The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Robert Henry Wilson, professor emeritus, English, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
ROBERT HENRY WILSON

Robert Henry “Bob” Wilson, longtime professor and subsequently professor emeritus of English at The University of Texas at Austin, died January 15, 1998. Bob was born April 5, 1909. He and his wife, Lucille, had one daughter, now Dr. Edith Wilson Miles of Bethesda, Maryland. He attended Kenyon College in Ohio for a year. Then he went to Stanford University where he became a member of Phi Beta Kappa and earned a BA in 1928 and an MA in 1930. He received a PhD in English at the University of Chicago in 1932, having studied under the well-known medievalists John Matthews Manley and Edith Rickert. He wrote his dissertation, *Characterization in Malory: A Comparison with the Sources*, on Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. It was published by the University of Chicago Libraries in a photographic facsimile edition of 150 copies and a photoduplicated clothbound Folcroft Library edition in 1970.

In addition to teaching at The University of Texas, Bob taught at Howard College, Southwest Texas State University, Southwestern University, and Louisiana State University. He served the English department at UT Austin as an instructor from 1934 to 1938, and rejoined the department as an assistant professor in 1947, where he taught full time until his retirement in 1978. He became a full professor in 1962. He served the department efficiently and effectively in various capacities, among them graduate adviser from 1974 to 1976, and chair of the PhD Qualifying Committee in 1978. He taught a full range of undergraduate and graduate courses in Middle English literature (Chaucer, Middle English survey, Malory), as well as composition and literature survey courses to freshmen and sophomores. He also liked to offer a course of his devising in English and American satire. He was known as a scrupulously fair and conscientious teacher who was always willing to take time with students.

Aside from his dissertation, Professor Wilson’s scholarship never took the form of a book, but his well-known articles, particularly on Malory, would fill more than one book. He published in all the leading literature journals of his day: *PMLA* (1940, 1943), *Philological Quarterly* (1930), *Studies in Philology* (1931), *Modern Philology* (1939), *JEGP* (1943), *Modern Language Notes* (1948), *Notes & Queries* (1970), and *Medievalia et Humanistica* (1978), as well as a series of essays for *Texas Studies in English*. He worked diligently for several years on the long section on Malory and Caxton in the *Manual of Writings in Middle English*, Albert Hartung general editor, the project reaching fruition in 1975 with the publication of Volume III.

Professor Wilson’s scholarship on Malory well reflects his scholarly and personal character. He was willing to take endless pains researching and writing on carefully selected significant topics. The result was a series of articles that are absolutely basic to Malory studies. A measure of their worth is the fact that the two most influential interpreters of Malory in mid-century, whose views of the nature and structure of *Morte Darthurt* were diametrically opposed, both praised Bob’s work highly. The great French and English scholar of Arthurian studies, Eugene Vinaver, writing of Professor Wilson’s work in 1952, speaks of his “grasp of detail,” “his ability to organize his material in a coherent and convincing way,” which had led to his “important and distinguished position in the field of Malory studies.” In the same year, Robert M. Lumiansky, Vinaver’s prominent American opponent in Malory interpretation, wrote that Wilson’s “thoroughly sound” series of “articles on the sources and evolution of the *Morte Darthur* furnish the most illuminating and convincing commentary on the book now available in print.”
Kurth Sprague, who earned his PhD in English at the University under Wilson’s direction and became a professor of American studies here, comments that he “knew Bob Wilson for almost 30 years, first as a teacher; then as adviser and dissertation committee member when I was a graduate student; and then afterward as a colleague and friend.” Of Bob as teacher, he comments on his “precise and meticulous” presentation and his exacting standards. When a student responded less than intelligently on the subject at hand, he adds, “his smile could freeze the student’s young blood.” Of Wilson’s essays he writes of their being “unfettered by jargon, shorn of excess verbiage, each a jewel of scholarship . . . and expressed with magisterial succinctness.” He recalls Vinaver’s visits to Austin in the 1970’s when Bob first met this grand old man of Arthurian studies for the first time. The two éminences grises, Sprague reports, exchanged “respectful civilities,” and shook their heads together over “excesses” of the scholars sometimes referred to as “the Lumiansky gang.” Both men were scholarly conservatives, even though Wilson’s discoveries indicated that Lumiansky’s more liberal interpretation of Malory had a point.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James Wimsatt (chair), James Garrison, and Thomas Cable.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on April 19, 2001. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/