

# John W Elwell

## “This Is Your Life”

1963

[Notation made by grandson John S Howard in 2012: John W Elwell reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 in the year 1963. In celebration of his lifelong career as an educator, his son-in-law Ranald West put together a program based on the then popular TV show “This Is Your Life” hosted by Ralph Edwards. The program was conducted at a special Wilson Junior High School PTA event. Ran West’s script for the program follows.]

OFFSTAGE SOUND: (on tape...“Ralph Edwards Theme”)...fade under

ANNOUNCER: (offstage on tape)

Good afternoon. From Station WJH (Wilson Jr. High)...we bring you a special program that could happen only once every 70 years. This is the story of an “institution” of learning...the story of the dean of Hamilton public school education...the story of a man who has taught, guided and influenced children in Hamilton for 37 years. “This Is Your Life”—John W Elwell!

(Mrs. Duersch escorts Mr. Elwell to stage. Mrs. Henes steps to ONSTAGE MIKE)

And, now, in the absence of Ralph Edwards, here is your “This Is Your Life” narrator—Mrs. Mildred Henes.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape) “Back Home Again In Indiana” (fade under)

NARRATOR: The beginning is a good place to start. And the beginning for John Elwell was in a log cabin in Franklin County, Indiana, on August 5, 1892. You started your formal education at the tender age of five. When your older playmates trudged off to school, you tagged along, quietly took a seat in the schoolroom, and when nobody told you to leave...started your long and distinguished school career. Then (doesn’t time fly?) 1909 found you ready to graduate from Brookville, Indiana, High School.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: (Mozella Klein speaks into offstage mike, then comes on stage. While Mr. Elwell is greeting her, NARRATOR identifies her for the audience. When Mrs. Klein sits down, NARRATOR continues with script. SAME PRODECURE IS FOLLOWED WITH ALL GUESTS.)

NARR: Recognize Mozella Klein? She graduated with you from Brookville High School. And here's another classmate of yours...

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mrs. Aldrich speaks.

NARR: Mrs. Ellsworth Aldrich...and the Rev. Mr. Aldrich.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Harry Davis speaks.

NARR: Still another classmate...Harry Davis, now of South Bend.

NARRATOR CONTINUES: After high school graduation, you began your first teaching assignment—at Beech Grove School, where you had slipped in, uninvited, to attend first grade.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mrs. Hoffman speaks.

NARR: This is Mrs. Mary Hoffman, mother of John Hoffman, geography teacher at Wilson. Mrs. Hoffman was a student at Beech Grove School.

At the still tender age of 18, you became principal of a three-room school at Mt. Carmel, Indiana—in spite of a few objections from parents who thought that an 18-year-old principal was a “might” young. In fact, some of their children were older than you were.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mrs. Mabel Luse speaks.

NARR: Mrs. Mabel Luce—a student, when you were that 18-year-old principal at Mt. Carmel.

You attended Indiana University during the summers of 1910 through 1913, then, just 50 years ago, you became assistant principal of the Middletown, Indiana, High School. You also taught history, Latin, geography, and botany, and played violin in the orchestra...and livened up the faculty of the school by whizzing around on your motorcycle! According to the Middletown yearbook for 1913, your pastime was: “Latin”...your favorite expression: “I’ll send you out”...your ambition: “To be man of the family”.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Miss Van Matre speaks.

NARR: Miss Catherine Van Matre—who later was algebra and geometry teacher at Hamilton High—was a senior at Middletown High School when you were assistant principal.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape...“Indiana University Song”)...fade under.

NARR: You returned to Indiana University—and in 1915, you graduated with chemistry major. And, while I’m sure you didn’t fiddle away your time, you did play violin in the Indiana University orchestra!

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mr. Fleenor speaks.

NARR: This, of course, is Mr. Fleenor—your roommate at Indiana University.

Shortly after acquiring your college degree, you acquired...(PAUSE)

MUSIC: (offstage on tape...“Wedding March”)...fade under.

NARR: That’s right—a marriage license. On September 2, 1915, almost 48 years ago, you married Mearl Ball, and here she is....

(MRS ELWELL COMES ON STAGE, ESCORTED BY JOHN HOWARD)

Miss Ball (she was then) roomed at the home of your parents while she was teaching at Athens, Indiana, County School. But your romance didn’t really get under way till some five years later, when she was attending Normal School at Bloomington, and you were a student at Indiana. We understand that you gained 40 pounds the first year you were married—and that’s understandable to anybody who has eaten one of Mrs. Elwell’s meals...or any of her famous sugar cookies.

