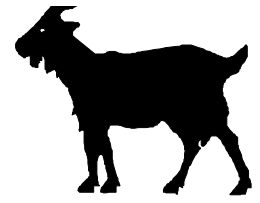


Nannygoats



CAMP KILMER

The Army's Biggest Hotel

by Walter R. Stochel, Jr.

Camp Kilmer was a vast U.S. Army base located in Edison and Piscataway, established by the United States Army for the deployment of troops overseas during World War II. At that time, it was the largest such facility built for that purpose in the country.

The camp was named for Alfred Joyce Kilmer, a sergeant in the Army during World War I, who was killed near the Ourcq River in France in July, 1918. He was posthumously awarded the *Croix de guerre* by the French for his heroism in combat. Prior to serving in the war, Kilmer had been an accomplished writer and poet, noted for his famous poem, "Trees," first published in 1913. He was married in Metuchen, at St. Luke's Church, to Aline Murray in 1908, and lived in New Brunswick. The camp was the first U.S. military base to be named after an enlisted man.

After four months of construction – and less than seven months after the United States' entry into World War II – Camp Kilmer was "activated" in June, 1942. This amazingly short period was quite a feat, considering all the land that had to be acquired, the 1,268 buildings that needed to be constructed, and the 29 miles of railroad track that had to be laid. Completed, the camp included 29 mess halls, 5 theaters, gyms, libraries, hospitals, and an 8,500-seat amphitheater called the "Kilmer Bowl."

As the Camp was used as a staging area for troops bound for the battlefield, it basically served as a giant sprawling resort for soldiers waiting to board ships in the New York harbor. During the



war, the camp processed 20 divisions on their way to and from the battlefield: in all, more than 5 million men passed through Camp Kilmer!

After the War, the camp went through periods of activation and deactivation. Notably, it was activated during the Korean War in the 1950s, and again in 1956 and 1957 when refugees from the Hungarian Revolution were housed at the camp.

Over the past five decades, the Federal Government has disposed of most of the Camp, with parcels of land going to Rutgers' Livingston Campus, the Middlesex County Vo-Tech High School, the Kilmer Postal Facility, the Kilmer Motor Vehicle Inspection Station, ball fields, parks, housing, and industrial areas. The few remaining Army facilities will be closed in the near future.

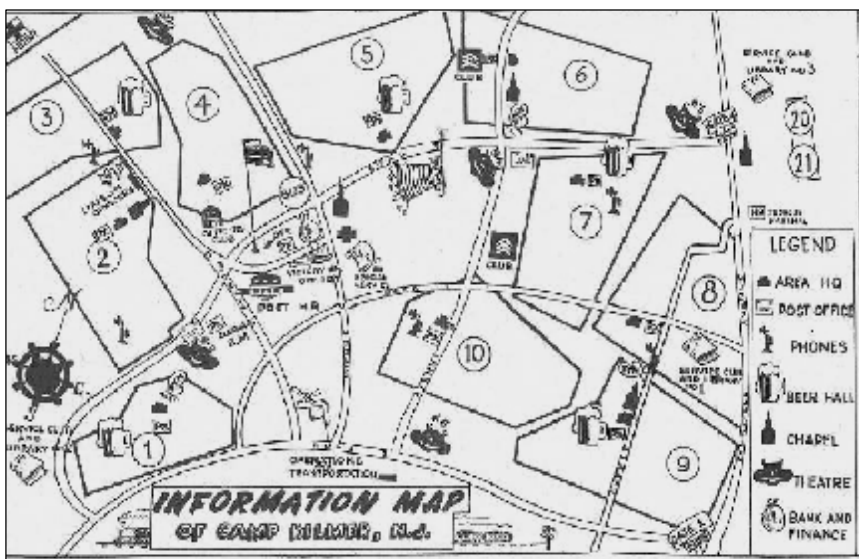
Some of the original Camp Kilmer buildings remain in use: the Job Corps Academy on Plainfield Avenue uses several of the buildings, some of the old warehouses on Cedar Lane are in use by Rutgers University, and the Timothy Christian School on Ethel Road also contains a few.

In 2006, Eagle Scout Carl Langhoff built an informational kiosk on Kilmer Road to tell the public more about the history and significance of this camp, which was once the Army's biggest hotel, and home for a short time to millions of American soldiers serving their country in the war overseas.

While there is a great deal of information available about Camp Kilmer itself, the Society does not have many records by or about local residents who have a connection to the camp. In this issue of *Nannygoats*, we are lucky to be able to include information from Society member, Scott Zederbaum, whose father passed through the camp, and also from Mary Ann Takash, wife of Society Board member Bob Takash, who lived at the Camp during the 1950s.

