

# WENONAH

## Historical Society Newsletter



May 2002  
Published by the  
Historical Society  
of Wenonah, NJ

## ALL AROUND TOWN

### Garden Fair

The Wenonah Lake is having a fundraiser on May 18, 2002. There will be a plant sale and fair in the Wenonah Park from 10:00am-12:00pm.

A garden tour of some of our resident's home (including our Mayor) will start at 11:00am. For more information, contact Bernadette Faix at 468-4912.

### Historical Society Picnic at Wenonah Lake

We will have our annual picnic at the lake on June 14, 2002. Join us for food and fun and good conversation. We provide the hotdogs and ice tea; we ask everyone to bring a share dish. For more information contact Vicki McCall at 589-2774.

### Victorian Herb Garden

RACHEL KNISELL

Thanks to Rachael Knissel for all her hard work as she cares for the Victorian Herb Garden at the Community Center. Her painstaking attention to this project keeps this garden looking beautiful for our visitors. If you happen to walk by while Rachael is "trimming", you may even be the beneficiary of some aromatic herbs!

### Fourth of July

YES, it is almost that time again! Roco Doto has offered to do a historical slide presentation at the Community Center between 11:00am and 1:00 pm. He has given this presentation at several local organizations and it has been very well received. If you would like to help out, please let us know! Look for more on this in June's newsletter.

We will be reintroducing the House Decorating Contest this year. The theme for this year's parade is "A Salute to America's Heroes." The House decorations can be in this theme or any patriotic manner.

We will have judges going around and awards will be given during the evening ceremonies. All participants will receive an 8 x 10 photo of their decorated home compliments of Tomorrow's Treasures, Inc. of Woodbury Heights, NJ (Thanks to George Braun for this ongoing tradition!). Applications will be available at the Wenonah Library. Look for more information in the June newsletter.

### Japanese Teahouse Restoration

The Environmental Commission has been working VERY HARD to restore the Comey Lake Japanese Tea House. This project was the brainchild of Chuck Forsman and his perseverance is paying off! The commitment of people like Chuck Forsman, Bob Bevilaqua, and John Schad is truly appreciated. We thank the Environmental Commission for their efforts to bring back to life a monumental historic structure in this town. Anyone interested in donating to this cause can contact Chuck Forsman at 304 Mohawk Dr, Wenonah, NJ 08090. Look for updates and an article on this project in upcoming letters!

### Help Needed

We need help in contributing to the newsletter. Anyone who can spare an hour a month to do the research for "Milton Webb's 100 Years Ago" PLEASE, PLEASE CALL US!

We can start you off with Milton's meticulous files. Groundwork is already done for much of this. This is an opportunity to really get to know your town!

### How to Contact Us

Mail: WHS - PO. Box 32  
Wenonah, NJ 08090-0032

E-mail: [wenonahhistoricalnews@comcast.net](mailto:wenonahhistoricalnews@comcast.net)

### President's Letter

April's program featured a moving slide presentation by Arnold Karp that portrayed events from the September 11th attacks. The presentation brought home the importance of remembering those events and realizing the ongoing importance of protecting our country. Thank you Arnie for sharing with us your own personal experiences and reminding us that the events of September 11th should not be forgotten are taken lightly.

We have a full business schedule for the May meeting and it is important that we have a good turnout. There are some exciting events coming up and of course the Fourth of July is just around the corner! There are plenty of fun projects for you to participate in, so, even if you've never volunteered before, here is your chance to do your part!

There are many members who no longer reside in Wenonah. We would love to get some letters from you about your life in Wenonah that we could put in the newsletter. Anyone who would like to share an experience, please write in!

I look forward to seeing you Friday night.

-Vicki McCall

# The Railroad and Wenonah, Part 2

Sixth in a series of articles about Wenonah's heritage.  
Compiled by Jack C. Sheppard Sr.

Continued from our April issue...

The manure problem created heated arguments. With the mixing of Philadelphia commuters and Wenonah House guests who used the passenger service of the railroad, and farmers who used the freight service there was bound to be a conflict. The commuters declared the unloading of manure in the center of town a nuisance and the railroad was requested to build a siding near the water pumping station to unload the manure. However some farmers were not satisfied with the new location and wrote letters claiming they would never use the railroad again. The siding was installed and the farmers did use it. Also the commuters did attempt to prevent freight trains from stopping more than five minutes and they complained of excessive locomotive whistling at night.

