HISTORICAL VIEW OF EDISON TOWNSHIP





R 974.941 EDISON, THOMAS ALVA, 1847-1931 Historical View of Edison Township BOOK LOCATED IN DIRECTOR'S OFFICE Pb. REFERENCE Edison Township Board of Ed., 1976 101941

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## INTRODUCTION

As a part of the plan for local observance of the Bicentennial, the Edison American Revolution Bicentennial Celebration Committee requested that Edison Public Schools prepare a report about the history of Edison Township. This paper is the response to that request.

This document is presented in two parts. The first part projects a humanistic view of Thomas A. Edison with insights into his relationship with his workers, with his family and with his wife, Mary. Since the period 1876-1881 represents not only his residency at Menlo Park, but also the most fruitful period of his life, non-technical discussions of his inventions are included. The essay shows the remarkable effect one person can have on an area and on society in general.

The second part includes a brief historical overview of Edison Township with selected aspects depicting the growth of the community. These informal examinations include the development of government with the expansion and the refinement of municipal services; the changes in the educational system; and the expansion of religious activities.

The initiation of this project and the task of carrying it through to completion have been possible through the interest, cooperation, and assistance of several individuals. We wish to express sincere gratitude to the contributing authors: Jack McGeever, Ronald Schuster, Dorothy White, Arthur Rittenhouse, George Tyber, and Ronald Roman. Appreciation is expressed to the citizens of our community and to the students of our senior-high schools who contributed to the development of this project. The contributions of Charlotte Rivers, Anita K. Moss, Agnes G. Saunders, and Louis DuBois were of significant importance. Special. gratitude is expressed to Joseph Kleinchester for his pertinent and timely advice regarding the selection of photographs and other visual materials for the project, the design of the cover, and the many other tasks related to the final printing of this document. We are indebted to the secretarial staff at the Superintendent's office for their patient cooperation and meticulous efforts in the preparation of this document.















## EDISON IN RARITAN

Thomas Edison's genius was not recognized as such during the early stages of his life. Tom liked to do things his own way, as do many with young, inquisitive minds. This inclination met with little sympathy or understanding from the teachers at the Port Huron School in Michigan. The rigidities of the program severely limited his interests. Its teachers found young Edison's incessant, driving questions aggravating. Brightness was misdiagnosed as an inability to learn normally. In fact, one teacher pronounced him addled.(1) Therefore, young Tom's education was undertaken by his mother who was a trained teacher.

His quick mind was restless, and he was unable to accept simple explanations, finding the need to experiment through the scientific method. This experimenting in one instance led to a fire, resulting in the near destruction of the town, and the administration of a public beating of young Tom at the hands of his father, whose punitive actions earned the town's support. (2)

His father, Sam Edison, a hard-working and somewhat restless person in his own right, could not understand why his son did not like playing with children of his own age. Indeed, by age twelve, Edison had little peer-level contact. He appeared not to have needed it, thriving instead on tinkering and experimentation. (3) In addition to his early preference for remaining apart from his peers, Edison, generally, did not become involved in what is considered normal enjoyment. While most people need a change of pace to return refreshed to their tasks, Edison generated this refreshing process while he worked. He did not need a break from tedium; it was pleasure. If this fact can be understood, then Edison becomes a person. If not, he remains the two-dimensional subject of his biographers.

Edison's early work experience revealed yet another interesting aspect of his personality; he had little desire for money. Enroute to a great career, he learned telegraphy after saving the life of a railroad telegrapher's son. This gave him the ability to support himself. He constantly took jobs as a telegraph operator as an opportunity not for income, but to continue his experimentation. Consequently, he was often fired and gained a reputation for unreliability.(4) His wanderings from telegraph office to telegraph office ultimately led him to a series of telegraph-related inventions including the stock ticker which he perfected and produced in Newark, New Jersey. It was in one of his shops on Railroad Avenue in Newark that his "feeling self" surfaced. He began noticing a young co-worker by the name of Mary S. Stilwell who worked at a bench near his. Now he had an interest other than scientific experimentation on which to center his powers of concentration. When not working on his numerous inventions, some of which were the duplex, multiplex, quadraplex, electric pen, or the automatic telegraph, he filled his idle hours thinking about the beautiful Mary.(5)

There were times when their shared interests proved extremely helpful. The classic occasion arose when they were in the diningroom of a boarding house surrounded by people and were able to use Morse Code to send love messages to each other.(6) This incident showed something of the personal Edison beneath his scientific commitment.

The affection grew, and on Christmas Day, 1871, Edison married Mary Stilwell. As a wife Mary exerted little direct influence over her husband. There was a clear family agreement that his work came first and could never be side-tracked for domestic considerations. Mary could not understand the problems with which her husband grappled. She has been described as "having a head as yet slightly furnished." Edison thought of her often as he worked and sometimes scribbled, "My wife Popsy Wopsy can't invent." (7) Unfortunately, since Mary could not share his work, she was destined to spend many lonely hours without her husband.

Edison worried his young wife with his financial dealings as well as with his work schedule. In 1873, while demonstrating an invention in England, Edison nearly lost his Newark factories because he had spent the revenues which were to have paid the taxes.(8) The following year the need for \$10,000 to save his Newark home drove him more deeply into the clutches of Jay Gould.(9) Thus, it would seem that Mary Edison had good reason to worry.

The truth is that Edison had little concern for money. While working on the duplex, he became involved in the war between Western Union and Jay Gould's Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company because he passionately wanted to improve the telegraph and did not care for whom he worked. As a result of this lack of consideration for the future, he had to face a problem once the invention was developed. The battles which raged through 1874 and 1875 resulted in Edison's being swindled by Jay Gould.(10) After almost two years of struggling, Edison yearned to escape to a secluded area where he could do what he wanted to do - invent. In 1875 he bought property; by 1876 a laboratory and a house had been constructed at Menlo Park, in what was then called Raritan Township. There is an interesting story involving Edison's reputation and the purchase of the Menlo Park land. The seller, Mrs. Maria Ayres Carman, was requested to deed the land to Mary Edison rather than to Tom. This action, an unusual one for the time, was taken to prevent him from losing the property through suits which might result from future careless financial maneuvers. (12)

Menlo Park, now congestd with traffic, housing developments, and shopping centers, was then a bucolic, hardly discovered hamlet "out in Jersey". One must say "hardly discovered" because the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line from New York City to Pennsylvania ran through it. Beauty and accessibility caught the attention of the rich and mighty of New York who were beginning to eye it as the perfect site for the summer villas which were just beginning to dot the countryside. This process of development was actually begun in 1869 when a massive tract of farmland was sold to the Menlo Park Association to be divided into building lots. (13)

The hamlet provided none of the luxuries of city life to which Thomas Edison had grown accustomed. Building materials had to be brought in by train and the essential foodstuffs often could not be bought without going a few miles to Metuchen which at the time was still a part of Raritan Township.(14) Menlo Park had only one tiny store, in a house just above the tracks near the depot.

We might pause at this point to pose a question: Why did Edison move to Menlo Park? The new location clearly offered none of the conveniences of living in a city. Furthermore, in moving to Menlo Park, he was removing himself from areas of greater demand for his inventions. Although both of these statements are true, the answer probably is that Edison wanted an escape. He wanted to get away from the humdrum of the city. As discussed previously, he had just emerged from a series of financial and legal trials which must have drained him. Coupling this with his long-term resistance to doing things he did not like, and his conception of himself as an inventor, not a manufacturer or businessman, one can understand and appreciate his desire to get away from potential customers. This is why he did not mind being away from New York City. In short, he wanted to find a place which insulated him from pressures and afforded contact with nature which soothed him as he wrestled with problems. Menlo Park represented his dream realized.

Why he left the city may now be clear, yet the reason for the Menlo Park selection instead of another location should be discussed. Menlo Park had received considerable press coverage extolling it beautiful, rolling countryside. Possibly, Edison's father, hired by the inventor to find a suitable location, came across it in the newspapers. Another possibility is that local people brought the hamlet to Edison's attention upon learning of his desire to leave Newark. Whatever the process which initially attracted him to Menlo Park, he loved its serenity and beauty. Unfortunately, Mary Edison, accustomed as she was to city life, was most unhappy about the move. Nevertheless, she kept her complaints to herself and did not protest being ensconced in the farm house that was her new home. The capital that Edison had accumulated since fighting off his creditors and settling with Western Union was now plunged into building his laboratory.(17) The hurricane of activity which hit the sleepy hamlet must have flabbergasted the natives. Overnight, Christie Street was converted from a hardly-trod country lane to a center of furious activity. The depot, large for the hamlet but small by any other comparison, was inundated. The local population was deeply impressed by these goings-on, although there was a certain degree of skepticism. These were quiet, simple folk who for the most part could not quite understand the significance of what was taking place. Others, such as William and Theodore F. Carman of Metuchen, hastened to become a part of the Edison circle.

When Edison moved he brought with him the best of his associates from Newark. He selected this circle because they were talented, willing and able workers. He called them "The Boys", a term of endearment which they returned by calling him the "Old Man".(18) The original contingent consisted of Francis R. Upton his resident mathematician; Charles Batchelor - who was proficient at translating Edison's ideas into forms, and later he became his secretary; John Kreusi - who built the first phonograph; and Edward Johnson - the persuasive supporter of the mechanical "segar".(19) Many others came as word of Edison's activities spread.(20) As they arrived, Menlo Park became more and more the private fief in Edison. Mrs. Jordan's boarding house became the lodging place for Edison's unmarried assistants, while the married men took over the other houses in the compound area.