See Pages 4, 5, and 6 for more on Camp Kilmer.

Above: Postcard image of Camp Kilmer, ca. 1944.
Left: A map of the camp included in the ca. 1945 orientation booklet donated by Scott Zederbaum.



The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society was founded in 1974 with the primary purpose of promoting an interest in and appreciation of the history of the Borough of Metuchen and of Edison Township.

The First Baptist Church of Metuchen

A number of Society members and the public braved the vestiges of Hurricane Hanna on Saturday, September 6, 2008 to learn about the history of the First

Baptist Church of Metuchen,

which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Attendees saw a slide show of historic photographs,

heard from two 50-

year members of the church, and were able to look through the church's extensive collection of documents and memorabilia, including the 75th Anniversary plate above. The Society would like to extend special thanks to all of the speakers: Dr. James Miller (Sr. Pastor), Cora Shersick, Art Peerson, and Church Historian and Society Board Member Marilyn Langholff, who was instrumental in arranging for the program. The amount of research Mrs. Langholff has done in compiling the church's history is so impressive that the Society hopes to feature the church's history in a future *Nannygoats*.



The News From Menlo Park...

So many things are happening at the Edison Memorial Tower & Menlo Park Museum...

- This past spring, the preliminary plan for the new Menlo Park educational facility was unveiled and has generated a great deal of excitement about the site's future role within the community.
- Restoration of the Tower is also moving forward, and the EMTC is now ready to proceed with the removal of an exploratory panel and the restoration phases.
- A new training program has been established for volunteers who would like to help out at the museum, especially on Thursdays and Fridays, or with any of the EMTC committees' work. If you are interested, please contact Ileana Rivera at 732-494-4194.
- Expanded museum hours are now in effect: Thursday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (large groups can call ahead to make special arrangements). New exhibits encompassing Edison's entire scope of work at Menlo Park are on display, and physical improvements of the museum building are underway. The museum's gift shop is also now stocked with a wide variety of new items, including t-shirts, bags, coasters, magnets, pens, bracelets, and books for all ages.
- The EMTC has recently received several grant awards, including a \$2125 grant from the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission for archival supplies, a \$50,000 Edison Township Community Development Block Grant to make the museum ADA-accessible, and a \$375,000 Middlesex County Open Space Trust Funds grant for use towards restoring the Tower.

Interested in learning more about what is going on at the Tower? Watch for "Light News," the EMTC's Fall newsletter at your local library, or call 732-494-4194 for a copy.

New in the Collection...

The Society would like to thank Bill and Linda Farley for their recent donation of a 1940 photograph of the Camp Kiddie Keep Well staff. Some, but not all, of the staff's names are included on the photograph. If you recognize any of these people, please let the Society know.

We also wish to acknowledge Jean Mayes' gift of a pamphlet about "The Little School of Arts & Letters," which we have happily added to our collection.

We plan to have these items, as well as other recent donations to the Society, on display at our Local History Days in February, 2009.



The following essay was written in 1936 by Gertrude Caroline Leis, while she was a senior at Metuchen High School, and published in that year's edition of the high school yearbook. At that time, three years before the start of World War II and five years before the United States' entry into the war, she was still a teenager and too young to remember World War I personally.

Miss Leis was a lifelong Metuchen resident and a long-time Honorary Member of the Society. She became active in the Society in the early 1970s, served as its Recording Secretary, and was instrumental in developing both the membership and genealogy departments. Miss Leis passed away in August, 2007, at the age of 89.

Off To War

The blowing of bugles, the beating of drums, grand parades, and every man is ready to enlist. Lines form outside the enlisting offices consisting of men from every class. Men who never would have spoken to each other before become acquainted and tell their stories. Some of these stories I will relate.

Said the first man who was shabbily, but neatly, dressed;

"I was born on a large ranch in Arizona of wealthy and respectable parents. Now you see me as a poor-looking roamer of the slums. But I'm not down yet, for I still have faith and love for what each day brings me. I won't give up even when at last I cross to the Great Beyond. Then I'll get my reward for all these years of waiting. That's why I'm enlisting."

Next spoke the son of an influential doctor of one of the large cities: "My father wants me to stay in America and become a great surgeon, but it isn't in me to stay. I have to go over the sea to ease and help my fellow-men. Anything that I can do will make me happy. I'll join the Medical Corps and help bring in the wounded from the battlefield. To aid my neighbor is my only wish."

