

OVCS Historical Tour
How We Came to be Who We Are
by Mitchell Gary (former Guidance Counselor)

First of all, it must be stated that I am not an historian. Much of the information that follows was obtained with the assistance of a few key members from two of the major communities that comprise the Otselic Valley. I apologize for any inaccuracies that might exist herein, and invite community members to submit corrections. The individuals who shared some historical documentation that was used in the preparation of this report, are acknowledged at the end of this "historical tour."

The Otselic Valley Community

The Otselic Valley Central School community is the result of a merger between two districts: The Georgetown Central School and the South Otselic Central School. This merger was concluded in the Spring of 1970, and the newly formed school, Otselic Valley Central School, sometimes known as the Georgetown-South Otselic Central School, opened its doors to students in September 1970. Of course, I was there on opening day, at the time, myself a mere child.

In between and to either side of the two major communities of South Otselic and Georgetown, lie other important villages and hamlets that also provide a population for our classrooms. These communities include Plymouth, Beaver Meadow, North Pharsalia, North Pitcher, Lincklean, the Crumb Hill area of DeRuyter, Otselic, Smyrna, Lebanon, Erieville, Eaton and West Eaton.

Initial plans for merging the Georgetown and South Otselic school districts included an invitation extended to the school districts of Cincinnatus and DeRuyter. However, the latter two schools declined the invitation. School districts decide to merge when it becomes apparent that two heads, not to mention budgets, are better than one. In addition, the State Education Department provides financial incentives for such projects.

Community Rivalry

It is never easy to merge two identities into one. The residents of both communities separately enjoyed distinct qualities and resources, and in fact, they were athletic rivals for many years. Some compromises would have to be made.

I do recall that during the 1970-1971 school year, it was a bit strange for everyone. A group of newly hired teachers, including myself, had the unique perspective of never knowing the two separate schools. Although initially there were some sensitive issues to be dealt with, the bottom line was a general acceptance of the new school, and a desire on the part of two proud communities to ensure a quality education for the children. This was the overriding concern, and it far outweighed any minor squabbles about alternating events between the two buildings and some very complicated transportation issues.

Looking at the OVCS yearbook #1 for the 1970-1971 school year, one can see half a soccer team wearing jerseys bearing the Georgetown name, and the other half of the team wearing the colors of South Otselic. In fact, one of the first compromises to be made was in the selection of the new school's colors. Georgetown colors were purple and gold, while South Otselic flew the orange and black flag. Taking one color from each of the former schools, Otselic Valley selected black and gold for its official school emblem.

It was decided that the South Otselic building would house the junior-senior high school in addition to classrooms for Kindergarten through third grade. The Georgetown building would house Kindergarten through the sixth grade. Eventually, in order to make better use of each building's facilities, the building in South Otselic became dedicated to grades seven through twelve, with the elementary grades being contained entirely in the Georgetown building.

Renovations to Otselic Valley Central School

There have been three significant renovations to the South Otselic building of the Otselic Valley Central School. During the 1952-1953 school year, an addition was constructed at the South Otselic building that was used to house elementary classrooms. These classrooms are currently the wing containing the Agriculture-Technology lab, the art room, the Home and Career Skills classroom as well as the reading lab. In 1958, it is said that a young Jan Wentworth and Rebecca Robbins (Ashton) would crawl about the counter tops in their kindergarten classroom, and take naps in the sink. Following the merger, these classrooms saw many changes. In the Fall 1970, a few high school classes were held there, and in the early 1980's, two of the rooms were renovated as administrative offices. As our needs continued to change, these rooms once again became classrooms.

Portable classrooms were brought in during the 1972-1973 school year. These were like modular homes, but were not of very high quality. A large one was located where our new classroom wing now sits. Over the years, this temporary unit housed a library, an elementary library, a few classrooms, administrative offices, and finally the chorus and band. Part of this unit was sliced off and moved up to Georgetown to provide additional classroom space. It was an exciting event to see this classroom being driven up Route 26. The New York State Electric and Gas Company had to raise some of the electric wires that crossed the road to provide clearance for the moving classroom. You may also recall an older temporary building that was located outside the art-agriculture wing. This two-classroom affair was already in place when I arrived in 1970. As the building began to sink into the earth, it was reduced to serving as a storage shed, and was finally sold at auction when we began our latest construction project.

The next major renovation in South Otselic took place during the 1975-1976 school year, and was proposed in response to our need for an improved gymnasium and library. I find it nostalgic to recall that I interviewed for the position of foreign language teacher in what is now the second floor elevator shaft of the junior-senior high school. This third and last major renovation in South Otselic was completed in the Fall 1994, a project that brought us a new classroom wing, a multi-purpose room, and numerous classroom and office renovations.

In Georgetown, the renovations were less dramatic, with the possible exception of the magical transporting of the severed classroom that rolled up Route 26. The elementary school obtained an "annex" in 1966 that housed an elementary library, a kindergarten, remedial mathematics and a speech room. When the South Otselic building obtained its new gymnasium in 1976, the elementary school received a new classroom wing with colorful, magic and moveable walls. The elementary library was renovated for the 1983-1984 school year. The final 1994 renovation project brought the elementary school an enhanced computer lab, an improved cafeteria and a new classroom wing.

All in all, there has been much change even in the past twenty- six years, as a community sought to improve the educational opportunities for its resident children through the approval of a merger and building renovation projects. Yet rather than destroy the past and create a structure without history, we have chosen to improve and to create additions that were built upon the lessons and traditions of the past. This is why it is possible to walk the halls of our buildings and still hear, perhaps on a quiet morning or evening, echoes of the past.

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