Among the newer arrivals were Francis Jehl and Ludwig K. Boehm who faithfully stayed on - dedicated to the "Old Man" - while others remained only long enough to learn what they wanted and then departed. Nevertheless, all contributed to the overall success of the invention factory. As John Ott, the manager of the electric pen company and an old friend said, "Edison was a man of ideas which he expected the hands of others to work out for him." (21)

Before becoming involved in the things that happened while Edison was in Menlo Park, it would be valuable to know what his compound looked like. The first building to be constructed was the two-story clapboard laboratory. It was of simple design which belied the importance of what was to happen within. The building was one hundred feet long by twenty-five feet wide with a double level porch across the front. The first floor was partitioned into a large workroom, an office, a prep room, another smaller workroom and a shop which occupied the entire rear third of the building. The second floor was completely open, provided with numerous benches and work tables. For the time, the laboratory was rather well-equipped, although by today's standards it would have to be classified as primitive. He later added the brick library-office building, a large red brick machine shop and various small, special purpose sheds, all of which were surrounded by a picket fence. (22)

Working for Edison was often a very difficult undertaking for the worker as well as his family. Edison's ability to work continuously at a project inspired his men to perform similar tasks. This meant they, as Edison himself, would often not see their wives and families for days on end. Consequently the fate of Mary Edison and the other wives was to care for their husbands as much as possible, to rear the children almost as widows and try to bear up under the burden. Edison's most fruitful years were spent at Menlo Park. They were years of hard work and sacrifice. Nevertheless, Edison's home and invention factory were not devoid of merriment. During their occasional long midnight vigils, punctuated by dinner brought in by Mrs. Edison, Tom would play the large pipe organ on the second floor and the entire company would sing and dance. Of one thing we can be certain, Edison was a good-natured person who enjoyed swapping stories and humorous jokes.(23) He was inclined to play practical jokes on "the boys", especially Boehm, his old German glassblower.

Although not a social person, Edison encouraged his wife's having parties for the neighbors and their friends in the new house on the hill overlooking the railroad. Here Mrs. Edison relaxed and enjoyed herself. When her husband attended, he sometimes threw peanuts at the guests, such being the degree of informality.(24)

Morale was high despite the hard work and long hours which Edison expected from his men. This was because the relationships which existed were rooted in love, admiration and respect. There was little pressure placed on his assistants. If one of them ran into a serious problem which was momentarily stumping, Edison would usually simply say to play around with it until it was solved. (25) However, Edison was not lax with his men; that would be a serious miscalculation. He expected as much from them as he did from himself. In fact, he went so far as to invent a corpse reviver, designed to prevent individuals from sleeping beyond four hours. This device could be, and often was, turned on its inventor. Indeed, he never asked workers to do anything he did not do himself. One of his old assistants, Henry Campbell, recalled how one time Edison had worked many hours and was exhausted. He told his men that he would sleep for a couple of hours. The two hours passed and Edison was sound asleep. He had worked so hard that the men did not want to disturb him. They let him sleep, and when he awoke he was so angry that he almost fired those involved. (26)

It was easy for workers to leave Edison's factory. He did not pay well which discouraged anyone from continuing on in a position simply for the money. This provided a safety valve which eliminated his potential personnel problems. Therefore, once workers became fed up with conditions, there was little to hinder their leaving.

At the outset it should be noted that Edison, early in his career as an inventor, vowed never to work on a device that was not obviously necessary and desired. He reached this plateau after having invented an electric vote counter for use by legislative bodies. His reasoning was that such a device could be used to save valuable time in Congress and State Legislatures. After presenting a successful demonstration in Washington and having the invention rejected because it would prevent minute maneuvering and deal-making, Edison was crushed. From this point on, he worked only on inventions he was sure would meet with popular acceptance. As in his work with the telegraph, much of what Edison invented was for improving a basic invention or for altering something to make it into something else. Since the summer of 1875 he had been engaged in a race with Elisha Gray, Johann Philipp Reis, and Alexander Graham Bell to develop the first telephone. (28) As early as January of 1876, Edison had filed a patent for a crude telephone. It was really a device for measuring sound waves which were actually faint voice sounds undetectable to Edison due to his ear aches and growing loss of hearing. (29) Evidently this was one of the few occasions in which his deafness appeared to be a liability. Even at this early time Edison's patent was only one of three filed on similar inventions. The U. S. Patent Office ultimately awarded the patent to Bell because he was the first actually to transmit speech over current, a point that Edison never disputed. (30)

Being the practical man that he was and urged on by William Orton, President of Western Union, Edison now turned his attention to finding a method where changes of pressure would not cause distortion or loss of volume. This was the inherent and persistent problem of Bell's telephone. Using the Reis phone as his basic model, Edison launched into an exhaustive series of experiments and encountered no success until an assistant brought him a lamp chimney encrusted with carbon deposits. When pressed into cakes and properly mounted, this lampblack provided the required elasticity to permit the unimpeded flow of current, thereby maintaining a constant level of articulation. (31) Having successfully improved the telephone, Edison sold the device to Western Union which then contested Bell over the precious patent rights. The improvement of the telephone marked the first serious scientific success scored at Menlo Park.

The episode surrounding the telephone controversy reveals something of Edison's personality. He deeply resented Bell's getting credit for the telephone, contending that Bell simply had stumbled onto it. This he compared with his own structured experimentation which is what he considered true inventing. In a letter to William Orton of Western Union, Edison clearly and with determination wrote that if A. E. Dolbear (a professor at Tufts College and an early entrant in the race for the telephone) could not stop Bell, he could. He went on to explain that both he and Dolbear had filed patents with the patent office which were identical, and since both of theirs covered the same ground and predated Bell's, Edison believed this would be enough to end the controversy. (32) The battle raged, not so much in America where Western Union and Bell's company compromised, but in England where both groups sniped at each other until Edison developed a receiver which was better than Bell's. This development finally generated a settlement - a merger based on equal terms. (33)

The Menlo Park period was indeed a fruitful one in Edison's life, as supported by the invention of the phonograph. While still working on the telephone, he wondered if the vibrating diaphragm of his transmitter would make an impression when attached to a point.

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When the needle pricked it, he substituted paper and found a track of holes. Now followed one of his periods of sleepless activity - a siege of creativity. He worked continuously forging a grooved metal cylinder which vibrated when he shouted into a speaking tube. When he shouted into the contraption, a track of tiny holes was inscribed in the tinfoil. He then adjusted the machine, removed the speaking tube, and reversed the cylinder to get back to the beginning. When he cranked the cylinder again, out came his voice reciting, "Mary Had a Little Lamb". Thus was the phonograph invented. Edison's feelings are best described in his own words: "I was never so taken back in my life...I was always afraid of things that worked the first time." (34)

There is an interesting story to be told about Edison and the phonograph. He was asked to demonstrate it to President Rutherford B. Hayes at the White House. Edison arrived late and went directly to the White House. The time was 1:00 a.m. when he knocked on the door of the presidential residence. This might seem audacious to most, but for Edison, accustomed to working at all hours, it was normal. The time was not particularly consequential. His knock was answered by a very tired President, obviously ready to retire. So imposing was the inventor's reputation, and so unbelievable the properties of the magic box he carried, that the President not only ushered him in but aroused the sleeping Mrs. Hayes. He knew she would not want to miss the thrill of Edison's talking box. President Hayes was so impressed that he had the demonstration repeated for the benefit of his entire Cabinet.

Although Edison took his mystifying talking box to the President, he usually invited people to Menlo Park to demonstrate his new device. The phonograph and later inventions lured many national and international notables into the farm country of Raritan Township. These demonstrations and the visitors they attracted duly impressed the natives who already stood in amazement at the idea of Edison's working all night while they retired shortly after dark. Never in all their born days had they seen such comings and goings.

Edison often deeply enjoyed these demonstrations. At times he used the phonograph as a toy, rollicking at the games and tricks that could be played with the machine. Once he recorded three different sound tracks over each other on the same cylinder, creating a poem, overlayed by the whistling of "Yankee Doodle", with counting recorded over both. On another occasion, he recorded, "Mary Had A Little Lamb" and reversed the cylinder. Saying nothing, he left the contraption alone and waited. Soon Francis Jehl, a dedicated employee, played the cylinder. Of course it should be noted that Jehl had no idea of what his boss had done, nor that he was to be the victim of Edison's sense of humor. What Jehl heard, as he later wrote, sounded like, "BMAL ELTTIL A DAH YRAM". He was shocked at the sound and was not content until he learned that Edison had reversed the cylinder. One does not need a great imagination to see the smile on Edison's face as he watched his friend figuring out what happened. (36)

Not all of the demonstrations started out as humorous as the two reported above. Some journeyed to Menlo Park as avowed skeptics, firmly convinced that what they would see and hear was rigged in advance. Edison was even prepared for coping with them. After presenting his demonstration, he would have them speak into the recording tube and took great joy in watching their faces as they heard their own voices coming back from the box. (37)

The campaigns for the telephone and phonograph were exhausting and Edison most uncharacteristically took a vacation - if that is the proper term. He went to Wyoming to rest and observe and measure the sun. As always with him, rest was liberally tinged with practical work considerations. The practical work consideration in this case was to change altitudes and the alteration of the sun's rays to test the accuracy of his tasimeter, an instrument designed to measure the heat of the sun. (38)

The results were disappointing. However, observing the difficulties that farmers had getting wheat from their fields to market, he identified a need for a less expensive and more efficient way to accomplish the task. This thought was later developed into the electric train.(39)

While the electric train idea continued to course through the canyons of his mind, it did not become his prime concern once back at Menlo Park. Instead, destiny called, and he immersed himself in what was to be his most outstanding invention, one that literally altered man's entire lifestyle: the quest for the incandescent lamp.

The knack for using electricity for lighting was not an unknown concept. There were a number of cities, mainly in Europe, where arc lights were used for commercial and street lighting. The arc lamp, however, was noticeably unsuited for the purpose that a bevy of inventors had in mind in the mid 1870's. They - Edison among them sought to ultimately adapt electricity to home and factory lighting.

During the years before 1878, Edison had periodically turned his attention to the problem of electric lighting. Though interested, he never did more than toy with it. Now he directed his full energies to finding a solution to the major stumbling block - how to subdivide the electric current to produce illumination. Some theorists argued vehemently that it was impossible due to the dictates of the law of conservation of matter. Edison disagreed. He believed it to be a problem of finding the proper filament material rather than destroying matter in the sense that his opponents argued. These opponents, interestingly enough, were very often representatives of the multi-billion dollar gas industry which, with a certain justification, saw its role as the basic utility challenged by the spirit of this potential interloper.