Freight service accelerated. Joseph Cattell shipped his baskets of sweet potatoes to the Philadelphia markets and T.P. Darlington, a local poultry shipper, sent four tons of poultry a week out of the Wenonah Station. Sweet potatoes, watermelons and tomatoes were leading farm crops. Charles Buckman continued to operate his Wenonah Mills at the millpond, John Steward operated a steam corn sheller, and on a sad note, John Kromer's cow died from eating potato vines sprinkled with Paris Green. One farmer boasted of a hog that weighed 775 pounds and another farmer displayed a watermelon in Thomas Savage's tobacco shop that weighed 63 pounds. The story was reported in the newspaper that "two young ladies were told they could have the watermelon for nothing if they could carry it away without letting it down to rest on the way. The ladies put the watermelon in a clothes basket and carted it home." The Duell and Perry canning house was still purchasing the farmers'

tomatoes and one progressive farmer succeeded in raising very large potatoes by using chemical fertilizer.

The town was growing at a rapid pace and by the early 1890's the old "New Mantua Station" was deemed inadequate to handle the number of people coming to Wenonah. Also, the Wenonah House, originally constructed in 1871, was apparently not attractive or large enough to provide the drawing power the railroad company felt was necessary for the greater number of passengers they sought.

A news article in April 1893 put it this way; "The Wenonah Inn Company is just completing a magnificent hotel designed to accommodate 150 guests." The erection of this hotel, which replaced the Wenonah House, was reportedly one of the conditions under which the West Jersey Railroad erected a handsome railroad station of rough-faced Pompeian bricks to "harmonize with general improvements and surroundings of the Borough."<sup>ix</sup>

Trains were scheduled every fifteen minutes "during the busy part of the day and no break of more than one hour on the schedule from five-thirty in the morning until midnight." A total of sixty-one trains a day ran between Philadelphia and Wenonah. An advertising brochure issued by C.C. Grosscup, President of the Wenonah Realty Company, noted that Wenonah has every "modern convenience, artesian water, sewers, electric light, gas, both telephones, graded and curbed streets and paved sidewalks." Also "it has a high moral tone and an earnest, happy social life that makes it a good place in which to live." The water has no "filtering or boiling process" and "the high pressure maintained by the Holly System for every house." Furthermore the brochure stated "the sewerage system is one of the few entirely satisfactory systems in the state. Sidewalks are of flagstone and con-



crete and there are one hundred thousand feet of walks. Every street is well lighted at night by gas lamps of sixty candle power. Both electric and gas available for homes. No industries. Churches are thoroughly organized for service."

A newspaper article in 1896 noted that "the Inn is full, the cottages are all occupied and the people prefer the proximity to Philadelphia instead of the shore." A few years later a warning signal was sounded when the same newspaper revealed that "several of the summer residents have autos and sometimes the streets are lively with them." Before the advent of the car, the railroad brought summer visitors to the Wenonah Inn after the advent of the car, the automobile tempted summer visitors to more distant resorts. Fewer and fewer visitors spent their summers at the Inn. The Wenonah Inn closed its doors. In 1890 the Wenonah Hotel Company sold the hotel, the servants' quarters and the sewer plant to Stephen Greene.

Summer visitors were not the only people who owned cars. Local people also owned them. Blair Smith is believed to be the first resident of Wenonah to own a car. George Frederick owned an Allen, Oscar Odgen, Theodore Rison and Clement Mattson owned

Waltham-Orient Touring cars, Dr. H.A. Stout had a Buick and Edward L. Farr had a White Steamer that could hold seven passengers. Automobile parties traveled as far as Salem and sometimes to Atlantic City. By 1912 there were enough cars in Wenonah for all the children in the Borough to ride in the fourth of July parade and after the parade they were treated to rides as far as Sewell. In fact so many cars appeared that "Go Slow" signs were erected at the town entrances. The town bulletin board was often rammed by cars and cars often rammed residents' carriages. Garages were built instead of carriage houses, although Edward E. Grosscup, when he built his house<sup>x</sup>, constructed both a garage and a carriage house. George Frederick built a garage<sup>xi</sup> large enough to hold fifteen cars at one time. He not only serviced cars, but also had one of the earliest car agencies in this area.

Although the automobile forced the closing of the Wenonah Inn and ultimately railroad passenger service, a new era opened in Wenonah. Major J. R. Jones, former head of the drill team sponsored by the John Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, riding past the vacant Wenonah Inn, conceived an idea for the use of the facility. He immediately relayed his plan to Stephen Greene and on

**Acknowledgement:** Some of the information in this document is from a book authored by Marjorie Lentz on behalf of the Wenonah Historical Society and distributed in connection with the Community Center dedication July 4th, 1976. The remainder of the information is from research, personal records, and information from a book by J.C. Sheppard Sr.

September 20, 1904 the Wenonah Military Academy opened. But that is a story for another time.

There is still a railroad station. Somehow it reflects the whole story of Wenonah.

