

Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 3 March 2008

MESSAGE FROM
VICE PRESIDENT
BARBARA CAPELLI

Dear Members;

This Friday's meeting is sure to be a crowd pleaser and we are expecting a super crowd at that! So, come early and make sure to get your seat! Also be sure to tell your friends and neighbors...bring the kids!

Another matter of importance, the Historical Society is taking a significant role in the creation of a Founder's Day in Wenonah Park on June 5th. We are looking for volunteers and anyone interested in speaking about the history of Wenonah!

Jennie McQuaide and Jack Sheppard are assisting Marjorie Lentz on an updated version of Marjorie's history book "Wenonah". The original edition was published in 1976 and has long since been out of print. When available it is sure to be a fun and informative reading experience.

We have so much to be thankful for here in Wenonah and so many people that work very hard to preserve what Wenonah's founders started.

Wenonah is full of great volunteers, and many of those volunteers are part of our Wenonah Historical Society. How wonderful it is to know that so many of you have been instrumental in keeping our town the reason why people want to live here and we continue to flourish by your examples.

Founder's Day should be a great family experience that the whole town

can enjoy and it will certainly provide a great opportunity to work with the Wenonah Elementary School and additional volunteers to see that this day will be another great reflection on the pride we all share about our town!

HISTORICAL FACT

Our neighbor to the south, Sewell, NJ was named after William Sewell, a General in the Civil War and President of the West Jersey Railroad. He was substantially involved in the creation of Wenonah.

WHS OFFICERS 2008

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| President | Louis McCall |
| Vice Pres. | Barbara Capelli |
| Secretary | Jo Dominy |
| Treasurer | Carol Wiltsee |
| Trustee | Betty MacLeod |
| Trustee | Vicki McCall |

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

MARCH MEETING PROGRAM

Wenonah resident Larry Ledrich will display his Native American Indian artifacts collection. The collection originated in a site in Harrison Township. He will be joined by professional archaeologist Jack Cresson. Jack has spent a lifetime studying native habitats and will share his knowledge and expertise on the subject. If you have found something unique or unusual while digging in your garden or yard bring it for Jack's

interpretation and analysis. This will be the "Show and Tell" part of the meeting.

THE HISTORY OF WENONAH BY MARJORIE K. LENTZ

During the mid-1970's the Wenonah Historical Society, wanting to do something for the Bicentennial decided a book about the origins of Wenonah would be an excellent way of both participating in the event, and creating a fund-raiser for the Society. Marjorie Lentz volunteered to author such a book. It was completed and published in 1976. She did a fantastic job, the project was a success, the entire printing sold out and there are few, if any copies available for the public.

Marjorie has graciously agreed to allow parts of her book to be used in subsequent WHS newsletters.

Accordingly, this and future issues will contain parts, or even chapters of her book. Save them up and you will eventually have your own copy of the original "Wenonah" by Marjorie K. Lentz.

For those who want a "whole" book, an updated version is currently being written, available late 2008.

HISTORICAL FACT

4/17/1883 Dr. George Bailey, on behalf of the Mantua Land and Improvement Company presented to the Borough two "squares" of land for our Park. It was accepted by the Borough and the Deed received and acknowledged September 11, 1883.

“JUST A RAILROAD STATION” December 1870

Excerpts from the book “Wenonah” by Marjorie K. Lentz

The new railroad station along the west side of the tracks of the West Jersey Railroad stood incongruous among the fields that surrounded it. Farmers had eyed the station with interest because they anticipated it would be a convenience in transporting their sweet potatoes to the Philadelphia markets. However, as the newspaper, *The Constitution* stated, the station looked far "too elegant for sweet potatoes because it boasted of "two compartments, one for the sale of tickets and joined by a comfortable passenger saloon."

Heading toward the station on December 19, 1870 was a special train which left Camden, New Jersey, just before noon. The train followed the West Jersey Railroad tracks past Gloucester, past Westville and at Woodbury took the Y that made a beeline to the station known as the New Mantua Station. The passengers who detrained that day were not in the least interested in transporting sweet potatoes, but they were interested in converting the sweet potato patches into building lots and in transporting commuters to a "new suburban town."

From the rise of the land at the New Mantua Station the visitors had a sweeping view of the fields now sliced by the railroad tracks. They saw Henisey's Landing Road which led to the busy wharves a-long the Mantua Creek. Within sight of the station they looked across to the dwelling of the Stone Farm House already 97 years old. A short distance away were meandering lanes that led to a few other farmhouses and to the west was the abandoned road bed of the railroad tracks that previously surmounted a thirty-two foot high trestle over the Mantua Creek leading to the old Mantua Station.

The stop at the station was brief, but while the passengers were there they envisioned how the land could be leveled, the country lanes erased and the existing farm houses squared and placed properly on straight streets. After "a site visitation the Gentlemen met in the passenger saloon of the New Mantua Depot" at 1:15 p. m. when Samuel A. Whitney read a proposal for forming a "Real Estate and Improvement Company to operate at the New Mantua Station of the West Jersey Railroad."

Whitney augmented the report by noting that the land, consisting of 572 acres, could be purchased for \$69,575. The group unanimously agreed and in a few minutes, \$29,500 was subscribed.