The search for the proper filament material was almost Edison's undoing. Up to the fall of 1878 he had experimented repeatedly with many materials and had decided that platinum must be the answer. At this point he committed his entire capital, accumulated through his telegraph and phonograph inventions, to a massive world-wide search for the platinum which he mistakenly believed to be extensively available, but simply not yet found. In this case his refusal to accept advice was nearly fatal to his experimenting.(40)

As his experiments continued it became evident that the platinum filaments melted away as quickly as his capital. The result was a highly impractical and notoriously uncommercial lamp, good for little beyond the fact that it permitted him to receive his first patent for an incandescent lamp in 1878.(41) At least he had scored, but at what price? His financial resources had been nearly exhausted in the globe-circling search for platinum. The end appeared to have been reached, and he must have begun to see the ghosts and goblins which plagued and haunted him in 1873-74 returning.

A great believer in friendship, Edison was now plucked from the edge of the abyss by his longtime friend, Grosvenor Lowrey. Lowrey, a successful lawyer in New York and general counsel for Western Union, had succeeded in organizing a syndicate supported by J. P. Morgan to give Edison support. This group stood ready to invest \$300,000 in the venture, and made \$50,000 immediately available for research. (42) What had occurred was the purchase of all future patent rights, not the buying of a specific invention. Lowrey, trusting Edison and seeing potential for great profit, set up one of the most lucrative business deals of the century with a risk of only \$50,000 to the investors.

Revived by the new infusion of capital, Edison again plunged. into the fray, still working with the platinum filament. By April, 1879, despite a number of different patents, he still had a highly impractical and uncommercial lamp. It simply did not last long. Because of his dependence on outside financing, he also had the problem of dissatisfaction among his backers. While Edison often wasted money in his experimenting, his backers wanted only one thing: a return on their capital. After six months, not only was there no return, but seemingly little progress. Again, disaster loomed. (43)

There was a real possibility that Edison would lose his backers when, as six months earlier, Lowrey came to the rescue. He convinced Morgan to stay in the syndicate which then offered \$50,000 for continued research.(44) Persuaded by Lowrey to continue, Edison finally discarded platinum and once again went back to his earlier experiments and tried carbon. He rejected the heavy carbon rods of his early research and used thin strands instead. As he played with carbonizing items of minute diameter, he seized on a cotton thread. Feeling that he now had the long elusive key, he and Batchelor launched themselves into a marathon to produce a working lamp.(45)

The tension mounted as the hours rolled on and became days. They worked at carbonizing tiny pieces of thread in molds and then somehow getting this delicate piece of carbon ribbon secured within a hand-blown bulb. The patience and endurance required are almost beyond comprehension. Yet after many times it finally happened. Starting one evening and working entirely through the next day, they succeeded in getting a tiny piece of carbonized thread into a bulb blown by Boehm. The crucial test was yet to come. Would it work? The air in the bubble was removed by an air pump and the lamp connected to a generator. Then as a small group of associates gathered around, the current was turned on. A steady light emitted from the filament! Their perseverance was rewarded.(46) The Old Man and his boys had done it - they had disproved the theoretical arguments of the skeptics.

As he walked the few hundred yards home that October morning, one wonders if he felt exhausted like his hero, Napoleon, after a major victory. We do know, however, that he threw himself on the bed fully clothed and slept for twenty-four hours.(47)

When he awoke, the theoretical success behind him, he still faced the problem which was monumental: How could he make it a commercial success? This, of course, he did within a year. He developed a full electrical system running the gamut from generation and centralized distribution to long distance conveyance and metering. Once involved it became obvious to Edison that the lamp itself was only one aspect of the total picture - a picture which only he was able to see.

Having taken this quick preview of things to come in late 1879 and 1880, I return to examine his efforts to perfect the lamp.

The obvious difficulty encountered by Edison and Batchelor in making the first lamp was proof that a better technique and improved materials would be necessary if the lamp could ever be seriously mass-produced. Once again, as often in the past, Edison set himself and his staff to a systematic carbonizing of everything they could think of. Finally they came up with a pressed paper substance which combined sufficient lighting qualities with the necessary malleability to facilitate production. It was for this lamp that he received his basic patent, number 223898, awarded January 27, 1880.(48)

Conquering the incandescent lamp marked a watershed in Edison's life. Before it, he could content himself with the research projects in his laboratory and allow others to run the businesses which sprang from the inventions he continued to control, such as the electric pen. However, the electric light, if it were to become a commercial success, could not simply be turned over to someone else to market.

The lamp still had to be perfected. In doing so he altered the design of the bulb, found improved techniques to produce it (alienating his glassblower, Boehm, in the process), and launched another globe-trotting inquiry to locate the best possible filament. Although the pressed paper filament in the bulb lasted hundreds of hours, and occasionally a thousand, it was still unsatisfactory. (49) The search for better raw material went on, with Edison displaying the same degree of tenacity with which he pursued his earlier quest for platinum. There was, however, a difference this time. Edison was right, and his agent, William Moore, finally found it in a strain of bamboo. Armed with this improved filament, he increased his production in the lamp works set up in a factory behind the Menlo Park depot which he bought. Using the old factory provided some problems. Not only did it have to accommodate his needs, but the hoboes who used it as a resting place had to be rousted. Being back in business was different this time for Edison whose interest in this plant was special. The warmth he had for his lamp works was perhaps caused by the pains he took in personally setting up all aspects of the production. (50) After all, who else had the command over an entire process as he proposed.

During this period of use, the lamp works represented a number of firsts. It was the first commercial lamp producing factory, and was the only factory in the world entirely run by electrical power, supplied with energy from the long-waisted Mary Ann Generator at the laboratory a half-mile away. The factory was ultimate proof that electricity could be used for a variety of purposes.(51) Most people do not realize that Raritan Township, a rural expanse of farmland, forests and swamps, possessing a few tiny hamlets - a township which did not even exist as a political entity ten years earlier - was the first capital of the new electrical empire born of Edison's mind.

While an improved lamp was necessary, so, too, was a better method of generating power. Conventional generators of 1879 were highly inefficient. If the electric light was to be a success, basic improvements had to be made. Edison understood this and had set to work on developing a new generator. The result was built at Menlo Park and installed in his laboratory. As mentioned before, it was called the "long-waisted Mary Ann", and it worked at eighty percent efficiency - almost double the efficiency of any existing generator.

A method of distribution had to be developed to deliver the current produced by the new generators. This, too, Edison planned on and came up with the idea of a centralized generating station where power for a large area would originate. This idea received its concrete form first in the Menlo Park generating station set up behind the machine shop.(52) The idea was later applied to the Pearl Street Station in New York City, which Edison designed to supply power for lower Manhattan.

Since centralized generating requires a means of carrying the current from point of origin to point of use, Edison, being the typical child of his monopolistic era's business thinking, opened the Edison Tube Company to produce all types of underground electrical distribution supplies. It must be remembered that as invention followed invention in his electrical system, he was the only one who knew how to use and produce each device. Thus, he and his backers endeavored to control every aspect of the new electrical industry. This he tried to do through the parent company, the Edison Electric Company which controlled all his patents. No competition was tolerated. Customers for one item found themselves required to buy all the necessary equipment from the Edison Electric Company. This caused years of legal battling with others who, using Edison's ideas, began developing similar equipment. (53)

As his inventions proliferated they spawned a financial empire which increasingly infringed on his solitude. His attentions were now diverted ever more into organizing and managing his companies, a task which he could not do well easily. More and more time away from Menlo Park was required as New York, the market for his product, was increasing its demands. In submission to the inevitable, the seat of his holdings was gradually transferred there, beginning in late 1880.

. On December 31, 1879, Edison held what must have been the largest party ever imagined by the natives of Raritan. It was New Year's Eve that a train of invited guests arrived at the Menlo Park Station and were bedazzled by the spectacle of glowing electric lights connected by wires, hanging from trees and poles. All of Menlo Park appeared to have been set aflame by Edison's lights. So fantastic was the display that special trains continued to run from New York to Philadelphia, carrying those demanding to see the wizard's demonstrations. It is from this point that the residents of Rahway, a nearby village, began to call Menlo Park Edison's "Star".(54) Now, too, began the flood of mail from people of all types wanting to visit the laboratory and tour his facilities.

Unfortunately, the night of December 31, 1879 did not end the large-scale public visiting. Indeed, the next day the crowd was even bigger, and since most were not specifically invited, they tended to be more unruly. Edison did not want to hold anything back from the people because he understood their curiosity and amazement. He went so far as to open all his laboratory and shop facilities to those interested, and put all his assistants at their disposal. Indeed, he even personally endeavored to explain the workings of the light, generators, and plans for using power generating stations. (55) There were times when he entered into public debates with representatives of gas companies who challenged the advantage of electricity over gas. (56)

Edison was no showman. He officiated at the first demonstrations because he knew he had developed a revolutionary system and honestly believed that the people had the right to know. However, he had no intention of his demonstration degenerating into a show. By the second day he began to retire to out-of-the-way areas of the laboratory, and came out only for someone special or on specific request. As train followed train, by January 2 damage began to be done. Machinery was being destroyed, lamps stolen, and someone tried to short circuit his generating system which supplied all the power for the lights in Menlo Park. (57) These incidents, which prevented work from being done, provoked the seclusion-loving Edison to close the doors to visitors with the exception of those bearing specific passes from his New York office. The general public, while banned from the laboratory, was allowed to tour the homes in Menlo Park which he had personally wired and equipped with lights. This brings two interesting stories to mind as being indicative of Menlo Park during Edison's reign. Mrs. Jordan's boarding house, the Dean house, and others were wired; Edison's personal residence was not. While Edison was convinced of the safety of his system, especially after inventing the fuse, his wife was filled with all sorts of misgivings about electricity. She resented the house being filled with all of his gimmicks and did not want their house as a showplace, thus categorically refusing to have it wired. For one reason or another, perhaps because he spent so little time at home anyway, he gave in to her wishes. (58) This was one of the very few times he did so.

The second story deals with the house of William Carman which was one of those wired by Edison. It seems that by some process which Edison did not reveal, a short was discovered and the problem traced to Carman's house. When Carman was told this by the "Old Man", he simply could not believe him. Edison went with him to his house and without hesitation strode directly to the point where the line entered the house. There, around the entry hold was a small charred area. To say that Carman was impressed is an understatement. (59) However, it did show that Edison thoroughly understood his new system and that his direct involvement would be necessary for success.

