

[Sykes, Richard Eddy]

DR. R. E. SYKES, EDUCATOR, DIES
Retired St. Lawrence U. President Succumbs
LEFT MINISTRY TO SERVE SCHOOL
Occupied Pulpit in Little Falls After Graduation

Potsdam, Oct. 2 (AP)—Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes, 81, president emeritus of St. Lawrence University, died today in a hospital here where he had been a patient since Sept. 25.

Dr. Sykes's connection with St. Lawrence University began when he was nine years old. Leaving the farm near Canton on which he had been born, he moved with his parents into the village where the elder Sykes had obtained the position of steward in the newly organized college. The steward's job was to board the entire student body, numbering in those days about 40 men, and to run the farm that fed them.

Richard helped to do the chores, but he also found time to go to the Canton grammar school. Later he attended the academy, graduating from that institution at the age of 17.

Too Young for College

Believing that he was too young to go to college, the youth asked for a position as district school teacher. But he was small for his age and had had no experience, so the school trustees told him he could have a job provided he would accept a woman's salary—\$11 a month and "keep." Richard agreed and got a school in the little town of Madrid.

He taught until 1879 when he entered St. Lawrence with the class of '83, the class that left its record in the annals of the institution. For its entrance was marked by the first and only scientific cane rush between first and second year men, an event that has been transferred to fiction by the pen of Irving Bacheller, a member of the class of 1880.

Wrestled and Sang

In the college young Sykes distinguished himself as a wrestler and as tenor of the glee club. But he was concerned with much more serious things, for he had decided to become a minister. Accordingly graduation found him transferred to the theological school. His first appearance in a pulpit came during his senior year in college when he delivered an address in the Universalist church at Williamstown, Vt. Later, while a theological student, he substituted for Rev. James M. Pullman, a Universalist pastor in New York, for a six-months period.

His first church on leaving the school was in Little Falls, where he ministered from 1885 to 1895. While in Little Falls he married Miss Mabel Houghton, a member of his congregation.

His work there terminated when officials of the Universalist denomination prevailed upon him to go to Denver, Colo., to build up a struggling parish.

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He spent eight years in Denver, leaving to accept a call from the First Universalist Church of Malden, Mass., founded in 1649. Perhaps the most outstanding event of his Malden pastorate was the erection of a splendid new church building.

Served As Trustee

Meanwhile, his beloved alma mater, which he had been serving as a trustee, had grown from a struggling north country college into a thriving university, and in 1919 he was invited to become the president. Dr. Sykes—he had received the honorary degree of Doctor of Theology from St. Lawrence in 1906—accepted, taking over his duties on May 1 of that year. By an interesting coincidence the room assigned to him for an office was the very apartment that had been occupied by his father and mother in the days when they had ministered to the material needs of the undergraduates.

Dr. Sykes immediately began the task of upbuilding the university. He found about 300 students in the college of letters and science but in a few years this number had more than doubled. The St. Lawrence law school in Brooklyn also showed a phenomenal growth under his guidance.

Dr. Sykes had an important part in the successful drive for a \$1,000,000 endowment fund, and worked untiringly on the university's building program.

Daily Sentinel, Rome NY, Fri. 2 Oct 1942

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All North Country Will Miss Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes
BELOVED PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

Death Occurred Friday at a Potsdam Hospital.

Funeral Was Held Sunday in Gunnison Chapel.

There is sorrow throughout the whole width and breadth of this North Country, and far beyond in countless homes. Our own Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes, President Emeritus of St. Lawrence University and a friend to all mankind, has been called unto Our Father. A great life, a useful and beautiful life, has come to its close. For him the sun has set. The end came during the first hour of Friday, at the Potsdam hospital where he had been taken the previous week. An operation which became necessary on Thursday was more than his failing strength could survive.

Sunday, with friends and admirers from all over this North Country present, with members of the Board of Trustees of the University and many other admirers and former associates present from great distances, services were held in the Gunnison Chapel, of which he more than any other person was the builder, and which to him symbolized all that the University represents. Dean John Murray Atwood of the Theological School, and Rev. Hugh S. Tigner, pastor of the Universalist Church, spoke words of comfort and tribute. Burial was in Evergreen cemetery, within sight of the campus and the Chapel.

Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes was a builder, a builder of beautiful edifices and above all else a builder of character. In his eighty-two years he had served many great and needy causes, both of religion and of education, as well as of upright and courageous citizenry. The greater share of his life had been devoted to the church when, in 1919, he returned to Canton to become President of St. Lawrence University. Applying the same principles of Christian fortitude and determination to that task, as he had to many others before, his administration stands without parallel in the University's history. After guiding the institution through its greatest period of expansion, and safely through the first days of depression, he retired in 1935, and as he would have it, lived out the sunset of his life amid the scenes and among the friends he loved so dearly.

Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes came of this North Country and has been returned to it. His were a sturdy, God-respecting people. The grandfather, Heber Sykes, a Vermonter, brought his family here when this region was in the raw. Dr. Sykes' father, Edwin Jones Sykes, was born in a log cabin, the family's home at that time, down at the County House Corners, on June 25, 1821. Heber Sykes and his son were brave and purposeful men. Their beginnings were humble to be sure, but they came of English blood and they were undaunted. The land they cleared grew into a farm of many broad productive acres, and the home that was built over a hundred years ago is still "the Sykes. place."

