

GIRARD

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 Girard and its schools.

Girard lies on the extreme westerly edge of Liberty Township in Trumbull County. The Mahoning River runs through the town, but Girard is almost entirely on the east side of that stream. Weathersfield Township adjoins Girard on the west.

Early mills were established along the river, which promoted the growth of Girard. However, for the first thirty years of its existence, Girard was a small settlement. The construction of the Pennsylvania and Ohio canal, which started in 1838, brought special interest to Girard. The canal extended from Girard to Niles.

A mystery surrounds the origin of the name Girard. Many people believe that it was named in honor of Stephen Girard, the great American philanthropist, who died in 1831. Stephen Girard had no interest in this part of the country, but he did have people here who admired his kind of deeds.

In 1837 a town plot was laid out at Girard by David Tod of Youngstown, and several Warren men. This date marks the birth of Girard as a city. Girard grew rapidly with the opening of the canal in 1839-1840. The railroad came a few years later and the 1860's saw the era of coal mining in Liberty Township; Girard became the southern terminus of the railroad which is now known as the Erie railroad. People who traveled to and from Youngstown to Cleveland or other points northwest of the Mahoning Valley had to go by canal packets, or drive or walk to Girard to take the train. The construction of transportation facilities brought much business to Girard and by 1850 it had become a manufacturing and business center. In 1840 a large flour mill was built on the west side of the river by Jesse Baldwin and Abner Osborne. It operated for over ninety years.

Girard grew steadily until 1890. The business depression of the 90's was country wide and especially bad in the steel districts. Girard remained stagnant in growth during that period but began to revive at the beginning of the 20th Century. Many families had much to do with that early history of Girard and its activities during the later decades of the nineteenth century included the Krehl Houser, Falkenstein, Rush Johnson, Carlton, and Eckman families which remained in Girard.

The first schools in the Girard-Liberty area included a log school near Churchill in 1810, but there were schools in Girard, unlisted historically, even before that. The first records of schools tell of two schools, one in an area south of Girard proper called Mosier. Another in an area west of Girard, called Weathersfield.

A school on Peter Carlton's land, later the Evan Morris property on South State Street, served that area. In 1855 there were schools in Girard proper. The residents of

Mosier can remember going down a lane bordered with trees, to attend school there that had been built about 1836.

Teachers there were Mary Hall and a Miss Underwood. The school was located near the Wormer home. Another family in Mosier at that time was Wallis clan, whose daughter Elizabeth became a prominent teacher of Latin and German. Members of that family owned the Youngstown Foundry.

In 1840 there was a one-room frame building on the south side of West Liberty Street. Residents now in their eighties remember skirting what was known as Krehl Hollow, what is now the end of Broadway, to attend another one room school near the site of the Krehl Tannery, long ago destroyed by fire. The school housed the first and second grade with teacher Blanche Jones Grice.

A two-room frame building known as the Brown School was used for many years as a grade school, and was located at the corner of Abbey and Market Streets. During World War I it was used as a hospital during the “flu” epidemic. The “baby” school was located on the northwest corner of High and Main Streets for the primary grades, hence the name “baby school.”

Third grade students were sent to the “old brick” school on today’s city building site. Children walked on the north end of town, crossing the dirt road which was State Street. Of course then the traffic was negligible, horses and buggies only.

Teachers there included Anna Harris (one of the founders of Alpha Omega Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma), Marian Owens, Mary Frack and Charlie Brooks, who lived in Weathersfield and served there on the Board of Education for many years.

Sixth grade students were moved to the “new” North Avenue building. Teachers there were Grace Krehl (Vogel) in sixth and Charles Brooks for seventh and eighth.

Before the Civil War as growth came with the Churchill coal mines, David Tod donated the site in a section known as Jefferson Square for a school building. \$21,000.00 was invested in the school. The lower part was used for a school and patriotic meetings were held on the second floor. In later years traveling theater companies performed there, and it finally became the town hall. Schools further North and East were considered to be better located and all were placed above State Street.

The Wilson Avenue School was built in 1887 on what was then the corner of State Street and Elm. It was a combination grade and high school, and also housed the superintendent’s office. The superintendent and the principal were the only teachers in the high school. Many Girard students attended Youngstown Rayen High School or Niles McKinley for their higher education. This became the first Girard High School then in the years to come.

Lucy Schoenfield, Sophie Spray, Sadie Farr, Ella Bowman, Lizzie Kennedy and Mary Morgan taught in the grades.

Freeman (Dart) Reapsummer was the janitor of the Wilson Avenue building and the truant officer for all the Girard schools. The building was torn down in 1964 and the area is now a parking lot for the Girard Federal Savings and Loan Bank.

The oldest building still standing and even today being used to house seven grades plus kindergarten, is the North Avenue building. It was constructed in 1903. Maple Avenue and Washington Avenue Schools were built in 1916 and Tod Woods in 1919. The land was sold to the school system for \$1.00.

Summit School across the Mahoning River in the West Liberty section of Girard was first a three-room portable building. The present building was completed in 1913.

The first graduating class in Girard was in 1879 with four members. The first Commencement exercises were held in the old opera house which stood where a theater stands today.

Records are available which tell us that in 1882 there were 303 students in the schools. There were six graduates in 1897. In those days every member of the graduating class made a speech. The class of 1922 held a class night at which they read their prophecy and will and the high school orchestra played. A class play was presented on the same evening.

The auditorium of the North Avenue School was used for dances and civic meetings as well. Before the early football team played arch rival, Niles, the mayor, priests and ministers met with the student body in the old auditorium for a pep rally and the mayor led a parade downtown along with the cheerleaders.

In these days the street cars passing through Girard were painted as they passed by, "Beat Niles." They came back an hour later re-painted by Niles fans, "Beat Girard."

The game in 1926 was played at Avon Park on the afternoon of November 11th with a crowd of 500 looking on. The half-time program featured a Miss Anna Marie Dillion costumed in red and black (school colors) and a snake dance was engaged by the student body.

Football games even earlier than this (1913-14) were held on Morris Field. A dozen or so young ladies in their long black skirts, white blouses and high buttoned shoes, walked the mile to the field to sit on rude benches to cheer for the players.

Those early games were played after school and many young men who worked in the steel mill furnaces took part. It was not necessary that they be attending school to play.

In 1928 the new stadium was built on Highland and Second Street.

In 1911 Girard boasted a fine girls' basketball team, coached by Miss Elizabeth Wallis, the Latin teacher. They played their game on half the floor on the second floor of the old "brick" school located on the site of Jefferson Square. The girls traveled by streetcar to play games in Youngstown in a gym located on Federal Street. In 1923 the coach Dave Williams coached both boys and girls.

Basketball team alumnae recall that the girls in later years traveled on their own bus to play the pre-game before the boys. There were no Junior Varsity teams then and the girls' games were noted for their roughness. A "hip block" was not uncommon and usually went unseen by the officials.

Women have long been recognized throughout the Girard School System not only as teachers but as administrators and board members.

Education continues to grow and develop in the Girard City Schools.

This script by Jane Harris, 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.