

Of Engineers and Presidents

rewind

My father worked for the CB&Q Railroad all his life, so as a small child I always knew what an engineer did: he drove the train. Many years later, as a college student, I read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and came away with quite a different image of an engineer: that of a small businessman who owned and operated a steam engine that he traveled around the countryside so he could thresh farmers' wheat. While this understanding of an "engineer" was different from my image of the train engineer, I could see the connection.

It wasn't until I came to IIT that my concept of an engineer was really challenged. A mechanical engineer seemed self-evident, but I had to assimilate the concept of an electrical engineer, a civil engineer, or a fire protection engineer. Newer IIT programs in biomedical and computer science engineering have added more options to the mix. The work of professionals in these fields is surely a long way from that of the man who stoked a boiler and fired up a machine so gears, wheels, cogs, and belts could convert steam into miles traveled or separate grain from fodder.

While yesteryears' engineers may have been apprenticed entirely on the job, our current education system has moved the training of tomorrow's engineers into lecture halls, classrooms, and laboratories. So in roles as research scientists and teachers, many of today's engineers are college professors and university administrators. Between preparing lesson plans and grading papers, IIT's chemical engineer may be conducting experiments in a campus

laboratory even as her professional colleague in the private sector is doing product development for clients. An IIT architectural engineer may spend his morning in a departmental curriculum planning session before meeting with a graduate student to check on the progress of his dissertation research. Obviously, IIT's engineers experience a wide variety of professional activities, but "drive a train" or "operate a steam engine" are not lines you'll likely find on their resumes.

Which brings me to John L. Anderson—a former engineering student, lecturer, professor, dean, and provost—who has now stepped into the role of university president. He is in good historical company, as several of his predecessors came to occupy IIT's presidential suite by way of the engineering classroom, administrative office, and laboratory. When we add the names of men who served as CEOs of former schools that have since become part of IIT, we can find educators, jurists, economists, and even one who preceded Anderson on the lecture circuit—preacher Frank W. Gunsaulus. Anderson is indeed in good company.

The IIT Archives extends a sincere welcome to President Anderson. We look forward to his tenure as IIT's "chief engineer."

For more information about IIT's past presidents, see www.iit.edu/president/past_presidents.html.



Frank W. Gunsaulus
President, 1892–1921



Howard M. Raymond
President, 1922–1932



Willard E. Hotchkiss
President, 1933–37



George N. Carman
Director, 1896–1936



Dugald C. Jackson Jr.
Director, 1936–38



Fred A. Rogers
Co-director, 1938–1940



Clarence L. Clarke
Co-director, 1938–1940



Henry Townley Heald
President, 1937–1952



John T. Rettaliata
President, 1952–1973



Maynard P. Venema
President, 1973–74



Thomas Lyle Martin Jr.
President, 1974–1987



Meyer Feldberg
President, 1987–89



Henry R. Linden
President, 1989–1990



Lew Collens
President, 1990–2007