

## Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 1 January 2008

MESSAGE FROM  
VICE PRESIDENT  
BARBARA CAPELLI

Dear Members;

Happy New Year! We celebrate another great year gone by and look forward to an even happier and more prosperous 2008! So, while you're putting away all your Christmas decorations and recalling all those wonderful holiday memories maybe take time to jot them down or even save a Christmas card that might mean something special to you or your family in the future. Keeping those memories remind us where we have been and help us look forward to creating new and fun filled adventures that your family and friends will certainly look back upon with fondness.

I must say that this past holiday season for me personally was very special. A wonderful Historical Society Christmas Dinner Party with many special friends and neighbors was one of the first highlights. Spending time with so many good people and family is what makes the holidays something truly special. We, here in Wenonah are so very lucky that our neighbors are our friends and for some our friends are our family. From events at the schools, the parks, the playgrounds, the meeting places and our homes it is clear that we in Wenonah know how to celebrate those special occasions with our friends and family.

I wish all of you a wonderful new year and look forward to new programs/speakers and to new members that will certainly enjoy all that the Wenonah Historical Society has to offer.

I want to share a phrase/quote I found in the newspaper a while back, by Mattie Stepanek.

"Even though the future seems far away, it is actually beginning right now. And while we are living in the

### WHS OFFICERS 2008

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MEETINGS ARE HELD THE SECOND  
FRIDAY OF THE MONTH AT THE  
COMMUNITY CENTER EXCEPT  
JUNE, JULY AND AUGUST

present, we must celebrate life everyday knowing that we are becoming history with every word, every action, every moment because we, today, are the history of tomorrow."

I am very pleased to inform you that our speaker/presenter for the January meeting is Paul Ladder.

Paul and his wife Sandy are fairly new to Wenonah and we are very happy that they are becoming involved with the Wenonah Historical Society. Paul will give us an overview

on New Jersey and South Jersey before and during the Civil War.

He will speak about South Jersey and in particular the Gloucester County region during the Civil war. He will discuss local personalities and figures and spotlight those from Wenonah who served in the civil war. Also, of interest he will show us how to trace our own ancestors who may have served in the war. He has a small slide show prepared and will certainly provide an evening of great intellect. Make sure to join us! Bring your friends and neighbors!!

### REMINISCENCES OF WENONAH HISTORY BY J.C. SHEPPARD SR

The first formal government in Wenonah was not the Borough form but a Commission. The Commission form of government was adopted in April, 1883 and changed to the Borough form in 1896.

The first "President" of the newly created Commission was Dr. George W. Bailey, a physician who served during the Civil War, who built and occupied the handsome dwelling on the southeast corner of East Mantua and South Clinton Avenues.

The first "Mayor" of Wenonah, Charles M. Wilkins, assumed his seat as Borough mayor January 1, 1896, was replaced as mayor by William J. Dawson and then by Andrew Carey within the same year. Carey then became Mayor January 1, 1898.

Interestingly, prior to becoming a Borough, while still a Commission, residents continued to pay real estate taxes to Deptford Township.

COUNTY VITAL TO BEGINNING OF RAILROADS  
South Jersey had role in development  
By GLENN KOPPELMAN, Staff Writer, *Gloucester County Times* 5/28/95

*(Last in a three-part series.)*

Railroads and railroad companies started popping up all over Gloucester County. The Williamstown Railroad. The Williamstown and Delaware River Railroad. The Glassboro Railroad. The Swedesboro Railroad.

The abundance of railroads prompted stations to be built in just about every large town in the county.

Early railroad stations served many purposes. Stations sold tickets and stored goods which were to be shipped via rail. They served as a gathering place for the community — a center of activity where all townsfolk could assemble to hear news and gaze in awe at the huge, steam-driven monsters that crawled along the tracks. Some stations even served as post offices as well.

"The biggest gift of the railroad; early on was to give the common man the ability to travel beyond his own town's borders," Schopp says (Paul Schopp, a historical consultant who specializes in rail history).

It was an uncommon man who helped bestow the gift of rail travel to Gloucester County.

Henry Roe Campbell, a Woodbury native, was called upon by railroad organizers to head the Camden and Woodbury Railroad's planning committee. He was later retained as its chief civil engineer and oversaw the technical aspects of the railroad.

Railroading was in Campbell's blood. His father, Amos, was famous as a builder of railroad bridges. He built five bridges for the Camden and Woodbury Railroad and many other bridges in the area.

Henry Campbell's most notable achievement was his design of the 4-4-0 "American" Type locomotive, which was patented in 1836. Campbell's locomotive was driven by eight wheels — standard engines had six — and had a heavier freight hauling capability than the locomotives of its day. Campbell's engine was reportedly capable of pulling 40 cars up an inclined plane.

Campbell prided himself in doing things cheaply but efficiently, Schopp says.

"He was very sure of himself," he said. "If he said something would work, then he was sure it would."

