

# Eric Vail Howell

*August 29, 1891 — August 5, 1978*

Eric Vail Howell, professor of engineering mechanics and materials emeritus, was born in Riverhead, New York, in 1891. His father was an attorney in nearby Southampton where Eric attended public schools before entering Cornell to study civil engineering. In 1914 he received the degree of Civil Engineer, which at that time was the official first (bachelor's) degree in the field. He went to Pennsylvania State College as an instructor in 1916-17 and then returned to Cornell to take his Master of Civil Engineering degree in 1918. He was appointed an instructor in the same year and began a professional affiliation with the College of Engineering that continued until his retirement in 1956.

Until 1948 mechanics and materials were taught separately in civil engineering and mechanical engineering, with separate orientations. In civil engineering the emphasis was on the teaching of mechanics as a base for structural and hydraulic design, and Professor Howell taught in this mode for many years. In style and manner he was formal and dignified, though not without a dry sense of humor. Along the way, he collaborated with faculty colleagues George and Rettger in writing several editions of the textbook *Mechanics of Materials*.

In 1948 the two departments of mechanics and materials from civil engineering and mechanical engineering were consolidated into a separate autonomous department, and Professor Howell became a member of that faculty.

During his years at Cornell, he also performed engineering services for the Land and Highway Division of the State of New York, the Finger Lakes State Parks Commission, and the City of Ithaca Engineer's Office.

He married the former Jessie M. Adkinson in 1915, with whom he shared a strong interest in contract bridge. Professor and Mrs. Howell were active in bridge circles in both the Cornell and Ithaca communities for many years.

Professor Howell was an avid golfer and a long-time member of the Ithaca Country Club; he was also a member of the Ithaca Power Squadron and the Ithaca Hobasco Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons. His professional affiliations included the American Society for Engineering Education and the Cornell Society of Engineers.

When Professor Howell retired in 1956, he was among the last of the civil engineering faculty who had served Cornell during the difficult years of the 1920s and 1930s, and on into the changing era following World War II.

*Richard H. Lance, John F. McManus*