



The Forman Martin Home, originally constructed in 1830 and expanded in 1850, appears now much as it does in this turn-of-the-century photograph. Because just three families have

lived in the house over the years, few changes have been made to the structure. It is the current residence of David Sheehan, president of the Edison Township Historical Society.

Review *Edison: Historic Buildings & Sites*

Forman Martin Home provides link to Edison's rural, agricultural past

Family oversaw apple operation from old road

By Kelly Sheehan

EDISON — Built in two stages, 1830 and 1850, the Forman Martin Home at 30 Old Post Road serves as a reminder of the township's agricultural past.

Forman Martin and his wife Hanna built their home on the oldest road in eastern New Jersey — Old Post Road. From this home, they would oversee the production of apple products. Farmers from throughout the area would bring their apples to Martin's mills along Old Post Road where their produce would be made into applesauce and cider.

The Martins' home overlooked several barns and barnlike structures where the apples were processed for sale. It is said that some of the homes which today lie across Old Post Road from the Martin House have the foundations of these Martin barns as foundations for their homes.

Old photographs and neighbors' recollections reveal that the Martins were not themselves farmers, nor did they tend any apple orchards; however, they owned and operated the apple processing facilities on Old Post Road.

Several generations of the Martins lived in the Piscatawaytown area over the years. Forman Martin was a direct descendant of John Martin, who, along with the Dunhams, Bonhams, Stelles, Hulls and Randolphs were the original settlers of the township.

Many of the Martin family are buried in the nearby cemetery surrounding the St. James Episcopal Church, Woodbridge Avenue. As is true with many old tombstones, the granite structures are accurate

chronicles of family relationships, fortunes and dates. Many a genealogist is grateful for the information revealed by these old grave markers.

The last two Martin "boys" — as they are referred to by long-time residents — were John and Oscar Martin. Both were said to have been bachelors and lived in the home well into the 1960s, and a Mrs. Hardy was the last member of the family to have resided on Old Post Road.

As the years took their toll on Mrs. Hardy, a kind neighbor would visit regularly and look in after her health. Mrs. Hardy was kind and generous and would always insist that this neighbor "help herself" to one of the antique pieces of furniture in her home. After many polite "thank you, but no thank you" replies from the neighbor, Mrs. Hardy became quite insistent that she somehow repay the neighbor for her kindness, and the neighbor decided to take the first thing she saw — a Martin family photo album.

Many of the photos were taken in the mid-1800s and early 1900s. They were very formal affairs and carefully posed amid Victorian backdrops. Names of the subjects and their ages are carefully recorded on the reverse of the pictures which have been a boon in retracing not only the history of the Martin family, but of those who lived in the home.

Today, many of the photos adorn the hallway of the Martin house. It is felt that these original dwellers still have an important place in the grand old home.

Architecturally, the house is described as "carpenter's gothic with Italianate detailing."

Inside, the rooms are very large, bright and open. The floors are wide-plank oak boards and all the doors and windows are the originals.

The 1850 addition — the

left-most portion of the structure — has a tree trunk as its main beam. A common practice in those days, the builders would lay a sturdy, straight tree trunk on its side and run lumber, beams and posts from the tree trunk to provide for flooring. Structural engineers report that the tree trunk is in the process of petrification and should serve well in the future as a sturdy part of the underpinnings of the home.

Since only three families have ever lived in the home, very few changes have been made to the original structure.

The kitchen boasts a large, tall fireplace in which one can find a crane — a common device used to handle kettles from over an open fire. It was an L-shaped piece of metal which swung freely over the fire.

There are also fireplaces in the dining room and the living room. The fireplace in the living room is not functional today, as the chimney is used to vent the gas heat system. Building codes of today do not permit "sharing" a chimney for two separate heating sources. The dining room's fireplace is equipped with a wood-burning stove as is the kitchen's.

Families of means in the early and mid-1800s viewed open-hearth fireplaces as a heating supply for poor families. Thus, in an attempt to retain the charm and of a mantle and fireplace but insure the more "modern" and even heat of coal and wood-burning stoves, the two were often combined with a mantle piece surrounding a wood-burning stove. The dining room and kitchen fireplaces have been recently restored to reflect that earlier practice.

Ceilings on the first floor are 9½ feet high in some rooms and 10 feet in others. This, too, was a very formal indication of the prosperity of the home-builders. Heating such large

rooms was (and still is) an expensive undertaking. Upstairs, however, the ceilings are much lower (about 7 feet high). This was to encourage the heat to stay at a height where it served the occupants best during the night. Flooring on the second floor is also wide oak plank and has been restored.

Neighbors indicate that electricity was not installed in the home until the 1930s. There were fears that since this was the tallest structure in the neighborhood that it would be subject to being struck by lightning. If electrical wires were strung throughout the walls of the homes, the Martins apparently worried that house would immediately become engulfed in flames.

Attesting to their worry were four lightning rods and wires which, until recently, were found atop the home's three chimneys and along the peaks of the roof.

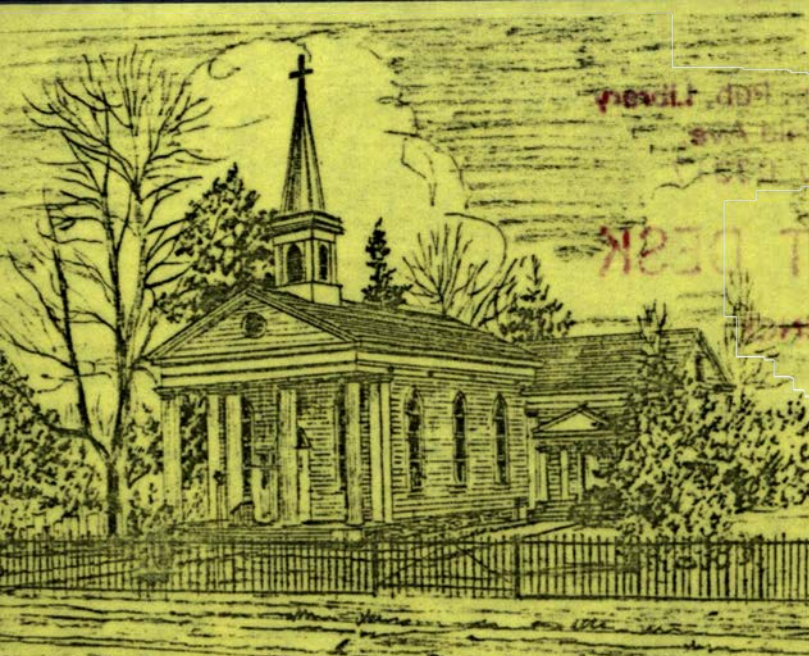
The cellar is under only a portion of the house and features a dirt floor. The present owners have had pebble stone placed over the dirt and its current use is as a photography dark room. The full attic also has wide-plank oak flooring.

There are three bedrooms on the second floor.

Next to the chimney in the dining room is a tall, narrow closet. Historians have pointed out that such cabinets were used to store handguns and gun powder.

Although not included on the National Register of Historic Places, the Forman Martin Home is a landmark which provides links to the architectural, cultural and agricultural history of Edison Township.

