

Millard Clayton Ernsberger

June 12, 1862 — January 25, 1940

The death of Emeritus Professor Millard Clayton Ernsberger at the Tompkins County Memorial Hospital on January 25, 1940, after a short illness, removed from the Engineering Faculty one of its ablest teachers.

Professor Ernsberger was born at Varick, New York, on June 12, 1862. He received the A.B. degree from the University of Rochester in 1888, entered a law office in New York City, and was admitted to the bar in 1891. While he was practicing law he became interested in the development of photography, and that pursuit led in 1897 to his appointment as manager of the pictorial department of the New York tribune. Meanwhile he was cultivating a more absorbing interest in the study of the rotary steam engine. In 1899 he went to work as a draftsman for the McIntosh-Seymour Company of Auburn, New York, builders of large steam engines, and there he trained himself so thoroughly that he became one of the company's designing engineers.

He had been employed by that company for seven years when his attention was drawn to a problem of education. There was a movement on foot at the University of Rochester to set up a department of engineering. He was consulted, as a graduate of that university engaged in the practice of engineering, and was retained as adviser. While that project was maturing he came to Cornell in 1906, earned the degree of mechanical engineer after two years of study, and served here for another year as instructor in Heat-Power Engineering.

In 1909 he organized the new department at the University of Rochester and remained there as its head until 1921, when he was drawn back to Cornell by the offer of a professorship of Heat-Power Engineering. He held this chair here until 1930, when he retired from teaching.

He was a member of Alpha Delta Phi, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Atmos and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

The wide range of Professor Ernsberger's abilities was exemplified by his successive interest in such various things as the practice of law, the development of photography, newspaper illustrating, the practice of engineering, and finally engineering education. He was by nature a scholar. Throughout his life he was an eager student of history, literature, architecture, and the natural sciences. He brought to his reading a critical appreciation, a retentive memory, and a mature judgment of values. He was an agreeable and inspiring companion.

He embodied in his life what the engineering colleges envisage for the future, a wide cultural background and a sound training in science as well as in its application to practical use. His lectures were models of logical precision and were delivered with scholarly diction and with a wealth of illustration from his wide knowledge of human achievement.