A number of notable individual visitations were made to Menlo Park. The visit by Sarah Bernhardt to Edison's establishment was certainly one of the most publicized, but should in no way be considered unique. As she was personally conducted through the factory, the inventor noted that she was a wonderful rubberneck. Since she wanted to go everywhere and see everything, Edison had to assign a man to her to ensure that she did not get her dress caught in any of the machinery or knock over vials of chemicals. She stayed one and a half hours and when leaving presented Edison with two self-portraits as a souvenir of her visit. (61)

Another of the more notable visits was that of President and Mrs. Porfirio Diaz. In 1890 they came to Menlo Park to see the inventions of its famous resident. This occasioned Edison's foray into diplomatic science, since he was the official host for the dignitary and his wife. As Edison later wrote modestly, "...I took them to railroad buildings, electric light plants, fire departments and showed them a great variety of things." (62)

The railroad buildings that Edison referred to were no doubt the local depot and the Metuchen Station. They might also have included buildings designed to house the electric trains that he was working on. Newpapers commented that the electric train was truly a marvel as it moved along without belching smoke and soot. (63)

The Wizard of Menlo Park came late to the field of electric railroad building yet registered a significant impact. He was the first person to demonstrate successfully the practicality of the electric railroad in America. It was not an international first, however, because Werner Von Siemens in Germany, in 1879, operated a circular railroad in a pavilion at the Berlin Exposition. Nevertheless, Edison's role, similar to his work with the telephone, elevated a somewhat theoretical and clearly uncommercial invention to the level of successful commercial use.

Some of the earliest electric trains carried batteries as their power source. This was not the direction taken by Edison. He knew that he had a highly effective generator in the long-waisted Mary Ann, so he simply modified one to act as an electric motor and mounted it on his locomotive. The controls were connected directly to it so as to allow the motorman to reverse direction. This was a feature which Siemen's model did not have. The on-board engine was then modified into a combined engine so the train would not slow to a crawl on upgrades. This was done by consolidating a series of small resistance boxes into one large box which could be plugged in and out at will by the motorman. This, in turn, was placed in series with the motor which was reinforced by winding copper wire around one leg of the electric magnet. This electric motor, unlike his first attempt, provided both more power and a higher degree of control. (64)

He constructed a number of small-gauge banked rail lines behind his laboratory, the farthest stretching to Pumptown over two miles away. This was to carry passengers and freight and passed a copper mine which he briefly intended to work. There were a number of demonstrations held in which he was able to prove the usefulness of his idea. While many rode on the train, including railroadmen, only one had any serious plans for the electric railroad.(65) This man was Henry Villard, President of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Villard imagined the railroad to be used much as Edison originally had conceived it, to move grain from field to railroad. So interested was he that on September 14, 1881, he agreed to advance Edison \$35,000 to \$40,000 to build the Pumptown Line described previously. Unfortunately, Villard soon after lost control of Northern Pacific and was unable to be of further assistance to Edison.(66)

However, a second line was built and operating successfully by 1882. Edison was absorbed in his New York operations, and his interest in it waned. All his energies were directed to his electrical system which was being put to practical use on an ever increasing scale. If Villard had been able to set up an electric line in the West, then perhaps Edison might have been sparked to activity. However, lacking this stimulus, nothing of consequence developed from the electric locomotive.

The topic of Edison, the family man, is one most authors 'do not explore in depth. One reason for this is that after lavishing time on his experiments and business ventures there simply was not much left over for his family. Unfortunately, Edison was deeply disappointed in his two sons, Tom and William, because neither demonstrated an interest in mechanics. Marion, his first born, was his favorite, but she was not a son who could follow in his footsteps. Of course, he occasionally romped with his three children, but even then his attentions have been described as bordering on cruel. One example of this fun at another's expense occurred when he brought home a beautifully blown swan that Boehm had made. He invited one of the children to blow on its tail. The child was not amused when water squirted over his neck and face.(67) Mary, Edison's wife, was lonely and she was forced to establish an existence which almost excluded her husband. She became renowned for her parties and social gatherings, most of which lacked his presence. Jehl writes that Edison was pleased that his wife was happy entertaining herself, but one must question the real depth of his feelings as reflected by his nearly total absence from festivities.

Another diversion of Mary Edison was having her unmarried sister, Alice Stilwell, move into the Menlo Park residence. This gave her the adult companionship and human contact not provided by her husband. However, it did not fill the void, as she began to neglect both her figure and her health through overindulgence. (68)

Weekends at Menlo Park were dull affairs, and there was usually an exodus to New Brunswick, Newark, or New York. Edison remained at the laboratory, although his wife did not. Mary customarily journeyed to her family in Newark, taking the three children with her.(69) A question arises when one becomes aware that after Edison finished at the laboratory he often took late Saturday night trips into New York. Night life in the city then was much less frought with danger than it is now. It is interesting to note that the stores were often open, and the theaters started performances even during the early hours of the morning.(70)

Perhaps Jehl was right in describing Mrs. Edison as a discrete, indeed self-effacing woman, "...who prepared to admit the inevitable nature of certain existing conditions" and did not expect her husband to sacrifice his previous activities.(71) It is this sacrificing nature which made her a more subtle, all-pervasive influence on her husband's life. It may be that Edison was bewitched by his mistress to the point of total distraction. The mistress in this case was no woman but rather his work. The other side of this coin, one not stressed by biographers, is the neglect this imposed on his family. Mary, as previously mentioned, developed her own life style. Her weekends with her family obviously were better than awaiting the uncertainty of her husband's taking an excursion into the city.

The marital relationship was one which satisfied Edison's needs. It was to the homestead that he retired when needing to think. It was here that he received Mary's comfort without being expected to share the burden of her problems. This enabled him to work with an untrammeled mind. (72) One point that needs to be made is that Edison loved his wife. While it was a love which did not cause him to alter his accustomed routine, perhaps this was because Mary Edison did not desire it. Had she tried to assert herself in this regard, the question might be more easily answered. The ultimate answer came with her sudden death on August 9, 1884, at the age of twenty-nine.

The dullness of Menlo Park had depressed Mary Edison who was thrilled when Edison shifted residence to Gramercy Park in New York during the winter of 1881. The Menlo Park residence was then used as a summer place. The Edison family during that last summer had spent a few weeks together in Florida and then went back to New York where Mary prepared the family for the summer move to the coolness of Menlo Park. In July of 1884, Mary contracted typhoid fever, which in itself did not cause great concern. As she weakened and required constant doctor's care, the family grew alarmed. As she began to sink suddenly, Edison was summoned from New York and was present at her death. (73)

This event plummeted Edison into the deepest grief, through which even his oldest friends and associates could not penetrate. He loved his wife and, being a unique person, had his own way of showing it. From the day of her death, he almost never returned to Menlo Park.(74) The laboratory was stripped of its equipment and abandoned, as were all other buildings. He no longer cared about the property. Perhaps it contained too many memories which had suddenly turned sour.

With the death of his wife and the departure of his sister-inlaw, the house was little lived in and the laboratory, known as the tabernacle, was used for local dances and meetings. This continued until lack of care caused floors to weaken, and it was abandoned completely except as a cow barn. Various outbuildings housed small livestock, and families periodically lived in the office building. In 1902 there were still a few who hoped the inventor would return, but by then the compound was desolate. Little besides crumbling walls and piles of rubble remained. (75)

By 1923 nothing of the laboratory remained except for two brick piers. The machine shop was decaying, although much of its walls and roof remained. The office had burned and the other outbuildings were simply gone. Sarah Jordan's boarding house remained though sadly in need of repairs. Edison's house, after lying vacant and briefly serving as a school house, was struck by lightening and burned to the ground. This, ironically, occurred on July 4, 1917 (76), the one day that Edison always spent with his family.(77)

The site of greatness had almost been destroyed when in 1928 Henry Ford, a good friend of Thomas Edison, resolved to reconstruct the compound in Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan. He commissioned Charles Carman of Metuchen to draw an exact architectural plan of the compound so that his re-creation could be perfect. This was to include as many Menlo Park buildings as Ford could secure, including Mrs. Jordan's boarding house. Ford also conducted a search for every artifact that could be found. As an example of his thoughtfulness, Carman had told Ford that his uncle and several others had built garages and other outbuildings with wood from the laboratory. Ford proceeded to track down these timbers and dismantle the structures holding them. He then dispatched what he recovered to Greenfield Village. Not only did he seek the original wood but also the very soil on which the inventor stood. He went so far as to fill a whole freight train with Menlo Park topsoil and sent it to his reconstruction site. So precise was Ford that when Carman found an error in figures for the dimensions of the laboratory, he had the partly reconstructed building altered to conform to the true measurements. (78)

While Ford privately established a noteworthy memorial for his friend in Michigan, the State of New Jersey was apparently taking a similar course. In 1931 the state passed legislation creating the six-member Edison Park Commission, providing \$10,000 for the preparation and survey of the park. (79) By 1938 Henry and Clara Ford had donated two acres of land in Menlo Park to the state, and Thomas Edison's family had presented an additional 21.71 acres. The land was now available. The cornerstone for the Edison Tower was put down on July 1, 1937, by William S. Barstow, an early Edison worker and president of the Edison Electric Company. He donated the tower on behalf of the Edison Pioneers, a group formed by the men who worked for Edison. The tower was completed at a cost of \$150,000 and dedicated on February 11, 1938. This structure and the land deeded to the state mark the total input for Edison Park in the area of Menlo Park. This was not originally the case. Indeed, the park was to consist of an extensive Museum of Light, formal gardens, graceful, circling roadways and picnic groves. It was to be a focal point for the Edison Parkway, the only memorial which Edison personally endorsed before his death. (80)

Edison approved of the parkway plans because, like his inventions, they were highly practical. According to the plan, the Edison Parkway was to stretch from the Watchung Reservation on U. S. Route 22 (then Route 29), intersect Route 28 in Scotch Plains, cross Route 27 at the Edison State Park, hit Route 25 (the superhighway, now designated as U. S Route 1), proceed through Fords Park, and link up with S-4 (now Route 440), which would provide a connection to the Outerbridge. A new highway was to be built both north and south of the Raritan River, designed to connect Route 4 with the then Route 25 in Woodbridge. The bridge across the Raritan was to be designated the Edison Memorial Bridge. The planners had created a fine design for this bridge. Of the whole project, very little was actually constructed. Route 4 was extended and became known as U.S. Route 9. While the bridge over the Raritan was built, it was not of the design originally developed. Of the Edison Parkway nothing was built and the existing roadways that were to become a part of it, though they may still exist, have lost their identification with the overall plan.