"Who wants to work over the wounded? What fun would that be?" These reckless words were spoken by a feverish looking young man. "I want to travel, parade, kill the enemy, anything but stay home and smother on a farm. Why does everyone say 'Join the Navy, or Army, and see world' if we are not to have any fun? If you're to spend your time playing nursemaid why leave home? I want to march, capture towns, and receive medals to show to all my friends who stayed behind. Isn't that what war is for?"

Three men have stated their opinions and who are you or I to say which is right or wrong? Each one of us for himself must decide what he thinks is best. Who would answer the last youth who doesn't know why he's fighting? It is true that each side is out to fight the enemy and capture whatever towns he can, but is that the right way to treat our neighbors? The world would be better if each person thought to help his neighbor as the doctor's son thought and not kill as many as he could. After all, what is left when the drums stop, the bugles cease their echoes, when millions of soldiers are dead, billions of dollars wasted, and people at home suffering because of the results of the war?

Year after year in every country of the world people are suffering because of the ignorance of men when war threatens. They only think of the vacant glory, not of the consequences.. If all would think of war as Sherman did perhaps there would not be any war. The best thing to do is to educate all people against war.

Gertrude Leis, '36

Interested in reading previous issues of *Nannygoats*? All of our back issues are available online at the Society's website at www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org

A soldier who passed through Camp Kilmer... and came back!

The following is based on information submitted by Scott B. Zederbaum of Edison, who recently donated to the Society a copy of a ca. 1945 Camp Kilmer orientation booklet, designed for returning soldiers about to be discharged. Scott has also been kind enough to provide a great deal of information about his father's time at the camp and during WW II.

Scott's father, Herman (Zeke) Zederbaum, was born in the Bronx on May 7, 1921. When he was 18, he married Ida Lipschitz and they had one daughter before he was drafted into the Army. After the war, the Zederbaums had four more children and moved to the Fords section of Woodbridge, where Zeke began a career as a welder. He was badly injured in a fire at his workplace, Aula Chemicals, Inc. of Elizabeth, in March, 1954. After a lengthy recovery, he went to technical school to become a licensed electrician and contractor. He and his family moved to Oliver Avenue in Edison in 1964, and he opened the Fix-It Electric Company in Edison. He was also active as a past president for the Middlesex County Chapter of the NJ State Electrical Contractors Association, and served as a Leader for the Cub Scout Webelos, Pack 71. He remained an Edison resident

until his death at age 54 in June, 1975.

His son Scott, who was only 10 years old at the time of his father's death, has since preserved his memory through a collection of photographs and documents about his father's life and experiences.

While serving with the 100th Infantry, 325th Engineers Battalion, Company C, Zeke passed through Camp Kilmer in 1944 on his way from Fort Bragg to join the combat in the European theater of operations in France and Germany. He was an amateur photographer, and not only took photographs during his time overseas, but also wrote twenty-two pages of memoirs about his experiences after landing in France. Mr. Zederbaum was eventually decorated for his expertise in explosives and demolition, and the 100th Infantry's history is well documented: they experienced 185 days of uninterrupted ground combat, during which time they liberated or captured over 400 cities, towns, and villages and defeated major elements of eight German divisions.

Right: PFC Herman "Zeke" Zederbaum, ca. 1944. Photograph courtesy of his son, Scott Zederbaum.



The following excerpts are from Zeke Zederbaum's wartime memoirs. While this depicts the everyday marches and tasks, other portions describe in great detail the more horrifying aspects of war that PFC Zederbaum and his fellow troops experienced.

On the 29th of October we started out on a 300 mile journey to the front. It took us three days and we were all a bit beat by the time we arrived. One night we spent in a field near a small town. We burned grape vines to cook our food and keep us warm. The next night we slept in the National Park of Dijon. During the night a Jeep ran over one of the boys while he was sleeping in his bedroll. I don't know how bad he was hurt but I do remember all the boys envying him since he was going right back to America. Our last night, before we hit the line, we bivouacked in an old German camp...

We stayed here for a few days and then we moved up the line. It was the 1st of November, we camped in the woods outside of the town of LaSalle... every day we were issued two cans of "C" rations with biscuits and were sent out on some job that usually took from early morn until long after the sun went down to complete.

Above Left: PFC Zederbaum's C Company in France. Below Left: the "Eagle's Nest" in Germany. Both photographs were taken by Zeke Zederbaum while he was on duty overseas.

Childhood Memories of Camp Kilmer...

As a child, Edison resident Mary Ann Takash lived at Camp Kilmer for a couple of years. Her father was in the U.S. Army, and they had lived at Camp Pickett in Virginia prior to moving to Camp Kilmer in the early 1950s.

