

[Priest, Ward Curtiss]

Dr. Ward Curtiss Priest¹ Left His Impress on St. Lawrence
SON OF DR. HENRY PRIEST, LONG DEAN OF COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE AT S.L.U.

Dr. Ward Curtiss Priest, head of the Department of Physics of St. Lawrence University, and associated with the University for over forty years as student and faculty member, died about nine o'clock Thursday night while being driven to Hepburn Hospital, Ogdensburg, on account of the grave condition of his health that had come within the preceding few hours.

Dr. Priest had been suffering for some years with a stomach condition which had greatly impaired his health. About 2:30 Thursday morning he was taken with severe pains and a physician was called. His condition had become so critical Thursday night that it was deemed advisable to take him to Hepburn Hospital, and while on the way, the end came.

Funeral services were conducted Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock at Gunnison Memorial Chapel, St. Lawrence, Dean John Murray Atwood, D.D., of Canton Theological School, assisted by Dr. Edson R. Miles, officiating. Prof. H. Wellington Stewart, head of the University Music department, was at the organ.

Following the service in the chapel, brief committal service was held at the receiving vault at Evergreen Cemetery, where the body will rest until burial in the Priest reservation at Evergreen in the spring.

The following served as bearers: Prof. John F. Smith, Prof. Willis Lee Dorn, Warren M. Taylor, George H. Hazzard, Prof. Lee Hunt and G. Atwood Manley.

[A lengthy list of honorary bearers is omitted here.]

The death of Dr. Priest recalls vividly Dr. Henry Priest, his father, who came to St. Lawrence in 1883-84 and there remained for a period little short of thirty years, one of the strong men of the faculty and for a long period of years Dean of the College of Letters and Science.

Dr. Ward Curtiss Priest, one of two children born to Henry H. and Flora Eaton Priest, was born on June 16, 1886, in the house on Judson street where nearly all his life was spent. A sister, Alice Priest, died in 1907. Ward Priest received his early education in Canton village schools and entered St. Lawrence in 1903, graduating in 1907 with Phi Beta Kappa honors. In 1910 he received his M.A. degree from Harvard University and in 1935 was honored by Clarkson College of Potsdam by the bestowal of a Doctor of Science degree.

He taught at Plattsburgh High School in 1907-08 and then came back to St. Lawrence in the fall of 1908 as instructor in physics and chemistry. In 1910 he went to Tufts College as instructor in Physics, remaining a year. In

¹ He was from a Universalist family.

[Priest, Ward Curtiss]

1911 his father, Dr. Henry Priest, was given a leave of absence for one year by the Board of Trustees, and during that year the son, Ward Curtiss Priest, took over the work of his father... [Dr. Priest] came back apparently renewed in body and spirit and entered into the work he had left the previous year. He had hardly got down to the work of the year, when on a late September morning while in his office at Richardson Hall, alone, his son, Ward Curtiss Priest, heard him fall, and rushed to his assistance. He found his father dying; death came before a physician could be called.

The Priest burial place in Evergreen is marked by a huge boulder transported from the old Priest farm—that of Henry Priest's father, Ethan Priest at Mechanicsville, Vt...

Professor Ward Priest succeeded his father as Hayward Professor of Physics at St. Lawrence in 1912. He served as secretary of the college faculty 1913-1918. Upwards of twenty years ago when a radio station, WCAD, was established he took a deep interest in this work. He spent long hours at something he found to be one of the most fascinating occupations. Naturally, as it was something closely linked with his work as physicist.

Dr. Priest though thorough in his work as a university department head, instructor, teacher, was not of the severe type. He drew the student to him and led those whom he instructed. The work to him, a fascinating pastime, made the student likewise a lover of this work. The older Priest, his father, was a crusader inside and outside the classroom. His lectures sunk in when he warmed to the work. The son, however, the forceful speaker and instructor, lecturer, had more of a soothing way. Both father and son were remarkably strong men on the College faculty, and both left it with startling suddenness, that seems almost tragic.

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When Dr. Ward Curtiss Priest entered St. Lawrence there were only three buildings on the Hill known as University buildings, the old brick building, now Richardson Hall, the college building, then an only place of instruction for the College of Letters and Science. Herring Library was over to the north of the brick building and Canton Theological School was housed in Fisher Memorial Hall, built about the time Henry Priest came from Vermont to take up his life work at St. Lawrence.

Shortly after Ward Priest entered St. Lawrence, Carnegie Science Hall was built and later on came the great building era—the golden age of St. Lawrence when numerous buildings were built, including Gunnison Memorial Chapel, Hepburn Hall of Chemistry, the Men's Residence and, southward of the University building, the group of buildings of the New York State Agricultural and Technical Institute, along with the United States Weather Bureau building, which was built about the same time the state school was built.

[Priest, Ward Curtiss]

Ward Curtiss Priest as a small boy used to accompany his father Dr. Henry Priest, to University Hill, and saw there only a bleak landscape, with the few buildings, but as a lover of beauty he recognized the wide spaces and the rich golden country of fall up toward the mountains and in winter the snow wastes that could be seen far off toward the mountains of the south.

Ward Curtiss Priest while having a father who left the mark of his strong personality on the St. Lawrence University and on the town, had a mother, not long gone, who was endeared to all the community of Canton. Mrs. Flora Eaton Priest, a Vermonter like her husband, and a teacher with him at Barre, Vt., was the ideal homemaker and mother of her family, the kindly woman of the town, the charming hostess in the home. Mrs. Priest's sister, Miss Emily Eaton, a student at St. Lawrence, entering shortly before Professor and Mrs. Priest came to Canton, lived at the Priest home after their coming. Emily Eaton, '86 St. Lawrence woman, married A. Barton Hepburn, banker and benefactor. Mrs. Hepburn has been associated with St. Lawrence for long years as a faculty member, and still holds deep interest for the college on the hill.

Professor Ward Curtiss Priest was happily married to Barbara Cramer of Ft. Edward, N.Y., June 26, 1911, and to this marriage were born a son, Dorman Priest, St. Lawrence '37, and two daughters, Helen C., St. Lawrence '36, and Alice C., St. Lawrence '40. Mrs. Priest graduated from St. Lawrence, 1908, and like her husband had P.B.K. honors.

Dr. Priest while a student at St. Lawrence affiliated with the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity; he was a member of Sigma Pi Sigma, national honorary physics society; Phi Beta Kappa, of which he was the secretary of the local chapter—Lambda Chapter for several years, the National Educational Association and other professional organizations.

Dr. Priest is survived by his widow, Mrs. Barbara Cramer Priest; two daughters, Mrs. Alice C. Graves of West Brattleboro, widow of Jeremy Graves who was killed in action in Germany in October, 1944; Mrs. Hugh (Helen C.) Rogers, of Ottawa, Ont., and Dorman Priest, research physicist at Mayville, N.Y.

Commercial Advertiser, Canton NY, Tue. 25 Dec 1945
(abridged)

Transcribed on 1 Sep 2013 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY