

Wenonah Historical Society Newsletter

Next Meeting at 7:30 P.M.

Friday, January 13, 2017
Volume 15, Issue 1, January 2017

Memorial Presbyterian Church, Wenonah, New Jersey

Designed by Isaac Newton Pursell

By Nora A. Taylor, Church Historian



*Memorial Presbyterian Church, Wenonah, NJ, 1904
Today it is listed on the National & NJ Registers of Historic Places*

Memorial Presbyterian Church, located at the corner of Mantua and South Princeton Avenues in the Borough of Wenonah, Gloucester County, New Jersey is an outstanding example of Gothic Revival architecture designed by Philadelphia architect, Isaac Pursell, A.I.A. (1853-1910). Not only was Isaac Pursell the architect of Memorial Presbyterian Church, he had close associations with the founders of Wenonah. The building of Memorial Presbyterian Church also reflects the growth of Wenonah at the turn of the century as the railroad became a prominent means of transportation from the city to the new “suburbs.”

Since 1904, Memorial Presbyterian Church has been in continuous use as a place of worship. Built as a memorial to Harriet Heston Whitney Synnott, the building and all its furnishings were a gift to the church by Thomas W. Synnott, son of Mrs. Synnott. The church has preserved extensive archives, thanks in part to the Synnott family. Memorial Presbyterian Church is also well recognized in the community for its high aesthetic value.

Constructed in 1904, the church is built of rough-cut, irregular coursed stone in Late Gothic Revival

style. A prominent tower has two arched double doors at the base and also features a belfry with tracery, topped by a steeple. This well preserved structure retains its original exterior and interior architecture, including large stained glass windows. A massive interior retractable door, still in working condition, reflects the Akron style educational movement of that period. The manse, also designed by Pursell, is Queen Anne in style with a gambrel roof and cross-gable façade. The porch roof is supported by paired columns. (Certificate of Eligibility letter)

According to American Architects and Buildings by Sandra Tatman:

Pursell, 1853-1910, was born and raised in Trenton, New Jersey, and moved to Philadelphia as a young man. “New Jersey resident Isaac Pursell was one of Philadelphia’s most prolific church designers, competing with the equally popular Charles Bolton for the Protestant market. Pursell apprenticed with Samuel Sloan and opened an independent office in Philadelphia in 1878. Except for a short period in the 1880s (ca. 1885-1887), during which he partnered with Joseph W. B. Fry in Pursell & Fry, he practiced independently from his office in Philadelphia. For many years Pursell was part of the effort on the part of the Presbyterian Board of Church Erection to publicize acceptable plans for churches and church manses; many of his designs appeared in the Board’s annual reports and were constructed across the United States. Many of Pursell’s church designs exhibit the English gothic revival style used for St. Martins P.E. Church (1006 East Oak Lane, 1901).

Illustrated Philadelphia: Its Wealth and Industries (1889, p. 129) described Pursell in this way:

Mr. Pursell is a thoroughly qualified and able architect who has evinced great skill and ability in the practice of his profession, designing and superintending the construction of many prominent buildings not only in Philadelphia but all across the United States. He has made a specialty of the building of schools and churches...Many of the buildings erected



Architect Isaac Pursell

by this responsible architect are much admired for their beauty, while the elaboration of detail and care bestowed upon every department of the work reflects the utmost credit on the skill and judgment of this popular gentleman.

In addition, two of Pursell's works are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: St. John's Episcopal Church in Charleston, WV and Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church in Snow Hill, MD.

Wenonah, founded by the Mantua Land and Improvement Company in 1871, brought wealthy Philadelphians to the new "suburbs" via the West Jersey Railroad. Plots of land were for sale, and the first three homes were built by Dr. George Bailey, Thomas W. Synnott, and Andrew W. Carey. (*Wenonah*, by Marjorie K. Lentz.)

In September, 1872, the Wenonah Sabbath School Association was formed with Dr. Bailey as superintendent, Andrew Carey as secretary, and Thomas W. Synnott as librarian. On September 22, 1873, the First Presbyterian Church was organized with 18 members, including these three men. As the town and the church grew, trains stopped at Wenonah every fifteen minutes. Church members realized that they must move from the N. Clinton Avenue location and build a new church. (Memorial Presbyterian Church Archives)

Isaac Pursell was selected as architect having designed many churches and buildings in the Philadelphia area. In the 1900 US Census, Mr. Pursell and his family were living in Chester, Pennsylvania. By the time of the 1910 US Census, Pursell and his family

resided at what is now 200 S. Princeton Avenue in Wenonah.

On January 9, 1903, Elder Thomas W. Synnott proposed to the Board of Trustees his plan for a new and more modern building which he wished to erect as a memorial to his mother. A resolution was passed on January 28, 1903, stating that Mr. Thomas W. Synnott, "an honored Elder of our church and President of our Board of Trustees, has out of the goodness of his heart, and love for the Master", agreed to give us a magnificent church edifice, to be located on the beautiful lot, corners of Mantua and Princeton Avenues.

