

WEATHERSFIELD

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 brief history of Weathersfield Township and McDonald and their schools.

As early as 1755, Weathersfield Township was a gathering place for Pennsylvania settlers who rode their canoes and flat boats up the Mahoning River to the Salt Springs. Samuel Houston Parsons obtained a grant for this area on February 10, 1778, signed by the governor of Connecticut. This was the first grant of lands. Adventurous people came here early, trying to make a fortune from the mineral waters, salt, coal, and ore. No one really succeeded, however, because of difficulties in refining salt and fear of Indian attacks.

In August of 1800, Joseph McHahn came home from work in the Warren area and found the little colony of families had been attacked by Indians. His own son had been struck by the tomahawk of Captain George, the chief of the tribe. Joseph then gathered 14 men and planned a successful attack on a small Indian tribe. In the struggle McHahn himself shot the Indian chief. The remainder of the tribe fled to Sandusky.

In 1801 Reuben Harmen, of Vermont, bought most of Weathersfield territory and settled in it with his wife Ruth, an adventurous pioneer woman. Small businesses began to prosper as a result of a toll bridge over the Mahoning River operated by John Hood. This made commuting between Weathersfield Township and the Niles-Warren area much easier. The tolls were collected by Mr. Hood and his wife.

About this time, the Ohl family came to the area; the name is still recognized in many parts of the township. In 1812 Michael Ohl opened the first post office. It was on the old state route to Ashtabula, which received mail each day coming from both directions. He also started the first grist mill. People soon referred to this area as Ohltown. With the help of Rodger Hill, a miner from Pennsylvania, coal was discovered on Ohl's property. In 1835 they opened the first mine, and Ohltown grew fast and was the main city involved in coal mining for many years. When it expanded and people settled farther east, businesses, churches, and schools grew out of necessity; and this area assumed the name of Mineral Ridge. It is easy to understand why. The minerals were coal and ore, and the town grew on the ridge which varied in altitude from 990 feet to 1,140 feet. This ridge had been allotted to Joshua Stow of Middletown, Connecticut. Many landmarks have survived here, while the early thriving Ohltown area is now under the Meander Reservoir.

Ohltown was the main city and shipped coal as far away as Cleveland.

When Mr. Jonathan Warner came to the area from Youngstown, business began to hum; he was a born tradesman. With the help of James Wood, the first furnace was built for the purpose of manufacturing pig iron from the coal and ore found in the Ridge.

Ten saloons soon lined the streets, catering to the lonely miners and furnace workers. More families moved in, including Welsh miners; and soon churches and schools were established to meet their needs. Religious gatherings were held in private homes, a few in public meeting houses; and soon log cabins became houses of worship. Various Welsh congregations, as well as Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic have survived here.

Jonathan Warner was the instigator of the petition signed by 190 residents; and the commissioners of Trumbull County responded by incorporating Mineral Ridge as a village in April 1871.

Where was Johnny learning to read? The mothers were teaching them at home, while a few fortunate families secured a tutor. By 1800 the children of the communities were housed in the first school on property owned by the Burnetts, near the present St. Mary's Catholic Church. Some of the children attended the Meander School, held in the one-room Ohltown Methodist Church.

By 1855 they were all in the Pleasant Hill School, which is still standing on Route 46, South of Interstate 80. There were few distractions here for the children -- no traffic and besides it had greased paper windows.

The South Side School, which was next used, was a little larger -- large enough to later be saved in half and made into two homes. Teachers were paid \$10 per month in grain and barter while they boarded from house to house.

By 1873 a new brick high school was built on Main Street. All building supplies came from this area. Stone was quarried from the banks of the Meander Creek on the Warner farm. Sandstone was from Austintown, and bricks were made on the Battle's farm. Seven teachers were employed at \$57 per month. The first graduating class consisted of four members.

As the years rolled by, industry shifted to the East again. Carnegie Steel Company bought 700 acres and erected steel mills. In 1917 the company built 122 houses for employees, and the village of McDonald was born. However, families with children refused to move there until educational facilities were improved. All they had to offer was a Weathersfield District School located near the intersection of McDonald Avenue and Marshall Road. It was a one-room school without conveniences of any kind. One teacher taught all eight grades.

The women hesitated to move into the village because the township board of education refused to make improvements in the school. So the Conneaut Land Company, a subsidiary of Carnegie Steel, which was formed to build and rent homes for the steel workers, became interested. With their help and the efforts of Captain James Freed, the first mayor, a one-room frame school building was erected. McDonald became a separate village but included a small part of Weathersfield Township in its school

district---and still does today. This building was located at the corner of Pennsylvania Ave. and Fifth St.

Now this new village became the pride of the area. Families moved in fast. Among these was the family of Dr. A.E. Ewing, the mill physician. He soon was the family doctor for everyone within miles, and his wife became the gracious social leader and everybody's friend. Their oldest daughter Mary became the first teacher in the new school.

Now the Weathersfield Board of Education agreed to help out and added another room to the building. This soon was inadequate to accommodate the children. So a local board of education was formed with Dr. Ewing as president, assisted by Frank Wick, James Streeter, James Scarborough, and Ralph Mould. Their first action was to secure the old dining hall of the construction workers, overhaul it, and equip it for the upper grades. It stood on Ohio Avenue, between Eighth and Ninth Streets.

As the new village was thriving, the board decided to build a modern school in 1918. They ran into difficulties – severe weather, trouble obtaining materials, and a plumbers' strike. The building has the date 1919 proudly displayed over the door, but it was the fall term of 1920 before it was occupied. Even then classes moved in as each room was completed. Fire destroyed the frame building on Ohio Avenue. A two-week vacation was declared, and the workers managed to complete those rooms in short order.

The school was patterned after the one in Gary, Indiana, where U.S. Steel had also built a steel mill and model community.

The first schools offered physical education (including boys' and girls' basketball teams), domestic science, Latin, Zaner writing methods, music, Glee Clubs, industrial arts, literary societies, and kindergarten. It was the only school in Trumbull County under county supervision to have a kindergarten. There were only three seniors (all girls), but the total enrollment was 232 when they all got moved into the new building.

Everyone accepted the fact that each class was large and all the grade school teachers were women, including the principal, Miss Ethel Vogler. At that time no one complained of overload or discrimination of hiring all women, and little was heard of poor readers and lack of achievement.

The board of education and the superintendent of the McDonald Mills worked hand in hand, and the school long boasted better equipment and facilities than many of its neighbors.

Two portable buildings were soon placed at the rear of the school, but soon it was apparent that this still was not adequate housing. The million dollar viaduct to Girard had been completed by 1928, three churches were thriving, and a new high school was under construction. Through the help of the WPA program, a modern building became a reality and soon became a showplace in the county. Its unusual features included a printing

press, modern manual arts equipment, a model apartment home, a school cafeteria, a modern library, a well-equipped commercial department, science laboratories, a music room, as well as a large auditorium on one wing, balanced by a large gymnasium on the other, with a swimming pool on the basement level.

And so the children and youth of Weathersfield School District have been assured of adequate education as the township grew. And now in 1978, the Mineral Ridge area is proud of its new high school building; and the McDonald Village area continues to expand and improve. And as anyone could prophesy, both communities are friendly neighbors but rivals in sports.

Friendly church bells ring out in both communities, and victory bells peal out the news of athletic accomplishments. Their sounds must surely help the inhabitants recall the “growing pains” that led to the founding of two pleasant pioneer villages in the heart of Trumbull County.

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