

Clarence Marion Cunningham



Clarence Marion Cunningham of Stillwater died peacefully at home surrounded by his family March 23. For more than three decades, he was known to his students at Oklahoma State University as a tough but fair-minded professor of chemistry. To all the rest who knew him, Clarence was a tireless social activist, community leader, a quick wit, a loving father and a dear friend.

Clarence was born July 24, 1920, in Cooper, Texas. He was the first of three sons of Willie Lee Cunningham and Naomi Stokes. The family moved to Pampa, Texas in 1926 and later to the nearby town of Panhandle, where Will and Naomi ran an ice business and grocery store.

Clarence graduated from Pampa High School in 1938 and from Texas A&M University in 1942, where he earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. When World War II interrupted his studies, Clarence joined the U.S. Army. He served in Panama as a second lieutenant from 1942 until 1946, then remained in the U.S. Army Reserves. He

retired with the rank of colonel in 1972.

After his service in World War II, Clarence earned a master's degree in physical chemistry from the University of California-Berkley. He taught briefly on the faculty at California Institute of Technology before moving to Ohio State University to continue his studies. There, he met Janet Kohl, a former Army nurse. They married in 1951. Clarence earned his doctorate degree in physical chemistry, while Janet became a certified registered nurse anesthetist.

Clarence witnessed the first hydrogen bomb detonation at Eniwetok Atoll in 1952. In 1954, he joined the faculty at Oklahoma State University, where he taught chemistry for 31 years.

As a couple, Clarence and Janet were both known for their community service. In 1955, they were part of a group that established the Stillwater Preparatory Friends Meeting, which is now the Friends Meeting of Stillwater (Quakers). Clarence was later the Quaker representative for the Religious Relations Committee of the Boy Scouts of America, and sat on the Friends Committee on national legislation.

Clarence was involved in many community service organizations. He joined Kiwanis in 1957 and was an active member for the rest of his life. He became the vice president of the original board of directors of the Stillwater Community YMCA in 1958. In 1968, he was an Oklahoma delegate for Eugene McCarthy at the contentious Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

For 15 years, Clarence served as scoutmaster of Troop 98 and chairman of the BSA district council. He was recognized by the Boy Scouts of America with the Silver Beaver Scout Leader Award. Clarence also served as president of the Cimarron Chapter of the Retired Military Officers Association and was a member of the American Legion.

Together, Clarence and Janet endowed a lecture series at the Stillwater Methodist Church and created the Janet Cunningham Nursing Foundation scholarship at the Stillwater Medical Center.

Clarence was preceded in death by his wife Janet Kohl Cunningham of Springfield, Ohio, and his brother William Cunningham of Oklahoma City. He is survived by his brother Charles Cunningham of Houston, Texas. Clarence is also survived by his four children, Elizabeth and Daniel Cunningham of Stillwater, Steven Cunningham and his wife Regina of Upton, Mass., and Margaret Cunningham of Billings, Mont. He had five grandchildren, Schuyler, Robert and Slone Cunningham of Stillwater, and Rebecca and Helen Cunningham of Upton, Mass. He had many nieces and nephews.

Clarence embodied peace in his every action and thought. He will be missed by all who knew him. A memorial service celebrating the life of Clarence Marion Cunningham is planned for 3 p.m. May 17 at the Oklahoma State University Wesley Foundation, 823 W. University Ave., Stillwater.