IN MEMORIAM

ALICE LOVELACE COOKE

Dr. Alice Lovelace Cooke, a retiree of The University of Texas Department of English, died in Austin on July 12, 1988. She was preceded in death by her husband, Travis C. Cooke, and by her sisters, Anne L. Brumby of Houston, Virginia L. Thompson of Eagle Pass, and Marie L. Allen of Houston. She had no children, and survivors include nieces, nephews, and numerous great-nieces and great-nephews.

Alice Lovelace, daughter of Charles Lovelace and Etta Belle Turner, was born September 25, 1890, in Jonesboro, Texas. She attended public schools in Jonesboro, Hamilton, and San Marcos, where she graduated from high school. In the early days of the twentieth century few career opportunities were available to women and, for the studious and intelligent, school teaching was the obvious choice. Alice Lovelace, who was both studious and intelligent, enrolled in Southwest Normal School (today Southwest Texas State University) in San Marcos, where she was an honor student and from which she received a permanent teacher's certificate in 1908. After teaching in the Presidio County Schools and the Flatonia High School, she secured a position in the Austin Public Schools (1911-18), serving during the last three years as Principal of Mathews School.

Living in Austin enabled her to attend summer sessions at The University of Texas, majoring in English, and to save enough money to take a year off from teaching in order to complete her A.B. degree in 1920. The University of Texas was still a comparatively young regional institution, enrollment was increasing rapidly, the physical plant--much of it comprised of World War I wooden shacks--was grossly
inadequate, oil had yet to be discovered on West Texas land, and The University was almost solely dependent upon the Legislature for its budget. Unfortunately the Legislature, meeting biennially, failed to anticipate the large number of new students registering each year, with the result that departments throughout The University found themselves understaffed at the beginning of each new school year. After the students were actually enrolled and sitting in classrooms, niggardly supplementary funds were available in the President's office. What happened in departments like English was that the Senior Professors appointed some of the more promising students in their graduate classes to part-time teaching positions. Thus most of the hordes of freshmen and many of the sophomores were taught by part-time teachers who were also part-time students working on advanced degrees.

Alice Lovelace, an experienced teacher who, as an undergraduate, had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, the highest academic honorary society, was appointed part-time tutor in English for the long session of 1920-21. There is no record of her feelings upon being appointed to the lowest of the various ranks (the title of tutor was later changed to teaching assistant) at the princely salary of $1,000, but it is quite probable that the Department of English needed her as much as she needed it. At any rate she held the rank for three years at slight increases in salary until she was appointed to full-time instructor in 1924 at a salary of $1,800.

The year 1921 was memorable in the life of Alice Lovelace. She was now a college teacher aiming at a Ph.D. degree, and she married Travis C. Cooke, with whom she shared a happy married life until his death in 1971, fifty years later. Shortly after her marriage she received her M.A. degree (1923), having written a thesis on Hawthorne's shorter narratives; then followed her Ph.D. degree (1933), with a dissertation on Walt Whitman, who became her lifelong speciality. (Even so she was
not permitted to teach a junior course in American Literature until three years later.)
After having been an instructor for fifteen years, during much of which she was also working on advanced degrees, Dr. Cooke was promoted to the rank of assistant professor in 1919--a rank that she was to hold until her retirement on February 1, 1958.

Meanwhile Dr. Cooke had established herself as a highly respected and popular, though demanding, teacher, a valuable and willing worker on committees, and a recognized publishing scholar. Her personal qualities made her a trusted friend, colleague, and teacher: she had a great deal of charm and warmth, a ready wit, a fine sense of humor, and a generosity that she shared with colleagues and students alike. (The chairman of this committee remembers that when he himself was suddenly and unexpectedly appointed to a part-time tutorship, without teaching experience, with little knowledge of what to teach, and without supervision, he turned to Dr. Cooke for help and advice. She gave generously of her time and experience and thereby earned an undying gratitude.)

That such a person as Dr. Cooke, whose scholarship and instructional qualities were recognized by all, should nevertheless spend nearly thirty-five years in the "trenches" (the lowest ranks, without tenure, and assigned chiefly to freshman and sophomore classes) may strike one today as a kind of horror story, as indeed it is. There are two explanations, neither justifications: The University had no policy concerning promotions and tenure, and in its early days the Department of English was governed by courtly Southern Gentlemen, whose elaborate courtesy toward women did not extend to treating them as professional peers. Indeed in this respect the Department of English was by no means alone; in other departments only a handful of women ever attained membership in the upper two ranks. Nor was the
situation better in the business and professional world outside academia; women usually did the menial and clerical work, often without the compensating courtesy. Women in all walks of the business and professional world, including academia, were simply victims of the times. It should be added, however, that although Dr. Cooke never held a tenure rank, her position was never in jeopardy; she was as much a regular member of the Department as the most senior of professors.

