

# Principal Dr. William A. Wetzel

1869-1951

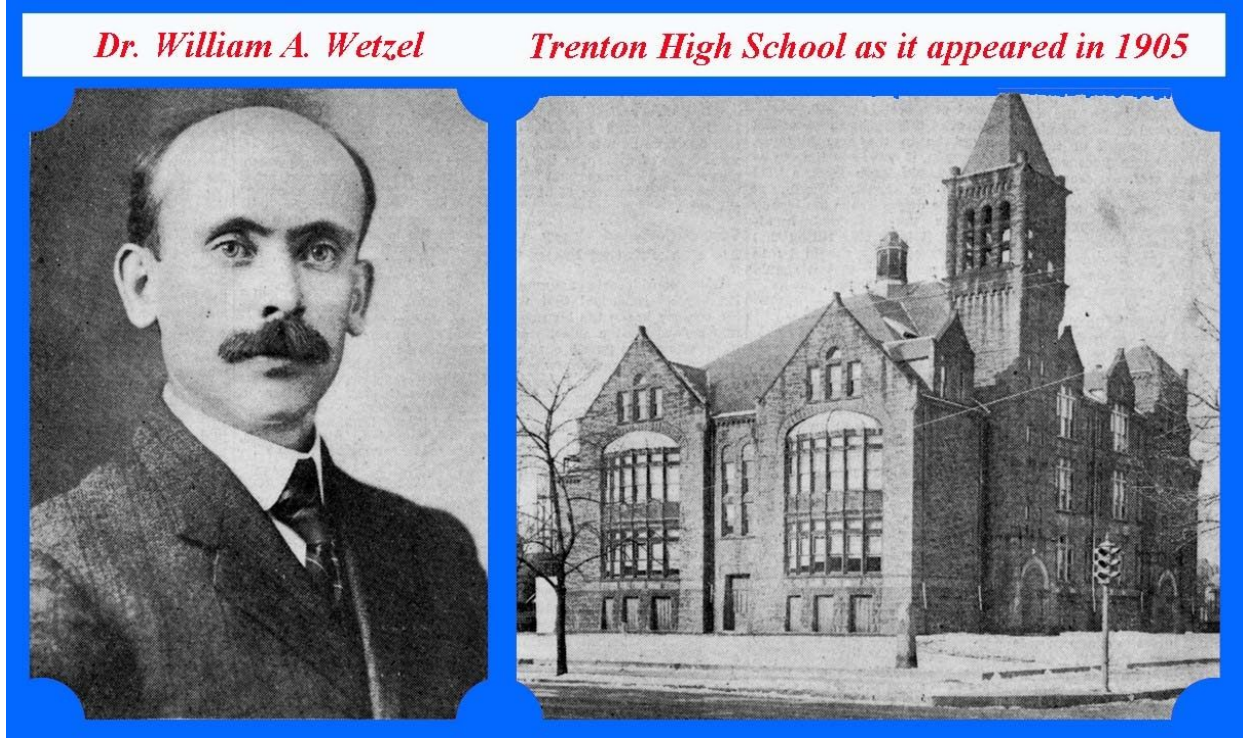


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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Dr. William A. Wetzel was born in Ackermanville, PA on July 30, 1869. In 1901, he accepted the principalship of Trenton High School that would define his career in education and also create many challenges during his 34 year tenure in the educational system of Trenton, NJ. The three decades that he was principal at Trenton High School and briefly at Trenton Junior High No. 1, from 1901-1935 would help establish the framework of education on the East Coast and be some of the hardest years to be visionary in creating long-lasting rubrics for the public-school system.

## **THREE DECADES OF CHANGE**

Trenton during the first decade of his administrative duties as principal was booming as an industrial port city with an increasing number of immigrants and children whose parents were working in nearby factories or migrating from other parts of the United States for better opportunities. This influx of population weighed heavily on the educational infrastructure and added to the growing need for rubrics and standards that would prepare

children to have skills to enter into the workforce or go onto higher learning.

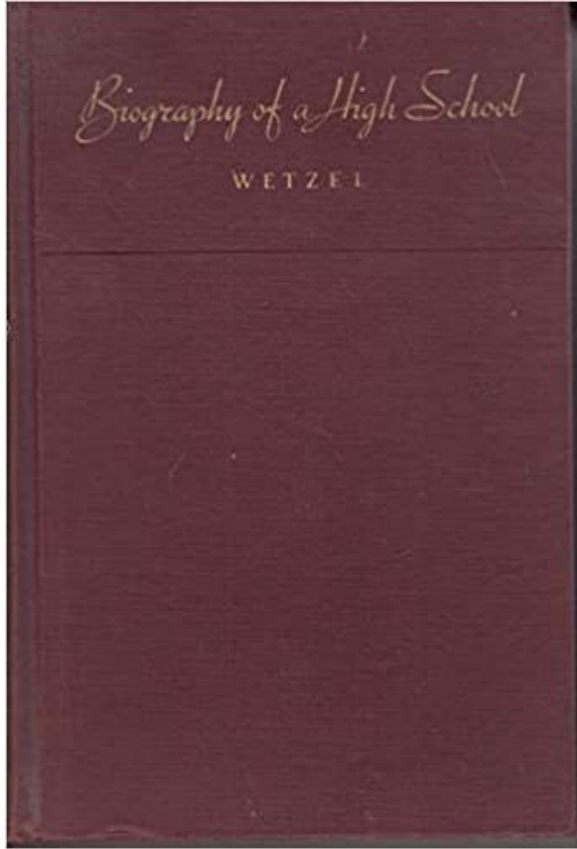
Prior to World War I and the conversations about the building of Trenton's Junior High No. 1, Principal Wetzel had traveled to Poland and to Germany to observe and understand the educational systems of each of these countries. Dr. Wetzel wrote extensively in scholarly journals, such as the *Journal of Education* and *The School Review*. In 1909, he published two articles in the *Journal of Education*, "German Schools" and "Schools in Poland" that highlighted his observations and comparisons to the educational system in the United States.

By 1911, though the publication of his reflections and observations from his travels to Germany and Poland helped create a pedagogical and philosophical point of view they also may have fueled the fire in the increasingly Anti-German sentiment that was rooting itself in America leading up to and during World War I. World War I is a pivotal moment in Trenton's history and coincides with the Junior High movement, in order to alleviate the overpopulation in high schools and combat the growing population of Trenton. World War I began on July 28, 1914 and ended Nov 11, 1918 and the inner politics of Trenton manifested itself with a war of accusations that aligned with global politics. In 1918, prior to WWI ending, Dr. Wetzel was accused of being anti-American with Mayor Donnelly a vocal opponent of this kind of sentiment.

His influence in the Junior High Movement and helping establish the first Junior High in New Jersey, It is unclear what began these allegations and also what kind of relationship Donnelly and Wetzel had, but the case against Wetzel was eventually dismissed. By 1917, Wetzel's scholarly writing was less about other countries, but rather began to look at the school subjects, like Latin more in depth.

In 1916, Principal Wetzel became the first principal of the newly opened Trenton Junior High No. 1. The article, *The Junior School*, published in 1919 set a clear vision of what he saw the purpose of what a junior school should be.

According to the *Yearbook of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals*, He had retired in 1935



On April 4, 1951, William A. Wetzel passed away at Chestnut Hill Hospital.