



THEN



NOW

## Bonhamtown Hotel's facade hidden by modern exterior

HN 10/7/86

An article featuring the old Bonhamtown School in *The Home News* of Aug. 17 pleased me. The school is one of the most fascinating of all buildings, old and new, in Edison Township and I commend the effort to save and restore the few historic buildings that remain. It's classification as "Colonial Revival" amused me, though, since I fail to find features supporting such a name. However, the pressing issue is that the article rekindled my anger over the fate of the school's longtime neighbor, the Bonhamtown Hotel of 1912.

The hotel, now a restaurant and formerly a tavern, also was one of a handful of historic gems still existing in Edison. Last autumn it suffered a fire, its facade surviving perfectly intact. Yet immediately afterward a new hideous exterior was constructed. Did the 1912 hotel escape the eyes of those in charge of the historic report? Did those responsible fail to turn their heads 90 degrees while admiring the school? Or was the hotel deemed historical but somehow the owner/developer found a way to bypass it? The building should have been restored to its original appearance, solely involving renovation to the first story.

Now the Bonhamtown School and

an adjacent church remain the sole survivors of the "now defunct community of Bonhamtown." The owners of the new restaurant failed to see the most elegant solution to their project: renovating and adding sensitively to the hotel building's historic architecture (which should have been required by the township's historical society). Also, the new buildings now occupying the adjacent corner of Main Street and Woodbridge Avenue, vacant since the old town disappeared, should have been designed to capture that old Bonhamtown charm. The school and hotel could have generated an amazing contextual architectural scheme for the whole corner. Instead, those responsible chose to copy the disintegration and exploitation of any type of community, an action predominant throughout Edison.

Beneath that new exterior, which is ironically labeled Victorian (given its appearance), most of the old brick hotel facade remains — a facade that shares that same "interesting feature" as the school front, the inscription of Bonhamtown, a community that could have existed in more than a name.

REIDUN ANDERSON

Edison



**PAMPHLET FILE**

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Edison - Historic Bldgs



# HISTORICSTROLL THROUGH

**EDISON**

Funded by Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism, Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Woodbridge Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, and East Brunswick Regional Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the Gateway Tourism Council, Inc. and Chambers of Commerce of Raritan Valley, Edison, and New Brunswick.





# Welcome to Middlesex County

The Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission invite you to explore the County's historic neighborhoods and communities, reflecting three centuries of remarkable growth.

*Settled originally by English, Scottish and Dutch families, Middlesex County was established in 1683 and gained early trading importance from its central location along the Raritan River and the siting of the Provincial capital within its boundaries in Perth Amboy. Later, numerous skirmishes of the American Revolution were fought in Middlesex County and George Washington with his troops frequently passed through this region.*

*In the 1800's, an agricultural economy thrived as trade and commerce developed along the excellent transportation routes of the area's rivers and on the new Delaware and Raritan Canal. Progress into the 1900's brought further regional development as railways and highways were constructed through central New Jersey. Business and industrial expansion, spurred by the inventions of Thomas A. Edison in Menlo Park, brought about the establishment of numerous companies which have grown to become today's corporate giants in the pharmaceutical, research and data processing industries.*

*Education has always played a significant role in the County since the 1766 charter of Queens College, which became Rutgers, the State University with five college campuses in the New Brunswick area. The County is also the home for the Forrestal Campus of Princeton University; the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry; Middlesex County College in Edison; and the County Vocational and Technical High Schools, the first vocational school system in the United States.*

*Middlesex County has attained a status matched by few other counties in becoming not only a prestigious and desirable location for business, industry and high-tech facilities, but also as an attractive and ideal place to live.*

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*Stroll through the tree-shaded streets where the architectural treasures of previous centuries wait to be discovered. Trace the vital links to the historic roots of the communities of East Brunswick, Edison, Milltown, New Brunswick and Woodbridge.*

*Each self-guided tour brochure features both public sites which welcome visitors during open hours and residential streets where private homeowners have preserved their unique structures with care. Please note that the private homes are not open to the public and it is requested that their privacy be respected.*

*The historical societies of each community welcome inquiries about their historic neighborhoods, programs, activities and volunteer opportunities.*

*The Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission promotes preservation endeavors and local and county history. To this end, the Commission has established the Middlesex County Coalition of Historic Organizations and Site Owners (MCCHOSO), a network and confederation of organizations and individuals. Please call or write the Commission to obtain additional copies of the walking tour brochures or to receive further information on the historic sites and cultural events in Middlesex County.*

*Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 841 Georges Road, North Brunswick, NJ 08902, (201) 745-4489.*





Edison Tower

Edison Township, formerly known as Raritan, was first settled in the late 1600's, when it was part of Woodbridge and Piscataway. Members of the FitzRandolph Family from the colony of Massachusetts, were among the first settlers in 1668.