It was just a railroad station but it witnessed the beginnings of a town and the town, still unnamed, already had a history.

Early maps reveal small campsites of the Unalachtigo Indians of the Lenni Lenape Tribe spotted along the banks of the Mantua Creek and the Chestnut Branch that flows into it. In the 1600's cartographers named the streams for the Indians who lived by them, and it is assumed that the Mantua Creek was named for the Manteses, a small band of Indians who had campsites along these waterways. The trails that border Mantua Creek and Break Back Run are considered to be Indian trails and it is along these waterways that arrowheads, net sinkers, stone hammers and axes have been found. Potsherds of the Woodland Period have been discovered and sufficient fragments at one site have made possible the reconstruction of pottery revealing a skillful design of inverted Vs.

Some of the land bordering the Indian trails was owned by Nathaniel Chew who in 1712 recorded in Gloucester County's earmark book the marks of his pigs, "a slitt in each ear and half penny on each side." One of his sons, Jeffrey Chew, inherited a part of the acreage and to his holdings purchased 125 acres from Samuel Moffett. Moffett either retained or later secured a five-acre plot from the farm on which in 1773 he built a dwelling which traditionally was a stage line stop on the route from Camden to Cape May. The house was strategically located on the Old Ford Road which led to the edge of Chew's farm to the only place below Berkeley, now Mount Royal, that stage lines could cross the Mantua Creek. During the ownership of Robert Sparks it is recorded that "the militia met in a field in 1777 to practice, hold meetings and elect officers at the stone-house." Deeds note that the five-acre plot was later joined to the farm and it was known as the Stone House Farm.

Traditional accounts relate that a Revolutionary War skirmish occurred at the intersection of Old Ford Road and Bark Bridge Road.

On both sides of Glassboro Road was the "plantation" of Benjamin Clark. The story has been told that while the British camped along the Monongahela Trail in 1777 they seized Clark's team of horses and a load of wheat he was driving to Valley Forge for General Washington's Army. However, that night Clark crept into the British camp and retrieved his horses hiding them on an island in the Mantua Creek. Also that same winter General Anthony Wayne foraged for supplies for Washington's army and records note that he secured hay along the Mantua Creek in this area and probably some of the hay was secured from the Stone House Farm.

By the 1850's the Mantua Creek was bustling with shipyards where shallops and flatboats were built. To the Philadelphia markets were shipped sweet potatoes, buckwheat, turnips and shad and from Philadelphia were received staples. Another commodity received from Philadelphia was manure which was sold to the farmers in this area. In 1855 shipped out of Philadelphia to the Mantua Creek were 120 loads priced of manure at seventy-five cents a load.

When the West Jersey Railroad was extended from Woodbury to Glassboro in 1861, a newspaper account notes that there was "difficulty in bridging the Mantua Creek." When a Danforth locomotive was added to the line it was reported that it had a three hundred ton traction and that "the power of this massive iron horse was seen recently when it took 24 loaded cars up the steep grade at Mantua." With the merger of the West Jersey Railroad with the Millville and Glassboro Railroad, plans were made to relocate the tracks to alleviate a dangerous curve and to reduce the height of the tracks.

New railroad tracks, a new station, easy commutation to and from Philadelphia, "healthy breezes" that promised a malaria free area, high elevation above the Mantua Creek that assured adequate drainage were all prerequisites for a "new suburban town."

William F. Allen, resident engineer of the West Jersey Railroad and son-in-law of the president of the railroad, made contact with the seven landowners whose land was adjacent to the tracks. Each one agreed to sell his land. The largest landowner was Isaac C. Stevenson who owned about 244 acres extending from the New Mantua Station northward to Glassboro Road and south to Bark Bridge Road. Charles Starn owned 163 acres in the area of the railroad station reaching westward toward the Mantua Creek. The Peter Kier Stone House Farm extended southward to the Mantua Creek. Other landowners were David Kay who owned the land including Dilk's Little Mill and the mill pond, Edwin Stokes whose land bordered the northern stretch of the new railroad tracks, Nathaniel Chew, a tanner, whose land bordered the northern section of Glassboro Road and Samuel W. Chew who owned a small slice of land on the road leading to the mill.

On December 14, 1870 Allen invited a group of twenty-one businessmen to the Camden office of the West Jersey Railroad Company to consider a plan to organize a land development company. Horatio J. Mulford of Bridgeton was appointed presiding officer and he named a committee to prepare a proposal.

Five days later on December 19, 1870 the businessmen reassembled in the Camden office and heard the first reading of the proposal which had been submitted by Samuel A. Whitney, former president of the Millville and Glassboro Railroad and leader in the glass industry, General William J. Sewell, vice-president of the West Jersey Railroad who secured the special train for the site visitation, George Wood, a director of the West Jersey Railroad and president of the Millville Manufacturing Company, and William F. Allen. The entire group then boarded the special train that took them to the New Mantua Station.

Although the visitors may have seen dormant sweet potato patches that winter day, they visualized the possibilities of a "new suburban town." The Constitution reported that "from the known energy of the gentlemen at the head of the enterprise, there is no doubt of its success."

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Here

PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

AMOUNT PAID \$ _____

CHECK _____ CASH _____

DUES: \$15.00 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

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

WHS PO Box 32, WENONAH, NJ 08090
