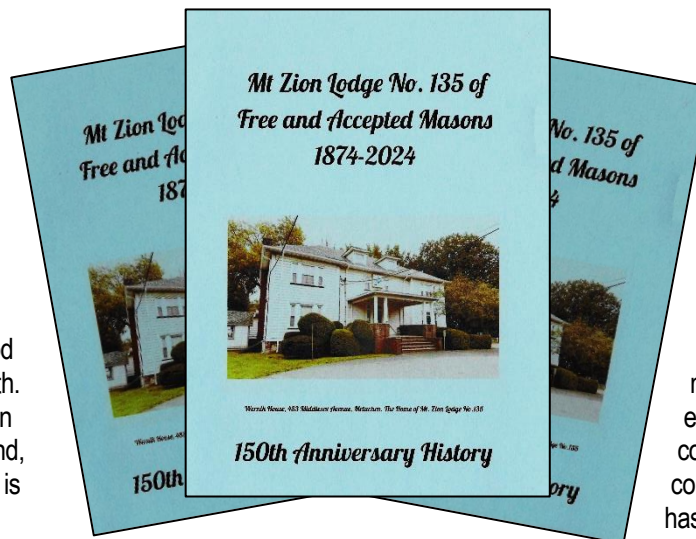
According to James Anderson in his 1723 book called *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, Adam had the Liberal Sciences in his heart and passed them down through his children and subsequent generations to Noah, who diligently applied Geometry to the building of the Ark "according to the Rules of Masonry." In a never before studied footnote in the Mt. Zion Lodge Bible in use in 1874, it is stated that just as Adam begat Cain and Abel, so also the Grand Lodge of New Jersey begat Americus Lodge in Woodbridge. And just as Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth, so also Americus Lodge begat Mt. Zion Lodge in Metuchen, as a result of which, we are sitting here this evening to celebrate 150 years.

To be clear, however, if you believe that footnote to be true, you must also believe that the Unicorns overslept on the day Noah's Ark departed.

But, to be serious, Mt. Zion Lodge #135 is 150 years old and in

that time has occupied space in four different locations within the boundaries of Metuchen without a break. Our present location is Wernik House, at 483 Middlesex Avenue, which has been our meeting place since 1927, thus, incidentally, giving us an opportunity for another centenary celebration in 2027.

Metuchen Masons' 150 Years of History



The Metuchen Masonic Building Association was created in 1927 to administer the Building and it oversaw its use by Mt. Zion Lodge, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Order of De Molay, the Rainbow Girls and the Craftsman's Club.

Since 2010 the YMCA has had the controlling interest in the building, while Mt. Zion Lodge has use of the common and Masonic areas. During this time Mt. Zion has played host to the Rainbow Girls, the Edison Square Club, the Level Club, the Sciots and Inspiratus Lodge.

In our 150 years the Lodge has held 2690 regularly constituted meetings, and a considerable number of extra meetings, or emergent communications, to meet the needs of conducting Masonic business. The Lodge has had 1550 members, 126 Masters, 26 Secretaries, 20 Treasurers, 20 Grand Lodge

Officers, 3 Grand Masters, 3 District Deputy Grand Masters, 3 District Ritual Instructors, 1 Junior Grand Steward, 1 Senior Grand Deacon, 1 Aide to the Grand Master, and 10 Grand Chaplains.

Perhaps the most unusual appointment occurred in 1967 when James Eagan was designated as Turkey's Grand Representative to the Grand Lodge of New Jersey.

These are bald facts about the Lodge, but they say little about what the Lodge has taught me as I have read 150 years worth of minutes of meetings both scheduled and emergent, and I would like to explore this theme for a few minutes.

Masonry is a fraternity, based on brotherhood, fellowship and friendship, and, as the minutes show, Mt. Zion has enjoyed an abundance of all three. Also the fraternity is dedicated to making good men better, and I believe Mt. Zion Lodge has succeeded

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.

50th Anniversary Celebration

The Society wrapped up its 50th Anniversary year in style with a celebration at Metuchen's Old Franklin Schoolhouse in December 2024. In addition to elegant appetizers and seasonal refreshments, a slide-show of the Society's many activities during the year was featured.

The highlight of the event was the awards presented to members who've made notable contributions in 2024.