The Old Post Road, the earliest public road in Eastern New Jersey, passed through Edison Township and was said to have been used by General Washington as he went through central New Jersey on the way to his inauguration in New York City.

The Bonhamtown area of Edison on the Post Road is named after Nicholas Bonham, a freeholder from 1682-83. This hamlet is said to have been the site of an old Indian village and later a Continental camp and battle ground during the revolution. Bonhamtown also served as the seat of justice for Middlesex and Somerset Counties as early as 1683. By 1834, the village featured 10 or 12 dwellings, 2 taverns, a store and school house.

The town grew in the second half of the 19th century as the attractiveness of the rural landscape became more accessible with the opening of the area's second railroad, the Easton and Amboy Line. By the late 1800's, many residents "commuted" to jobs in New York and other parts of New Jersey.

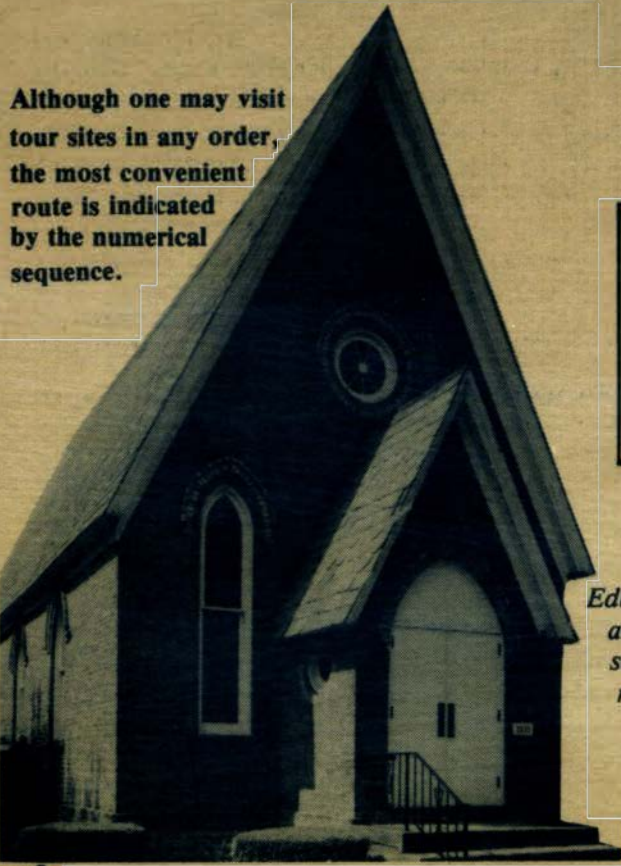
The establishment of Thomas Edison's industrial research laboratory in the Menlo Park section from 1876-1886 brought fame to the township as it became the site for some of the most innovative research and manufacturing feats of the 19th century. While there, Thomas Edison invented over 400 patented items including the phonograph, electric railway and incandescent light. During the Christmas season, Christie Street and his laboratory compound were illuminated by electricity utilizing a system of underground wires. This dramatic display brought thousands of tourists to the Menlo Park site. To commemorate the genius of the "wizard of Menlo Park", the township was renamed Edison in 1954 and today a memorial tower stands on the site of his laboratory.

Developing from a rural-residential community in the 1920's, Edison has grown into a major population, commercial and industrial center ranking as the second most populous municipality in Middlesex County. Edison's expansive area of 32 square miles is well suited to its role as the hub of air, rail and highway networks for the distribution of numerous goods and services. The Raritan Center is one of the largest industrial, office, shipping and warehouse complexes, developed through its prime location and interstate access.