Kelly Sheehan is a member of the Edison Township Historical Society, and this article is one in a series by society members for the Metuchen-Edison Review on the history of the area.



For years, St. James Episcopal Church was referred to as "The English Church" reflecting its long Anglican heritage. The parish was established in 1694. As early as 1703, there are published records of sermons delivered here by Rev. George Keith. The church's bell was cast in Leeds, England and was brought here in 1702. It is recognized as the oldest purely colonial church in the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey. It was selected by the Historic American Buildings Survey for its exceptional historic and architectural interest. Inside is found a three-tiered pulpit. From it, Samuel Seabury, the first Episcopal Bishop in America and John Croes, the first Bishop of New Jersey preached. Rev. William Gerhart is the current Rector of St. James.

"SAINT JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH"
2136 Woodbridge Avenue

Churches

(Edison History)



"EDISON COMMONS"
Park Way and The Commons

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

Noted throughout history as an active gathering place for the community, it was a mustering area for the militia during the Revolutionary War; the "heart of town" while "Old Town Hall" was the site of all municipal business. Today it boasts ballfields, open areas for golfers, jogging enthusiasts, summer playgrounds and an accessible greenspace to meet with playmates, friends and neighbors.

REFERENCE

Historic Buildings

& Sites

(Edison History)

ASK AT DESK



"THE CEMETERY AT SAINT JAMES"

Churches

Saint James Church's Memorial Garden is located immediately to the right of the church building. A memorial tree and plaque are shown in this picture. The plaque is dedicated to Capt. Ronald Mayercik, a parishioner, missing-in-action in Viet Nam. Behind the garden area is the mounded gravesite of six British soldiers killed in a skirmish during the Revolutionary War at the present day intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Old Post Road.

(Edison History)

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

ASK AT DESK

Historic sites in Edison listed



NEW DOVER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, EDISON

Built in 1849

EDISON — Township historic and cultural sites included on the list compiled by Aurora Bacon of the Edison Public Library include the following:

Thomas A. Edison Tower on Christie Street; Edison Municipal Building; the Main Edison Library, 340 Plainfield Ave.; the North Edison Branch Library, Grove Avenue and Library Place; the Clara Barton Branch Library, Pleasant and Hoover Avenues; John P. Stevens High School, Grove Avenue, and Edison High School, Boulevard of the Eagles.

Also, the St. James Episcopal Church, built in 1835, and its cemetery, established in the 1600s, at 2136 Woodbridge Ave.; the Stelton Baptist Church, 1925, and cemetery, 1740s, 334 Plainfield Ave.; the New Dover United Methodist Church and cemetery, 1849, New Dover Road; the Bonhamtown Grace Reformed Church, 1875, at 2195 Woodbridge Ave.

Restorations include the Benjamin Shottwell home, built in 1775, now the Klingler residence at 26 Runyons Lane; the Carriage House, now the Trapp residence, 79 Cedar St.; the Forman Martin Estate, built around 1829, now the Dipple residence at 30 Old Post Road; the John Dunham Estate, built around 1775, now the Pukash residence at 33 Parkway; the Old Hickory Farm, built around 1762, now the

McDermott residence on Inman Avenue; and the N.J. Home for Disabled Soldiers, built 1930, in Menlo Park.

Historic markers include the Bonhamtown School, 1908, at 2825 Woodbridge Ave.; the Piscatawaytown School, 1913, at 2060 Woodbridge Ave.; the Stelton School, 1923, Plainfield Avenue; the Oak Tree School, 1925, Oak Tree Road; the Old Town Hall on Park Way; the Oak Tree Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1, 1929, on Oak Tree Road.

Markers are also at the following homes: the 1752 Van Buskirk home, now the Graber residence, 744 New Dover Road; the Yelencsics home, 1887, now the Edison Recreation Building on Woodbridge Avenue; the 1811 Mook residence, 4001 Park Ave.; the Martin home, 1886, now the Dickenson residence on Mill Road; the Bonhamtown Union Hotel, 1912, now Bo's Den; the 1917 Raritan Arsenal; Camp Kilmer, built in the 1930s; the Hutchinson residence, circa 1780, at 2109 Woodbridge Ave.; the Fitzrandolph house, circa 1850, now the Gough home, 2111 Woodbridge Ave.; and the Beehive Oven House, circa 1740, now the Warren residence at 1032 Featherbed Lane.

Some of the sites will be selected by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission for inclusion on a county historic map.

History can be found in various sites

By David C. Sheehan

EDISON — Edison cannot boast of a museum dedicated to showcasing the rich and diverse cultural, historical and architectural history of the township.

The Edison Memorial Tower serves as an admirable tribute to the community's most famous resident, Thomas A. Edison. The museum located on the grounds of the tower is filled with memorabilia and artifacts of the famed inventor and rightfully focuses on his inventions and his many marvelous accomplishments in Edison in the 1870s and 1880s. Its focus, however, is not Edison the township.

How, then, can one gain insight into the history of the township? Because the township itself serves as a living museum, one excellent way is to tour the places where historical buildings and other sites are located.

Although a tour of the 32-square-mile township would seem a formidable task, it can be made manageable, enjoyable, educational and even inspiring if the tour is plotted properly. In 1983, the Edison Township Historical Society set out to plot such a tour.

It was the desire of the society to showcase the heritage of the township in a format wherein the tour of the places of historical and architectural interest could be accomplished in an afternoon's drive through Edison.

The tour features both public and private sites. The Edison Memorial Tower and museum is the site most often open to the public. The private homes, however, are not open to the public and anyone taking the tour should respect their privacy.

The tour begins at the Stelton Baptist Church, 324 Plainfield Avenue, near the Edison Main Library. Stelton Baptist Church was formed in the spring of 1689 and founded by some of the original European settlers of Edison, including the Stelle family, after whom that part of Edison and the church itself derive their names. The church buildings have been replaced several times because of destructive fires. The present sanctuary was rebuilt in 1925. The interior of the structure recently was restored and renovated in celebration of the church's 300th anniversary.

Stelton Baptist is the second oldest Baptist community in New Jersey. A stroll through the cemetery surrounding the church serves as an education to those researching their own genealogy and those interested in the names of the families and founders of the township.

Immediately to the left of the church is the Stelton Community Center, 328 Plainfield Avenue. It was formerly the Stelton Elementary School.

Built in 1923, it was closed, because of declining enrollment, in 1982. The school is known to have been the first to provide a school lunch program. Thanks to its unique architectural features, it was long referred to as "The Castle." The exterior of the

Center is open many recreation and meetings.

Unique south Woodbridge block to

Structures in Edison provide 'museum' for glimpse of past

have been the first school in the township to be equipped with a telephone.

Heading east toward Woodbridge Township on Woodbridge Avenue and a short distance from Piscatawaytown School, you will find the E.G. Gough Home at 2111 Woodbridge Avenue.

It is a three-bay, two-story clapboard structure which was built in the first half of the 19th century as the home of the Fitzrandolph family — one of the first families in the area.

