Wilkes University  
Commencement, August 28, 1997  
Citation for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters  

GEORGE L. FENNER

Product of Franklin Street Public School in South Wilkes-Barre and graduate of the Class of 1931 at Wyoming Seminary, you went on to Princeton University with the encouragement and example of Gilbert McClintock and Paul Bedford. You discovered a new world there, with emphasis on the aesthetic and the life of the mind, and were influenced over time to share your substance and that of your late wife, Hilda (herself an alumna of Bucknell University Junior College), to help provide such a culturally rich environment for the young people of Wyoming Valley at Wilkes University. After graduating from Princeton in 1935, you went on to Dickinson Law School where you graduated in 1938. You were admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar in 1939 and joined your father, George L. Fenner, Sr., and Gilbert McClintock in the practice of law. You began work by searching land titles involved in tax sales and discovered in the subbasement of the Luzerne County Court House a great cache of tax records going back to the founding of Luzerne County. You helped get these records to another building where they could be used and where, it turned out, they were high enough to escape the flood of 1972, thus contributing to the preservation of irreplaceable records fundamental to our local history. Much of your early work involved sale of lands whose owners had been delinquent in paying taxes. You began to buy land in such tax sales, including 600 acres in Rice and Hanover Townships which you are now giving to Wilkes to sell to the Wildlands Conservancy to preserve forever wild, providing a substantial benefaction both to Wilkes and to the people of Pennsylvania. After three years in the Army during World War II, you returned to the practice of land and estate law and became and remain the most knowledgeable individual alive about land in Luzerne County. You acquired what a colleague of yours at the bar described as an "intimate knowledge of things before you were born" through your disciplined and thorough research of all records relating to land. As an estate lawyer you also helped several clients leave significant benefactions to Wilkes University.

Your love of nature led you to travel the world over with Hilda to see birds, flowers and other wild life as well as to fish, a sport and pastime you learned as a boy from your Uncle Ralph Beers. Combined with your fascination for color photography, first stimulated by the Kodak exhibition at the World's Fair in 1933, these trips lived on for you and your fortunate friends through your beautiful slides. Whether of birds in India taken through your telephoto lens, or of your own roses here on the Wilkes campus, these slides preserve your finely developed reverence for nature. On these trips you also were in search of unusual stones which you would tumble and polish in the basement of what we will know in the future as Fenner Hall. The rock collection, which you now keep in the home you share with your lovely wife, Minerva, is breathtaking.

In your remarkably focused life two institutions besides Wilkes have received your particular attentions, both of which you share with your devoted friend and fishing companion, our Marshall, Dr. Charles Reif: The Torch Club and The First Presbyterian Church. Your quiet but constant friendship, including the sharing of roses and your incomparable raspberries and grapes, encircle many fortunate individuals. But no one has benefited more than your friends at Wilkes. You and Hilda were determined to give Wilkes your all to help the future youth of this valley and you have recently declared your fixed intentions in a seven-figure benefaction. From Fenner Hall to the Fenner Quadrangle, your generosity will be remembered. You also need to know that your constant and creative support of Wilkes has been recognized at a recent Board meeting where you were made the first Honorary Trustee of Wilkes University. Henceforth, the Trustees wish to have your wisdom in their meetings.

Now, by the powers vested in me by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Trustees of Wilkes University, I hereby confer upon you the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto.