

## BLOOMFIELD

The Alpha Omega Chapter, Alpha Delta State of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, an honorary women educators' group, in co-operation with the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, presents a brief history of Bloomfield Township and its schools.

In 1814 Ephraim Brown of West Moreland, New Hampshire, and his uncle, Thomas Howe of Williamstown, Vermont purchased from Peter Chardon Brooks of Boston a tract of land five miles square in the northern part of what is now Trumbull County. Howe and Brown were boyhood playmates since they were about the same age. "It is said that the first business transaction between the two took place when the uncle and the nephew were both less than ten years of age. Howe rented a setting hen of Brown for the season; and at the expiration of the time agreed upon, returned the hen with half of the chickens."

In 1815 Howe sold his share of the township to Brown reserving 1,000 acres in the southern part for himself. Thus Ephraim Brown had to assume the responsibility of developing the area. He hired S.E. Ensign of Mesopotamia to survey the land -- no easy task on account of the swamps. The township was divided into 170 lots, containing 50 acres to 100 acres each, and named West Moreland, probably because Brown had originally lived in West Moreland, New Hampshire. Later the name was changed to Bloomfield.

A large portion of the eastern part of the township was covered by the Tamarack Swamp. Just mentioning this swamp terrorized the women and children because of the dreadful tales they had heard. It was infested with deadly rattlesnakes; and it was said that men and children going into the area to pick elderberries and huckleberries, which grew abundantly, often walked into quicksand and were quickly drawn down to their death. Actually, the swamp could not be crossed in many places even on horseback.

Over the years the swamp has been drained to make the rich fertile soil available. Today many acres are cultivated. Garden crops such as green onions, celery, turnips, cabbage and carrots are raised and trucked to neighboring cities to be sold in the stores and farm markets.

The west part of Bloomfield is drained by Grand River and its small tributaries. The river bottom is often flooded. It has been wet and swampy from pioneer days to the present time. Between the river bottom and the Tamarack Swamp was a ridge of higher ground running through the central part of the township from north to south. This ridge had sandy and gravelly soil which made excellent farm land. However, the two swampy areas were a drawback to settlement; and as a result, the township was late to be settled in comparison with the other parts of Trumbull County.

Most of the early settlers in the Trumbull County area came by the way of Youngstown, which was a mustering-out center. After resting there for a short time, they

would branch out into the wilderness to the various tracts of land which they had purchased, often sight unseen.

However, Leman Ferry, the first settler in Bloomfield, entered the territory from the north, coming by way of Conneaut. He had left Bloomfield, Vermont, in January, 1815, and arrived in Bloomfield, Ohio, about six weeks later on February 20, 1815. He had two conveyances when he left Vermont, a sled drawn by two oxen and a sleigh drawn by two horses. The sled carried their household goods. Mr. Ferry was accompanied by his wife, two sons, three daughters, and a hired man. West of Buffalo, the snow became so scarce that he traded the sled for a wagon. He kept the sleigh, but much of the way the horses had to pull it over mud rather than snow.

The group entered the township from the north and proceeded southward until they came upon a deserted log cabin just over the line of Bristol. The family took shelter here until Mr. Ferry, his older son, who was twenty-one years old, and the hired man could erect a cabin on his own land which was in the southern part of Bloomfield. The three men soon had a comfortable dwelling finished. Since at first there was no fireplace or chimney, the fire was built on the dirt floor; and the smoke escaped through a hole in a roof. Here the family lived and worked.

Mr. Ferry had never built a log house before this and, therefore, was not especially skilled in that kind of carpentry; and the roof which was covered with "shakes" or long shingles, held down by weight poles, was not properly constructed. One day when his younger son climbed upon the roof to rescue the cat, the entire roof started to move, and the whole thing slid to the ground burying the boy. Luckily, the hired man was nearby to free him without any serious injury. He was just a bruised and frightened youngster.

Later in the spring, other settlers came to make clearings and built cabins on their land. At least 20 of them boarded with the Ferrys. Mrs. Ferry cooked for them until they had a place of their own. Supper was cornmeal, mush and milk every night. Occasionally thick Orleans molasses was poured over the mush making a "crowning dessert." The woman slept in the lower part of the cabin, and the men crawled into the loft and slept on the floor. Mrs. Ferry must have thrived on the work, for she lived to be 90 years old.

During the summer of 1815, more settlers arrived and began improving their land. Israel Proctor, Samuel Eastman, and David Comstock walked the entire distance from Vermont to Bloomfield. Comstock was the best woodchopper in the township. Many pioneered as an adventure and a race for fortune, but a few came to escape the rigid laws and social unhappiness.