Directly across the street from the Gough home is the site of St. James Episcopal Church, described as one of the "crown jewels" of historic sites in the region.

Chartered by Queen Anne of England in 1714, the church was used as a British barracks and hospital during the Revolutionary War. The original church structure was built in 1724, but was destroyed in 1835 by a tornado. It was restored and rebuilt at the expense of Joseph Foulke, using as much of the original fittings and fixtures as possible.

While at St. James, spend time strolling through the cemetery surrounding the church. The graves date back to 1693, that being of Mrs. Mary Jones. This is the oldest marked grave in Middlesex County. One of the more unusual tombstones to see is that of the Hooper brothers, whose deaths from eating poisoned mushrooms is chronicled on the tombstone.

Directly to the rear of St. James is "Edison Commons." The area, now a municipal park, had its origins as a common meeting place for the original settlers in the area. Additionally, the militia Mustered there to practice and drill, using cannon and other weapons, during the Revolution.

Also on the Commons is the site of Edison's "Old Town Hall," the first municipal building which housed all township administrative, school and police functions. It stood at the site until the late 1890s when it was destroyed by arsonists.

At 33 Park Way, on the Commons, is the Col. John Dunham Estate, circa 1732. It was the home of the pioneer Dunham family. George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and some of their troops ate a breakfast in the home on July 10, 1778.

Follow Woodbridge Avenue to Old Post Road and turn left. Old Post Road is the oldest road in eastern New Jersey and was used by President Washington on his journey through Edison to attend his first inauguration in New York.

At 30 Old Post Road is the Forman Martin Home. Built by Hanna and Forman Martin in two stages, 1830 and 1850, the home had been occupied continuously by the Martin family until the late 1960s. It features carpenters Gothic scrollwork on the eaves and porches and is highlighted with Italianate detailing.

Return to Woodbridge Avenue and head east to the Bonhamtown historic district. At Woodbridge Avenue and Grace Street, near the old Raritan Arsenal and what is now Middlesex County College, you will find Bonhamtown Grace Reformed Church.

Circa 1875, the building is a good example of vernacular Gothic architecture as evidenced by the steep gable and pointed windows.

On the same block is found Bonhamtown School at 2825 Woodbridge Avenue. Currently renovated as a professional building, it was built in 1908. A neoclassical colonial revival school building, it 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, lenette windows in a pedimented gable, corner quoins and a hip roof with massed chimneys.

Further east at 2965 Woodbridge Avenue is the Yelencsics Homestead. Built in 1887, it was the birthplace and family residence of Edison's longtime mayor, the late Anthony M. Yelencsics.

The site was used by the Army

during World War II and had been used also as the offices of the township Department of Parks and Recreation. It presently is used as the township Senior Citizens Activity Center.

From the Yelencsics Homestead, the tour reaches its conclusion at the Edison Memorial Tower and Christie Street.

Located in the Menlo Park historic district off Route 27, this is where you will find a 131-foot-tall concrete tower built on the spot where Thomas A. Edison invented more than 500 of his patented items. The tower, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is made of Portland cement (an Edison invention) and has a replica bulb, 13 feet in diameter, atop the structure.

A light bulb in the base of the tower burns continuously in honor of Edison's accomplishments at the site.

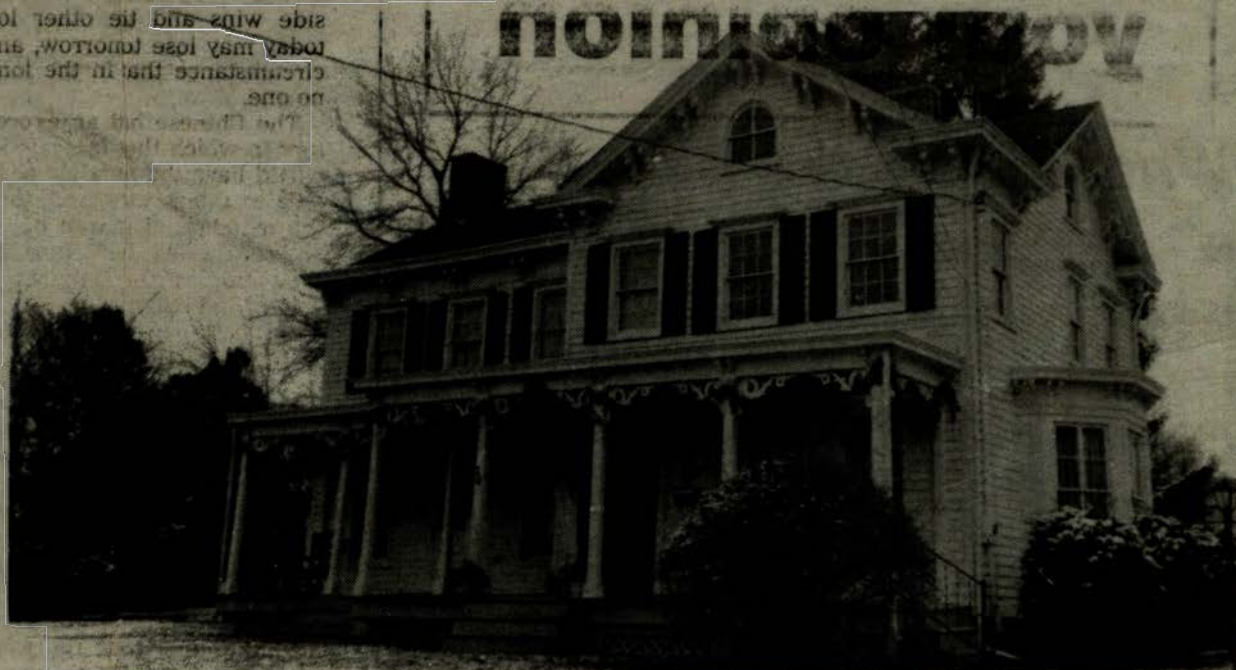
Some of the wonders invented by Edison and his workers there were: the phonograph, the incandescent lamp, an electrical distribution system, a carbon telephone transmitter and electric traction railway.

A museum and gift shop houses Edison memorabilia, light bulbs, models, phonographs and letters. Handicapped accessible, it is open Wednesdays through Fridays from 12:30 to 4 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. It is also open on Tuesdays during June, July and August from 12:30 to 4 p.m.

The tower is located on Christie Street, which was the first street in the world to be illuminated by incandescent lamps. Twelve replica street lamps, a gift of the Edison Township Historical Society, surround the tower to commemorate the lighting of Christie Street by Thomas Edison.

This, then, is a brief tour of places of historic interest in Edison Township. While not a complete tour of all places of historic note and interest in the community, it serves as a pleasant and informative glimpse into the past of the township.

David C. Sheehan is co-founder and president of the Edison Township Historical Society, and this is one in a series of articles on the history of the area by society members for the Metuchen-Edison Review.



—Photo by Thomas R. DeCaro

The Forman Martin House at 30 Old Post Road, Edison, was built in two stages, 1830 and 1850, and features carpenters Gothic scrollwork on the eaves and porches.

Gadzooks, has the Stelton Baptist Church changed!

