

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
WILLIAM OWEN SHEPPARD SUTHERLAND**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Professor Emeritus William Owen Sheppard Sutherland, Department of English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

**IN MEMORIAM
WILLIAM OWEN SHEPPARD SUTHERLAND**

W.O.S. (Bill) Sutherland was born January 19, 1921, in Wilmington, North Carolina, and died November 19, 2017, in Austin, Texas. His distinguished career in the Department of English at The University of Texas at Austin extended from 1954 to 1999. As Chair of the Department from 1983 to 1990, Bill worked with courage and tenacity to promote his vision of English as a discipline central to the Liberal Arts and to achieve his goal of raising the Department to a new level of national prominence. For his accomplishments as Chair and for his many other enduring contributions to the University, the College of Liberal Arts bestowed on him its highest honor, the Pro Bene Meritis award, in 1996.

Bill Sutherland will be remembered by colleagues and students for his many personal gifts, not least for his unfailing courtesy, for his gentlemanly demeanor, for his composure and poise under stress. His manners, like his distinctively accented English, reflected his North Carolina heritage, a frequent subject of his casual conversation. He loved to tell the story, for example, of a distant ancestor who had settled in America only to discover that, because of unexpected deaths in his homeland, he had suddenly inherited an Irish earldom. In his letter declining the honor, Bill's ancestor wrote: "No thank you. I'd rather be a North Carolina gentleman than a rag-tag Irish earl." A true descendant of this North Carolina gentleman, Bill attended The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, graduating in 1942 with honors in English. Entering the army later that year, Bill indicated on his induction papers that his major had been "Eng." Taking this abbreviation to mean Engineering, the army sent him with the Army Corps of Engineers to build roads and air fields in India, China, and what was then called Burma. While thus serving his country during World War II, he developed a keen interest in the flora and fauna of the lands where he was stationed, including the native birds, the beginning of a life-long passion for birdwatching. Returning from the war in 1946 as a captain, Bill entered the graduate program at UNC, completing his Ph.D. in English in 1950. After four years of teaching at Northwestern University, Bill accepted an offer to join the English Department at The University of Texas at Austin, his academic home for the next forty-five years.

Bill had wide-ranging intellectual interests anchored in his love of Restoration and eighteenth-century British literature, especially the work of the period's great satirists. His book *The Art of the Satirist* was published in 1965, and he regularly taught undergraduate and graduate classes that engaged students with the intricate ironies of Dryden, Swift, and Pope. Appreciating the connections between English and other fields of study well before such inquiry had earned the name "interdisciplinary," Bill devised innovative courses that explored literature as a point of access to the Humanities more generally. He helped to found and later directed the University's Humanities Program, served on review panels for the National Endowment for the Humanities, and was appropriately named to the Robert A. Law and Thomas H. Law Centennial Professorship in the Humanities.

An outstanding classroom teacher, recipient of the Scarborough Award for Excellence in Teaching and the President's Associates Teaching Excellence Award, Bill devoted the last years of his career to the formidable problem of teaching E316K, the sophomore literature course required of virtually all UT Austin undergraduates. Thinking through the challenges of this course before the electronic revolution had made a meaningful impression on the curriculum, Bill created a file-sharing system that enabled teachers to collaborate in developing strategies for achieving the goals of the course. It is largely thanks to him that this course still serves the larger University population so effectively. As an expression of its gratitude, the English Department named its lower-division teaching award in his honor. Among the recipients of this award are several faculty members whom he was responsible for recruiting during his term as Chair.

Recruitment of professors who could build up the graduate program and publish cutting-edge scholarship was one of his highest priorities. By bringing to Austin outstanding scholars, Bill set the English Department on a path toward national recognition, making it competitive with the best English programs in the country. It should be emphasized that the faculty who joined the Department under his leadership included a cadre of women and minority scholars. This achievement continues to pay intellectual dividends: thanks to him, English has assumed a leading role in the University's efforts to realize the goal of a more diverse faculty. Again—as in his vision of a curriculum with space for interdisciplinary courses, as in his grasp of the educational importance of the electronic revolution—Bill's idea of a Department strengthened by its diversity was decidedly ahead of its time.

If Bill was thus exceptionally open to innovation, he was also a man with a profound respect for the past. He liked to say that if we can see anything of the future it is only because we “stand on the shoulders of giants.” One of the most memorable social events of his tenure as Chair was a reception for retired faculty, a celebration and acknowledgment of the debt the present owes to the past. This side of Bill's educational vision found elegant expression in an essay he published in the *Texas Humanities Review*. Recalling a road trip he took on an interstate highway that cut a swath through the landscape, he noticed the old road running alongside, meandering its way around groves of trees, across old bridges, near to houses and farms, following the natural contours of the land. Reflecting on this contrast between the highway and the road, Bill argued for a way into the future of education that paid attention to the metaphoric landscape of traditions and inherited values. Bill's many contributions to the life of the University were shaped by his ideal of progress respectful of history.

Bill was accompanied on the road trip of this essay by his wife Madeline, his companion on many journeys during their seventy years of marriage. They met in a playwriting class at UNC and were married in Minot, North Dakota, on September 12, 1947. She survived him by less than a year, dying on April 23, 2018. Throughout their life together, they spent a portion of every summer at the family cabin in Bemidji, Minnesota. Together they explored this area of the far north and in retirement they coauthored a book on the early settlements around their beloved Lake Julia. It was by this lake that they pursued their favorite hobbies -- birding and canoeing -- often joined by their sons Bill, John, and Thomas, and daughter Madeline. The University of Texas at Austin community joins the surviving members of his family in grieving his loss, celebrating his achievements, and treasuring his legacy.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Jim Garrison (chair), Elizabeth Hedrick, and Wayne Reborn.

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