When the son was born on January 3, 1860, at the home of Edwin J. Sykes and his wife, Louise Brewer Sykes, that couple gave to the boy the name of

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their minister, Richard Eddy, pastor of the Universalist church in Canton. Rev. Richard Eddy was a man of strong character. He lived in Park street in what is now the Richard C. Ellsworth residence, and went from there to become one of the great Civil War chaplains, a member of the 60th New York Volunteers.

Richard Eddy Sykes was born just as the clouds of the Civil War shrouded the United States. He lived to see the nation survive that conflict, pass through the Spanish-American War, the First World War, and then to see it become engaged in the present struggle. Dr. Richard Eddy Sykes possessed lasting loyalties, great faith, and unflinching courage. World War I found him at the very height of his career as a minister and preacher. It is said that his sermons during those trying days were so imbued with patriotism that his church congregations were frequently moved to applause. Those who had ever heard Dr. Sykes speak in his full vigor can well appreciate this, for he was an orator of great personal magnetism and power.

But as a young man Richard Eddy Sykes possessed no more than many another farmer lad, the will to work and to learn.

He came under the influence of St. Lawrence University at an early age. When only ten his parents moved from their farm to the village, and his father became steward at the college, an institution then only fourteen years old. There was only one building, that which is now Richardson Hall. The steward and his family lived in the basement and boarded the forty students attending the college. This was an arrangement which continued seven years. It covered the period marking the transition from the administration of President Richmond Fisk to that of President Absalom Graves Gaines. The influence of Dr. Gaines, both as a teacher and friend, had a marked effect on the young man Richard Eddy Sykes. In fact, there were several others whose influence stirred his desire to turn to books and education rather than returning to the farm

In 1879, although his parents had gone back to the farm two years previously, Richard Eddy Sykes entered St. Lawrence in the Class of 1883. It was not a large class, of whom only two now survive. They are Miss Alice Grace of Denver, Col., and Mrs. Isabelle Maxwell Rutherford of Riverside, Calif. Among his classmates were George S. Conkey, son of that stalwart Cantonian, Dr. Jonas Conkey, druggist and family physician; Daniel Fisher, to become a Universalist minister; Frank [?] Post, who was to become a prominent utility lawyer and magnate of the Pacific coast; William L. Caten; James Church and Fred A. Sweet.

During part of his days as a student at the University, Richard Eddy Sykes made his home with Dr. and Mrs. Isaac M. Atwood, Dr. Atwood being President of the Theological School. It was Dr. Atwood's influence, probably as much as that of any other person, which led the young man to enter the ministry. He graduated from the Theological School in 1885, and when Dr. Atwood received an emergency call from New York City that year asking for some one to supply for Dr. James Pullman in the large city church of the Divine Paternity, he sent

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the young theological student, Richard Eddy Sykes. The assignment lasted for six months and was filled to the complete satisfaction of the parish. It was again later in 1885 that Dr. Atwood personally introduced the young graduate to the Universalist parish at Little Falls, where Dr. Sykes was to begin his pastoral career. That was in October and proved to be the beginning of an unusual and most successful ministerial record.

In looking back, it is significant to note that Dr. Sykes served but three parishes during his entire ministry: that at Little Falls from 1885 to 1895; that at Denver, Colorado from 1895-1904; and the one at Malden, Massachusetts from 1904-1919. There existed between parish and pastor in each instance an unusually close bond of fellowship which endured until the end.

It was while at Little Falls that Dr. Sykes founded a mission at Dolgeville which, under his care, developed into a self-supporting parish. It was at Dolgeville, also, that he met Miss Mabel M. Houghton, whom he married 57 years ago.

In the Universalist denomination Dr. Sykes was often referred to as the builder of parishes and churches. The parish at Little Falls flourished under his leadership, and it was only when the Universalist General Conference asked that he respond to a call from Denver, Colorado to organize a parish there, that he moved from the Mohawk Valley to the west in order to undertake this pioneering effort. It proved a happy experience. He not only organized the Denver parish but during his ministry there saw a church and parsonage erected.

In 1904 he went from this church to the oldest Universalist church in the United States, the First Parish of Malden, Mass. The Malden church was established in 1649, but nearly 140 years ago a split occurred among the parishioners. Most of them became Universalists, while the remainder separated as Congregationalists. It was during Dr. Sykes' pastorate that the present building of the First Parish was built. While he occupied that pulpit, he was for many years the only Universalist minister in Massachusetts.

His success in his various parishes had attracted wide attention. When Dr. Almon Gunnison retired as President of St. Lawrence University in 1914, it followed that Dr. Sykes was approached, but felt that his work in Malden would not permit accepting the Presidency at that time.

Then in the spring of 1919 the office of President of St. Lawrence again became vacant, and a committee of which Herbert F. Gunnison, Owen D. Young and others were members waited upon Dr. Sykes, and laid before him the great opportunity for service which existed in the North Country.

