

GUSTAVUS

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 Gustavus and its schools.

Gustavus Township, located in northeastern Trumbull County, was named for Colonel Lemuel Starr's son, Gustavus, after the colonel purchased the rural area in 1800. Josiah Pelton, a Connecticut farmer, was the first settler to arrive; and later his son Jesse and his bride, Ruhamah DeWolfe, who were married in 1802, arrived. They had the township's first birth, which sorrowfully became Gustavus' first death. Elias Pelton, a brother of Jesse, was the second to arrive; he and his family became residents of Gustavus. Their daughter, Barbara, was the first white child to survive; and her brother, Storrs, was the first white boy born in the township.

It is interesting to know that Josiah Pelton, the original settler, Jesse Pelton, Josiah's son, and Fensard Pelton, grandfather of Mrs. Florence Pelton Lucas, are all buried in the Gustavus Cemetery. Mrs. Lucas's father, Eugene Pelton, is still living at age 96.

As the settlement expanded, many buildings were constructed, including the Empire House, which was one of the best known buildings, and a stagecoach tavern with several adjoining houses. Calvin Cone was Gustavus' first justice of the peace and later became a state senator, while Riverius Bidwell walked barefoot from house to house collecting taxes and walked to Columbus to deliver the money. He was also the first postmaster.

In the early days of the township, several sawmills, cheese factories, machine shops, blacksmith shops, tanneries and other shops lined the dirt roads. William Roberts, who came from Connecticut in 1816, was a shoemaker. Mr. Dyer had a woodworking shop where he specialized in making wooden troughs for sap to use in the maple sugar industry. Most farmers kept sheep to help clear the brush from the land and to make a little money. Gustavus Township inhabitants showed much interest in raising and showing ponies and riding horses.

A history of Gustavus would be incomplete without mention of the part that Gustavus people played in the Abolitionist Movement. Obadiah Gildersleeves came to Gustavus in 1804. He obtained permission for the court to drop the last part of his name, and his descendants have always been known as "Gilder." He had eight children when he arrived, and the ninth born afterward. Mrs. Gilder drove wagonloads of slaves to the lakes, where they made their escape. The Underground Railroad for north-bound slaves was very active in the township with the Hezlip-Selby-Bingham-Kimple House one of the main stations.

Religion began in the home of Jesse Pelton with Reverend Thomas Robins preaching the first sermon. He was sent by the Congregational Missionary Society of

Connecticut. He, with Joseph Badger, Mr. Osgood, and others, preached at intervals until 1809 when Henry Cowler, a Congregationalist from Austinburg, preached through the summer in the home of Jesse Pelton, who also provided most of the pay. Through the labors of these men, brave for toil and bold for the truth, conversions and revivals prevailed, reformation progressed, and a Methodist Episcopal Church was established. A Congregational Church was organized in 1825 with James Badger as the first minister. His salary was \$200, \$50 of it being supplied by the Missionary fund. The Bible, presented by Josiah Pelton to the church, bears a date 1792 and was printed in Edinburgh, Scotland. When this revered old book was displaced by a new one of a modern type, it was returned according to his request to one of his descendents. Through the cooperation of the churches in the community, Gustavus has held Fourth of July festivals since the first one in 1800.

The Elias Pelton family, whose daughter and son were born in 1803 and 1805, is credited with having the first school in the township. Miss Roxy Brockway was the teacher of this school, which was for the benefit of the Pelton children.

The first public school was kept in a new log barn belonging to John Lane, one and one-half miles northeast of the center. Miss Sally Wakeman, the teacher, was paid seventy-five cents per week. Many of the children found their way to school through the woods by means of blazed trees. The parents paid the teacher because there was no public school money until 1804.

School books were scarce until Dr. Naphtali Streeter made a trip on horseback to Pittsburgh in 1908, where he bought Webster's Spelling Book, Columbian Orator, English Reader, and Elements of United Knowledge. He bought these books back to Gustavus.

