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New Jersey

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Wenonah Borough, George Washington Share Birthday

WENONAH, Feb. 18.—Washington's Birthday on Monday will mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Borough of Wenonah. It was on that date in 1870 that the New Jersey Legislature approved plans for the Mantua Land and Improvement Co. so that a community could be developed on the banks of Mantua Creek.

To celebrate the centennial, the Woman's Club of Wenonah—101 civic-minded women—is making plans that will culminate in a big Fourth of July celebration.

At a meeting last week, Mrs. William F. Powell, president of the club, reviewed the history of the town and pointed out the highlights to make this year's Independence Day parade and celebration a spectacular event.

The 1.66-square-mile borough was once an important site for river traffic. Even before it became a borough it was a port of considerable importance, with large wharfs piled high with firewood to be carried to Philadelphia for fuel.

There was Duell and Perry's tomato canning factory, which also sent its products to the big city. On both sides of the creek there were shipyards where flat boats and sloops were built.

The river was not the only mode of transportation to and from the area. A railroad between Camden and Woodbury was built in 1859 and was extended to Glassboro in 1861.

At that time it bore west of Woodbury Heights, extended through the woods along Wenonah Lake where it crossed a trestle over Mantua Creek. In 1871 the curve in the tracks was straightened, bringing them to their present location. This latter project resulted in the birth of the borough.

It was the idea of William Sewell, president of the West Jersey Railroad Co., and William F. Allen, chief engineer, to lay out a community along the tracks three miles south of Woodbury.

The name was chosen—Wenonah, Hiawatha's mother, "beautiful daughter of Nokomis"—as a tribute to the Lenape Indians. It means "first-born daughter."

By 1883, Wenonah was incorporated through the Borough Commission Act. There were 50 cottages—most used as summer homes by Philadelphians—and a year-around population of 300. It had grown considerably from 1872 when there was only a hotel, the Wenonah Inn, and four cottages.

Old sites, some demolished to make way for modern living, serve as a record of the town.

For example, William Clark's coal yard and livery stable is now where Mary Ogden's real estate office stands; the B. F. Coles store built in 1881 on E. Mantua ave. is the Carriage Shop soda shop. The first school, built in 1873, is the American Legion Hall on Marion ave.

At the turn of the century, Wenonah was a popular summer resort for Philadelphians. Families rented furnished homes from the local people who went off to the seashore or mountains for their vacations. Businessmen easily could commute to the town because there were six trains a day from Philadelphia.

Its attraction as a summer resort gradually dwindled but in 1904 the Wenonah Military Academy was established. The academy brought culture to the town and it enjoyed many lively seasons of plays, music, dances and sports. The academy closed in 1934.

There are 2100 inhabitants in the community and it is "the kind of place where people like to raise children."

The elementary school, which goes to the 6th grade, has 350 pupils. For the 7th to 12th grades, the children attend the Gateway Regional School in Woodbury Heights.

1970 101 year anniversary of Wenonah's founding

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bob_thomas_wk
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