She and her family lived in a barracks building that had been converted into four apartments. They had a second floor apartment with bedrooms, a kitchen, and a porch. Other families lived in the surrounding barracks, and it was not far from the camp's pool. "It wasn't a bad place to live, there were trees, and we had the upstairs porch," Mary Ann has said.

Mary Ann remembers taking the Army bus to first grade at St. Paul's School in Highland Park. The bus had a soldier stationed on it to keep the unruly students in order, and also took children to the public school in New Brunswick.

Parties were given at the Officer's Club, which is now part of the Job Corps campus, for Christmas and other occasions. They could swim in the pool, and go bicycle riding. Mary Ann had a older friend named Ida with whom she would ride bikes to the camp hospital. Once there, they would deliver newspapers to the recuperating soldiers. It was at this hospital that Mary Ann's brother was born.

The camp was deactivated while Mary Ann and her family lived there and, after a couple of years, her father left the Army to work at Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick. She and her family then moved to a new house on the Lincoln Highway, only about two miles away from the camp.



A young Mary Ann in 1951, posing in her Communion dress, at Camp Kilmer.



The front cover of the ca. 1945 orientation booklet donated by Scott Zederbaum. Note the rail line and train leading to Camp Kilmer.

In order to move five million soldiers in and out of Camp Kilmer, an extensive railroad system had to be built.

The camp was located next to the Pennsylvania Railroad. To get the northbound troop trains into the camp without switching across four tracks, a long "balloon track" was created where the trains would loop over the Pennsy corridor, and then southbound into the Camp. The Edison Municipal Building is located where the balloon track once was, and the bridge still exists over the Northeast Corridor.

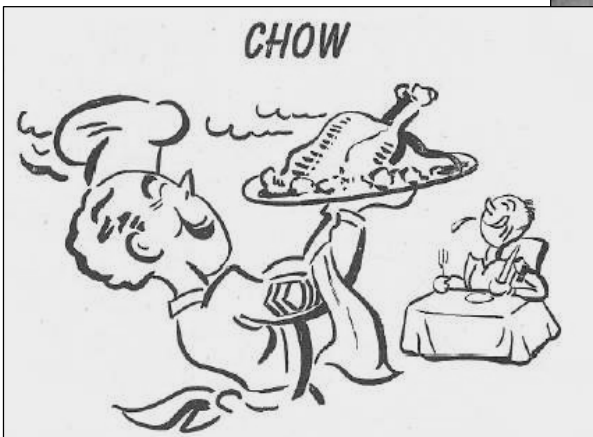
There was a connection to the Reading Railroad just north of New Durham Road. Present day Reading Road, about where the Durham Woods apartments are now, was the location of this "y" connection. This section of railroad crossed Talmadge Road near New Brunswick Avenue and linked to the southbound balloon track.

The connection to the Lehigh Valley Railroad took place behind the Gulton factory in Metuchen. This "Y" (weye) connection then spurred into the Reading Railroad connection to the west. The berm that elevated this corridor is still visible in the back of Edison Woods Park, on Karen Place. Further up in South Plainfield there was a spur that linked to the northbound main line of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

Inside the Camp, a network of sidings directed the trains to the appropriate locations so that troops could disembark/embark or supplies could be unloaded. *Many thanks to Walter R. Stochel, Jr for this information about the railroad lines in & around Camp Kilmer.*

For on-line access to the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society's newsletters, membership information, program announcements, historic photographs, merchandise, and more, please visit our website at www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org.

More of the Camp...



After you have been billeted stay in your barracks until your Unit or Group Commander returns to take you to chow. A tight schedule has been set up which requires that you eat at the time designated or else the whole thing will go haywire. For later meals a mess schedule is posted in your barracks. Enlisted men will take with them their knife, fork and spoon. Officers will not need them—but we'll collect "two bits" on the line before each meal from them.

Do you have any memories of Camp Kilmer, or any memorabilia you would like to share with the Society? We'd love to hear from you! Please contact us at 732-906-0529 or via email at wstochel@earthlink.net.



Above: The page on "Chow" from the ca. 1945 orientation booklet.

Top Right: Photograph of a "chow" line, ca. 1945.

Above: A photo postcard image of soldiers at the Joyce Kilmer memorial tablet at the camp.

Left: The "Recreation" page from the orientation booklet. Note the "unusual club atmosphere" to the themed PX beer halls: Gay '90s, Circus, Barn, Pirate's Den, and Ranch. Also, one wonders what kind of performances took place at the amphitheatre called the "Kilmer Bowl."



