

DEDICATION OF RALPH KNOWLTON GALLERY AT MARINE MUSEUM, DULUTH

May 22, 1976

This is a point where many things come together. It is a point of convergence in the natural landscape. We call it the Head of the Lakes. Here the waters end and the forests begin. Here the lake receives the river. Here the level land suddenly finds itself a mountain and looks down in sudden wonder at this huge inland sea. Here the land extends a long, curious finger out into the water and thus makes a harbor.

And it is here, too, that human enterprise comes together, comes together both with itself and with these natural forces. Here the ships come to meet the grain and the mineral wealth that travels down to the shore from the prairies and the forests. Here the factories rise up and behind them the places of commerce and beyond them the dwellings of the people, clustered like the nests of swallows on the banks of a river. The people converge here because this is where things come together, because there is a harbor here where prairie and forest and iron range link up to the lake and ultimately to the ocean and so to every other place where people come together.

And it was at this point of convergence that Ralph Knowlton lived and did his work. Land and water, city and hillside were part of him. In him they came together and it was his job to help put them together in ways that sustain the lives of us all.

Ralph Knowlton put many things together within himself. His nearly half a century of service with the Corps of Engineers was recognized not only by official commendation from high places, but by the quiet gratitude of his associates. He was respected for his knowledge, his energy, his meticulousness, his dedication and his ability to work with others.

Ralph Knowlton brought the same qualities to his community activities. The Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Propellor Club, Animal Allies and other organizations profited from his faithfulness and from his determination to get things done.

But it was the personal quality of the man himself that we remember. All who knew him, I think, knew him as a man of gentleness and kindness, a keen, intense man, who went resolutely after the objectives before him and yet who did so with sensitivity to the feelings of others. He knew almost everybody and almost everybody knew him. Most of you knew Ralph Knowlton far longer than did I. You know the sort of man he was.

Toward the end of his life, after he had retired, there came to Ralph Knowlton an opportunity of the sort that comes to very few of us. There came the chance to share in building something that would continue to speak as his life had spoken of this place where things come together, of the harbor and its ships, of the city and its commerce, of the land and its resources. The opportunity came to plan this Marine Museum. His whole life in those closing years was caught up in his assignment of gathering artifacts for the gallery we dedicate today. He lived to see the museum open and that was the crowning event in his own story.

Up on the hill there, looking as durable as the pyramids of Egypt, is a colossal pile of rather sooty red stone. Old Central High School is one building you can't miss. Like the aerial bridge it stands as a landmark, not only of Duluth, but of Ralph Knowlton's life. Fifty-eight years ago he carried home from that building his copy of his class year-book. He found that the editors had managed to say a good word about him and to put it to rhyme.

Ralph Knowlton is a quiet man but his words are wise.
He'll work at every chance he gets and carry off the prize.

The authors of that verse were more prophetic than they knew. Today we can all agree with their early judgment except perhaps with the very last part. Ralph Knowlton did not carry off the prize. He left the prize behind in the memory of his friends, and in this museum in which the interests and enthusiasms of his life continue to come together and to speak of him.