

WENONAH

Historical Society Newsletter



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Her Life was Rich by Example

Reprinted from the Gloucester County Times, August 19, 2002 · By Bob Shryock

The oldest of the six Ramsay children was 10 years old when their father left home. But Jane Tucker Ramsay, their mother, never wavered in her awesome responsibility as a single parent.

"She was a strong woman who was very protective of her children," says David Ramsay, oldest of the six. "She always showed us a positive attitude. Things could be bad for her but he'd still come up smiling, get through the days and weeks, and have dinner for us. We went through a lot of powdered milk and goulash.

I remember Christmases with \$5-\$10 budgets per kid. We always had hand-me-down clothes. She had a specific definition of what she'd accept and what she wouldn't. She didn't want charity from people who felt sorry for her, but she'd accept from good neighbors, and she was always helping others as well. She would absolutely refuse public assistance of any form. She wouldn't take Food Stamps. She wouldn't take unemployment."

Jane Ramsey died June 27. She is survived by her six adoring children: David, Tucker, Jimmy, Ed, and the twins, Jane and Louise. Four graduated from college. Five of the six are in business for themselves, and successful, a classic case of them mirroring their mother's powerful independence.

"We grew up with a very strong work ethic," David Ramsay says. "She taught us that and she demonstrated it. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and she



worked 53 years as a dental hygienist. Her independence traveled through us. We were one adult and six kids who stood our ground. As a family, we were very cohesive and balanced and backed each other up. We fought among ourselves like cats and dogs but we always stuck together as a family.

"It was a very good environment to be raised in. She didn't play favorites. She focused on our strengths and encouraged us to do whatever was good for us—as long as we had good grammar and used good English. She taught us to be independent, believe in ourselves, and beat the odds.

"Her kids were her life. After our father left, she shut down her social life. In the days after he left a single woman didn't get invited out so she decided early to stay out of the fray.

"Her legacy was that she accepted people for who and what they are. One of my brothers said that since her death we realize who she was as an individual. Hundreds have come forward to tell us how she gave them, and others, encouragement. She loved people and loved to be around them. Mother wasn't invited out much, and she hated to miss a party."

Jane lived in a big, sprawling house, and was a resident for all but one year of her life.

She gave back to the town what she felt the town gave to her. She belonged to the Wenonah Reading Club, the Wenonah Woman's Club, the Wenonah Historical Society, and served as Sunday school treasurer of All Saints Episcopal Church. A free spirit, she also was a member of the Wenonah Rifle and Gun Club as a young woman.

A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Dentistry, she worked for four dentists, including Dr. Don Furey in her hometown of Wenonah, and during her career worked with and educated children, migrant farm workers, and underprivileged children and adults in the Camden Free Dental Clinic. She was a uniquely talented woman whose many interests ranged from pottery making to jewelry smithing to watercoloring to antiquing and carving.

Besides her children, her work and her hobbies, Jane Ramsay also had a healthy love for the uniqueness of Wenonah. No one loved the day-long Fourth of July celebration in Wenonah more than Jane. She passed away a week before the 2002 parade and festivities. Jane would have loved to be there, seeing old friends, remembering the good times, and perhaps the tough times as well.

"But I think she wanted to check out before the Fourth," son David says. "Mother never wanted to do anything halfway."

President's Letter

This had been a difficult year for many of us and we have experienced many losses. It is with a very heavy heart that I report the passing of a DEAR friend to the Historical Society, the town, and to me. Jane Tucker Ramsay passed away in June. She leaves a legacy of friends and family. She inspired us all to follow her lead and dedicate ourselves to preserving the wonderful history of this town. Jane raised her family in this town and LOVED every bit of this town. She loved life and taught many of us how to savor each day.

Her love of the Historical Society was unquestioned. She brought new life to this organization under her terms as President and Vice President. She will TRULY be missed.

