

Newsletter

Volume 8 Issue 7 October, 2010

OCTOBER MEETING PROGRAM

The Cowles, Dominys and Harts will be discussing their lives in the fire company from 1960 through 1988. They will briefly discuss fire company history, life as a member and the friendships made, major fires during the time frame, innovations, and humorous stories of fire fighting and non-fire fighting activities. The final part of the presentation will be one of many movies made by the fire company during those years, entitled "The Red Hot Mamas" depicting life in the Wenonah Fire Company if it were run by women.

EARLY DAYS IN WENONAH

Street lighting

The first lights along our streets were oil lamps, provided by citizens, that needed to be lit each evening and extinguished some time later. According to the Minutes of the Borough Commission May 8th, 1883 a Resolution was adopted to "... assume the care of filling, cleaning, lighting and extinguishing all street lamps that are located by private individuals". However the cost of the oil and other materials for the lamps was at the expense of the residents. At the July 1883 meeting Mr. George Vogt was hired to light,

extinguish and maintain the lights for the sum of Fifty dollars a year. Shortly after this period the Borough started purchasing and installing street lamps at public expense. By the end of 1883 many more lamps had been purchased and installed requiring George Vogt's contract to be adjusted. Going forward he was to be paid 30 cents per lamp per month.

WHS OFFICERS 2010

President	Barbara Capelli
Vice President.	Charles Horan
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

(Editor's Note; In view of the many electrical outages in Wenonah recently we may have to go back to installing and maintaining our own street lights and possibly building an electricity generating plant.)

Just kidding of course but we do have problems with interruption of electricity to Wenonah needing immediate attention. I have expressed my concerns to Mayor Capaldi and Chief Scheetz as these outages are not only a nuisance, but

dangerous as well. Electronic devices are rendered useless along with hard-wired telephones. Many senior citizens don't have cell phones so emergencies cannot be reported if phone lines are disabled.

Jack C. Sheppard Sr.

WENONAH HISTORICAL MUSINGS

In last month's newsletter I mentioned the problem of gaps in our July 4th program collection. We have the program for the first celebration in 1872 but none going forward until 1897 and then another gap through 1909.

This then raises the question of continuity of July 4th celebrations in Wenonah since its founding.

I recently spent time reviewing Milt Webb's collection of news clippings and found a significant number of articles in local papers reporting celebrations in Wenonah. These reports indicated there were parades, speeches, athletic contests, and for many years fireworks.

In view of these findings I feel safe in suggesting there have been Independence Day observances in Wenonah continuously since its founding in 1871. There are very few communities in the state, or in the country for that matter, that can make that claim.

Jack C. Sheppard Sr.

The following is the first of two parts of an article written by Wenonah historian Milton Webb. Milt was born in Wenonah and loved the town more than anyone I have known. He retired from employment early for health reasons and spent a great amount of the rest of his life at the Gloucester County Historical Society museum studying Wenonah history.

There were two hotels, the first being the Wenonah House Hotel which was also among if not the first building in Wenonah. .

THE HOTELS OF WENONAH
BY MILTON H. WEBB

Wenonah was a housing development created by the Mantua Land and Improvement Company. This organization was a mix of men associated with local businesses, the West Jersey Railroad and Philadelphia investors. The West Jersey Railroad in Deptford Township below Woodbury had been realigned and a new station built called the "New Mantua Station at Wenonah." This was sited in the middle of what had previously been Isaac Stevenson's sweet potato field. This was the area proposed for the new town on the West Jersey Railroad. In December 1870, the decision was made to form this land company and to buy 572 acres of land in this area for \$69,575.

One of the men attending this preliminary meeting was William Frederick Alien, Resident Engineer of the West Jersey Railroad. He was the son-in-law of Thomas Jones Yorke, president of the railroad and director of the Land Company. Alien's role in the creation of Wenonah was vital, as it was his plat,

which would be the guideline for the future evolution of this new town.

In Alien's plan, the focal point was to be a "boarding house" facing a two block park area. Adjacent to this was the new railroad depot and a two block business section. The streets were laid out in a grid pattern, roughly north and south, east and west. "Wenonah was an early example of a railroad suburb that was established around a transportation node both to derive profit from the sale of land and to provide ridership for the railroad itself."

The proposed Wenonah House, the "Boarding House," was specified to be 45 by 52 feet, three stories high with a back building 26 by 40 feet surrounded by a veranda 12 feet in width. It was described as being Doric in style but the cupola on top gave it a distinctive Italianate style, very Victorian. Each room was to have water and gas, a luxury for this period. An interesting detail was a windmill to provide power to pump water into a tank on the roof.

Bids came in from as far away as Cape May City. One typical bid of interest was for "the Boarding House at Mantua Station in the sum of \$15,800 signed by Sterling Clayton, guaranteed by E. Stokes Co. of Woodbury, dated April 3, 1871." The low bidder was Harden and Brother of Camden in the amount of \$15,000, for which they were awarded a contract.

