

Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 6 September 2008

UPDATED WENONAH HISTORY BY MARJORIE LENTZ

I am pleased to announce that our esteemed member/author Marjorie Lentz has spent most of the summer working on the long awaited history update of her book "Wenonah". The original version that was published in 1975 has long been out of print.

Her work consists of additions to the original text as well as new material that was not included in the original version. Should be very interesting and an excellent addition to our fund-raising capability.

COMMUNITY CENTER GRANT

According to Borough Engineer and grant coordinator David Kreck he has submitted updated plans to the NJ Department of Transportation and hopes to receive approval of that agency yet this month. Once that approval is received funding is assured and bids for the work can be sought, hopefully yet this Fall/Winter. Contracts can then be awarded for work commencing in the Spring of 2009.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Progress is being made, albeit more slowly than I would like, however we are somewhat closer to the goal of the "digital museum" completion.

Computer whiz Scott Barnes has been assisting with setting up a new computer program that affords a great deal of flexibility for using digital images. The program permits sorting images into presentations for different interests such as Wenonah's Origins,

Wenonah's Historic Homes, the Wenonah Military Academy, etc.

Julie Ream continues with her necessary and much-valued activity of categorizing and storing the items having Wenonah historical meaning.

Jack Sheppard Sr

WHS OFFICERS 2008

President	Louis McCall
Vice Pres.	Barbara Capelli
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Meetings are held the second Friday of each month at the Community Center except June, July and August

SEPTEMBER 1908 WENONAH 100 YEARS AGO

Mayor Lorence gave four boys, who were caught playing crap by Constable Park, a good lecture and told them if he ever caught them again he would fine them \$25.

The Academy opened Tuesday. All the boys have not reported yet, but there will be more than last year. The boys seem very much pleased to get back. That's because demerits haven't commenced.

Notice: I beg to announce to my friends and patients I have opened a branch office for the practice of my profession and am thoroughly equipped for advanced dentistry in all its branches. I have personally administered narcotized air, thirty two thousand times and extracted thousands of diseased teeth without

pain. Chas. H. Lorence DOS (Among his many other talents, he was Mayor of Wenonah)

We hear that Mr. Jorden and Mr. Swartz are going to run for council on the Prohibition ticket.

Our railroad station is well lighted now since the electric company has been cut out and the railroad company is using its own electricity. (This was a problem in the community and gas was still the source of illumination.)

James Carey has just returned from Maine where he has been touring in his 60 horsepower Pierce Arrow car. He had as his guests on the trip Mr. and Mrs. Edward Farr.

Part of the Canoe Club will take their annual Labor Day cruise up the Timber Creek. Mantua Avenue is a fine place to train horses and our people are availing themselves of the opportunity.

The Misses Comey, daughters of Robert H. Comey entertained about twenty five of their young friends at their handsome boat house. Guests were present from Philadelphia, Woodbury and other places and all report a delightful time. The boat house was beautifully decorated and a string orchestra from Philadelphia provided the music for dancing. (The boat house was at the foot of East Willow Street.)

We have no congratulations only regrets for the indifference or willful ignorance of the people of this county of a subject that is vital to them-Temperance.

An Episcopal Church and a bridge across the railroad at Elm Avenue seem to be the next things necessary for a perfect town.

Woodbury Daily Times

“A CHAPEL, A SCHOOL AND TOMATO CATSUP” 1873 - 1883

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

(continued from the May 2008 newsletter)

Previously the topic was the Wenonah House that purportedly dominated the social scene. By now the hotel was kept open all year with many interesting activities. However it was still considered to be a summer resort.

Dinners included such local specialties as reedbirds served on toast and lunches included waffles served with a “dressing of sugar and spices.” Dances included quadrilles, glides and mazurkas. There were maze dances and stair dances. At some dances the women were requested to wear only pink gowns and at a phantom dance they wore white gowns. Orchestras arrived from Philadelphia by train. One account notes that the “company enjoyed themselves without restraint in dancing, promenading, music and conversation until an early morning hour. During intermission terpsichorean exercises were held. Afterwards the company was invited to the dining room where tables were spread with fruit collation, both native and imported.”

However the most talked about entertainments were the amateur theatricals planned sometimes by the hotel staff and sometimes by the guests. Original songs, tableaux, farces with pungent stabs at those in the audience were weekly performances. In one instance the “Philadelphia hotel visitors devised costumes to represent potato bugs which were grotesquely made to promenade and indulge in a comic flirtation. The lampoons evoked peals of laughter especially on one gentleman farmer in the audience who recently purchased a hundred young turnip sprouts for celery sprouts. He gathered his agricultural knowledge in Pennsylvania and only recently has been transplanted into Jersey long enough to represent his district in the Legislature and to serve as chairman of the Committee on Agriculture.” Few guests escaped being caught into a farce.

Other entertainment planned for the hotel guests included a Dime Museum Burlesque complete with barkers, lining skeletons and snake charmers. Often the waiters and bellhops participated in concerts and cakewalks. A Carnival of Venice was staged by the lake with a juju band and pantomimes and at this event the applause was so tremendous that some of

the performers overplayed their roles and fell into the lake.

