

SUPERINTENDENT KEISTER HONORED

A PORTRAIT of William Hampton Keister, Superintendent of city schools, is now hanging in the Harrisonburg High School in recognition of an achievement of forty years of continuous service to the citizens of Harrisonburg. Not the gift of an unnamed friend, not a purchase with pupils' accumulated pennies, this portrait is even more significant; it was ordered by the City Council of Harrisonburg—a public and official recognition of a public servant.

The presentation of the portrait was made with becoming ceremonies on the evening of May 24, 1934, by the chairman of the finance committee of the City Council; and the chairman of the City School Board officially accepted the gift. The program included as well felicitations to Mr. Keister on his vigorous and progressive services to the people of Harrisonburg; the speakers were Mayor Ward Swank; Dr. C. J. Heatwole, secretary of the Virginia Education Association; Dr. Harris Hart, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction; and John Paul, Judge of Western District of Virginia, U. S. Federal Court. Mayor Swank and Judge Paul are both graduates of "Mr. Keister's school."

Some measure of the physical growth of the public school system in Harrisonburg is evidenced by the following contrast:

In 1894 the 225 pupils of the Harrisonburg Public Schools occupied two buildings, one eight-room brick building, now a part of the Main Street School, and one four-room brick building, now a part of the Effinger School. The total number of teachers employed in both schools was eleven.

In 1934 the 1800 pupils of the Harrisonburg Public Schools occupy four large modern buildings, containing 64 regular classrooms, gymnasium, cafeterias, libraries, laboratories, consultation rooms, and of-

fices. A teaching staff of 58 well-trained teachers is employed in these four schools.

The cordial relations that have always prevailed between Mr. Keister and "his boys and girls" suggest the feeling Professor William Graham Sumner of Yale expressed when he said: "My relations with students and graduates have always been of the pleasantest; and I think that there can be but few relations in life which can give greater satisfaction than these."

Not only has Superintendent Keister enjoyed the hearty support of townspeople; his co-operation with the State Teachers College since its establishment here twenty-five years ago has also met with constant recognition. During the first decade of the college's history the then President, Dr. Julian A. Burruss, developed with Superintendent Keister's approval and assistance, a plan for the use of public schools for observation and practice-teaching purposes. This plan, later followed by all of the Virginia teachers' colleges and now quite common throughout the country, was successful, President Burruss has often pointed out, because of the hearty co-operation and efficient help of Mr. Keister. President S. P. Duke, under whose leadership the college has continued to prosper during the last fifteen years, presided over the program and paid tribute to Mr. Keister's constant recognition of the stimulating value of the training-school in the public school system.

Dr. C. J. Heatwole, speaking as secretary of the state association of which Mr. Keister had once been president, pointed to Mr. Keister's way of firing his students with ambition. Said he:

"By some strange and subtle influence probably found somewhere in the intricacies of his unusual personality Mr. Keister's students went to college at a higher percentage rate than from any other high school in the state. It is fitting and proper and at the same time highly significant that this delightful occasion was arranged by his

former students now in places of control in the social, political, financial, business, and economic life of the community and that they conceived the gracious idea of placing an enduring portrait of the man who means so much to the life and welfare of Harrisonburg."

Dr. Harris Hart, State Superintendent during thirteen years of Superintendent Keister's incumbency, spoke in high approval of "this testimonial to a man while he is yet active and vigorous in his work." In part Dr. Hart said:

"In the realm of public education in the last one or two decades there have been innumerable theories, methods, and so-called philosophies. This has been natural because the process of training has been and ought to be fluid, not static, a constantly flowing stream subject to all the new influences of civilization. It has been a meandering stream; sometimes allowed to flow with natural current; sometimes littered with refuse and deadwood, and occasionally obstructed by artificial dams. To steer a straight and safe course down such a stream requires no mean navigator.

"He that accepts all theories and methods proposed; that merely copies what others do; that maps his course only as others have charted, endangers his ship and its precious cargo. On the other hand, the man who exercises judgment and reason and caution, who dilutes theories with common sense and sober judgment, will make a real contribution in the training of pupils under his care. Superintendent Keister has, in my judgment, persistently applied common sense and good judgment to all educational procedures. He has not acted without proportioned thought, and therefore has never led astray either his teachers or his pupils.

"I think of Superintendent Keister, in the second place, as always the hail-fellow-well-met, in the meeting of whom there is perennial delight. The author of a recent life of Andrew Jackson, *An Epic in Home-spun*, quotes Rachel as saying, "The General

kicked the kivers off last night and we all kotched cold." This leads the author to remark that Andrew Jackson was quite frequently in politics a pretty rough bed-fellow. His early environs, his first experiences, combined with a pretty acid stomach naturally made him a severe kicker.

"Occasionally there appears on the horizon a man of Jackson's temper and calibre who can overcome every obstacle and by dint of personal courage and character forge to the front. Most of this world's work, however, comes through a method of wise cooperation, of an understanding with one's fellow-man, of sharing their ups and downs, and of making one's self a real part of the society in which he lives. It is to this humanity and spiritual relationship that most men have proceeded in some real accomplishment in the world. I think this is true of Superintendent Keister. Undoubtedly he can "walk with crowds and save his virtue"; he can "talk with kings, nor lose the common touch."

"In the third place, his long service of an important and difficult office is a high tribute to the man. The public schools touch more people than any other institution, and touch them through the tenderest point—the little child in the home. The institution is, therefore, subject to all sorts of criticism and complaints. He that through the years can meet these with a reasonably equable disposition and sensible treatment, who can undergo these experiences for four decades and then have his fellow-citizens come to him in a meeting to testify their admiration, their confidence, is a man who ought to be proud of his record. I am grateful for having the opportunity to take part in this tribute."

The need for new school buildings has increased greatly during the last four years, and especially since the depression, as the NRA prohibition of child labor added to the high school enrolment nearly a million pupils.