

Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 2 February 2005

MESSAGE FROM
PRESIDENT DON RALSTON

Dear Members;

As the New Year begins I am pleased the membership has elected me to be their President. I hope to contribute as much to the organization as past presidents have done.

As we started the January meeting, I stated we have two main objectives during the two years of my term as President. First to complete the identification and cataloging the various documents and artifacts in our possession and second, to assist with the restoration of our historic railroad station building, both inside and out.

Ours is a volunteer organization and it was especially gratifying to see the large turnout at the January meeting. Many have volunteered to assist in our projects and meetings to make them more enjoyable.

We have in the past and will continue in the future to strive to accomplish the objectives set forth in our Mission Statement. The gist of those objectives are to acquire and preserve historical material related to Wenonah, keep them in a suitable place, encourage the preservation of historic places within Wenonah, encourage historical research, and make all of our acquisitions available to our citizens, especially the children.

Since the January meeting our objective was to survey the furnishings left by the Borough when they moved to the new building and dispose of unneeded furniture. This has been accomplished. The next activity will be to do a raw inventory of the many documents, photos and artifacts and decide how best to identify, classify and store the materials. For this work we will need some willing and able volunteers. We have some names of

those who volunteered at the last meeting. If you were not contacted and wish to become involved please contact me or any other officer so we can add you to the list.

Future Projects we need to pursue are:

- Acquire a computer to help in the filing and cataloging process.
- Reinstate the plaque program for those dwellings that qualify. We will have to establish an age of the dwelling, such as over 90 years old, and a cost to the dwelling owner.

WHS OFFICERS 2005

President:	Don Ralston
Vice Pres.	Jack Sheppard Sr.
Secretary	Rachel Knisell
Treasurer	Carol Wiltsee
Corr. Sec.	Betty MacLeod
Trustee	Vicki McCall
Trustee	Macy Pedersen
Trustee	Lucy Schulz

Meetings second Friday of the month at the Wenonah Community Center except June, July and August

- Reinstate an exhibit and open house on the 4th of July.
- Look into the possibility of creating a "Life Membership" fee, in conjunction with the annual fee.
- Establish an annual budget and audit of our finances.
- Encourage and train members to become officers of our Organization. We need a good continuity of our leadership, especially the younger members.
- Make a contact with the Wenonah Public School to see if we if we can

establish an essay program for the 6th grade students, on the subject of the *History of Wenonah*.

- Develop a questionnaire for members to complete, as to future topics of interest, or programs to increase interest in our organization.

FEBRUARY 11TH PROGRAM

Joe Colanero, Author of *Down Jersey Cooking*. "*Celebrating Our Heritage From Past to Present*," will be our speaker. His book sells for \$19.95. He will return \$5.00 to our organization for each one sold at our meeting. Joe will also do sample cooking for our enjoyment during the course of the meeting.

WHS Trustee Lucy Schulz, is currently recovering from recent hip surgery at the Manor Care Health Center 550 Jessup Road, West Deptford, NJ 08068.

Should you wish to send a card to Lucy she is in room 108, 2nd bed.

HISTORICAL TIDBIT

As young boy, living in Wenonah, I remember, 1936 was a very cold month. Temperatures were as low as 6 below. Ice on Warner's Lake was measured 14" thick. Gordon Fay would drive his car on the Lake.

We ice skated with old clamp skates and built bonfires on shore to keep warm.

It was a wonderful period of time in Wenonah. To clear the sidewalks Mr. Carr used a mule with a wooden plow. Little did we realize that 5 years later our country would be involved in a worldwide war.

The War Memorial in Wenonah Park contains the names of the Wenonah citizens who served. Don Ralston

At the January meeting Bob Sands, author of a new book about the origins of Glassboro spent much time describing the Whitney family, whose glass manufacturing operations were probably the most important factor in the towns creation. I thought it interesting that Thomas Synnott who went to work as a \$300.00 per year clerk at the Whitney Glass Works eventually became a partner in the Company. In the late 1800's he became involved in the creation of another town, Wenonah, building and living in the beautiful mansion at Mantua and Marion Avenues.

The following narrative was excerpted from "The Glassboro Story 1779 – 1964" by Robert D. Bole and Edward H. Walton Jr.