NARR. CONTINUES: After a short stay at Columbia City High School, where you were assistant principal, in addition to directing the orchestra and coaching the basketball team, you came to the new Hamilton High School in 1916, where you taught ancient history and geography.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mr. Sam Mohler speaks.

NARR: Your good friend, Mr. Sam Mohler—who taught German at Hamilton High.

In addition to teaching, you played bass viol in the orchestra (having graduated from the violin)...and also coached the basketball team.

OFFSTAGE VOICES: Harold Black and Courtland Manning (MIGHT APPEAR TOSSING A BASKETBALL TO EACH OTHER).

NARR: Harold Black...and Courtland Manning...both senior stars on the Hamilton High basketball team in 1917.

And, now...we leave the hallowed halls of learning for a few years. In 1917, you joined Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. in Akron, Ohio. Then, just to confuse things, you moved to Akron, Indiana, where you and your father-in-law had a lumber business. Perhaps you got a little bored with lumber, because you also taught physics and coached basketball at the Akron High School.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: (An excerpt from a letter from Cecil Kuhn is read)

NARR: That was part of a letter from Cecil Kuhn—a friend of yours in Akron, Indiana.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape...“Hamilton High Song”)...fade under

NARR: Retracing your steps, you returned, in 1927, to Hamilton High School to become physics teacher.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Katherine Lampe Browne speaks.

NARR: And this is one of your prize physics students, Mrs. Katherine Lampe Brown, who later taught math at Wilson.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape: “University of Cincinnati Song”)...fade under

NARR: Back to the books...this time for a master’s degree, in 1929, at the University of Cincinnati. Your Master’s thesis was titled: “Pupil Failures in the Elementary Schools of Hamilton, Ohio”.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mr. Charles Thackera—principal at Harding Jr. High speaks.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape...“Roosevelt Song”)... (\*Washington & Lee Swing)... fade under

NARR: In the fall of 1929, you became the first principal of the new Roosevelt Jr. High.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mr. Russell Baker speaks.

NARR: Mr. Russell Baker, now of Middletown, former superintendant of Hamilton schools.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Mrs. Martha Rayfuse speaks.

NARR: Mrs. Martha Rayfuse, teacher at Roosevelt the first year you were there. And now, a former student at Roosevelt...

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Martha Hetterich Flatt speaks.

NARR: Mrs. Martha Hetterich Flatt, who now lives in Cincinnati.

MUSIC: (offstage on tape: "Wilson Junior High Song")...fade under

NARR: In 1938 you became principal of Wilson Junior High. For 25 years, you have shepherded some 20, 000 students through their junior high years.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Miss Wittman speaks.

NARR: Miss Lillian Wittman, Dean of Girls at Wilson.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Jerry Schick speaks.

NARR: Mr. Jerry Schick, one of your students during the war years—and now a teacher at Wilson.

We even have a second-generation Wilsonite here this afternoon...(Carolyn and Eleanor Milliken Latimer come onstage).

Miss Carolyn Latimer and her mother, Eleanor Milliken Latimer, who also attended Wilson.

NARR: One of your proudest accomplishments—and rightly so—has been membership in the 'long committee' for 13 years. This is a real honor—since only one hundred principals from all over the country are invited to participate..

OFFSTAGE VOICES: Mr. Bulow, Dr. Dickey, and Mr. Hammons speak.

NARR: These gentlemen are, of course, Mr. Theodore Bulow, who will be the new principal of Wilson...Dr. Lester Dickey, superintendent of schools...and Mr. Abe Hammons, new assistant principal.

Also very much a part of your life at Wilson have been...(Mrs. Engel and Mrs. Wehr come onstage).

Mrs. Colleen Engel and Mrs. Betty Wehr—your indispensable secretaries.

NARR: Many letters have come from your former teachers at Wilson. We'll turn those over to you so you can read them at your leisure. And we might even let you relax for a minute, right now, while we introduce some of the former teachers who are in the audience:

(INTRODUCE TEACHERS, HAVE THEM STAND)

NARR: This fall will be the end of an era for Wilson and for you—but it will be a beginning, too, as you start a new career—as representative for Scholastic Magazine in

eight counties in Ohio and Indiana. Also, you will continue as president of the Hamilton Cancer Society...as a member of Rotary...and with other civic and church responsibilities.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: excerpt from a letter from Rev. Goist is read.

