

THE HUDSON YEARS

BY ELLEN BROWN

Case Western Reserve's storied history begins 175 years ago in a little village south of Cleveland.

If you're driving into the village of Hudson, Ohio, on Route 91, it's difficult to miss the row of stately red brick buildings that rise along the wide sweep of green on College Street. After all these years, the nineteenth-century buildings still remain—remnants of the late Western Reserve College, founded 175 years ago, on February 7, 1826. Among them is the chapel, where many a student endured the early morning sermons. And the observatory with its sea-foam-green weathered dome. And the president's house, a grand presence with its curved entryways.

Today, the buildings and surrounding land are home to the students and faculty of Western Reserve Academy, a preparatory school that shared the campus with the college from its founding in 1826. Western Reserve College, of course, is long gone. It packed up its belongings and moved to Cleveland in 1882, eventually evolving into Case Western Reserve University. But the buildings have been

preserved and are still used today by the academy as dormitories, offices, and classrooms. On this, the 175th anniversary of the founding of Western Reserve College, we take you back to those early years in Hudson, Ohio, to give you a snapshot of the University's beginnings, a time twined with persistence and struggle.

THE MAIN STRIP: PICTURED IN THIS NINETEENTH-CENTURY ILLUSTRATION ARE (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) THE ATHENAEUM, NORTH COLLEGE, THE CHAPEL, MIDDLE COLLEGE, AND SOUTH COLLEGE.

Ironically, before the village of Hudson was chosen as the location for the college, Cleveland was considered as a possible site. But the bigger city was rejected, says late history faculty member C. H. Cramer in his book *Case Western Reserve: A History of the University 1826-1976*, "because it was thought that a commercial lake port with rollicking sailors in the streets would be detrimental to the morals of college students."

On February 7, 1826, after Hudson was selected as the site for Western

college began instruction, there were only three students and one tutor, David Coe, who made up not only the entire faculty but the janitorial staff as well, according to Prof. Cramer. But by the time the college was only four years old, it had four professors and one tutor, which was considered quite an achievement, given that Ivy League colleges like Harvard and Yale were eighty-five and fifty years old before they appointed their first professors.

As the faculty grew, so did the campus facilities. In 1827, when the first building, Middle College, was



Reserve College, the charter for the institution was granted by the State of Ohio, and less than a month later, the Board of Trustees held its first meeting. The trustees moved fast to ensure the swift

opening of the college. On April 26, the cornerstone was laid for the Middle College building.

On October 4, the first class of three began in a facility in Tallmadge, Ohio, ten miles south of Hudson, because the first building wouldn't be completed until 1827.

Highs and Lows

The early years at Western Reserve College were years of growth. When the

Founding Father

David Hudson, who founded the village of Hudson, is considered the father of Western Reserve College, because for



DAVID HUDSON

many years he had envisioned a college being established in the village and was a leading force in the creation of WRC. When it was determined that \$10,000 would be needed to open the college, Hudson donated \$2,142 plus 160 acres of land for the campus. (The land proved to be unsuitable and was never used by the college.) He served on the Board of Trustees from 1826 to 1836.



FRONT AND CENTER: THE CHAPEL, AT THE CENTER OF THE COLLEGE GREEN

completed, half of the building was used for recitations and the other half for a dormitory. But as more students enrolled, additional space was needed, and, in 1830, South College—which initially included classroom space, dormitory rooms, a chapel, and a library—was added to the campus green along with the President’s House, a double structure that was occupied through the years by most of the college presidents and various faculty members.

In 1836, the chapel was completed, and, in 1838, North College, which was used as a dormitory, was ready to be occupied. (North College is still used as housing today by students at Western Reserve Academy.) The observatory, which is the second oldest of its kind standing in the United States, was also built in 1838. In 1843, the Athenaeum, the natural sciences building, was completed.

The college experienced a series of ups and downs in the first twenty-nine years of its life, shepherded by Presidents Charles Backus Storrs and George E. Pierce.

A reluctant president from the start due to his wavering health and his contention that he was ill suited for the position, Charles Backus Storrs was appointed to the post in 1830. Storrs believed a moral education was essential for students, and that the development

of their intellect could lead to grave repercussions. During his brief tenure, the professor of theology became involved in what was known as the slavery crisis of 1833, in which he and several other professors crusaded for the abolition of slavery.



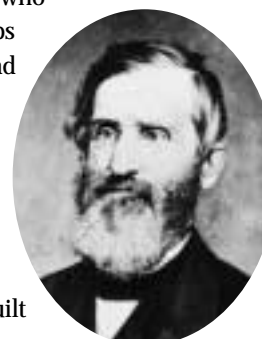
GEORGE E. PIERCE

When George E. Pierce took over as president, in 1834, he turned the college around. It came to be considered the top college in the West by educators in the eastern United States. But in the late years of his presidency, financial problems plagued the institution. In 1851-52, many students withdrew, and, in 1853, there were no graduates, because the entire senior class—and most of the junior class—had dropped out.