THE SYNNOTT FAMILY BEFORE WENONAH

This is the only Glassboro first family of Irish stock. Long before the first Synnott left the old country, the family had played a heroic role in Ireland's sad and turbulent history Colonel David Synnott, for example, a military governor of Wexford, Ireland, had contested bravely but futilely the Puritan Oliver Cromwell's ruthless siege of Wexford, in 1649. For his efforts the Colonel paid the highest price a man can pay in defense of home and country; he was slain in a brave but vain attempt to throw back the English invaders. Martin Synnott, a descendent of the courageous Colonel David, was the first of the proud Irish family to leave the old country and settle in America. In 1794 Martin established himself in the shipping business at bustling Philadelphia, where he built a fortune but lost most of it in 1812, when the British intercepted and confiscated his ships on the high seas. A few years before this unhappy event, the Irish immigrant had shifted the base of his operations from the Quaker City to Mays Landing, New Jersey. It was at this place that Martin Synnott died at the early age of thirty-six, leaving behind a widow and four children, one of whom was a six-year-old boy named Myles. This was the Synnott who later became a part of the Glassboro Story.

Myles Synnott was eight years old when his widowed mother remarried; her second husband was the medical doctor. Jacob Fisler. By marrying Dr. Fisler, Myles' mother made it possible for her son to grow up in a medical atmosphere of patients, pills, and medicine. He developed a great interest in the medical profession, probably accompanying his stepfather on his daily rounds of home visitations and in many ways acquiring a kind of pre-internship in the medical field. Myles' boyhood zeal for medicine remained with him to young manhood, so much so that he decided to choose this profession for his lifework. He, therefore, translated this decision into action by attending and graduating, in 1831, from Philadelphia's Jefferson Medical College. Now a full-fledged doctor, Myles Synnott returned to his birthplace at Mays Landing, where for about ten years

he practiced the healing art on many of the patients who had known him first as the boy interne.

In 1841 Dr. Synnott brought his medical kit, equipment, and skill to Glassboro to begin a long and fruitful twenty-six year career. Exactly what attracted the young doctor to the glassmaking village is not known. But not long after his coming he provided solid evidence that his was not to be a transitory stay. For, in 1842, he married Harriet Heston Whitney, daughter of Ebenezer and Bathsheba Whitney. By this union, young Dr. Synnott became the brother-in-law of the up-and-coming Whitney Brothers, a relationship which must have given the young physician immediate status in the glass community.

By coming to Glassboro, Dr. Synnott earned the distinction of being its first doctor. The young physician had no trouble in building up a large practice, for the people "down in the woods" were in need of medical care, and the supply of doctors was short. Dr. Synnott serviced Glassboro residents. He also saddled and rode his horse to make calls in the outlying villages of Cross Keys, Williamstown, Franklinville, Fislerville, Mullica Hill, Five Points, Bethel, Barnsboro, and Mantua.

Some conception of the extent of his practice can be gleaned from his account books, which showed that Glassboro's first doctor had 450 patients, not a small number when it is realized that Glassboro's entire population in 1842 numbered only 604 people. The good doctor was a busy man engrossed and dedicated to his healing work. He apparently had little or no time for any other activities. His name for example, fails to appear among those nineteenth-century boro citizens holding political or civic offices. His sole service to the community was getting and keeping its people well not an unworthy contribution.

What was this dedicated medical man really like? Those who remembered him best have left some fascinating written answers to this question. Among other characteristics, they tell us that Dr. Myles Synnott was a man with a few delightful idiosyncrasies, among which was an excessive fondness for cigars.

He was a tall, slim man, noted for his native wit, his dedication to his profession, and incidentally, his love for cigars. He wore a high hat, filling the upper section with cigars, holding them in place by a large handkerchief between the cigars and his head using about one hundred a week, usually between house to house visits to his patients. However, he did not smoke them all the way and the Glassboro urchins used to linger about Doctor Synnott, waiting for the generous butts . . .

Doctor Synnott must have had a cheerful bedside manner for he is remembered as having a ... "humorous disposition and the scene of his labor is full of dry jokes, and numerous witty sayings". Notwithstanding this light touch, he could be stern when the occasion demanded sternness. The doctor

stood for no nonsense from his patients. He expected them to follow his instructions explicitly. It is said, perhaps apocryphally that: . . . "he once blistered a man's feet because he would not stay in the house when the doctor ordered it."

Fellow members of the medical profession held Glassboro's first physician in high esteem. Among other things they admired his dedication, his abhorrence of quackery in or out of the profession, his quiet, unassuming competence, his willingness to counsel and encourage budding young medical colleagues. Undoubtedly, there were times when Doctor Synnott's medical contemporaries considered him a bit rigid in applying his high professional standards. Nevertheless, they forgave him his flashes of dogmatism because they realized that the medical profession was fortunate in having Myles Synnott as one of its members.

