

SCHOOL HISTORY OF COLUMBIA COUNTY

Part Two of a Two Part Series

Introduction: *William H. Snyder, Columbia County Superintendent of Schools from 1872 to 1881, wrote an extensive article entitled, "School History of Columbia County," that provided a brief overview of the early schools throughout the county. It appeared in a Bloomsburg newspaper, The Columbian, on February 15, 1878. The Newsletter for December 2002 carried the first part. The second part reviewed the schools in the remaining fifteen townships as to their locations and early teachers: Franklin, Greenwood, Hemlock, Jackson, Locust, Madison, Main, Mifflin, Montour, Mt. Pleasant, Orange, Pine, Roaringcreek, Scott, and Sugarloaf. Concerning Montour Township, Snyder incorporated information from a report by John G. Quick that cited the school issue as a major factor for the establishment of Montour Township in 1837 from Hemlock Township.*

As noted in the introduction to the first part, the early schools, before the advent of a public education system, were mainly subscription schools, basically, private schools. Rather than the community establishing schools, the teacher announced he or she would open a school. The parents would pay the teacher a fee for their children to attend. Classes were often held in a home or sometimes a barn, or church before the township built a schoolhouse.

The article is reprinted as written in the newspaper.

Franklin – After the school closed at McIntyre, in Catawissa township, a house was built, just above the foundry, on the land now owned by William Stocker, to accommodate the settlers at the mouth of Catawissa creek. Mr. Stuck, who had taught at McIntyre, was succeeded in this school by Daniel Krist and Daniel Rigles. Several married men availed themselves of the opportunity to receive instructions at this school. Near where Joseph T. Reeder now lives, Joseph Horlocher opened a school, which was called, "Clayton's school," the same name the one goes by in the district now. The one established below Esther furnace was taught by Samuel Bitler and James Stokes.

Anterior to public schools there was also one kept at the river, about where the public school building now stands.

Greenwood – About the year 1785, a school was kept in a dwelling, at Millville. In 1800 a house was built near where Richard Heacock now lives, and occupied until 1836.

In 1805, another was built on the land now occupied by Jacob Girard. This house not being suitably located, was abandoned after a few years' service, and a more convenient one erected, where Catharine McCarty now lives, west of Rohrsburg. In 1838, when public schools were adopted, there were six houses erected.

Prominent among the early teachers were; Jesse Haines, Jacob Wintersteen, John Shively, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Ferguson, Benjamin Kester, Jonathan Colley, Robert Lockard and his daughters, Jane and Nancy Lockard.

Hemlock – About the year 1801, Mr. Donaldson established the first school, in a dwelling which was located on the land now owned by Isaac Pursel. Eight years later, Thomas Vanderslice opened one in the same kind of building which was erected on the land now owned by M. S. Appleman and John Boonemother, at the forks of Hemlock and Fishingcreek, near James Barton's. Henry Ohl succeeded Mr. Vanderslice as teacher. The next was opened in 1810, by Jacob Wintersteen, in a building which was located on the estate now owned by Dennis Pursel. The house located at the forks of the road, where the brick school-house now stands, is given in Montour township sketches. The Doll school, which was kept near where ex-Sheriff Smith now resides, 1816, was principally composed from Madison township, now West Hemlock, in Montour county.

Jackson – John Denmark taught the first school in the township, in 1820-21, in a dwelling which was located near where the Union Church now stands. In 1822, a school-house was built close by, in which John Keeler taught four, and William Yocum three, terms. The house was then torn down. In 1825 a house was built at the lower Jackson church, and Mr. Yocum, who had taught in the former building, opened the first school. He was succeeded by Cornelius McEwen, Miss Ellen Calvin, Joseph Orwig, and Peter Girton. In 1832, a house was re-located at the Union church, and those who taught in it before public schools were established were: William Riche, John Fullmer, and Isaac K. Krickbaum, our present associate judge.

Locust – The first school in this township cannot be accurately given, as there were several schools in session at the same time.

Joseph Stokes taught one in his residence, which was located on the land now owned by D. Mears. Joseph Hughes taught another at Kerntown; Alexander Mears one at Slabtown; and James Miller one near where the old Quaker church now stands. There was also one at Esther furnace, but by whom taught is unknown.

When the vote was taken on the public school question there was considerable excitement in the township. Had it not been for Mr. John Kline, who induced his tenant not to vote, (but voted himself,) the election would have been a tie; consequently, there was one majority in favor of establishing public schools.

Madison – The first school in the township was taught, in 1799, by a Mr. Wilson, in a dwelling which was located at Jerseytown.

In 1810, Thomas Lane opened one in a similar building, which stood on the land now owned by Leonard Kisner.

The third and fourth were also in dwellings, one of which was erected near where the Reformed church now stands, close by the road leading from Jerseytown to Buckhorn, and the other in the eastern part of the township, near Millville.

Main – This township formerly belonged to Catawissa. Before any school was established within its present limits the pupils were obliged to attend the school which was held up stairs in the spring-house spoken of in Catawissa township, which was considered a very important school.

About the year 1820 a school was established in a dwelling which was located near where the old fulling-mill stands, above Mainville, and was taught by Jacob Gensel.

1824, John Walts opened another in the same kind of building, which stood near where Fisher's church now stands. When this church was completed, the old church, which stood close by, was fitted up and occupied for school purposes until public schools were established.

Daniel Krist was a prominent teacher of this school.

Mifflin – In the year 1794, David Jones opened the first school in this township, in a hut which stood among the scrub pine and oak below Mifflin, on the land now owned by Christian Wolf.

There being no primary books in market, the teacher printed the alphabet on shingles for the abcdarians [*sic*].