-Vicki McCall

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The Origin and History of Comey's Lake

Acknowledgments: Some data derived from the archives of Wenonah Historian Milton H. Webb



Milton Pierce, a member of the Mantua Land Improvement Company, had a Carp pond in 1872 along a stream called "Patrick's Run" in the vicinity of what is now Comey's Lake, where natural land contours had already created a water reservoir. It is believed that this was part of Aquadale Lakes where high quality Carp were raised to sell as food in Philadelphia and surrounding areas to the Jewish population as Gefilte Fish. A large lake was established in about 1885 when a leveling dam was placed at the South end of the Patrick's Run stream and the dam increased the water area to about four acres. In 1886 the first Wenonah Parks and Woodland Improvement Association was formed and they participated in the improvements to the lake. The inlet stream to the lake was later named "Camels Back Run". During the Spring of 1890, Stephen Greene purchased the land around the lake and made important improvements to it. In 1894 a new leveling gate and other improvements were made to the lake dam and they named it Camels Back Lake. That same year, the Northern end of the lake had filled

up with silt to such an extent that 20 men were employed for six weeks by Mr. Greene to clean and deepen it. This made the lake better for boating.

Robert H. Comey bought the lake and surrounding property Feb. 1904 from Stephen Greene. He bought an adjoining 27 acres April 1904 from George L. Dilks and started construction of a handsome, large White Mansion for \$25,000.00 as his residence on Mantua Ave. He also had a servants building nearby. (presently located at #12 Lenape Trail). April 1905 he received a large number of shade trees for a Park on his property that was to be stocked later with Deer. March 30, 1908 he moved into his new house. March 13, 1910 the Northern end of Mr. Comey's Lake was dug out again by eleven men to make a better boat landing. Dec. 7, 1910 he built a beautiful Wooden Arched Bridge with decorative side rails (constructed of Long Leaf Yellow Southern Pine) fifty feet over the upper lake and it was painted a bright Vermilion color. April 3, 1911 he built a new dam on his lake and added a colorful Japanese Tea House,

built by John L. Drummer, on Cedar pilings at the North end of the lake. An Amphitheater with five levels was built on the East side of the Tea House. Canoes and small rowboats were docked under and around the base of the Tea House for the use of guests who dressed in their finest for a ride in the lake. Adjacent to the amphitheater a large pool was built that was shaped like the State of NJ and a Tennis Court was also built nearby. A variety of Yellow, Gold and White Algae eating fish were introduced into Comey's Lake. The predominate fish species was Carp and although not specifically mentioned, it is believed that the others were a variety of Koi.

By June 1912 large catered parties were held at the Tea House area. The lake and Tea house were beautifully decorated with colored electric lights and all around the lake Japanese Lanterns peeked from the green foliage. The Tea House was illuminated with hundreds of lanterns and it looked like a fairy garden. A full string orchestra played all the catchy tunes while the guests sang with them. Launches plied up and down the lake for

the pleasure of the guests and the evening ended while they danced under the stars.

In 1924 Ethel R. Hassrick bought the property from Robert Comey. One year later she sold it to Doctor H. Wesley Jack and wife Pearle C, who carried on the tradition of parties at the lake until 1958. On 3/17/58 the lake and surrounding property were sold to Bryant and Sarah Langston. That same year Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Sanderson bought the mansion on 4760 acres. The Langston's built a large home overlooking the lake. The Sanderson's sold the mansion in 1979 to Mr. and Mrs. Ken Sharp who made wonderful improvements to the building and grounds. The mansion was again sold to Mr. Lou Paolino in 1985. He made many additional improvements to the home, pool, tennis court and outbuildings and he is still the current owner.

During the 1960's the lake became known as Langston's Lake. Bryant and Sarah Langston died in a private plane that Bryant was piloting when it crashed in 1969. Through the efforts of the Wenonah Woodlands Council, the entire lake and the land on the East and West sides was dedicated to the Borough of Wenonah by the Stewart Estate for inclusion in their conservation lands. The house on 1,003 acres was then sold to Anthony S. and Carol (Wick) Balchan on Feb. 27, 1970. The house was sold again on May 8, 1971 to Jerome A. and Dolores W. Hoffman. On July 8, 1982 the home went to Sheriff George G. Small for lack of tax payment. The 1st National Bank of Princeton took over the property Feb. 11, 1983. On May 15, 1985 Charles and Dolores Cornell purchased the house overlooking the lake. They made many improvements to the home, built large gardens around it and cleaned debris from the Southern portion of the lake. Charles and Dolores Cornell

are still the current owners of the lakefront home.