One of the first and probably the most prominent citizens was Ephraim Brown, who was known for his ability, wealth and public spirit. He came from Cheshire County in New York, in July, 1815, accompanied by his wife, four children, and two sisters of Mrs. Brown. They settled in a log cabin which had been built by Major Howe. Mrs. Brown,

one of the real pioneers, suffered from homesickness and after two years went back east with her husband when he went to Boston for goods for his store. They missed the boat at Fairport and went all the way on horseback to Utica, New York. They continued from there by stagecoach.

Five years after the Browns came to Bloomfield, "Brownwood", a beautiful stately farm mansion, was built on the site of the original log cabin. It still stands today enhanced by a fine setting, well back from the highway. In 1973 the National Park Service designated it as a National Registered Historic Place. It has remained in possession of the Brown family until very recently.

Thomas Howe of Williamstown, Vermont, brought his family in 1817 and settled south of the center. Most of the earliest settlers were from Vermont, but at a later date some "foreigners" came from England to establish homes in Bloomfield. Mr. William Howe was one of these first English settlers.

Ephraim Brown was the first postmaster, the first merchant, and the second justice of the peace. Mr. Jared Kimball was the first justice of the peace and was an excellent one. The following case illustrates his shrewdness and fairness.

A poor man living in the township rented a piece of grassland which he was to mow and have a portion of hay for his work. He mowed the field and stacked the hay. Some time later the owner set a fire which slowly worked its way across the field, eventually reaching the renter's haystack and destroying it. The poor man sought to recover damages and brought the case before Kimball. Squire Brown made the plea for the owner of the field, stating the law applicable to the case; but Squire Kimball said, "Here is a law which applies," and quoted from the Bible: "If a man set a fire which catches in the stubble and destroys his neighbor's grain, verily that man shall make restitution." Judgment was accordingly rendered in favor of the poor man.

Bloomfield played a prominent and active part in the Underground Railway. The residents were sympathetic and supported the cause. No matter how liberal the rewards, there was never known to be a betrayal of a runaway slave. Mr. Brown was an uncompromising opponent of slavery. "Brownwood" was one of the stations on the way to Canada. Abolition and politics were often the subject of discussion at town meetings and at family gatherings.

Connecticut sold the land of the Western Reserve without providing any kind of school fund. This was a drawback to early settlement of the territory. Mothers practically had broken hearts when they came to this wilderness, not because of leaving comfortable homes and friends but because there were no schools for the education of their children. The state of Ohio did give a small sum for schools, but the greater part of the expense had to be borne by the parents. Teachers were often paid in produce and were obliged to "board around" to piece out their salary.

The first schoolhouse in Bloomfield was a log structure built in 1817 on Leman Ferry's farm in the southern part of the township. The first teacher was Chester Howard, a brother of Mrs. Thomas Howe. He continued to teach, completing 42 winter terms and 26 summer terms. A schoolhouse of logs was built at the center quite early. The first term of school, however, was taught by Noah M. Greene in Lewis Clisby's home in 1817.

In the late 1850's Reverend D. L. Hickox and his wife opened a private school. The building had two stories and was not only used as a school but also as a town hall. The school was divided into three grades, and Reverend Hickox was elected the principal of the high school. He built up a good school, and students from outside the township were received. Mr. Viets followed him as principal. When Mr. Hickox left to enter the ministry, the school failed to keep up its high standards.

Three women were members of the Board of Education in those early days — Mrs. Hitchcock, Mrs. Works, and Mary Watson. Mrs. Works, whose father had died when she was very young, was a tailor, teacher and nurse. Although she was small and retiring, she was very brave. Like her mother, she was left a widow early but kept her family together and paid all of her obligations.

And so the township of Bloomfield grew and prospered, partly because of the industriousness and thrift of its citizens and partly because of a unique location. The Warren-Ashtabula Turnpike passed through the township from north to south. Ephraim Brown had taken an active part in pushing the construction of this road, which connected Lake Erie and the Ohio River. Within seven years of the first settlement, mail coaches passed through the village daily. Bloomfield was also well located at the southern end of the Painesville-Bloomfield Plank Road. These roads were made of wooden planks or smoothed logs. Weather caused these planks to spread and buckle, so travel over them was a series of "ups and downs"; but at least vehicles did not become mired in the mud.

Today Bloomfield is a quiet farming community with a shady commons at the center surrounded by a bank, post office, store, church, town hall and several well-kept homes. Just a few hundred feet south of the center stands "Brownwood," just as beautiful and just as majestic as in the days gone by.

*The script by B. Lucile Woodford, narration by Gene Roberts. These programs were prepared by the Delta Kappa Gamma Society, in cooperation with the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, to promote a better understanding of the history of the townships of Trumbull County with a focus on early education and the role of the woman educator.*