

Wenonah Historical Society Newsletter

Next Meeting at 7:30 P.M. on
Friday, February 8, 2013

Volume 11, Issue 2, February 2013

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Charles Horan*

Dear Members,

I hope those in attendance enjoyed the presentation (verbal and photo) given in January by local author Tom Wilk. His presentation highlighted the history that surrounds us here in southern New Jersey. While it may not always be on a grand scale of national events (although some of it is), often it may be overlooked or taken for granted. I am drawn to it partly because it is close-by and easily accessible. Our own Wenonah Library has a nice selection of books that cover topics related to local history. Examples: New Jersey from Colony to State by legendary Rutgers history professor Richard McCormick. John Cunningham is a notorious New Jersey author of several books on local history topics. The library has available a number of his publications as well as various other authors.

Our program for February 8, 2013 will be given by Patricia A. Waltman Hrynenko, the Museum Collections Coordinator of the Gloucester County Historical Society. Her PowerPoint presentation will feature Sibyl Tatum Jones: Her family genealogy, history, heirlooms and dedication to the Gloucester County Historical Society. Patricia will expand on a current exhibit at the GCHS Museum

entitled "Stitched Through Time: A Legacy of Quilts, Part II."

I look forward to seeing you this coming Friday evening. Please bring a guest along.

2013 WHS DUES ARE DUE

Dues for 2013 are now due and are still a bargain at \$15 per family. The dues can be given to any WHS officer or mailed using the membership application on the last page of this newsletter.

ODDS AND ENDS

➤ If you would like to receive an electronic version of the newsletter instead of a copy delivered by the U.S. Postal Service, let me know at smithlr@att.net. The newsletter will arrive sooner, reduce our printing costs, and if there is something in color, you will be able to see the colors.

➤ President Horan and I would greatly appreciate your ideas, thoughts and suggestions on the following:

- Programs for future meetings
- Feature stories or enhancements to the newsletter
- Ways to attract new members

Please send me an email or letter (110 S. Clinton Ave., Wenonah, NJ 08090), or give me a call (856-468-3480).

2011 WHS OFFICERS

President	Charles Horan
Vice President	Paul Lader
Secretary	Vicki McCall
Treasurer	Carol Wiltsee
Trustee	Betty MacLeod
Trustee	Louis McCall

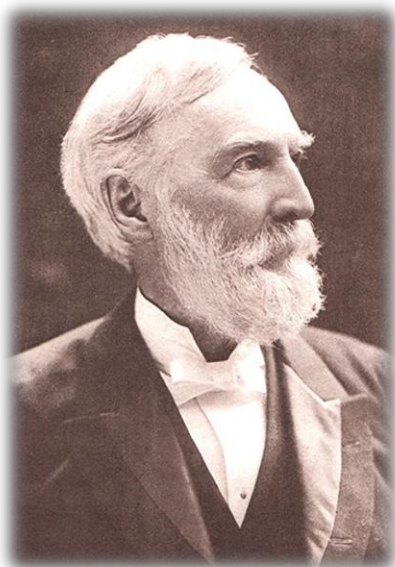
Meetings are held on the second Friday of each month (except June, July and August) at the Train Station Community Center.

The following article was provided by Jack C. Sheppard, Sr. Sources of information for the article were "The Business Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania" by John Woolf Jordan, et al., and the book "Wenonah 2009" by Marjorie K. Lentz.

This part of the article concludes Jack's return to September 20, 1904 by time machine and interview of Stephen Greene on the front porch of Wenonah Military Academy. (The first part of the interview appeared in the January newsletter.)

STEPHEN GREENE: A FOUNDER AND PIONEER IN WENONAH (PART 2)

by Jack C. Sheppard, Sr.



Stephen Greene
1831 - 1908

Question: You mentioned the construction of churches in your grand plan for Wenonah, what was that all about?

Stephen Greene: Wenonah started out as a very Christian community. Not only was Tom Synnott a devout Presbyterian, he had the financial means to build our beautiful church and donate it to the town. My parents raised me as an Episcopalian and I served as a vestryman and rector's warden of the St. Peters Episcopal Church near where we lived in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Also my wife was a devoted member of the Methodist Episcopal faith. I wanted the same access for our family when away from home. So I provided the ground for the Methodist Episcopal Church across the street from my home.

