



Fred H. Croninger,
Educator

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Address on the occasion of the

Dedication of the

Fred H. Croninger Elementary School

By

Rex M. Potterf,

Member of Board of Trustees

of the

Fort Wayne Community Schools

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Too often men delay proper and fair evaluation of their leaders. Saints have often been canonized centuries after their work on earth was finished. The image of a Washington and a Lincoln glitters today, but it bears little similarity to the image held by their contemporaries.

While living,

Give him the fame thou wouldst be giving;

So shall he hear, and feel, and know it —

Post obits rarely reach a poet,

says Lord Byron's translation of an epigram by the Latin poet Martial. Although the man we honor today is not a poet but an educator, we are glad to honor him while he can hear and feel it.

We recognize today a contemporary — one who in his professional career was an unusual leader of youth, the architect of a great educational institution, and an innovator of useful and successful educational enterprises. He will be remembered by those who knew him best as pure in thought, word and deed, as one who was never involved in any sordid experience. Stephen Spender evaluated such a man when he said, "The names of those who fought for life, who wore at their hearts the fire's center. Born of the sun they travelled a short while towards the sun, and left the vivid air signed with their honor." This is our evaluation of Fred Croninger today. We are confident that it will stand. Emerson epitomized this man's life when he said, "Whoever is open, loyal, true: of humane and affable demeanor; honorable himself, and in his judgement of others; faithful to his word as to law, and faithful alike to God and man — such a man is a true gentleman."

Born on a farm near Green Springs, Ohio, November 25, 1879, Fred H. Croninger attended a country school near Tiffin, Ohio. Thereafter, he attended high school at Republic, Ohio, which he reached by walking two and one half miles. Graduated from Republic High School in 1897, Mr. Croninger for one year attended the Green Springs Academy, a teacher-training school. The following years, 1898-1900, for teaching the Fox District School two miles south of Republic, Ohio, he received as his remuneration one dollar per day.

Mr. Croninger entered Heidelberg College, at Tiffin,

Ohio, and majored in mathematics. He was graduated in 1905 with the B.S. degree. He financed the cost of his college education from his savings as a rural teacher, from part-time school teaching while in college and from doing farm chores in evenings, on Saturdays and during holidays. On August 29, 1906, Fred Croninger was married to Jessie Holtz. From this union was born one child, Howard.

From 1905 until 1913, Mr. Croninger rapidly advanced in his chosen profession. Immediately after graduation from Heidelberg College, he served two years as principal and head teacher of the high school at Deshler, Ohio. In 1907 he was appointed principal and teacher of high school subjects in the high school at Vermillion, Ohio, which position he held for the three year period ending in 1910.

Mr. Croninger was now marked for a notable professional advance. He was appointed to the principalship of the Bluffton High School in 1910 by Superintendent P. A. Allen, then one of the outstanding educators of Indiana. In this large and important educational post, Mr. Croninger accepted and sought responsibilities. He still did some teaching and perfected his pedagogical techniques in the field of mathematics. An ardent devotee of sport, he coached the baseball, basketball and track teams of Bluffton High School during those years. He brought the Bluffton High School basketball team to a high standard of excellence. In 1911 it defeated all competitors in the local tourneys. This placed the Bluffton team in the state contest at Bloomington, the first Indiana State basketball tourney. Mr. Croninger proudly piloted his team into this contest where he and his boys won distinction. Bluffton won its first and second games but went down in the finals.

Mr. Croninger was now well-known and well reputed among the Indiana men who then sponsored and guided inter-school athletics. This reputation bore fruit several years later when in 1927 he was elected to a five year membership on the Indiana High School Athletic Association board of control. In 1931 he was elected president of the I.H.S.A.A.

In 1913 Mr. Croninger was employed as mathematics teacher at Central High School. He now joined that glittering group of educational celebrities and master teachers assembled around Principal Chester T. Lane. Upon the resignation of Mr. Lane as principal in 1915, Louis C. Ward, another master teacher and great educational leader, ac-

ceded to the principalship of Central High School. He recognized the unique ability of Fred Croninger in the management of athletics and in the teaching of mathematics. Mr. Ward designated Mr. Croninger immediately as business manager of athletics and in 1918 as head of the mathematics department. Mr. Croninger soon attained an enviable reputation as teacher of college algebra and trigonometry, which courses were offered for elite high school students. Mr. Croninger held an interim teaching position as instructor of arithmetic at Winona College in the summer of 1912 and again at Indiana University in the summer of 1919.

When Mr. Ward became Superintendent of the Fort Wayne Schools in 1921, he immediately recommended Mr. Croninger as his successor for the principalship of Central High School. At that time Central was the only high school in Fort Wayne and had outgrown its inadequate building with the rather unwieldy enrollment of two thousand in a building designed for no more than seven hundred students. The congestion and inadequacy of the building confronted the new principal with many problems. It was difficult to find rooms for all the classes. He met these problems with energy and resourcefulness. South Side High School was then under construction. When it opened its doors the next year, Central's enrollment was halved and reduced to manageable proportions.

Mr. Croninger's tenure as principal at Central extended from 1921 until his retirement in 1947, a period marked by many economic and educational changes. With the completion of North Side High School in 1927, the greatly increased enrollment at Central was again divided by creation of new boundary lines and a newly constructed attendance district. Central was henceforth to draw its student body from the central portion of Fort Wayne. Mr. Croninger adequately met the new problems imposed by a rapidly increasing constituency and one which included an increasing number of newcomers to Fort Wayne, many of whom brought with them meager educational endowment and modest educational potentialities. These resulting problems Mr. Croninger met with patience, intelligence, and professional competence.