It was a call which Dr. Sykes could not decline. When he arrived in May of 1919, he was met at the station by the assembled student body, members of the faculty, and many townspeople. It was a welcome back home where he had accepted a service under his alma mater. This proved to be the culminating achievement of an already remarkable career.

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When he took office Dr. Sykes announced that he was prepared to give at least twelve years to the task, and trusted that within that period he could attain the goal to which he set himself. He was then 58 years of age. The institution which now graces University Heights stands as a monument to his administration as much as it does to any individual.

The writer of this article knows somewhat of Dr. Sykes' period of office at St. Lawrence. There were those first years when a classroom at Richardson Hall was converted into a president's office. There were lean years, to be sure. In Dean Edwin Lee Hulett he found a fellow-worker and constant source of help. There was a willing, though small faculty. Dr. Sykes possessed the happy faculty for winning friends. His first public speech as President of the University was before a group of three thousand militant farmers who had gathered at Eel Weir park to consider a milk strike. Earl Laidlaw of Gouverneur was chairman of the meeting and Dr. Sykes stood in the rear of a Franklin touring car to address the throng. He won the men instantly and from that day to the present he commanded the respect and admiration of the farm people of this section.

Dr. Sykes found St. Lawrence University at the cross roads, both academically and from the point of its physical plant. The question which concerned the Board of Trustees and others was, what was going to become of St. Lawrence University? Upon Dr. Sykes' shoulders was placed the responsibility for answering that question, and he began doing so promptly.

First, there was the winning of friends. He answered requests to appear as a speaker throughout the whole North Country, before granges, chambers of commerce, and public gatherings of all kinds. It was always the same: wherever he went, he won friends and more friends. A great affection for the man warmed the hearts of countless people. His sincerity and purposefulness impressed everyone. There was the magnetism of his personality, and the thrill of power and conviction in his utterances. He had a job to do and he was at the task.

Through his friend Hon. A. Barton Hepburn, and his former fellow college student, Mrs. Hepburn, it became possible to establish the course in Economics. Need for funds and buildings arose. Dr. Sykes wanted first of all a beautiful chapel; he wanted a singing college; he dreamed of the influence which beautiful music and beautiful architecture would have on the lives of young people. A campaign to raise \$100,000 launched almost immediately after his arrival in Canton soon developed into a \$300,000 campaign, grew into a \$500,000 campaign and in 1922 was enlarged into the Million Dollar Campaign.

Those were great years during the 1920's. Great men stood with President Sykes aiding him at every turn, advising and working with him. There was Judge Ledyard P. Hale, Owen D. Young, Charles Snow Brewer, Charles W. Appleton, Irving Bacheller, Wriley N. Beard and scores of others, all of that band of Laurentian loyalists. An enthusiasm seized all. Commencements became thrilling events. There was always some new announcement. Nationally and

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internationally prominent people came to the campus, such as in October 1929, when Madame Marie Curie dedicated the Hepburn Hall of Chemistry.

New buildings were erected, and one of the very first was the chapel, of which Dr. Sykes first dreamed, Gunnison Memorial Chapel, designed by the great American architect Bertram Goodhue. Then came Hepburn Hall of Chemistry, Dean-Eaton Hall, the Kingsley heating plant, Brewer Field House, the remodeling of the old President's home into the Administration Building, the new president's residence, new fraternity and sorority homes, a University campus which grew to seven hundred acres with its golf course, riding paths, lodges and bird sanctuary.

Events sped rapidly along. The years passed. New horizons constantly replaced the old. There could be no stopping. The Men's Residence came as the culmination of the building era. A student body had doubled and nearly tripled in size and the curriculum in scope. A once small faculty numbered seventy. Landscaping had transformed a somewhat barren campus into a thing of wondrous beauty.

The twelve years which Dr. Sykes had first allotted himself were not enough. They extended to sixteen. With reluctance that economic forces the world over had intruded, and that a depression had called a halt on his plans, that the new library which he so wanted could not be built, Dr. Sykes accepted the inevitable and in 1935 announced his decision to retire.

He and Mrs. Sykes moved to their little Dutch colonial cottage standing under the brow of college hill, where quietly and happily amid the choiceness of their home surroundings, their flowers and garden, in the companionship of students, faculty and friends and the resources of their library, they enjoyed the sunset of life together. About them flowered the things they loved best.

On Sunday, September 13th, Dr. Sykes, as was his custom, attended services at the Universalist church, and as he entered the door extended the hand of fellowship to the writer. Two weeks later it was the writer's privilege and honor to be one of those who bore him to his resting place. A noble life had come to its close, a grand and good man had fulfilled the trust which life had reposed in him, the truest and most lovable friend had said goodbye.

To Mrs. Sykes and their two daughters, Mrs. Felix Frederiksen of Fairibault, Minn., and Mrs. Ralph H. Michaels of Canton, and their families, is extended the sympathy of all. May they be comforted by the good things which life brought to a man who so justly earned them, and one who was so universally loved and admired.

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