Something happened in 1941 that was to transform the Department of English in many important respects. Having given notice of his intentions at a preceding departmental meeting, Professor Dobie, on May 7, 1940, introduced a motion that a committee be appointed by the chairman (Philip Graham) "to study the organization and functions of the Department and all other matters relating thereto..." The committee would be instructed to report in the first semester of 1940-41, and all matters approved by the Department would be referred to the appropriate authorities. The motion, upon being introduced and seconded, was open to discussion, which immediately centered upon whether the committee should be elected or appointed by the chairman. Appointment by the chairman prevailed, and the committee subsequently appointed comprised Messrs. Boatright, Joughin, Starnes, Graham (chairman), and Dr. Cooke. It is significant that three of the members were under-professors and that the inclusion of Dr. Cooke underscored her standing with her colleagues.

The committee report, which encompassed 32 measures, was not submitted until March 25, 1941. Its recommendations, regarded as radical by conservative members of the Department, required a dozen meetings before being approved with minor amendments. Voting by ballot was adopted, but the debate, led by Graham, was both warm and relatively free, with Dr. Cooke a frequent defender of the report.
Adoption of the report, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated, in effect almost completely transformed the Department of English. What it did was to transfer most authority to the Department as a whole, except for budgetary authority vested in the full professors by the Board of Regents. Thereafter it was a different Department.

It has been stated previously that throughout her career Dr. Cooke was a publishing scholar (see Bibliography) and a distinguished teacher. The adoption of the Graham report, however, greatly enhanced her value and usefulness as a committee member. She was an active member of the Freshman English Committee during a period when important revisions of the course were being undertaken, she served for many years on the committee that supervised courses in American literature, and she also served for extended periods on two highly important committees: the Committee on Teaching Assistants and Assistants, of which she was a long time chairman, and the departmental Work Load Committee, which sought to rationalize, if not to equalize, teaching assignments with the myriad administrative positions inherent in so large a department. Of importance also was frequent membership on the Undergraduate Course Committee, which recommended teaching assignments in the numerous undergraduate courses to all members of the Department. Of these various assignments perhaps that of chairmanship of the Committee on Teaching Assistants and Assistants was of most importance, as it was certainly the most time-consuming. In a growing and now large Department the number of applications for these positions might number in the hundreds, and interviews and evaluations of credentials consumed more of the time of the chairman than of her fellow members. Although there were other routine committee assignments for Dr. Cooke during her long service, those mentioned were not only the most important but would not have been possible before the Graham Report, when
such authority would have been vested in the full professors (familiarly called the Old
Guard). Not only were the assignments, all performed conscientiously and well, of
significant importance to the Department, but they are central to an understanding of
the status of Dr. Cooke in the Department.

The retirement of a tenureless assistant professor in 1958 did not pass
unnoticed at the time nor was forgotten afterwards. Of Dr. Cooke's many students, the
one who attained the greatest distinction was perhaps Willie Morris. He became editor
of the Daily Texan in 1955, editor of the Texas Observer in 1960, and editor-in-chief
of Harper's in 1967. He spent the school year of 1956-57 as a Rhodes Scholar at
Oxford. He is the author of a notable book, North Toward Home (1967), and is now
writer-in-residence at the University of Mississippi. At the time of Dr. Cooke's
retirement he wrote a tribute, a paragraph of which follows.

"To her English classes, she was known always as a lady who took constant
delight in her work. Her favorite is Walt Whitman, and she succeeded, perhaps
through some process of poetic osmosis, in passing along something of the bard's
unending faith in life and people to her students."

Professor M. M. Crow, who was chairman of the Department of English for
several years during Dr. Cooke's membership, says of her, "First of all, she was a very
successful teacher, highly regarded by her students. She was always faithful, loyal,
true to her convictions as to what was right, and unremitting in her efforts to maintain
and improve Departmental standards at all levels. What would be best for the
students, best for our staff members? She was never motivated by self-interest.
Through her tireless work on committees and through her plainly stated and
convincing speeches in Departmental meetings she exerted much influence and was
highly respected."
Professor Wilson Hudson, who of all her colleagues knew Dr. Cooke best in her later years, writes of her: "My earliest recollection of her goes back to the summer of 1926. I had enrolled in the standard sophomore course, a survey of English literature. Mrs. Cooke happened to be the teacher of the section for which I was registered. After calling the roll, she began with this statement: 'Whatever can be said of the English, they have produced the world's greatest literature.' This was a sweeping pronouncement for a sophomore to ponder. Because of a conflict I had to change my schedule. I have since regretted what I must have missed by dropping out of Mrs. Cooke's class.

