

# PRIDE OF WALL SENIORS

*1977 to 2007*

*by*

*James P. Fanning*

*with the cooperation of*

*Elizabeth Colarusso, Tom McGrath, Eleanor Lukowitz, Joseph Roma, Walter Gratton, Grace Peterson, Marion White, Elaine Doyle, Robert Jenkins, Mary Burne, Lee Sheehan, Janet Ebner, Eva Larson, Cliff Gibson, Carmella Mastrianni, Helen McNally, Helen Van Note, Charles Nicosia, Joan De Sarno, Geri O'Connor, Elmer Myers, Jr., Ruth Myers, Ray Walton, Alma Walton, Dan Zomak, The Asbury Park Press, The Coast Star, The Wall Herald, Our Town*

*June 6, 2007*

In 1977, the Wall Municipal Building was located on Municipal Court. A portion of the building was a branch office of the Belmar Post Office, while the space behind the building formed a triangular recreation area bound by New Bedford Road and Belmar Boulevard. A U. S. Navy jet fighter from the Korean War was mounted in one corner of the park with a sign announcing "Airplane Park". Swings and benches provided a "playground" for children and concrete shuffleboard lanes offered diversion for older citizens. Helen McNally recalls that the shuffleboard lanes were very popular in those years. She was a member of a shuffle board club which participated in tournaments with clubs from other towns. Joseph Roma reports that when active seniors, such as Tom McGrath, inquired about programs for seniors they were directed to the Recreation Department. Bill Spayd, Walter Gratton's brother-in-law, reports that Tom Rogers, one of a group of men who enjoyed the shuffleboard experience, met with Town officials about beginning an organization for Seniors.

Interest in the needs of "Seniors" - anyone 50 years of age or older - was a national concern in those years. In 1976, Governor Brendan Byrne of New Jersey appointed Joseph Mastriani and Gloria Phillipone of Wall Township to a newly formed Office of the Aging. That same year Wall Township established a *Steering Committee* which met with newly elected committeeman Bob Jenkins in the reading room of the Wall library. The Township authorized by ordinance a *Senior Citizens Program*. In April, a *Senior Citizens Advisory Council* (SCAC) was created by the town for the purpose of seeing that the ordinance was carried out. The nine appointed members included Bertha B. Schue, Frank Halifax, and Gertrude Clayton. Committeeman Bob Jenkins was appointed liaison between the SCAC and the Town Committee. An article by Bob Jenkins in Our Town, 5/27/78, states the SCAC first met in a recreation building on Marconi Road at Camp Evans and then moved in May, 1978 to the Wall Township Youth Center, South M Street.

## *BEGINNING*

*The Pride of Wall Seniors* was founded and conducted its first meeting on July 5, 1977. The first order of business was the adoption of a Constitution and By-Laws. The third article stated, "The primary purpose of *The Pride of Wall Seniors* is to provide a center, where men and women may meet to enjoy good fellowship, and to render a service to the community." There are no extant minutes of that meeting.

### *Charter Members*

Documentary testimony to the beginnings of *The Pride of Wall Seniors* is scant. What we have at this

writing is the result of the interest of members in 1988. A committee, which included Tom McGrath, assembled a photograph *Album 1*. The first item in the album is a handwritten list entitled *Charter Members of Pride of Wall Seniors July 5 - 1977 - 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting*. There are seventy-seven names. (*Appendix 1*) Enclosed with this original list is a typed copy. The third item is a handwritten notation giving *Special Tribute to our deceased 1<sup>st</sup> President Louise Halloway died August 1986*. The notation adds that this Album was “made up June 1988 and will be stored in Club’s Cabinet for Members.” On the reverse side of the notation is the information, *From the kitchen table of: Tom McGrath*.

### FIRST DECADE

During its first years, *Pride of Wall Seniors* (PWS) had no permanent home. Early meetings were held in a tiny cottage off Marconi Road on the Camp Evans property. (This is probably the recreation building used by SCAC.) According to the Proclamation issued by the Wall Township Committee on the occasion of PWS’ silver jubilee, “When it outgrew that location, it moved to the American Legion Building in Belmar, then to an old house in West Belmar, then to the Masonic Lodge on Highway 38 and finally to the new community room in the newly constructed Wall Municipal Building.”

