



Clarence H. Linder

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1903-1994

By Walter L. Robb

At his memorial service on May 7, 1994, celebrating the life of Clarence H. Linder, three of his grandchildren may have said it best. He was above all, a gentleman, a kind parent, a master storyteller, and a warm friend.

To those of us in the engineering profession, and to those in his church, he was a leader, always thinking of ways to improve the world we live in. Clarence led the drive to establish the National Academy of Engineering. He lamented that the academically oriented National Academy of Sciences ignored the translation from basic research to the development of real products (an issue that continues to be debated). In modest triumph, he was a founding member of the National Academy of Engineering and in 1970 became its first full-time president.

Clarence received both bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Texas. In 1924 he began his General Electric (GE) career in typical fashion, on turbine night test. He qualified for the second class of the advanced engineering course and later served as an instructor for these courses.

Clarence had assignments throughout the Schenectady Works, which included serving as superintendent of the Searchlight Department, a rapidly growing and critical business at the start of World War II. During the 1940s he was

assistant manager of the Schenectady plant, often filling in for an ill works manager. In 1951 he was named manager of the Major Appliance Division, and he had a key role in the creation of Appliance Park in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 1953 Clarence was appointed vice-president of engineering for the company, and in that position he traveled widely to raise the standard of engineering throughout GE and throughout the world. Then, in 1960, Ralph Cordiner asked Clarence to become group executive for the Electric Utilities Group, which was then badly in need of a highly creditable general manager in the wake of a price-fixing scandal. As Mr. Cordiner said, "Clarence has everyone's respect."

Clarence's retirement in 1963 marked the start of another career aimed at upgrading the status of—and respect for—engineers in this country. It began with his leadership in founding the Engineering Joint Council and the construction of a new headquarters in New York City. The Council's objective was to bring together the leaders of all of the nation's various engineering bodies.

Clarence was himself a leader in a number of professional groups. He was a fellow and president of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, from which he received the Haraden Pratt Award in 1972. He was a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and a member of the American Society for Engineering Education and the National Society of Professional Engineers. He served on the executive committee of the Thomas Alva Edison Trustees and was active in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Corporation and at Harvard University, Vermont Academy, and Union College.

Clarence received honorary degrees from Clarkson College, Lehigh University, Union College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Texas in 1962.

In 1970 in a talk at Union College on the future of engineering in the United States, Clarence emphasized British architect Nicholas Butler's definition of engineering as "the link, the bridge between man and nature; a bridge over which

man passes to get into nature to control it, guide it, to understand it, and a bridge over which nature and its forces pass to get into man's field of interest and service."

Further in this remarkable speech, Clarence said; "About two thousand years ago Vitruvius, the Roman engineer, observed that the engineer 'should be a man of letters, a skillful draftsman, a mathematician, familiar with historical studies, a diligent student of philosophy, acquainted with music, not ignorant of medicine, learned in the opinions of lawyers, familiar with astronomy and astronomical calculations. He should be fair-minded, loyal, and what is more important, without avarice, for no work can be done, truly done, without good faith and clean hands. Let the engineer not be greedy, nor have his mind busied with acquiring gifts, but let him with seriousness guard his dignity by keeping a good name.'"

What a wonderful description of Clarence Hugo Linder!

Clarence remains, today and for the future, a model and inspiration for engineers.