

Wenonah Historical Society Newsletter

Next Meeting at 7:30 P.M. on
Friday, January 11, 2013

Volume 11, Issue 1, January 2013

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Charles Horan

Dear Members,

A heartfelt wish to all for a Happy and Healthy New Year 2013. I feel our 2012 Holiday Party was another resounding success. The unanticipated visit by the Presbyterian Church Carolers that evening was most enjoyable and really helped kick off the festive Christmas season. Our thanks have been conveyed to them. I also want to thank again Jean Cowles for her diligent efforts in planning this annual event.

This month marks the end of a two-year term for myself and Paul Lader as President and Vice President, respectively. Elections will be held this Friday evening during our January 2013 Business Meeting. The current slate of WHS Officers are willing to serve another two-year term subject, of course, to member approval. Nominations from the floor will be accepted per Roberts Rules of Order.

Our presenter this month will be Tom Wilk, a resident of Pitman. Tom has worked as a reporter and copy editor for the Gloucester County Times (now SJ Times) and the Courier-Post between 1975 and 2012. He is the co-author of "New Jersey Firsts: The Famous, Infamous and Quirky of The Garden State" (Camino Books) and "Tales of South Jersey: Profiles and

Personalities" (Rutgers University Press). He also has written for New Jersey Monthly, Inside Jersey magazine, Atlantic City Magazine and Atlantic City Weekly, among other publications. Tom has had a longtime interest in New Jersey history and we look forward to his presentation.

I look forward to seeing you this coming Friday evening. Invite a friend.

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.

Cara DeHart Lewis and Gerard McGarrity are currently working out the schedule for completing their video on Wenonah's rich history as well as the people that have made it into a wonderful town.

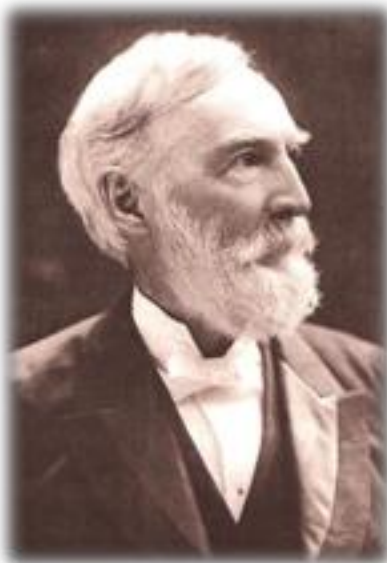
2011 WHS OFFICERS

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.

STEPHEN GREENE: A FOUNDER AND PIONEER IN WENONAH
by Jack C. Sheppard Sr.



Stephen Greene
1831 - 1908

In the interests of learning more about the founders and the bygone days of Wenonah, I rented a time machine at a nearby rental agency, had it delivered to the center of Wenonah park, and set the date-dial for September 20, 1904, the day the Wenonah Military Academy opened. A short time later I opened the door and stepped into the Park, the former front yard of the hotel that had been deeded to the town in perpetuity by the Mantua Land and Improvement Company. It was a beautiful, warm Fall day. The park didn't look that different but as I looked toward the train station, a steam locomotive pulling passenger cars came into view with steam and smoke belching from it. On Mantua Avenue, which was still a dirt road, I saw a mixture of horse drawn wagons and automobiles. I walked toward the converted former hotel and standing on the veranda was Stephen Greene, there to cut the ribbon and welcome the first cadets to the school. He was an extremely distinguished looking man with white hair and beard. I introduced myself and asked if I could interview him

for an article I was writing. I decided to refrain from telling him I was from 108 years in the future as I thought it would focus attention on me and possibly thwart my reason for being there, to interview him.

Mr. Greene graciously agreed to be interviewed. We sat in cane-backed rocking chairs on the front porch of the former Wenonah Inn hotel, now an aspiring military/academic school, while activity swirled all around us on this the opening day.

This picturesque little town named Wenonah had only been here for 33 years, created by the West Jersey Railroad Company in 1871 to stimulate its passenger and freight business. The beautiful station located just a few hundred feet from the academy was a center of activity as trains arrived at the station disgorging a number of excited young men, anxious to get started on their higher education and careers. They were met by instructors and professors, many wearing military uniforms. They welcomed the youngsters and immediately commenced instilling in them the military discipline that was the backbone of the military style educational system.

The excitement was infectious and it was a great time to be in this wonderful small town named Wenonah.

I started the interview with Stephen Greene:

Question: When and where were you born?

