

Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 3 April 2005

MESSAGE FROM
PRESIDENT DON RALSTON

Dear Members;

We are now through the winter season and entering the springtime. This season brings out the very beauty of Wenonah.

The Wenonah Lions Club theme for the 4th of July this year will highlight the Wenonah Military Academy for the years it was in existence from 1904 until it closed, allegedly as a result of the depression, about 1934.

The Wenonah Historical Society has a large number of artifacts from the former Military Academy. Therefore we are planning to display them on July 4th with an open house at the Community Center. By then we hope to have many, if not all of our historical papers, photographs and artifacts identified and catalogued by our filing committee. We will also do some fund raising activities on the Fourth such as selling Wenonah flags, hand bags, and possibly donations will be on hand.

Membership chairperson Jean Cowles has sent out a letter requesting those who have not yet paid their dues for the current year to please do so.

At our March meeting speakers Bob and Carol Cassel, presented a very interesting program on the wildlife in South Jersey. The pamphlets on

"Conserve Wildlife" they provided are interesting to read. The Cassels sent a thank you note to our organization for allowing them to speak.

I encourage all members to be active in the Wenonah Historical Society. Should you have any subject, a speaker, or program preference you wish to be presented please bring it to our attention.

In closing I wish to emphasize

WHS OFFICERS 2005

President	Don Ralston
Vice Pres.	Jack Sheppard Sr.
Secretary	Eileen Caraker
Treasurer	Carol Wiltsee
Corr. Sec.	Betty MacLeod
Trustee	Vicki McCall
Trustee	Macy Pedersen
Trustee	Lucy Schulz

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

once again that although we have many fine members and volunteers, we need and encourage you to become future officers and trustees of the Wenonah Historical Society.

APRIL 8TH
PROGRAM

Mayor Thomas J. Capaldi, will be our speaker for this meeting.

Tom has been a member of Borough Council for many years,

and was recently elected to a second term as mayor. I have asked him to speak about the Tea-21 grant for restoration and repairs to the Community Center. Also about programs now in the planning stage covering problems, such as Homeland Security, the water shortage and traffic control. Please plan to attend this meeting.

WHS Trustee Lucy Schulz, has recovered from her recent surgery for a fractured hip and is currently staying at the Mews in Woodbury.

HISTORICAL TIDBIT

The Wenonah Inn Company of which Stephen Greene is president, Dr. Geo W. Bailey Vice President, Dr. Wm. Greene Treasurer, is just completing a magnificent hotel, designed to accommodate 150 guests. The house and furniture will cost at least \$70,000 and be completed in time for this season's business. The erection of this hotel was one of the conditions under which the West Jersey railroad company is erecting a handsome railroad station on the east side of the tracks immediately opposite the old station. The new building is constructed of rough-faced Eastern hydraulic brick which gives it the appearance of a finely chizzled [sic] stone structure.

From the *Gloucester County Democrat* April 20, 1893

The following is the text of a letter I prepared and sent to our federal and state legislators recently expressing my concerns about putting trains on the old tracks through Wenonah.

Like most of you I too have pleasant memories of the days when you could board the train in Glassboro or Pitman, Wenonah or Woodbury Heights and go to Woodbury, Camden and eventually Philadelphia. But that was a long time ago, a time that ended back in the sixties when the railroads finally admitted railroad passenger service could no longer compete with the convenience of the automobile.

Since then a great amount of development has taken place in our part of the state with the result that the majority of people in the tri-county region want to go to the Deptford, Cherry Hill and Echelon Malls, as well as to numerous housing projects that are not remotely close to Camden or Philadelphia.

As a result, even though it sounds like a good idea, in my opinion recreating train passenger service may be great for a trip down memory lane, but for all practical purposes it will just result in one more heavily subsidized system that will not solve our traffic woes but in fact will add to them.

By now anyone living in south Jersey for any length of time has to be familiar with the frequently recurring studies of transportation needs in our Gloucester, Camden, Burlington County region. Most of the studies were sponsored and conducted by the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA), the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), and New Jersey Transit (NJT) either singly or in combination.

The earliest modern study done in 1975 concluded with the recommendation that a high-speed rail line in the median of Route 55 be implemented. The reason given for the recommendation was that "Although a Glassboro Line alignment following the PRSL Millville Branch has been studied, this alignment has been proven inferior on the basis of capital costs and disruption to the local community".

The most recent study in 2003 by the DRPA apparently went nowhere at the time but has now re-emerged as the "Route 55 to Philadelphia Corridor Transit Study" and has as its stated objectives an assessment of the need and opportunity for improved transit services in Gloucester and Cumberland Counties, improved transit passenger distribution to Penn's Landing and other business districts in Philadelphia, and improved connections between the High-Speed Line and the Camden waterfront.