NARR: That was a letter from Rev. Mr. Wilbur Goist of First Methodist Church, who was unable to be here this afternoon.

MUSIC: (Offstage on tape..."In The Good Old Summertime")...fade under.

NARR: We know how much you're looking forward to spending many happy hours at the family cottage at Lake George, Indiana. You'll be pulling those big bass...and living a well-deserved "life of Riley" during the summer months.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Charles Milligan speaks.

NARR: This story wouldn't be complete without Mr. Charles Milligan, former physics teacher at Hamilton High. He has been almost one of the family since you built your cottages together—and next door to each other—at Lake George in 1933.

NARRATOR CONTINUES:

Remember that ambition of yours way back in the Middletown yearbook...to become "man of the family"? Well, you really achieved it, by becoming the father of three girls. First came Ruth, who tried—but just couldn't get away from her duties with the Red Cross to be here today. After serving for two and one-half years in Korea, she left, last fall, to become assistant director of Red Cross in Europe, with offices in Stuttgart, Germany...and a staff of 50 persons, serving in France, Morocco and turkey. She is in Morocco, at the moment, and has cabled her best wishes for this program. (Read Cable?).

Next...

(Anna, Harold, John and Dick come on stage)

Anna...who is Mrs. Harold Howard. Mr. Howard was with the Hamilton Schools for several years, and is now treasurer for the Dayton City School District.

John, the older son, was a student at Wilson, and is now a freshman at Miami University.

And Dick, a sixth-grader, must have inherited his love of basketball from his grandfather.

Next...

(Mary, Ran and Margy come on stage)

Mary...Mrs. Ranald West, lives in Cincinnati. Mr. West is chairman of the board of Stockton-West-Burkhart Advertising Agency. Their children are Patty, who lives in San Francisco with her husband and two children.

Margy, who also has two lively young ones—in Cincinnati.

Their son Steve is a freshman at Stanford University.

NARR: So...these are your friends...this is your family. This is your life.

(Present book)

At least it's as much of your successful, rewarding 70 years as we could crowd into an hour. And we know there's a challenging, rewarding future ahead.

NARR: (looks inquiringly toward stage wing) Has it come through? Good. A telephone call has just come through from Washington...from the White House, in fact...and I think you'll all recognize the voice...

OFFSTAGE VOICE: (PRES. KENNEDY on tape)—ASKING WHAT'S GOING ON...A PARTY...ETC.

OFFSTAGE VOICE: (on tape)...Yes, this is quite a party—for John Elwell, in appreciation of the 37 years he's given to the Hamilton schools...and school children. (PAUSE) You say you'd like to sing a chorus of "Auld Lang Syne" for him? Fine...you tell when to join in...

MUSIC: on tape—JACK, JACKIE AND CAROLINE SING. WHEN "JACK" SAYS, "EVERYBODY TOGETHER", NARRATOR ENCOURAGES AUDIENCE TO JOIN IN.

NARR: This program, except possibly for the very last part, has been planned by the Wilson PTA, with Mrs. William Duersch a tireless chairman.

(MRS. DUERSCH COMES ON STAGE)

New, before we adjourn to the cafeteria—and we hope you'll all go down and visit with Mr. Elwell and have refreshments—I would like to present Mrs. Sherman Gurr and Mr. Jack Ernst, president and vice-president of the Wilson PTA.

(MR. ERNST PRESENTS GIFT)

[End of script...Photos follow]



**John W Elwell**





### **John W Elwell and Family**

Front Row: Dick Howard (grandson), Mearl Ball Elwell (wife), John W Elwell

Back Row: Harold Howard (son-in-law), John Howard (grandson), Anna Elwell Howard (daughter),

Mary Elwell West (daughter), Margy Wachs (granddaughter)

(Photo taken by Ranald West)



**Wilson Junior High School**

## John W. Elwell, Wilson Principal, Will Resign; Noteworthy Career In Education Spans 37 Years

By JIM NEWTON  
Journal-News Staff Writer

A most successful career in education—and an “institution” in learning here for more than 37 years—is ending one phase and beginning another.