Mr. Edwards, a builder, purchased additional land of about 30 acres adjacent to the lake in 1966, subdivided it into building lots and constructed 49 homes (Academy Hill). Up to this time the lake had remained crystal clear for over eighty years. As homes were built and lawns established, the rain-water runoff into the lake increased and along with it came fertilizer. This added excessive nutrient to the lake causing more and more Algae and Duckweed blooms on the surface. At the same time there were less Algae eating fish species due to other predator fish like Pickerel and Bass.

In 1972 Robert & Jane Kitz who owned the Tea House property, with the help of Chuck Forsman, Environmental Commission Members and neighbors, completed a partial restoration of the Tea House and Amphitheater. There was a large celebration with celebrity guests, music, dancing, entertainment, great food and drinks. From 1973 through 1982 Chuck Forsman promoted a massive cleanup of the area surrounding the lake and trail plus dam repair projects, which were all done by volunteers from the homes in Academy Hill.

In 1983 a second overflow dam was built adjacent to the existing dam. It was paid for by Heinz Hoefers to handle the increased water runoff by new homes he was building in the Brookmeade Development (Tom Synnott's property). Slowly silt filled the Northern end of the lake diminishing the size to about two acres. Chuck & Dolores Cornell, owners of the lakefront home, developed attractive gardens down to the lake on their property where they built a trail and allowed hikers to pass by.

By 1991 the lake developed a total cover of Green Algae and Duckweed during the summer months

and although the basic quality of the water remained good, it was not a pleasant sight to see the green cover over the water. In 1993 a pump from the lake to an attractive waterfall was built by the Cornell's, which helped aerate the water and increase the oxygen content. During the following years, Chuck Forsman with the help of volunteers, filled in the earthen area at the dam and raised it two feet to contain the erosion at the lake. A variety of indigenous plantings were placed over the area and the outlet stream was cleaned of debris. The original 1885 dam was rebuilt with material and funds provided by Bob and Dan Bevilaqua in 1995. A wooden dock was built in 1995 as a protective cover over both the original leveling dam and the 1983 overflow dam, with funds provided by the Cornell's. Two hatches in the dock provide access to the dams for maintenance and repair. In 1996 the Northern end of the lake inlet channels were cleared by hand with 7 local volunteers led by Gary Reddig. Frank Eggert and Chuck Forsman restored a bridge over the inlet stream with wood from the original arched bridge and placed a sample of the original bridge side rails nearby in 1996. During 1997, 1998 and 1999 several large trees were removed from the lake with many volunteers.

A program was instituted by Chuck Forsman of the Wenonah Environmental Commission in 1999 & 2000 to decrease the fertilizer runoff into the lake, rake off the bulk of the Algae, increase aeration, increase water activity/circulation and increase the Algae/Duckweed eating fish and fowl population. A railing was also added to the dock. The Cornell's again donated funds for these projects. Old and new trails around the lake were defined for hiking and equipment access. They were lined with mulch by

volunteers in preparation for the annual 4th of July trail hikes conducted by the Wenonah Environmental Commission members.

December 2000 the Japanese Tea House was exhibiting such severe damage that drawings and specifications were developed by Chuck Forsman in preparation for restoration. During that severe snowy winter the structure began to collapse and by April it was down. A call for volunteers to clear away the enormous amount of debris went out along with a request for \$5,000.00 in donations to purchase materials for the restoration of the Tea House.