We laid the cornerstone of the Church on August 15, 1883 with Bishop Matthew Simpson presiding. Simpson had preached at Abraham Lincoln's funeral service. The silver trowel used in the cornerstone ceremony was presented to the Bishop and is now

in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. The day was stormy so the services were held on the front porch of our home across the street.

In 1884 I awarded a contract for \$5,300 to build the church. Work on the building progressed slowly and it was soon discovered the builder wasn't trustworthy and hadn't paid his suppliers. To resolve the problem I bought the building and obtained a new builder who finished the church. I then donated the church to the parishioners. My wife also donated an oak book case with 250 books for use by the Sunday School.

And speaking of "Sunday Schools" let me tell you about another of Wenonah's pioneers, Dr. George W. Bailey, who practically invented Sunday Schools. He started one in Wenonah and in time was responsible for the creation of many others throughout the state, the country and overseas. He eventually became the president and driving force for a world-wide Sunday School Association. A wonderful person, a credit to Wenonah.

Question: It has been 35 years since the founding of Wenonah and you and your partners in the Land & Improvement Company spent a lot of serious time getting the town to the status it now

enjoys. Was it all business during that time or did you take some time to have a little fun and enjoyment time?

Stephen Greene: Glad you asked. Yes, we did have many good times while creating our beautiful Wenonah. There were many memorable events such as the time we had orange blossoms shipped into Wenonah for the wedding of Fanonda Lorence. At a reception in Thomas W. Synnott's home every room was decorated with a different color with flowers from his conservatory. Bob Comey's boathouse on his lake at "Camelback" and my boathouse on Lake Cornelia were both the scene of many weekend festivities. Dinners were catered, orchestras were imported from Philadelphia, our naphtha powered boats provided rides on the lake and on one occasion Enrico Caruso sang. I occasionally invited members of the Philadelphia Opera Company to give impromptu concerts on my front porch and fifty singers under the direction of Dr. H. Lake Gilmour presented Gounod's Faust at the Wenonah Inn. One visitor while visiting his sister's home joined a group of local masqueraders at Halloween. He wore no mask and a resident said to him, "You look just like Groucho Marx." It was Groucho Marx. I was told Groucho Marx treated all the boys to ice cream at the Wenonah Drug Store whenever he came to Wenonah.

To provide outdoor sports the Wenonah Field Club was started in 1890 using my athletic park, which was completely enclosed by a high board fence and included a grandstand that held 300 visitors. I even had space prepared under the grandstand for storing the carriages and bikes of those who rode to the grounds to witness the athletic events. I had a bicycle track, baseball diamond, tennis courts and even held horse shows there. You asked if we had any fun along the way, I think you will agree that we certainly did.

Question: We are sitting here on the front porch of a military academy that until just a few years ago was the Wenonah Inn, a fine country hotel. What happened to the hotel and what caused it to become a military school?

Stephen Greene: Toward the end of the century the hotel business started experiencing hard times. Due to the advent of the automobile people were no longer restricted to going only where the railroad took them, they could make use of the "horseless carriage," as the automobile was first called, to go wherever they pleased. Also the building was old and lacked amenities such as improved plumbing facilities and electric lighting. The hotel was sold a couple of times but it seemed no one could make a go of it. The building remained empty. The *Constitution* newspaper noted "the Wenonah House is of no advantage to the owner or to the Borough." In 1891, an attempt at a public sale was a disaster. Only the furniture was sold. I saw what was happening and understood the reason for it. However, in 1892 the building was advertised for sale for \$5,000. At that price I couldn't resist it. I figured I would buy it and find a use for it later. In hindsight my purchase of the building at that time and eventually turning it into a Military Academy probably assisted the town in surviving the great depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Following the purchase, I immediately organized a syndicate named the Wenonah Company. It was composed of myself as president, Thomas W. Synnott, who was then the president of the Whitney Glass Works in Glassboro, Dr. George W. Bailey, owner of a coal business, J. Frank Shull, the owner of a wholesale grocery firm, Charles M. Wilkins, owner of a company that manufactured electrical supplies, my son Dr. William H. Greene, and Isaac C. Stevenson.

