

ERNEST LINCOLN SPENCER**1913 - 1975**

Ernest L. Spencer, Professor of Civil Engineering and Chairman of the Department at Northeastern University, died suddenly on October 18, 1975, at the age of 62. Long active in professional societies, he was President of the Boston Society of Civil Engineers in 1970. He had sustained a severe heart attack in April, 1974, and subsequently underwent open-heart surgery for the implantation of artificial valves. His decision to undergo this serious operation made it possible for him to return to work full time from September, 1974, to the time of his death. He would not have wanted it otherwise.

Ernie was friend to literally hundreds of students, faculty, alumni, and staff, and although he gave civil engineering matters top priority, he was a kind of good will emissary to all parts of the University. A graduate of Norwood High School, he received a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Northeastern in 1936, and spent the next three years in engineering practice, as chief of survey party for E. M. Brooks, as engineering aide for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, and as assistant engineer at Jackson & Moreland. He joined the Northeastern faculty in 1939, received an MSCE from Harvard in 1943, and followed Emil Gramstorff and Charles O. Baird as department chairman, assuming that position in 1961.

He oversaw the growth of the civil engineering department from six full time faculty members to 22, and was instrumental in developing and strengthening programs at associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree levels. His own expertise was in concrete technology, in which he was a consultant throughout his career. He was, for four years, Chairman of the American Society for Testing and Materials, New England District, and was a member of the Prestressed Concrete Institute. A Fellow of ASCE, he was for six years Secretary-Treasurer of the Massachusetts Section. He was later Vice President, and in 1959 President of that Section. He was a member also of the American Society for Engineering Education, Tau Beta Pi, and Sigma Xi.

Ernest Lincoln Spencer was born in Norwood, Mass. on May 17, 1913, and in recent years made his home in Medfield. He was a member of the Medfield Planning Board for 12 years. Devoted to Northeastern University, he was generous in his support financially and in time and effort. He was Chairman of the Northeastern Diamond Anniversary Celebration Committee, and served on many academic groups, including the Committee on Graduate Study in Engineering and the College Tenure Committee. From 1961 to 1974 he was a member of the University Cabinet.

Students and faculty could depend on his office door being open at all times; his valued counsel was always available. Ernie's warmth, good humor, and dedication markedly influenced those who came within his large sphere of activity. Through his initiative and guidance, a chapter of Chi Epsilon, the national civil engineering honor society, was brought to Northeastern in 1965, and he was made a charter member. He continually gave his encouragement and assistance to the N. U. Student Chapter of ASCE.

Lighthearted in his approach to academic matters, he seldom underestimated the importance of problems to students and staff, and was always ready to lend his assistance and advice. Professor Spencer enjoyed maintaining communication with alumni, and visited many in cross-country trips in his beloved Saab. He took great pride in his mechanical ability, and was not above plunging into laboratory and maintenance problems to keep things in working order in the Botolph Building. In 1975 he helped initiate formation of a Visiting Committee of professional engineers to review programs and facilities in his department, in the interest of continuing improvement and upgrading of the learning experience made available to civil engineering students. He did not live to see the final report of that committee; it was dedicated to his memory. His presence will be sorely missed and long remembered by friends and associates.

Professor Spencer is survived by his wife, Doris E. (Howlett), by his son, Kennard A. of Littleton, by his mother, Mrs. Alice (Pettee) Spencer of Foxboro; by two brothers, Robert G. of Burbank, California, and Arthur L. of Boston, and by two grandchildren.

(Memoir by Robert L. Meserve)