

## Military Drill and Aesthetic Dancing

by Chris Rossetti

In 1913 Hudson High school was just an ordinary American school. By 1918 it was one of the most advanced high schools around. All this was thanks to one man, and he was Superintendent Carl R. Dietsch.

Carl was born on November 7, 1885, in Brooklyn Village, a suburb of Cleveland. In 1910, he earned a degree at Adelbert College in Cleveland, formerly Western Reserve College founded in Hudson in 1826. While studying there, he founded the Delta Zeta Chapter of the Sigma Nu Fraternity. He had no real background for being a superintendent at all. As Carl states, "I was going to become a chemist, and when I got to quantitative analysis, I decided that I didn't have the temperament for that profession." His career started in Auburn, Ohio, when the dean of Adelbert College had heard that the community needed a superintendent. The dean asked Carl if he wanted the job. He couldn't refuse the offer and stayed at Auburn until 1912 when he became assistant principal and teacher at Kent High School in Kent, Ohio. It was at that time that Carl decided to grow a mustache. Whenever he would visit the restroom, the primary children mistook him for a high school student and would kick him in the shins. That would not do for an assistant principal! And then an offer came from Hudson.

Western Reserve College was founded in Hudson in 1826 by twelve trustees, originally from Connecticut, who wished to establish a "Yale of the West." In 1882 the college was moved to Cleveland. Amasa Stone of Cleveland had offered \$500,000 as an endowment on condition the college be moved and the name changed to Adelbert College in memory of his deceased son who had drowned during his senior year at Yale University.

The story behind Carl's assuming the superintendent post in Hudson is a good one. At the time the Hudson position was proposed, he was asked to head the science department of Central High School of Akron which was a better paying job. Still Carl let it be known that Hudson had first shot. The Hudson School Board was dragging its feet. "If you want me, then make up your mind," Carl advised them. In a short time the board met with him in an informal meeting on the Village Green where they all sat on a bench near the clock tower. It was decided that Carl would be the new superintendent.

While serving as superintendent of Hudson during the time of World War I, Carl made many changes. He instituted military drills for the boys in high school to get them in shape. They used sticks for guns. For the young women, he began a program of "aesthetic dancing." The superintendent felt that if you could teach a girl to be graceful on her feet, then you would have taught her something as useful as arithmetic. Another innovation of his was to start a football team. Carl says that the boys became so good that on Thanksgiving Day when Hudson played against Kent, they tied the older team. Carl then lobbied for a gymnasium which the school board approved. He was also responsible for a boys' and girls' basketball team. Another interest of his — drama — sparked the founding of a drama club at the high school, and Carl coached the young thespians. His interest in the theater began during his college days, when, as a member of the drama club at Adelbert College, he played the well-known character, "Mrs. Malaprop", in "The Rivals." None of these changes came easily, according to Carl, for the "moss backs" in town were apt to oppose them.

The Hudson School was a busy place in those days, but Carl didn't let things get out of hand. He made sure that the students payed attention to business and that there was no foolishness. An example of Carl's discipline: He would not allow kids just to leave the school grounds when the fire bell rang, which some were apt to do. He ran to the assembly hall. The students had the door open, ready to get out. Carl shouted, "Just a minute! Come back here." He then exclaimed, "If you leave, you'll never come back!" That ended it.

At that time, Carl was a resident of the historic John Brown House on Owen Brown Street. In 1915, his only daughter, Elizabeth Ann, was born to Carl and his wife, Bessy. In 1918, Carl joined the J.R. Holcomb Company, eventually building up a nationally known wholesale school supply business from a mail-order business. He was to become chairman of the board and remained with the company for forty-seven years. In 1982 Carl retired to the Norwood Apartments in Aurora where he is the eldest resident. He will celebrate his one hundredth birthday on November seventh of this year.

This past spring, Carl participated in the Centennial Celebration ceremonies in Hudson where he "stole the show." The festivities, marking one hundred years since the first Hudson High School graduation, began as

Carl, along with present Superintendent Gerald Reeves, rang the huge school bell which once hung at the old Union School on Oviatt Street where Carl had spent his first years in office. Several of his students from 1913 to 1918 were amazed to greet the tall, handsome man who not only could remember their names, but the minute details of their studies and activities.

"This is my toast to Carl," said a friend on his ninetieth birthday, just ten short years ago:

*To a man who has spirit and heart  
and during his years  
has known how to use both  
to make his life and the lives  
of others around him  
fulfilling.*



*"Learning makes a man fit company for himself."*

--Edward Young



Carl R. Dietsch

Photo by Adam Ackerman