Mr. Synnott conveyed the land, buildings and furnishings to the church, free of all debt, as a memorial to his mother, under the condition that the name of the church would be changed to the Memorial Presbyterian Church of Wenonah, New Jersey. It is documented that a contract was signed in Pursell's office, 119 S. 4th Street, Philadelphia, on June 8, 1903 to build the new manse next to the church. The church, built as a memorial to Harriet Heston Whitney Synnott, carries a strong local influence. (Memorial Presbyterian Church Archives)

According to the book, *Wenonah*, by Marjorie K. Lentz, Thomas W. Synnott was the guiding force in one of the oldest and largest glass manufacturing establishments in the country. The plant in Glassboro, first known as Heston's Glass Works, later became the Whitney Glass Works, of which he became its president, a position he retained until retiring in 1872. Mr. Synnott was active in the creation of Wenonah and his mansion, built in 1884, still stands today.

Dr. George Bailey was highly interested in Sunday schools, and became president of the World's Sunday School Association. He was a Civil War veteran, physician, and businessman. Andrew Carey was general manager of the White Dental Manufacturing Company in Philadelphia and a world traveler.

The church holds a vast archive representing the work of Isaac Pursell. All the original blueprints for the church and the manse, the work orders and bills, the Session minutes approving the building, and photographs of Pursell are carefully archived. In addition, the Synnott family gave a large portrait of Thomas W. Synnott and scrapbooks documenting the history of the church to Memorial Presbyterian Church. Many other documents pertaining to the church and its history are housed in the archives. The public is welcome to view the archives by appointment.

Isaac Pursell died in 1910, and is buried with his wife in Wenonah Cemetery. The large stone monument is a lasting tribute to this master architect, who chose to call Wenonah his home and Memorial Presbyterian his church.

WHS OFFICERS

President	Charles Horan
Vice President	Nora Taylor
Secretary	Vicki McCall
Treasurer	Scott Barnes
Trustee	Paul Lader
Trustee	Louis McCall

Meetings are held on the 2nd Friday of each month
(except June, July and August)
at the Train Station Community Center

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Charles Horan

Dear Members,

It is a pleasure to serve as your president, and our Wenonah Historical Society is looking forward to an exciting New Year with informative programs, great socializing, and our Third Annual Cemetery Walk!

Our newsletter will now be published in January, May and August. We hope to give you a quality newsletter with well researched articles. If you are interested in contributing an article, please let me know.

Mrs. Barbara Price does a tremendous service as our newsletter editor. She has been sending the paper copies through the mail as well as publishing the on-line version. We are calling for a volunteer to pick up copies of the newsletter three times a year at Staples and apply prepared stickers with return address, personal address, and a stamp to the envelopes that are sent to the members that do not receive e-mail. All expenses will be covered by the society. Barbara has been doing this on her own time at her own expense, and we need to find her an assistant. We can always use more than one volunteer for this job. Thanks for your consideration!

I hope to see you all at our January 13th at our meeting.

Charlie Horan



Wenonah Historical Society

January – May, 2017

Program Guide

All Friday evening meetings begin at 7:30 PM.

Friday, January 13, 2017

Back by popular demand is the “**Show and Tell**” Program.

This fun program is dependent on "you" for being successful. Please bring something special from your own personal collections to show off and talk about. Items can be Wenonah related or just something that is interesting.

All our programs are open to Wenonah Historical Society members as well as the general public. We encourage you to invite your friends to come along and enjoy Wenonah's history. Please limit your presentation to five minutes so everyone has a chance to share.

Friday, February 10, 2017

“Save the Hugg-Harrison House”

Ms. Bonnie Elwell, librarian of the Camden County Historical Society, will present a program on Revolutionary Camden County and the Hugg-Harrison House.

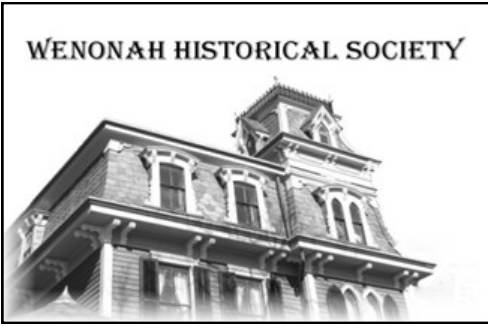
Friday, March 10, 2017

Philadelphia Architects that built Wenonah

Friday, April 7, 2017 ... Please Note Change in Meeting Date

Mr. Glenn Ceponis of the New Jersey Historic Trust will speak on “Dispelling Myths Concerning Historic Preservation”

May 2017, field trip to be announced.



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PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2016

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