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The Responsibility of the Engineer to His Community

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This essay was presented as initiation requirement to Tau Beta Pi, honorary Engineering Fraternity.

Back in the long ago when man got his food by picking it from the trees or by killing game with his bare hands or crude stone axe, there was little responsibility of one to another. Each went his own way and lived almost independently of the others. As time went on, however, and civilization advanced, each individual became more and more responsible to his neighbor. To the farmer, merchant and manufacturer fell the responsibility of supplying the needs of their fellow men. The whole system of civilization was built on the foundation of trust and responsibility between men.

Now we come to the engineer's place in this system of civilization and his responsibility to his community. The engineer is an individual trained and specialized along certain scientific lines which are commercially applied. He is to our present system what lubrication is to an engine, absolutely indispensable. Without the engineer a greater part of our present rate of progress in invention and gaining scientific trust must cease. Very few great discoveries or inventions were the result of luck. Thousands of people had seen apples fall before Newton but it took the mind of Newton trained to think along scientific lines to read into this simple fact a deeper meaning.

No engineer today can be self-made. To him have been handed down the generations of human thought and experience. It is his duty to add his bit in thought and service and to pass them on, but to his present day and to his own community he owes the benefits of this knowledge and experience. He has borrowed from the toil of others and he cannot take and give nothing in return. He has been educated in the public schools, he may have received his technical training in a state university, all of which are benefits

given by his community and state and for which he is expected to give something in return in service to his fellow men.

To the engineer falls the responsibility of keeping pace with human progress. He must be a theorist as well as a dreamer. He must anticipate our needs and meet them as they come. Almost every modern development has been the product of engineering thought and effort. It was the engineer that made Hudson tunnels and Woolworth buildings possible.

The engineer's community is in many cases unlimited. The community served by men like Thomas A. Edison is world wide. To his immediate community the engineer is responsible for its up-building, such as proper lighting of streets, homes, and shops, proper layout of streets, new buildings and improvements, proper transportation, etc. He should feel it his duty to see that the public is best served by the present day engineering knowledge and experience.

Today when the name Engineer is comparatively new in its present meaning, though the profession itself has long existed, it is his duty to educate the people to appreciate this profession and especially to see that opportunity is given in the schools for the development of future engineers. And unless the profession is given its proper place in the minds of the people, future civilization and human progress must be the loser.

The engineer has taken much of the burden from human toil and it is the engineer's responsibility to continue to relieve human suffering and to give to the multitudes of toilers more time in which to enjoy the blessings of life. That they may give more time to making a life and less time to making a living.