The situation grew so grave that there was talk of the college closing. In 1855, Pierce resigned. But by then, many faculty members had done the same, and donors were refusing to pay their pledges, unsure of whether the college would survive.

New Beginnings

But the college did survive, actually thriving under the care of President Henry Hitchcock, who mended friendships with those who had distanced themselves from the college. Appointed in 1855, he strengthened the curriculum and built up the faculty, bringing in, among



HENRY HITCHCOCK

others, Carroll Cutler, who would ultimately become the fourth president of WRC. Unfortunately, due to failing health, he was forced to resign in 1871.

In his inaugural address at commencement in 1872, Carroll Cutler created a stir when he announced that women would be admitted to the college for the first time, much to the surprise of his colleagues, few of whom even realized the notion was being considered (the idea was a contentious one from the start and thereafter).



CARROLL CUTLER

During his tenure, the college had a small enrollment, because of its high standards and stiff competition from Oberlin, Wooster, and Buchtel

colleges, and though attempts were made to increase enrollment at WRC, the efforts were futile. By 1875, officials decided they needed to take radical action—specifically, moving the college—if the institution was to be saved.

Ultimately, it was decided that if the college was to be moved, Cleveland was the likeliest site. While the founders believed in the beginning that a college should be located away from the distractions and temptations that a city held, by the 1870s urban universities in other cities had been established, proving that an institution of higher learning could flourish in an urban setting.

After trustees determined that it would take \$500,000 to move the college to Cleveland, railroad tycoon Amasa Stone offered to provide funding, and trustees decided to move the college in 1880. It would be two more years before the college would move. At the request of Amasa Stone, who wished to honor his late son, Adelbert, the college changed its name to Adelbert College of Western Reserve University. ■

Ellen Brown is the magazine's associate editor.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER ART FROM UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

STUDENT LIFE: LENIENT IT WAS NOT

When Western Reserve College was founded 175 years ago, students faced a plethora of challenges, both personal and academic. In the early days, while the cost of living in a dormitory

was only \$4 to \$6 a year, the accommodations were less than extravagant. There was no running water in the buildings, which made bathing, in particular, especially challenging. In the warmer months, students bathed in a creek near the college, reported C. H. Cramer in his book *Case Western Reserve: A History of the University 1826-1976*. “In the winter, bathing—such as it was—was attempted at the college pump,” Prof. Cramer wrote. “At this fountain, naked students—standing ankle deep in snow—sloshed pails of icy water on each other, covering the bodily surface from crown to heel in a major test of endurance.”

Students today would likely shudder at the regimented nature of their early counterparts’ schedules, which were nearly absent of free time. The school day began sometimes as early as 5:45. And a sample day in 1837 included prayers at 6, recitation at 6:15, breakfast at 7:15, work and exercise until 9, study hours from 9 to 11, recitation from 11 to 12, dinner at noon, study hours from 1 to 3, recitation from 3 to 4, work and exercise from 4 to 5, prayer at 5, supper at 5:30, and study hours from 7 to 9, according to Frederick Waite in his book *Western Reserve University: The Hudson Era*. On Sundays, students were required to attend two

church services, and, in their spare time that day, they were expected to read religious books in their room or sing psalms. The only time students had free was on Saturday afternoons.



HANGING OUT: WESTERN RESERVE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN FRONT OF MIDDLE COLLEGE

There were other rules as well: Students were not allowed to drink liquor, wine, or cider. And inhaling ether, which was not an uncommon practice in those times, was prohibited. Students, of course, didn’t always follow the rules, and were fined accordingly, up to a dollar in the 1830s, it was said.

But by the 1870s, the tenor of campus life had changed dramatically. Formal prayer was required only once a day, at 8 a.m., and students spent Saturday evenings in fraternity meetings or recreation, according to Mr.

Waite. On Sundays, students were required to attend only one church service. Since students were allowed to leave town, and trains ran several times daily from Cleveland, it was not unusual for them to depart for the weekend or attend the theater in Cleveland on Saturday nights. Although there were still religious activities in which students could partake, fraternities became increasingly popular. Interclass sports (such as baseball and football) and intercollegiate sports also began during this time. In general, there were more opportunities for students to be involved in extracurricular activities, including participation on publication staffs, athletic teams, and musical groups, which were also in existence in the '30s.

Through the Years

1826

FEBRUARY 7

Western Reserve College Charter signed

MARCH 1

Members of the new Board of Trustees gather in Hudson for their first meeting

APRIL 26

Cornerstone laid for Middle College

OCTOBER 4

Instruction of first class begins in Tallmadge, Ohio

July 1827

Middle College completed

1828

First professor hired

August 1830

First class, numbering four, graduates; Charles Backus Storrs appointed first president

1834

George Edmond Pierce appointed second president

1843

Instruction begins in the Medical Department of Western Reserve College, popularly known as Cleveland Medical College (because the department was located in Cleveland)

1855

Henry Hitchcock appointed president

1872

Carroll Cutler inaugurated as president

1880

Case School of Applied Science incorporated

1882

Western Reserve College moves to Cleveland