As the Camden and Woodbury line was nearing completion Campbell gambled and purchased two locomotives from the state-run Columbia-Philadelphia Railroad. At the time, locomotives were difficult to maintain and were in need of constant repair. The two Campbell purchased — the Fire Fly and the Red Rover — were deemed especially bad by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In fact, upon receipt of their sale, it was recorded in the Pennsylvania State Canal Report of 1836 that "it would have been a savings to the Commonwealth had they been given away for nothing the first day they were placed on the track."

Despite Pennsylvania's snickering, Campbell managed to get four years' use out of the engines, but they required frequent repairs.

"I think he honestly thought he could do something with them," says Schopp, who intends to write a book about Campbell.

On the job, Campbell was a stern boss. In fact, his firm demeanor almost cost him his life.

According to court documents, Campbell was attacked on Aug. 15, 1838 by a mob of six to 10 men "wielding fists and brickbats."

Although the motive of the attack is unclear, Schopp thinks the men may have worked for Campbell at one time. Campbell had a strict policy prohibiting use of "spirituous liquors" by anyone working for the railroad. Schopp thinks the malcontents may have violated that rule.

"He might have fired them," he said. "But that's just my opinion."

The day after the assault he was "attacked again by two men wielding Bowie knives with an intent to kill," according to court documents.

Campbell survived both attacks and continued to work on the railroad.

But all was not well with the Camden and Woodbury line. Rider-ship was never as strong as the organizers had hoped, due in part to a reluctance to change practiced routines.

The locomotives proved unreliable and horse-drawn cars were introduced. Heavy rains routinely washed away rails and ties. In April of 1839, sparks from a locomotive caused a brush fire. Saboteurs

routinely placed ties and other debris on the tracks and jammed switches in an effort to thwart the train's progress.

Bad business practices implemented by a scandal-plagued stockholder board led to more problems. A revision of the railroad's original charter allowed for the line to continue to Cape May. That project dried up the railroad's funds and plunged it further into debt.

Eventually ridership declined to a point where the tracks lay barren. Schopp said stagecoach drivers — the railroads direct competitors — used to take passengers along the empty tracks and laugh at the railroad's misfortune.

"The ridership was never as strong as the proposers anticipated," Schopp said.

It was dealt a deathblow in November 1842 when a fire at the Woodbury stable destroyed several pairs of horses used to drive the railroad cars. The line ceased operations in April 1846 and the rails and ties were taken up in 1850. Campbell, who had acquired a bad reputation, left the area and took up operations in New England where he was held in such high regard that a song was written about him.

Despite its failure, the Camden and Woodbury Railroad did usher the age of rail travel into Gloucester County.

The old railroad's right of way was later used by the West Jersey Railroad, which was chartered in 1853.

At the time, "Gloucester County was just not ready for a railroad," Schopp said.

#### RESTORATION OF PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE THROUGH WENONAH – A BAD IDEA?

By 1860 the tracks from Woodbury to Glassboro had been straightened and improved and a sizable amount of both freight and passenger service was being generated. Just imagine how the passenger service benefited the communities along the line.

Prior to the coming of the trains, freight and people moved very slowly and arduously. Horses and wagons on dirt roads, barges on the rivers and creeks, walking, movement was difficult and slow at

best. Then, almost miraculously, a person could board a train and get from Camden to Cape May, or from Glassboro to Camden or Philadelphia quickly and comfortably. What a quantum leap in technology.

Then along came the automobile, bus, truck, paved roads and everything changed again. People and jobs moved away from city centers and the rails no longer took them where they wanted to go and or to live. According to a Philadelphia Inquirer study conducted in 1996, "While 13,500 Gloucester County residents work in Philadelphia, nearly four times that number work in Gloucester County". "Only about one in ten workers who live in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties works in Philadelphia according to a special compilation of statistics from the 1990 Census".

In spite of statistics such as these the DRPA and other agencies are proposing putting trains back on the tracks, the very same tracks where they took them from in the 1960's due to lack of customers.

Well in my opinion it will not work. The alternative is no longer the horse and wagon, it is the motor vehicle that wants to go east and west (cross-county), not north to Camden.

Residents, especially those of Wenonah and Pitman should know that a two-rail system is no longer easily accomplished. The railroad companies sold off a lot of their lands and the right-of-way is no longer the width it needs to be. Reacquisition of the necessary land would do away with Wenonah's new municipal building and severely impact Pitman's business district. With the rails at grade (ground level) the disruption to cross-county auto traffic would be substantial and unacceptable. When this problem was raised during the 2005 study, we were told the rails would either be raised on towers or buried in an open trench. Besides the tremendous cost of such a design, the resulting disruption to town centers would severely damage many towns along the route and cause significant reduction of property values at and near the tracks.

Add in the very real possibility of a nearly \$1 billion cost and you may be forced to agree that putting trains back on the old track is definitely an idea whose time has passed.

Jack Sheppard Sr.

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Here

PO Box 32  
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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# WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2008

### Membership Benefits

- MONTHLY NEWSLETTER MAILED TO YOUR HOME
- MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH INTERESTING PROGRAMS
- ACCESS TO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES AND MEMORABILIA
- INFORMATION BY KNOWLEDGEABLE WENONAHIANS

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

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

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\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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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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