IN MEMORIAM
LORENE LANE ROGERS

Lorene Lane Rogers, daughter of Mort M. and Jessie Luster Lane, was born April 3, 1914, in Prosper, Texas. After attending the public schools in Prosper, she entered North Texas State Teachers College (Denton), receiving a B.A. in English in 1934. While a student there, she also met her future husband, Burl Gordon Rogers, whom she married on August 23, 1935. After completion of their degrees, they taught high school in Canton, Texas, for a year before moving to Austin for Burl to enter graduate school in chemistry. On completion of his studies, they moved to New Jersey where Burl was a research chemist.

After Burl’s death in a laboratory accident in June, 1941, Lorene attended Columbia University for a year and then returned to Austin as a graduate student at UT Austin. Although originally an English major, she became interested in chemistry during the time that her husband was a graduate student. She therefore entered the graduate program in chemistry, receiving an M.A. in 1946 (organic chemistry) and a Ph.D. (biochemistry) in 1948 under the supervision of Professor W. Shive.

During 1947-49, Dr. Rogers taught chemistry at Sam Houston State College (Huntsville). In 1949, she returned to UT as an Eli Lilly Postdoctoral Fellow in the Clayton Foundation Biochemical Institute and continued as a research scientist in that institute, becoming assistant director in 1957, a position that she occupied until 1964. During this period, she published a number of research papers in collaboration with the director of the institute, Professor Roger Williams, and with her former mentor, Professor Shive. These dealt primarily with the biochemical and nutritional aspects of alcoholism, mental retardation, and congenital malformations.

In 1962, she was appointed professor of nutrition in the Department of Home Economics (now School of Human Ecology), a position that she occupied for the remainder of her association with UT Austin. Her effectiveness in the classroom was recognized by being awarded the UT Students Association Teaching Award in 1963.

Dr. Rogers’ administrative talents were obvious to many, and in 1964, Dean Gordon Whaley invited her to become associate dean of the Graduate School, a position that she occupied until 1971. During that period, she dealt especially with academic and student issues that arose. She also became recognized by the faculty as a straightforward problem solver. This led to her appointment in 1971 by President Stephen Spurr to the position of vice president of UT Austin. Although the title did not specify the duties, she handled many of the sensitive issues that faced universities at that time, including in particular those involving affirmative action programs. She also served as a major advisor to President Spurr, who had not previously encountered Texas culture and politics.

In 1974, Dr. Rogers decided that it was time to return full time to teaching. History did not agree, and with the subsequent dismissal of President Spurr by the Board of Regents in 1974, she was asked to become president ad interim for one year. She reluctantly accepted but took on the job with the strong dedication that typified all her activities. She proved herself equal to the demands of the job, and when, after a year during which little progress had been made in the selection of a new president, she was asked to become president, and she agreed.
The first year of her tenure as president presented a number of challenges in addition to those usually associated with the job. This was a time of unrest in society in general, and the fact that she had been appointed without formal faculty and student advice provided opportunities for expressions of discontent from both groups—a protest against the process by which she was selected rather than of her personally or her competence for the position. It was thought by some that she would be intimidated by the confrontation and perhaps resign. On the contrary, one group of students that tried to blockade her office was invited in for an open discussion of the various issues. At the end, the group left with greater understanding of the situation and with much greater respect for the dedication of President Rogers and the challenges that she faced balancing the political and academic issues. The University Council, after refusing to meet as a means to protest her manner of selection, also decided to resume meetings the second year.

Being the first woman to lead a major research university in the United States was both an honor and a challenge. Among the challenges was assuring that the university continued as a major center for research. Another was assuring that women and minorities were given equal opportunities to participate in the activities of the university. Her record in these areas is outstanding. Among her actions was combining the College of Humanities and the College of Social Sciences into a single College of Liberal Arts, a change that was widely applauded. She also provided strong administrative support for the major building program of the College of Fine Arts.

Dr. Rogers also served on a number of important national committees in higher education. These include the Graduate Record Exams Board (1972-76), which she chaired (1974-75), and the advisory committee to the ITT International Fellowship Program (1973-1983). She chaired the Council of Presidents of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (1976-77) and was a member of the Executive Committee (1976-79). She was a member of the Committee on Identification of Professional Women of the American Council on Education (1975-79) and a member of the Committee on Government Relations of this organization. (1978-79).

Dr. Rogers had many interests outside of formal academia. She was a member of the Board of Directors of the Texaco Company and was chair of the Texaco Philanthropic Foundation, a role that she especially enjoyed because of her love of opera. The Texaco Foundation funded the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera for many years, and she had free access to the Texaco box for those performances. She also was a director of Gulf States Utilities and of Republic Bank Austin. She also served on the Board of Directors of Texas Opera Theatre and of Austin Lyric Opera.

Dr. Rogers received many awards and other recognition for her professional accomplishments, both personal and on behalf of the university. Her honorary degrees include a D.Sc. from Oakland University (1972) and an L.L.D. from Austin College (1977). She received Distinguished Alumnus awards from North Texas State University (1972) and from The University of Texas (1976).

As a child of the depression and with a strong belief in the importance of education, Dr. Rogers personally contributed funds for the establishment of several student fellowships. These include The Burl Gordon Rogers Excellence Award (University of North Texas, Denton) for a graduating pre-med student majoring in chemistry. At UT Austin, she endowed Presidential Scholarships honoring Mamie E. Smith (1978), Verna Harder (music, 1982), A. David Renner (music, 1993), Kelly Fearing (art, 1994), Burl Gordon Rogers (chemistry, 1996), and Phyllis Benson Roberts (music, 2002). She also contributed an Excellence Fund and an Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Nutrition (1981). Her estate has established the Burl G. and Lorene L. Rogers Chair in Human Health to benefit the College of Natural Sciences.

When she completed her service as president in 1979, the Texas House of Representatives passed a resolution in her honor and noted her many contributions and achievements. The UT Board of Regents also established the Lorene L. Rogers Endowed Presidential Scholarship. On her retirement in 1980, she was awarded the title of professor emeritus, and in 1990, the Board of Regents named her president emeritus.

Although known for her dedication and professionalism, Lorene had a large circle of friends with whom she shared many happy times. She enjoyed good food and travel. Her home on Nob Hill Circle was always a fun
destination. She was known to relax on occasion by entertaining her friends with renditions of gospel hymns, accompanying herself on the piano.

One final honor occurred four months before her death on January 11, 2009: the new Lorene Lane Rogers Middle School opened in her hometown of Prosper.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors H. Eldon Sutton (chair), James P. Duncan, and Stephen A. Monti.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on March 26, 2009. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.