John W. Elwell, the dean of Hamilton public school education and principal of Wilson Junior High School for the last 25 years, is resigning his position at the end of the present school year. He will begin a new career as representative of Scholastic Magazine, a national school publication, representing four counties in Indiana and four in Ohio.

A man who refuses to quit at the age of 70, Mr. Elwell long has been revered for his stable philosophy of an orderly classroom, a strong academic curriculum, and a never-ending drive for maximum individual achievement.

### Log House

Born in a log house in Franklin County, Ind., he attended elementary school in Springfield Township of that county, and was graduated from Brookville (Ind.) High School in 1909.



MR. ELWELL  
... young at 70

His first teaching assignment was in September of 1909, in a one-room school in Beech Grove (Franklin County) Ind., and a year later—at the age of 18—

he was principal of a three-room school in Mt. Carmel, Ind. The three rooms included 11 grades, and Mr. Elwell was the principal and the only high school teacher for the three grades of high school.

The fourth grade of high school was held in another building, in another town. He held this position for two years, in spite of objections from some folks who thought an 18-year-old youth was too young to be principal. Some of the high school pupils were older than the teacher-principal.

Mr. Elwell attended Marion (Ind.) Normal School during the summer of 1909, and attended Indiana University during the summers of 1910 through 1913.

### Bachelor's Degree

He was a teacher and assistant principal at Middletown, Ind., during the 1912-1913 school year, and in September of 1913 enrolled at Indiana University as a full-time student, graduating from that school with a bachelor's degree in June of 1915.

He married Mearl Ball on Sept. 2, 1915, the same month he started

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## John Elwell Will Retire

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School in 1929, and served in that position until 1938, when he was appointed principal of Wilson Junior High School.

In February of 1916, Mr. Elwell joined the faculty of the new Hamilton High School, teaching ancient history and physical geography. He was also the school basketball coach for the rest of that season, and throughout the 1916-1917 season, using the YMOA gymnasium for practice and games.

In June of 1917 he was named head of the efficiency department of the time study division of Plant 2, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., Akron, and remained there until September of 1918.

From September of 1918 until 1925, he worked at Akron, Ind., (moving from one Akron to another) as a partner in a lumber business with his father-in-law. During the 1922-23 school year, he also served as physics teacher and basketball coach at the Akron (Ind.) High School.

He and his wife's father operated a lumber business at Crawfordsville, Ind., from 1925 until 1927, when Mr. Elwell returned to Hamilton High School as a physics teacher.

### First Principal

He was named the first principal of the new Roosevelt Junior High

School in 1929, and served in that position until 1938, when he was appointed principal of Wilson Junior High School.

In September of 1963 he will begin his career as representative of the national school magazine, serving Butler, Clinton, Greene and Warren Counties in Ohio, and Wayne, Union, Fayette and Franklin Counties in Ohio.

Active in fraternal, church and school affairs, Mr. Elwell served as president of the Franklin Discussion Group of Ohio Principals Association for two years, and was a member of Akron (Ind.) Town Council for two years.

He is a member of the board of trustees of the First Methodist Church, and is now serving as president of the Hamilton Butler County Unit, American Cancer Society.

Mr. Elwell is also a member of the National Education Association, the Ohio Education Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the Southwestern Ohio Teachers Association. For the last 13 years he has been a member of the "Long Group," a small group of junior high and senior high school principals with a national membership of 100 educators.

### Good Health

Possessing unusually good health and having the stamina of a man much younger than 70 years, he has not missed a day of school for more than 20 years because of illness.

John Elwell is a deservedly proud man. He has been a leader in education in Hamilton for more than a quarter-century. He is equally proud of his family; his wife and three daughters.

His youngest daughter, Mrs. Ranald (Mary) West, Hyde Park, Cincinnati, is the wife of an executive in an advertising agency in Cincinnati; another daughter, Mrs. Harold (Anna) Howard, Dayton, is the wife of Harold Howard, director of business affairs in the Dayton City School District, and the eldest daughter, Miss Ruth Elwell, is an assistant director of Red Cross in Europe, with offices in Stuttgart, Germany, and a staff of 50 persons serving France, Morocco and Turkey.

An enthusiastic gardener with the proverbial "green thumb," and an ardent woodworker, he plans to spend his leisure hours pursuing these hobbies and "spending a lot more time at our cottage" on Lake George, Ind., the family's summer retreat for 28 years.

Newspaper Article About John W Elwell