

Wenonah Historical Society Newsletter

PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090-0032

Volume 1 Issue 3 March. 2003

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT ROCCO DOTO

Dear Members,

Another exciting month. I have seen a few of our objectives come to fruition early in the year starting with our publicity campaign. Posters advertising dates and time of meetings are now in the Post-Office, Library, Train Station and its Kiosk. We succeeded in exhibiting several Wenonah Military Academy items in the Library. Please be sure to stop in and see the display. The items look great and certainly look better than when tucked away in a closet. Lastly we have received a grant from the NJ Council for the humanities, providing two presentations in 2003. I hope to see you at the March meeting and please bring a friend.

MARCH MEETING PROGRAM

Our March program is "*The Gibson Girl Friday Meets The Victorian Lady*". This program compares the lives and fashions of a turn-of-the-century society lady and a working class "typewriter", as those who first operated the typing machines were called. We will also be given a historical look at women's undergarments and the practice of tight lacing (of corsets). Obstacles women encountered entering the male-dominated world of office work and employment practices before and after marriage are also presented. Because we are offering this presentation to the general public, the location will be at the Wenonah Elementary School. The hour-long program will start at 7 PM with light refreshments being served afterwards.

Following the refreshments there will be a short business meeting.

The speaker for the evening is Barbara Meyer Darlin. Ms. Darlin studied ballet and acting before deciding on a career in costuming. After receiving a Bachelor's Degree in theatre from Indiana University, she began a journey of creative experience ranging from her own fashion design business to costume designer for regional dance and theatre companies. In 1987, Barbara moved into a 100-year-old house and began her love affair with the Victorian Era.

WHS OFFICERS 2003

President: *Rocco Doto*

Vice Pres. *Jack Sheppard Sr.*

Secretary *Eileen Caraker*

Treasurer *Carol Wiltsee*

Corr. Sec. *Betty MacLeod*

Trustee *Vicki McCall*

Trustee *Diane Magarelli*

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

Fascinated by the 19th century, she produced "Unlacing the Victorian Woman", a fun, costumed lecture/demonstration that explores the impact of turn-of-the-century women's fashions on their lives. Barbara has added two more programs to her repertoire: "The Gibson Girl Friday Meets The Victorian Lady" which we will be offering, and "Arsenic and Tight Lace: Beauty Secrets of La Belle Époque" about turn-of-the-century beauty secrets.

Ms. Darlin performs these entertaining and educational programs for historical societies, libraries, schools,

women's groups, museums, retirement communities, and at conventions, but not at bachelor parties! She has given talks up and down the East Coast, as well as at the Biltmore Estate in NC, the Taft Museum in Cincinnati and several venues in the Berkshires. She is a familiar face at Cape May's Victorian Festivals. She has been featured in the Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine and Main Line Today.

Ms. Darlin is a founding member of the Costume Society of America and lives in Swarthmore, PA, with her husband and two cats.

We are fortunate to have this program sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. The NJCH is a non-profit organization established in 1973 as the state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Programs are offered free and open to the public. The mission of the NJCH is to develop, support and promote projects that explore and interpret the human experience, foster cross-cultural understanding and engage people in dialog about matters of individual choice and public responsibility. The Council's Horizon Speakers Bureau supplies lecturers to non-profit organizations in humanities areas as wide ranging as ethnic studies, history, literature, interpretation of the arts and public policies. Learn more about the NJCH by visiting their website www.njch.org or by calling 1-888-FYI-NJCH.

MEMBERSHIP DUES 2003

A reminder that quite a few members have not remitted dues for 2003. Sorry but the newsletter will not be sent in April to those remaining unpaid.

**HISTORY OF THE
WOMAN'S CLUB OF WENONAH
BY PAT HART**

During the year 2003, the Wenonah Woman's Club is celebrating its 80th anniversary. The following is a brief history of the first 40 years.

