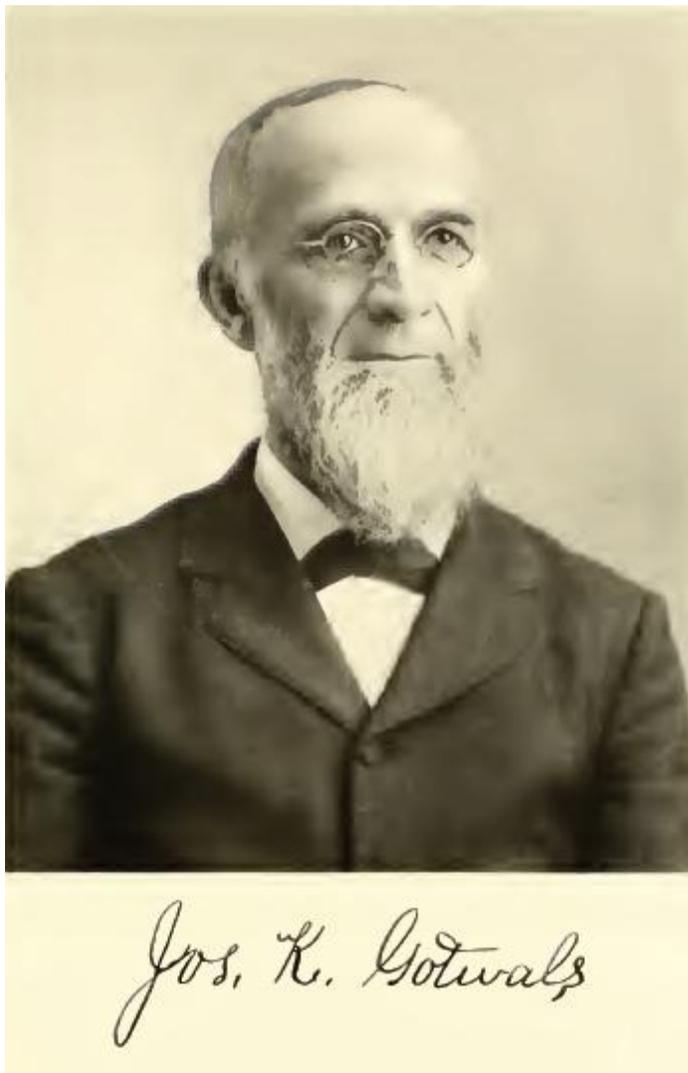


Biographical Annals, **Montgomery County**, Pennsylvania, Volume I, Ellwood Roberts, Editor, T. S. Bernhard and Company and The Lewis Publishing Company, 1901



PROF. JOSEPH K. GOTWALS, A. M. The public schools of Norristown have long had a reputation second to none in the country. They have stood so high in the estimation of the people of the County-seat and its vicinity that there has for a long time been apparently little or no room for private institutions, and these, accordingly have not flourished to any great extent for many years. There has been a steady growth in the thoroughness and usefulness of these schools for a quarter of a century and longer. It is natural, under such circumstances, to seek to ascertain the causes of this growth and success, as manifested in the educational system of Norristown, and in so doing it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the excellent results that have been attained are due very largely to the wise direction which has been given the schools by the man who has been a teacher in the borough for over forty years, and who has filled the position of superintendent for more than thirty-one years.

Joseph Kulp Gotwals was born in Lower Providence Township, this County, October 15, 1832. He is the son of **Joseph** and **Ann (Kulp) Gotwals**, both natives of Montgomery County. Twelve children in all were born to them, five sons and seven daughters. Of these, four are now living: **Joseph K.**; **Isaac**, of Bridgeport; **Roger D.**, of Eagleville; and **Jane**, wife of **Isaac Z. Reiner**.

The father of Borough Superintendent Gotwals was born near Trappe, where he grew to manhood and engaged in farming. He lived to a good old age, dying at Eagleville in 1871, in his eighty-second year. His wife survived him eight years, dying also in her eighty-second year. The couple were Mennonites in their religious faith.

The paternal grandfather, of **Joseph K. Gotwals** was **Henry Gotwals**, also a farmer by occupation. His wife was a daughter of **Abraham Funk**, a well-known Mennonite preacher. The family were of German descent, like most of the residents of that section of the County, they

being an honest, industrious race who cultivated the simple virtues that adorn and dignify humanity. **Henry Gotwals** and his wife had a large family and both died at an advanced age.

