REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR

HARRY L. KENT, JR.

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a Memorial Resolution for Harry L. Kent, Jr., Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM

HARRY L. KENT, JR.

Harry Llewellyn Kent, Jr. was born on June 8, 1908, in Hays, Kansas. He attended high school in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where his father (Kent Sr.) was President of New Mexico A&M College (later New Mexico State). Although he did not actually graduate from high school young Harry accumulated enough credits to enter New Mexico A&M in 1925 and received his B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering in May 1929. While in college he was active in student affairs, played varsity baseball, and was editor of the college yearbook in 1928. His academic record placed him near the top of his graduating class. As an honor graduate of the Reserve Officer Training Corps he was offered an appointment as a Second Lieutenant but decided instead to pursue a Masters degree at Kansas State College, beginning in the summer of 1929. Harry had lived in Manhattan during his earlier years when his father was associated with Kansas State.

He completed his graduate degree in May 1930 after submitting a thesis on the conversion of home heating furnaces from coal to natural gas. Anticipating an immediate job offer from a large manufacturer of equipment, he learned instead that his entry date had been delayed for one year because of the national economic crisis. Since he had achieved what was then the terminal education for college teachers, he decided to continue with an academic career and became an Instructor at Oklahoma A&M College (later Oklahoma State) on September 1, 1931. Two years later (August 13, 1933) was married to a charming Oklahoman, Miss Alfa A. Riden, in Las Cruces. While in Oklahoma he became a Registered Professional Engineer (1935) but remained at the Instructor rank.

On September 1, 1938, Harry joined the Mechanical Engineering Department at The University of Texas as an Assistant Professor and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1943. Although his advancement to Professor would not occur for two decades, this should not be seen as a sign that his academic career had not been successful. Indeed, during his 35-year tenure at Austin, Harry Kent became one of the most respected and revered teachers in the College of Engineering, as well as a skilled academic administrator.

Unlike many of his peers who returned to graduate school in the two decades after World War II to pursue the newly-required Ph.D. credential, Harry and his family (which included two children, Harry L. III - 1940, and Roberta Bernice - 1944) chose to remain in Austin with full awareness of the consequences on his professional advancement. Such a momentous decision, in which he weighed his own career desires
against the impact of such a move on his family, displayed one of Harry's unique strengths — he was the consummate "team player," always ready to sacrifice personal desires to help the group achieve its goals. As a faculty member he was a Department Chair's delight, willing to teach a wide range of courses, to participate on numerous governance committees, and to serve as a faculty adviser to student organizations. In the administrative area, he served as Acting Chair of Mechanical Engineering on two different occasions when the department was seeking a permanent leader (Summer 1962 through Fall 1963, and Spring through Summer 1964). Finally, in January 1965, he was appointed Vice-Chair and Undergraduate Program Coordinator, a post he would hold (under two Chairs) until his retirement in August 1974, at which time he was designated Professor Emeritus.

In 1954 the Dean of Engineering in Austin asked Harry to serve a two-year term at the Chulalongkoru University in Bangkok, Thailand, as the primary University of Texas participant in a U.S. government-sponsored development program between the two institutions. During this assignment Harry organized a graduate program in engineering, supervised the construction of new engineering laboratories, edited the academic catalog for the engineering school, and served as a senior adviser to the local Dean of Engineering.

During the late 1960's Harry would finally be recognized for his decades of diligent service as a classroom teacher and student counselor. In 1966 he received an Outstanding Teaching Award from the Student Assembly, and a year later he was one of three members of the University faculty recognized as recipients of the Standard Oil of Indiana Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence. For three consecutive years, beginning in 1966, he was named the Outstanding Student Adviser in Mechanical Engineering (and received it twice later). In 1969 he received the College's highest recognition for teaching excellence, the General Dynamics Award. Showing further recognition for his exemplary career of service, the College established in 1981 an endowed Professorship for Mechanical Engineering in Harry's honor.

Harry was not only inspiring in the classroom but also as a personal mentor of graduate students. Without education or experience in the theoretical aspects of engineering science, he chose to concentrate on developing Masters degree candidates for the real world of engineering practice in industry. Between 1950 and 1969 he supervised a dozen M.S. theses in the general area of internal combustion engine performance. A number of his graduate students later received doctoral degrees and became college faculty members. Another former student distinguished himself as a co-founder of one of Austin's first "high tech" R&D companies.

Although not a prolific writer, Harry collaborated in 1953 with two of his faculty colleagues to produce an undergraduate textbook in thermodynamics, and with one of his former graduate students on two research papers in technical journals. Thus the legacy of Harry Kent was not an extensive published literature but rather it was the broad, positive influence of his teaching, advising, and counseling on the lives of literally thousands of students (and hundreds of colleagues) at the four venues where he served (Manhattan, Stillwater, Austin, and Bangkok).

One can gauge the character of Harry's influence on those about him by reviewing a packet of reference letters supporting his nomination for an award. The holder of a Distinguished Professorship at another institution wrote, "In dealing with my own graduate students, I often realize that I am unconsciously following the pattern I learned on my Masters research with Harry Kent." A former undergraduate student commented, "My experiences in his classes have given me the highest regard for his professional knowledge as well as for his wit and insight into human problems, all of which he blends together successfully." And a former Dean of Engineering remembered, "When we began hiring young PhDs into Mechanical Engineering, I asked Harry to work with each of them to develop a method of effective teaching." But perhaps the most appropriate comment on the life and career of Harry appeared in a letter from a long-time Department Chair who said plainly, "I have never met a person who did not like Harry Kent."
Outside of his family and his faculty activities, Harry was an avid outdoors man and an expert storyteller who could weave intriguing tales about the adventures of his early years in Kansas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma (during the decades just after they had achieved statehood). As a fisherman, he especially enjoyed being in Austin as the newly constructed Lake Travis was being filled. He eventually came to know how to catch fish in virtually every cove and finger of this vast reservoir. Indeed, because of this expertise he became an unofficial fishing guide for many of his faculty colleagues.

Harry Kent died on January 5, 1995, in Austin, survived by his wife Alfa and their two children.

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors J. Parker Lamb (Chair), H. Grady Rylander, and Howard E. Brown.

Distributed to Voting and Emeritus Members of the faculty of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, the Dean of the College of Engineering, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on August 31, 1995.