

## VERNON

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

The original settlers of Vernon were mostly from Connecticut, and the present inhabitants are largely descendents of the pioneers from that state and also New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

The township was originally divided into three tracts. Gidion Granger owned the entire northern half; Jeremiah Wilcox, the western part and Mr. William Shepherd owned most of the southern part. The settlers from Connecticut purchased land from Jeremiah Wilcox and settled on his property.

In the spring of 1798 Doctor Jeremiah Wilcox of Hartford, Connecticut, hired General Martin Smith first and then Thomas Giddings to go to his land, which was number 6, range 1, in the Western Reserve lands of Connecticut, and survey his land. At that time towns were only known by their number and range since it was all part of the Western Reserve. The men were paid \$10.00 a month and \$10.00 for expenses. The two men were responsible for hiring their own helpers and purchasing supplies. Giddings was offered a job to drive some cattle to some families living in the present Vienna. So he left before Smith with the understanding that the two would eventually meet in Vienna.

Giddings and company backpacked their way to Pittsburgh without too much difficulty. That was the only route open at that time into Western Reserve. Once they left Pittsburgh they had to forge their way through the forests. After many weary days they arrived at Sharon.

Meanwhile General Martin Smith had hired Aaron Brockway, his wife and Mr. Ely to drive his covered wagon of supplies. When they arrived in Pittsburgh, General Smith and Mr. Ely decided to ride ahead of the wagon. They were anxious to see new land. So the two men, on horseback, arrived in Sharon, Pennsylvania, only a few days after Giddings.

Smith then rode to Vienna, where he learned that Giddings had arrived only the day before. Giddings told Smith that he would visit him the following day in Sharon, but first he had to sort the cows and give them to their owners.

The following day Giddings walked to Sharon because he enjoyed tramping through the wilderness. There the two men purchased a boat and two barrels flour, one barrel pork, one barrel whiskey and some other small supplies. With a loaded boat, Ely and Giddings started up the Shenango River to the Pymatuning. Smith rode along the bank looking for a landing place near the area that they were to survey. Their course

in the creek was often blocked by logs and driftwood. Frequently they had to cut away the obstructions before they could proceed.

On June 19, 1798, they finally arrived at a point about one half mile south of the present crossing in Vernon. Here they camped the night and stored their provisions as securely as possible. The following day they began an exploration of the Vernon Forests for a spring, since water was essential for the development of a new settlement.

In the days to follow, the three men surveyed the land, and worked hard to blaze a trail to Hartford Township. They were frequently visited by friendly Indians who wanted some "fire water." Mr. Giddings hid it and offered bread and other food instead. Soon each afternoon for awhile the Indians would appear for their "daily bread."

Soon Aaron Brockway and his wife, Mary Williams Enmons Brockway, arrived and became the first family to move into the township. She was the daughter of the first practicing physician of Hartford, Connecticut. She possessed the pioneer spirit and truly a courageous woman that suffered many hardships. She was pregnant when she arrived in Vernon, so the men quickly erected the first permanent log cabin. This was in July 1798. It was crudely constructed with an earthen floor. It stood near the present burial grounds at Vernon Center.

The men worked exhaustingly to clear the land and plant wheat for the winter, particularly on the 14 or so acres where Sutliff's orchard later stood. They also built more cabins for the families that would arrive.

Martin Smith returned to Connecticut to bring his family. Thus his became the second family to arrive. His wife Sarah was also a hardy woman. She and the seven children, the youngest was one, arrived by wagon in April, 1799. The Smiths were an influential family whose daughter Electra later became the first school teacher.

Mrs. Smith became very friendly with the Indians. In fact, one day they marched in with a papoose and exchanged it with Mrs. Smith's baby daughter Havilah. She was frightened but didn't question them when they took her baby. That evening they returned with the baby and took their papoose back. Mrs. Smith didn't know what that baby was fed, but it seemed to be in good health. In fact, this same Havilah was the first child born in this new settlement to reach adulthood.

More and more families began to arrive. Land in Vernon at this time, 1800, was only \$2.00 per acre. It became necessary to name this land. So it was decided to call it Smithfield in honor of Martin Smith. It remained so until 1815 when it was suddenly changed to Vernon. There is no record as to why the name was changed. One record cites that Mr. Kinsman of Kinsman Township was quite upset with the name change and offered his good friend Martin Smith a farm in his township because he considered it an insult. But Smith refused the generous offer and preferred to remain in his own township.

In 1800 Governor St. Clair divided Trumbull County into eight districts; Greene, Mecca, Gustavus, Johnston, Fowler, Brookfield, Hartford, and Vernon Townships. Martin Smith was appointed one of the justices and Titus Brockway the constable. In 1806 Vienna separated from Vernon Township and the formal organization as it now stands became effective.

In June 1800 Joseph DeWolf's family, Adam Burns, Hiram Hutchins, Mr. Bates, Rev. Obed Crosby, Abner Moses and his three children arrived. Abner Moses's wife died on the journey and Myra Pelton has recorded the incident. It seems that Mrs. Moses had endured a normal day riding in the wagon. The following morning, however, found her dead. They were near a town, but she was refused burial because she was considered an immigrant. So the party started on its way with the dead body. When they reached the foot of Laurel Hill Mountain, they dug a grave and buried her. The father and children, numb with grief, continued on their way to Vernon. Two of the DeWolf children, Catherine and Ruhama, dug daffodils from that place and took them to their homestead and planted them.

