

Byron W. Saunders

June 27, 1914 — January 4, 1987

Byron Winthrop Saunders, retired dean of the University Faculty and professor emeritus of operations research and industrial engineering, died in Ithaca, New York, on January 4, 1987. When he retired in 1979, he had been a professor at Cornell for thirty-two years. He was always deeply involved in university and related affairs; at the time of his death he was president of the Association of Cornell University Emeritus Professors, an organization he helped found.

Byron was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 27, 1914. He received his B.S. degree in electrical engineering from Rhode Island State College (now the University of Rhode Island) in 1937 and spent the next ten years with the Radio Corporation of America and other industrial firms. In 1945 he received his M.S. degree in engineering economics from Stevens Institute of Technology. Byron's formal education and years as a full-time practicing engineer had a profound effect on his outlook on engineering education. He recognized early the key role that the efficient design of manufacturing and production systems plays in cost and output, and that viewpoint greatly influenced his outlook on engineering education in the School of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research as a professor and later as the director. He was always a strong champion of a balance between applied and theoretical work in his discipline.

In 1947 Byron joined the faculty at Cornell as an assistant professor of industrial and engineering administration in the Sibley School of Mechanical Engineering. He was promoted to associate professor in 1951 and to professor in 1957. He spent the academic year 1960-61 as the Joseph Lucas Visiting Professor at the University of Birmingham, England. There he investigated the design of manufacturing systems, including both production and warehousing, and he later used much of the new information in the development of courses. His stay in Birmingham broadened his perspective on engineering, and he made many friends for himself and the university. He was invited to return to Birmingham in 1978 and spent another very pleasant and fruitful sabbatical year there.

He served as acting head of the Department of Industrial Engineering from 1962 to 1964 and as head the following year. When the department was reorganized as the School of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research within the College of Engineering, Byron was appointed director, a position he held until 1975. During the academic years 1971-74 he was also the director of continuing education in the College of Engineering.

In 1974 Byron was elected dean of the University Faculty by his colleagues. His election was a fitting tribute to his willingness to be involved in a broad range of college and university activities and the recognition of the outstanding job that he did in every area in which he was involved. In every assignment, whether professional or administrative, Byron participated with full effort and dedicated himself to top achievement. His loyalty, integrity, and high moral and performance standards were always evident. While serving as dean of the University Faculty, Byron exhibited his strong support for academic freedom during the so-called Ky incident in December 1975. A speech by then vice president Ky of South Vietnam was disrupted by those protesting his policies. Byron urged the faculty to take a stand on the issue. His opinion was stated forcefully in his annual report: "There can be no honest search for truth, no honest hearing of differing opinions and differing perceptions, if one allows the closing off of views, no matter how objectionable they might be or how objectionable the people who are voicing these views." He served with distinction as dean until 1978. Then, following his sabbatical year in his much-beloved England, he retired in 1979.

Byron was a fellow of the American Institute of Industrial Engineers and chairman of its Visitor's Group, which performs accreditation inspections of industrial and systems engineering programs. In addition, he was a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and chairman of its Materials Handling Division. He was a member of the American Society of Engineering Education and served as chairman of the Industrial Engineering Division and as chairman of the National Council of Industrial Engineering Academic Department Heads. He was also a member of the American Association of University Professors, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Institute of Management Sciences.

In the College of Engineering Byron served as chairman of the Special Committee on Engineering Design, as chairman of the Engineering Policy Committee, and as chairman of the Graduate Professional Programs Committee of the Engineering Division of the Graduate School. During his years in the college he also served as a consultant to several industrial concerns, including the General Electric Company and the Western Electric Company.

At the university level he was a member of the original Faculty Council and the first chairman of the council's Committee on Research Policy and Personnel. He was a member of the Nominating Committee, the Committee on Membership of the University Faculty, the Administrative Board of the Cornell University Council, and the University Senate. He served as chairman of the board of directors of Cornell United Religious Work and was the faculty adviser to the swimming team.

Byron's interests were broad and varied. For example, he served with energy and enthusiasm as an official at the Cornell track meets. Less noticeable, but equally enthusiastic, were his behind-the-scenes responses to the financial needs of many groups at Cornell and elsewhere: he was an outstanding practitioner of quiet philanthropy.

For several years Byron was a member of the Faculty Committee on Music and later served as a consultant to the committee. When the committee was in dire financial straits and it looked as if the Statler and Bailey Hall concert series would have to be drastically cut back, he worked with former university president Dale Corson to organize a fund-raising campaign, the Fund for Quality Concerts. That effort was highly successful and continues today. Byron was also chairman of the Friends of Music of Cornell University.

Byron and his wife, Miriam, were active members of the First Unitarian Church of Ithaca, where Byron served at one time as chairman of the board of trustees. He was devoted to the church, which occupied a significant portion of his time and energy. Both he and Miriam were involved for many years with the Unitarian-Universalist conference center on Star Island at the Isles of Shoals, off Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

It was because of his great attraction to things marine and his knowledge of the Shoals that Byron became a strong behind-the-scenes force in the founding of the Shoals Marine Laboratory on Appledore Island, Maine. (This is a joint venture of Cornell and the University of New Hampshire that has become one of the most successful marine science programs in the country.) He was also a member of the board of trustees of the Sea Education Association at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, an organization that provides intensive nautical education for undergraduates of many colleges.

Byron was very active in community affairs. He served as a member of the Town of Ithaca Planning Board, as chairman of a citizens' committee to establish the northeast water district in the Town of Ithaca, and as president of the Eastwood Commons Residents Association.

Byron had a phenomenal memory for names and faces: he was able to call by name virtually all his students, including those who had graduated many years ago. He was very well liked by his students and helped them in many ways to realize their full potential. He kept in touch with many of them as their careers developed. In recognition of Byron's reputation as a humane and caring educator, the Byron W. Saunders Award was established in 1970 in the College of Engineering. This award, accompanied by a cash prize and medal, is presented annually to the senior who achieves the best academic record in the School of Operations Research and Industrial Engineering.

Byron was a devoted family man who took great pride in his children, William C. Saunders of Urbana, Illinois; Martha E. Nabation of Ottawa, Ontario; and Carolyn E. Munger of Seattle, Washington, as well as in his five grandchildren. His wife, Miriam Wise Saunders, whom he married on December 28, 1942, shared deeply his interests and ideals. She resides at 17C Strawberry Hill Road, Ithaca.

Byron expressed his credo in *Who's Who in America*: "My primary motivation and basis for decision making has been to try as best I can to help others as I have been helped and to make the world just a little bit better for my having been here." Throughout his life he more than achieved his ambition. He will be greatly missed by his family, his many friends and colleagues, and his former students.

William L. Maxwell, Martin W. Sampson, Jr., Robert E. Bechhofer