Frustrated Teacher

Harry David Gideonse

The elm trees of Brooklyn College are a lot taller than they were twenty years ago when Harry David Gideonse was chosen president of the municipal institution away in Flatbush. The campus has a serene and settled look today, with its red-brick buildings and mostly in Colonial style, set in the amid green lawns and neat gardens.

News Its 1930 student body of 13,000 has almost doubled; its alumni since its foundation in 1930 number 25,000.

But Dr. Gideonse is still the tall, vigorous, outspoken economist who strode onto the campus and took over in the summer of 1950.

Yesterday, which was his fifty-eighth birthday, friends and colleagues honored his two decades of service at a luncheon in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

He still stretches up to 6 feet 3 inches; his heavy eyebrows are black as ever, though his hair is white; his figure is still as trim as it was when he went to Brooklyn.

Born in Rotterdam

Dr. Gideonse (pronounced like the plural of Gideon) was named Hendrick at his birth in Rotterdam. The family moved to the United States in 1904 and when his father became naturalized, the son became Harry. After his elementary schooling in Rochester, N.Y., his father’s business took the family back to the Netherlands, so his secondary education was in Dutch. His other working languages are French and German.

A 1923 graduate of Columbia University, he took a Master of Arts degree there in 1924 and lectured in economics at Columbia and Barnard. He also met Edna Koch, a student in social work. They were married in 1926 and went to Geneva for two years. He left the Students International Union there and won a diploma in international studies. Although he had wanted to get a doctor’s degree as a student, he has been given six honorary ones.

Three years at Rutgers were followed by eight at the University of Chicago. After a year back at Columbia University of Economics and chairman of Economics and Sociology at Barnard, the call to Brooklyn came.

He still thinks of himself as a “frustrated teacher,” but he had—and has—deep feelings about the tuition-free municipal college. Last year, when visiting the Soviet Union with other American educators, he was able to contradict “with particular joy” the suggestion that higher education in America was only for those with money.

His presidency was challenged by the American Teachers Union, a group he denounced from the beginning as Communist-dominated. Left-wing student groups in those days accused him of being a dictator. Confident of his precise liberal opinions, he steered a firm course through the storm.

Busy in Outside Life

His extracurricular activities since going to Brooklyn have ranged from the Human Relations Commission of the Protestant Council to the chairmanship of Freedom House and the presidency of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. He is a “voracious” reader and a lover of poetry especially. A hobby in recent years is collecting bronze medals (silver and gold cost too much, he explains) struck in commemoration of great men and events.

He looks back to the pre-war years when he and Mrs. Gideonse could travel abroad on their own almost every summer. Now he gets away only to lecture in India or West Berlin or on similar missions of a public nature. When he looks forward, one dream is a return to active teaching.

The Gideoneses have two sons. One is an Amherst graduate now studying education and philosophy at Harvard; the other is a junior at Swarthmore.