

Mecosta County's First Pioneer School

Special to the Pioneer by James C. Wood

In 1840 the State of Michigan established the boundaries of Osceola and Mecosta Counties. In 1858 both counties were unorganized and attached to Newaygo County for judicial and municipal purposes. The entire region was an under-brushed primeval forest covered with more trees than most people could imagine. The sparsely settled area was part of the Nation's frontier and the only open spaces were the lakes, streams and small family plots.

On April 5, 1858 the first local elections were held in "Young Bear County". On this historical red-letter day in Mecosta County, voters elected officials for Green Township, present day Mecosta County's Green and Grant townships and Osceola County's Richmond and Hersey townships. Simultaneously voters elected township officials for Leonard Township, present day Mecosta County's Austin, Big Rapids, Colfax, Martiny, Mecosta, Morton, Sheridan, and Wheatland townships.

The movie industry likes to portray people living on the frontier as uneducated bumpkins who can barely read or write, cannot sign their names, and use atrocious grammar. A check of the 1860 United States Census shows that 99 percent of the adults in Mecosta County could read write and cypher. The 1870 Census confirms this statistic and adds the fact that 99.5 percent of all school age children could likewise read, write, and cypher. The early settlers of "Young Bear County" were a varied lot. Most of them had what we would term an Eighth Grade education. However, many had attended high school and several were college graduates.

Historical records indicate that Mecosta County pioneers valued education and wanted their offspring to be educated. In May 1858, the Green Township Board created Green Township School District No. 1 whose schoolhouse was located on the northeast corner of the southeast quarter section of Section 28. This site is the present southwest corner of 210th Avenue and Coolidge Road intersection. Martha and Henry Evarts who had settled on their 160-acre farm in June 1856 donated the land for Mecosta County's first school.

A log schoolhouse worth \$115 was erected on the site valued at \$15. During the summer of 1858 Mary J. Boynton Evarts taught the first session of education in Mecosta County. In 1858, the State of Michigan considered those residents between the ages of five and twenty to be of school age. The following school age students resided within walking distance of the school, which in later years would be known, as the Ekas School.

PARENTS	CHILDREN	AGE
Jesse – Caroline Barker	Frederick	15
	Eliza	13
	Mary	11
	Addison	9
	Phebe	6
David – Lucretia Ford	Alfred	10
	Gilbert	7
	Henrietta	5
Richard – Lorinda Ford	Esther	8
	Ira	6
	Lucretia	5
	Albert	10
Daniel – Sarah Dutcher	William	20
James – Laura Montague	George	15
	Laura	12
	Henry	9
	Mary	7
	Jonathan – Mary Williams	Julie Clifton

Who exactly attended the first session of education will always remain a mystery. The older boys 15 may not have attended and likewise the youngest might have been kept home. Probably at least a dozen children were Mecosta County’s first scholars. The next year Leonard (Big Rapids) Township stated its first school known as the “Old Red School” on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Oak Street. In 2003 Mecosta County quietly celebrated 145 years of continuous education thanks to the efforts of the Green Township’s Pioneers.

GREEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP

J.WELLNITZ-SUPERVISOR ~ J.CLARK-CLERK ~ C. CHIPMAN-TREASURER
A.D.GRANT ~ J.PEEK ~ G.TODD ~ P.WINTER - TRUSTEES
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MECOSTA COUNTY'S FIRST PIONEER SCHOOL

Whereas: Upon being organized on April 5, 1858, the Green Township Board established in May 1858 the first school district in Mecosta County at the intersection of 210th Avenue and Coolidge Road and

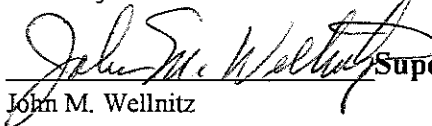
Whereas: The land for the Green Township School No. 1 was donated by Martha and Henry Evarts who settled the southeast quarter section of Section 28, Green Township in June 1856 and

Whereas: Martha J. Boynton Evarts taught the first session of the school later known as the Ekas School and

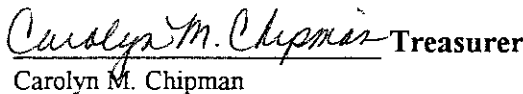
Whereas: At least a dozen students attended a three month summer session of Ekas School during 1858 and


Whereas: This is the 145th year of continuous education in Mecosta County, now

Therefore Be It Resolved, That the Green Charter Township Board recognizes and honors the successful early education endeavors of Green Township Pioneers and the memory of the first school in Mecosta County.

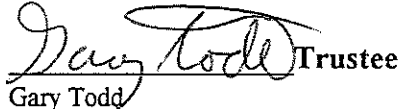

John M. Wellnitz Supervisor


Janet Clark Clerk


Carolyn M. Chipman Treasurer



A. Donald Grant Trustee


James T. Peek Trustee


Gary Todd Trustee


Peter Winter Trustee

The undersigned, being the Clerk of Green Charter Township, does hereby certify that on the 11th day of November 2003, the Green Charter Township Board did approve the above Resolution.


Janet Clark, Green Charter Township Clerk Nov. 11, 2003 date