Edison State Park is at least marginally more substantial. The land and the tower provide some substance although the park remains largely undeveloped. Charles Carman related the difficulties of getting anything done at the park. Money now, as during the planning period of the Menlo Park concept, is at a premium and hence little can be seen of the great projections of the 30's.

Perhaps with State funding, Edison Township, its name alone being a memorial to the man, will be able to boast an Edison shrine of a caliber rivaling those of West Orange and Dearborn, Michigan.

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#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The early history of the local area is directly related to the histories of Woodbridge and Piscataway Townships from which Raritan Township was formed in 1870. Early settlers who replaced the original inhabitants - Lenni-Lenape Indians - came from New England and several European countries. Included among these were the Stelle and Bonham families after whom sections of the Township are named. Despite difficulties inherent in founding early settlements, these pioneers cleared land for farming, built St. James and Stelton Baptist churches, established local government, constructed a meeting house in Piscatawaytown and founded a local school there and one in Oak Tree.

During the Revolutionary War local residents remained loyal to the Patriots' Cause, engaging in numerous skirmishes, especially in the Piscatawaytown-Bonhamtown area where several British regiments were stationed. Among the many who served with the American militia were Major Reuben Potter and Captain Abraham Tappan. Following the end of hostilities, residents turned their attention to improving and extending facilities and services started before the War. Funding through subscriptions and special taxes was initiated.

Of major importance during the 19th Century was the movement to form a new township from portions of Woodbridge and Piscataway Townships. Led by a group of Metuchenites, local leaders were successful when Raritan Township was incorporated, with the first election held at the Academy on April 16, 1870. Family names of the earliest settlers filled many of the civil servant lists -Tappan, Martin, Stelle, Campbell.

Internal political differences concerning representation, improvements and taxation continued after the formation of Raritan Township. Leaders in Metuchen opted successfully for the creation of a separate borough in 1900, followed by Highland Park in 1905.

During the following years, residents again renewed their efforts towards extending and refining facilities and services. A major change was made in the form of local government from Township Committee to Commission which lasted until 1958. However, throughout much of the eighty-four year period of Raritan Township, there existed a need to identify with the township and not with sections of the township - a situation which was common to other townships made up of villages in a rural setting.

The post-World War II period brought with it a rapid and massive increase in population with its corresponding demands for expansion and reorganization of all the resources of the community. The change from Raritan to Edison in 1954 honored Thomas A. Edison, who spent perhaps the most fruitful period of his life in the Menlo Park section during the latter part of the 19th Century. Numerous individuals and civic groups made concerted efforts to remove the last of the sectionalist feelings and build an identification with Edison. The result of their efforts is apparent.



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#### POLITICAL GROWTH

Since it was incorporated as a separate political unit by the New Jersey Legislature in 1870, Edison Township has had three separate forms of government: Township Committee, Commission, and the present Mayor-Council.

During the earlier years under the first form of government, committeemen had to deal with many of the sectional differences which were instrumental in the separation from Piscataway and Woodbridge Townships and the formation of Raritan Township. As the communities of Metuchen and Highland Park prospered, there were conflicts over the responsibility for funding necessary improvements such as lighting and water. In addition, proposed changes in the legislature gave increased powers to township committeemen, creating disharmony within several sections of the township. Bitter exchanges between representatives of these sections and township officials led to the formation of these communities as boroughs in 1900 and 1905 respectively.

Through these formative years and especially after the separation of its central community - Metuchen - development of Raritan remained on a neighborhood basis which continued into the post World War II period. Identification was difficult since residents were served by numerous post offices, lacked a local newspaper and considered schools as neighborhood concerns.

The Commission form of government in 1928 provided for five commissioners, each of whom was responsible for one of five departments. Elected on a nonpartisan basis, they served for four years with one chosen to serve as Mayor who held certain appointive powers, including the naming of members to the Planning and Zoning Boards. The Commissioners were responsible for appointing other municipal employees such as, township attorney, superintendents of departments, township clerk, engineer, tax assessors, tax collectors, the treasurer, and auditor. Commissioners were responsible for running their departments, sharing joint responsibility for making laws.

To encourage municipal reform, the New Jersey Legislature passed the Optional Charter Law in 1950 for citizens to study their local governments and opt for changes if necessary. A five-member Charter Commission was elected in 1955 and its recommendations for adoption of the Mayor-Council Plan E was approved by the voters in November, 1956. The Mayor and seven councilmen, elected a year later, took office under the new form of government in January, 1958. A referendum to change the nine-member council to a six-member council with three members elected from wards and three members elected at large was defeated in 1968. With the initiation of the Mayor-Council form of government in 1958, major responsibilities of the mayor and council were established and continue to today. The mayor enforces all laws and policies; supervises, with the assistance of the business administrator, the work of all departments; holds appointive and removal powers of the business administrator and department heads with the approval of council; attends council meetings but has no vote on resolutions; prepares the annual budget for approval by the council; has veto power over legislation and prepares an annual report on the state of the municipality to the council and public.

The council makes laws, votes on appointments of the mayor, sets all salaries of township officials, and holds investigative power over township officials with the power to remove officials after a public hearing. Local laws are called ordinances. These ordinances are drafted by the township attorney, introduced at one council meeting, and presented at a public meeting. Notification of such possible ordinances must be published in full in one or more local newspapers. Ordinances must be passed by a majority vote of the entire council. If the latter occurs, the council has the option to override the veto by a two-thirds vote.

In May, 1971, a resolution was presented by the council authorizing the mayor to sign a contract codifying Edison's municipal laws. This represented the first codification of local laws after one hundred years of Edison's history as a separate form of government.

#### RECENT MAYORS

MAYOR	TERM OF OFFICE	POLITICAL PARTY	FORM OF GOVERNMENT
Walter A. Christensen	1937-1947	Republican	Commission
Julius Engel	1947-1951	Democratic	Commission
James Forgione	1951-1955	Republican	Commission
Thomas Swales	1955-1957	Republican	Commission
Anthony Yelencsics	1958-1969	Democratic	Mayor-Council
Bernard Dwyer	1970-1973	Democratic	Mayor-Council
Thomas Paterniti	1974-Present	Democratic	Mayor-Council

A resident of Perth Amboy, where his family owned C&S - a general construction business - Walter Christensen moved to Raritan Town-ship during the late 1920's. He sold real estate and insurance and was active in local volunteer fire companies.

Mr. Christensen served as a Commissioner for approximately twenty years, ten as Mayor. According to his daughter, Mrs. Carol Nelson, he believed much was accomplished by the Commissioners. "Preventing the township from going bankrupt during the Depression was often mentioned as one of the major accomplishments."

After serving as Mayor, Mr. Christensen worked for an engineering firm located in New Brunswick. Both Mr. & Mrs. Christensen are deceased.

One of the early residents who came to Raritan Township from New York City was Julius Engel, who went to work for International Preposit Company (Tenneco) at age nineteen and remained with that firm.

Before becoming Mayor during the Commission form of government, Mr. Engel had been elected Tax Collector and served as a Committeeman.

During Engel's administration Raritan Township was undergoing the early post-World War II growth in population and industrial expansion. He was especially pleased with having major plants, such as Ford, locate here, providing job opportunities for the residents.

While serving as Mayor, Mr. Engel also was Sheriff of Middlesex County. When he died in 1961, he held the position of Undersheriff. His widow, Mrs. Dora Engel, continues active in local civic affairs having served as Grand Marshall of the recent Bicentennial Parade.

James Forgione moved from New York City to Raritan Township where he attended local schools. He worked for the old Metuchen Theatre which he purchased and operated until 1928 when he and other businessmen built the Forum Theatre.

Mr. Forgione was elected to the Board of Education in 1933 and served as its president until 1935. He served on the Board of Commissioners from 1935 to 1955, the last four years as Mayor during which time Raritan became Edison. Following his term of office, Mr. Forgione served as Supervisor of Public Works until 1957. He remained active in local public affairs until his death in 1960. Although not born in Edison, Thomas Swales moved here from Elmsford, New York, at age five, attended Piscatawaytown School, and made the area his place of residency and business interests.

Before becoming Mayor, Mr. Swales was active in service organizations, including the fire department to which he belonged for eighteen years, serving as Chief of Engine #1. He also pioneered efforts with the Emergency Squad and served as president of the Safety Council.

Mr. Swales served concurrent terms on the original Planning Board and Board of Adjustments which he chaired. The former Mayor believes that improving zoning regulations and large-scale industrial/commercial growth were important accomplishments during his administration.

Since his term of office, Thomas Swales maintains interest in civic affairs including his serving as a Trustee of John F. Kennedy Medical Center and he continues active in banking and business.

Born in the Bonhamtown section and a life-long resident of Edison, Anthony Yelencsics served as Mayor until illness and a belief that others with new ideas should participate in government convinced him not to seek re-election after 1969. Without prior political experience he took office when an important change to a new form of government - Mayor-Council - became effective.

When asked why he ran for Mayor he replied, "I wanted to participate in the community. As a citizen I wanted to get involved. Residents owe the community a service and I wanted to help put Edison on a sound political and economic basis."

During Yelencsics' administration, previous provisions for establishing the identity of Edison and for providing planned economic growth and improvements in community services were successfully brought to fruition. Some of these were : construction of John F. Kennedy Hospital; improvement of municipal services, including new firefighting equipment and a sanitary sewer program; establishment of major industries which provided jobs and ratables; addition of Edison signs to major highways; planned community growth in recreational and educational areas and the establishment of a central post office. Mr. Yelencsics continues to maintain an interest in the public affairs of Edison. Bernard J. Dwyer came to Edison from Perth Amboy and established himself in the insurance business in which he still maintains an interest. He became active in political affairs within both the township and the county.

Before his election as Mayor, Mr. Dwyer served as a member of Council and represented that group on the Planning Board which adopted the Master Plan for Edison. During his term of office as a member of Council, he found it exciting to be involved in the reorganization of government and to be associated with those who worked to bring about the changes. During his term as Mayor, the township continued to grow, with municipal services expanded and refined.

Mr. Dwyer continues to represent residents of the area, serving as a Senator in the New Jersey State Legislature.

