

Taylor Downer Lewis

April 24, 1911 — March 1, 1969

Taylor D. Lewis, professor of civil engineering, died unexpectedly at the age of fifty-seven. A cardiac condition had necessitated a rest from University responsibilities during the fall semester, but he was actively teaching again at the time of his brief, final illness.

Professor Lewis was born in Detroit, Michigan. He received the B.S. degree in civil engineering from the University of Michigan in 1934 and, in 1937, a certificate from the Bureau for Street Traffic Research at Harvard University. He was awarded the degree of civil engineer by the University of Michigan in 1950.

Taylor Lewis began his professional career in 1934 with the Connecticut State Highway Department. In 1937 he became highway safety engineer with the Globe Indemnity Company in New York City. From 1938-40, he served as traffic engineer for the cities of Wichita, Kansas, and Gary, Indiana.

Called to active duty in the army in 1940, Professor Lewis was released in 1946, after service in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany, as a lieutenant colonel in the Field Artillery. He was subsequently promoted to colonel in the Army Reserve.

After World War II, Professor Lewis resumed his career in engineering as a research assistant at the Bureau of Highway Traffic at Yale University. He came to Cornell as an assistant professor of civil engineering in 1946, and was promoted to associate professor in 1949 and professor in 1955. He was head of the Department of Transportation Engineering from 1954 until 1966.

During the summers of 1949 and 1950, Professor Lewis coordinated field work in Alaska and Greenland for the University's arctic research program. Other short term professional assignments included civil engineer for the Panama Canal Company (1951), operations analyst with the Operations Research Office of the Johns Hopkins University (1952-53), and senior visiting fellow, British Road Research Laboratory (1960-61). During the 1967-68 academic year, he was engaged in transportation systems planning with Freeman, Fox, Wilbur Smith, and Associates in London, England. Professor Lewis served as a consultant, beginning in 1953, to the Operations Research Office of the Department of the Army. He served as a traffic consultant to several municipalities, including Ithaca, and often was called upon to advise the Board on Traffic Control at Cornell. He was frequently called to serve as an expert witness in court cases.

Professor Lewis was registered as a professional engineer in Connecticut, Indiana, and New York. He was a member of the honorary societies Sigma Xi and Chi Epsilon. A fellow in the American Society of Civil Engineers, he served as chairman of the Highway Division's Committee on Significance of Tests for Highway Materials; locally, he served as president of the Ithaca Section of ASCE in 1959-60. He also held membership in the Institute of Traffic Engineers, Highway Research Board, Operations Research Society of America, American Road Builders Association, and American Society of Testing Materials. In ASTM, he was a member of committees on road and paving materials, and the effect of water on bituminous mixtures. He was the author of many papers and articles in the areas of traffic engineering and highway materials.

Something of the extent to which Taylor Lewis was respected as a traffic engineer in the Ithaca community is evident from these words of Charles Chatfield, news editor for WHCU:

Taylor Lewis, from the public works department point of view, was not a professor. He was one of their boys. He was a man who had highly specialized engineering knowledge of traffic and parking problems. His recommendations, even the ones considered too unpolitic to adopt, were considered sound. Taylor Lewis, in the capacity of traffic constant, was trusted for his good sense, and therefore he was respected. ... In essence, the service that Professor Taylor Lewis gave Ithaca was a high standard for those who attempt to bridge the distance between a campus and a city hall.

Taylor Lewis served the community in many ways other than as a traffic constant. He served as a member of the village board in Cayuga Heights and as captain of the fire company. Interested in sailing, he had been commodore of the Ithaca Yacht Club. He was also an ardent skier and tended to chafe under the enforced slowdown in physical activities this past winter.

To his students and colleagues, Taylor was a good teacher, sympathetic adviser, and warm friend. If students ever thought early in a course that his teaching was underorganized, they came to learn later that it was by intent. His laboratory courses in highway materials were open-ended experiences that brought benefits far beyond mere proficiency in performing standard tests. Students benefited also from his patience in letting them approach a task their own way before quietly offering a then-obviously-better alternative.

Professor Lewis is survived by his wife, Clara Bartholow Lewis, his daughter, Clare, and his sons, Forbes and Samuel.

Donald J. Belcher, Ta Liang, James W. Spencer