In 1922, Jessie White went to The New Jersey State Federation of Woman's Clubs Convention in Atlantic City at the invitation of member of The Woman's Club of Woodbury. She returned to Wenonah fired up about the group because they were really eager to make the world a better place in which to live. The stated purpose of the organization is "The study of subjects affecting the development, the welfare, and the advancement of women, and cooperation in Federation and community projects." Jessie and several friends discussed the idea, found it appealing, and formed The Woman's Club of Wenonah.

Quoting from a letter that Mrs. White wrote for the 40th anniversary in 1963: "The idea of having a woman's club in Wenonah was actually spontaneous. It was every woman's wish ...everyone's work."

Jessie believed from the outset that much could be done for the local library. The first project, 80 years ago was to earn money for it. She had the brilliant idea to turn her house, (which is now the home of Jim and Pat Haney at 210 N. Jefferson Ave.) into a Dickens' house and fortunately, her husband, Nate, went along with the idea. She, with the help of other members of the Woman's Club, decorated one room to represent "The Tale of Two Cities." Then they decorated another room to represent Bleak House. Another was "David Copperfield." The members dressed in costumes of the time. One special room was just for children. It was decorated

entirely with cobwebs made of yarn and sprinkled with chocolate spiders. The children could select their favorite spider.

In May 1925 another major event held by the new club was a May Fair under the direction of Mrs. White and Mrs. Walter Farr. Mrs. Farr was the member who suggested that the library become the club's project. It was held on the "greensward" in front of the Farr estate, now owned by Vicki and Lou McCall. The Tudor style of architecture fitted in with the period portrayed by the affair, the Elizabethan age.

At 3:15 the church bells rang to call the folks to the festive scene. Woman's Club

MISSION OF THE WENONAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The objectives of this Society shall be:

1. To acquire and preserve historic documents, records, artifacts and memorabilia of the Borough of Wenonah.
2. To locate and acquire a suitable place for the storage and display of such materials.
3. To encourage the protection and preservation of historical landmarks and points of interest within the Borough of Wenonah.
4. To encourage historical and genealogical research, and publication of its results.
5. To encourage interest in history generally, and in Wenonah history in particular, among the youth of Wenonah.
6. To make all information and acquisitions of the Society available to the public.

members dressed in costumes representing vendors, jesters, Gypsies, milkmaids, chimney sweeps, and dancers. There were May pole dances and booths where toys, food and beverages could be purchased. Husbands also participated as noted by Simple Simon and the pie man. A

highlight was the crowning of the May King and Queen.

Also, there was a parade including 40 young girls pushing their decorated doll coaches. The program ended with the Men's Club Chorus singing several old-time songs. Quite a large sum of money, \$600, was realized for the benefit of the Wenonah Public Library.

"A Pageant of Women" in 14 episodes was held in the Military Academy Gymnasium on Saturday, October 20, 1928. Once again the Wenonah library was the beneficiary of the event. Each episode featured an outstanding woman in history, from Deborah the Hebrew Prophetess to a grand finale featuring the Spirit of Motherhood. There were 75 women in the cast. And more than 400 people enjoyed the pageant!

On Saturday, September 28, 1929, the members staged the continuous perform of Le Jardin De Paris (The Garden of Paris) a gay resort of French Art Students, for the benefit of the library. The production took place in the gardens at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Erskine at the corner of South Princeton Avenue and Cherry Street. In addition to several dances, vocal renditions and a string ensemble, the comedy play "The Prince who was a Piper" was performed. Supper was served to more than 260 guests. A matinee was given in the afternoon at three o'clock for children.

During the '30's, our club performed an annual play, often in the Legion Hall or at the home of Mrs. Farr, Little Grange. Several titles were "A Chip off the Old Block," "Sardines," and "Shall We Join the Ladies." The latter was an unusual play because it was only the first act of an unfinished mystery play by Sir James Barrie. One year they gave an original play written by a member, Miss Elizabeth Farr, the Marjorie Lentz of that day.

In 1931 a very elaborate program entitled "The Little Shawl Pageant" was given to a very appreciative audience in the Legion Hall (originally Joe Noblitt's Hall on N. Marion Ave behind the Weems Medical Center). 15 tableaus, including music and dance, shawls of the ages from the early Egyptian period to the gorgeous silk shawls of that day were presented.