The present Mayor came to Edison from Perth Amboy in 1960 and has his own dental practice. Prior to becoming Mayor, Dr. Paterniti served as a Councilman for four years, serving as Council President for one of the years.

During his term in office , Dr. Paterniti's administration includes among its accomplishments plans for completing a total sewerage program for the community, expansion of park and recreational facilities and plans for the completion of a new municipal complex.

Dr. Paterniti said he ran for office because, "I had served as a Councilman and I wanted to see the community prosper. I was dedicated and wanted to give more time to the community."

By expanding and refining the services for the people, the Mayor believes that Edison will continue to improve and maintain itself as one of the finest communities in New Jersey.



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#### MUNICIPAL SERVICES

The following report deals with some of the municipal services in Edison Township. It is designed to give a brief historical and contemporary view of these services. The report is general in nature because the statistical and historical records of Edison Township (Raritan Township) prior to 1958 are stored in areas that are not accessible.

#### DIVISION OF FIRE

Volunteer fire companies started to appear in Edison Township just after the turn of the century. Historically, the fire company played a major role in the town. It has been only in the past fifteen years that fire companies have not been the heart of community activities, although they still sponsor many social activities.

In addition, membership in the fire department provided a base for successful political aspirations of local politicians. With the rapid increase in population coupled with changes in government in 1958, this is no longer true.

As the township grew, responsibilities of the fire department have grown. Starting in 1949, the first paid firemen were employed. In one station the two firemen worked twenty-four hour shifts - one on and one off. They were responsible for driving the trucks with several volunteers required for other equipment. Other volunteers responded as best they could.

By 1958 there were twenty-one paid firemen and by 1975 the number increased to eighty-six. These men are professional firefighters who have a regular work schedule, subject to call twentyfour hours a day. With the large increase in residential, commercial/ industrial buildings, it became necessary to maintain a paid fire company for there is no guarantee of the availability of volunteer firefighters, many of whom do not work locally. Edison still has a large contingent of volunteers - 210 - which complements the regular force.

There are five fire companies located at six fire stations. All but one of the fire stations have paid personnel. A volunteer fire company handles calls from the one station without paid firefighters. A central control handles all fire calls. It then dispatches the fire company in the district covered by the fire and keeps in constant contact with the firefighters in the event more equipment is needed. This includes the one station without paid firefighters.

#### Location of Fire Stations

Precinct	1Raritan Engine Company #1 - Plainfield Avenue
	Raritan Engine Companý #1 - Route 27 and
	Langstaff Avenue
Precinct	2Edison Volunteer Fire Company #2 - Route 27 near
ant state	Parsonage Road
Precinct	3Raritan Engine Company #2 - Amboy Avenue
	(Central control located at this fire station)
Precinct	4H.K. Volunteer Fire Company #1 - 840 New Dover Road
Precinct	5Oak Tree Volunteer Fire Company #1 - Beverly Street

Equipment in Edison consists of two Snorkels (each has an eighty-five foot elevating platform), two rush trucks, thirteen engines, and eight cars. The 1961 Snorkel was the first of its type on the East Coast of the United States.

The oldest piece of fire equipment in use in Edison is a 1948 White engine which pumps seven hundred fifty gallons of water per minute. The newest is a 1973 Seagraves Pumper which pumps 1,250 gallons of water per minute.

Under the new form of government in 1958, control of the fire companies was taken from individual commissioners and placed under the direct control of the Mayor's office. Under the Mayor's office, the Division of Fire Protection was established with Joseph Simon appointed as the first Fire Supervisor. In 1969, H. Raymond Vliet was named acting Fire Supervisor and became Fire Chief when a change was made by the local government. Mr. Vliet currently holds this position. Funding for the fire companies is provided through local taxes.

#### DIVISION OF POLICE

The Department of Public Safety includes the Division of Police which has four bureaus - Uniform, Detective, Juvenile and Traffic - with the Chief of Police directly responsible to the Mayor. Except for the Juvenile Bureau which is located in its own building on Woodbridge Avenue, they are located in the Municipal Building. Local taxes support their operations.

The police force has 120 regulars and a reservoir of 200 trained volunteers (Auxiliary Police Corps) who can be utilized to assist the regulars, especially at many civic events which include school dances and parades.

More than twenty vehicles are used by the force including a specially designed van which contains fingerprinting, photographic and clerical equipment for prompt and thorough work in the field.

The Juvenile Bureau works closely with many of the youth organizations and the local schools on crime prevention programs. Officers are available to speak at different programs to aid the public in gaining a better understanding of the role of the Juvenile Bureau.

The Traffic Bureau is responsible for the maintenance and erection of all traffic signs which meet State regulations. The State Highway Department is responsible for the lights and signs located on state highways. The township may request that signs be placed on the highways. However, the State Highway Department must make a survey and determine the need. Traffic lights and signs on county roads are maintained with the cooperation of the county government.

#### DIVISION OF POLICE



The department also maintains jail cells located in the basement of the Municipal Building. These cells are used primarily as detention areas before a person receives a hearing or is sent to the County Workhouse or County Jail. Juveniles are sent to the Juvenile Detention Center run by Middlesex County.

All persons hired by the Police Department undergo six weeks of training at the State Police Academy in Sea Girt, New Jersey. Following a probationary period, state law decrees that tenure is automatic upon permanent appointment. Complex rules and interpretations of laws regulate the Department's activities.

#### DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

The Department of Public Works was established under the new form of government which went into effect January 1, 1958. Prior to this, the various departments such as, sanitation, roads and water, were handled by different commissioners. Commissioners were given budgets and could hire and fire as they pleased. No accurate records prior to 1958 are available.

Under the Mayor-Council form of government, the Director of Public Works is directly responsible to the Mayor, with a budget financed through local taxes.

In 1962 a new Master Plan for the Township was developed. In 1966 the Plan was revised and updated and in 1968 the Planning Board adopted the Plan. The Planning Board amended the Plan in July of 1970. The purpose of the plan is to develop the full utilization of the township's resources in maintaining orderly growth.

Under the Plan, proposed residential acreage would amount to 6,323 acres; commercial, 645 acres; industrial, 6,744 acres; parks and recreation, 1006 acres; semi-public and institutional use, 865 acres; railroads and utilities, 698 acres; and schools, 392 acres.

The Master Plan and its implementation has brought about one of the lowest tax rates in Middlesex County. The burden of taxes being paid is as follows: 32.4 percent, residential; 33 percent, industrial; and 34.6 percent, other. Director of Public Works, William Godwin, feels "the Master Plan is one of the major developments in the growth of Edison Township."

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Edison's water supply, for one-third of the township, is controlled and developed by the Edison Water Company under the Department of Public Works. The remainder of the township receives its water from the Elizabethtown Water Company or the Middlesex Water Company. The New Jersey Public Utilities Commission sets the rates. Approximately 35,000 people live in the area served by Edison's Water Company.

Sanitation is one of the major efforts of the Department of Public Works. Edison has its own landfill for disposing of refuse collected by the department. Edison allows outside communities and other garbage collectors to use the landfill at rates approved by the Public Utilities Commission. The landfill will eventually serve as industrial and recreational areas.

Garbage pickup in Edison is done by both the Sanitation Department and by private scavengers. In 1958 only ten percent of the garbage in Edison Township was picked up by the Sanitation Department. By 1975, this increased to sixty percent. Only residents who are served by the town are billed for the service. Residents served by scavengers are billed by the private companies under regulations controlled by the Public Utilities Commission.

The Department is responsible for maintaining 265 miles of township roads. In addition to the township roads there are twenty miles of county and state roads which pass through Edison Township. These are maintained by their respective agencies.

The township garage serves as the recycling center for the town. At present, glass can be dropped off at the garage. At one time, paper was also collected, but this was found to be too costly.

#### PARKS AND RECREATION

Edison Township has 1006 acres of land devoted to parks and recreation. Six of the parks range in size from three acres to fifty-eight acres. There are thirty-five playgrounds and the twohundred-acre Roosevelt Park maintained by the Middlesex County Board of Freeholders. The State of New Jersey maintains the thirty-acre Edison State Park and Museum on the site of Thomas A. Edison's original laboratory at the Edison Tower.

The Edison Township Recreation Department offers activities to people of all ages. Some of the activities offered by the Department are: tennis, soccer, baseball, basketball, football, softball, hockey, square dancing, fencing, bridge, dramatics and a host of other activities. Schools and other public buildings are used for many of the activities, making it possible for many township residents to participate. The Department operates the Edison Boat Basin, a power and sail marina on the Raritan River.

As the population has grown and open space in Edison has diminished, the township has made certain that land was set aside for parks and recreation. The Master Plan adopted in 1968 provides for the use of this land.

#### DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

The Business Administrator heads the Department of Administration. When the township changed its form of government to the "strong" Mayor-Council, the Business Administrator was the most important innovation. The Business Administrator is appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the Council to a term of four years.

The job of the Business Administrator is to assist the Mayor in the preparation of the budget, administer a central purchasing system, develop and direct a personnel system. The Administrator coordinates the operation and administration of departments, offices and agencies in township government.

The Business Administrator acts as the purchasing agent for the township. Each department, through its Department Head, orders needed items. Central purchasing allows printed forms and other office supplies to be purchased in large quantities, saving money for the township.

Prior to 1958 Edison had two different forms of government. A Township Committee from 1870 to 1927 and a Township Commission from 1927 to 1957. Under each of these plans of government the Committee members or Commissioners controlled their own budgets. In many cases this led to duplication of funds and poor recordkeeping.

The Council determines the needs for jobs, salaries and working conditions and the Business Administrator serves as a personnel director.

The township currently employes over four hundred full time and two hundred part time employees. Police and Fire Department employees who are full time participate in a state-aided retirement program. Other full time township employees participate in a retirement plan that is not state-aided.

#### SOURCES

Edison-Dynamic Pace Setter at the Crossroads of New Jersey, Township of Edison, John Delesandro, Business Administrator.

Edison, New Jersey, The Edison Chamber of Commerce, Windsor Publications Inc., Enrico, California, 1970.

Know Your Township, League of Women Voters of Edison Township, Twin City Press, North Plainfield, NJ, 1971.

