



## **Donald Sherman Clark**

**1906-1976**

### **A Tribute by William H. Corcoran**

**D**ON CLARK devoted seven days a week for more than 50 years to Caltech, and he was happy to do it. From 1925, when he came here as a freshman student until his death on October 2, he gave Caltech everything he had.

Don received his BS in 1929, his MS

in 1930, and his PhD in 1934. He was a teaching fellow and a teaching assistant during his graduate school years, and he then went through all the faculty ranks from instructor in mechanical engineering to emeritus professor of physical metallurgy.

His interest in research was the

dynamic behavior of metals, and he was greatly honored for his achievements. He and Dave Wood (who was first his student and then his colleague) received the Templin Metal Award from the American Society for Testing Materials in 1949. The same organization awarded him and Pol Duwez (professor of applied physics and materials science) the Dudley Medal in 1951. Don was the 1953 Campbell Memorial Lecturer for the American Society for Metals. He was president of the American Society for Metals in 1956-57, and national president of the engineering and science fraternity, Tau Beta Pi, in 1962-64.

As a metallurgist, Don had a special concern for materials and processes. Many a sophomore student would have been willing to guarantee that that concern was an all-consuming one. The students' name for his required course was "Memory 3." In fact, anyone who knew Don has to believe that God is probably now learning something about iron carbide diagrams that he never knew before.

Don's textbook *Engineering Materials and Processes*, which was first prepared in collaboration with Professor Howard Clapp, is now in its third edition, and more than 75,000 copies have been sold. Another textbook, written in collaboration with Professor Will Varney, was *Physical Metallurgy for Engineers*, and it is in a second edition, having sold over 50,000 copies.

Along with all this, Don handled a wide assortment of administrative functions at Caltech. In 1935 R. A. Millikan appointed him Director of Placement, and for 36 years he was the middleman between Caltech graduates and the corporations that were interested in hiring them.

In 1943 Dr. Millikan appointed him Director of the Alumni Association, and he served in that capacity until 1945. For 23 years, beginning in 1946, he was Secretary of the Alumni Association, and in 1965 the members of the Association tried to indicate their recognition of the quality of his devotion by establishing a fund in his name — the Donald S. Clark Alumni Award, to

be given to sophomores or juniors (preferably in the engineering option) who demonstrate leadership potential and superior academic performance. By 1967 the fund had grown sufficiently for the first four awards to be made.

He was editor of the Caltech *Alumni Review* from 1942 to 1943, and when the magazine's name was changed to *Engineering and Science* in September of that year, he was named its first editor-in-chief, a position he filled until 1946.

I think he served on essentially every faculty committee, and at one time he was vice chairman of the faculty and the faculty board.

I suspect that one of the jobs Don liked best at Caltech was the one he held for eight years — from 1934 to 1942 — as Resident Associate of Dabney House. He might have held it much longer, but World War II intervened and made it necessary for Caltech to use the facility for the Navy V-12 Program. Because I lived in Dabney House during Don's tenure there, I can testify that he was an outstanding RA. Though we students did almost everything to bother him, he really made us shape up. He had no trouble at all with matters of discipline. One shake of his head was good and sufficient warning to a wayward undergraduate to tread cautiously thereafter.

Don also did a lot to introduce culture to Caltech when he purchased a Hammond electric organ and installed it in Dabney House. It was used by everybody on campus for years — at no cost to the administration.

Don worked hard as a teacher and researcher. He kept records of everything, including the fact that he had some 4,400 students in his classes during his career. And though, in prewar days, the number of weekly student-faculty contact hours was higher than today, the incredible median number of such hours for Don from 1934 to 1942 was 22. (If you asked a faculty member today to have 22 hours of class, you might have a revolution on your hands.)

Don liked good things, especially Cadillacs. In the depression period, he was probably the only one around here

who drove one. He also liked bow ties, and he was probably the best advertisement for them that the industry has ever had. He enjoyed good food and good times, and he contributed some of his share to both as a chef. One of his specialties was crepes suzette.

The grounds of his home in Corona del Mar showed how much joy he took in gardening. For many years he also had a lovely home in San Marino, which he shared with his mother. It had one of the most beautiful gardens in the area. Even when he moved to an apartment in Pasadena, he chose one that had an outdoor patio that he could landscape and care for.

One aspect of Don's personality is unforgettable. He was a tough-minded, straightforward guy. Whatever he had on his mind, he said. My recollection is that from my student days on he felt complete freedom to tell me precisely what he thought on any subject. He never stopped. Once when he was ill enough to be confined to the little convalescent hospital across the street from St. Luke's, I got a hurry-up call to come up and see him. I don't think he necessarily wanted to *see* me, but he did want to tell me to do something — right now. He waved an injection-molded part for some device or other in my face and said, "Did you ever see such a poor construction job as that? Fix it."

Well, there I was, 56 years old, still being told by Don (who was 69) to fix something right now. And I did. If you know Don, you know that if I had left there without fixing it I would have been in real trouble.

Don gave a great deal to his students, to his colleagues — and to Caltech — *because* he was so straightforward and hard-driving. The legacy of a positive imprint like that is indeed a measure of a great life. I am very thankful to have known him. □

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*As RA of Dabney House back in the late 1930's, Don Clark must have helped his undergraduate housemate, William H. Corcoran, onto the right track at Caltech. Corcoran has since become professor of chemical engineering and vice president for Institute relations.*