

IN MEMORIAM
WILLIAM AUGUST FELSING

William August Felsing was born at Denton, Texas, on May 19, 1891, the son of a Methodist minister, William Felsing, and his wife, Anna. The meager income of a minister made it imperative for William to help earn part of his expenses by working at odd times, particularly during summer vacations. This habit of hard work was never broken until failing health forced him to slow down somewhat during the last few years. His parents moved to Bartlett where William attended high school. He then studied at Blinn College at Brenham for a year before teaching in the public schools for two years. He came to the University in 1910 where he obtained a bachelor's degree in 1913. During these three years he came under the influence of a great teacher, Professor E. P. Schoch, and decided to become a chemist and teacher. He took his Master's degree in 1915, and by 1916 his first two scientific publications appeared and were followed by about seventy others in the next thirty-five years.

Since the University did not offer the Doctor's degree at that time, Felsing went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he worked under F. G. Keyes and A. A. Noyes, who exerted a powerful influence over him while he was working toward his degree which was awarded in 1918 at about the time he joined the Chemical Warfare Service. He was stationed, with few interruptions, at the Edgewood Arsenal Chemical Laboratory and attained the rank of Captain, but as a typical Texan he thoroughly disliked the climate and terrain of Edgewood.

As soon as his war service was over, he came to The University of Texas which had offered him a position in the Department of Chemistry, and where Dr. Schoch promptly turned over his class of first year chemistry students to him. His time during the first year was not entirely taken up by teaching and research, however, because he found time to buy and furnish a house, which was to be his home for more than thirty years. During the next summer he returned to Boston where he married Miss Stella Scorgie, whom he had met while a student, and thus began what was to be a long and happy married life.

Among those surviving are his widow, Mrs. Stella Felsing, two children, Barbara, now a University graduate working in the Biochemical Institute, and William A., Jr., who is now a junior majoring in chemistry, and a sister, Mary, Mrs. Oscar Cage.

His scientific work on physical properties of solutions and on pressure-volume-temperature relationships of gases was continued without interruption, except during the two war periods, to his death. The experimental work was carried out largely by a large number of enthusiastic and devoted graduate students who are now widely scattered over the United States. On the side, he was always willing to cooperate with any colleague in working out various problems for which they did not have the equipment or the training, so we find a series of miscellaneous papers with members of the staff in organic and other divisions of chemistry.

During World War II he worked in the Underwater Sound Laboratory at Harvard with Dr. Paul Boner, and their cooperation was resumed in 1945 when the Defense Research Laboratory was organized at the University. He gave a minor part of his time to that work.

Undoubtedly, his greatest contributions to the University and the State came from his teaching and leadership not only in formal classroom teaching but in individual teaching and training of dozens of graduate students who worked with him through the years for eighteen years he had charge of the course in freshmen chemistry where his lectures to sections of 225 to 255 students were known for clarity and for his enthusiasm for chemistry and the scientific method and straight thinking. To meet the needs of the highly original course, which had been started by Dr. Schoch and developed by Dr. Felsing, a text was written, first with Dr. Schoch, and then with him and Dr. Watt. A number of revisions and new editions of this text have appeared. The large number of part-time tutors and instructors required to direct the laboratory work of this class of nearly 1000 students received only general directions in regard to the conduct of the laboratory work, but what they failed to do because of inexperience or lack of close supervision was probably made up largely by the enthusiastic attitude of the instructors who valued the faith placed in them.

As younger men took over the task of teaching the first year course, Dr. Felsing took over the senior and a graduate course in physical chemistry. Here again his patience, complete fairness, and lack of pretense were immediately appreciated by his students.

He was interested not only in Departmental and University affairs but also in those of his city. He was an active member of the Austin Kiwanis Club. His greatest extramural interest and activity lay, however, in the University Methodist Church. Probably none can evaluate his work in his Church better than his pastor and longtime close friend, Dr. Edmund Heinsohn, who said of him,

Great has been the contribution that he has made to the life of the University Methodist Church, of which he became a member during his student days. That means that he has been an active force and influence in the life of this Church for over thirty years. He has served as General Superintendent of the Sunday school, and has taught classes in the School. For a number of years, he was a member of the Church Campus Relations Committee, which serves as a governing body for the Wesley Foundation. He has been the Chairman of the Board of Stewards, and at the time of his going, was the Chairman of the important Committee on Pastoral Relations.

Among his colleagues, as chairman of the Department or as chairman of the Budget Council, his primary function seemed always to be that of peacemaker wherever frictions were about to show up. While he could take a very firm stand when he considered that an important principle was involved, he seemed always to find some basis for compromise, and he enjoyed the confidence of all members of the staff, of the administration and of the students.

He joined the American Chemical Society about thirty years ago and held, at various times, practically every office of the Central Texas Section of this Society. For a number of years he was a contributing editor of the Journal of Chemical Education. He was a member of the Texas Academy of Science, Sigma Xi, Phi Beta Kappa, and Phi Lambda Upsilon. As a Mason, he belonged to Acacia.

During the past five years his health had deteriorated slowly, and he was forced to avoid exertion, but he invariably claimed publicly that he was feeling fine and often met classes when he should have been in bed. His death came suddenly, of a heart attack, on Sunday, October 5, 1952. It leaves a gap in his home, in his Department, in the University, and in the University Methodist Church that, cannot be filled. It is the desire of the Faculty and the Administrative Staff of The University of Texas to pay tribute to this great Texan, and to express heartfelt sympathy to the members of the family, especially his devoted wife.

The Committee presents this statement for entry upon the Minutes of the General Faculty as an acknowledgement of the University's appreciation of him and the debt the University and Texas owe him for his studies and teaching, and asks that copies be sent to members of his bereaved family.

Respectfully submitted

C. P. Boner
H. J. Ettliger
Banks McLaurin
H. L. Lochte, Chairman

Filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty by H. L. Lochte, Chair of the Special William August Felsing Memorial Resolution Committee, December 11, 1952.

Distributed among the members of the General Faculty by the University Stenographic Bureau
December 18, 1952.

A.W.C., Manager