Stephen Greene I was born in Bainbridge, New York on September 25, 1831. At age three my family moved to Columbia, Lancaster County Pennsylvania where I spent my young years and received my formal education.

Question: After your early years in Columbia where did you go next?

Stephen Greene: In 1846, I left home for Hellam Township, York County, Pennsylvania where I taught briefly in a district school. Although I eventually decided against a teaching career, throughout my life my interest in the education of young people was intense. I became friendly with the Dean and higher-ups at the University of Pennsylvania and assisted many young people in obtaining an education there.

Question: Tell me about your marriage and family.

Stephen Greene: In 1853, I married Martha Houston and started a family that eventually included a son and five daughters.

Question: You said you were a teacher but decided against that as your life's work. What did you do next?

Stephen Greene: After my brief teaching experience, I decided to take up a career in printing. I entered the printing field in 1847 working my way up the business ladder through employment with several printing companies, learning the printing business from the bottom up. By 1881, I felt I had enough skill and experience to succeed on my own in the printing business so I started the Stephen Greene Co., Printers, with myself as President.

Question: You were in the printing business in Philadelphia. Why and how did you become involved in the creation of a small town in New Jersey?

Stephen Greene: Earlier in my career, in 1870 while working for the Liesenring Printing Company in Philadelphia, I invented a method for printing a new type of railroad tickets with consecutive numbering, the first ever used in the railroad industry in this region. While doing research for this purpose I met with several railroad owners and operators including Civil War General William Sewell who was vice-president of the West Jersey Railroad Company. The West Jersey had recently realigned its rail system south of Camden, NJ making it a much more attractive and profitable freight and people mover. Following the track realignment, General Sewell and his Chief Engineer William F. Allen conceived the idea of creating a new town along the tracks, the chief objective being to stimulate business for the railroad. They were advertising a virtual Eden along the tracks offering fresh air and water, a new station, easy commutation to and from Philadelphia, all prerequisites for a "new suburban town." It sounded like a grand idea to me so I joined the General and several other businessmen in the venture. So on March 15, 1871, I joined Samuel A. Whitney, General William J. Sewell, George Wood, Horatio J. Mulford, George Harris, John Starr, Edward Warne, Samuel Hopkins, Thomas P. Carpenter, and Thomas Jones Yorke, president of the West Jersey Railroad, as the first Board of Directors of the Mantua Land and Improvement Company. The Company was authorized to lay out building lots as well as boulevards, alleys and parks. It was directed to build a hotel and erect residences. In short, a town was born and they named it "Wenonah." I saw this place as a good business venture.

Question: I can understand the business investment attraction for you but you were in the printing

business in Philadelphia. Why did you become personally involved in the creation of a town where nothing existed except for fields of sweet potatoes and a few farm houses?

Stephen Greene: Philadelphia where I lived at this time and had my business was not only crowded but hotter than Hades in summer. I listened to the vision of Wenonah as expressed by General Sewell and his engineer William Allen and believed this would be an ideal place not only as an investment, but also as a cool and refreshing retreat for my family in the summer.

Comment: My interview was interrupted at this time by the arrival on the porch of Mayor Charles Lorence and Councilmen Thomas Synnott, Henry Peddle, James Carey, John Holeton, Charles Yost and Daniel W. Brown. The group proceeded to welcome Stephen Greene and the Military Academy to Wenonah. Mayor Lorence made some brief remarks in which he commended Stephen Greene for his devotion to Wenonah commencing in 1870 when Mr. Greene was one of the original founders of Wenonah. He pointed out that Mr. Greene's investment in Wenonah of both money and time was to a substantial extent the reason for the town's success and reputation as a wonderful place to reside and raise a family. Councilman John Holeton mentioned that he had an 8-year old son Arthur J. Holeton, who he hoped would attend the Academy when he was old enough.¹

Sheppard: I'm glad I was here when the Mayor and Council arrived as I already knew a lot about them having studied the history of the Borough Council, but it was great to have been able to meet them in person. Now, back to our interview:

Question: As Mayor Lorence mentioned, in 1870 you participated in the creation of Wenonah as an original member of the Mantua Land and Improvement Company. Having done your part to get the town started you could have resumed a typical investor role by returning to Philadelphia and leaving the start-up work to the locals. Why did you stay around and get involved?

Stephen Greene: It was because of the new people I met during the start-up activities. In addition to General Sewell, there were Sam Whitney and Tom Synnott in the glass business, builder Dan Brown, Tom Carpenter in the boat-building and shipping business (Carpenter's Landing on Mantua Creek), and local farmers Isaac C. Stevenson and Charles Starns. They all seemed to have the same motivation as I did. They were self-made business successes with the American entrepreneurial spirit seeking to play a part in the growth of the railroads that were transforming the country. Remember, this region, so close to Philadelphia, still relied on horses on dirt roads and barges in the Mantua Creek to transport farm-products, goods and people to and from the cities.

