

Rethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Latin • County Historian



DR. HERBERT SEELEY WEET 1871 - 1953

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'I am large, I contain multitudes' . . . Whitman

Dr. Herbert Weet was born in the Township of Shelby to Elroy and Jane Smith Weet. He graduated from Medina High School and immediately entered the field of education teaching in the rural schools of Orleans County from 1888 until 1895. In 1894 he married Ada Eleanor Smith. The following year he entered the University of Rochester and received his Bachelor's degree from that institution in 1899 and his Masters degree there in 1901.

He then became principal of the North Tonawanda High School for two years when he accepted a similar position at the old Monroe Grammar School in Rochester. In 1905 with the opening of West High School in Rochester he became its first Principal until 1910. From 1911 to 1933 he was Superintendent of Rochester Schools. It was during this time that he rose to become a national authority on public education. His most notable accomplishment during this twenty-two year period as superintendent was the creation of a Junior High School system that was considered a model throughout the United States. His work there was marked by leadership in maintaining the city's high education standards through the depth of the depression in the early 1930's.

In 1918 he received an honorary PhD from Albany State Teachers College and just prior to his retirement in 1933, the University of the State of New York broke precedent by awarding Dr. Weet another honorary doctorate, the first ever presented to a public school superintendent.

Recognition also came to him with appointments to important survey commissions including national educational finance from 1926 to 1933. The recommendations which he made usually carried enough authority to bring about enactments. His contributions to education were many. In 1915 he was elected a trustee of the University of Rochester and served as secretary of the Board until 1951. He was also on the Board of the Rochester Theological Seminary, Rochester Dental Dispensary and Mechanics Institute (now RTI).

In 1942 the University of Rochester called him out of retirement to act as a special consultant on education to Dr. Alan Valentine, the UR president. He gave advice to the university on meeting the special demands of the war years and on preparing for the post war rush of students. In 1945 he returned to retirement and his residence in Shelby. It was at this time he directed his attention to research on the history of his native Orleans County. In May of 1953 he was presented the 17th annual Rochester Rotary Club award for outstanding citizenship.

He was a great educator who never belittled anyone, a man with kindly manner, concerns and affection for others. "He reduced his problems to human equations". He believed in humor and anecdotes; yet never made wisecracks. His was a fine career which attracted nationwide attention. "He did not elbow his way to success and leave bruises in his path; he walked courteously and left affection where he passed."