

Frank W. Cyr, 95, 'Father of the Yellow School Bus'

Frank W. Cyr, the professor emeritus of rural education at Teachers College who was known as the "Father of the Yellow School Bus," died Aug. 1 at a nursing home in Stamford, New York. He was 95 years old.

In April, 1939, Cyr organized a conference at Teachers College that drew transportation officials from each of the then 48 states, as well as specialists from school-bus manufacturing and paint companies. At that conference, funded by a \$5,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the participants established national school-bus construction standards, including the standard color of yellow for the school bus.

Cyr, however, always thought the color was more orange than yellow.

The color was selected because black letter on that hue was easiest to see in the semi-darkness of early morning and late afternoon.

It became known officially as "National School Bus Chrome." The formula for the color is on file with the National Bureau of Standards.

Until the 1939 conference, there were no standards for the construction of school buses. In 1937, Cyr began a study of school transportation and found that children were riding to school in all kinds of vehicles, including trucks and buses of all different colors (one district, hoping to instill patriotism in the children, painted their buses red, white and blue). In Kansas, Cyr found one district that transported children to school in horse-drawn wheat wagons.

School bus manufacturers were also complaining that, because each district could set its own standards, the manufacturers could not mass-produce buses on an assembly line.

The 1939 conference drew engineers from Blue Bird Body Co., Chevrolet, International Harvester, Dodge and Ford, as well as paint experts from DuPont and Pittsburgh Paint. The conference met for seven days in the Grace Dodge Room at TC and the attendees created a total of 44 standards, including specifications regarding body length, ceiling height and aisle width. Most of those standards have changed since 1939, but the color has remained the same.

Within a few years of the conference, about 35 states adopted the bus standards. The last, Minnesota, changed from "Minnesota Golden Orange" to the standard yellow in 1974. In April, 1989, Cyr was honored at luncheon at Teachers College marking the 50th anniversary of the original conference. The luncheon was also held in the Grace Dodge Room--where Cyr pointed at the wall and explained that, when it came time to discuss color, he and others put colored strips on the wall ranging from yellow to red. Finally, the attendees narrowed the colors down to three slightly different shades of yellow. The variation of shades was allowed, Cyr said, because the color of the paint could not be mixed exactly.

After the conference, Cyr continued to be interested in school buses. In 1942, he chaired a federal conference that set school transportation policy during wartime.

In 1940, Cyr served as president of the Rural Department of the National Education Association and authored "A Policy for Rural Education in the United States," published that year as the Rural Department's yearbook.

In the 1950s, Cyr experimented with teaching by telephone in his educational administration classes.

When he retired in 1965, he moved to Stamford, New York, where he was instrumental in establishing a television system for the rural schools of the Catskills.

Today, a television station in Stamford is used to send out advanced placement classes to the schools in the area. That station is located in the Frank W. Cyr Educational Center of the Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

A native of Franklin, Neb., Cyr was born on July 7, 1900. He said he could remember watching wagon trains move across the plains as a boy. He attended Grinnell College and then earned his bachelor's degree in education at the University of Nebraska in 1923. He was superintendent of schools in Chappell, Nebraska, before coming to TC as a graduate student in 1930.

He earned his Ph.D. here in 1933. His dissertation, "Responsibility for Rural School Administrators," became a book published by the Teachers College Bureau of Publications.

Cyr was also the author of *The Small School in Wartime* (1942) and *Rural Education in the United States* (1943), which was translated into both Spanish and Portuguese. He was the coauthor of *The Small High School at Work* (1936), *An Introduction to Modern Education* (1936) and *Planning the Rural School Building* (1949).

Until a few months before his death, he was working on a book about the rural school of the 21st Century.

Cyr is survived by a son, William P. Cyr of Swarthmore, PA; a daughter, Kathryn Ruth Cyr of Hastings, Neb.; a brother, Leland of Franklin, Neb.; three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

It was William Cyr who, as a child, asked the professor, "If you're the father of the yellow school bus, what does that make me?" Cyr replied that, whenever the boy saw a school bus, he could say, "There goes one of my brothers."

Funeral services were held at the First Presbyterian Church of Stamford. A reception followed in the Frank W. Cyr Educational Center.

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