In 1872, the new Wenonah House opened for its first summer season with Benjamin Packer, a local resident, in charge. Although the town was sparsely populated with only ten houses, the hotel was fully

booked up for the season. Newspaper accounts give a glimpse into the activities of the boarding house. Mentioned were plays, cakewalks, pigeon matches, yachting parties, concerts and turtle suppers. One such event is related in the local newspaper:

"The guests of the Wenonah House prior to closing enjoyed a reed bird supper, and the last hop of the season, impromptu". At the supper the reed birds were invitingly imbedded in the only toast offered as if they were anxiously expecting appreciation, which they fully met with, in connection with the hot waffles and dressing of "sugar and spice and all that is nice." Every luxury was included in the amply spread table, and all did full justice to the repast, and were reluctant to leave the supper room radiant with brightness and good cheer. Dancing on the "light fantastic toe" was heartily enjoyed until the participants were well tired. This was followed by a tableaux and stair dance, so vivid, so real that all could participate in the mirth. The respected proprietor and his lovely wife have our warmest thanks for their cordial hearty efforts for the comfort and pleasure of their guests, and as we parted it was with the earnest wish and prayer that they might be encouraged for many years with the same well filled house of cultured and pleasant people."(1) Wenonah was never a "boom town" and has had its periods of depression. One such period was in the early 1880's. Bookings at the hotel became meager; houses built on speculation by the Land Company remained unsold. It was decided to hire a resident agent to create momentum for the land development. The man

hired was Ephraim J. Lloyd of Salem. He pursued his job with vigor and his first action was to persuade the Mantua Land and Improvement Company to get out of the hotel business and sell the Wenonah House. The sale was to an Ann Linch of Philadelphia and then to a Samuel Shreeve of Mt Laurel in the same year and finally to Mahlon Newton of Woodbury in 1884.

Newton was an experienced hotel manager. He entered the hardware business at the young age of eighteen and four years later opened and managed the Newton Hotel at Broad and Delaware Streets in Woodbury. The first new approach, at the suggestion of Lloyd, was that the hotel would be opened all year. Flyers were distributed which read: "Go To Wenonah the new town on the West Jersey Rail Road 11 miles from Philadelphia before making arrangements for the summer or for the year. No healthier location in the vicinity of Philadelphia fine rolling country and the best of water, boating and fishing."

In 1884, he opened the Wenonah House hosting a reception for one-hundred invited guests. There was a string orchestra from Philadelphia, Chinese lanterns, flags and flowers. This-set the stage for the coming season. There were elaborate dinners, tableaux, lectures, yachting parties and hops. General William Sewell, the supervisor of the West Jersey Railroad and a frequent guest of the hotel, on several occasions provided private cars to be added to the excursion trains for trips to the shore. The period of 1884 to 1887 was very successful.

Unfortunately the ownership of Newton ended in 1887 when the

building and grounds were sold to Senator George Pfeiffer, Jr. of Camden for \$12,000. He was a successful businessman owning a coal and lumber business, and also the water supply business for the city of Camden. His hotel experience involved the ownership of a hotel at Brown's Mills In-The-Pines. Business at the Wenonah House diminished rapidly, possibly because of absentee, ownership and lack of interest. In 1890, the building remained empty and reflected poorly on the financial condition of the community. The newspaper wrote "There is no probability that the hotel will open this season. As things go at present the Wenonah House is of no advantage either to the owner or to the borough."(2)

1. Constitution, 1 September 1874

2. Ibid, 11 March 1891

Next month's concluding installment, the second hotel in Wenonah, *The Wenonah Inn*.

WENONAH 101 YEARS AGO
OCTOBER 6, 1910

Speech by President Woodrow Wilson to the Cadets of the Wenonah Military Academy

"I wish it were possible" said Mr. Wilson "to impress upon fellows at your age the great importance of what you are doing here. I suppose, as most boys do, that school is a necessary evil and few realize it is to equip them for a better battle of life. The men who loaf don't get anywhere, don't amount to any thing; it is only the men who achieve who get anywhere.

"It is a question for you to answer whether you are going to be mere

tools in the hands of someone else or are going to be masters and take hold of things. Don't be foolish enough to ask what the sense of this is. You go to the gymnasium and wonder what the use of it all is. You will never perform on the parallel-bars with your business partner. You are expending good muscular strength and wonder what the use of it all is. You are just getting your muscles in shape to answer the call when the time comes for you to use them.

It is just like the piece of structural steel fitted in all its fibers to meet the strain in the steamship when the stress of storm of the Atlantic comes. It is just so with your books. They are getting you men fully fit when the contingency arises and you are called upon to wrestle with the problems of life; you are mentally fit to meet the stress. Don't lose sight of the fact that you want to play a creditable part in the world to do something in its great work.

A school like this is a breeding place for men. Some one said, "If you would consider me witty, I must ask you to make a joke. If you would be considered educated, I must ask you to know something. The witty man who preceded me as head of the university (Princeton) once told an anxious mother whose son was about to begin the course: "Madam, we guarantee satisfaction or return the boy" Most men I know, after their years of experience, would like to go back and be schoolboys again and gain the greater profit from the advantages then obtained. Take the advice of one who knows, who has been through it, and lay hold of all that you can here obtain for the building of your bodies and minds, that you may be useful citizens in this great land."



Stamp
Here

PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2010

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

DUES: \$15.00 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

WHS PO BOX 32, WENONAH, NJ 08090
