

In Memoriam

Jorgen H. Isaksen, co-founder of Pickering & Company, Inc., and an AES charter member, died at the age of 90 on December 29, 1989. Born in Denmark in 1899, he emigrated with his family to America in the early 1900s. After working with his father, who was an architect and builder, Isaksen became an electrical engineer. He was one of the unsung heroes of the audio industry. Although he gave no lectures and wrote no technical papers, his life and work had a strong positive impact on the people and the products he was associated with. He was obsessed with quality — quality of design, quality of manufacture, quality of sound, and with quality of performance in every task.

No one ever called him by his formal first name — he was “Joe” to everyone. His own life was conducted with disarming simplicity in which right was right, and wrong was wrong. Only those who were close to him learned how much agony was involved before reaching these seemingly effortless judgments. His example made better human beings of all who knew him.

Settling in East Rockaway, Long Island, he worked with his father and brother as a tiling contractor until the beginning of World War II. Primarily self-educated, Isaksen became very knowledgeable in political philosophy, general science, and music. He was an avid amateur violist and lover of chamber music. He used his skill in electronics during the war at Republic Aviation where he installed and tested electronic equipment on the P-47 fighter aircraft.

We met during the war while I was making experimental recording and reproducing equipment as a hobby. Together we decided to form a company to produce pickups commercially, which we did immediately after V-J Day. From the very beginning, Joe's insistence on the highest standards and his skill in realizing them were largely responsible for the success of the enterprise.

Joe spent the rest of his working life at Pickering and Company. Even after his retirement in 1965 he maintained a close association with me and the company. Five days before his death, he spent a day at the Pickering laboratory in Southampton, delighting in the latest developments in acoustic research. His enthusiasm and wise comments encouraged many a flagging project engineer. His passing leaves a large gap in their lives.