

# WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE CEMETERY NOW?

In July of 2015, in cooperation with a local girl scout, the Society hosted a Cemetery Workshop where participants were taught how to safely clean and maintain historic stones. A great deal of work was done and the Society was looking into grant funding for preservation planning and projects for the cemetery.

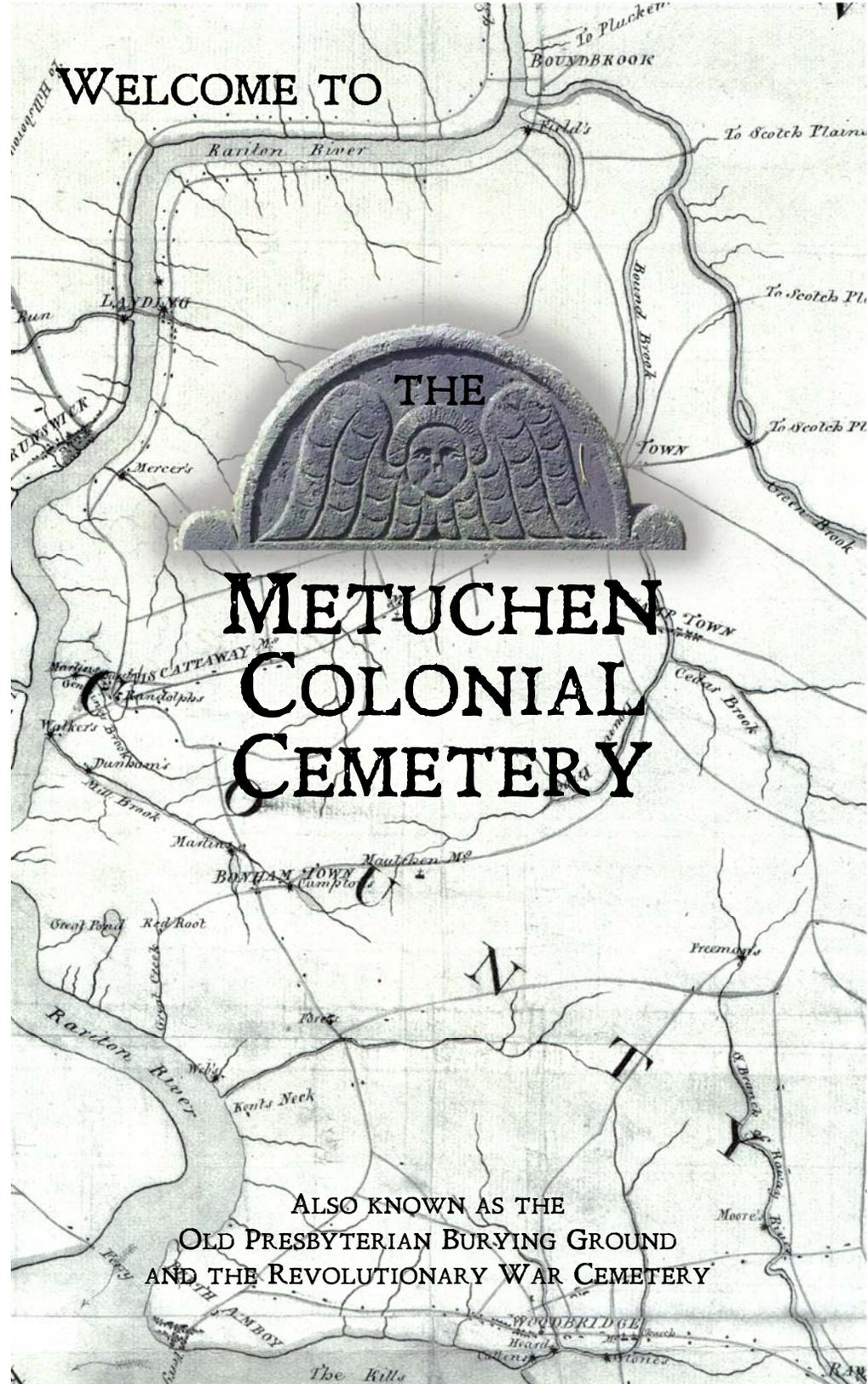


Unfortunately, the progress in the site's restoration came to an abrupt stop in 2016 when the cemetery was vandalized one evening in August. Some of the stones were heaved up and tossed, some pushed over, and many cracked. The vandals were never found. The Society raised money for the repairs while the Borough filed insurance claims for the damage. A college student volunteered to help document the stones and create a visitor's guide for when the site could be safely visited again.

