IN MEMORIAM

ROBERT CRAWFORD COTNER

Dr. Robert C. Cotner, University of Texas Professor Emeritus of Social and Urban History, died at his home on September 23, 1980, at the age of seventy-three. He is survived by his wife Elizabeth, a son, Robert C. Cotner, Jr. of San Marcos, a daughter, Mrs. Catherine McCulley, and a granddaughter, Ann McCulley, both of Houston.

Born November 1, 1906, in Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Cotner earned a B.A. degree from Baylor University in 1928. He also held a M.A. degree from Brown University (1929) and a Ph.D. degree from Harvard University (1959). He held fellowships while a student at Brown and Harvard. He also was a recipient of the Walter Sharp Fellowship at Rice University in 1949. In 1970, Baylor honored him with a Doctor of Letters degree, citing him as an authority on Southern and Southwestern history.

Prior to coming to The University of Texas faculty, Dr. Cotner was debate coach at Midland High School (1929-31); Assistant Professor of History, Dean of Men, and debate coach at Henderson State College in Arkansas (1931-35); and Professor of History and Government and Dean of Men at Stetson University in Florida (1935-40).

Dr. Cotner was one of six instructors hired by The University of Texas Department of History in 1940 to accommodate increasing student enrollment. Only he and Dr. Barnes Lathrop stayed. He started with four American history sections of about thirty-five students each. In 1941, Dr. Cotner, a student of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. at Harvard, offered the first course at Texas in United States social and intellectual history.
During World War II Dr. Cotner served as a commander in the United States Navy, assigned to the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations Personnel Plans.

Dr. Cotner was promoted to Assistant Professor at Texas in 1949, to Associate Professor in 1960, to Professor in 1969, and to Professor Emeritus in 1977. He was a visiting professor at the University of Virginia in the summer of 1957 and at the University of Kentucky in the summer of 1965.

Dr. Cotner's scholarly contributions were many. Of most enduring value were his publications on Governor James Stephen Hogg of Texas. In 1951, he edited the Addresses and State Papers of James S. Hogg and eight years later brought out the standard biography of Hogg. The book won the Summerfield Roberts Award of the Sons of the Republic of Texas, as well as an award from the American Association for State and Local History. Governor Price Daniel gave a reception at the Governor's Mansion on June 8, 1959, to launch the biography of Hogg. On the wall of Dr. Cotner's office in Garrison Hall was a photograph of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson presenting a copy of the biography to President John F. Kennedy.

Among his edited books were Theodore Foster's Minutes of the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention of March, 1790 (1929, 1967); (with R. L. Bieseke, John Ezell, Gilbert Fite, and Joe B. Frantz), Readings in American History, 2 vols. (1952 and four revisions); The Texas State Capitol (1968); and Texas Cities and the Great Depression (1973). In addition, he contributed numerous invited papers and lectures, chapters in books, articles in scholarly journals, and book reviews.

Along with this scholarly activity, Dr. Cotner was active in many professional organizations, serving on the membership committees of the Western Historical Association, Southern Historical Association, and
Southwestern Social Science Association; on the program committees of the Organization of American Historians and the East Texas Historical Association; on the executive committee of the Southern Historical Association; on the board of directors of the East Texas Historical Association; as book review editor for the Southwestern Historical Quarterly and West Texas Historical Association Yearbook; as history editor of the Southwestern Social Science Association Quarterly; as a fellow of the Texas State Historical Association; and as president of the West Texas Historical Association and the East Texas Historical Association. In 1979 the latter association honored him with the Ralph W. Steen Service Award. His contributions to scholarship were recognized by the Texas Heritage Foundation which awarded him its National Medal in 1957. He was elected to the prestigious Texas Institute of Letters. He was also a member of the honorary society, Phi Kappa Phi.

Dr. Cotner loved to meet socially with his faculty colleagues. He usually attended several association meetings each year. He was a longtime member of Scholia, an organization of faculty from The University of Texas, Southwest Texas State University, and Southwestern University, which meets monthly during the academic year for dinner and to hear a guest speaker.

Dr. Cotner gave unselfishly of his time in department, University, and public service. The committees on which he served over the years are too numerous to list here, but included the Faculty Senate, the University Council, the Commencement Committee, Faculty Advising Committee on Extended Service, and the Arts and Sciences Pre-Law Advisory Committee.

Fully as important as Dr. Cotner's contributions to scholarship and to the vitality of the historical profession was his impact as a classroom teacher. For decades he made undergraduates at The University of Texas aware of dimensions of American history that their high school and college
survey courses had left largely untouched. Dr. Cotner's upper-level two semester course in U. S. social history became famous as a vehicle for broadening students' understanding of their country's past beyond the conventional political, economic, and military aspects. His reading list for the course invited students to understand that all that happened was part of the richly-textured fabric of history and to appreciate the complexities and diversities of our national experience. His other curricular innovations included courses in biography and urban history.

But more than just opening new vistas to undergraduates, Dr. Cotner made them believe that he cared about them. In a large state university, students may feel lost in the crowd. Dr. Cotner always had some word for students to let them know he appreciated their individuality. He was especially quick to identify promising students. He invited those who made A's on his exams to have lunch with him, enabling them to establish an intellectual community. If Dr. Cotner thought a student showed the promise to do successful graduate work, he encouraged him or her in that direction. Professor Lewis Gould, chairman of The University of Texas at Austin History Department, called Dr. Cotner "a valued and dedicated" member of the department. "He spent endless hours with his undergraduates and graduate students, and their welfare and future were always his first concerns," Dr. Gould said. "His biography of Governor James S. Hogg is the standard life of an important Texan. His colleagues and students will miss his forceful presence in their meetings and the classrooms of Garrison Hall."

Many graduates of The University of Texas at Austin have an understanding of the richness of American history because of having studied with Robert Cotner, but equally important, they have an understanding that human concern, dignity, and involvement have been wonderfully present in his classrooms. His colleagues will remember the courteousness and thoughtfulness that marked him, in the old-fashioned phrase, as "a gentleman of the old school."
This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Norman D. Brown (chairman), Philip L. White, and Brian Levack.