A Beggars Fair was held in the Wenonah Park in 1933. It was composed of many booths with food, games, books, etc. Also Major Lorence kindly offered the services of the Military Academy's Cadet Band. The afternoon affair ended with a dance in the drill hall, for which the band also played. The club netted \$88 for the library fund. In those days, the Woman's Club donated the bulk of the money spent by the library for book purchases.

In 1936 the club joined with the PTA to beautify the school grounds with shrubbery. The first Borough tree commission was appointed in 1938, largely through the efforts of the club. Musical instruments were purchased for the Wenonah Elementary School in 1939. Thirty of the lovely dogwood trees in the Wenonah Park were donated by the club.

During the early 1940's, much of the club's activities were channeled toward the war effort. During these lean years (beginning back in the '30's), there were often disbursements for welfare such as milk and eggs to needy families. Quite often there were expenses for materials for Red Cross projects such as ditty bags and saltines. A fair was held in September of 1944 and it turned a profit of only \$13.55, a testament to the lean times.

In the mid-1940's the club aroused interest in acquiring a community athletic field and urged that a referendum be placed on the November ballot to purchase it. The referendum passed. Mrs. S.M. Langston purchased the field for \$4,000 to

make sure it was still available for the Borough once approved.

Club meetings were held in the Presbyterian Church until 1948 when they were moved to the American Legion Hall. Beginning in 1956, the club met in the Methodist Church Fellowship Hall; and they still meet there today, 46V2 years later.

The practice of sending a Citizenship Institute delegate to Douglass College began in 1948. Girls from the entire State meet there for four days in June. The program is now called Career Institute and delegates are introduced to many career options for women, in addition to getting a taste of college life.

Beginning the '50's, a Women's Chorus was organized under the direction of Iris Starke. That chorus, directed by several other members also, was in existence until the late '70's.

Sometime during the '50's, the club decided to purchase a heifer. To quote a newspaper article: "Although the club has shown interest in a variety of fields, this is the first time it has expressed an interest in livestock. The group hastens to note, however, that the heifer will not be tethered to a dogwood tree in the Borough Park, but will be tethered to a kapok tree in Java. After examining many methods of expressing good will to other peoples, the Woman's Club evaluated the Heifer Project as being the most constructive approach to maintaining peace."

On Friday, September 28, 1956, a flower show and art exhibit was held in the Fellowship Hall. This was a community project planned by The Garden Club of Wenonah, The Junior Garden Club of Wenonah, and The Woman's Club of Wenonah. It was non-competitive and free. There was even a division for children's arrangements. For the Christmas program in 1959, the Millville Madrigal Singers entertained. The newspaper noted that this

type of singing was "almost a lost art." But we know better than that today, since our own Gateway Madrigal Singers are alive and well. At present they provide the entertainment for the Woman's Club December programs.

Beginning in 1962 the club members cared for all repairs to library materials, mending or rebinding approximately 100 books per year. It is not clear how long the project continued but it is not in practice today.

The 1963 Christmas meeting included dances performed by a group of South American dancers that lived in the Philadelphia area. Food for the evening was typical of Latin America and was prepared by club members who were part of the Spanish Language class taught by member Ada Jacksen.

On May 25, 1963, the club's 40th anniversary was celebrated. An original skit, "Melvine's Trunk," marked the occasion. The trunk used in the play was the original trunk that for many years was passed from president to president, to store mementos of the club's activities. It had been recently rediscovered thereby explaining the curious item that appeared in early treasurer's reports. Annually the item, "transporting trunk: \$.30 appeared. In reading the remarks made at the anniversary, several more interesting facts about earlier years were discovered. Because meetings were originally held in members' homes, the amount of \$1.75 was set aside each month to purchase chairs so that there would be adequate seating. (Apparently they were transported from house to house as necessary). Dances sponsored by the Woman's Club were held for young people in the Legion Hall in the late 1930's and early 1940's.



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Wenonah Historical Society
PO Box 32
Wenonah, New Jersey 08090

Wenonah Historical Society

Membership APPLICATION 2003 – 2004

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