The first schoolhouse was built on the premises of Riverius Bidwell in 1813. Soon after, Esther Bidwell, Riverius Bidwell's sister, became the first teacher. Children from the center, nearly three miles away, came to her school. In a letter written home on September 21, 1813, she describes the school building as a house without windows or chimney and added, "It grows dark in my hut." She had started teaching nine weeks before, with 25 pupils, 11 of them learning to write, children and parents both engaged. She was concerned that there had been only four sessions of three months each before this and no school for two years. She hoped that they would never be as indifferent about schooling as in the past. Lucy Case was also mentioned as a beloved teacher in this school.

Every few years the districts changed. More were added, at one time, there were ten. There were nine when the schools were centralized, consisting of seven districts, one sub-district, and the high school at the center.

Early in April of each year, three directors were elected by each district. The directors hired the teachers and maintained the buildings. Later these directors were replaced by a Township Board of Education, one elected from each district; later still, this was changed to five members elected at large.

The nine district schools were located as follows, according to one authority:

- No. One - Barclay L. York's tenant house
- No. Two - Hayes Road and Pearl Street
- No. Three - Center. O. White's house
- No. Four - West of Dilworth. D. Brainard's house
- No. Five - Canfield Road. A. Bonar's house
- No. Six - Sadler Road
- No. Seven - West of Center. M. Smith's garage
- No. Eight - York Street. L. Spring's house
- No. Nine - Pearl Street. L. Runkle's tenant house

New Englanders could be traced across the country by the academies they erected. In 1841, Reverend Benjamin Fenn promoted interest in an academy for Gustavus. Buell Barnes, a local resident, was in the State Legislature at that time, and he secured the incorporation papers. Shares of stocks were sold for \$10 each. A large two-story brick building with a belfry was erected in 1843 - 1844 on the west side of the village square, south of the site of the present Federated Church. School started in the fall of 1844. The Academy flourished for about 40 years, and many graduates went on to college for higher education. In 1881, a two-story boarding house was built at a cost of \$2,300 to accommodate out-of-town pupils.

When the academy had outlived its usefulness, the Board of Education purchased the building for \$2,300, and the old high school was held here through the 1890's. One year it was held in the then-new Town Hall when the Academy building was condemned as unsafe for use.

An early teacher was E.J. Southwick, noted for his thoroughness in teaching higher arithmetic (or mental arithmetic) and advanced grammar. Other high school teachers were A. P. Bacon and G. P. Gillmer who taught one year in the old building and one in the town hall. Charles Merwin was another high school teacher.

It was largely enough through the effort of G. P. Gilmer and C. G. Williams, Clerk of the Board of Education, that the people decided to centralize, bringing the children from all the districts into a new central building which was built west of the Center of 1898, at the cost of about \$4,000. This consolidation brought Gustavus the

honor of being the first township in the United States of America to have a centralized school.

In 1960 Gustavus School consolidated with Kinsman, Vernon, and Hartford Schools. The high school students were transported to Kinsman, and a part of Kinsman's grade pupils were brought to Gustavus. The consolidated schools were appropriately called "The Joseph Badger Local Schools" for the circuit-riding minister who served the Gustavus Church from 1825 to 1835.

Gustavus Township is justly proud of its people who have become prominent in many occupations. They are represented among artists, inventors, teachers, public officials, armed services, preachers, health services, agriculture, and all other contributing fields of employment. They reflect the spirit of their pioneer ancestors. These Connecticut pioneers spent six or more weeks traveling from their homes to this new township of Gustavus. Often they had to build bridges and repair roads in order to proceed on their way. They journeyed westward in their wagons, pulled by ox teams. They ate and slept in these wagons with the goal of a new home urging them onward. Trumbull County is richer for having Gustavus as one of its townships.

This script was prepared by Sarah May Thompson, narration by Gene Roberts. These programs were prepared by 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 woman educator.

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