

WENONAH

Historical Society Newsletter



April 2002
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Historical Society
of Wenonah, NJ

President's Letter

Welcome to our many new members!!! We have received a great response to our presence in the Wenonah School. The Display Cabinet and newsletters have been instrumental in bringing in some new faces. It is rewarding to see such a renewed interest in our town's history.

As some of you know, my father recently passed away. I wish to thank you for all your support and kindness. My father dearly loved this town and my parents recently pledged a donation of a town clock. This clock will be in his memory and the family hopes to see up in time for the Fourth of July.

We have some wonderful programs in the coming months. This month fellow townsman Arnold Karp will be doing a slide presentation on effects of September 11.

We hope to see some of the new faces at the upcoming meetings

-Vicki McCall

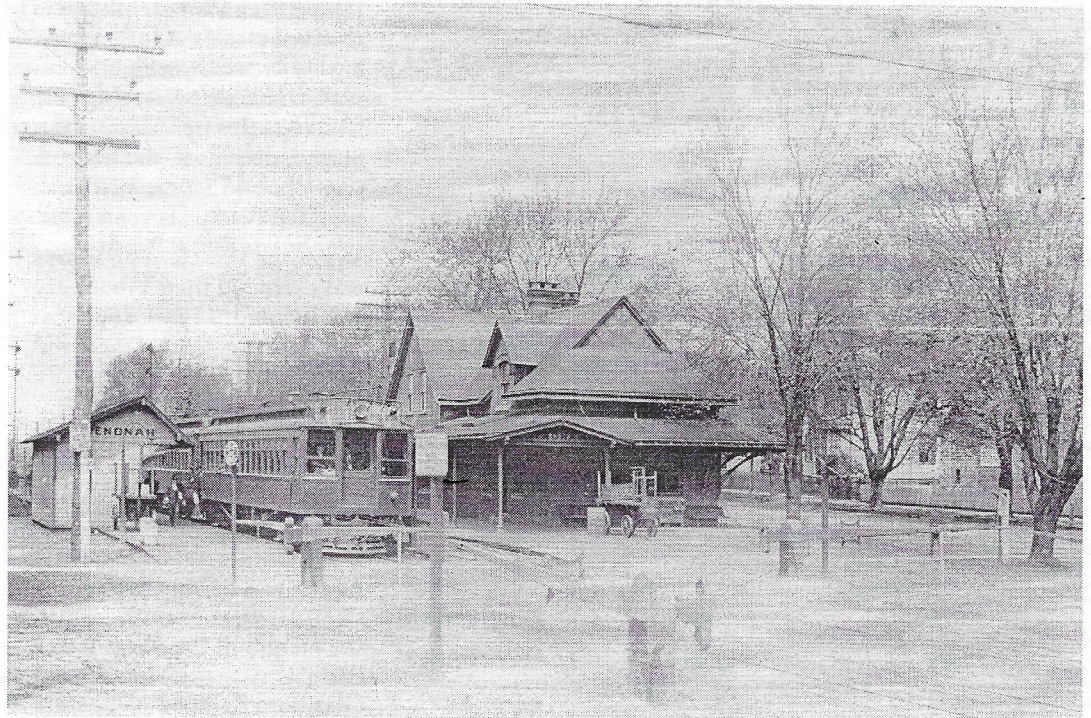
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The Railroad and Wenonah, Part 1

Sixth in a series of articles about Wenonah's heritage.
Compiled by Jack C. Sheppard Sr.



The new railroad station along the west side of the tracks of the West Jersey Railroad stood incongruous among the fields surrounding 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 that 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 that led to the busy wharves along 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

Continued on next page...

Acknowledgement: Some of the information in this document is from a book authored by Marjorie Lentz on behalf of the Wenonah Historical Society and distributed in connection with the Community Center dedication July 4th, 1976. The remainder of the information is from research, personal records, and information from a book by J.C. Sheppard Sr.

The Railroad continued . . .

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 farmhouses 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 V's

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 Maffett. Maffett either retained or later secured a five-acre plot from the farm on which in 1773 he built a dwelling that 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 stonehouse." 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 George 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 an open boat fitted with oars or sails or both. Shallopssm and flatboats were built. To the Philadelphia markets were shipped sweet potatoes, buckwheat, turnips and shad and in return from Philadelphia was received staples. Another commodity received from Philadelphia was manure that was sold to the farmers in this area. Shipped out of Philadelphia to the Mantua Creek in 1855 were 120 loads priced 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 lands

were 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 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 the proposal.

Five days later on December 19, 1870 the businessmen reassembled in the Camden office and heard the first reading on 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."

Much pride centered on the railroad station. Flowerbeds 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. Locomotive sparks started frequent brush fires, on-coming trains killed track-walkers and passengers were discouraged from standing on the platform as the trains approached. With the railroad came a deluge of tramps that were blamed for stealing everything from watermelons to trousers from local 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 Philadelphia 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.

To be continued next issue...

Notes

- i Relocated and now a residence at 8 South West Ave.
- ii 100 South West Ave.
- iii Extended through the parking lot of Wenonah Playground to Mantua Creek, slightly west of South Jackson Ave.

- iv Remains still visible in the Mantua Creek at location commonly called Clay Hill.
- v Extended from South Monroe Ave. To the area of West Cedar St. Where it curved through the woods fording the Mantua Creek.
- vi In area of West Cedar St. And South West Ave.
- vii In Mantua Creek opposite South Jefferson Ave.
- viii An open boat fitted with oars or sails or both.

Who remembers this program???

HATS OFF to our members!!!



WENONAH

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM • 2001-2002

Name _____

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

- Monthly newsletter mailed to your home
- Monthly meetings with informative programs
- Access to various archives and memorabilia
- 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

April Meeting

Friday, April 12, 2002 • 7:30pm
Wenonah Community Center (Train Station)



Arnold Karp, 177th Fighting Wing, Air National Guard
will present a slide and picture presentation of the
Effects of September 11, 2001

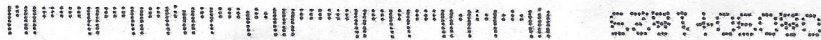
Future meetings

- May 10, 2002.....**Historic Postcards and Ephemera**
Jo White and Sallie Murphy
- June 14, 2002.....**Family Picnic at Wenonah Lake**
- July and August.....**No Meetings**
- September 13, 2002.....**Porch Party at Little Grange**
- 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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