An award for Historic Preservation was presented to Nancy Zerbe and Peter Materna for their incredible work renovating 443 Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen, breathing new life into this historic building.

A Volunteer Service Award was presented to Charles Leckenby in honor of his work organizing the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery cleanups; true to form, Charlie was busy serving others on that day, so his wife Melissa accepted the award for him.

Many thanks to all that attended and helped with the event, especially Society Director Grace Shackney who took a lead organizing role.



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.
info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org**

Welcome to our newest Board Member, Marilyn Mills Matthews!

Marilyn is a Metuchen native whose family has lived in this area for generations. We look forward to all she has to contribute to our mission of "saving the past for the future." She is shown here on a recent trip to the Pyramids of Egypt.



New in the Archives

Listed here are just *some* of our many recent acquisitions from December 2024 through January 2025. 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 with any questions.

- *Heavenly Poems of Inspiration* by Harold I. Brown, Mavie A. Brown, and former Metuchen resident Michael J. Kesely, and newspaper clipping from *JET* magazine of Joseph Kesely winning a new Pontiac convertible at nine years old after winning a poem contest sponsored by Bamberger's stores and Pontiac in 1963 (donated by Micheal Kesely)
- Photo album of the First Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, Fall 2024 edition of the *08840, Metuchen* magazine, typed history and flyer for the Second Baptist Church 110th Anniversary Celebration, blank envelope from the Amerchol Corporation in Edison, 2001 educational coloring & activity book for Wernik's Pharmacy in Metuchen, and the 2024 Celebration of Life program for Phyllis Boeddinghaus (donated by Tyreen Reuter)
- Genealogical research material gathered about Obadiah Ayers and his wife Hannah Pike, the owners of the Ayers-Allen House (donated by William R. Erwin Jr.)
- Saint Francis of Assisi Cathedral 125th Anniversary book (donated by the Metuchen Public Library)
- 1976 commemorative plate for the 80th Anniversary of The Trust Company of New Jersey and the 200th Anniversary of the United States of America, Edison Citizens Bill of Rights booklets from the 1990s-2000s, A Guide to Passport to Edison - 2001 booklet, Welcome to Edison: An Enlightened Community with the 1995-1996 Edison Recreation Department's Program of Activities booklet (donated by Lois Wolke)
- *History of Middlesex County, New Jersey, 1664-1920*, vol. 1-3, 1921 (donated by David Edgar)
- Digital photograph of George Hutchinson and Chief Enos Fouratt in front of new Metuchen Police car, ca. 1954-1958 (donated by Kathy Hutchinson Schwalje)
- Edison High School Letterman's Jacket from Class of 1969, "Edison Eagles" Sweater, and Cardigan for Edison High School 1965 Soccer Champions (donated by George Mikitzki)
- Two bricks from Franklin School, 1909-1999; Edward Wetzel painting of Franklin School; *Know Your Town Handbook: Metuchen* published by The League of Women Voters, September 1971; *A Walking Tour of Metuchen*, prepared by the Metuchen Public Library, ca. 1990; and the *International's Map of Metuchen within Edison Township*, ca. 1962 (donated by Pat Dyremose)
- Digital photograph of Officers - Ordnance, Maintenance, & Repairs Schools, Raritan Arsenal, NJ, 12/3/1918 (donated by Daniel Granato, **see below**)



admirably.

For example, the Lodge minutes tell us that the Lodge has always taken care of its own members when called on. The very first occasion occurred as early as 1874 when a ship's master called William Cathcart met his premature end aged only 40. This left his wife in financial difficulties. The Lodge, being still a young organization, had no money to give, but individual members got together and were able to provide enough to help William's widow.

In another more extreme example of need, in 1927 a Brother's wife told the Lodge that the family was in some distress. The Lodge made an immediate donation. This was followed by a visit from the Lodge Secretary, who was shocked to find that the family was quarantined with scarlet fever, and had nothing to live on. The Secretary immediately paid the family's outstanding bills himself, the Lodge set up arrangements to make regular payments and later the Grand Lodge Masonic Charity stepped in to match the Lodge payments. One member even donated a kitchen sink!