By GWEN SHRIFT
Home News staff writer

EDISON — Under the sun and air of a blue and gold morning in June lay the stern elders of the Stelton Baptist Church, asleep in their old churchyard.

Inside the little house of worship on Plainfield Avenue, their heirs of the spirit, and a few of the flesh, were at prayer yesterday. The words and melody of the hymn "Rise Up, Oh Men of God" floated through stained-glass church windows open to the congregation's 15,496th Sunday morning.

As worship ended yesterday, men in white Colonial wigs, breeches, and ruffled jabots opened the church doors to allow similarly clad men and women in long dresses and Martha Washington caps to drift down the steps, pausing to chat with their pastor, Rev. Richard Cook, and to pose for a snapshot or two.

The costumes were a tribute to the fact that on the fourth Sunday in June of 1689, six God-fearing men founded the First Day Baptist Society of Piscataway, the predecessor organization to today's Stelton Baptist Church. The present church building is the fourth to shelter the congregation on land first purchased by it in 1748; earlier, the church was located on

Woodbridge Avenue.

The Abraham Van Gilders, the Randolph Drakes, and the Stelle Pyatts who are buried next to the church would recognize little of what their spiritual community has become since they left its embrace in the first half of the last century. Some of the living, indeed, have learned to turn the other cheek when progress slaps them on the face.

As the 18th century gave way to the 19th, church elders lived to "reprove, rebuke and remove from the church" those who were "walking disorderly or not according to gospel," according to present-day church members.

One "walked disorderly" if one went to a race track, an establishment that sold liquor or a place where people openly engaged in shuffleboard — rules of conduct not considered burdensome to a community whose members were willing to be baptized in the Raritan River on March days when ice floes choked the water.

One such fearless Christian baptized on a bitterly cold day in 1843 was Teressa Davis, whose great-great-granddaughter, Nellie Potts, is a member of the congregation today. Miss Potts, 92, also a descendant of Edmond Dunham, one of the six original founders, ran the

Sunday school at the church for 35 years.

In the heyday of moral strictness, drinking and smoking were far more serious breaches of conduct in the Baptist community than they are today. As late as 1945, the Stelton Baptist Church protested a proposal to build a race-track in what is now the Washington Park section of Edison, and fought against granting a liquor license to an establishment near the church now known as Bottle & Cork Liquors.

Cook and others of the congregation acknowledge that rules are not as tight these days, and even draw amusement from the relatively tyrannical tactics of the past. "It's just a shame people can't read the history," said Ruth Smith, head of the church's anniversary committee. "It gets to be hilarious. If you were seen at a horse race, you'd be kicked out of church. There should be a happy medium ... I don't know what we'd do today (with such strict rules), the church would be empty."

But Miss Potts has her reservations about modernity among churchgoers. "I'm not too happy with it. I suppose you have to call it progress ... It's quite a different world than the world I grew up in. You have to go along with it," she said.

See CHURCH, Page B2

CHURCH

Continued from Page B1

During the 1920s, there was a special Sunday school class of little girls she called "The Sunbeams." Miss Potts strengthened them against the temptations of the Roaring Twenties. "None of them were flappers. They were very well-behaved, nice girls ... I never had any problems with any of them," she said.

One of the original Sunbeams, Elizabeth Stout, 78, sat to Miss Potts' right at a special church anniversary dinner yesterday at Cryan's restaurant in Metuchen.

The Stelton Baptist Church has been a wellspring for its denomination well beyond the borders of Edison. "A lot of Baptist life in America today takes its roots in this church," Cook said. Stelton Baptist founded six other churches, including the First Baptist churches in New Brunswick and Metuchen, and helped establish the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1707 and the New Jersey Baptist Convention in 1830.

The congregation is nearing its fourth century, but not without some cost. Church enrollment has declined from 350 members in 1960 to about 150, largely because of its missionary work christening new congregations, Cook said.

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

ASK AT DESK

NOT TO BE TAKEN
FROM LIBRARY



Edison:
Historical Bldgs
& Sites

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

ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH, EDISON
Built in 1835

NOT TO BE TAKEN
FROM LIBRARY

Edison's past being compiled

ASK AT DESK

By ANITA SUSI
News Tribune staff writer

EDISON — One of the most vital tasks of a librarian is the job of documenting and preserving the history of a community for present and future generations.

Toward that end, Aurora Bacon, head librarian at the Edison Public Library, recently finished compiling a formidable list of local cultural and historic sites, some of which will be included on a countywide map to be published by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission early next year.

Mrs. Bacon, who came to Edison six years ago from Staten Island, admitted she didn't really know much about the township's past before undertaking the project.

"There's not a good history of the town in the library," she pointed out, adding that she had gleaned most of her information from "Notes on the History of Piscatawaytown," a 1937 volume compiled by Agnes Glen Saunders, one of the first township librarians, along with Louis DuBois.

She also learned that Edison has no historical society of its own, but instead is included in the Metuchen Regional Historical Society.

"Even though name 'Metuchen' does confuse things, they seem willing to work toward Edison historic goals," she reported after attending a recent meeting.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Bacon's research leads her to conclude that the township requires the services of a fulltime, professional historian who could compile a better history of Edison, particularly, the last 100 years.

"After trying to find the answers to my questions and not knowing where to go, I found my best source to be senior citizens," Mrs. Bacon said. One local woman, Dora Engel, led her to the historic Martin Dock house on Silverlake Avenue. The building, now occupied by the Sheer family, is believed to be the oldest house in the township and may be 300 years old.

Although admittedly lacking qualifications as an architect or historian, Mrs. Bacon personally visited the Dock house as well as every one of the 34 homes, his-

toric markers and sites included in her submission to the county heritage commission's map project.

This involved a lot of knocking on doors as well as visits to elderly residents who still give directions by landmarks that no longer exist, Mrs. Bacon said, recalling the time she was told to make a turn near the no-longer-existent Hadley Airport, which is now the site of the Middlesex Mall.

Other people told her of swimming in the Raritan River and watching as road crews worked on constructing U.S. Highway 1, many years ago.

When she first started tackling the project, she sometimes met with an attitude that Edison really didn't have much of a past, but discovered "some things that are phenomenal."

For instance, did you know that Christie Street was the first street in the world to be lit up with Thomas A. Edison's electric lights, a hundred years ago?

Or that Old Post Road was the earliest public road in eastern New Jersey, and was used by President Washington as he traveled through Bonhamtown on the way to the nation's first Inauguration?

The first session of Middlesex County Court was held in Edison in June of 1683, and thousands of years earlier, glaciers covered this part of the world.