Death came to Glassboro's first physician in 1867 his widow and three children were his survivors. Before he died, Dr. Myles Synnott had provided his only son, Thomas Whitney Synnott, with a sound educational background! in Glassboro's public school, at Plainfield Academy in Pennsylvania, and at Bridgeton's West Jersey Academy. Furthermore, the Doctor's son, two years before his father's decease, had begun what was destined to be a long and profitable business career, one which made him a worthy son of his worthy father.

Thomas W. Synnott began work in his uncle Whitney's glassworks as an assistant bookkeeper. For working six days a week and eleven and one-half hours daily, Thomas collected \$300.00 annually. The salary was low, but there were other compensations. For one thing, he took advantage of the opportunity to learn thoroughly the commercial aspects of operating a large glass manufacturing plant. His progress was so rapid that by 1872, his uncles admitted him into the firm's management as a partner with a fourth interest, the other partners being Thomas Whitney, Samuel Whitney, and John P. Whitney, Thomas' son. Approaching retirement, the two elder Whitney's, Thomas and Samuel, increasingly placed the active management of the Whitney Works in the hands of the younger men. At age twenty-seven, Thomas Synnott had become general business manager of the Glass Works, with headquarters in Philadelphia; his cousin, John P. Whitney operated the actual manufacturing end of the business at Glassboro. Ten years later, in 1892, Thomas Whitney passed away. With his death Thomas Synnott and John P. Whitney became the sole owners of the Whitney Works. And in 1887, the business was legally incorporated as the Whitney Glass Works. Thomas Synnott was made the first president of the corporation. Four years later, in 1891 Synnott retired from the glass business after a nineteen-year service stint which was marked by a doubling in the Whitney Plant output.

Synnott had retired from the Whitney Glass Works at the relatively young age of forty-six. On the surface this seemed to be a puzzling step for a successful businessman to take.

But the explanation is that Synnott wanted more time to devote to his banking and investment interests. In 1892, one year after his retirement from glassmaking, he became President of Glassboro's First National Bank. Shortly after taking over Synnott faced an unpleasant situation. A trusted employee's dereliction placed the bank in financial jeopardy. After this act became publicly known, bank officials braced themselves for a run on bank deposits. Bank President Synnott forestalled this calamity *by* posting a notice taking upon himself full responsibility for the bank's fiscal ability to meet its obligations. Synnott's reputation, together with his firm action, was all that was needed to restore depositor confidence, although some Glassboro residents of that time gave some credit to an incident which occurred during the crisis. It seems that funds hastily requested from Philadelphia had reached Glassboro by railroad transportation. Harried bank officials met the train at the station, piled the greenbacks in a wheelbarrow, and raced to the bank. Depositors, seeing money arriving in wheelbarrow volume, were satisfied that all was well. The story may be a dubious one, but it does seem interesting.

But banking and investments were not Thomas Synnott's sole interests. While he made no attempts to hold political offices of any kind, Mr. Synnott devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to educational and church matters. He was, for example, a member of the State Board of Education for eight years; President of the Board of Trustees of Princeton's Theological Seminary; and a trustee of Lincoln University. Among his church activities were: Vice-president of the General Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; Vice-president of the Presbyterian Board of publications; President of the Lord's Day Alliance in New Jersey; Vice-president of the Lord's Day Alliance in the United States; and member of the Presbyterian General Assembly's Evangelistic Committee.

Thomas Synnott took his religion seriously. As a leader in the Lord's Day Alliance, he led the fight against the motion picture, liquor, and racing interests. In effect he acted the role of a legislative lobbyist determined to defeat bills calling for legal approval of gambling, motion pictures, and racing on Sundays. Synnott was no political amateur when the threat of commercializing the Sabbath was the issue. He won his legislative battles. Sundays remained a day of rest and worship, at least during the 1890's.

There is no question that the Synnotts belong in the tight little category of Glassboro's first families. Like the Hestons and Carpenters, the Synnotts brought prestige to the community. Their achievements, professional and commercial, were recognized far beyond the Glassboro boundaries; for very often in the nineteenth century, outsiders thought of Glassboro in terms of the Synnotts. But still more important, the Synnott family was a potent force in promoting the Glassboro community and in making its steady growth possible.



Wenonah Station Winter 2005

Photo by [unreadable]

Stamp
Here

Wenonah Historical Society
PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2005

Membership Benefits

- MONTHLY NEWSLETTER MAILED TO YOUR HOME
- MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH INFORMATIVE PROGRAMS
- ACCESS TO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES AND MEMORABILIA
- NETWORK OF KNOWLEDGEABLE HISTORIANS
- HISTORICAL FIELD TRIPS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

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
