Joseph Brandly Converse is portrayed as a man who had a job to do and did it: asking no recognition for himself, but that the job speak for itself. A native of Louisiana, he attended the Virginia Military Institute and graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1910 with a degree in civil engineering.

His career began with the Alabama State Highway Department as an assistant engineer in Dallas County. He spent several years outside the state in Tennessee and Florida, but returned in 1913 as a resident engineer with the AHD. During his public career, Converse designed Alabama’s first reinforced concrete bridge which was built in 1917 in the Tuskegee-Phenix City area and which is still in use.

His move into the consulting business was with the late J. W. Billingsley of New Orleans, where he stayed for eight years. When he returned to Alabama, it was to Mobile where he organized his own firm in 1928, J. B. Converse and Company, Inc., Consulting Engineers. From this point, history has already been written about the successes directed by Mr. Converse. The first large contract was with the city of Port Arthur, Texas for a $4 million project of seawalls and pumping stations. Even today, some of the largest engineering projects in the South bear the “Converse” name. In 1936 Converse designed a $15 million shipyard, including fitting-out docks, a mold loft, railroads, shop buildings, and utilities at Pascagoula, Mississippi, for the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation. This shipyard was a forerunner in the construction of nuclear submarines, tankers, and modern passenger ships. The Anniston Ordnance Depot was a $20 million project, including 900 ammunition igloos, 125 miles of highways, 30 miles of railroads, railroad shops and yards, sewage disposal system, and water supply system. The company was also heavily involved in the city of Mobile’s water supply and in the state’s highway development. In all the work, whether it be large or small, Mr. Converse took total responsibility for the outcome and demanded the best of his engineers and workers.

He became close personal friends with many of them, encouraging them in their own careers and lives.

Joseph Converse’s civic and professional responsibilities and involvement read like a dictionary. Heavily involved in the inauguration of professional registration for engineers, he continued taking an active role, serving on the state and national boards. He was a member of the National Society for Professional Engineers. He served as president of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce, and Alabama State Chamber of Commerce and director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. His love of community was not something he kept a secret, but encouraged his employees to do also. Some of his engineers served as volunteer substitute teachers at nearby schools.

Among his favorite service organizations was the Rotary, for which he served as president of Rotary Club of Mobile and district governor of Rotary International.

In December 1961, Joseph B. Converse was named recipient of the Professional Recognition Award by the Alabama Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers. In nominating him for the award, Arthur Beck and W.F. Land quoted him as saying, “Life is not a 100-yard dash. It’s a long and grueling marathon and the knocks and adversities that come are meant to test us and strengthen us.” These words, uttered by a man dedicated to honest, hard work, should serve as a motto for all humankind.