Chuck Forsman, with the assistance of Bill Schnarr operating a tractor along with nineteen men and women, removed all the debris except key reusable parts of the Tea House. The group was so inspired that they also removed all the vines that had covered a won-

agreed and the first upright beams were in place on 6/12/01. Donations for materials began to arrive and by 6/15/01 \$2,370.00 had been received from former and current residents. Again, the Cornell's made a generous contribution towards the materials. By 6/23/01 John Shad had all the vertical posts, floor beams and knee braces in place despite the frequent and very heavy rainfall, which created terrible working conditions. Work continued on the Tea House in September. By October 26th \$4,300.00 had been donated, the decking was complete and roof beams were installed. December 2001 the roof rafters were installed. January 2002 the upper roof was enclosed. Nearby, a new trail and repairs to the inlet stream waterfall were completed by Jonathan Nate as an Eagle Scout project with the help of his volunteers. March 2002 the lower curved roof was installed. By May 2002 the steps and railings



derful 5 level cement Amphitheatre next to the Tea House. The only disappointment was later that week when 8 of the 20 had Poison Ivy infections. The base of the Tea House still had the original nine concrete foundation columns. Three of them needed masonry repair. Bob and Dan Bevilaqua donated forms, concrete and their time to complete the repairs on 6/2/01.

Chuck Forsman asked John Schad (Wenonah builder, Schad Construction Co.) to volunteer his time to reconstruct the Tea House. He

were installed and the project was completed within the one-year time frame. The goal of \$5,000.00 for materials was achieved. Another new trail was designed to go north from the Tea House Waterfall area and connect to Synnott's Pond on Elm Street, which would allow the trails to encircle two thirds of Wenonah.

Comey Lake ERI Document, Phase 4. Do not reproduce without express permission of C.R. Forsman, Chairman, Comey Lake Historical Restoration & Maintenance Committee 1973-2002.

Jane T. Ramsay

Jane T. Ramsay of Wenonah, NJ on June 27, 2002 at home among her children. Born Jane Tucker to Samuel Lewis and Frances Rode Tucker in Swedesboro, she moved to Wenonah at the age of 1 and resided there until her passing. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dentistry, she was a licensed dental hygienist for 53 years. She began her career in private practice working with Dr. Sausser of Center City, Philadelphia and later with Dr. Don Furey of Wenonah and Dr. Don DeFonce of Mantua. Also during her career she worked with and educated children and migrant farm workers throughout southern New Jersey and later for underprivileged children and adults to the Camden Free Dental Clinic. She then joined H.I.P. of South Jersey from where she retired, but ended her career back in private practice working part-time for Dr. Holtzheimer of Mantua.

Mrs. Ramsay's hobbies and interests included designing,

making and painting pottery for the last 60 years, jewelry-smithing, gem cutting, painting in water colors, antiques, cooking and carving. Her particular interest was spending time and exchanging stories with her family and many friends. She was a member of the Wenonah Reading Club, the Wenonah Woman's Club, and of the former All Saints Episcopal Church, where she served as Sunday School Treasurer for many years. As a young woman she was a member of the former Wenonah Rifle and Gun Club. She remained a very active member of the Wenonah Historical Society until her passing.

She was previously married to David Ramsay, Jr. Together they had six children, all of whom survive her. The are: David Ramsay III and his wife Linda of Wenonah, Tucker Ramsay and his wife Tina of Woodbury Heights, James L. Ramsay and his wife Terry of Wenonah, Edward A. Ramsay and his wife Clare of Pittsgrove, Jane Ramsay, Jr. of Annapolis, MD and Louise Ramsay Cotta and her husband Chuck of Annapolis, MD.,

and four grandchildren, David IV, Scott, Victoria and Rebecca, also survive her. Also surviving are her sisters, Nancy Mohr of Yellow House, PA and Louise Tucker of Wenonah. Her brother, Donald K. Tucker predeceased her.

