

A Statement from the Editors

Preserving the Firsthand Chronicle of a Twentieth-Century Civil Engineer

The publication of *Talking Through My Hard Hat: Chronicle of a 20th-Century Civil Engineer* represents the culmination of a decades-long effort to preserve, edit, and share the firsthand career autobiography of our father, civil engineer John J. Scheuren, Jr. This statement explains why we undertook the work, the principles that guided us, and why we believe his account has enduring historical value.

Preserving a Voice

Late in his life, our father recorded his recollections on more than twenty-five cassette tapes. His daughter Margot transcribed those recordings into an approximately 800-page manuscript, which he reviewed before his death in 1995.

He was doing more than recounting the events of a long career. He was preserving experiences, observations, and lessons from a life that spanned much of the twentieth century. He wrote with an engineer's curiosity, an observer's careful eye, and the humility of someone who believed meaningful work should speak for itself. More than thirty years after his death, we are honored to bring that voice to readers.

A Work of Stewardship

Over the decades that followed, the manuscript and its supporting archive—recordings, photographs, maps, correspondence, engineering and project documents, field notes and editorial materials—were carefully preserved. Bringing the chronicle to publication required patience and persistence, but our purpose remained constant: to make it accessible to contemporary readers without altering its essential character.

We came to understand that preserving the manuscript also meant preserving the evidence and context behind it. Together, the published chronicle and its archive form a documentary record of one civil engineer's life and work and of the people, projects, and events he encountered. We hope these materials will have lasting value for readers, historians, engineers, students, and future researchers.

Our Editorial Philosophy

We approached the manuscript not simply as editors, but as stewards. Our guiding principle was that readers should encounter John Scheuren's voice as faithfully and naturally as possible. We sought to retain the clarity, curiosity, integrity, humor, and reflection that characterize his account, intervening only where necessary for readability, historical context, or clarification.

Our purpose was never to reinterpret his story. It was to preserve it with honesty, care, and respect, so that readers could hear the voice he intended to leave behind, in his own words.

A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century

As the editorial work progressed, it became increasingly clear that this was more than a personal narrative or career autobiography. It is a firsthand chronicle of engineering, exploration, public service, and human experience across a period of extraordinary change.

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From New England highways and coastal works to Arctic infrastructure, international development, scientific expeditions, and environmental stewardship, our father witnessed and participated in work that connected engineering with history, diplomacy, scientific discovery, communities, and the natural world.

Why We Believe This Book Matters

History is not only made by famous figures. It is also shaped by thoughtful men and women who do consequential work and leave an honest account for those who come after. We believe our father's chronicle is one such account.

Its value lies not only in the accomplishments it records, but in the quality of the mind behind the observations. Readers encounter an engineer who combined technical excellence with public service, intellectual curiosity, respect for other people and cultures, concern for the natural world, and a willingness to think beyond immediate needs to the generations that would follow.

At a time when questions of technology, stewardship, infrastructure, public responsibility, and sound judgment remain urgent, his firsthand reflections offer both historical perspective and a distinctly human voice. We hope the chronicle and its archive will contribute to continuing conversations about how we build, how we serve, and what we choose to preserve.

A Work of Stewardship

Over the decades that followed, the manuscript and its supporting archive were carefully preserved. As editors, we sought to preserve not only our father's words, but also the clarity and wisdom with which he observed the world.

We came to understand that preserving the manuscript also meant preserving the evidence and context behind it. Together, the published chronicle and its archive form a documentary record of one civil engineer's life and work and of the people, projects, and events he encountered. We hope these materials will have lasting value for readers, historians, engineers, students, and future researchers.

Building Another Kind of Bridge

John J. Scheuren spent his professional life building bridges, roads, airfields, foundations, pipelines, and other works that connected people across landscapes. Through this chronicle, we hope to extend that work in another way.

Talking Through My Hard Hat could itself be a bridge: between one generation and the next, and between the practical work of building the physical world and the equally important work of preserving the ideas, judgment, values, and humanity that give those achievements lasting meaning.

We offer it in the hope that what has been preserved will carry forward not only knowledge of the past, but also the habits of mind, sound judgment, and humanity that every generation is called upon to build anew.

Margot R. Scheuren and Claire E. Scheuren, Editors

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