

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
PASADENA

ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING



February 26, 1943

Mr. H. H. Henline  
Secretary  
American Institute of  
Electrical Engineers  
33 West 39th Street  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Friend Henline:

Sunday, February 14, I was asked to assist in a Friendly Relations Radio Program which presented data concerning outstanding Americans of Slavic descent. I broadcast the enclosed statements about Nikola Tesla. Having an extra copy I thought I would send one to you just as a matter of record.

I think some paper devoted to the interests of the American Slavs is going to publish the article.

Sincerely yours,

R. W. Sorensen.

RWS:mh  
Encl.

Last month, January 16, 1943 "Electrical World" bore in large letters on one of its pages the heading, "NIKOLA TESLA, ELECTRICAL WIZARD, IS DEAD AT 86"; followed by the statement:

"Inventor who devised first practical application of alternating current, developed the induction motor and made scores of original contributions to electrical industry, passes."

As an electrical engineer, born and raised in the United States of America, I am speaking about a fellow electrical engineer, not born in this country but who came to it and made valuable and enduring contributions to the comfort and well-being of every man, woman and child who uses electricity. Nikola Tesla was that man.

He is highly regarded by the electrical engineers of the world because of his outstanding inventions of electrical machinery. Near the end of the last century when there was still a commercial rivalry between alternating current and direct current power systems, Tesla invented the polyphase alternating current system and built the first polyphase induction motors. He did this in the face of much ridicule on the part of the many who said his ideas were mad dreams and his apparatus would not work. This system of his is, as we well know, the universal electric power system of today.

Mr. Tesla was born in Smiljan, Lika, a borderline region of Austria Hungary, at present in Yugoslavia. He was educated in the Gratz Polytechnic School and at the University of Prague in Czechoslovakia. He began his electrical career at Budapest in 1881 where he made his first electrical invention, a telephone receiver and conceived his idea of the rotating magnetic field.

He came to the United States in 1884 and became a naturalized citizen. It is interesting to note that also is the year of organization for the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, a great engineering Society,

with a membership of 20,000 electrical engineers. The growth of this organization marks the growth of electrical engineering and coincides with the span of Tesla's life as an engineer. <sup>of you</sup> Many listeners-in who are not electrical engineers have been entertained and awed from time to time by uncanny and spectacular exhibitions of stage lightning. You have seen it leap about from the transformer to the hands of the operator. You have seen it lighting up electric light bulbs held in his hand or ignite bits of cotton saturated with alcohol held on the tip of his tongue. Electricity, which the man skilled in its use can play with in this manner, was first produced by Tesla and the exhibits he gave had much to do with his being called the "Electrical Wizard". Indeed, the device which produces these sparks is known to this day as the Tesla coil or Tesla transformer. That part of his activity, while largely for show, is no indication that he was merely a showman. He had a sound and thorough technical knowledge of electrical phenomena in all its phases. This led him to be well ahead of standard practice in his creation of new uses of electricity.

We pay Tesla tribute today at the finish of his useful and long career. He was happy in his adopted country, America, wherein he had opportunity to grow in his profession and contribute without political restraint, through that profession of electrical engineering to the welfare of mankind. In recognition of his contributions, in 1917 on the 29th anniversary of the reading of his paper announcing his work on polyphase transmission, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, under whose auspices he presented that paper, awarded him the Edison Medal for "early original work in polyphase and high frequency electric currents". This award is the highest recognition his professional associates, the electrical engineers, could make.

Serbian orthodox

His father was a Greek clergyman and orator,--his mother an inventor as was her father before her. As we think of him and his contributions to the world and our country, these great United States, we also think of many other men, included among whom were electrical engineers such as the late Charles P. Steinmetz, a political refugee from Germany and Michael Pupin, born in Hungary, whose names are inseparable from our thoughts of electrical achievement.

As we ponder these things we learn again the value of American freedom for which we are fighting today, <sup>freedom</sup> not only for America, but for all the people of all the world. We have welcomed Nikola Tesla and others of his type to our midst. We have profited by their genius. We hope when this war is over that it will not be necessary for such men to be trans-  
planted <sup>to America</sup> in order that they may have opportunity. But we also hope that America will always keep alive the spirit that will make Czechs, Yugoslavs, and others like Nikola Tesla, seek our land as the land of greatest opportunity. We can make it come to pass if we faint not in the tasks that come to our hands.

R. W. Sorensen

File in  
folder of  
Nikola Tesla

March 4, 1943

2821

Dr. R.W. Sorensen  
California Institute of Technology  
Pasadena, Calif.

Dear Dr. Sorensen:

We appreciate very much your sending us with  
your letter of February 26th a copy of your radio broad-  
cast address on Nikola Tesla.

Very truly yours,

National Secretary

HHR:LMW