"It was not until I returned after the war to teach English at UT that I came to know Mrs. Cooke. In Departmental meetings she was a frequent participant in our debates, some of which were rather heated. She was never excessively positive, nor did she indulge in sarcasm. Her arguments were always well reasoned and they seemed to me to be on the right side of every question. She was never motivated by factionalism.

"After marrying Gertrude Reese I came to know Mrs. Cooke personally. When Gertrude joined the Department as a teaching assistant Alice befriended her and gave her many helpful hints. Our first dinner invitation came from Alice and Travis--and what a dinner it was! After Travis's death and Alice's retirement, we called on Alice every Christmas. Gertrude would take something of her baking, a cake or a loaf of bread. On our visits Alice loved to talk about old times and personalities in the Department.

"On one visit Alice told us why she had resolved to seek a doctor's degree. After serving as principal of Mathews Elementary School, she saw that she had to make a choice. 'I said to myself that it was a Ph.D. or the river for me.' To earn a Ph.D.
while teaching was no easy task. Alice had to write her dissertation by lamplight because at the time (during the Depression) she and Travis were living on a farm with no electricity. Jean Allen Richardson, a niece of Alice's who lived with her in later years, remembers seeing Alice seated in dim light at a big table covered with papers.

"Alice had a very active sense of humor and she did not hesitate to raise a laugh at her own expense. She told this story of a predicament that she had fallen into as a young teacher. On a final examination she set before the students a subject and asked them to discuss it 'in the style of Matthew Arnold.' Charles Fay, who had the reputation of being a brilliant student, wrote in his booklet, 'I cannot write like Matthew Arnold, and I would not if I could.' Then he laid the booklet on the desk and left the room. Alice was in a jam: she could not fail a brilliant student and she could not pass Charles in the course unless his final was passing. She had to get permission to give him a special examination and then persuade him to take it. Alice would laugh heartily when recalling her impossibly difficult question and the trouble it had caused her.

"During our last visit to Alice in the Christmas season of 1987 her mind was on her days as principal at Mathews. She would say over and over, 'Mr. McCallum wanted me because I could sing, I could sing.' Then she would say, 'He said I could take care of the big boys.' It seemed that by having them sing when they became unruly she could control them. This may be one of many reasons why the Superintendent of Austin Public Schools wanted her as a principal. Alice liked to play the piano and sing with her sisters, the Lovelace girls, when they were young."

Dr. Cooke was a member of numerous honorary and professional organizations. Among them:

Phi Beta Kappa (for which she served as Secretary of Alpha Chapter, University of Texas, 1945-46)
Delta Kappa Gamma (National Honorary Society for Women Teachers)
Modern Language Association of America
Texas State Teachers Association
Conference of College Teachers of English
American Association of University Women
Poetry Society of Texas
Austin Poetry Society
University Ladies Club
Austin Women's Club

After her retirement Dr. Cooke remained active in various organizations to which she belonged, especially local ones. Her mind remained clear and active, as exemplified by her co-authorship of *Pioneer Women Teachers in Texas* (1952) and a volume of poetry, *Sitting and Looking Out* (1972). Indeed many of her close friends and former colleagues can recall receiving, during the latter days of her life, Christmas cards in the form of a sonnet written by her.

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS READ

"Prize Literature of the Past Five Years," read before the Hyde Park Reading Club, November 1933.

"Whitman's Background in the Industrial Movements of His time," University of Texas Studies in English, No. 18 (1938), pp. 140-162.


Review of Betty Smith's A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943), given for the benefit of St. David's Episcopal Guild, 1943.

"Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass," paper read before the Ashbel Literary Society, University of Texas, 1943.


"Lecture on Free Verse," read before the Austin Branch of the Texas Poetry Society, 1951.


*Pioneer Women Teachers of Texas*. Austin: Published by Delta Kappa Gamma Society, Alpha State Organization [1952]. Edited with Clara M. Parker, Mary Emma Rosson, and Lalla M. Odom. Sonnet by Alice Cooke, p. 4.

"Walt Whitman as Critic: *Democratic Vistas*," read at Whitman Symposium, University of Texas, 1957.


William H. Cunningham, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors C. L. Cline (Chairman), Powell Stewart, and Wilson Hudson.