

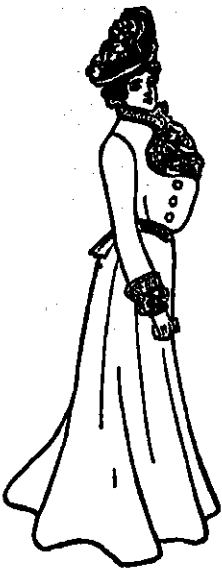
WENONAH

Historical Society Newsletter



February 2001
Published by the
Historical Society
of Wenonah, NJ

WHAT FEBRUARY HOLDS...



Our program for February is another one which depends on your participation. We would like to make our February meeting about "the things you love." Since Valentine's Day is upon us, we thought this month would be a great time for you to share with the society one object that you love (other than your spouse!). So bring in that one treasure that sits at the center of your front parlour and tell us why it means so much to you. It doesn't necessarily have to be a Wenonah artifact, and the more unusual the better!

We will also be starting a new "feature" at our meetings: "Can You Identify It?" At the commencement of each meeting, we will present an object to you for identification. If you can guess its purpose... the payoff is big! You gain the admiration and adoration of your fellow Society members and the nickname "Know-it-All"

Our next newsletter will also be expanding, with regular columns on "Why I Moved to Wenonah", "Letter from the President," and "Letters." As part of our meetings and newsletters, we will gradually incorporate some of the ideas presented during our January meeting. We appreciate any help or contributions you can offer.

Thank you to Bill DeAscentiis for answering our questions about the new municipal building and Rocco Doto for his fine presentation in January!

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.

WENONAH 100 YEARS AGO - FEBRUARY 1901

Compiled by Milton Webb

There is considerable complaint about the electric light service again.

Checkers have become a fad here again and several of our players would like to meet some who think they can play from other communities.

The first meeting of the tourist club was held at the home of Miss Edith Farr last evening. (The Farr's were great travelers with many frequent trips to Maine and later to Europe, particularly Switzerland.)

The small pox scare has reached this town in the past few days and has caused a number of the mothers to keep their children from attending school.

Charles E. Simpson is engaged in the Belgian hare business quite extensively. (This was on North Jefferson Avenue north of Buttonwood Street. He had over five thousand rabbits at one time. The Wenonah depot became the main debarkation

point for these animals in New Jersey. We were the rabbit capital of South Jersey!)

There was an interesting all day missions meeting at the Methodist Church yesterday.

There is complaint because of the ordinance prohibiting the dumping of ashes in the streets is not being enforced.

There is a prospect of renting several of our houses this spring. (This was the tail end of Wenonah being a summer resort. A hand full of houses was still unoccupied in the winter in anticipation of summer rental.)

Officer Drummer picked up a man about 3:00 o'clock this morning. The officer declared a man with good intentions would hardly be prowling about in the cold at that unseemly hour. He was locked up but nearly froze and so was released at daylight.

Good ice is making but most of people have their icehouses filled.

A missionary lunch was held at the home of Mrs. Charles Bilderback. (The site of this home later became the Wenonah Free Public Library.)

The grip epidemic seems to be a bating.

Frank Hendrickson has his tomato and cabbage beds sown.

A bargain for sale because of want of use. An 8-year-old bay horse-kind, sound, and gentle-can road ten miles per hour-price \$50-credit of 3 months can be given-apply to Charles Fedser

One of Job Scott's grays is dangerously ill this morning. (These were draft horses used to pull the lumber and coal wagons from his Mantua lumberyard.)

From the Woodbury Daily Times - Woodbury, New Jersey

JOE NOBLIT'S HALL

6 North Marion Avenue

Second in a series of articles detailing the histories of some of Wenonah's more notable structures. By Milton Webb

On March 19, 1878 in three public places in Wenonah the newly formed school district 54 posted the following notice: The annual Wenonah school meeting will be held in the school room in the Wenonah House on the Tuesday of the week following the town meeting at which meeting will be submitted the question of voting a tax to maintain a free public school, the amount thought to be three hundred dollars. The question of building a schoolhouse will also be considered with the matters related thereto. The amount thought to be necessary for this purpose is twenty five hundred dollars. George Baily District Clerk. The meeting was a public forum where the question of building a schoolhouse was thoroughly talked over and a free expression of opinion given. It was agreed that the Board of Trustees be authorized to build a school not to cost over \$2500 exclusive of well, out buildings and fences. There was one vote in the negative. The Mantua Land and Improvement Company donated the land and Dr Fithian purchased the entire bond issue.