This hut was occupied but a short time, then abandoned, and a school was opened in a building located where the Lutheran church now stands at Mifflinville.

Another school-house was finally built in the eastern part of the township.

Montour – The following is a synopsis of John G. Quick's report, secretary of Montour: The first school, to my recollection, was established in the year 1831, by Miss Harriet Rupert, daughter of the late Judge Rupert. She opened this school in a shanty, which had been built and occupied by contractors, while making the North Branch canal, and building the aqueduct across the mouth of Fishing creek. In this shanty Miss Rupert commenced instructing the children in the vicinity of Rupert, charging one dollar for each pupil per term. After teaching here a short time, she had a room comfortably fitted up, in a log-house near her father's dwelling, in which she taught successfully for some time. She, being a Christian lady and model teacher always opened school with reading 'the Scriptures' and prayer. After this school closed, we were obliged to travel fully two miles to a school, which was taught by James L. Nevins, in an old log building, located at the forks of the road leading from Bloomsburg to Buckhorn. At this time Montour belonged

to Hemlock township. The law, in those days, provided for the schooling of indigent children at the expense of the county, was scarcely realized. Parents would rather have their children grow up in total ignorance, than permit them to be educated under this act.

Then came the passage of the common school law, which created a great sensation. The idea of assessing a tax upon the people for the schooling of all children, was a serious thought with some, and, consequently, a division of Hemlock township was brought about by a caucus being held by some of the citizens in the southern part of the township, who thought, by dividing the township, they could get rid of the school law. Thus, in 1838, Montour was taken from Hemlock. Much might be said, in comparing the past with the present; but in conclusion, I shall only say, that I have been a director for six years, and have just entered upon the duties for three more, to look after the future blessings of the rising generation. Yet, I loathe to say, there are some who are opposed to public schools, and ever ready to criticize a director for faithfully and conscientiously discharging the duties of his office.

Why not make our school-houses and grounds pleasant and attractive, as well as our homes?

One of the greatest privileges I enjoy is to visit our schools, and compare their contrast with those of forty years ago.

Mt. Pleasant – The first school in Mt. Pleasant was founded by Peter Oman. He employed an instructor, at his own expense, to come to his dwelling to instruct his and his neighbors' children. Finally three houses were built: one upon the land now owned by Joseph Gilbert, one upon the land now owned by Aaron Kester, and another upon the land now owned by Andrew Crouse. These houses were of the same description as early school-houses generally, built of logs, filled between with sticks, daubed over with mud mixed with cut straw, and furnished with slab seats. Careful provisions were made for a large fire hearth, and spacious door, so that logs could be rolled in for fuel. This afforded amusement for the boys at recess.

Orange – The first school in this township was taught in a building which was located on the north-eastern part of Honorable H. R. Kline's farm, by Daniel Rake, Philip Doder, and Jonathan Colley, father of Alexander Colley, of Benton, now ninety-one years of age. 1820, George Vance, who taught at Bloomsburg, opened a school in a small log building, which stood on the land now owned by William Delong, below Orangeville. Mr. Vance was succeeded by Clemuel G. Ricketts, William Rantz, and John Kline. The house was then torn down, and a more substantial one erected at Orangeville, on the very spot where Mr. Kline's residence now stands. This house was accepted afterward for public school purposes. Among the earliest teachers were Abraham Kline, Ira Daniels, and Charles Fortner.

In regard to adopting public schools, the same feeling arose here as elsewhere in the county. The most enlightened, by whom nearly all the taxes were paid, advocated their adoption.

Pine – This township was not as early and rapidly settled as some of the townships in the county. In 1830, there was but one school-house in it, which was taught by John Masters, in a house located at Sereno. In 1836, when public schools were accepted, education took a new impetus, and at present the schools in this, as well as the schools in other sparsely settled townships, compare favorably with those in towns and villages.

Roaringcreek – The first school within the present limits of this township, was taught in 1816, by Joseph Stokes, in a small dwelling which belonged to Mahlon Hibbs, and stood on the land now owned by William Rhoads.

This school continued only one term. The following year Thomas Cherrington, a Surveyor and experienced teacher, opened a school in his son's dwelling, which stood on the land now owned by Samuel Hauck. After teaching several terms, making his entire work in the field as a teacher, forty winters, he abandoned the profession, and assigned the school to his son Samuel, who taught it successfully up to the introduction of public schools.

In 1821, Charles Breech re-opened another school in the same house in which Mahlon Hibbs had taught, and about the same time, David Chase also opened one in an old log dwelling near where the Methodist Episcopal church now stands. The first house for school purposes was built on the site where "No. 2" school-house now stands fourteen years after the organization of the first school.

Scott – The first school-house was built in Scott, about the year 1805. One at Espy, on lot No. 56, and the other below Lightstreet, on lot now owned by J. W. Sankey. This lot belonged to the tract of land purchased from chief of the Province of Pennsylvania, in 1773.

The school at Espy was established by Messrs. Webbs, Kennedy, and Waters.

In 1814, the third school was opened in a building which was located on lot now owned by B. Ammerman, at the upper end of Lightstreet.

The names of teachers who had charge of these schools were George Vance, Joseph Solomon, William Love, and John Kennedy.

Sugarloaf – The pioneers, following up Fishing creek, settled along its headwaters. Among them was a scholarly gentleman, by the name of Philip Fritz, from Philadelphia. He taught the first school of this township, in a log hut, which stood where Saint Gabriel's church now stands. This hut was occupied for school purposes for some time. Finally, a school-house was erected on the land now owned by Andrew Hess. Joseph Maissey, a professional teacher, taught in it many terms.