Although your schedule will be full, you undoubtedly will have time to take advantage of our outstanding recreation facilities. You will find a Daily Bulletin on your barracks' bulletin board informing you of current entertainment at theatres, clubs, etc. We want you to enjoy them to the fullest extent but remember take it easy. Don't take 'em apart, because there are thousands of men who will follow you and who should be given an opportunity to use them. We haven't the time nor the money to repair or replace them every day. So be a good sport and use your head!

POST EXCHANGES—in each area recognized by their red and yellow color.

- Haircuts: There's a barber shop in each area PX.
- Enlisted men's clothing store at Building #1406.

THEATRES—Five War Department theatres painted blue.

SERVICE CLUBS—Three, located in Area #1, Area #3 and Area #21.

KILMER BOWL—Outdoor amphitheatre on Road 3, near Theatre #4.

OFFICERS' Club—Building 139, across from Post Headquarters, and flag pole.

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS' Club—Buildings #1511 and #606.

OFFICERS' POST EXCHANGE #13—Building #1303, near Post Headquarters. Officers' uniforms are available here.

VICTORY ROOM—Officers' Restaurant, across from Officers' Post Exchange.



PX BEER HALLS—Unusual club atmosphere (Gay '90's, Area #1; Pirate's Den, Area #3; Circus, Area #3; Ranch, Area #7; Barn, Area #9).

For those who wish to engage in athletic sports, there are handball courts, tennis courts, and gymnasium with equipment available. Your Area Headquarters will give you information concerning these.

Interested in Becoming a Nannygoats Contributor?

Do you have an interesting story, fact, or image that you think would make a good addition to a future issue of *Nannygoats*? If so, please contact the Editor... If your submission is published, we'll send you a complimentary copy of the 1888 "Crumbs of Comfort" history and cookbook! The submission deadline for the Winter/Spring 2009 issue is January 10, 2009.

Nannygoats Editor
Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
P.O. Box 61
Metuchen, NJ 08840
ayersallenhouse@msn.com
732-452-1381

Borough Improvement League

Founded in 1901, the "BIL" is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, affiliated with the GFWC and NJSFWC Womens' Clubs, devoted to community service & preserving the ca. 1807 Old Franklin School on Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen.



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Ever wanted to know more about the history of your house? When it was built, who lived there, or if there is a historic photograph of it?

Our Grimstead Room Archives may hold the answer...

The Society's Grimstead Room archives, containing thousands of local history images and documents, are located at the Metuchen Public Library and guided access to the collections is available from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on the following upcoming Saturdays: October 11, November 1, and December 6. For more information, contact Tyreen Reuter at 732-452-1381 or ayersallenhouse@msn.com.

Come Visit Us and Find out!

Published by

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
P.O. Box 61, Metuchen, NJ 08840
Tyreen A. Reuter, Editor
732-452-1381
ayersallenhouse@msn.com

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The name of the newsletter, "Nannygoats," is taken from the title of a collection of anecdotes, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area, mostly during the 1930s, which make up 80 percent of the Historical Society's photographic collection. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society dedicates this publication to Lloyd Grimstead, as a way of honoring him for collecting and recording so much of our local history.

The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Boro Ace Home & Garden Center

655 Middlesex Ave.
Metuchen, N.J. 08840
Phone: (732) 548-8974
FAX: (732) 548-8021



Steve Epstein
President

METUCHEN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

320 Main Street, Suite B, Metuchen, NJ 08840
www.metuchenchamber.com



Office Phone: (732) 548-2964
Office Fax: (732) 548-1091
Office E-mail: metuchen.chamber@verizon.net

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Upcoming Programs & Events

WALKING TOUR OF MENLO PARK

**Sunday, October 26, 2008
11:00 a.m.**

Join Society President Walter R. Stochel, Jr. for a walking tour of the historic Menlo Park site, where Thomas A. Edison and his team's "invention factory" developed more than 400 patents. To join the tour, meet outside the museum, located at 37 Christie Street in Edison, at 11:00 a.m.

HISTORY OF THE METUCHEN POST OFFICE

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 AT 3:30 P.M.

The Society is delighted to have Kevin Hale, one of our Board Members, present a program on the history of the Metuchen Post Office. This past spring, Mr. Hale was successful in having the post office building on Main Street placed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

What makes this building so significant? Join us on November 23rd to find out! The program will take place at the Old Franklin School, 491 Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen, and will be followed by a reception of light refreshments.



*These programs are free and open to the public, and guests are welcome.
For more information, please call Steve at 732-452-1381.*



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

**Save the date for our upcoming Local History Days! Yes, you've got that right...
we are extending our ever popular Local History Day to an *entire weekend*...
February 7 and 8, 2009! Watch your mail and the local newspaper for more details.**