The contract for the erection of the building was let out to Daniel Brown, a local builder and developer for \$2245.95. Other contracted items were to Sam Chew, digging a well \$15; Henry Frederick, well pump \$13.50; William Allen, bell and lightning rods \$9.00; Sam Dilks, carting \$3.00; Isaac Stevenson, grading and digging cellar hole \$38.00 and Ed Ward, plans and specifications \$30.50. The building was completed in the early months of 1879 and classes were immediately started in the new schoolhouse. This building, as a schoolhouse was to serve the community until 1894 when it was replaced by the "Stone School House" on North Clinton Avenue.

Several expenditures were significant during this period. Ella English to be employed as teacher at a salary not to exceed \$35 dollars a month. Sam Chew coal for the year \$37. May Clark to assist Tracy Waddington at a salary of \$1 a day.



The building in its role as the American Legion Hall in 1959.

During the period of use as a schoolhouse the trustees rented out the building for other purposes. The most significant was the Mantua Grange # 39, Patrons of Husbandry. It might be noted that the Granger movement was a powerful political force and this chapter was large, numbering over two hundred members. Lectures were held and auctions of produce and grain held in the building. Also the tradition of this building as a polling place started lasting over one hundred years.

In June of 1894, the Trustees of the school district sold, at auction, the building to Joseph Noblit for \$1,500. He was a well-known citizen of the community. A farmer by trade, he also was the Deptford Township clerk. Wenonah still was a part of this township at this time. Known as "The Old War Horse," he was a veteran of the Civil War having served with the 138th Pennsylvania Volunteers. He was an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veteran's organization.

Every up and coming community during this period had what was known as an "Opera House" and this building would fall into the category. On several occasions an advertisement would mention that an event would be held at Noblit's Opera House. He leased out the building for a number a varied social affairs. The Mantua Grange continued to use the hall as well as several political organizations. In 1989 the Wenonah Field Club was formed which was the forerunner of our modern Wenonah Athletic Association, and they used the building for a number of years.

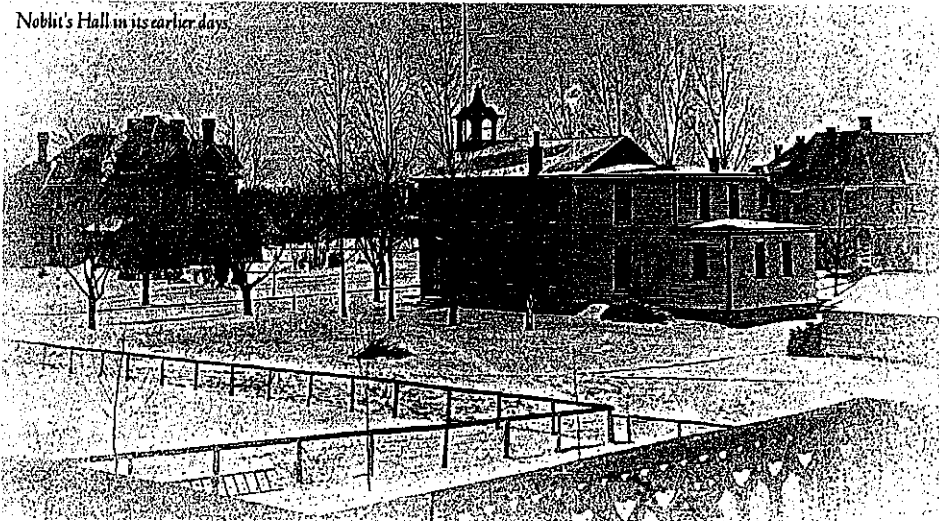
In 1913 The YMCA was reconstituted their organization and rented the hall with a long-term lease. They had the backing of several wealthy citizens who provided funds for extensive renovations to the building. It was then became known in Wenonah as the YMCA Hall. Unfortunately during this period Joe Noblit's sight failed and he moved to Oregon with his grandson, dying in 1915. The Y took title to the building and started a large undertaking of activities. Shuffleboard tournaments were held and there were dances and socials for the teenagers. This was the beginning of the ongoing concern for the youth of the town through providing recreation. Outstanding were the Saturday night movies when it was advertised seating capacity for 250 people. Stars at the time were Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Pearl White, Buster Keaton and others of the silent screen.