In September, 1978, PWS celebrated its first anniversary at *The Barclay*. Our Town reported that about 105 were in attendance and that Mayor Bob Jenkins and his wife were honored guests. In December, 1979, the “Annual Christmas Luncheon” was held at *The Homestead*. A photo in Our Town shows President Louise Halloway and other PWS members with guests Mayor Donald Corson and Committeeman Robert Jenkins. In 1980, the Christmas luncheon was attended by “nearly one hundred members and guests”. Charlotte Scholz and Marietta Bariexca were chairpersons of the event. Mayor Jerry Hough spoke about the need for all parts of the Town to take an interest in all the Town. Anecdotal reports are that for most of the first decade, the organization counted about fifty members and that during the presidency of Bertha Schue bus trips and card parties were introduced into the life of the organization. In July, 1981, PWS member Agnes Stevenson suffered a loss when her husband Will left their home in the Glendola area for a walk and was never seen again. Agnes searched his usual route in vain and the Wall police were likewise unsuccessful in finding any trace of him. (Article Asbury Park Press, 12/7/86, with photo of Agnes at PWS luncheon at the Barclay)

In 1987, PWS celebrated its tenth anniversary on December 1 at the Barclay. A photograph in *Album 1* shows Charter Members with former Mayors Bob Jenkins, Harry Rash, Claire French, current Mayor Wesley Jost and President Bertha Schue. Bob Jenkins was proclaimed “Father of All Seniors”.

### SECOND DECADE

In 1988, when Angela Mullen was third President of PWS, Mayor Wesley Jost gave a “Certificate of Acknowledgement” to Lucille Anderson and Martha Brown “for their efforts in Pride of Wall Seniors”. At the St. Patrick’s luncheon, *Pride of Wall Seniors* gave a plaque in appreciation to Borough Clerk Beatrice Gassner “for her many years of dedicated and loyal service to the senior citizens of the community.” (The Herald) At the meeting of the Township Committee on May 25, 1988, Mayor Jost issued a *Proclamation in Memory* of Bertha Schue, who passed away on May 9, 1988. In May of that same year, The Wall Township Chapter of A.A.R.P. was formed at Wall United Methodist Church. Their first officers included PWS members Grace Peterson as President, Bernice Cutrell as Membership Chairperson, Nancy Dell’Osso as Hospitality Chairperson and Gladys Thompson as Program Chairperson. An article (with photo) about this event mentions that the *Wall Township Shuffle Board Players* were active three days a week at the Municipal Complex. (The Herald)

It was around this time that *Album 1* was lost. After two years, a new “album (#1A) was reproduced by

the membership". This *Album 1A*, followed by *Album 2*, covers the years 1988 to 1992 and includes a copy of the original "Constitution and By-Laws", photos of the officers from 1988 to 1991 and a list of deceased members ("compiled as of February 13, 1992 with the cooperation of Jennie Restaino, Membership Chairman") with copies of memorial cards and death notices. According to a notation inside the back covers, these albums were the work primarily of Agnes Stevenson, who was historian from 1989 to 1992. She was succeeded by Dorothy Staab in 1993 and by Tom McGrath in 1997. The name of G. J. Heulitt is included without further information.

In 1990, the Wall Municipal Building was dedicated. In March an "Annual Covered Dish" at the Masonic Lodge hosted Town Committeemen and members of the Monmouth County on the Aging. A notation in *Album 1A* states that the PWS was due to move "to the new library building on Allaire Road to accommodate members who have difficulty climbing stairs." Membership at this time was 50 plus members. Members mourned the sudden death of Police Chief Leo Kubaitis at the age of 50. At the June luncheon, Charlotte Scholz was given a crystal dish "for 11 years of service as luncheon chairlady." Her thank-you note is included in the album. A photograph by Agnes Stephenson, "Photographer", of the December luncheon at the Barclay that year is the first indication of the use of the PWS banner created by Elizabeth Colarusso, daughter of Tom McGrath.