During the summers of 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, Mr. Croninger attended Teacher's College at Columbia University, where he earned his A.M. in secondary education. He

applied new educational procedures to the creation of homogeneous groupings of pupils. He consistently led his teachers in applying the seven cardinal principles of education to their problems. He created Recognition Day for the public identification of student achievement in all fields of worthy endeavor. He realized the necessity of enlisting parental interest and support and influenced his teachers to visit the homes of their pupils.

Mr. Croninger made it a standard practice to visit all school extra-curricular activities; he never missed an athletic contest. In this way he not only envisaged the entirety of the Central School effort at close range but came to know a great deal about the achievements, attitude and qualities of hundreds of Central pupils. Mr. Croninger entered actively into program-making and was able to apply his knowledge of the qualities of individual teachers in selecting suitable programs. In these and many other respects Mr. Croninger maintained an unusually close rapport and knowledgeable sympathy with the heartbeat of Central High School.

In 1948 Mr. Croninger modestly retired without the synthetic fanfare which often accompanies such an event. He quietly stepped aside for his successor and effaced himself from the management of what had become, under his direction, a great educational institution. He did, however, retain his interest in the school. He attended games and other functions very much as he had done for so many years as principal.

After leaving Central High School, Mr. and Mrs. Croninger travelled widely and spent much time with their son Howard and his family. However, it seemed increasingly to Mr. Croninger that he should engage in further productive formal educational effort. In 1952 the Indiana Institute of Technology fortuitously offered him a position in the mathematics department of that growing institution. He accepted and for the following eleven years he taught college algebra, trigonometry and analytic geometry. In 1962 he resigned this position.

Mr. Croninger is a deeply religious, albeit a tolerant man. His parents were Methodists and he was reared in that faith, attending the Methodist Episcopal Church and teaching Sunday school classes in the various communities where he taught public school. A long-time member of the Wayne

Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Mr. Croninger taught Sunday school classes there for twelve years. He was for many years and still is a lay teacher.

The Lion's Club has furnished an arena for Mr. Croninger's exuberant energies. He assisted in organizing it in 1922 and became a charter member. He was elected president of the Lion's Club for the year 1930-31. For forty-four years he has been a member of the naturalization committee of that club and has assisted in the practical Americanization of many immigrants on their way to citizenship.

While assisting and leading the school athletic programs at Bluffton and Fort Wayne, Mr. Croninger engaged in Y.M.C.A. physical training. He was particularly interested in volleyball and for many years played on teams at the Y.M.C.A. A more sedentary interest was his enjoyment of chess whenever he could find a worthy opponent.

Among the literary interests of Mr. Croninger are his recurrent excursions into the works of Longfellow and Lowell. He has constantly collected the utterances and sayings of wise men. By discussing them with others and by introspection he has woven them into his inner self. His pockets often bulge with clippings and notes derived from many sources. His ideal is Theodore Roosevelt, whose life and career he has studied through the years.

During summer vacations and later during the leisure years 1948-1952 Mr. and Mrs. Croninger have travelled widely in the United States and the Western Hemisphere. They have visited all of the states of the Union except three or four. They have flown over most of the Caribbean and South America.

With the narrow techniques of instruction Mr. Croninger had little to do viz, class visitation, checking results, measuring pupil achievement, methods of conducting class exercises. These problems he left to departmental heads who, he had reason to believe, were qualified. Mr. Croninger's relations with his co-workers was well-described by Thomas Huxley who said: "Thoughtfulness for others, generosity, modesty, and self-respect are the qualities which make a real gentleman as distinguished from the veneered article which commonly goes by the name." Mr. Croninger had an uncanny knowledge of the abilities and shortcomings of his teachers. It is difficult to account for this very extensive knowledge; however, he studied the semester and period reports of teachers, he had many opportunities to hear

grievances of pupils, and he saw the products of good and poor teaching. This knowledge he employed in an occasional admonishment, a word of praise or indulgence in a meaningful silence. The wise teacher cherished and profited by these hints. Mr. Croninger required promptness and expert technical compliance by teachers. A failure to appear for hall-duty or an error in school reports elicited no smile of forgiveness. He made sure that teachers were eager to avoid any repetition of such delinquency.

Fred Croninger gave his loyalty to his family and to Central High School. He identified himself inseparably with each. His son Howard was always uppermost in his thought, and until Howard was entirely on his own, Mr. Croninger planned for him and assisted him in his projects. In all, Mrs. Croninger was his wise and prudent counsellor.

Mr. Croninger seemed to mould Central High in his own image. Loyalty to the school, interest in all of its activities and active cooperation with its student body were the hallmarks of his deep and abiding influence. His steadfast allegiance to the school stimulated that of teachers and pupils. That marvelous phenomenon which has impressed so many, the elusive but ubiquitous spirit of Central, was a projection of the heart of Fred Croninger. Beyond school and family the anchors of Mr. Croninger's life were the Methodist Church, the Lion's Club and the pursuit of knowledge derived from wide travel and contact with distant countries and strange people. His world is the embodiment of Edna Millay's observation, "The world stands out on either side no wider than the heart is wide; above the world is stretched the sky, no higher than the soul is high. The heart can push the sea and land farther away on either hand; the soul can split the sky in two, and let the face of God shine through."

Lord Shaftsbury has delineated the Herculean dimensions and stance of Fred Croninger in his words, "The taste of beauty, and the relish of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfect the character of the gentleman and the philosopher." So today, in the autumn of Fred Croninger's long and useful life, we dedicate this school to bear his name and to recognize his certain place among those eminent school men whom this and other Boards have similarly honored, a man who has spent his life in obedience to what Micah said the Lord requires of man — "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God."