Interest in the local chapter of the YMCA waned and the building went into disuse. Probably the greatest reason for this was the growing interest in the scouting movement under the leadership of Dr. Gage. In 1922, the newly organized J. Arthur Holeyton Post 192, American Legion purchased the YMCA Hall. Previous to this they were meeting at what is now the Wild Iris floral shop, formerly the offices of the Wenonah Realty Company. Now the building became known as the "Legion Hall", the name lasting for over half a century. It became the center of social activity in the town. Saturday movies were started again for the children as well as teen-age dances, travel lectures, potluck dinners, strawberry festivals, band concerts and public forums. Voting was still held there. The American Legion Rifle and Pistol Club, the oldest NRA sponsored club in New Jersey build an indoor pistol range in the basement. In the second floor were recreational facilities including a fine old slate pool table.

In 1984 the Legion sold the building to a private owner after they began using the newly renovated train depot for their meetings, a new era emerged in the history of the hall.

Regardless of what you call it—Public School House, Grange Hall, YMCA Building, Legion Hall or my house—it is still a grand building. Basically it still retains its exterior architectural integrity and if treated kindly should exist another one hundred and thirty years.

Noblit's Hall in its earlier days.



COMMITTEE REPORTS

Archiving and Preservation Committee

We would like to present our mission statement for this newly formed committee:

Mission Statement

Committee for the identification, archiving, and preservation of Wenonah's historical treasures for future generations to enjoy. To identify all existing Wenonah Historical Society artifacts. To secure additional Historical treasures relevant to Wenonah's heritage and History.

The overriding goal is to prevent the destruction or damage of historical artifacts.

Currently the steering Committee for this new Committee is made up of Milton Webb, Diane Magarelli, Curt Kapus and Rocco Doto. The committee has had two additional volunteers and they are Larry Ledrick and John Mullens.

Our immediate goals are:

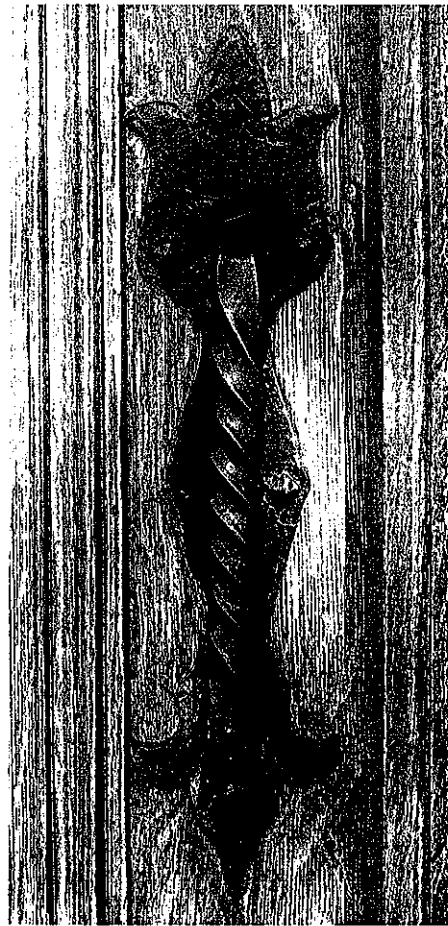
- Catalogue the existing inventory of W.H.S. documents and artifacts
- Identify Archival storage materials and conservation supplies
- Identify a temporary storage facility
- Identify a computer-based program that we can use for storing data about documents, photographs, and artifacts, and make the information available on a web page for all to enjoy

Our goals are ambitious and we will need everyone's cooperation. We encourage all to learn as much as possible about the history of our special town. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or articles to donate to the Historical Society please feel free to contact me.

Rocco F Doto · 415-1215 · rockracc@aol.com

To submit your committee's report:

- Provide a disc to Curt Kapus (464-2485) with your file saved as a text or MS Word file
 - eMail your file to wenonahhistoricalnews@home.com
- Your report must be received two weeks before our monthly meeting for inclusion in the newsletter.



WHERE IS IT?

Can you identify this building by this key piece of hardware? Each month we'll feature an architectural detail from one of Wenonah's structures for you to ponder. Don't worry...they'll get harder as we go along! If you haven't already figured it out, you can find out the answer at this month's meeting.

Remember to bring the thing you love to this month's meeting! See you there.

WENONAH

Historical Society Membership Form · 2000-2001

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

eMail Address _____

Amount Paid \$ _____ Check # _____ Enclosed Cash Enclosed

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

Return to Wenonah Historical Society · P.O. Box 32 · Wenonah, NJ 08090-0032

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