The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Drury “Blake” Alexander, professor emeritus, architecture, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
DRURY “BLAKE” ALEXANDER

Professor Emeritus Drury Blakeley Alexander died in Austin on December 11, 2011, at the age of eighty-seven. He served on the faculty of the School of Architecture from 1955 to his retirement in 1994, but his ties to The University of Texas at Austin began in his childhood. Born in Paris, Texas, in 1924, Blake grew up among family members who had graduated from the University during its formative years. In turn, Blake entered the University in 1942 as a freshman in the Department of Architecture. World War II interrupted his studies, and he served with distinction in the U.S. Army until 1946, receiving a Bronze Star. Upon his return to Austin, he completed his Bachelor of Architecture in 1950, but rather than follow the path to architectural practice taken by most of his classmates, he decided to pursue the study of architectural history, which was an emerging academic discipline at the time. He took an additional year of courses to earn a Bachelor of Science in Art and then went on to Columbia University where he received a Master of Arts in Art History in 1953. His thesis topic was a comparative study of the planning of seven towns in colonial America.

Following his graduation from Columbia, Blake began his teaching career in the Department of Architecture at Kansas State University and achieved professional registration as an architect. Two years later, he returned to his alma mater as the School of Architecture’s first full-time architectural historian. Promotions from assistant professor to associate professor and professor followed, respectively, in 1960 and 1967. In 1964, Blake became director of the Texas Architectural Survey. For nearly forty years, he introduced generations of students to the history of Western architecture. His soft-spoken enthusiasm for his subject inspired many to travel and see with their own eyes the buildings he had shown them in class, many of which he had photographed on his own study trips. The University, the Texas Students’ Association, and the Texas Society of Architects recognized the quality of his teaching. The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture honored him with its Distinguished Teacher Award in 1995.

An off-campus project in the summer of 1958 was pivotal in his development as a scholar. Through the recommendation of Ernest Connally, another University of Texas architecture graduate who had become an architectural historian, the Historic American Buildings Survey appointed Blake to lead a team documenting buildings in the Schuylkill Valley in Pennsylvania. This experience brought him face to façade with a variety of historic structures and challenged him to master the techniques of preparing measured drawings, skills that he would apply to his teaching.

Blake had life-long interest in the classical tradition of architecture in the American South. With colleagues and friends of the School of Architecture, he developed expertise in the history of architecture in Texas and adapted the documentation techniques he had mastered in Pennsylvania to undergraduate measured drawings classes that recorded buildings throughout the state. Jointly sponsored by the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art and the School of Architecture, it was one of the first surveys of historic architecture undertaken in Texas. His research on the project culminated in the 1966 publication, *Texas Homes of the Nineteenth Century*. This book remains a landmark in the historiography of Texas architecture, both as a foundational study and as an early vehicle for promoting its subject among the public.
Blake applied his knowledge of historic buildings to the challenges of their preservation and was instrumental in establishing historic preservation as a professional discipline in Texas and, more broadly, as a public responsibility of the state, the City of Austin, and the University. The success of the Texas Architectural Survey inspired the state to broaden the scope and authority of the Texas Historical Survey Committee (now the Texas Historical Commission). In 1969, Blake chaired the committee’s first State Board of Review for the National Register of Historic Places. He subsequently directed the Dallas Historic Landmarks Survey (1971-74) and, nearer to home, served for many years on the City of Austin’s Historic Preservation Commission. He always kept a close eye on the University’s historic structures. His leadership received recognition by the City of Austin, the Austin Heritage Society, the Texas Historical Commission, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Blake served the University community in many capacities, including terms on the Faculty Council, the Faculty Building Advisory Committee, and the Committee on Committees, and he was instrumental in the acquisition of the Winedale Historical Center. His most enduring achievement is the Alexander Architectural Archive, formally established as a component of the University of Texas Libraries in 1979 and named in his honor in 1997. Now among the largest architectural archives in the United States, it is an outgrowth of “Blake’s Closet,” a collection that began with student drawings and occasional donations of professional works entrusted to Blake’s care.

This stewardship of drawings and architectural records complemented Blake’s love of books. An ardent advocate of the Architecture and Planning Library during his lifetime, his influence continues through the gift of his personal library and archive and the creation of the Blake Alexander Architectural Library Endowment, which he dedicated to enrich the quality of students’ experiences through collection enhancement and innovative services.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Richard Cleary (chair), Michael Holleran, Christopher Long, and head librarian of the Architecture and Planning Library, Beth Dodd.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Architecture on October 30, 2012, and posted under “Memorials” at http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.