

# Newsletter

Volume 7 Issue 5 May 2009

## A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BARBARA CAPELLI

Dear Members,

Spring is here and our town is beautiful with new flowers and plantings and "How about that Train Station!" Yes, our beloved Wenonah Train Station is getting the much needed restoration and big thanks to everyone involved in that project, and there are many! I especially want to mention a recent donation for the Train Station from Eugene Cowell III in honor of his late aunt (former WHS member) Connie Cowell. This very generous donation will certainly be of great help to us in making special additions to our Train Station.

Founders Day was a huge success this year and also included many hard working volunteers. The Train Station was celebrated and everyone enjoyed a beautiful day of learning and great community socialization. Thanks again to all who participated.

We are continuing to make great progress with some new ideas for our Society. This summer we hope to have ideas for new sale items, a beginning of a website that will be included as a link to the Borough's website, new programs, and perhaps a new committee or two, so let's continue to encourage new members to join us. Also of note, we want to encourage anyone who has memorabilia. We would graciously accept anything of historic value regarding Wenonah. Just recently, I received a 1920's Wenonah Military Academy yearbook from Richard Paulus whose father attended the academy! It's in pretty rough

condition but it is a super donation for our museum.

This Friday, we will have the pleasure of having Jeanne Brody as our guest speaker. She is an adjunct professor at Villanova and St. Joseph's University where she teaches Art History. She is going to speak about History through Prints, and how printmaking has been used historically to spread ideas, propaganda, and counter-government ideas.

## WHS OFFICERS 2009

President	Barbara Capelli
Vice Pres.	Brenda Birkland
Secretary	Vicki McCall
Treasurer	Carol Wiltsee
Trustee	Betty MacLeod
Trustee	Louis McCall

Meetings are held the  
second Friday of each month at the  
Community Center (Train Station)  
except June, July and August

If anyone has old prints or even old cartoons or political imagery she would be glad to reference them. Please feel free to bring your old prints for sharing!

Also of note, don't forget our June Picnic is at the Wenonah Lake...no bathing suits yet please!! See Pat Sole to sign up to make your favorite dish!

I hope to see you all Friday! And don't forget we are meeting at the Municipal Building!

Barb Capelli

## GLOUCESTER DEMOCRAT APRIL 20, 1893

The erection of the Wenonah Inn was one of the conditions under which the West Jersey railroad are erecting a handsome railroad station on the east side of the tracks. The new building is constructed of rough-faced Eastern hydraulic brick, which gives it the appearance of a finely chizzled [sic] stone structure.

## GLOUCESTER DEMOCRAT DECEMBER 7 1893

The real beauty of our little station is more highly appreciated these cold wintry months. To the early birds especially, the bright cheery waiting room presents a most attractive appearance. The building of the station master's house in connection with the office is a great improvement also making it not only more convenient for this official, but giving him a better opportunity of fulfilling the duties of his position.

## STATION REHAB PROGRESS

As many of you have no doubt noted while driving by, the station is a mess. Don't despair, it will get better, just wait a little while. The interior is stripped down to the bare plaster and painting is about to commence. Outside the old overgrown trees and shrubs have been removed and a brick plaza with plantings is about to be created. We are now trying to determine a color scheme for the exterior and the architect Margaret Westfield is trying to identify the original colors from when new in 1893. When finished our much used building should be useful for another generation or two.

## INTERVIEW WITH JACK SHEPPARD, SR., ABOUT HIS ROLE IN THE PUBLICATION OF MARJORIE LENTZ'S NEW BOOK "WENONAH"

*Marjorie stated her new book would not have been possible without you. What type of assistance did you provide?*

Marjorie is too modest. I mainly provided technical assistance with word processing and photos and an index for the new book which was lacking in the original. I encouraged her to write the second book since she had additional material that wasn't included in her first book. It was enjoyable working with Marjorie and comparing notes on Wenonah history.

*How did you become so interested in Wenonah's history?*

In 1982, Jane Ramsey, Marjorie Lentz, Jack and Jean Ehlers and others came to council and asked permission to create an archives committee. Out of this committee, the Wenonah Historical Society was formed. While planning for the 1976 bicentennial celebration Marjorie was asked to write a book about the town's origins. Her book made me realize how little I knew about the early days of Wenonah. I was amazed how interesting our history is.

*If you could go back in time, what period of Wenonah's history would you like to live in?*

I would like to visit any period of time prior to 2001. I would love to sit on the porch of the Wenonah House in 1872 and watch the guests arriving from Philadelphia. I would like to be at Noblitts Hall and watch the beginnings of the first Wenonah School. I would love to attend the opening day of our train station built in 1893 and certainly all the activity surrounding the Wenonah Military Academy would be thrilling to watch.

