

ROME TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

The territory of the present Rome Township was one of the earliest settled regions of Athens County. The township, with the exception of two sections, was formed from territory taken from Troy Township by an order of the Athens County Commissioners on April 4, 1811. These two sections were detached from Washington County and added to Rome Township by an act of the legislature passed February 10, 1814. The formal organization of the township took place in June of the same year. At this time the population of the township was estimated to be about 200.

Educational institutions, however, had been established even prior to the formation of the township. The first school house in Rome Township was erected in 1804, and was built by subscription; that is, the neighbors joined in the work. It was a log structure, sixteen feet square, located on the east bank of Federal Creek, near its mouth. Abraham Richard was the first teacher, and Mrs. Polly Driggs, a daughter of one of the first settlers, Ebenezer Barrows was next. The school was the center of a school district about five miles in diameter. Of course other schools were soon established.

The population of the township increased rapidly during the first half of the century. In 1853 the township enumeration showed that there were 283 males and 278 females of school age. At this time, the township was redistricted to form eleven school districts.

It is interesting to observe that a special committee consisting of W. Selby, G. S. Simpson and D. B. Stewart was appointed in 1853 to prepare a set of rules and regulations for the government of the "primary" schools in the township. A few quotations from the regulations indicate the general tone of school administration in these early days

"Exact order shall be preserved in the schools and neither whispering, laughing, play, nor idleness be allowed in school hours. To this end moral suasion should be sufficient, but inasmuch as it has always been found inefficient in some cases, corporal punishment administered with firmness and mixed with mercy must be resorted to should such cases occur in any of the schools."

"The health and physical comfort of the pupils shall be attended to and promoted. Athletic exercise in both sexes shall be encouraged, even to romping of the girls."

“ We would strenuously insist that virtue, the moral benevolent and religious feelings without any tincture of sectarianism be assiduously cultivated even at the expense, if it must be so, {which we doubt} of scientific attainments.”

The following books were recommended for use in the township:
Webster’s Spelling book, The Bible, McGuffey’s Eclectic Series Readers, Smith’s Folio Geography, Ray’s Arithmetic, Green’s Grammar, Webster’s Dictionary and Polk’s Course Of Time.

It is difficult to trace the development of the public schools of the township during the early and middle parts of the 19th century. However, by 1869 {according to Walker’s History of Athens County} there were still eleven school houses in the township, each accommodating about forty pupils.

These were strictly elementary schools since public secondary education had not been provided. Nevertheless, a higher education was provided by three tuition schools of the academy type. The Miller Seminary was the first of these schools in Rome Township. It was founded in 1841 by the Rev. Amos Miller, and was located on his farm one mile east of Savannah {Guysville}. A two story building was erected in 1859 to house this institution which could accommodate about one hundred students of both sexes. The Savannah Academy was founded in 1867 through the efforts of some public spirited citizens of the township. Frederic Finsterwald, Peter Boyles, Vincent Caldwell, Harvey Pierce and John Caldwell were the first board of trustees. A third institution of a similar character was established at Big Run in 1866 through the voluntary contributions of the citizens of that community.

By 1890 there were fifteen school districts in the township, each district having a one-teacher school. School administration was provided by three directors in each district, who were elected in April by voters of the district. These directors selected a clerk, and the clerks of all the districts of the township constituted the Township Board of Education. It is interesting to note that the total appropriations for all fifteen districts in 1891 was \$2,480.00. The appropriations ranged from \$150.00 for an outlying district to \$185.00 for Guysville. The appropriation for the Stewart District had been \$340.00 in 1887 [probably providing two teachers] but it was cut to \$190.00 in 1889 and it was further reduced to \$165.00 for 1890.

This reduction by the Rome Township Board in the appropriation for the Stewart school in 1890, may seem insignificant; but it was a history-making act. There were in the district 83 pupils, whose education was to be provided by one teacher at a cost of \$165.00 per year. The good people of the district rebelled. They petitioned the board to permit them to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the township board and to form the Stewart Special District. Their petition was granted. Because of the large amount of taxable wealth in this district, a two-room school was maintained on a three-mill levy, whereas the township tax rate had been seven mills for the school purposes. The first directors of the Stewart Special District were: P. T. Busch, Frank J. Carpenter and James A. Caldwell. The number was later increased to five. The first teachers were L. W. Hoffman of Amesville and Mattie Frickle of Cutler.

The first high school in Rome Township was the Guysville High School, which was established in 1894 by the township board. A new, two room building was built at a cost of \$1,673.00. This structure of the present school house at Guysville. L. C. Crippen was employed as the first teacher in this school at a salary of \$40.00 per month plus one half of the income from the students paying tuition. C. H. Copeland succeeded Mr. Crippen in this position. This high school was a third grade school offering a two year course, but apparently it did not thrive.

By 1897 the Stewart Special District recognized the need for a larger building. They selected the present site of the Rome High School for the new structure. A two room brick building was erected at a cost of \$2,500.00. These two rooms are the North and South rooms of the present school building. The construction of this building, which was the first unit of the present school plant, was provided by a school board having the following members: D. W. Hoisington, President, C. E. Kincade, clerk, J. W. Melchi, H. J. Smith, D. V. Stewart and Hiram Thomas.

Nine years after the establishment of the Guysville High School, the Stewart Special High School was chartered on November 4, 1903 as a third grade school. It was successful from the start, and attracted many students from outside the limits of the special district. In 1911 the records of the Rome Township Board of Education showed that it paid to the Stewart Special District tuition of \$343.87 for the education of pupils from the other districts.

