GENERAL ELECTRIC

INTERNAL CORRESPONDENCE

SUBJECT

LOCATION

REFERENCE

New York, May 4, 1932

Miss Gertrude Chandler
Office

Dear Miss Chandler:

I believe the National Cyclopedia of America Biography contains a sketch of Mr. Coffin, which was prepared underneath his direction, and, if so, presumably the facts given therein were appealing to him as, in his modest way, setting forth some of his many accomplishments, and by referring to that record Miss Tarbell should have at hand the information which she seeks. Mr. Coffin died in Locust Valley on the 14th day of July, 1926.

I enclose a paper which was found in Mr. Coffin's desk after his death, that I believe contains the same information as that given in the Cyclopedia referred to above. After Miss Tarbell is through with it, please have her return it to me at this address. One would think that in such a book as Miss Tarbell is writing, in touching on a general review, year dates would answer her purpose; i.e., General Electric Company was formed in 1892, from which date Mr. Coffin was a Director until 1926; he was President of the company from its inception (1892) to 1913, and Chairman of the Board from 1913 to 1922. If specific dates are required, to make sure that they are right they will have to be secured I presume from the records of Mr. W. W. Trench, Secretary of the company.

Very truly yours,

CPH:KS Encl.

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COFFIN, Charles Albert, financier and manufacturer, was born in Somerset county, Maine, December 30, 1844, son of Albert and Anstrus (Varney) Coffin, and a descendant of Tristam Coffin who came to this country from England and settled at Salisbury, Mass., in 1642, and on the island of Nantucket in 1660. From Tristram and his wife Dionis Stevens the line of descent is traced through their son Stephen and his wife Mary Bunker (daughter of George); their son Stephen and his wife Experience Look; their son Zephaniah and his wife Miriam Macy; their son Stephen and his wife Mary Bunker; their son Alpheus and his wife Love Pitts; and their son Charles Frederick and his wife Mary Folsom, who were the grandparents of Mr. Coffin.

Tristram Coffin was the first governor of Nantucket. He was the father of the Hon. James Coffin, the widely known Mary Coffin Starbuck and of Hon. Peter Coffin of Dover, N. H.

Lucretia Mott, acknowledged to be one of the greatest women that America has produced, was a descendant of Tristram Coffin. Others of his descendants were Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin and his brother General John Coffin, a staunch loyalist, as was Sir Isaac Coffin, both of whom greatly distinguished themselves for gallantry in the Revolutionary War.

Charles A. Coffin received an academic education in Maine and began his business career with his uncle Charles F. Coffin of Lynn, Mass., a prominent member of the Society of Friends, and for nearly twenty years was engaged in manufacturing and financing. In 1882 he formed a syndicate which purchased a

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controlling interest in the Thomson-Houston Electric Company, which company was moved from New Britain, Conn. to Lynn, Mass. Mr. Coffin became the Executive head of the company. His capacity for organization soon began to make itself felt in a rapid expansion in the business of the company. The Thomson-Houston Electric Company acquired control of the Excelsior Electric Company, the Schuyler Electric Company, the Van Depoele Electric Railway Company, the Brush Electric Company, and the Bentley-Knight Electric Company, and later the Thomson-Houston International Electric Company was organized to act as representative of the home company in foreign countries. In 1892 a consolidation of the Thomson-Houston Electric Company and the Edison General Electric Company, the two leading factors in the trade, was effected under the name of General Electric Company, of which Mr. Coffin became the head. The consolidation of the resources and the engineering and inventive talent of the two companies had a stimulating effect on the industry as a whole. During the thirty years that he was the head of the organization, twenty years as president and ten as chairman of its board, it was the main factor in an evolution which made the past quarter of a century known as the "age of electricity." In all the avenues of progress and invention it has been a prime mover and the impress of its creative energy appears in every country where electrical improvement has found a footing. Its capitalization grew from $35,00,000 in 1892 to $200,000,000 in 1923; its volume of business from $12,000,000 to

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$275,000,000; the value of its manufacturing plants from $4,000,000 to $167,000,000 and the number of employees from 4,000 to 80,000. Among its many contributions to scientific progress during Mr. Coffin's management were the turbine generator, machinery for the development of electric energy from water power, the electric propulsion of ships, the introduction of electricity for street railway transportation and later for the propulsion of railroad trains and finally the remarkable development of radio art. Its present main plant at Schenectady, New York, is the largest in the world devoted to the manufacture of electrical appliances, and it has other important manufacturing establishments at Lynn and Pittsfield, Mass., Harrison, Watsessing and Newark, New Jersey, Erie, Pa., Cleveland, Ohio and Fort Wayne, Ind., with small auxiliary factories in many other cities. As the guiding force of this vast organization during the period of its greatest growth, Mr. Coffin and his able associates did more to direct and stabilize the electrical industry than any other group of men.

Soon after the outbreak of the European war, Mr. Coffin, Myron T. Herrick, Ambassador to France, and others, organized the War Relief Clearing House, the function of which was to receive and forward to France and other allies contributions of clothing, foodstuffs and surgical and medical supplies, of thousands of organizations, churches, schools, voluntary groups and individuals from all parts of the United States. The War Relief Clearing House was consolidated with the Red Cross, after the latter came under the direction of the late Henry P. Davison. To avoid

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duplication in relief work, a committee on cooperation was appointed by the American Red Cross, of which Mr. Coffin was chairman, and which succeeded in bringing into relations of harmony and cooperation with the Red Cross nearly all the independent relief organizations operating in the United States upon lines at all parallel to the activities of the Red Cross.

In 1916 Mr. Coffin, Dr. J. H. Wigmore and others, organized the Society for American Fellowships in French Universities, now the American Field Service Fellowships in French Universities, and is still active in the affairs of that organization. For his various services during the war, he was made an officer of the Legion of Honor by the French government and was decorated with the Order of Leopold II by Belgium and the Order of St. Sava by Serbia. The honorary degree of LL.D. was conferred upon him by Union College in 1914 and he was given M.A. by Yale University in 1919 and LL.D. by Bowdoin College in 1922. He is an officer of the Chamber of Commerce of New York, and a member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Union League, National Arts, Bankers, Piping Rock and Creek Clubs. His favorite interests are the promotion of industrial peace, the exchange of educational facilities between America and other countries, public and private charities, horticulture and forestry. He is characterized by capacity for organization, for concentrated work, and for the upbuilding of industrial and engineering enterprises. He was married Sept. 25, 1872 to Caroline Louise, daughter of Rev. Edward Russell, D.D., of Holbrook, Mass., and had three children: Edward Russell,

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Jane, wife of Starling W. Childs, and Alice S. Coffin.

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