VALLEY OF THE GIANTS



HISTORICAL ACHIEVEMENTS



WILSON A. CHARBONNEAUX

Editor's Note: The following "Valley of the Giants' profile of Wilson Charbonneaux first appeared in the April 1993 <u>Dayton Engineer</u>, uncredited to any author. It is supplemented with information gleaned from another "Meeting Members" profile - also uncredited - originally published in this newsletter in January of 1985. If the original authors are later identified or step forward, I'll be happy to give them belated credit in a later issue.

Wilson A. Charbonneaux, born on a farm in southeastern Iowa on November 27, 1912, received his firsty name from Woodrow Wilson, who had just been elected president. His family name goes back to at least 1659, when ancestors came from France to Canada to fight Indians. One notable uncle was Toussaint Charbonneaux who, with his young wife, Sacajawea, and their tiny son accompanied famed explorers Lewis & Clark on their trailblazing expedition which opened up the Great Northwest in 1804.

Tenth in a family of six boys and six girls, Wilson spent his early life on the farm, was active in the Lone Scouts, the Boy Scouts, and was a Scoutmaster, Cubmaster, Committeeman, Councilman, and achieved the elite rank of Eagle Scout. He was second-highest in Iowa for overall Scouting achievement. He was a four-letter man in high school athletics and earned a scholarship at Iowa Wesleyan College, where he and James Van Allen were laboratory assistants to Thomas Poulter, head of the Physics Department.

Dr. Poulter later became Second in Command of Admiral Richard Byrd's South Pole Expedition, and was credited with saving the Admiral's life. Van Allen is, of course, the renowned physicist for whom the Earth's radiation belt is named. Wilson Charbonneaux completed his engineering education at the University of Iowa, where he received his BSEE in 1935. Following this, he promptly married his childhood sweetheart, Elaine Thomson. Shortly thereafter, he accepted a 25-cents-per-hour job, as there were no engineering positions available; however, he soon accepted a designing job in the Brown Boveri Division of Allis Chalmers in Milwaukee.

A year later, he was back in Burlington, Iowa, where he organized Burlington Instrument Corporation, a manufacturer of voltage regulators, relays, and a full line of electrical panels meters for industry and government. He later volunteered for

service in the US Navy and was slated for the rank of Lt.

Commander, but his company's essential war effort would not permit him to leave his position as manager of a key industrry.

Shortly after World War II, Wilson resigned from BIC and moved to Bedford, Indiana, where he organized Ace Electric Company, to manufacture a line of fractional horsepower motors for the furnace manufacturing industry. He built the building, bought all of the machinery, and reached a production rate of 200 motors daily. He subsequently sold the plant to his primary customer and moved to Dayton, Ohio, where George H. Leland had offered him a position as Plant Manager of G.H. Leland, Inc. (now Ledex). With a downturn in business, Wilson transferred to the Leland Electric Company as Special Projects Engineer, where he assisted in the development of DC to AC aircraft inverters, and in securing government approval. Leland became the prime source for such inverters, and this division became known as Leland Airborne.

Wilson organized the Wac Engineering Company in 1950 toproduce various Air Force electronic devices, such as radar target indicators, radar dummy loads, motorized variable capacitors, and other instruments. Later, the company was incorporated under the name WacLine, Inc., and began to expand rapidly, producing a wide vaiety of aviation and industrial instruments, controls, and related equipment. Twenty-seven WacLine instruments were incorporated into the design of the Boeing 707, along with a specialized RPM tachometer generator. When WacLine was later sold in 1967, to Simmonds Precision Products in Tarrytown, New York, it boasted 425 employees.

In 1968, Wilson decided not to retire, instead establishing a small company to market patents and promote invention. He named it Pro International Corporation, with the trade name "ProCorp" (a palindrome, tipping his poet's hand). Although engaged to sell some 3000 patented ideas during 1968 and several years following, manufacturers were balking at new product development, so Willson went into the sale of companies, and later into general real estate sales, forming Pro Realty. He sold ProCorp in 1980, and sold Pro Realty in 1985, and remained a licensed broker well into the 1990s.

Wilson was personally granted 17 patents, and assisted in the development and licewnsing of many more. He became a Member of the Engineers Club of Dayton and the Executives Club upon arriving in Dayton in 1947, and remained a Member until his death in January of 2002. He was a past member of the Lions Club International and the Dayton Chamber of Commerce. He remained an active member of the Grafton Hill Neighborhood Association until his health necessitated his to relocation to the east side of Dayton in 2000. He was a member of the Discussion Club, the World Future Society (of which he was a founding member of the local chapter), Dayton Art Institute, and Northminster Church. He helped to organize the Barn Gang, and has served on the Library & Archives Committee of the Engineers Club, as well as the Chairing Membership Committee. At one time, Wilson was credited with signing up over 300 Members in one year.