In 1991, Lloyd Heulitt became fourth President. Mrs. Smith, aunt of PWS member Mandie Mortimer, made more than 20 lap robes for St. Clare's House for AIDS children. In September bingo was offered, and in October Diana Partuch stated in The Herald, "at present, Pride of Wall Seniors has 80 members. About 30 attend the meetings....Wall is working on plans for a Senior Center, and Senior Housing is being planned for Colfax Plaza." The Herald also reported that WCAC had received a grant for '91-'92 to hire Lisa Brady as a full-time coordinator. "She will begin with an assessment of Seniors' needs." Dr. Anthony Crsicuolo was Chairman of the WCAC.

In January, 1992, Lucille Anderson was honored on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the PWS meeting in the Masonic Lodge. It seems that the move of *Pride of Wall Seniors* from the Masonic Lodge to the Community Room at the Wall Municipal Building took place in September, 1992, when Mayor Wesley Jost was instrumental in getting the Community Room completed for use by PWS and other community organizations. A photo from The Herald, unfortunately not dated, shows the officers newly installed "for the coming year at last Tuesday's meeting held in the new community room at the Wall Township Municipal Complex." The officers at this historic moment were Ray Morton, Nancy Dell'Osso, Vi Gennari, Grace Rothery, Jennie Restiano, Tom McGrath, Agnes Stevenson and Lillian Lukins. (See Appendix, page 9) "Meetings begin with coffee and fellowship at 11:30 a.m., with business conducted at 1:00 p.m."

On January 1, 1993, Commttee Person Mary Burne was appointed *liaison to Pride of Wall Seniors*. The Herald of January 20, 1993, reported that the Township Committee agreed at its regular meeting that the "nearly finished community room in the municipal complex...will be used only by local, non-profit organizations." Marion White testifies that, because of the interest of Seniors in the sport, shuffleboard lanes were painted on the concrete floor of the large central room in the lower level of the WMB. That same year Mae Trautman was honored at her home with a party for her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was the oldest member of PWS at that time and was active in crocheting blankets for AIDS babies.

In December 1994, members took advantage of free telephone calls at Merill Lynch. In 1995, Kathleen, Kristina and Colleen Nicosia danced Irish step-dance at the March party. In May, Tom McGrath was honored by the Township Committee "for his involvement with the Pride of Wall Seniors" (The Herald), and in December Ruth Griffies was "Mrs. Santa Claus" at the luncheon at the Barclay.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary luncheon was held at the Barclay on June 3, 1997. In preparation for the event, a typed copy of the handwritten list of Charter Members was prepared for Helen Crosby. The Charter

Members were seated “at a special table with former Mayor and Mrs. Jenkins.” (Minutes of Jeanette Heulitt) The new officers sworn in were President Cliff Gibson, Vice-President Charlie Nicosia, Recording Secretary Nancy Dell’Osso, Treasurer Elmer Myers, Jr., and Sergeants-at-Arms Louise King and Lillian Tedesco. Eva Lawson’s Line Dancers and Shuffle Board were on the schedule as coming events. In time, after the interest in shuffleboard declined and concerns arose about the dust and fumes in the “inner room”, the floor was covered with carpeting and is so today.

With growth in membership and development of different programs, a By-Laws committee was formed in 1997. Its members were Marion White, Elmer Meyers and Jeannette Heulitt. They restated the *Motto* of the *Pride of Wall Seniors* : “Working Together in Unity” and amended the *Primary Purpose* to read, “The primary purpose of *The Pride of Wall Seniors* is to provide a center, where men and women may meet to enjoy good fellowship, to be enlightened on those matters which pertain to Seniors, and to encourage participation in the organization for the betterment of all its members.” The office of Financial Secretary was changed to an honorary position, and the duties of the Financial Secretary, exclusive of dues, were assigned to Financial Chairperson, to be appointed by the President. A final amendment established *Honorary Membership*. The amended By-Laws were adopted on December 2, 1997. At present, Tom McGrath, Lloyd Heulitt, Ruth Malick and Rev. Harvey Malick are Honorary Members. Dorothy Staab called Bingo after the December meeting. Charter Member Charlotte Schultz passed away in mid-December.