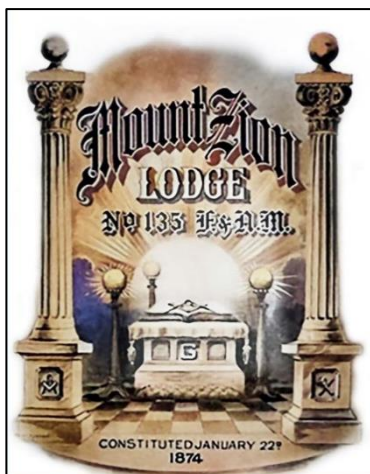
Also the Lodge has been part of the local community through donations to First Aid Squads, the local volunteer police and fire departments, local chapters of the Red Cross, local hospitals and young people's organizations and through taking part in events such as the Memorial Day Parade. Already this year the Parade has taken place and donations have been made to the Metuchen High School Graduation Project, to the organization that spearheads the Moms helping Moms charity and to sponsoring the Metuchen Baseball Little League so that youngsters get out and play instead of being glued to screens.

As recorded in your souvenir book, the Lodge has played its part in the development of the Masonic Home in Burlington and the previously mentioned Masonic Charity, as well as contributing to the work of the New Jersey Grand Lodge through three members of the Lodge who served as Grand Master, and 17 other members who have worked as Grand Lodge Officers.

Nationally, the Lodge has supported the development of the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia, and has always responded to appeals to help when nature has struck in the form of earthquakes like the one which caused the fire in San Francisco in 1906, also floods in Ohio, hurricanes in Florida and grasshoppers in Kansas among many other occasions.

Also in your booklet, the story of Major Ulysses Grant Fetterman helping 800 Masons in Austria in 1946 illustrates the international reach of the Lodge.

Every Lodge will have stories like these to tell, and I am not making any claim that Mt. Zion is different from other Lodges in terms of fellowship and brotherhood, but, while sorting through the Lodge's archives I discovered a letter, which illustrates the bond between a Brother and the Lodge. Until today, I am probably the only person who has read this letter in 140 years, and I am going to share it with you. I have taken the liberty of translating it from the ancient, no longer taught, cursive script for tonight's occasion. It reads as follows:



Brooklyn, New York 14th April 1880

Dear Brethren,

Having removed from your vicinity more than a year ago and perhaps not to return, it is my desire to affiliate with some Lodge near my residence, and for this purpose I desire a demit from Mt. Zion Lodge. It is with sincere regret that my membership with you will thereby cease – Mt. Zion Lodge, its interests and members have been very near my heart from the beginning of its organization. I had the pleasure of being one of its Charter Members, I was your secretary for two years, occupied the South and West, each for one year, and the East as Worshipful Master for two years. You can appreciate my feelings after these close relations when the thought comes to me

that I shall probably no more meet with or be numbered as one of your members.

But, Brethren, I shall often look back and review the pleasant memories of the past, looking forward with greater pleasure to a happy future in meeting with you in that Grand Lodge above when we, as Master Masons, shall meet to part no more.

Very Truly and Fraternally Edgar L Pierson

Nobody writes letters like these any more. But, moving on, my studies of Lodge documents and minutes have taught me so much more about the Lodge and human behavior.

Unintended Consequences: In 1907 a member complained about the cleanliness of the Lodge. Instead of getting a cleaner Lodge, the janitor resigned.

Tact and Diplomacy: On one occasion the District Deputy made his official visit and praised the Lodge for the quality of degree work, only for the Lodge Ritual Instructor to later berate the Lodge for the poor quality of work done and to demand an extra Friday night rehearsal.

Committees: Formed for a myriad of reasons including Finance, By-Laws, researching petitions, relocation of the Lodge, upkeep and improvement of the Lodge and organizing functions such as this one today. The minutes reveal that slightly more obscure committees were created to order pots and pans for the kitchen, to evaluate the need for tree-trimming at the Mt. Zion burial plot, to respond to a request to assist in planting 10 million trees in honor of George Washington, and a committee for the prevention of unexpected burials in the Mt. Zion plot. The list goes on.

Spirit of Adventure: In 1926, a brother from this Lodge was recorded as visiting the most northerly Lodge in the world, the Canara Lodge #162 in Fairbanks, Alaska. This feat can be matched by a current member of the Lodge who recently visited Lodges while on a trip to Australia and New Zealand.