Private railroad cars for the hotel guests were attached to excursion trains to Atlantic City and upon their return the guests would find the hotel veranda illuminated with Japanese lanterns and a special supper prepared. Guests who traveled the summer resort circuit reported that the festivities at the Wenonah House compared favorably with the best hotels in Cape May and Long Branch.

Some hotel guests brought their teams for the summer season. On one occasion thirty-five turnouts¹ decorated with flags and flowers paraded through Wenonah, Mantua and Woodbury.

Morning card parties, progressive euchre parties, strolls around Wenonah’s lakes, bowling and shuffle board kept the guests busy during the day. In the evenings the men who commuted to their businesses in Philadelphia joined their families at the hotel or at their summer homes. In September when the hotel closed for the season and the commuters closed their summer homes, Wenonah settled down to a slower tempo. However this lasted only a short time because excellent commuter service on the railroad encouraged summer visitors to purchase lots and to become permanent residents. Commutation tickets to Philadelphia were fifty dollars a year.

Much pride centered around the railroad station. Flower beds were groomed and permanent plantings established. The People’s Stage Line brought passengers from Woodstown, Mullica Hill and Mantua. In 1873 passenger receipts from the West Jersey Railroad were \$9,232.34 and freight receipts were \$1,469.94.

By 1875 the Pennsylvania Railroad owned 80% of the West Jersey Railroad stock and plans were developed for a double track to extend from Wenonah to Glassboro. With increased railroad service, troubles grew. Accidents were frequent. South of Wenonah a train collided with a Cape May freight and six cars were demolished. As one observer described the scene, “a more complete train wreck cannot be imagined.” A Bridgeton freight lost a wheel forcing three cars down an embankment.

¹An outfit of a carriage with its horse or horses

Locomotive SPARKS started frequent brush fires, track walkers were killed by on-coming trains and passengers were discouraged from standing on the platform as the trains approached. With the railroad came a deluge of tramps who were blamed for stealing everything from watermelons to trousers from nearby clotheslines.

The railroad controlled the town. No special church service, no musical program, no out-of-town dinner guest was scheduled without first consulting the time table. Advertisements to Presbyterian musicals noted that "Woodbury people can take the 7:07 for Wenonah and return on the 10 o'clock train." Even funeral announcements included the time when trains arrived in Wenonah and one as far away as Mullica Hill noted that "carriages will meet the 8: o'clock train from Phila. at Wenonah station." Special cars were attached to regular trains. Special cars brought visitors to the dedication of the Presbyterian Chapel, to weddings, and, of course, to the annual meetings of the Board of Directors of the Mantua Land and Improvement Company.

Although Philadelphians filled the forty rooms in the Wenonah House, built big houses around the square, spent their evenings driving their teams along the avenues and promenading on the hotel verandas and the parks in front of the hotel, Wenonah was still bordered by farm land. Farmers exhibited prize vegetables at the stores and delivered fresh farm products to the door. Because of the abundant supply of farm products a cannery was established. Located along the Mantua Creek on the northern side of West Mantua Avenue, the cannery occupied a building formerly used by Daniel Brown for a sash factory. Hayes Perry, Chalkley Duell and John Colbert began operations in 1880. However Colbert shortly withdrew to begin his own cannery across the creek. In the first year of operation 50,000 cans of tomatoes were processed and two years later they increased their production to 200,000 cans hiring about one hundred workers. The cannery processed not only tomatoes and catsup, but when the tomato season ended it canned pumpkins and during later years asparagus which was sealed in glass jars.

Other businesses followed. William W. Clark opened the Wenonah Coal Yard², Carre's gardens sold flowers and plants³, B.F. Coles opened a general store⁴ and Mrs. Lashley had a boarding house⁵.

The new residents from Philadelphia and the farmers who rented land from the Mantua Land and Improvement Company were congenial neighbors. The dances and the amateur entertainments at the Wenonah House were opened to all. A newspaper account notes that "to the Wenonah House guests, the neighboring farmers' dairies are never bolted or melon patches or orchards barred, while the novelty of these summer excursions among the farmers in the height of their work are reciprocally enjoyed."

On the Fourth of July the entire community joined together to celebrate. A new event introduced during this period was the tub race. Contestants paddled tubs with their hands to a stake in the lake and then raced back to shore. The event was boisterous, upsets were expected and the races became so vigorous that complicated rules were enforced by the judges. No ballast was permitted, no water splashed into the tub could be removed until the tub capsized and no assistance could be given "unless the contestant is in dire danger." One account notes that "the staid professionals, thriving merchants and brawny business men engaged in the sport."

During the decade of 1873 to 1883 as the town grew, Thomas W. Synnott continued to receive patents on his inventions in the manufacturing of glass bottles. The Wenonah Advance, a newspaper was published by Milton Pierce and a ferry boat named Wenonah plied across the Delaware River.

Also the Mantua Land and Improvement Company made detailed plans to dam the Mantua Creek along the southern border of Wenonah to create a lake. Drawings, cost of securing necessary land bordering the creek and all details are preserved. However the lake was not created because of the limited height of the railroad bridge.

²In area of South West Ave. And Cherry St.

³In area of 205 South Princeton Ave.

⁴3 East Mantua Ave.

⁵1 East Mantua Ave.



PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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Here

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 _____

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