### THIRD DECADE

At the opening meeting of September, 1997, Vice-President Charlie Nicosia conducted Bingo games after the meeting. This practice continued through May, 1998. At the September 16 meeting, as Nancy Dell’Osso’s minutes record, Bea Pace “said a very sad farewell as she is moving to New York. She was told she would still be a charter member of the [Pride of] Wall Seniors.” In 1997 and 1998, the Exercise Class under Jessie Ewbank hosted “Soup Days” for Town workers, clerical staff and police. Photos show a lineup of slow cookers and “Soup Girls”. In March 1998, Pride of Wall members enjoyed a “Senior Prom” at Wall High School. In June, at the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary luncheon, Lillian Lukens was honored on her retirement after 20 years as Chaplain. Cliff Gibson was President and Ruth Creighton was Chairperson of the event. On July 21, Pride of Wall Seniors held its first Picnic at Oak Tree Lodge on School House Road. The annual event has been continued to the present.

At the September 1, 1998 meeting, Charlie Nicosia resumed calling bingo after the meeting. Past President Ray Morton passed away in November.

In February, 2000, during the presidency of Charles Nicosia, the Pride of Wall Seniors worked with Mayor Robert Peters on a new program, *Lifeline*, designed to reach out to Wall residents who normally would have very little contact with others. Ten members volunteered to contact one person daily to check on him/her and to offer advice about services that they might need.

In March, 2001, the Steering Committee approved a *Memorial Service* composed by Reverend Harvey Malick, to be available to any member who might request it. A photo shows Committee Person Mary Burne, President Cliff Gibson, Event Chairperson Ruth Creighton and Officer Nancy Dell’Osso at the December Luncheon at the Barclay.

In February 2002, President Cliff Gibson appointed Ray Walton delegate to the Monmouth County Senior Citizens Council. He “will attend their monthly meetings and will report back to the Pride of Wall” (Minutes of Janet Ebner). In March, members read to students of Old Mill School. Christine Tomassi reported on the work of Eyes for the Needy. Dory Gardner reported for Lifeline that “Betty

Riddle is calling one person” but more volunteers were needed.

In June, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Pride of Wall Seniors* was marked at the annual luncheon at the Barclay. The officers on that occasion were President Cliff Gibson, Vice-President Walter Gratton, Secretary Janet Ebner and Treasurer Elmer Meyers. Ruth Creighton chaired a committee of 18 members. Charter Members in attendance as guests included Dominic and Rose Sion, Dorothy Lane, Frances Blair, Carmela Mastriani and Elizabeth (Libby) Scott. Bob Jenkins and his wife Pat Jenkins were honored guests. The Township Committee issued a proclamation acknowledging the event, signed by Mayor Edward H. Thomson, Deputy Mayor Mary L. Burne, and Committee Person Frank Addonizio.

July 28, 2002, was “Eleanor Lukowitz Day” in Monmouth County in recognition of her years of service to the community. At the meeting of September 17, “Life Line Chairman Dory Gardner thanked Alma Walton who makes daily calls.” (Minutes of Janet Ebner, Secretary) On October 31, the Exercise Class, now being lead by Ruth Creighton and grown to 60 members, held its annual Soup and Dessert Luncheon for Wall employees. Line Dancing Instruction was being given on Mondays and Fridays. Rev. Harvey Malick organized several day trips and overnight trips. Pride of Wall Seniors was included on the Wall Township web site under the Recreation Department.

At the Steering Committee meeting on January 7, 2003, the financial health of the Pride of Wall Seniors was demonstrated with the adoption of Walter Gratton’s motion “to give two \$25 gift certificates to a restaurant and one gift certificate to a food-store at every regular meeting based on the sign-in sheet”. (Janet Ebner, minutes) In February, “Tom McGrath thanked everyone who sent condolences for Lillian Lukens who recently passed and who was Chaplain of POW for 20 years.” (Minutes of Janet Ebner, Steering Committee meeting 2/4/03) At the first meeting of April, the gift certificate drawing went into effect. On April 15, the first annual Easter Bonnet Parade, sponsored by the Wall Recreation Department was held during the regular meeting of the Pride of Wall Seniors. As recorded by Janet Ebner, Secretary, “The winners were: Prettiest - Louise King; Funniest - Eleanor Lukowitz with ‘Toast of the Town’; Most original - Josephine Lenard with “My Big Fat Polish Easter Dinner’.” On August 8, 2003, Nancy Dell’Osso passed away. She had been Vice-President for nine years and Recording Secretary for two years during the 1990’s. In November, Corresponding Secretary and Eyes-for-the-Needy Chairperson Christine Tomassi resigned due to illness. The Line Dancing Class continued to meet on Mondays and Fridays through December.

