

BRACEVILLE

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 Braceville and its schools.

During the summer of 1803 the sound of an axe could be heard in the forest along the Mahoning River in land that is now known as Braceville Township. Ralph Freeman and William Mossman were building themselves a log cabin. Ralph's brother, Francis, had purchased the land and William had gotten a hundred acres of his own.

Both of these purchases had been made from Jonathan Brace, one of the three proprietors to whom this section of land had been allotted by the Connecticut Land Company in 1802.

Freeman and Mossman lived the rugged pioneer life. They had few tools or supplies. They depended upon one cow and what they could wrest from the forest to supply their needs for about one year. At best it was a marginal existence and not to Mossman's taste. He sold his holdings to Freeman and departed for Warren, which was more civilized. Thus Freeman has the honor of being the first settler in the township.

The area was becoming more "crowded." In 1804 Samuel Oviatt, Sr. of Goshen, Connecticut purchased a thousand acres. Soon after, his sons Samuel and Stephen and their wives moved to Braceville. Their long journey from Connecticut, across the Allegheny Mountains, took them to Pittsburg, and then northwest across the Ohio River to Warren, the capital of the Connecticut Western Reserve.

Imagine the consternation to find that there was no access to their holdings in this new land. A wagon road had to be hewn through the forest from Warren. The horses and oxen strained against their harnesses and yokes to drag the wagons over the rough and sometimes swampy ground. It took careful handling to avoid the stumps and mudholes as they inched their way toward their new homes.

Life was far from pleasant in this pioneer settlement. Food was scarce. There had not been time to clear much land and to grow grains. The staple of their diet was mostly potatoes and some corn. It is recorded that at one time for a week all they had to eat were potatoes. Occasionally this dull fare could be augmented by a wild turkey or some other game.

The little settlement grew. In 1805 the Bradfords came. Samuel Oviatt, Sr. and two more of his sons and their families arrived from Connecticut to join those already here. Each year saw the little settlement thrive as others came to take up claims throughout the township.

In 1811 people began to feel the need for some sort of organization. Enough people had moved into the area and the number of children had increased so that a school was needed. The township being organized, the first order of business was a school.

Accordingly a town meeting was called. Many speeches were given in favor of having a school. These vocal efforts were enhanced by the frequent passing of a jug of whiskey. Finally the matter was resolved by common consent just as dawn was breaking.

The first log schoolhouse was built by the men of the township at the “center”. It is likely that both labor and materials were donated and that the work was done in the order of a barn “raising.” This one small building housed children of all ages. They walked in all kinds of weather. Those coming farthest might have ridden if the farmer could spare the animal from his work. However, crops came first. At planting or the harvest season the older children would be absent from school in order to help at home. Sometimes the term was broken or delayed while the farm work was being done.

The first paid teacher of this new school was a “nice young man” by the name of Harvey Stowe. As mentor of his small flock he was paid \$11.00 a month for teaching eleven scholars. No mention was made of the length of the term. Harvey had a liking for the more cultured life so he went to Warren on most Saturdays and stayed at the General Perkins.’ This was so he could enjoy “church privileges.” As fringe benefits Mrs. Perkins saw that his laundry was done and sent him off each Monday morning with a fresh loaf of bread.

Things changed for Harvey when he met Lucretia Oviatt whom he visited “often and long.” Finally old Mr. Oviatt invited him “to bring his knitting work and stay all week.” He accepted this invitation and married the fair Lucretia and settled down to the pioneer life.

As settlers moved in, a second school was built farther west in the township at a place known as the “ridge.” Mindel Barnes was the first certified teacher and was paid “75¢ a week and the balance in ½ store pay and the rest in maple sugar.”

As the population increased other schools were built around the township and a district organization was adopted. Eventually there were nine districts and each was governed by a board of three directors. Each district operated independently of the other districts.

These district schools were all much alike in appearance. The children were housed in a building usually 20x40 feet with a belfry and a steeple. Each had a term of eight months and pupils ranged in age from six on upward. If the school population and range of age permitted it, there would be grades one through eight. Very likely they were graded on their reading ability.

If they hoped to go to high school they had to board out of the district. Usually they went to Warren, Newton Falls, Windham, or Garrettsville. Later when one could travel by rail these places were easy to reach by train.

Texts of this early era usually consisted of McGuffey’s Readers, Ray’s Arithmetic, Harvey’s Grammar, and Patterson’s Speller. At times these were augmented

by Eclectic Physical Geography and Eclectic History. Books were bought by the parents and passed down through the family.

By 1883 definite rules were set down for both teachers and pupils.

Teachers were required to adhere to a definite length of day and term. They were responsible for seeing that fires were laid and that buildings were warm and comfortable when pupils arrived. In addition teachers had to sweep, dust and air their buildings; see that school property was “not cut, scratched or marked”; and lastly, see that pupils were properly entered, withdrawn, absence recorded, and a record kept of scholastic achievement.

The children prospered depending upon the interest, training and skillfulness of the teacher. Teachers had to qualify by taking an examination before they could get a certificate to teach.

Teachers could attain a one, two, three, five year or life certificate depending upon the success in the examination.

The school often became the social center of the community. Teachers organized spelling bees, literary programs, and song fests, all of which were very popular. Many of these ended with the box social which allowed a swain to bid for the box of his favorite girl or woman. Good teachers were well liked and respected. Often they sought for their advice being considered the best educated person in the community.

By 1905, the districts were organized under a township-wide board. Schools in the various districts become more uniform. In fact the idea of centralization was mentioned. However, this would mean a larger central building, ways to transport students, and a great deal of money. October 4th, 1915 a motion was considered by the school board to place the centralization issue on the ballot. On November 2nd, 1915 the voters approved.

Now nearly a hundred years of educational scene had passed. Braceville had moved from the one room pioneer schoolroom with only bare essentials of subject matter being offered to a new day in education. Now all grades could be offered. There would be a high school with a wide choice of subject matter. All children could have the same chance for an education. The early foresight of these rough Connecticut pioneers had paid off.

This script was by Della Mathews, 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.