We promptly demolished the old original Wenonah House hotel. On the same site we built a new

hotel to accommodate 150 guests, three times as many as the original hotel. It included a barber shop, a laundry, a 30-foot by 60-foot amusement hall and an engine-dynamo room to make electricity. In a separate building there was a ten pin (bowling) alley and a billiard room. It was a big improvement and immediately attracted new guests along with many of the old visitors. In May 1894 the hotel opened as the Wenonah Inn and it again resumed its whirl of concerts, hops, nightly entertainments and daily parade of turnouts. Several trains were put on railroad sidings for dances and other special events for the convenience of the hotel guests.

Other improvements followed such as servants' quarters and an ice house as well as stables for horses and sheds for carriages. A sewage system was installed for use of the hotel and some homes in the hotel area. Flagstone walks were installed replacing the wooden walks and there was even a small golf

course. The hotel staff was increased including a manager, chief clerk, night clerk, chef, head waiter, head cook, head engineer, head porter, master-of-ceremonies, bell boys and waiters.



Wenonah Military Academy
1904 - 1935

Business was excellent for the next several

years, but nearing the turn of the century it became noticeable that more guests were arriving by automobile than by train, and by the early 1900s there were not enough guests to justify keeping the hotel open, so it closed. The automobile had presented people with a choice of locations for events and vacations not determined solely by the railroad destinations.

My business skills, although adequate for most purposes, couldn't buck this nationwide trend of the automobile replacing the horse and the train for moving people. But I got lucky. Major J. R. Jones, former head of a drill team sponsored by the John Wanamaker Store in Philadelphia, while riding past our vacant hotel conceived an idea for the use of the building. He immediately met with me and presented the idea for a military school. Because of my lifelong interest in the education of young people, I thought it a great idea and started almost immediately on the conversion.

And that brings us to this day, September 20, 1904, the opening day for the Wenonah Military Academy.

The people that I have been introducing you to during the course of this interview are the first

officers of the Wenonah Military Academy. Over there is my son, Dr. William H. Greene, who I am proud to say is an internationally known scientist. He is vice-president. Local, Dr. Harry A. Stout, is treasurer and Major J. R. Jones is the secretary. On the Board of Counsel are local Presbyterian Rev. Raymond H. Gage and my long-time friend Thomas W. Synnott. That handsome uniformed gentleman over there is Captain Percy C. Jones, commander of the cadets.

Sheppard: There being no further reason for my presence, I walked down the steps and into the park where I had parked my time machine and reluctantly dialed in my return to the future. I hated to leave. I intend to use the machine again soon to visit Wenonah on the day the Wenonah House Hotel opened in 1871 and for other important occasions.

End Note by Sheppard:

During its thirty years of existence the Wenonah Military Academy gained renown throughout the country and had many students from foreign countries. Its student cadets excelled in academics and sports. Much of its success can be attributed to the educational and moral standards of its founder Stephen Greene.

In September 1935, Dr. Charles H. Lorence announced that the Wenonah Military Academy would not reopen "because of economic reasons." Just as the doors of the Wenonah Inn closed an era, so did the doors of the Wenonah Military Academy close an era. Wenonah had gained strength from both institutions. As dogwood trees in the park were maturing into full grown beautiful trees, so was the Borough maturing.

After a useful life and career, a considerable amount of which was spent in and around Wenonah, Stephen Greene died at the age of 77 on May 21, 1908. In his eulogy it was noted "Stephen Greene needs no monument of marble to perpetuate his memory, the recollection of his life of honor and usefulness and of his kind and charitable nature being his most fitting memorial. His life should prove an inspiration to every ambitious young man showing, as it does, what can be accomplished by a clean living boy and man with a high purpose."

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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Here

Wenonah Historical Society

Membership APPLICATION 2013

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 _____

DUES: \$15.00 PER FAMILY HOUSEHOLD PER YEAR

BRING FORM AND PAYMENT TO MEETING, OR MAIL. THANK YOU

WHS PO BOX 32, WENONAH, NJ 08090
