Wheaton Bradish KUNHARDT

1859-1933

Founder of the
W.B. Kunhardt Fund in

The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

In his will Wheaton Bradish Kunhardt left an income in the care of The New York Community Trust to be used for educational, charitable, and benevolent purposes.

WHEN ADMIRAL RICHARD BYRD and Floyd Bennett first proved that man could circle the North Pole by airplane, their sensational 1926 success was vicariously enjoyed by a gentleman they had never met, yet who, nevertheless, played a small but essential role in their feat. He was Wheaton Kunhardt, the chairman of the company that had made the special steel for their engine. A year later Mr. Kunhardt had the satisfaction of knowing that his steel was helping to propel a shy young pilot named Charles Lindbergh across the Atlantic.

It is not surprising that Mr. Kunhardt's company—Carpenter Steel—had contributed to these historic Firsts. In prior years Carpenter had developed the world's first chrome-nickel alloy steel and had adopted this to produce the first armor-piercing projectiles in the United States—projectiles that during the Spanish-American war helped Admiral Dewey rout the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay. Nor was it surprising that Mr. Kunhardt had become the chairman of such a pioneering firm. He not only was a veteran mining engineer but also an excellent administrator and an enterprising businessman.

This enterprise may have been a family trait. His father, a German, strongly opposed his country's rising militarism and, in protest, left Hamburg in the 1840's. After working in South America and Hawaii, he heard of the California gold rush and cashed in on it by arriving in food-short San Francisco with a cargo of grain that brought very high prices. When the San Francisco fire later wiped out his fortune, he joined a foreign trade company that his brother had established in New York City. It was in this city, in New Brighton, Staten Island, that his son Wheaton was born and was educated, first at the Charlier Institute and then at Columbia University's School of Mines.

AFTER GRADUATING as an engineer of mines in 1880 (much later he was given an honorary MS), young Wheaton traveled extensively and studied in Europe and the West. He started his career as an assistant to George W. Maynard, a prominent New York consulting mining engineer. Five years later he joined the Boston Heating Company as assistant engineer and in 1890 began diamond drill exploration of coal deposits in Rhode Island. He then did research on direct steel processes and the magnetic separation of iron ores.

He must have been an extremely bright young man, on the alert for good opportunities and almost precociously capable when given them. For by 1893, when he was only 34, he was given a position of major responsibility as president of the Osceola Placer Mining Company of Nevada.

His brilliant mind and business acumen proved so conspicuous that in that very same year the Carpenter Steel Company, then four years old and famous for its armor-piercing steel, asked him to become a member of its board of directors. In retrospect, the company believes that his advent was a very important milestone in its development. In 1895 he was made its second vice president, in 1904 its treasurer and general manager, in 1916 its president, and in 1920 its chairman.

When he joined the firm, it was trying to recover from a disastrous fire that had destroyed its steel plant. Mr. Kunhardt helped it rise from the ashes. By the time he became general manager, most of the company's pioneering officials were older men, retiring or retired. Mr. Kunhardt helped to rejuvenate the firm, bringing in young men of vision and perspective and reorganizing it for efficient, modern production.

A DESIRE FOR EFFICIENCY seems to have been a personal characteristic. A business associate recalls that "his office was so neat I wondered how anyone so busy could be so tidy." A short, spare man with wavy gray hair and a flowing moustache, he always was meticulously correct in his dress, with every detail exactly in place. And he was extremely punctual. A niece remembers asking the time of breakfast. "I always dress in 29 minutes," he answered. And he did. A person so fastidious is sometimes a bore. But not Mr. Kunhardt. Within his family, his nieces and nephews (he never married) knew him as a warm and sympathetic friend, a generous and beloved uncle who also was a popular visitor and guest, a very cultivated, interesting man. And in business he was admired for his active imagination and foresight.

At the very time Andrew Carnegie was concentrating on mass production of general, structural steels, Mr. Kunhardt urged the

Carpenter Steel Company to continue doing the opposite—to concentrate on high-quality, more expensive specialized steels. He emphasized research, and under his leadership the company began to make stainless steel, became the first company to manufacture high grade steel for the automotive and aircraft industries and developed the world's first free-machining stainless steels, providing industry with the finest and easiest-working stainless ever made.

Only a year before the United States entered the First World War, Mr. Kunhardt became president of Carpenter and under him the firm became a major supplier for U. S. ordnance. It also produced one of the first stainless steels used in the U. S. famous Liberty airplane engines. Then its tool steels got to be extremely popular in machine shops. Alloys became a company specialty under Mr. Kunhardt, and Carpenter patented a process for using Selenium and Tellurium as alloying elements for high quality stainless steel.

HAVING HELPED CARPENTER become one of the country's leading manufacturers of premium specialty steels, Mr. Kunhardt broadened his business activities. He was interested in the American Institute of Mining Engineers, also became treasurer of the Parish Manufacturing Company in Reading, Pa., the city where Carpenter Steel has its headquarters. In addition, he was a director of the Farmer's National Bank in Reading and president of that city's Chamber of Commerce. Yet he lived much of the time in New York, where Carpenter also has offices, and was a member of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York Botanical Society, and a fellow of the American Museum of Natural History. His involvement in the latter revealed a deep and lifelong interest in nature. Nature study, often pursued during long horseback trips (in his youth he was an expert horseman), occupied much of the spare time he allowed himself—nature study and serious reading, particularly of literary essays and books on American history and the natural sciences. Although he was a prominent business leader, he was not a gregarious man and preferred, when at his leisure, to be alone with his books. He was, in fact, rather reserved, but his few friendships were very deep. And in a quiet, discreet way he was very generous. He died in 1933 in the very depth of the depression at the age of 74 and left his estate to the New York Community Trust for general charitable purposes. Grants totaling around a quarter of a million dollars have been made from this fund in his memory, the total increasing year by year.