

Will Miller Sawdon

January 1, 1873 — April 1, 1952

Will Miller Sawdon, professor emeritus of Mechanical Engineering, and one of the community's most beloved and respected citizens, passed away Tuesday, April 1, 1952 at his home in Ithaca. He was 79 years old, and had been an active member of the Cornell University Faculty for forty-one years. Professor Sawdon was born January 1, 1873 in Aurora, Indiana, the son of George W. and Annie R. (Miller) Sawdon. A district school in the town of his birth provided his early education, after which he attended the Aurora High School. He was graduated with a bachelor of science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Purdue University in 1898. As an undergraduate, he was a captain in the Cadet Corps, and president of the Emerson Society. He spent the next six years in the middle west gaining both practical experience and facility as a teacher: he taught mathematics and manual training at the Detroit School for Boys; a summer was spent with Cincinnati Shaper Company; for three years he taught at Kansas State College, after which he served as assistant professor of Mechanical Engineering at Armour Institute of Technology.

In September, 1904, Professor Sawdon joined the Engineering Faculty at Cornell as instructor in experimental engineering. He combined his teaching duties with various research projects and was awarded his masters degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1908. At that time he was advanced to Assistant Professor, and in 1919 he was appointed to a full professorship. For many years, Professor Sawdon served as secretary of the Cornell University Engineering Experiment Station. In this capacity, he directed its numerous and diverse projects and investigations, and prepared its scientific reports. He was responsible for the leather belting laboratory when this was the only center of its kind in the country. He pioneered work and initiated courses in heating, ventilating, and refrigeration, and contributed extensively to the literature in these fields. His broad practical knowledge combined with his versatility in so many phases of engineering work made him widely sought as a consultant by many industries and individuals.

Although he was officially retired from active teaching in June, 1941, such a valuable member of the engineering staff could not be overlooked when the university inaugurated its V-12 training program for the Navy. Consequently, Professor Sawdon was immediately recalled to teach the mechanical laboratory courses. He worked without vacation or recess until the war training program was completed in 1945, when he was again retired. Professional and academic societies to which Professor Sawdon belonged included: The American Society of Heating and

Ventilating Engineers, The American Society for Engineering Education, Sigma Xi, Gamma Alpha, Atmos, The American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the Cornell Society of Engineers. Many of these societies honored him by election to executive office. Professor Sawdon was among the first to register as a Professional Engineer. His extensive knowledge made him a valuable member of the University Library Committee.

Although Professor Sawdon's primary interest was in teaching and technical research and development, coupled with an active participation in the affairs of the University and national scientific societies, he, nevertheless, found time to pursue his special avocation of civic and community service. This, for him, was a genuine avocation, for it called him away from his work on the hill, he followed it with vigor and ardor, and without any financial remuneration or the slightest thought of any personal gain. He had a sincere faith in his fellowmen, and an unselfish belief that this entire community deserved to benefit from any special talents which he might have to contribute to its welfare. With this thought in mind, he accepted an appointment to his first public office on the Municipal Civil Service Commission. His distinguished service on the Board of Public Works over a twenty-three year period is testimony of his technical ability and wise planning. He was primarily responsible for the development of the city's water supply system, its reservoirs, filter plant, and distribution system. He not only did the bulk of the engineering work involved, but he established it on a sound financial basis so that while this utility is operated by the municipality, it does not have to be financed from taxes.

Although Will Sawdon was never, in any sense of the word, a politician, the Republican party persuaded him to be its candidate for Mayor of the city in 1923. He won the election by an overwhelming majority and served the two year term without pay. At the time Professor Sawdon's candidacy was announced, the incumbent mayor said: "It would be difficult to find a citizen of Ithaca more interested in its welfare than Will Sawdon. I know his great capability, his earnestness and thoroughness, and above all, his great love for the city which has been his home for twenty years." This fine tribute to Professor Sawdon's ability and character is especially significant because it came from "Lou" Smith who has also unselfishly devoted much of his time to community welfare.

Further evidence of his interest in the social well-being of others is to be found in the enthusiasm and energy he devoted to his church, the Masonic fraternity, and the Rotary Club. He was a lifelong member of the Methodist Church, serving as trustee of the First Methodist Church, a member of the official board, a trustee of the Wesley Foundation Board and treasurer of the foundation. As an active Mason for many years, Professor Sawdon was a member of the original planning board which undertook the construction and financing of a new temple, following the complete destruction of the lodge rooms by fire thirty years ago. He was president of the Corporation at the

time the temple was built, and for a long time a member of the Board of Trustees. He was past high priest of Eagle Chapter 58, Royal Arch Masons, past commander of St. Augustine Commandry 38, Knights Templar, and prelate through 1950. He was also instrumental in establishing a DeMolay chapter in Ithaca, and served for ten years as chairman of its advisory council. Professor Sawdon was an ardent Rotarian, who rarely missed a meeting. Even in the most inclement weather during the past winter, he summoned the courage and effort necessary to arrive at the regular Wednesday noon meetings of Rotary where he would exchange a friendly greeting with his associates in the community and share their responsibilities. He also took an active interest in the Tompkins County Tuberculosis and Public Health Association.

During World War I, Professor Sawdon was inspector in the United States Fuel Administration, and during the summer of 1919 was inspector for Jersey City at the Carnegie Steel plant. He served on the Board of Directors of Treman, King and Company for several years.

In 1902, at Manhattan, Kansas, Professor Sawdon married Adelaide F. Wilder, who survives him. Surviving also are two sons, George W. of Garden City, L. I., and Will W. of Palo Alto, California; three daughters, Mrs. Walter C. Guthrie of Pavilion, Mrs. Warren Taylor of Plattsburg, and Miss Agnes F. who lives with her mother.

Rarely indeed has Cornell University had the distinction of having as a member of its faculty, one who has contributed so much to the welfare of the community as did Will Miller Sawdon. His sympathetic understanding, his wise council and cordial smile will long be remembered by the thousands of students whom he inspired. And a host of friends in the community will cherish his memory for years to come.

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