Personal Responsibility: A brother reported an exchange that he had experienced with a shortwave radio enthusiast in Liberia, Africa. After an exchange of details, it was discovered that the Liberian enthusiast was accompanied by a member of this Lodge whose first question was How much did he owe in Lodge dues.

Cooperation: A US Army Sergeant, a member of this Lodge, was based in Des Moines, but was serving in Iran in 1945. His wife was in

need of assistance, so he contacted the Lodge, which in turn contacted a Lodge in Des Moines, which offered immediate assistance as needed. The Sergeant thanked the Lodge by dispatching an ashtray made of stone taken from the quarry which had supplied material for the building of the Temple of Solomon. Tragically, the stone was broken in transit.

Mistaken Priorities: In 1926 a New York brother was involved in an accident with a trolley. An unknown Mason from New Jersey assisted him. The lodge received a letter asking if the New Jersey Mason was a member of our Lodge, not because he wanted to thank him for his assistance, but because he needed a witness in his lawsuit against the trolley company.

Mistaken Identity

In 1924 the 50th Anniversary of the Lodge was celebrated in the presence of the Grand Master and the Governor of New Jersey. A very nice leather wallet was produced as a memento of the occasion with the logo "Mt. Lion Lodge, No 135".

Weird History: In 1933 the Lodge offered silent prayer for 10 Masons who had perished in the USS Akron. This ship was a helium filled rigid airship which was the world's first purpose built flying aircraft carrier capable of carrying 5 Sparrowhawk fighter planes which could land and take off while the airship was in flight. The disaster took place just off the Atlantic City coast when the airship was struck by lightning and crashed into the ocean.

Disrespect: Unfortunately, I learned a little about disrespect when a brother was accused by a fellow brother of alienating the affections of his wife, and for failing to keep a promise made to the Master to keep away from her. Even Masons have human failings.

Civic Duty: 6 members of the Lodge have served as Mayors of Metuchen covering 34 years of Metuchen history, and several other members worked in a variety of roles at the Borough Offices.

Family Ties: Several families have had long standing ties to the Lodge including the Moss family, the Jensens, the Nielsens, the Werniks and the Mooks, but the longest span was the 110 year connection that the Carman family had with the Lodge including two secretaries, who incidentally worked for Thomas Edison, and four Masters, one of whom authored the History published in 1974 to mark the Lodge centenary.

Patience: Many Masons have sat through interminable meetings when such issues as the precise location of a light switch have dominated hours of discussion. However, the longest meeting experienced by Mt. Zion Lodge was NINE days. The Lodge was opened to perform a funeral at a nearby funeral home, but could not be closed because the Order of the Eastern Star was working in the Lodge. As a result, the meeting opened on September 5th, 1933, was closed at 8pm on September 14th so that the meeting scheduled for that night could be opened in due form.

All of these stories, and many more, are included in the new History of the Lodge, specially written to mark the 150th Anniversary, so it is time for a shameless plug. Originally priced at a modest \$49.99, copies of the history are already becoming scarce collectors items, but we have a few copies available tonight at an extra special price of \$19.99, though please bear in mind that I don't have any

small change.

I would like to finish with some very serious research centered on the question of "How many Masons does it takes to change a light bulb?" After a great deal of research it is now possible to answer this very vexing question: it takes 20! Two to complain that the light doesn't work, one to pass the complaint to either a committee, the Temple Board or the Master of the Lodge, three to do a study on light in the Lodge, two to check out the types of lights used in Jerusalem Lodge, three to argue about it for 45 minutes in a Regular communication, thus persuading some of the newer Masons never to return, five to plan a fundraiser to purchase the bulb, two to complain that that's not the way we did it before, one to borrow a ladder, donate the bulb and install it, And... one to order the brass memorial plate and have it inscribed.

In a follow up survey the question was asked, "How many Past Masters does it take to change a lightbulb?" and the overwhelming response was: Change it? Why? We didn't change it in my year. It was working fine then. A further follow up posed the question...How many Grand Masters does it take to change a lightbulb. Answer: None, because I have people for that!

Yes! The Grand Master may have a Grand Light Bulb Changer as one of his people. He couldn't be here tonight because he is changing a bulb at Atlas Pythagoras Lodge, but the truth is that as Masons we all have people!