In order to make room for the increased enrollment in both the high school and grades, the present grade building was erected in 1912. It is a substantial two room building, built at a cost of \$2,745.36. Bonds amounting to \$3,000.00 had been sold. The Stewart Special Board had the following Membership at this time: E. S. Bryon, E. H. Kincade, R. A. Lowman, C. H. McCune and S. J. Biddison.

A real milestone in the progress of education in Rome Township was reached in 1913 when the consolidation of Guysville High School and the Stewart Special High School was effected. A joint school board was formed, which was governed by a special joint high school committee. On this committee, Stewart was represented by S. J. Biddison and R. A. Lowman, while the Rome Township Board was represented by W. B. Rice and E. D. Harper. The joint school was chartered as a second grade high school on January 7, 1913 and then as a first grade school on September 6, 1913 under the name of Stewart High School.

The next year [1914] the Stewart Special District was dissolved, her schools, including the high school, going back under the control of the Rome Township Board. She had existed as a special district for twenty four years. Her school property was turned over to the township, and her indebtedness of \$2,775.00 was paid by tax levies on the property of the old school district. Rome Rural High School was thus granted a first grade charter on October 18, 1915 as a township school. The school still operates under this charter, but it is generally known as Rome High School. E. G. Gibson was the first principal of the school.

From 1915 to 1921, the growth of the school was spasmodic. In 1916 the enrollment of the high school was around 60, while in 1919 it was only 42. Undoubtedly, the World War brought unsettled conditions which tended to arrest the growth of the school. In the connection, it should be said that thirty six graduates of the high school served their country in the war. Earnest Windsor, who died December 27, 1917 was the first Athens County youth to lose his life overseas.

In 1920 the task of erecting a new building was undertaken when on April 27th the voters of the township acted favorably upon a bond issue of \$30,000.00. The architects underestimated the cost of the proposed structure; consequently no bids were received which were within the limits of the

available funds. The State School Inspector and architects recommended that the board should proceed with the building without the letting of a contract. The \$30,000.00 proved to be insufficient to complete the structure, hence another bond issue for \$23,000.00 was passed on April 8, 1922. The building was finished late in 1922 but not until \$10,000.00 more funds was made available thru the action of the state authorities who authorized the additional bond issue without the sanction of the voters. Thus ended the struggle for an adequate building. This building was an addition to the two original rooms built back in 1897. Completed at a total cost of \$63,000.00 it provided for two grade rooms and the high school. It included a gymnasium and a separate auditorium with a seating capacity of almost three hundred. This was the first gymnasium in a school of the county system. Incidentally, the first game played in the gym was on January 6, 1923 when Rome defeated John Hancock High School of Athens by a score of 22-2. The members of the Board of Education during this building period were: W. B. Rice. G. R. Cook, Theodore Rowell, James Featherstone and Joe Marshall.

Rome was the first Athens County school to have a vocational agriculture department under the Smith-Hughes Act. It was established in 1922. In 1930 the home economics department was established under the provisions of the same act.

The high school enrollment gradually increased during the late 20's. In 1927, it was 65; in 1928, 73; and in 1929, 83. In 1930, the State Department of Education ordered the discontinuance of the Canaan township High School at Canaanville and further ordered that most of the students be transferred to Rome. Consequently, the enrollment has increased. This consolidation has enabled the pupils of both communities to enjoy the privilege of attending a modern and efficient high school. Rome now has the largest senior high school of the county school system. There are seven full-time high school instructors and two part-time teachers. In the grades at Stewart, there are four teachers; while there remain three other grade schools in the township, Guysville with two teachers, and New England and Kilvert, both one-room schools. The present Board of Education consists of Art Finsterwald, John Barrows, Carl Hayes, Louis Winner and George Starkey. Greg Barrows is Clerk of the board.

In November 1933, the voters of the township sanctioned a bond issue of \$26,500.00 to provide an addition of four rooms to the present grade building, which was built in 1912. When this project is completed, the

Guysville and New England schools will be brought to Stewart. Adequate school facilities will be provided for all the grades of the township and for the high school pupils of the larger school community. It is interesting to observe that the enrollment of the high school is made up as follows: Rome Township, 78; Canaan, 60; Bern, 10; Carthage, 2; and Troy, 1.

Because of her remarkable record in athletics, it seems that even a brief history of the Rome Schools should give recognition to these accomplishments. Rome High's basketball teams have won the County Championship for the last three years, they have played in the Southeastern District Tournament for five consecutive years, and they have won the District Championship twice. Rome is the only Athens County School ever to play in the State Tournament. Her track team also won the District Championship in 1933.

Finally recognition should be given to those men who have rendered particular service to the schools of the township. It is possible to mention only a few of them. Theodore Rowell retired from the Board of Education in 1930 after serving for 28 years. O. O. Bryson was president of the board for 21 years. With the exception of two years, S. J. Biddison was clerk of the board from 1903 to 1932. Alex Root and E. G. Gibson both served as superintendent for long terms and had much to do with the school's progress. The present superintendent, C. H. Copeland, has held this position since 1929. His first connection with the schools of the township was as principal of the Guysville high School in 1895. A more complete survey of the Rome Schools would include the names of many others who have rendered service as faithful but perhaps less conspicuous.

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