

# Wenonah Historical Society Newsletter

Next Meeting at 7.30 P.M. on  
Friday, November 9, 2012

Volume 10, Issue 8, November 2012

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Charles Horan*

Dear Members,

It seems as though our Borough has endured Hurricane Sandy and emerged relatively unscathed save for a few fallen trees and a relatively short power outage. Hopefully the weather will cooperate this coming Friday for our November 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Let our hearts and prayers go out to those who were impacted much more severely by the hurricane than we were here in Wenonah and Gloucester County.

Our November program will feature Dr. Kenneth J. Lacovara who is an Associate Professor at Drexel University in the Department of Biodiversity, Earth and Environmental Science. Dr. Lacovara holds a PhD in Geology from the University of Delaware and is an elected fellow of the prestigious Explorers Club.

He has traveled the world in pursuit of dinosaur fossils, appeared on several national news outlets, authored books on related topics, and guided viewers through a tour of the earth's history on a two-hour documentary on the Discovery Channel.

Dr. Lacovara has been excavating at the Inversand site located behind the Lowes store on Woodbury-Glassboro Road in Mantua. There will be a pre-lecture site visit available on Friday from 2-4 PM. (Access is

via a left turn into the driveway past the Lowes entrance). Our regular evening program will feature a summary of the progress and discoveries that Dr. Lacovara and his paleontology students have made at the site "in our backyard." I hope to see a good turn out for what promises to be a very interesting presentation as evidenced from the following headlines from our local papers:

### **Mantua Township's Inversand site may be of national**

#### **importance to paleontologists**

*Gloucester County Times, June 28, 2012*

### **Fossils from the Cretaceous Period unearthed at Inversand in Mantua, June 26, 2012**

*Gloucester County Times, June 27, 2012*

### **Heavy lifting in N.J.: A 65 million-year-old sea turtle**

*Philadelphia Inquirer, June 9, 2011*

#### 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.

## WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY CHRISTMAS DINNER

Our annual Christmas Dinner will be on Friday, December 14<sup>th</sup>. The cost is \$20 per person. Please bring your check (payable to Wenonah Historical Society) to our meeting on Friday or mail it to Jean Cowles at 304 N Stockton Ave, Wenonah, NJ 08090. This is always a great affair so please make plans to kick off the holiday season close to home.

JOSEPH NOBLIT'S HALL, 6 NORTH MARION AVENUE  
*by Milton Webb (research by Jack C. Sheppard Sr.)*

On March 19, 1878, in three public places in Wenonah, the newly formed School District 54 posted the following notice: *"The annual Wenonah school meeting will be held in the school room in the Wenonah House Hotel on the Tuesday of the week following the town meeting at which meeting will be submitted the question of voting a tax to maintain a free public school, the amount thought to be three hundred dollars. The question of building a schoolhouse will also be considered with the matters related thereto. The amount thought to be necessary for this purpose is twenty five hundred dollars. George Bailey District Clerk."* The meeting was a public forum where the question of building a schoolhouse was thoroughly talked over and a free expression of opinion given. It was agreed that the Board of Trustees be authorized to build a school



not to cost over \$2,500 exclusive of well, out buildings and fences. There was one vote in the negative. The Mantua Land and Improvement Company donated the land and Dr Fithian purchased the entire bond issue. The contract for the erection of the building was let out to Daniel Brown, a local builder and developer, for \$2,245.95. Other contracted items were to Sam Chew, digging a well \$15; Henry Frederick, well pump \$13.50; William Allen, bell and lightning rods \$9.00; Sam Dilks, carting \$3.00; Isaac Stevenson, grading and digging cellar hole \$38.00; and Ed Ward, plans and specifications \$30.50. The building was completed in the early months of 1879 and classes were

immediately started in the new schoolhouse. This building, as a schoolhouse, was to serve the community until 1894 when it was replaced by the Stone School House on North Clinton Avenue.

Several expenditures were significant during this period: Ella English to be employed as teacher at a salary not to exceed \$35 dollars a month; Sam Chew coal for the year \$31; and May Clark to assist Tracy Waddington at a salary of \$1 a day.

During the period of use as a schoolhouse, the trustees rented out the building for other purposes. The most significant was the Mantua Grange #39, Patrons of Husbandry. It might be noted that the Grange movement was a powerful political force and this chapter was large, numbering over two hundred

members. Lectures were held and auctions of produce and grain held in the building. Also the tradition of this building as a polling place started and continued for over one hundred years.

In June of 1894, the Trustees of the school district sold the building at auction to Joseph Noblit for \$1,500. He was a well-known citizen of the community and farmer by trade. He also was the Deptford Township clerk. Wenonah was still a part of Deptford Township at this time. Known as "The Old War Horse," he was a veteran of the Civil War having served with the 138th Pennsylvania Volunteers. He was an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War veteran's organization.

Every up-and-coming community during this period had what was known as an "Opera House" and this building would fall into the category. On several occasions an advertisement would mention that an event would be held at Noblit's Opera House. He leased out the building for a number of varied social affairs. The Mantua Grange continued to use the hall as well as several political organizations. In 1889, the Wenonah Field Club, which was the forerunner of our modern Wenonah Athletic Association, was formed and the club used the building for a number of years.

In 1913, the YMCA reconstituted their organization and rented the hall with a long-term lease. They had the backing of several wealthy citizens who provided funds for extensive renovations to the building. It then became known in Wenonah as the YMCA Hall. Unfortunately during this period Joe Noblit's sight failed and he moved to Oregon with his grandson where he died in 1915. The YMCA took title to the building and started a large undertaking of activities. Shuffleboard tournaments were held and there were dances and socials for the teenagers. This was the beginning of the ongoing concern for the youth of the town through providing recreation. Outstanding were the Saturday night movies when it was advertised there was seating capacity for 250 people. Stars at the time were Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Pearl White, Buster Keaton and others of the silent screen.

Interest in the local chapter of the YMCA waned and the building went into disuse. Probably the greatest reason for this was the growing interest in the scouting movement under the leadership of Dr. Gage. In 1922, the newly organized Arthur J. Holeton Post 192, American Legion purchased the Hall from the YMCA. Previous to this, the Legion was meeting at what is now the Wild Iris Floral Shop, formerly the offices of the Wenonah Realty Company. Now the building became known as the "Legion Hall," the name lasting for over half a century. It became the center of social activity in the town. Saturday movies were started again for the children as well as teen-age dances, travel lectures, potluck dinners, strawberry festivals, band concerts and public forums. Voting was still held there. The American Legion Rifle and Pistol Club, the oldest NRA sponsored club in New Jersey built an indoor pistol range in the basement. On the second floor were recreational facilities including a fine old slate pool table.

In 1984, the Legion sold the building to a private owner after they began using the newly renovated train depot for their meetings ... a new era emerged in the history of the hall.

Regardless of what you call it, Public School House, Grange Hall, YMCA Building, Legion Hall or my house, it is still a grand building. Basically it still retains its exterior architectural integrity and if treated kindly should exist another one hundred and thirty years.

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PO Box 32  
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

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# Wenonah Historical Society

## Membership APPLICATION 2012

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

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