

Walter Wendell Cotner

February 27, 1896 — June 10, 1970

Walter Wendell Cotner, professor emeritus of electrical engineering, was born in Lima, Ohio, on February 27, 1896, the son of Jacob B. and Carrie H. Cotner. Upon obtaining his B.S. in E. E. degree at Ohio Northern in 1925, he came to Cornell as an instructor in electrical engineering, and continued his formal study, receiving the E. E. degree in 1928, and the M.E.E. degree in 1932. Remaining at Cornell, he became assistant professor in 1939, advanced to professor and, upon his retirement in 1964, to professor emeritus.

Throughout his career, even before coming to Cornell, teaching was his dominant interest. He gave of his time and talent with full devotion to the student's needs both for instruction and for counsel. He served as adviser to the student branch of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (now the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) and to several classes of undergraduate students in the field of electrical engineering.

With a professional competence extending well beyond the "academic," Professor Cotner maintained a life-long interest in the broader aspects of engineering, and was active in the engineering profession beyond the limits of the campus. His summers and sabbatic leaves were devoted to varied research, design, and consulting experiences in industry. These experiences were rewarded by patents issued to him, and by the enhancement of his teaching effectiveness, both in the laboratory and in the classroom.

His academic role at Cornell included responsibility for teaching junior-year circuit theory, electrical machinery, basic electronics, and industrial electronics. During World War II, in addition to his on-campus duties, he taught extramural courses in electronics to industrial groups in Ithaca, Elmira, Binghamton, and Sidney. During a sabbatic leave, his work for the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Corporation on electronic motor controls resulted in two patents. His summer activities included employment as a senior field engineer for the New York State Power Authority and involved rehabilitation of two 80-mile-long, 110-kilovolt transmission lines. He made studies of transmission circuits for the New York Telephone Company.

He served as secretary, and as chairman of the Ithaca Section of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, and as commander of the local flotilla of the U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. His affiliations included the Ithaca Power Squadron, Acacia Fraternity, Phi Mu Delta Fraternity, and the Masonic Blue Lodge, Chapter, and Council.

Prior to his service in the Signal Corps of the United States Army in 1918-19, Professor Cotner was a teacher and principal in the Allen County, Ohio, public school system. This teaching experience, combined with his subsequent studies at Ohio Northern and at Cornell, led him to establish a firm philosophy that held undergraduate teaching and advising to be of highest importance. His research and industrial activities were carefully chosen to advance his effectiveness on campus.

The possessor of a ready wit, Curly, as he was affectionately called by his colleagues, was always prepared with an amusing story or a wry comment on the foibles of contemporary civilization. Proud to be an American, he kept himself well informed on civic matters and participated actively in them. Aldermen, mayors, state and federal officials were among the recipients of his many suggestions and comments.

A keen interest in the progressing state of the art in manufacturing prompted Professor Cotner to obtain and restore to their original condition many examples of the manufacturer's best products down through the years. His collection of radio receivers dating back some fifty years, all in their original cabinets, perfectly restored and in perfect operating condition, is but one example of his interest in man's material advancement.

He was married August 17, 1935, to Coral E. Jack, who survives him, together with a son, Calvin B. Cotner, and a daughter, Jacqueline M. Cotner. He is survived also by five younger brothers, Wilbur C. Cotner of Van Wert, Ohio; Herbert Cotner of Wapakoneta, Ohio; James M. Cotner of Lima, Ohio; Milo Cotner of Birmingham, Michigan; and Bernard W. Cotner of Lima, Ohio; and a sister, Mrs. Cecil Ramga of Canton, Ohio.

Robert E. Osborn, Howard G. Smith, Everett M. Strong