*Some people new to town may not realize you served as Mayor of Wenonah for 24 years, which is the longest time any single Mayor has served. In your lifetime as a Wenonah resident, what have been your fondest memories?*

My fondest memories are related to my children and their activities, and to the many

benefits of living in a small town and having involvement and friendships with people. We are a close knit community and there are many clubs and organizations for one to be involved in such as the Lions Club, Athletic Association, the Home and School, Wenonah Swim Club and Warner's Lake, the Fire Company. Volunteerism really shines in a small town. The push by Governor Corzine to merge services among municipalities is concerning to me as I believe our quality of services will decline and we could lose our small town identity.

*You also wrote a book with highlights from Borough Council minutes. What was the genesis of that book?*

Thomas Synnott III, grandson of one of Wenonah's original residents, found in the Synnott mansion old borough records dating to 1871, the time of Wenonah's creation. He invited me to visit his home to view those records. I spent many Sunday afternoons reviewing the material, ultimately using much of the information in a book as a fundraiser for the Historical Society.

*While reading the old minutes, did you discover anything about the town that surprised you?*

I was surprised that the Borough government had little contact with the Wenonah Military Academy. There was virtually nothing in the records about the relationship of the borough to the Academy. After 1935 when the Academy was closed, the minutes did mention that our building inspector Tom Carlson determined the building to be a fire hazard and recommended it be demolished. At the time, the Academy was still owned by the Estate of Stephen Greene, the entity that owned it. There is no information about the Borough contacting the Greene Estate before it was torn down.

I was also surprised about the huge part the West Jersey Railroad Company (WJRC) played in founding the town. In 1861 the narrow-gauge tracks that ended in Mantua were straightened, replaced with the more universal standard gauge

tracks and extended to Glassboro. WJRC Vice President William Sewell and his Chief Engineer William Allen apparently seeing the beauty of the area decided a town at this location would increase ridership for the rail company. They convinced investors of the benefits, created the Mantua Land and Improvement Company to do the selling, built a hotel and a town was born.

*While you were reviewing the minutes, I understand you found the deed for the train station land that allowed you and council to stop the sale of the train station to a private party in 1973. Tell me about the timing of this.*

In 1973 I learned the Pennsylvania-Reading railroad company had sold our train station to a private party. I don't know whether it was pure coincidence or just plain good luck but at almost the same time while viewing the old Synnot records I found a deed noting the land given to the railroad by the Borough Commissioners was granted with a condition: the land was to be used "for passenger station purposes only." Borough Council contested the sale in Superior Court and the land reverted to Borough ownership. Council then purchased the building for \$3,000.

*Volunteers refurbished the train station for use as a Community Center for Wenonah citizens. What was the refurbishment project like?*

The project was so much fun. Kids, parents and grandparents all worked together on this project. Dave Miller headed a committee of volunteers and we had people in town donate their skills, time and money. Local professionals also volunteered. We repaired plaster, put on a new roof, planted and painted. We even had T-shirts with the slogan "I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD." This project was another great example of small town living and volunteerism.

*As we sit here looking at the current renovation of the train station, how does that make you feel?*

Wenonah is one of the few towns along the track that has successfully maintained its historic

train station for community use. It is truly an accomplishment and I am so pleased to see its current renovation underway. I am extremely grateful to former Borough Administrator Dawn Human for her success in acquiring this grant and to Dave Kreck for all his expert efforts as Borough Engineer to ensure satisfactory completion.

*What do you feel was your most significant achievement while Mayor?*

Because Wenonah is such a small town I felt it was important to be connected to the region outside the town to ensure our voice was heard. When the county wanted to create a county-wide sewer system I volunteered to spearhead the project mainly to assure Wenonah wasn't damaged by the process. The project took four years and involved the 13 most populated communities in the county. As a result we were able to close our sewage treatment plant that existed at what is now Lisle Field, and the previously frequent Oak Valley sewage plant overflows no longer affect Wenonah Lake.

*What one message would you like to convey to the people of Wenonah, both young and old?*

Wenonah is a wonderful place to live and in which to raise a family but its future well-being could be in jeopardy if plans to place passenger service back on the tracks through Wenonah are carried forward. Such a project would be devastating from a construction standpoint. Whether placed below grade in a pit or raised high in the air the increased width of the right-of-way would severely impact our new borough hall or the train station or both. The resulting barrier of pit or elevated structure would be an eyesore that would devalue a significant amount of our beautiful housing stock. With no room for parking space we would not even have access to the train but would have to drive to a "park & ride" facility somewhere else in the region. Suffice it to say the most recent professional study of the proposal resulted in a recommendation against putting trains back on these ill-suited old tracks.

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PO Box 32  
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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# WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2009

### Membership Benefits

- MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
- MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH INTERESTING PROGRAMS
- ACCESS TO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES AND MEMORABILIA
- INFORMATION BY KNOWLEDGEABLE WENONAHANS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

RECEIVE NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL: YES OR NO

AMOUNT PAID \$ CHECK \_\_\_\_\_ CASH \_\_\_\_\_

BRING FORM AND PAYMENT TO MEETING, OR MAIL. THANK YOU

WHS PO BOX 32, WENONAH, NJ 08090

DUES: \$15.00 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

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