About this time different small businesses began to develop. Jared Hill and James Skinner brought a load of material to Vernon to build mills. Discovering that there were no roads west, they had to cut a road to Sugar Creek in Johnston Township for their wagons. They built both a sawmill and gristmill. Until then the settlers had to travel all the way to Beaver, Pennsylvania, (which took 6 to 9 days) in order to have their grain ground up. This was a real time saver.

Joseph DeWolf then built a sawmill on Mill Creek, which was located about one mile northwest of Vernon Center.

Joseph DeWolf framed the first barn for Martin Smith. It was covered with white oak boards two feet wide. On them was cleat 4 inches wide, fastened with spikes made by the blacksmith.

The first farm house was built by Perry Sheldon in 1805. This was quite an accomplishment since roads were still at a minimum and transportation of logs and materials was quite a problem.

The first wedding in the township occurred under unusual circumstances in 1802. It seems that Josiah Pelton of Killingsworth, Connecticut, bought some land in Gustavus, and after visiting his land in the wilderness, announced that he would give 100 acres of that land to the woman who would first make her home there. So his son Jesse accepted the offer and asked Ruhama DeWolf to be his bride. The wedding took place in Vernon with Martin Smith officiating. The newly-weds remained in Vernon until a clearing was made and a log cabin built on their Gustavus land. Some men from Vernon began work on it on July 4, 1802, and in December Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Pelton moved into their new cabin.

With the arrival of so many people school became a necessity. In 1802 the first school was opened on lot #4 of the Wilson tract (which was south of the Center on the southeast corner of Joseph DeWolf's place.) Electra Smith was the teacher and had eight students. Dr. Amos Wright taught the next winter and some of the DeWolf children studied Latin under him. Sarah Wright, sister of Dr. Wright, taught in the summer of 1803. Mr. Gilpin taught as early as 1803-4, and after him Ebenezer Chapman at Vernon Center. The books used in this school were the well-known text books which comprised the curriculum of the early schools, Lindley Murray's Grammar and Webster's Speller.

It seemed that Mr. Chapman had many peculiarities, but was in general a good teacher. He is remembered as being very watchful of his students.

In 1803 a school-church building was built in Burghill for Hartford, Vernon and Burghill students. Schools and churches shared buildings for several years. It wasn't until 1817 that the first school was erected in Vernon Center.

The schools were called District Schools until 1902. District School Number 1 was located in the center of Vernon beside the town hall. Both of these buildings were located where the present Methodist Church now stands.

District No. 2 School was located at the west end of Allen Creek Road where John Britt now lives. In 1900 Clara Trunkey became the teacher and the school was located on her farm. In Mr. Trunkey's diaries he relates how each man who had a District School on his property was responsible for its upkeep. He had to hire the teacher and arrange for the transportation home. If the teacher lived a distance, the owner would provide room and board during the week and transport the teacher home for weekends. He also was responsible for complete repairs of the building and supplying wood for the stove. He was repaid for all this by the school board.

District No. 3 School was located on the east side of the Kinsman-Orangeville Road about one mile south of Vernon-Kinsman Township line. It was located on the exact site of the present G. Dodge home.

1902 saw the passing of the District Schools. During that year a wooden frame school was built at Vernon Center. Children were brought to school in horse-drawn school "vans." There were long wagons with canvas curtains that covered the sides to keep out rain and snow. The top was usually metal. Long seats were on each side of the wagon. When attending District Schools, the children had to walk or their parents had to provide transportation. But even yet the horse-drawn vans could not always go over the muddy roads, and the parents would have to be responsible for transporting their children. The van drivers were paid 25¢ per day for the double trip. In 1914 the frame school building burned. The pupils had to finish in other township schools. A brick school was started immediately on the same site to replace the frame one.

In 1903 was the first graduating class from the frame school in Vernon, and in 1905 H.R. Jennings had just completed his new home, and he offered his first graduates

his dining room for the first Alumni banquet. That house is presently owned by William Durr.

In 1960 the Hartford, Vernon, Gustavus and Kinsman township schools consolidated under the name of Joseph Badger District. It was named after Rev. Joseph Badger, a circuit rider preacher.

The Vernon Presbyterian Church, like many of the early Congregational and Presbyterian churches, was called the Church of Christ. It was organized on September 16, 1803, at Martin Smith's home. Reverend Joseph Badger presided at this meeting. Services were held in cabins, barns, groves and other churches, when available, until 1826.

The Free-Will Baptist Church was organized by Elder Ransom Dunn on March 9, 1840, and its full title was the Hartford and Vernon Free-Will Baptist Church of Christ.

The United Brethren Church was organized about 1860 by Rev. Silas Casterline, in the house of Western Smith, about one-half mile west of the present church building.

The Corinth Church was organized in 1870-71 as the Disciples or Campbellites. The meetings were held in Reed's Hall and Rev. George Stillwagon was the pastor.

It has now been approximately 180 years since the first men arrived in Vernon. It still is – as it began - an agricultural community. There are a few industries. From a large township Vernon has grown into a peaceful small community.

*This script was prepared by Maggie Shilakis, narration by Gene Roberts. The 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 the Trumbull County with a focus on early education and the role of the woman educator.*