

# Replica of Wenonah teahouse labor of love

By **BERNIE WEISENFELD**  
Courier-Post Staff

## EVER WONDER?

### WENONAH

Borough skeptics thought it was Forsman's folly.

It's history, replied Chuck Forsman.

The Japanese teahouse in the woods is even more than that — more than most trail-walkers in the Wenonah conservation area realize.

The structure near Comey's Lake is the story of a wealthy manufacturer, a passion for open space conservation and the volunteer efforts of a local contractor to replace a small piece of Wenonah history.

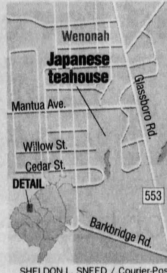
"It fell down, and now we've got it restored," said Forsman, a longtime borough environmental commission member, speak-

ing of the teahouse that wealthy Philadelphia hat maker Robert H. Comey built in 1911.

"You won't find anyone in town who isn't thrilled about that project," said borough administrator Dawn Marie Human. "It's such a classic fixture."

Designed for social occasions, the gazebo-like structure stood next to a lake Comey created behind his mansion on his 100-acre estate off Mantua Avenue.

At the foot of the wood-frame teahouse was a five-level amphitheater where guests sat for concerts. To one side was a picturesque 50-foot arched wooden bridge Comey had constructed over a stream.



SHELDON L. SNEED / Courier-Post

Rowboats from his lakeside boathouse glided beneath.

Japanese influence was strong in the United States in the early 1900s, and Comey wanted something unusual and colorful for his parties, said Forsman, who has collected news ac-

counts and photographs about the wealthy Wenonah resident.

Through friendships with executives of the RCA Victor Co. in Camden, said Forsman, Comey hosted many celebrities who made records at Victor. The likes of opera titan Enrico Caruso and comic genius Groucho Marx performed under the slate teahouse roof for guests in their finest clothing, he said.

"At night, they'd have Japanese lanterns lit all the way around the lake," said Forsman, 69, a retired Mobil research employee who lives near the former Comey estate.

But nature began to reclaim the scene after the Comey property passed into other hands and the land was subdivided.

The teahouse was re-



MICHAEL SCHWARTZ / Courier-Post

**A replica of the Japanese teahouse built in 1911 by a wealthy manufacturer is nestled in the Wenonah woods. Chuck Forsman led volunteers in building it.**

paired in 1972 for the 40th birthday party of another owner at the time. But by the early 1990s, the teahouse and bridge were rotting and the amphitheater was overgrown with

vines. Forsman saw Comey's creations and the woods around it as treasures the borough should keep. He

See **TEAHOUSE**, Page 2B

## Replica of Wenonah teahouse labor of love p23

Clipped By:



**bob\_thomas\_wk**  
Thu, Apr 8, 2021