In January, 2004 the Line Dancing Class changed to Mondays only. 138 members attended PWS’ Italian Fest that year and Inez Boyan won “Most Original Hat” in the Easter Parade. In April, President Walter Gratton appointed Ray Walton the PWS representative to the Office of the Aging in Freehold.

On May 17, 2005, *Revisions to the By-Laws*, submitted by the By-Laws Committee (Jeanette Heulitt, Elmer Myers, Jr., and Marion White), were approved. This included raising the annual dues to \$5.00.

In 2006, Pete Peterson shared his enthusiasm for model yachting, the sheriff’s office took photos for “Ident-adult” cards, Gertrude Winans won “most original hat” at the Easter Parade, and the voting commission gave PWS members a hands-on demonstration of the new electronic voting machines. In late summer, Frances Blair, Charter Member, Ruth Creighton and Alice Dorrer passed away. In October, the Octoberfest was conducted as a *Fall Festival*.

In 2007, through the intervention of Geri O’Connor, Kempton Flags of Wall Township donated a parade banner to the Pride of Wall Seniors. This was used for the first time at the Belmar Parade on March 4. Betsy and John Thompson repaired the Elizabeth Colarusso banner in time for the St. Patrick’s Fest, which was conducted as a *Welcome Spring* party with Eva Lawson’s line dancers participating. At the February meeting, Marion Meneghan’s one hundredth birthday was celebrated. Her family was present

and supplied a birthday cake. Mary Burne read a proclamation of congratulations from the Township Committee. In April, Rev. Harvey Malik and his wife Ruth moved to Ocean Grove. To acknowledge their years of service and leadership, the Steering Committee voted them *Honorary Members*. In April, Ruth Malik passed away. In May, the officers of PWS and Marge Krupin of A.A.R.P. attended the ceremony at the Town Committee's meeting in which Council Person Mary Burne proclaimed May "Older Americans Month". The proclamation is in the Community Room.

### TODAY

This spring, Wall Township began an extensive renovation of *Airplane Park*. The Korean War era jet fighter has been returned to the U. S. Navy for restoration and eventual display on the aircraft carrier *Intrepid*. The swings and benches were removed to be replaced by equipment of a safer and more contemporary design. The concrete shuffleboard lanes, long quiet, were dug up and carted away. The branch post office rents space across Belmar Boulevard in Colfax Plaza. The building that once housed the Township offices is now home to *Wall Primary School*. The sign still proclaims "Airplane Park".

Committee Person and former Mayor Mary Burne is the current liaison between Pride of Wall Seniors and the Wall Township Committee. She also attends the meetings of the *Senior Citizen Advisory Committee*, which meets on the first Tuesday of each month from September to June. The members of the SCAC are Clifford Gibson, Ruth Brant, Elaine Doyle, Walter Gratton, Eleanor Lukuwitz, Charles Nicosia, Geri O'Connor, Joseph Roma, Ray Walton.

For 30 years, *Pride of Wall Seniors* has been the occasion for many good people to come together. It has lived its life from day to day and, like most of us, only afterwards is trying to put together its history from bits and pieces of memory. The author of this report thanks all who have contributed information so that this story might be told and remembered. He apologizes for any failures in attributing such generosity and for any inaccuracies in assembling the narrative. In May, 2007, *Album 1* was recovered. Anyone with additional information is invited to inform the author.

With gratitude we dedicate this narrative to those who had the vision that resulted in *Pride of Wall Seniors*. We thank Bob Jenkins who believed in Seniors and brought together those who began this work. We thank the succession of Mayors and Township Committee Persons who have nurtured the development of PWS through three decades. We acknowledge the cooperation of the Town Recreation Department and Maintenance Department who act as resources and facilitators. We acknowledge Mary Burne who has watched over PWS for the last fourteen years. Finally we acknowledge the commitment of PWS officers, committee members and volunteers, many now deceased, who began this work, have brought it to the present moment and hand it on to those who will come after us.