Middlesex County College, New Jersey's largest county college, was established in Edison in 1964 on the site of the former Raritan Arsenal. Nearby is the Thomas A. Edison County Park equipped with tennis courts, ballfields and fitness courses.

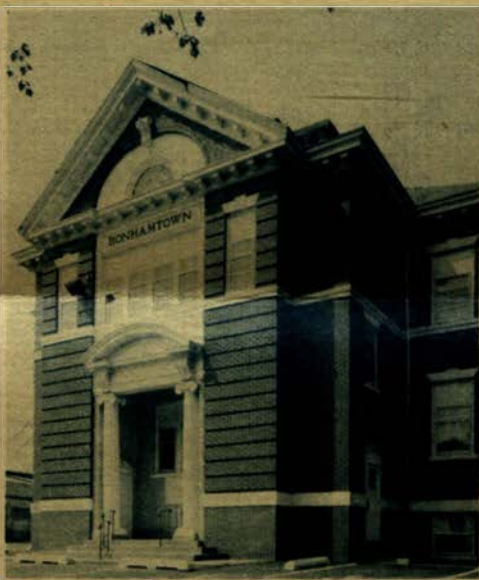


Although one may visit tour sites in any order, the most convenient route is indicated by the numerical sequence.



## 6 Bonhamtown Grace Reformed Church

**Woodbridge Avenue and Grace Street**  
Proceeds in the amount of \$130 from a tableau and musical performance in 1875 began the building fund for the Grace Chapel Sunday School. Established by Miss Hannah Manning, the Sunday school chapel was successfully funded, constructed and dedicated in 1876. In later years, it evolved into the Grace Reformed Church. The Gothic style of the simple brick church is expressed in the steep gable, pointed windows and absence of other overt ornament.



## 7 Bonhamtown School

**2825 Woodbridge Avenue**  
Currently renovated as a professional building, the Bonhamtown School housed the offices of the Edison Township Board of Education until 1980. Built in 1908, the neoclassical Colonial Revival school building is an excellent example of the use of indigenous brick in a public structure. The fine architectural details include; Ionic columns supporting an elliptical pediment, lunette window in a pedimented gable, corner quoins, and hip roof with massed chimneys.

## 2 Colonel John Dunham House

**33 Park Way**  
Colonel John Dunham resided in this c. 1775 clapboard home on the Commons. The Colonel was a member of the prominent Dunham family who were among the earliest settlers in the Piscataway area in the late 1600's. The home today is a private residence.