Mr. Gotwals' maternal grandfather was **Henry Kulp**, whose wife was **Esther Metz**, who was born August 11, 1769. The couple were married April 8, 1788, and both died at an advanced age. They had a family of nine children.

Professor Gotwals was reared in Lower Providence township and attended the common schools of that vicinity until he reached the age of fifteen years, when he entered a private school taught by Rev. Harry S. Rodenbough, a Presbyterian, who was for many years the pastor of the Lower Providence church, a few miles above Norristown and was a very competent instructor, having formerly been a teacher in the Washington Hall Boarding School at Trappe, which had at one time an excellent reputation as an educational institution. Mr. Rodenbough took a special interest in Mr. Gotwals.

Under Mr. Rodenbough's care, he studied four consecutive winter terms. He was a diligent student and an apt pupil, and at the early age of twenty years, he had made such rapid progress that he passed a very creditable teacher's examination, and was appointed to the position of teacher in the public schools of Silver Creek, Schuylkill County. He taught there very successfully a term, and then entered the Millersville State Normal School. He remained there but a short time, again engaging in teaching. He taught five years in Lower Providence Township, and in 1859 went to Orwigsburg, Schuylkill County, where he reviewed the higher branches under the direction of Professor Schneider, who was conducting a private school, and at the same time rendered assistance in the school, by instructing pupils in the intermediate grades. There he remained about a year and a half. In 1860 he came to Norristown and was elected principal of the Cherry Street School. In 1865 he was elected principal of the boys' high school. He held this position until 1872, when he was made superintendent of the borough schools, which responsible position he has since ably and efficiently filled.

Under the wise supervision of Professor Gotwals the schools have been thoroughly organized, employing a corps of about eighty teachers. The most modern methods of instruction have been introduced and the work done in these schools compares favorably with that of any borough or city in the country. In recognition of Prof. Gotwals' long service as a teacher and his superior educational attainments, Franklin and Marshall College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts in 1872. He has long been an elder in the First Presbyterian church of Norristown.

On December 25, 1860, **Professor Gotwals** married **Miss Jennie H. Galbraith**, daughter of **Dr. James** and **Jane (Coulter) Galbraith**, of **Perry County**. They had one daughter, **Anna Gotwals**, who was born June 7, 1863. She became the wife of **Rev., Robert H. Taylor**, a Presbyterian. They resided at Westtown, New York, where he was pastor for thirteen years. On the 9th of May, 1889, her husband was installed pastor of the Westtown church, and during the same month their marriage was celebrated at the home of her parents, and immediately thereafter they commenced their joint labors with the people of that church. **Mrs. Taylor** proved herself an efficient and acceptable helpmate to her husband in his work and was recognized as an ideal pastor's wife. She was highly educated and an accomplished musician. Her gifts for organizing

and carrying out plans for charitable work, and her quiet helpfulness to her family, was wonderful. Ever a welcome guest in social gatherings, she was also a tender, loving friend in time of bereavement. She died December 25, 1901, in Norristown, leaving her sorrowing husband and parents and three children—**Robert G.**, **Jennie** and **Helen**.

Professor Gotwals is a member of Lynwood Lodge, Ancient Order of United Workmen. He is a Democrat in politics, as were his progenitors generally, but he is not in any sense a partisan politician, preferring to devote all his time and attention to educational matters or church work. He was president of the Norristown Young Men's Christian Association for four years. He is a member of the State Superintendent's Association, and of the State Educational Association.

He has also been a member of the National Educational Association for a number of years. Professor Gotwals takes great pleasure in attending the annual sessions of these bodies, and participates actively in their discussions and deliberations.

Mrs. Gotwals, in her young womanhood, was a teacher in the Arcadian Institute, at Orwigsburg, where she and Mr. Gotwals became acquainted with each other. **Her parents** were natives of Juniata County, but passed most of their lives in Perry County. Of their children, three grew to maturity. The family was of that sturdy Scotch-Irish stock whose virtues have been impressed upon the people of that section of Pennsylvania to the present day. Professor Gotwals has been a patient and persistent worker in the educational field. The success that has crowned his labors is the best possible testimonial to his ability as an instructor and school superintendent. He is a practical, earnest man, affable and courteous to all, unassuming in his manners, and highly esteemed by old and young in the community that he has served so well.

www.theperryhistorians.org