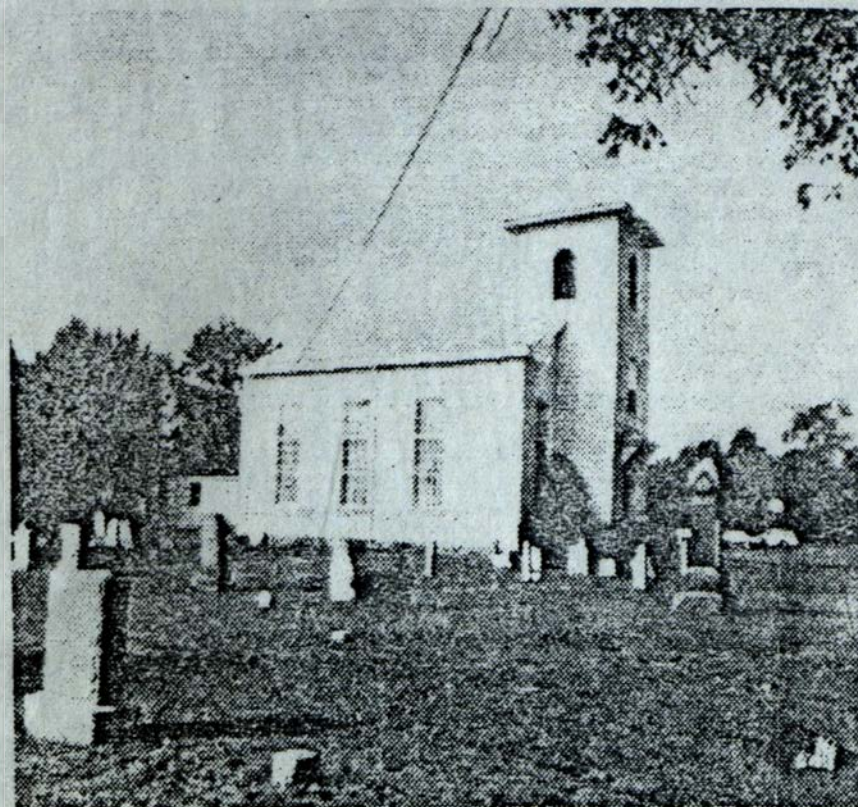
A tombstone in the cemetery of St. James Episcopal Church is listed in the Library of Congress, and bears the names of two lads who succumbed to mushroom poisoning many years ago.

As a followup to the map project, for which lists were completed on Sept. 30, Mrs. Bacon is now working to gather Edison "firsts," the most obvious one being the many inventions of Thomas Edison during his years in Menlo Park. Convinced that there may be other firsts, Mrs. Bacon asks people with such information on notable persons and notable events happening here to contact her at the library.

She is also working closely with the cultural and heritage commission on an oral history project which involves tape recording the reminiscences of longtime township residents.

"This history will be lost to us completely if we don't tap our resources," she said.

Historic sites in Edison listed



NEW DOVER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, EDISON

Built in 1849

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Markers are also at the following homes: the 1752 Van Buskirk home now the Graber residence, 744 New Dover Road; the Yelenosics home, 1887, now the Edison Recreation Building on Woodbridge Avenue; the 1811 Mook residence, 4001 Park Ave.; the Martin home, 1886, now the Dickenson residence on Mill Road; the Bonhamtown Union Hotel, 1912, now Bo's Den; the 1917 Raritan Arsenal; Camp Kilmer, built in the 1930s; the Hutchinson residence, circa 1780, at 2109 Woodbridge Ave.; the Fitzrandolph house, circa 1850, now the Gough home, 2111 Woodbridge Ave.; and the Beehive Oven House, circa 1740, now the Warren residence at 1032 Featherbed Lane.

Some of the sites will be selected by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission for inclusion on a county historic map.



Antique photographs of both the home and its original occupants grace the walls of the Sheehan home. Among the photos are those of the Martin's cider mills, originally located directly across Old Post Road. The main beam of this ten room home is a large tree trunk in the process of petrification. The working fireplace in the kitchen still has an iron arm from which large kettles of soup and stew were cooked.

Historic Buildings +

Sites

REFERENCE

(Edison History)

ASK AT DESK

"THE FORMAN MARTIN ESTATE"
30 Old Post Road

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



The Forman Martin House in Edison may have a gas station for a neighbor, but once it was surrounded by fertile farmland and echoes of the Revolutionary War.

The Martin house stands out; a bit of history amid suburbia

HN 15186

EDISON — When the Sheehans first painted the vintage house they bought in 1979, people stopped their cars along Old Post Road to give them a thumbs up sign.

The Forman Martin House, located on Old Post Road between Route 1 and Woodbridge Avenue, commands attention — a gem among the suburban sprawl. Once surrounded by farmland, the house now has a Chevron gas station and the Peanut Bar nearby. These establishments stand at the intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Old Post Road where a Revolutionary War battle took place three hundred years ago.

David Sheehan, the president of the township's Historical Society, and his wife Starr, the society's corresponding secretary, bought the house in 1979. The home has been deemed eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

"I always admired it," said Starr. She used to pass the house and wondered what it looked like inside. One day, she saw a "For Sale" sign go up; soon after they bought the house.

Until the early 1970s, descendants of some of the township's earliest settlers, the Martins, lived in the home. Forman and Hanna Martin were the first to live in the house, built in 1830, with a section added in 1850.

"They were filthy rich people," David said of the Martins, who ran and owned an apple cider mill across the street. Martin first acquired land in the area in 1666, said Sheehan.

When the Sheehans originally looked into the house's history, they thought it once overlooked apple orchards. But the lack of apple trees across the street led Sheehan to believe "they processed apples from farmers" in the

area. The cider mill no longer exists.

In the home's downstairs hallway, the Sheehans have hung photographs of former residents. They got the photographs from a woman who used to visit the last Martin descendant living in the house.

Apparently, the house was crowded with various items the Martins had acquired over the years, said David.

People who had visited the house said "it was tough to walk around in here," he said, so the last Martin descendant to live in the home would tell people, "Take something."

The house has 32 windows, three fireplaces, Carpenters Gothic architecture with Italianate details, wide plank oak floors, a stone foundation and, on the side of the 1850 addition, a tree trunk for a main beam. The trunk, visible from a window in the basement, is in the process of petrification, said David.

Other unique features of the house include a crane in the kitchen's fireplace, where pots hung for cooking, and a mysterious circular hole cut in a bedroom floor and covered within a wooden disc.

"Inside there is an asbestos-lined box — and not a penny in it," said David.

The house is located in a section of Edison called Piscatawaytown. Although few people these days know the section as Piscatawaytown, the surrounding area has some unique historical features.

Old Post Road, David points out, is the oldest road in Middlesex County, and a graveyard near St. James Episcopal Church has the county's oldest grave (Mary Jones, 1692).

Also buried in the cemetery are six men killed during a Revolutionary War battle.

Past Premises is a weekly real estate feature.



Edison: Historic Buildings + Sites

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

ASK AT DESK

Copy #1

(1987)

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HISTORICSTROLL

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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 Forrester 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.

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.