## 4 Forman Martin House

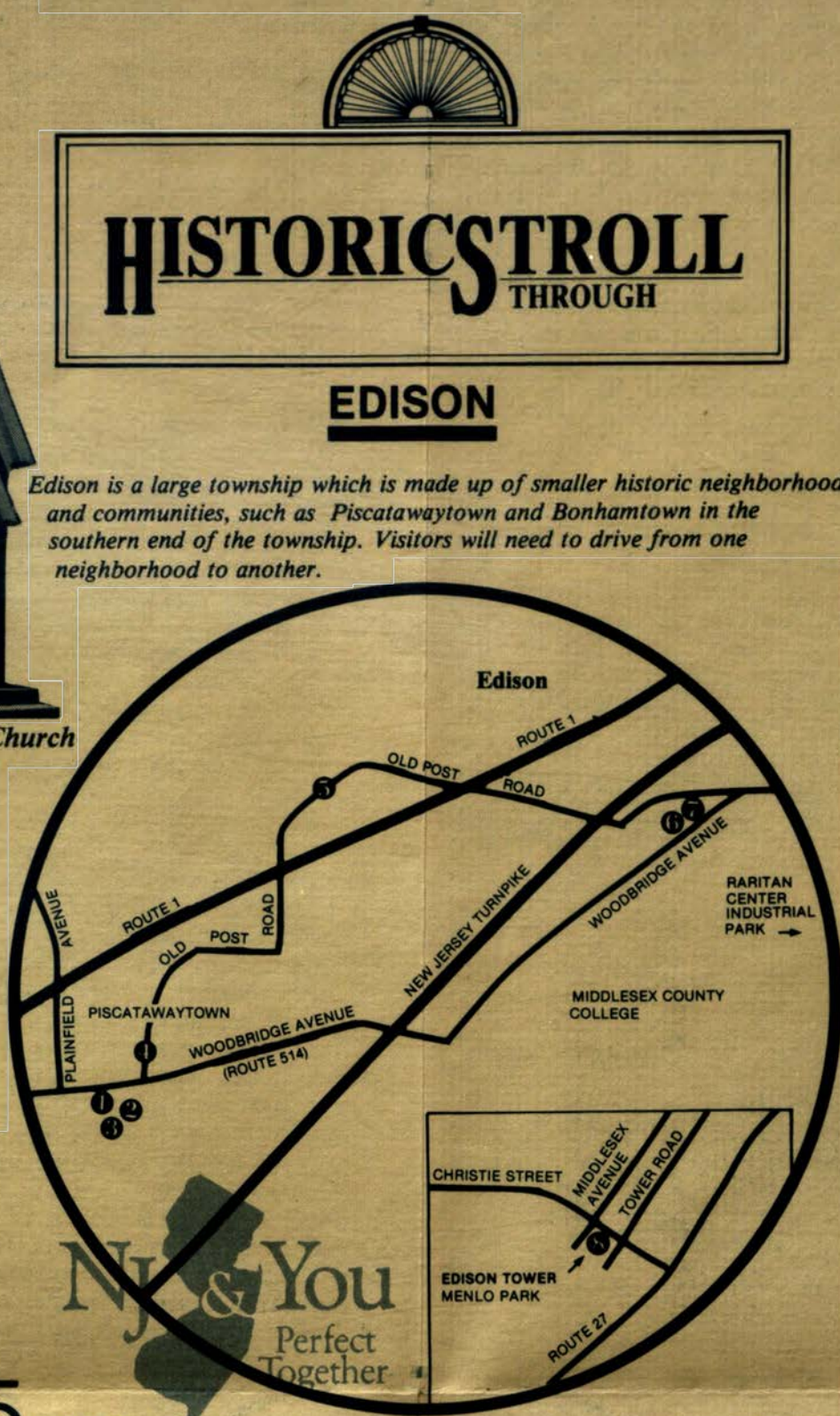
**30 Old Post Road**  
Construction of the Forman and Hannah Martin home was completed in two stages; the first in 1830, the second in 1850, on land across the street from their brandy and cider mills. The estate overlooked the vast apple orchards necessary for cider production. The Martin family resided in the home continuously until the 1960's. Among the distinctive details of the Italianate structure are bracketed cornices, jigsaw porch elements and an interior beam that is a large tree trunk in the process of petrification. It is still a private residence.

## 5 Old Post Road

The Old Post Road was the earliest public road in eastern New Jersey. Public roads linking the villages and crossroads were the only means for traveling across New Jersey in the late 1700's. Most often the roadbeds were rocky and deeply rutted making journeys a miserable and even hazardous experience. In 1789, George Washington traveled on the Old Post Road as it wound through Piscatawaytown, Bonhamtown and Woodbridge, while on route to his Presidential inauguration in New York.

## 3 Edison Commons

**Park Way**  
A common meeting place for the original settlers of the area, the Commons is now a municipal park. During the Revolutionary War, the militia mustered on the Commons to practice and drill with cannons and the weapons of that era. The "Old Town Hall" on the Commons was erected in the 1800's as the first municipal building and meeting hall for the small agricultural community. The hall continued to be used as the township municipal building and police headquarters until the 1930's when the offices were moved to a new facility. Today, Edison residents and organizations utilize the building as a convenient meeting place.



# HISTORICSTROLL THROUGH

## EDISON

Edison is a large township which is made up of smaller historic neighborhoods and communities, such as Piscatawaytown and Bonhamtown in the southern end of the township. Visitors will need to drive from one neighborhood to another.

