The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for William W. Newcomb, Jr., professor emeritus, anthropology, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
WILLIAM W. NEWCOMB, JR.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on October 30, 1921, William W. Newcomb, Jr. Ph.D., succumbed peacefully to pneumonia in Hospice Austin’s Christopher House on Monday, February 8, 2010. He was eighty-eight, having lived his years to the benefit of all who knew him, and many who only read his books or who visited the museum of which he was first a curator and, after only two years, its director. He directed the Texas Memorial Museum for twenty-one years, and served on the anthropology faculty at The University of Texas at Austin, where the museum is housed, until 1978 when he became professor emeritus of anthropology.

Bill grew up in Ann Arbor, not far from his Detroit birthplace, where he pursued and received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Michigan. Between graduation with the B.A. and his graduate work, he was drafted into military service, where he served in General Patton’s Army from 1943 through the end of World War II. He was awarded three battle stars for his service to country.

His first academic job was at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, where he fit in marvelously but for the cold weather, which neither he nor his young wife, Gleny, found congenial. After a year at Colgate, he was happy to accept a job offer at UT where the weather was warm and sometimes hot and where he was needed as curator of the Texas Memorial Museum and a research scientist. Two years later he was director of the museum. His tenure at the museum was not without an occasional controversy, which he handled well, but he is better remembered at the museum not for the controversies that were part of the times, but rather for his expansion of the museum’s study collections and for his ability to utilize available materials to their fullest extent in service to his vision of the museum as an important educational institution. His colleague, Dee Ann Story, who once worked for him as curator of anthropology, and is now a retired director of the University’s Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, remembers, “He was able to take extremely modest resources and do a lot with them. The exhibits were enormously improved under his leadership.”

His colleagues in the anthropology department used to marvel at what he was able to accomplish in the museum, and they noticed particularly, of course, the floors that housed anthropological materials. His colleagues and successors at the museum note his success in turning the museum into the educational entity that he had wanted to “tie together fields of knowledge formally separated in the classroom but inseparably linked in nature.”

Bill Newcomb’s lasting interest in Indians of North America may have been sparked by his first fieldwork with the Delaware, but the best known of his many books and articles is his 1961 book, The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times, which UT Press continues to reprint in order to keep up with the brisk demand. A persuasive writer, he garnered considerable praise for this, his first book. The review in the journal Ethnohistory says, for example, that it is “the most comprehensive scholarly, and authoritative account covering all the Indians of Texas, and is an invaluable and indispensable reference for students of Texas history, for anthropologists, and for lovers of Indian lore.”

Bill truly appreciated the environment, especially its living components—the animals and plants—for which he had a special affinity. We all knew about his green thumb, utilized even more eloquently in his retirement; and we heard stories of his powers over and good relations with animals of all kinds. Even fish seemed to do his
bidding; for he was indeed a committed and very successful fly fisherman after having first been invited to join his anthropological colleagues, Chad Oliver and Glen Evans, on their outings of fly fishing.

Bill Newcomb, Jr. will be long remembered by the academic community for the lasting contributions he made in book and article form, and by The University of Texas community for his leadership for twenty-three years at the Texas Memorial Museum. He is mourned by all who knew him as a friend or colleague. His passing is a great loss.

The memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Brian Stross (chair), James Neely, and Mariah Wade.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on July 21, 2010. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.