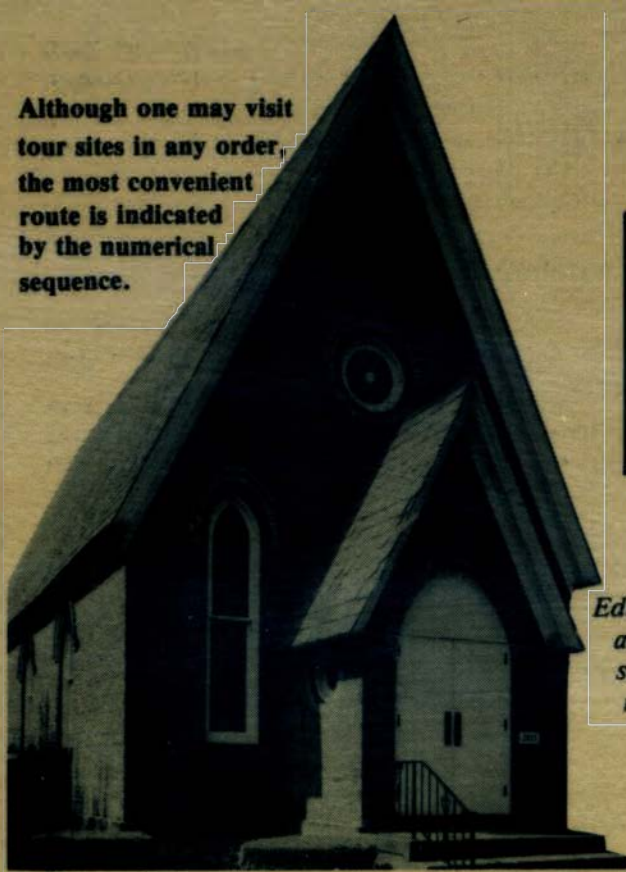
The town grew in the second half of the 19th century as the attractiveness of the rural landscape became more accessible with the opening of the area's second railroad, the Easton and Amboy Line. By the late 1800's, many residents "commuted" to jobs in New York and other parts of New Jersey.

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.

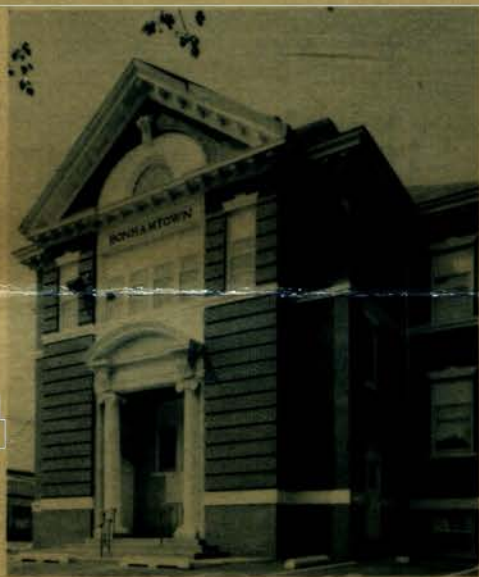
Although one may visit tour sites in any order, the most convenient route is indicated by the numerical sequence.



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

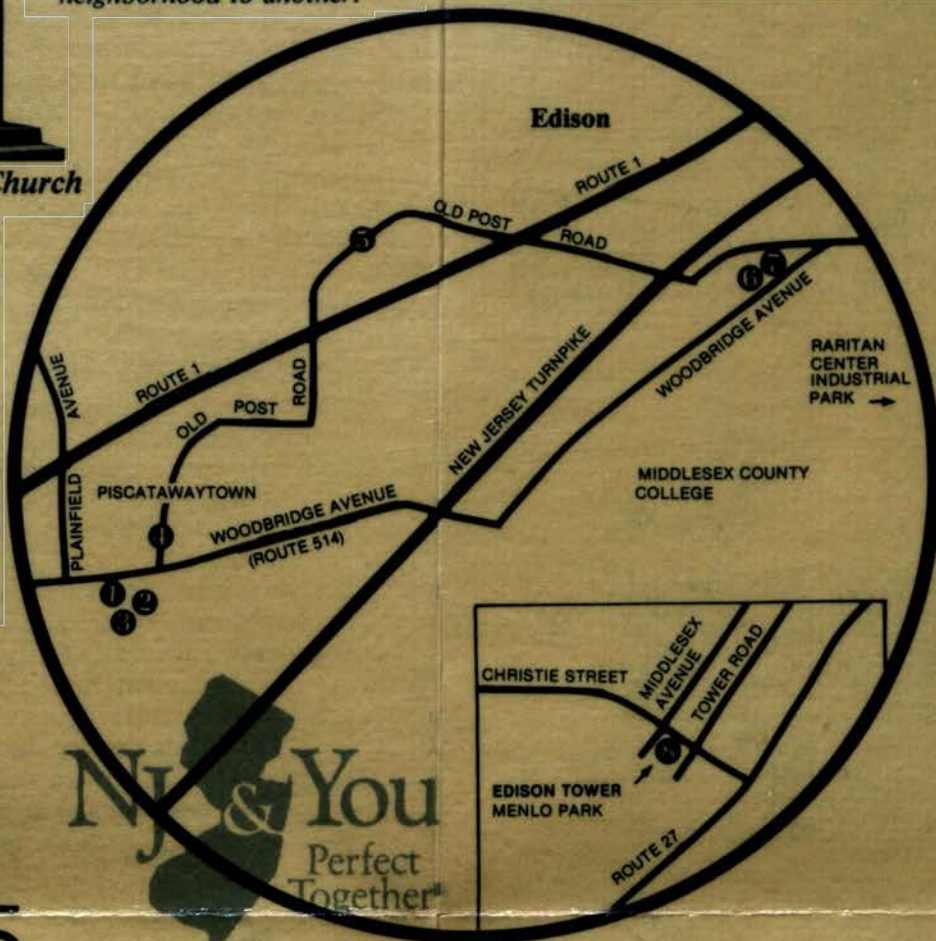
Park Way

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.



The Cemetery at St. James

Surrounding the St. James Episcopal Church is a large cemetery which contains the oldest marked grave in Middlesex County, that of Mrs. Mary Jones who died in 1693. Another tombstone, dated 1695, chronicles the deaths of two young brothers, the Hoopars, who succumbed from eating poisonous mushrooms. A mound marks the gravesite of six British soldiers who were killed in a Revolutionary War skirmish at the present day intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Old Post Road. The St. James Memorial Garden is located to the right of the church. A memorial tree and plaque are dedicated to the memory of Captain Ronald Mayercik, a parishioner who is missing-in-action in Vietnam.

Thomas A. Edison Memorial Tower

8

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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PROPOSED HISTORIC & CULTURAL SITES FOR INCLUSION IN THE
MIDDLESEX COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION MAP

Edison:
Historic Bldgs.
+ Sites

Thomas A. Edison Tower, Christie St.
Main Edison Library, 340 Plainfield Ave.
North Edison Branch Library, Grove Ave. & Library Place
Clara Barton Branch Library, Pleasant & Hoover Ave.
J.P. Stevens High School, Grove Ave.
Edison High School, Blvd. of Eagles

CHURCHES & CEMETERIES:

St. James Episcopal Church (1835). Cemetery (1600's), 2136 Woodbridge Ave.
Stelton Baptist Church (1925). Cemetery (1740's), 334 Plainfield Ave.
New Dover United Methodist Church (1849). Cemetery (1849), New Dover Road
Bonhamton Grace Reformed Church (1876?), Woodbridge Ave. & Grace St.
Piscatawaytown Baptist Church (1875), 2195 Woodbridge Ave.