Let me explain: The Grand Master recently attended a Master Mason Degree at Mt. Zion Lodge. In his short address after the Degree was concluded, he pointed out to the three new Master Masons that they had become members of the greatest and most wide-spread fraternity in the world, a fraternity in which Masons support each other and have each other's backs. Brother Masons, as many of the stories already told tonight have shown, Masons in Metuchen, in the 10th District, in New Jersey, in America and all over the world will have your back as you will have theirs.

As Masons, in an increasingly fractious world, we all have people! And it will be up to some of these people to steer Mt. Zion Lodge into the next 150 years.

Thank you to Lodge members for being here tonight to celebrate our past and look to our future, thank you to the Grand Master and our guests from Grand Lodge, and from our brother Lodges for helping to make this such a noteworthy occasion, and thank you all for your time and attention.

IMAGES Page 1, Cover of the 150th Anniversary History book. Page 4, Mt. Zion Lodge's official logo. Page 5, Author/Historian William Bodycombe and his wife Nancy at The Pines Manor for the 150th Anniversary Celebration in June.



News and Notes

VINTAGE FILMS

The family of Michael G. Muha has uploaded several of his movies to YouTube, featuring parades, sporting events, weddings and graduations at the old St. Francis church, plus everyday life in small-town Metuchen in the early 1950s. Muha was a Metuchen-based photographer and proprietor of Muha's Photo Service (later Color Life Photographers). From the early 1950s through the mid 1970s, he shot dozens of reels of 16mm films documenting his family and the wider community.

Nannygoats readers will remember his many articles and contributions over the years. We are grateful to him and his family for sharing these wonderful films. To access them, visit www.youtube.com/@MichaelGMuha or scan the code here.



125TH BIRTHDAY

The Borough of Metuchen kicked off its 125th Anniversary at the Annual Reorganization meeting on January 1, where Mayor Jonathan Busch spoke about the year's plans to honor the Borough's history and used Metuchen's first Mayor's gavel, on loan from the Society.



HOUSE HISTORY GRANT AWARDED

The Society is delighted to share that we have been awarded a 2025 Arts & History grant from the Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners. This funding will allow us to host a series of "House History Workshops" this year; more information will be coming soon.

MAJOR DONATION RECEIVED

Many thanks to the Jessica Foundation for their recent \$2000 donation! We are extremely honored to be the recipient of this award and we will certainly put the funds to good use in "saving the past for the future."

PRESIDENT CARTER'S VISIT TO EDISON

With the recent passing of former President James Earl Carter, Jr. (1924 –2024), many have reflected on their interactions with and memories of the 39th President. Did you know that he once visited the Clara Barton section of Edison Township?

On Sunday morning, July 29, 1985, while nearing New York City in a bus full of Habitat for Humanity volunteers, Carter asked the driver to exit the turnpike to find a church to attend services, ending up at St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church on Pleasant Avenue (now occupied by Swaminarayan Mandir), then had lunch at Stewart's on Amboy Avenue. More about his visit – and our members' memories of the former President – coming in a future issue.



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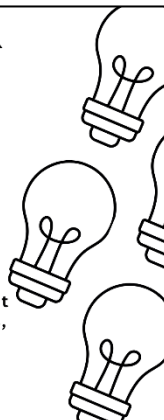


The Thomas Edison Center museum offers guided tours to individuals, families, corporations, scout programs, schools, summer camps, and senior groups.

We book private tours for groups of 12 or more on other days in advance when available.

Visit our website for more information about other programs, volunteering, memberships, and much more.

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**Want to write an article for
Nannygoats? Contact us at
metuchenedisonhistory@gmail.com**

Save the Dates!

Notices about these events below – and those we will add throughout the year – will be emailed to all members and posted on Facebook and our website.

Tri-County History Day
Saturday, May 3, 2025
Plainfield Public Library

Middlesex County History Day
Saturday, May 17, 2025
East Jersey Old Town, Piscataway

Metuchen Colonial Cemetery Spring Cleanup
Sunday, May 18, 2025
Scouts/Service Hours Welcome!

Edison Township Memorial Day Parade
Saturday, May 24, 2025
Join the Society as we march in the Parade

www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org

Join Us!

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.



Facebook Group

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