DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
SHIRLEY BIRD PERRY

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Shirley Bird Perry, senior vice president, Office of the President, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
SHIRLEY BIRD PERRY

Shirley Bird Perry, who played a leadership role in the administration of The University of Texas at Austin for nearly five decades, died on May 4, 2011. She was seventy-four years old and had battled cancer for several years.

Born in 1936 near Stockdale, Texas, to Homer and Laura Stevenson Bird, Shirley Ann Bird was known by friends and colleagues throughout her life as “Shirley Bird.”

After graduating in a class of 21 seniors in 1954, Shirley Bird arrived at UT Austin where her first class had an enrollment of 240 students. This experience provided her with an eternal soft spot for students arriving at UT from small towns. While at UT Austin, she was an active member of several student organizations, including the Texas Union Board of Directors, Orange Jackets, and Mortar Board. During her senior year, the Dads’ Association (now the Parents’ Association) named Shirley Bird the University’s “Most Outstanding Woman Student.”

Shirley Bird earned her degree in education in 1958 and joined the Texas Union staff as program director. The following year, she ventured to California to teach junior high and was joined by several other UT Austin graduates who became her life-long friends. After a very long year of teaching seventh graders, she returned to the Texas Union as program director. She began dating Sam Perry, and they married in 1963, notwithstanding her disdain for his conduct at UT sporting events.

Shirley Bird continued her work at the Texas Union for nearly a decade, and the Union, under her direction, played a major role in the lives of the students who participated in its programs. Many of those students became her lifetime friends. Among many other activities, she coordinated appearances by distinguished speakers, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy, and Marianne Moore. Shirley Bird earned a master’s degree in educational psychology from UT Austin in 1967. She was an active member of the Association of College Unions-International (ACUI), serving as its first female vice president and president. In 1972, Shirley Bird was named director of the Texas Union.

She left UT Austin to work for the ACUI for three years. In 1980, President Peter Flawn asked her to return to UT Austin and placed her in charge of the University’s 1983 Centennial, which included managing the activities of the Centennial Commission, a series of commemorative events, and a capital campaign. These efforts resulted in an enormous growth in faculty endowments, lectureships, and scholarships that provided an infusion of faculty and student talent, giving a major boost to UT’s academic standing and its transition to the stature of a national research university.

A short time later, President Flawn appointed Shirley Bird vice president of Development and University Relations, a position she enjoyed under both Presidents Flawn and Cunningham, participating in many of the decisions that guided UT during that time. When President Bill Cunningham became chancellor of The University of Texas System, he insisted that Shirley Bird join him as vice chancellor for Development and University Relations. In this position, she directed fund-raising operations, public affairs activities, estate and
trust management, event planning and special services, and other related activities. However, Shirley Bird couldn’t be kept away from the Forty Acres for long. After her retirement from the UT System in 2004, UT President Larry Faulkner welcomed her back to campus as a senior vice president.

In addition to being a member on numerous University-related committees, she served on the Public Affairs Committee of the Association of American Universities, the Executive Committee of the University Relations division of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and a special task force on State Relations coordinated by NASULGC and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. She also received the Marvin D. “Swede” Johnson Service Award in State Government Relations.

A Life Member of the Texas Exes, she received the organization’s Top Hand Award in 1984. The Parents’ Association presented its Award of Distinction to her in 1992. The Texas Union named a special student recognition award in her honor, the Shirley Bird Perry Leadership Award. She was named a Woman of Power by the Austin Business Journal in 2003 and received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Texas Exes in 2005. In 2011, President Bill Powers awarded Shirley Bird with the University’s highest honor, the Presidential Citation, and he and the other UT presidents, for whom she had worked, established the “Shirley Bird Perry Endowment Fund for University History” in her honor.

Shirley Bird was also instrumental in preserving much of the history of The University of Texas through the UT Oral History Project to record the memories and achievements of the institution’s leaders, most all of whom she had worked with during the last half century. Her colleagues recognized the depth of her knowledge of the institution and her dedication to UT.

Shirley Bird also served on the boards of directors of City National Bank of Austin and Southwest Public Service Company, the advisory board of JP Morgan Chase Bank of Austin, and other corporate boards during her long career.

Friends also remember Shirley Bird for her boundless energy, her grace under fire, and her irreverent sense of humor. She was famous for her “expressions.” One assistant even prepared a glossary, which included lines, such as “There I was with my hair on fire and my horse in a ditch,” “I’m suffering from a loss of personality,” and “I am between a sweat and a faint.”

Shirley Bird’s work ethic did not recognize weekends, and her colleagues admired her prodigious energy and capacity for getting things done. She once said, she wanted her epitaph to read, “She has gone to a meeting.”

This memorial resolution was prepared by Director of Communications and Special Assistant to the President Geoffrey Leavenworth.

Distributed to the executive vice president and provost and the president on May 31, 2011. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.