Friends and neighbors may call Monday evening 6-8pm at Smith Funeral Home, 47 Main St., Mantua, NJ. Funeral services Tuesday 10:30 am at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, N. Monroe and W. Poplar Streets, Wenonah, NJ. Interment will immediately follow at Eglington Cemetery, Clarksboro. Memorial contributions may be made to either the Wenonah Historical Society, PO Box 32, Wenonah, NJ 08090-0032 or the Wenonah Fire and Rescue Department, 14 S. West Ave., Wenonah, NJ 08090.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Archiving and Preservation Committee

Photography is still underway to accompany the recorded written records in our database. As the cooler fall evenings and shorter days come upon us, we will have more time to work indoors to get back to the task of photographing the remainder of the archives. If you have any ideas or items that you would like to contribute to the Historical Society please contact me.

Rocco F Doto · 415-1215
rockracc@aol.com

Japanese Tea House Restoration Completed for Fourth of July!!!

The efforts of many volunteers under the guidance of Chuck Forsman and Bob Bevilaqua were rewarded at a dedication ceremony led by Chuck Forsman. John Schad, a resident builder, was recognized for his untiring volunteer efforts in the reconstruction of the nearly destroyed 1911 Japanese Tea House. The Historical Society thanks the many volunteers who have worked VERY HARD to restore

the Comey Lake Japanese Tea House. The commitment of people like Chuck Forsman, Bob Bevilaqua, and John Schad is truly appreciated. We thank all those who contributed to the efforts to bring back to life a monumental historic structure in this town. Anyone interested in donating to this cause can contact Chuck Forsman at 304 Mohawk Dr., Wenonah, NJ 08090.

All Around Town FOURTH OF JULY

YES... it was a banner year for the Parade. There was a HUGE turnout and patriotism galore. We did ourselves PROUD!

The House Decorating Contest this year was also a success. We Thank all those who entered. The theme this year was "A Salute to America's Heroes." The judges had many entries. All entrants will receive an 8 x 10 photo of their decorated home compliments of Tomorrow's Treasures, Inc of Woodbury Heights, NJ (thanks to George Braun for this ongoing tradition!).

The Top Three Winners Were:

- 1st Place.....The Snock Family at 8 N. Monroe
- 2nd Place.....The Scott Shaver Family at 1 N. Jackson
- 3rd Place.....The Redmond Family at 103 S. Marion

HELP NEEDED

We need help in contributing to the newsletter. Anyone who can spare an hour a month to do an article, interview a longtime resident, or can contribute in any way PLEASE CALL. This is a great opportunity to get to KNOW your town!

WENONAH

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM • 2002-2003

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Address _____

Phone _____

eMail Address _____

Amount Paid \$ _____ Check # _____ Enclosed Cash Enclosed

Please bring this form with your payment to any meeting or mail. Thank you!

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

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- Network of knowledgeable historians
- Historical field trips

COST: \$10 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

RETURN TO WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY • P.O. Box 32 • WENONAH, NJ 08090-0032

September Meeting

Friday, September 13, 2002 • 6:00pm

The September Meeting will be held at two locations:

First, at 6pm at the newly restored Japanese Tea House will be the dedication of the plaque from the Wenonah Historical Society recognizing the efforts of Chuck Forsman, Bob Bevilacqua, John Schad, and the many other volunteers who have worked so hard to restore and preserve this historic treasure. For those who have not seen this wonderful restoration, this is a good time to come and bring a friend to thank those who have followed our mission statement and preserved the integrity of one of Wenonah's structures!

Second, at 7pm, we will have our meeting at Littlegrange (The McCall Porch). Refreshments will be served.

In the event of rain, both events will be held in the Community Center.



Future meeting

October 11, 2002.....South Jersey Ghost Research
Scientific approach and study of the paranormal

THE MISSION OF THE WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The objectives of this Society shall be:

1. To acquire and preserve historic documents, records, artifacts and memorabilia of the Borough of Wenonah.
2. To locate and acquire a suitable place for the storage and display of such materials.
3. To encourage the protection and preservation of historical landmarks and points of interest within the Borough of Wenonah.
4. To encourage historical and genealogical research, and publication of its results.
5. To encourage interest in history generally and in Wenonah history in particular, among the youth of Wenonah.
6. To make all information and acquisitions of the Society available to the public.



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WENONAH
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