When the original railroad station outgrew its usefulness, a more adequate station was built. Wenonah also rebuilt as it grew, sometimes discarding the old for the new. However, throughout the history of Wenonah, the railroad station has been a part of its growth. From the station, farmers' sweet potatoes were shipped to Philadelphia markets, summer visitors arrived to spend the season at the Wenonah Inn, the cadets arrived to attend the Wenonah Military Academy, the commuters rode to their places of employment beyond Wenonah. Still changes came. Trains became less and less frequent. And one day the passenger train no longer stopped, and the freight train shrieks and rumbles by it too, no longer stopping at Wenonah. The railroad station stood useless, forlorn and dilapidated.

And then came an event that was both unforeseen and fortunate for the future of the station and for the Borough.

During the early 1970's Mayor Jack C. Sheppard Sr.<sup>SM</sup> had been researching Borough history using old Borough records belonging to Thomas Synnott III, grandson of one of the founders of Wenonah.

During this research he discovered a Letter from the West Jersey Railroad Company to the then Borough Commission stating in part, ... "The West Jersey Railroad Company hereby accepts the provisions of the Ordinance of the Borough Commission of Wenonah, New Jersey entitled "An Ordinance to vacate a portion of the west side of West Jersey Avenue, between Mantua Avenue and Poplar Street, adjoining the right of way of the West Jersey Railroad Company and to sanction the use thereof by the West Jersey Railroad Company for station purposes", passed January 10, 1893, and hereby agrees to use the land in said Ordinance described, for the purpose and in the manner in said Ordinance described and not otherwise."

By marvelous coincidence about this same time the Mayor heard a rumor that Conrail had sold the station to a private party. Contacting the Railroad Company he was told that

the station had already been sold to a party who purportedly intended to open a food service shop of some sort and that the deal was already done. When Mayor Sheppard protested the sale and advised the railroad real estate agent of the words of the 1893 Ordinance he was told "your information is too old, it has no validity today."

The Borough challenged the sale in the Superior Court of New Jersey and it was the unique wording of this Ordinance that gained Wenonah ownership of the railroad passenger station in 1973. Superior Court Judge John B. Wick decided this provision was valid and governing and decreed the land should revert back to the Borough. The railroad company, no longer owning the land under the station and unable to convey clear title to any buyer, somewhat grudgingly agreed to sell the building to the Borough for \$3,000.00.

Volunteers from every section of town, from Academy Hills, from the Synnott Tract, from the original town plot and from beyond gave freely of their skills. Their skills were varied. They planned and painted, hammered and hauled,

landscaped and labored. Together they restored the station, which was opened and dedicated to community use on July 4, 1976.

From that time until today the railroad station turned Community Center has served as a focal point for the community. The building houses Wenonah's Municipal Court and Council Chambers, the Court Clerk's and Borough Clerk's offices, and is in constant use by all Boards, Commissions and private groups in Wenonah.

The railroad station seems to be a symbol. Just as many people representing many skills have made possible the preservation of this landmark, so have many people representing many skills made possible the preservation of a heritage that belongs in Wenonah.

#### Notes

- ix See historical information on page 5
- x 9 West Buttonwood St.
- xi Rear of 203 West Mantua Ave.
- xii Serving Wenonah 1962 thru 1990

# WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM • 2001-2002

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

eMail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Paid \$ \_\_\_\_\_  Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed  Cash Enclosed

Please bring this form with your payment to any meeting or mail. Thank you!

#### MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Monthly newsletter mailed to your home
- Monthly meetings with informative programs
- Access to various archives and memorabilia
- Network of knowledgeable historians
- Historical field trips

COST: \$10 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

RETURN TO WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY • P.O. Box 32 • WENONAH, NJ 08090-0032

# May Meeting

Friday, May 10, 2002 • 7:30pm  
Wenonah Community Center (Train Station)



May's program will feature Joanne White and Sallie Murphy of Murphy's Loft in Mullica Hill, NJ. They will be sharing information on historical postcards, letters, and memorabilia. Please join us for an informative "SHOW AND TELL".

Bring in your own items for evaluation!

## Future meetings

June 14, 2002.....	<b>Family Picnic at Wenonah Lake</b>
July and August.....	<b>No Meetings</b>
September 13, 2002.....	<b>Porch Party at Little Grange</b>
October 11, 2002.....	<b>South Jersey Ghost Research</b>
	Scientific approach and study of the paranormal

## THE MISSION OF THE WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The objectives of this Society shall be:

1. To acquire and preserve historic documents, records, artifacts and memorabilia of the Borough of Wenonah.
2. To locate and acquire a suitable place for the storage and display of such materials.
3. To encourage the protection and preservation of historical landmarks and points of interest within the Borough of Wenonah.
4. To encourage historical and genealogical research, and publication of its results.
5. To encourage interest in history generally, and in Wenonah history in particular, among the youth of Wenonah.
6. To make all information and acquisitions of the Society available to the public.

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Newsletter Committee

**WENONAH**  
Historical Society

