Clifford Eric Erickson was born on June 23, 1907 in DeKalb County, Illinois. He completed a bachelor's degree in education from Northern Illinois Teachers College in 1930 and continued his studies, receiving a master's degree in 1934 and a doctorate in 1937 from Northwestern University. He began his career at Michigan State College in 1944 as professor of Education, having previously taught in the Illinois public school system and at Northwestern University. Throughout his career he held various roles within the university. He became Director of the Institute of Counseling and Testing and Guidance in 1945 and later became the Dean of the Basic College in 1951. In 1953, he became the Dean of the School of Education and served in that role until being appointed Provost in 1962. Erickson unexpectedly passed away in March 1963.