Question: Well I can certainly understand your wanting to stay involved with the people involved in the creation of the town but you went further, you bought more building lots than any other investor. Why was that?

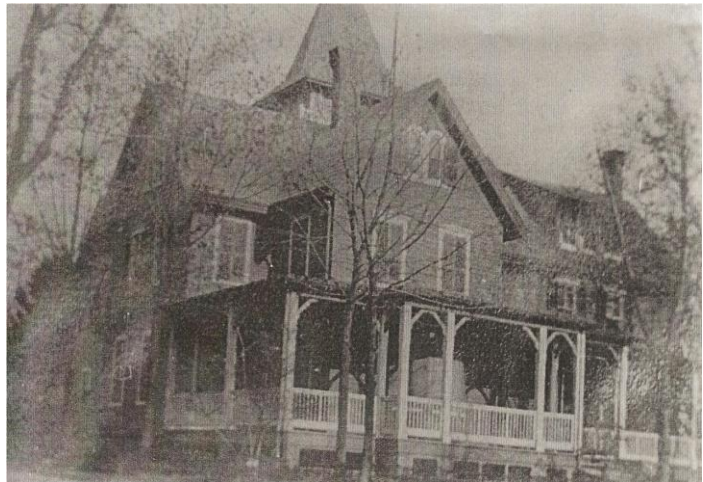
Stephen Greene: Mainly because I had a vision of what Wenonah could become and I wanted to play a part in it. Once it was decided to build the Wenonah House Hotel in the southeast quadrant of town, I could foresee that this section would grow the fastest, and not only provide the most housing sales opportunities, but would also be the most enjoyable to live in. I envisioned a large

¹ In fact, Arthur J. Holeton did attend the Academy graduating in 1916. He lost his life in France during World War I. Wenonah American Legion Post 192 is named for him.

summer residence that my family could enjoy in the heat of the summer. I pictured one or more churches nearby to help with the religious needs of my family, and I hoped to build houses that would attract homebuyers having the same principles and objectives as I held.

And above all, it was a great experience starting a town from scratch and being involved with people such as Daniel Brown, Horatio J. Mulford, A. McFarland and Thomas W. Synnott. Double cottages were built facing the railroad tracks and a row of houses on West Willow Street was named "Brown Town" for Daniel Brown, the builder. The east side of the tracks where I took up residence was nicknamed "Greene Town" after me. Some builders used the identical plans on various lots and they can still be identified throughout Wenonah.

I built my home on the corner of South Clinton and East Willow streets and kind of got carried away with it. It became very large and part of a block-sized complex including a dwelling for my caretaker John Truncer, a coachman's dwelling, a laundry and living quarters for our cook and laundress, and a barn and stables. I also built a gazebo for my Dutch garden and a peacock house with a brick wall mortared with flecks of oyster shells bordering the peacock run. I even hired a Japanese gardener to care for the gardens and greenhouse. Once I got started it seemed as though I couldn't stop.



Stephen Greene's Home in Wenonah

So after completing my "residence" block, I developed South Marion Avenue at my own expense, lined the street with pine trees, laid many yards of flagstone, built a dam at the foot of Marion Ave. and developed Lake Cornelia, naming it for Cornelia Truncer, the wife of my caretaker. To aid in making the Wenonah House Hotel an even-more attractive destination I added a two-storied boathouse and a Japanese-designed bridge beside the lake. I built arbor-covered walks from rose gardens leading to a glen known as the Hermitage near my lake. I also built the town's first sanitary sewer system to serve the hotel and my various properties. I even built a sports complex at Cedar and Clinton streets for various sports including a grandstand seating 300 spectators. These were the predominant amusements at the time and were so successful I eventually expanded the grandstand to a capacity of 500. The sports attracted a lot of people to Wenonah, many of whom stayed and/or ate at the hotel. I did all this while running a successful printing business in Philadelphia. I was a busy guy.

**** Jack Sheppard's interview of Stephen Greene will continued in the February newsletter. ****

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2013

Membership Benefits

- MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
- MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH INTERESTING PROGRAMS
- ACCESS TO HISTORICAL ARCHIVES AND MEMORABILIA
- INFORMATION BY KNOWLEDGEABLE WENONAHIANS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

RECEIVE NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL: YES OR NO

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