During the summer of 2018, the Borough completed tree work required before the repair work could be conducted, and repairs began in the Fall, following a large volunteer cleanup. One stone, unable to be repaired, was replaced in the summer of 2019 by a reproduction fabricated locally. Repairs to the stones are ongoing, with the goal of addressing not only those damaged by vandalism but those disrupted by falling branches, tree roots, etc.

If you would like to volunteer with the cemetery committee, contact: [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org). To contribute financially to the cause, visit [www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org) or send a check earmarked to the Cemetery Fund made out to the M.E.H.S. at PO Box 61, Metuchen, NJ 08840.

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The site reflects Metuchen's early European settlement and is the resting place of at least 59 Revolutionary War soldiers & 7 Patriots. In 1777, General Washington referenced Metuchen Meetinghouse in letters regarding local skirmishes. Many of the extant markers are notable for their early American folk art motifs - Death's Head, Cherub, Urn, & Willow - created by carvers such as Ward, Price, Hand, & Osborne.

## CEMETERY HISTORY

Metuchen's Old Colonial Cemetery was established between 1715 and 1730 as the burying ground associated with the Presbyterian Church. Just over 1 acre, it contains approximately 500 marked graves and 60 unmarked graves from the early 1700s to the late 1800s. Of these, 59 are graves of Revolutionary War soldiers and 7 are "Patriots" who contributed to the cause.

The first Metuchen meetinghouse was an 8-sided building located near the southeast corner of the site. After it burned, a new building was constructed on the same site and then later enlarged in 1753. In 1777, George Washington referenced the Metuchen Meeting House in letters regarding skirmishes in the area. The meeting house was expanded again in 1792, but the congregation continued to grow and in 1836 the new Presbyterian Church was built on the east side of Main Street and the original meetinghouse was demolished. That same year the railroad was laid through Metuchen and ran along on the northern edge of the cemetery. In 1887 the railroad bought the property along the northern edge of the cemetery as part of a track expansion project and the remains from that section were reinterred in the new Presbyterian Cemetery located on eastern side of Main Street.

As time passed and the cemetery was no longer in active use, its condition declined. Headstones were vandalized; weather and acid rain wore off the face of some of the stones. In 1974, the Presbyterian Church donated the cemetery to the Borough, with the hope that it would be better cared for, but little was done until the 1990s when the Cemetery Committee of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society was formed and raised money to remove old trees, install flagpoles, benches, a new staircase, and a fence. After a great deal of work done by the Society and numerous Eagle Scout projects, the cemetery became more accessible, the site of the original meeting house was marked, and signage was placed to interpret the site to visitors. The Historical Society assists the Borough with maintaining the site wherever possible, including accepting donations towards the repairs of damaged stones.

\*\*Borough-owned

\*\*Open dawn to dusk daily

\*\*Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue



## Please Visit Safely!

- Although a gravestone may look sturdily placed in the ground, it may not be. Often the slightest nudge will not only shift a stone on its base, but may just as easily topple the stone. The pressure of sitting on, leaning onto, or resting items against a gravestone can cause significant structural damage to the stone, or worse - cause physical injuries.
- Tread carefully! Expect uneven, rocky, sandy, wet or spongy ground. Be sure of your footing at all times.
- Beware of sharp objects – broken stones, protruding tree roots, broken glass and torn aluminum bottles. Wear gloves when you aren't sure what you are touching; cemeteries can be sites where used drug needles and paraphernalia are found.
- Watch for snakes, in-ground wasps' nests, and other pests.
- Beware of poison ivy, poison oak, etc.
- Do NOT take grave rubbings; can damage markers, so please avoid this practice. Use a camera to record a grave, adjusting light and contrast can help bring out images and words on faded stones.



POISON IVY



POISON OAK



POISON SUMAC