## Thomas A. Edison Memorial Tower

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**Christie Street**  
The Edison Tower is in the northern, Menlo Park section of Edison Township, off Route 27 (Lincoln Highway.) The Memorial Tower was built in 1937 on the exact spot where Thomas Edison's research laboratory stood from 1876-1886. Over 400 patented inventions were created there by Edison and his scientific team, including the phonograph, incandescent electric lamp and its method of distribution to homes, carbon telephone transmitter and electric traction railway. Edison's scientific methodology revolutionized science, technology and industry. The removal by Henry Ford of all the buildings associated with Edison's early career in Menlo Park to Dearborn, Michigan, necessitated the installation of a memorial structure. The Edison Tower is one of the finest examples of an Art Deco structure in New Jersey. An amber glass replica of an incandescent lamp, weighing 8 tons, tops the 131 foot high cement tower. An eternal light in the tower base commemorates the invention of the first practical incandescent lamp. A small museum and gift shop houses Edison memorabilia, light bulbs, models, phonographs and letters. Open Wednesdays - Friday, 12:30-4 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday, 12:30-4:30 p.m. Also open on Tuesdays, 12:30-4 p.m., during June, July and August. Guided tours by appointment, handicap access. (201) 549-3299 or (201) 287-0900, Ext. 265. The tower is administered by the Edison Township Recreation Department. State and National Registers of Historic Places.



## St. James Episcopal Church

**2136 Woodbridge Avenue**  
The church is the oldest institution in Edison with its congregation tracing its establishment to 1694. A charter was granted to the congregation by Queen Anne of England in 1704. The bell was cast in Leeds, England and brought to Edison in 1702. In 1724, a building known as the "White Church" was built on land already in use as a burying ground, with stones dating to 1693. The church, which was used as a barracks by the British during the Revolutionary War, was later destroyed during the fighting in 1777. Its replacement, built in 1792, was destroyed by a tornado in 1835. It was rebuilt from 1836 to 1837 using as much of the original fixtures and fittings as possible and this is the structure seen today. St. James is a well-preserved combination of Greek and Gothic Revival architecture. The Greek Revival style is reflected in the full Doric portico and pilaster treatment of the steeple.

For further information about Edison contact Edison Township Historical Society, 328 Plainfield Avenue, Edison, NJ 08820 or the Edison Chamber of Commerce, 1974 Lincoln Highway, P.O. Box 281, Edison, NJ 08817 (201)287-1951.

Photography Jim Padilla





# HISTORICSTROLL THROUGH

## EDISON

Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission  
841 Georges Road  
North Brunswick, NJ 08902

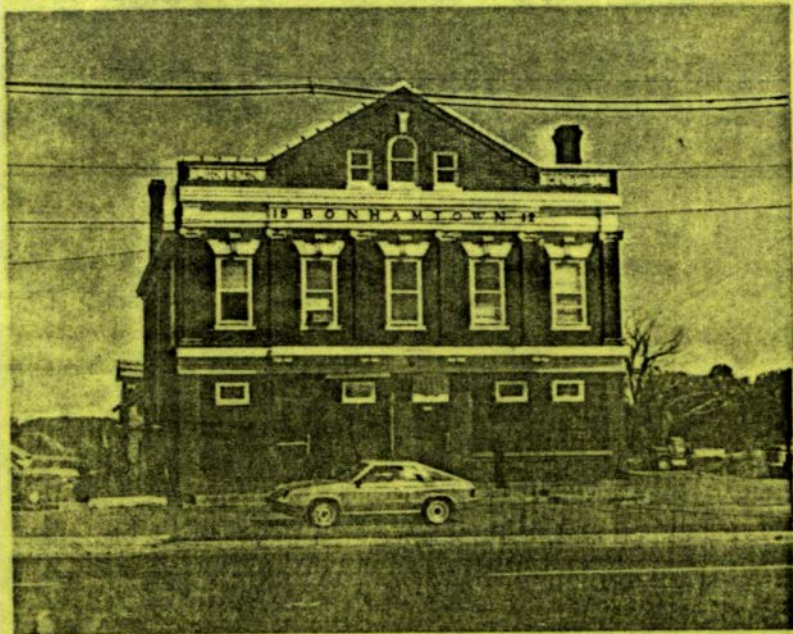
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EDISON TWP. PUB. LIBRARY  
340 PLAINFIELD AVE.  
EDISON, N.J. 08817



BONHAMTOWN UNION HOTEL  
Woodbridge Ave.

REFERENCE

## Historic Building & Sites (Edison History)

Built in 1912, The Bonhamtown Union Hotel serves as a gathering place for area residents and travelers.

The facade has recently been refurbished and restored to more faithfully reflect its original appearance. The Bonhamtown Union Hotel currently houses a tavern.

Edison Twp. Pub. Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
Edison, N.J. 08817

ASK AT DESK