#### INTERVIEWS

George Bandics-Police Department Er D. Dudics-Deputy Fire Chief Wi H. Raymond Vliet-Fire Chief

Ernest Bertha-Police Department William Godwin-Director, Public Works



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Growth of a Community

# Educational Changes

#### EDUCATIONAL CHANGES

During the Colonial Period, local schools were typical of others found throughout the colonies. Each had a school master - seldom a school mistress - who demanded respect and held total authority, often administering corporal punishment to tardy and unprepared students.

In contrast to today, conditions for study were harsh with limited facilities and few materials. Curriculum was based on the 4R's: "Reading, Riting, Rithmatic and Religion" with a heavy emphasis on religious themes. Formal education was for boys; domestic training was for girls.

Historical highlights of events, 1689-1926, which led to the creation of the Public Schools of Edison Township:

- 1689 The first school was established in what was then known as Woodbridge Township near Oak Tree. The teacher at that time was a man by the name of Fullerton.
- 1694 John Conger stated his opposition to the idea of a free school. A schoolmaster by the name of Brown was to teach for the sum of twenty-four pounds. His term of employment was to be a sixmonth trial period, "he to keep ye school this winter time until nine o'clock at night."

The outbreak of the Revolutionary War prevented the schools from functioning.

- 1784 A special tax was placed upon dogs to enable poor children the luxury of attending school.
- 1800 Piscatawaytown schoolhouse was abandoned.
- 1816 A man by the name of Bethune Dunkin began his teaching career at the age of twenty at Oak Tree School. He remained in the system for forty-five years.
- 1835 A tornado completely demolished the new Piscatawaytown schoolhouse.
- 1837 Neighborhood residents built a new two-story schoolhouse. Funds for this new schoolhouse were raised by subscription.
- 1852 Piscatawaytown Schoolhouse was enlarged at a cost of \$331.00 and funded by a special tax.
- 1871 Repairs again were made on the Piscatawaytown Schoolhouse, providing modern seating for the students.

- 1875 To keep up the tradition of a school which survived approximately fifty years, the school was again "...put in a condition of neatness and comfort worthy of its character."
- 1882 Raritan Township consisted of nine public schools. Attendance at these schools was based on neighborhood residency. The teaching staff consisted of one male and ten female instructors.
- 1894 All schools located in independent sections of Raritan Township were consolidated into one school district:
- 1897 Schools #1 and #2 in Metuchen and Highland Park were given facilities to provide steam heat.
- 1899 The total school budget for Raritan Township was \$6500.00.
- 1903 The Board of Education allocated money for the improvement of outhouses and school fences. There were 926 pupils.
- 1900 Separation of Metuchen and Highland Park created changes 1905 in distances traveled by students and overcrowding in some schools.
- 1908 Raritan Township appointed its first truant officer.
- 1909 The old Bonhamtown Schoolhouse was sold for \$50.00.
- 1910 The Board of Education formally stated new rules pertaining to trolley car transportation, including proper conduct for pupils and penalties for misbehavior.
- 1920 The township floated a bond to purchase a schoolhouse and all necessary equipment. It was to be built on the James Parker Liddle tract of land.
- 1921 Teachers requested and were granted five days' sick leave. Buses were introduced as a mode of transporting children to school and teachers were assigned to bus duty.
- 1922 Teachers could not be absent from duty without permission by the supervising principal, unless for illness or emergency. The Board of Education authorized the purchase of land in order to build an addition to the Oak Tree School.
- 1924 The proposed budget of \$103,000.00 for the 1923-24 school year was presented by the Board.
- 1926 A ballot containing five proposals to provide more adequate space and equipment was presented to the voters of Raritan
  Township. The first record of a possible violation of administering corporal punishment by a teacher was introduced at a Board meeting.

Economic conditions of the Depression had an adverse impact on the school program as they did on other aspects of community life. Local residents were either unable to pay taxes or paid part of them, often over extended periods of time. Without adequate funding the Board of Education initiated actions for reducing expenditures.

Employees were asked to take a voluntary reduction in salary of twenty percent or with tenure teachers, submit a refund of the same percent. All employees of the township including Commissioners were to take similar reductions. The Teachers' Association, while admitting the problem, stated that its members had not received a raise during the previous two years and were having difficulties meeting their obligations and requested further discussion on the issue. A compromise agreement was reached. Payment to teachers was on an irregular basis often in the form of script which was accepted in lieu of cash by some local merchants who also extended credit whenever possible. Teachers sometimes accompanied their neighbors to the tax collector and received some of this tax payment.

The Board, like other surrounding boards, adopted a policy of terminating contracts of any married non-tenure teachers whose income was not the main source of support for the family. This had an impact especially on women who often misrepresented changes in their marital status during the Depression.

Internal shifting of teachers and students, deferments in purchasing supplies and equipment, were also instrumental in saving money.

Raritan Township had no high school and tuition payments had to be paid to neighboring communities to support the costs of educating students from Raritan. This funding continued to be difficult to maintain and resulted in the establishment of a ninth-grade program at Clara Barton and an application to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for a loan (\$285,000) to construct a high school. The request was denied.

In 1937, the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution calling for "Thorough and Efficient Education" with appropriate funding - an issue currently undergoing heated discussion in New Jersey.

Finally, in 1937-38, the transition from an elective to an appointive Board of Education took place. With the change, budgets were no longer voted on by residents and the title of Superintendent of Schools replaced the title of Supervising Principal. With the outbreak of World War II and the hardships caused by the national emergency, the Board of Education and its employees committed themselves to continue quality education as a major contribution to the war effort. A new emphasis was placed on the Industrial Arts Program to provide mechanical training with a continuing interest in other programs such as music - limited only by the scarcity and expense of musical instruments.

First-aid training for teachers and students was implemented with emergency and safety procedures stressed through regular air raid and fire drills. Schools were closed during summer vacations except for activities related to the war effort with facilities open year-round for various war-related activities, including registration for rationing. School supplies were limited and priority items in school purchases included blackout shades and first-aid kits.

The loss of teachers to military service and rising living costs forced the Board to compete with neighboring districts to retain qualified personnel; thus periodic bonuses and fringe benefits were given. Teachers presented a petition which requested the restoration of the salary increment schedule abandoned during depression years. New state legislation concerning minimum salaries, sick leave and other benefits were explored by the Board and an agreement was reached with the teachers.

The location of Raritan Arsenal on Woodbridge Avenue and nearby Camp Kilmer and the accompanying activities were daily reminders to local residents of the war effort. One day, Piscatawaytown School was evacuated and students were advised to take an alternate route home avoiding the area near the Arsenal where a fire was burning. No injuries to students were reported. However, according to a former teacher at the school, parent reaction to the incident was strong with some families moving away from the district.

The Board signed an agreement with the U.S. Office of Division of Engineers for use of Bonhamtown School as an administration building for the Raritan Arsenal. One room was set aside as an office for the Board of Education.

In addition to providing personnel to assist with emergency measures and lending school facilities, the Board encouraged the purchase of Defense Bonds by its employees and Defense Stamps by students.

Parents and school board members continued to meet regarding promotion procedures, establishment of kindergarten and the practice of not allowing all students to have opportunities for taking books home. Mr. Talbot, Superintendent of Schools, looked into these matters. The Board agreed to institute testing programs to help with the placement of students, class sizes were reduced and kindergarten soon became a reality.

To assist returning veterans who wanted to complete high school, the Board funded their schooling in the evening program at New Brunswick High School. In addition, permission was granted to the Bonhamtown Athletic Club to place a memorial to veterans on the grounds of Bonhamtown School where it still stands today. Rapid and massive increases in population following World War II placed heavy demands on school facilities. Renovations to existing structures and construction of two elementary schools - Lincoln and Washington - were immediate responses to these pressures. New plans for expansion were needed, however.

The Board of Education, through Superintendent Joseph Ruggieri and Theodore McCrosky, a consulting engineer, developed a long-range plan for school construction based on projected populations of 33,700 by 1960 and 38,000 by 1965. Actual census figures for 1960 were 44,799 and 67,120 for 1970. Predictions of population growth always fell short of the actual rate.

As a result of the study, the first high school was built in 1956, and in 1957 the first junior high school - Thomas Jefferson - was constructed on what is now Division Street in the Stelton section.

Continued population growth in the 1950's and 1960's resulted in double sessions at some schools and stimulated further expansion. New elementary schools and the new Cerebral Palsy Center were completed. Between 1961 and 1974 additional construction brought the figure to twenty two, including Woodrow Wilson Junior High School - the last one constructed.

Throughout this period of increased enrollments and the corresponding need to construct new buildings and hire staffs for the schools, the Board of Education has focused on improving the quality of education by providing in-service training for teachers and refining the curriculum in all areas, making Edison Township one of the leading districts of New Jersey.





LOCATION OF BARITAN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS IN 1882

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- #10. Friendship
- #11. Mount Pleasant
- #12. New Dover
- #13. Oak Tree
- #14. New Durham
- #15. Metuchen
- #16. Lafayette Union
- #17. Piscatawaytown
- #18. Bonhamtown



The Public Schools of Edison Township















#### LOCATION OF EDISON TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS IN 1975

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- 3. Piscatawaytown
- 5. Stelton
- 6. Oak Tree
- 7. Clara Barton
- 8. Lincoln
- 9. Washington
- 10. James Madison Intermediate
- 1. Benjamin Franklin
- 13. John Marshall
- 14. Menlo Park
- 15. James Monroe
- 16. Linden Avenue
- .7. Woodbrook
- 18. Martin Luther King
- 20. James Madison Primary
- J. Thomas Jefferson JHS
- A. John Adams JHS
- H. Herbert Hoover JHS
- W. Woodrow Wilson Junior High
- E. Edison High School
- S. J.P. Stevens High School.

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- P. Cerebral Palsy
- P. Our Lady of Peace
- M. Saint Matthews

SYMBOLS: Elementary School Secondary School Parochial School



NOTICE is hereby given to the legal voters of the School District of Raritan, in the County of Middlesex, that a

### SPECIAL SCHOOL MEETING

#### WILL BE HELD AT

## METUCHEN PUBLIC SCHOOL HOUSE

### Friday, the 13th day of August, A. D. 1897, At 5 o'clock P. M.

The polls will remain open one hour, and as much longer as may be necessary, to enable all the legal voters present to east their ballots.