RESTORATIONS:

Benjamin Shotwell Home (1775)--now the Klingler residence, 26 Runyons Lane
Carriage House (about 1857)--now the Trapp residence, 79 Cedar St.
Forman Martin Estate (about 1829)--now the Dipple residence, 30 Old Post Road
John Dunham Estate (about 1775)--now the Pukash residence, 33 Park Way
N.J. Home for Disabled Soldiers (1930), Menlo Park
Old Hickory Farm (about 1762)--now the McDermott residence, Inman Ave.
Martin's Dock (1677)--now the Scheer residence, 162 Silverlake Ave.
Edison Municipal Building, Woodbridge Ave.

HISTORIC MARKERS:

Bonhamton School (1908), 2825 Woodbridge Ave.
Piscatawaytown School (1913), 2060 Woodbridge Ave.
Stelton School (1923), Plainfield Ave.
Oak Tree School (1925), Oak Tree Rd.
Old Town Hall (pre 1890), Park way
Oak Tree Volunteer Fire Co., #1 (1929), Oak Tree Road
Van Buskirk Home (1752)--now the Graber residence, 744 New Dover Road
Yelencsics Homestead (about 1887)--now the Edison Recreation Bldg., Woodbridge Ave.
Mook residence (about 1811), 4001 Park Avenue
Martin Homestead (about 1886)--now the Dickenson residence, Mill Road
Bonhamton Union Hotel (1912)--now the tavern, Bo's Den
Raritan Arsenal (1917), Woodbridge Ave.
Camp Kilmer (about 1942), Plainfield Ave.
Hutchinson residence (about 1780), 2109 Woodbridge Ave.
Fitz Randolph House (about 1850)--now the Gough residence, 2111 Woodbridge Ave.
Beehive Oven House (about 1740)--now the Warren residence, 1032 Featherbed Lane
Letson House (pre 1876), Plainfield Ave.
Conover House (about 1876)--now the Winter residence, Mill Rd.

(Submitted 9/30/77 by Mrs. Aurora Bacon)

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ASK AT DESK

Old town comes back to life

Former residents to return

By JONATHAN SCHUPPE
STAFF WRITER

The subdued 15-minute car ride into North Edison ended with Patricia Lovett's shocked voice ringing out from the passenger's seat. Parked on a back road in the Robert E. Holmes housing complex, she was pointing toward the spot where her she and her husband raised their children more than three decades ago.

EDISON

Beyond a patch of trees and a strip mall, Lovett could just make out the property off Inman Avenue where their home of 10 years once stood.

"It's a Burger King!" she shrieked. "I can't believe it!"

As Lovett left her car and surveyed the location, memories rushed forth of her life in Potters Crossing, a settlement built by blacks on dozens of wooded acres and farmland early this century. In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, a federal urban-renewal program slowly took over the land.

Lovett grew up romping with neighborhood children through a nearby brook and pastures, picking blackberries and string beans, chasing livestock. As teen-agers they danced in juke joints and ate chicken and ribs at Smitty's Barbecue. The roads were dirt, the homes had no locks and running water was a luxury — a reconstruction of the Southern life many of

the residents had abandoned to seek opportunity in New Jersey.

Startling discoveries such as Lovett's will be repeated hundreds of times this week, when former Potters Crossing residents return from all over the country for the first time since they were forced off the land. The homecoming was organized by Potters Crossing residents who remain nearby and the Edison Housing Authority, which has managed the still-unfinished urban renewal of the area.

The reunion starts Saturday and continues the next day at the Robert E. Holmes apartment complex, built by the authority in 1959 as a place to relocate Potters Crossing residents. Many still live there today with their grandchildren and people who have moved in from nearby cities.

"We want the children to know the history of this neighborhood," said Felton King, the authority's chairman. "A lot of land was taken, and a lot of promises weren't kept."

Former residents say the first blacks settled in Potters Crossing in 1917: seven upper-middle-class families from New York City's Harlem who were attracted by the clean air, open space and safety of Edison, then named Raritan Township. They built homes near the railroad stop at Inman Avenue, where many commuted to their New York City jobs. The station was known as Potters Crossing, after



TANYA BREEN/Staff photographer

● Sisters Deotis and Eloise McMurrian sit in their Edison home and remember their lives in Potters Crossing, a settlement built by blacks early in the century and then decimated by a federal urban-renewal program in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

a farmer who sold many acres of land to the settlers.

By the 1930s, as the Great Depression gripped the country, the Potters Crossing settlement had gained a reputation for good, simple living. More blacks migrated from New Jersey and New York. As word spread, folks rode

the train north from Southern states, where economic opportunities for blacks lagged. Some bought land from farmers, while others squatted on land owned by the township or by someone they didn't know.

The neighborhood developed into a tightly knit community of clapboard

shacks and two-story brick homes, mom-and-pop stores, churches and a community center. Families butchered their own meat and grew their own vegetables. Men and women worked in local factories. Children attended Oak Tree School and Metuchen High School.

Local men organized a baseball team, which played semipro black squads from Newark and Jersey City. A Potters Crossing civic organization was created to represent the neighborhood's interests to township leaders.

Gradually, Potters Crossing fell out of step with the surrounding community. The dirt roads, outdoor sewage system and lack of electricity were regarded by outsiders as backward and crude. Much of the woods and farms around Inman Avenue and Grove Avenue — then called Edwards Avenue — remained undeveloped.

"The only lights you saw was a lightning bug, really," said Beatrice Austin of Rahway, who was born and raised in Potters Crossing.

In the 1950s, the township started to deny Potters Crossing residents permits to renovate their homes. Bad conditions grew unlivable, and sturdy homes fell into disrepair. In 1955, the township declared the area "blighted" and set up a Housing Authority to oversee a rebirth. The neighborhood's name officially was changed to North Edison.

The area was identified for a federal Office of Housing and Urban Development urban-renewal program, through which 170 acres would be transformed into low- and middle-income homes, apartments, town houses, senior-citizen housing, a church, a shopping center and light industry. According to the plan, residents would be relocated, their homes would be demolished and a new settlement — including houses affordable to the displaced — would be built.

For more than two decades, through innumerable plan changes, the community fought with the authority over relocation payments, the new developments and the undertones of urban renewal — critics labeled it "Negro removal." While some residents managed to sell their homes for equitable sums and relocate nearby, others held out. Many were forced out by condemnation and received payments too small to buy new homes in North Edison.

In the early 1970s, residents were offered less than \$10,000 for the land they had built homes on. New homes then cost from \$40,000 to \$80,000, according to newspaper accounts from the 1970s and '80s.

"We were forced to sell our property with no place to go," recalled T. Daniel Steward, now a Linden resident and a minister at the Supreme Council of the House of Jacob in North Edison.

James M. Scott Jr., who served as the authority's executive director from 1972 to 1994, argued that "the quality of life improved" with urban renewal. He also disputed claims that residents did not receive their buyout checks.