I attended the transit study "Open House" at the Deptford Township Municipal Building March 3rd and was fortunate to run into former state Senator John Matheussen, now the new head of the Delaware River Port Authority. It provided me with an opportunity to present him with several of my previous writings on the subject and to discuss with him my thinking on why an extension of light rail from Camden to Glassboro on the old railroad tracks is still not a good idea.

There is a fundamental reason why trains on the old tracks and/or trains in the right-of-way of Routes 42 and 55 will not significantly address and appreciably resolve our transportation problems.

According to a Philadelphia Inquirer study conducted in 1996, "While 13,500 Gloucester County residents work in Philadelphia, nearly four times that number work in Gloucester County". "Only about one in ten workers who live in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties works in Philadelphia according to a special compilation of statistics from the 1990 Census".

Today employment opportunities are to be found in every direction, wherever there is a road to take you there.

Unfortunately our major roads follow the old railroad routes like spokes on a wheel generally toward and away from the major cities. Studies in the 1960's by the transportation-oriented agencies indicated there was a great need for construction of "cross-county corridors" but action on these failed to materialize. As a result there is a great tide of traffic morning and night from the residential areas to the commercial areas in and

around the Deptford, Cherry Hill, Moorestown and Echelon Malls. Many would be surprised to learn how many people are employed at the large number of industrial parks in and around the tri-county region.

Traffic heading toward these and other similar areas zig and zag their way through local streets in Glassboro, Pitman, Wenonah, Mantua, Woodbury Heights and Woodbury, with much stop and go driving.

Will the implementation of railroad service generally heading in a north/south direction relieve the congestion on these roads? I think not and predict that grade level train traffic will disrupt the cross-county traffic flow and result in even slower driving times, if that is at all possible.

However it is not enough to just criticize the ideas of others who are trying their darnedest to find a way to address and resolve our traffic problems. Anyone criticizing should at least offer what might be a better idea.

My idea is this. Instead of concentrating all our eggs in one basket, that being an extremely expensive, long-term construction project to put trains in the infields of our major north-south highways, we should give priority to alternatives that could be implemented more quickly.

One way to get started on this is by adding another element to the study that is currently being conducted, and that is "demand-activated bus systems".

Give immediate priority to construction of cross-county road improvements. Certainly not limited access highways, we have no space available for them, but a few new roads where it is still possible to build them, and third or fourth lanes added to existing roads.

You have seen the small busses currently in use on our roads. They come in many different sizes and configurations, attractive, with comfortable seating and other amenities. Unlike trains on their fixed tracks, the bus routing can be changed very quickly to suit changing needs and routes can be designed to pick up numbers of people with the same or similar destinations.

Busses would be afforded reserved portions of the

new and widened roads at certain times of the day thereby aiding greatly in getting one-person vehicles off the road during peak periods of traffic.

One thing is absolutely certain. With the traffic congestion as bad as it is we need action and we need it now. Possibly the best part of this idea is that it can be implemented almost immediately as soon as busses can be acquired, with the road additions and improvements coming along as time and funding permit.

As I mentioned earlier in this letter I have been involved in many of the studies of transportation needs in this region and can almost predict the outcome of this one.

No doubt the current "Corridor Study" will once again determine that "light rail", whether on old tracks or in the center of Routes 42 or 55 will be tremendously expensive and take a long time to construct. But due to the intense pressure to do something, even if it won't do the job, a lot of money will be put into some part of a project with little anticipation of a beneficial return. See "Camden to Trenton Line" as an example.

However there is a new and different aspect of the current study that we haven't heard before and that should be of great concern to Wenonah residents. In response to the often cited criticism that the trains will disrupt "cross county" auto traffic at the crossings during peak traffic periods, this new proposal is to either raise the tracks above grade on elevated piers, or to bury the tracks below grade in a pit similar to the below-grade line through Haddonfield. The problem this creates for us especially is that the right-of-way width needed for construction purposes will have serious consequences for our beloved Community Center and the new Borough Hall that are located very close to the existing track bed.

We need a solution and we need it now!! But it must be a solution that doesn't ruin Wenonah while trying to help the problem.

Let us give some serious thought to the idea that offers a quicker and better "bang for our buck", "light-busses" instead of "light-rail".

May I suggest you contact our elected officials.



Stamp
Here

Wenonah Historical Society
PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2005

Membership Benefits

- MONTHLY NEWSLETTER MAILED TO YOUR HOME
- MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH INFORMATIVE PROGRAMS
- ACCESS TO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES AND MEMORABILIA
- NETWORK OF KNOWLEDGEABLE HISTORIANS
- HISTORICAL FIELD TRIPS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

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