At said meeting will be submitted the question whether the legal voters of the school district will authorize the Board of Education to erect and build an addition to the Metuchen public school building and furnish the building with steam heating apparatus at a total cost not to exceed \$3,000.; to erect and build an addition to the Highland Park public school and furnish and heat the same at a total cost not to exceed \$1,500.; to erect a new school building at Menlo Park and furnish and heat the same at a total cost not to exceed \$1,500, and to provide for the payment of the same by an issue of bonds in the corporate name of the district for the sum of \$6,000, to be made payable in such denominations and at such times and place as the legal voters of said district shall determine, the amounts necessary for meeting such payments to be raised by district tax.

The total amount of bonds thought to be necessary is \$6,000.

Dated this 2d day of August, 1897.

Thos. E. Willard,

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Wm. Carman, District Clerk.

President.





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#### RELIGION

The history of religion in Edison Township can be traced from the colonial era through the rapid population explosion of the post World War II period. Two colonial churches served the early sparse population. One emerged in the nineteenth century, with the vast majority founded relatively recently. Residents of the area had attended religious services in surrounding communities before finally establishing places of worship here.

In the year 1664, Charles II of England gave the territory between the Connecticut River and Delaware Bay to his brother, James, Duke of York. The Duke transferred what is now New Jersey to Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret. In an attempt to attract settlers, Berkeley and Carteret provided for religious freedom, stating that no person "shall be molested, punished, disquieted or called in question for any difference in opinion or practice in matters of religious concernment." (1)

Of the existing colonies, only Rhode Island granted religious freedom, so messengers were sent to New England to advertise the liberal philosophy of New Jersey. In 1666, several families settled along the Raritan River. They named their village Piscataway, after the Piscatagua River on the border between Maine and New Hampshire.

Piscataway received its charter in December, 1966, and by 1685 it included about forty thousand acres, with eighty families or about four hundred inhabitants. It was in 1685 that a town house was erected near what was to become St. James Episcopal Church. Early history records that, "Agreet every inhabitant of this towne is to pay nine pence in silver toward ye buying of nailes for ye Town House." (2) It was used as a town hall, a court and as a place to hold religious services.

In 1688, a Baptist Church was established in Middletown, and some time during 1689, Hugh Dunn, Edmund Dunham (the first child born in Piscataway), John Smalley, John Drake, Nicholas Bonham and John Randolph organized the First Day Baptist Society of Piscataway (later, the Stelton Baptist Church). They were assisted by the Reverend Thomas Killingsworth who had organized the Middletown Baptist Church. Three of the founders were lay preachers, and John Drake was selected to be the first pastor. Reverend Killingsworth officiated at this ordination.

Drake served as pastor from 1689-1739. He had come from England to New Jersey in 1668 and is reputed to have been a nephew of Sir Francis Drake. He married three times and had six sons and two daughters. He was a representative from Piscataway to the General Assembly held in 1693 in Elizabethtown and held several offices in township government. Membership in the First Day Baptist Society of Piscataway grew steadily under his firm leadership.

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In 1705, a group of thirteen members left the church to form a Seventh Day Baptist Church in New Market. One of the initial founders, Edmund Dunham, chastised a neighbor for working at menial tasks on the Sabbath. When challenged to cite Biblical reference that the first day of the week was holy, he studied the Bible and became convinced that the Sabbath should be observed on Saturday. Armed with his convictions, he became the first pastor of the Seventh Day Church.

When John Drake died in 1739, after serving fifty years as pastor, he was succeeded by Benjamin Stelle, who had assisted Drake during the last years of his ministry. Stelle had come to Piscataway around 1707 from his native colony, New York. He was ordained at fifty-five years of age after Pastor Drake's death. Like Drake, Stelle was deeply involved in local politics and served as Justice of the Peace, Chosen Freeholder, Collector of Taxes and Overseer of the Roads.

Although the church in Piscataway continued to meet in the Town House, it purchased four and six-tenths acres a mile west of Piscataway in 1731.

During Benjamin Steele's pastorate the church continued to expand. The Town House became too small for the purposes of the Piscataway Church, and in 1748 a church was erected on the lot purchased in 1731. The new building was forty-six feet wide and thirty-six feet long with no heatng facilities until 1798.

Benjamin Stelle succeeded his father as pastor of the Baptist Church upon his father's death in 1759 and continued until he died in 1781. Apparently, the church suffered immensely during the American Revolutionary War. Church meetings were suspended during the war, and the building was used as a military hospital. Reune Runyon, born in Piscataway in 1741, licensed to preach in 1771, was selected as pastor in 1783. The church consisted of 40 members, but under Reverend Runyon's pastorate, it grew to 148 in 1790.

In 1819, one hundred years before the nineteenth amendment to the U. S. Constitution was adopted, the Piscataway Baptist Church gave women "an equal right, in all cases with the brethren, in voting, speaking and governing the church." (3)

Disaster struck on January 1, 1851, when the meeting house caught on fire from a defective stove pipe and burned to the ground. A new building was completed and dedicated on December 31 of the same year at a cost of \$7,000.

Most of the original settlers in Piscataway were New England Baptists, but a few families were Episcopalians (Church of England) who were affiliated with St. Peter's Church in Perth Amboy. A group of Episcopalians chartered St. James Church, Piscataway, in 1704 under the leadership of John Brooke of Elizabethtown. John Barrow and Thomas Wetherel were elected warders when the church was formally organized in 1714. Vestrymen elected were John Molleson, William Hodgson, Robert Webster, Charles Glover, Hopewell Hull, Henry Langstaff, Samuel Walker, John Jennings, William Olden and Samuel Royce. Most of these men were early settlers and large landowners.

The people repaired the town meeting house mentioned above, but it became too small, and services had to be held in the home of John Burroughs. In 1714, a hundred pounds was subscribed for the erection of a brick church at Piscatawaytown. Part of this sum was expended for materials, but the frame was not erected until 1717. The building was completed in 1724, at which time the Reverend Mr. Skinner, of Perth Amboy conducted the services. There were nineteen communicants, only six fewer than at Perth Amboy. The church was built on the site of an old inn, where the first government of Middlesex County held its meetings.

Bishop Samuel Seabey, first American Bishop, preached at St. James. By 1742, the parish had grown steadily and included many people from farther up the Raritan River in the western part of the township. A movement by these people resulted in the formation of Christ Church, New Brunswick.

In 1763, the New Jersey Missionaries recommended that Piscataway unite with New Brunswick under Reverend Leonard Cutting. He was pleased with his large congregation, but unhappy with a fifteenpound salary. He supplemented his income by obtaining free produce.

In December of 1776, British Troops occupied Piscataway and used St. James Church as a hospital until June, 1777.

The original church was destroyed by a gale in 1835. The present white structure on Woodbridge Avenue was completed in 1837. Included from the original 1717 church are the pulpit and the pews.

The cemetery surrounding St. James Church is often associated with it. However, the cemetery itself is the property of Edison Township. According to Father Thomas Waldron of St. James, the cemetery was deeded to Piscataway in the 1680's. The oldest tombstone dates to the 1680's and tells of two boys who died from eating poisonous mushrooms. There are graves of revolutionary soldiers and a legend of a ghost. It is said that a certain Mary Worth was burned as a witch and buried there. With the correct knowledge of rituals, one is supposed to be able to summon her.

During most of the nineteenth century, those few Piscataway residents whose religious affiliation was other than Baptist or Episcopalian had to travel to surrounding communities for services. Many attended the First Presbyterian Church (1730) in what is now Metuchen as well as the Dutch Reformed Church (1847), a church founded by forty families who left First Presbyterian. In 1867, the eighty Roman Catholic families in the Woodbridge-Piscataway area were offered Mass by a horseback-riding priest, Reverend John Rogers, assistant at St. Peter's in New Brunswick. Mass was held in a shed on the property of Mr. John Christol in the Metuchen area. St. Francis Mission was established, and of the eighty families, according to parish chronicles, "...the majority were Irish. There were a few Germans and a sprinkling of French. Most of the men worked on the railroad or at the gravel pit in Nixon. Not a few were employed as gardeners or coachmen on the large estates." (4)

The first church building replaced the shed in 1870. In 1878, the parish was incorporated and extended from Fords Corner, Highland Park, South Plainfield, north to the boundary and included all of Raritan Township, which had been created in 1870 by the State Legislature from the townships of Woodbridge and Piscataway. The first pastor, Reverend Stephen Bettomi, resided at St. James Parish in Woodbridge, where he was also pastor and commuted by horse and carriage.

The only other religious organization to develop in the 19th Century in Edison was the Grace Chapel Sunday School in Bonhamtown, organized by Miss Hannah Manning. Proceeds from such affairs as a tableau and musicale held at Robbins Hall on April 29, 1875, which netted \$135.00, were applied toward a building fund. In 1876, the chapel, free from debt, was dedicated. The chapel evolved into the Grace Reformed Church in May, 1974.

In 1908, seven members of the Stelton Baptist Church established the First Baptist Church of Metuchen. Thus, the second oldest Baptist Church in New Jersey helped to establish its fifth member church.

All of the remaining religious denominations in Edison were established after Edison experienced an unprecedented influx of population from the late 1940's to the present. As people arrived in various sections of Edison, they began to seek places of worship. Finding none of their denominations available, they petitioned their specific religions for local parishes and congregations.

Since 1960, St. Matthew's, St. Teresa's, Guardian Angel and St. Helena's Roman Catholic churches have all been founded in Edison. Congregation Beth-El (1952), and the Temple Emanu-El were established to meet the needs of a growing Jewish population.

Piscataway Baptist Church was established in 1960 after serving as a Sunday School for fifty years. The Raritan Valley Baptist Church, Mount Zion Free Will Baptist and the Mount Pleasant Baptist Churches have all been founded during recent Edison history, along with St. Paul's Lutheran (1954), St. Stephen's Lutheran (1958), Our Savior's Lutheran and the Church of the Nazarene. Many of these relatively recent denominations were given permission to use public school facilities for worship services until their own buildings could be financed and erected.

#### FOOTNOTES:

- 1. The concessions and agreements of the Lord Proprieters of New Jersey to and with all and every of the Adventurers and all such as shall Settle and Plant there, 1667.
- 2. History of the Stelton Baptist Church, 1964.
- 3. History of the Stelton Baptist Church, 1964.
- 4. <u>St. Francis Roman Catholic Church 100th Anniversary</u> Savv.Bk., 1974.


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