Marion Simpson Barnes, who with her two children was forced out of a home without running water and into the North Edison Gardens apartment complex, said urban renewal helped her family.

"It benefited me because I was able to move my children into a new place," said Barnes, who now lives in Hazlet.

Today urban renewal is complete — except for 14 acres on the north side of Inman Avenue slated for industrial use. The Greenwood and Colonial Square town houses are fully occupied, as is North Edison Gardens, which has been renamed in honor of the late civic leader Robert E. Holmes. Two-story colonials with well-trimmed lawns lie east of Grove Avenue and a shopping center and a senior citizen complex face Inman Avenue.

Few Potters Crossing residents live in the area. Most have moved to surrounding communities — Piscataway, East Brunswick, Linden, Roselle. Others have fanned across the country.

When they're asked about urban renewal, many say they're still frustrated by not being able to relocate within their community.

"Our children don't know what they did to this area," Austin said.

Those feelings will be drowned out next weekend, when former residents will greet old friends, trade stories, eat Southern-style cooking and discover what's happened to their old neighborhood.

In the crowd will be Albert Robinson, born and raised in Potters Crossing.

After urban renewal forced him out of his home, Robinson spent many years away from Edison. A few years ago he returned and moved into the Inman Avenue senior citizens complex.

"I decided I would go back to Potters Crossing to die in my home," he said. "This is where my roots are."

Business world

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The News Tribune, Woodbridge, N.J. — Sat., Sept. 8, 1984

14

New owners restoring charm to old landmark

By DONNA KENYON
News Tribune staff writer

EDISON — The new owners of a Bonhamtown tavern are working to restore some of the original charm to the township landmark.

Randall Dammers, 28, who formerly operated Randy's Place on Route 27, and Arthur Lauri, 32, a local building and plumbing contractor, recently purchased the structure at 2863 Woodbridge Ave.

Originally called the Union Hotel, the tavern was known as Bo's Den for about the past 10 years and has been renamed the Family Roost by its new owners.

In a recent interview at the tavern, the new owners, who purchased the landmark for \$500,000 from the former owners, the Borwegen family, said they have spent approximately \$40,000 so far on renovations.

The sale of the building and 2.5 acres of property was negotiated by Charles Frankel, assistant manager of the Berg Realtors — Better Homes and Gardens Mtuchen office.

The tavern refurbishment includes reopening of the original entryway, refinishing of the original cherrywood bannister adorning the staircase in the entry hall, and restoration

of the original flagstone fireplace in the dining room.

The new owners are also having the building's exterior refinished with stucco to resemble its original facade, and plan to construct balconies and a canopy over the entryway, Lauri said.

Two, two-bedroom apartments have been made out of the hotel rooms on the second story, where doors still retain their original hotel room numbers.

Lauri said he and his partner plan to turn the third story attic into offices for their businesses.

The pair also has even bigger plans for the tavern.

The owners hope to open a country and western lounge and banquet facilities to seat 400 in the rear of the building by next summer.

The two are now also partners in Randy's Catering, which Dammers had operated out of his former Route 27 restaurant for 10 years.

The building's kitchen has been remodeled, and a second kitchen is being set up to handle the nighttime traffic, to free the first kitchen for the catering service, Dammers said.

Lauri said he would eventually like to see arrangements made with bus companies which make runs to Atlantic City to have the tavern as a

pickup spot.

Lauri said a stone wall with seats surrounded the hotel in its heyday more than 100 years ago, and he plans to have a similar wall rebuilt for passengers waiting to board Atlantic City-bound buses.

Lauri said the property will also be landscaped and the parking lot paved within the next few months.

The Union Hotel, which has been officially designated as an historic site by Middlesex County, served as a stage coach stop and "neighborhood watering hole," according to David Sheehan, president of the Edison Historical Society.

Lauri said the hotel was constructed in the 1800s and underwent extensive renovation in 1912, when a dance hall originally at the back of the building was torn down. The building's freshly painted facade bears the date 1912.

The stage coach passed through the area on Old Post Road, which served as an early stage route from New Shrewsbury to Philadelphia.

The neighborhood acquired its name from Nicholas Bonham, a former freeholder, who with his wife owned 220 acres of land in the area. The property was allotted to them when Bonhamtown separated from Piscataway.



TNT photo

Old hotel

Structure at 2863 Woodbridge Ave. in Edison is the former Union Hotel in the Bonhamtown section of the township. It also housed Bo's Den, and now has been bought by two businessmen, who have renamed it the Family Roost. Photo at right shows interior of tavern.



Former school buildings see unusual reincarnations

HN 8/17/86

ASK AT DESK

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In the former Bonhamtown School on Woodbridge Avenue in Edison, Joseph C. Duncan operates a personnel service offering temporary and career placements.

By ALLAN HOFFMAN
Home News staff writer

Historic Buildings & Sites (Edison History)

Across Central New Jersey, schools have closed in recent years, bringing senior citizens, men and women in business and health-care experts into the classrooms where children once spent their days learning to read and multiply.

Older schools, no longer needed by communities with declining enrollments, have been sold in recent years to developers, hospitals and other parties looking for a business venture or a home.

The former school buildings, their owners say, offer an atmosphere with more character than the typical office buildings or residences being built in the area.

In Edison, several schools have been closed and subsequently sold.

In one of them, the Bonhamtown School, Joseph C. Duncan operates a personnel service offering temporary and career placements. The Woodbridge Avenue school, last used as the offices of Edison's Board of Education, was sold in 1982 to Thomas Sharlow, who renovated the building and later sold it to Duncan.

Personnel Line, Duncan's business, occupies the middle floor. Three other businesses rent space there.

"It works extremely well," said Duncan. "The architecture is warm and pretty."

Like other school buildings converted for non-educational uses, renovation was necessary. The building required new wiring and new plumbing, the floors were carpeted, and heating and air-conditioning put in.

But Duncan does not plan to alter the exterior.

"The charm of the building means a lot to me," he said. "I kind of like the nostalgia."

Nostalgia, of course, has a lot to do with the reasons why communities want to preserve schools, even as commercial buildings, rather than see them demolished.

A 1985 historic report for Middlesex County says the Bonhamtown School "was erected as a centerpiece of the community, with architecture reflecting pride in and aspirations for the public school system."

"Its well-handled early Colonial Revival styling, and its association with the now defunct community of Bonhamtown certainly make it eligible as part of a thematic nomination for outstanding schools in Middlesex County," the report says.

One interesting feature of the building, left intact, is the large "Bonhamtown" inscription on the front of the building — a community that exists in name.

Several years ago, Edison announced the closings of several schools, including the Clara Barton and Oak Tree elementary schools. The township preserved the sites.

When Clara Barton was sold, the township stipulated that it be used for senior citizens housing. Plans are still in the works for the construction of the apartments.

For a nominal fee, Edison gave the Oak Tree School to the Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Lifestyle Institute, an ambulatory care facility running a variety of programs aimed at the well, disabled and injured population.

Scott Gebhard, the institute's director, said the less sterile, less clinical nature of the building has been an asset. Built in 1908, the building required some renovation, but the institute has been able to make use of several of the features of the school, including the gym.