

## DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR  
MARTIN MICHAEL CROW**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution Martin Michael Crow, Professor Emeritus of English, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary  
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM  
MARTIN MICHAEL CROW**

Martin Michael ("Mike") Crow, longtime professor of English, died January 30, 1997, at age 95. He was born October 30, 1901, in Crow's Mill, Pennsylvania, on the West Virginia border. Mike never married, and his nearest surviving relative is a nephew in Pennsylvania. His younger brother, Homer, who lived with him in Austin for several years, preceded him in death.

Mike came to the University of Texas Department of English in 1934, having taught previously at the University of Arkansas, and Washington and Jefferson College. He earned his BA degree at Washington and Jefferson in 1924, his AM at Harvard University in 1925, and his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1934. At Harvard, Mike studied Shakespeare under the legendary Professor George Lyman Kittredge, about whom he had a number of amusing first-hand anecdotes that he enjoyed recounting. He chose the University of Chicago for his doctoral studies, in large part as a result of an interview he had with Professor Edith Rickert. She was the less celebrated, but perhaps the more magnetic member of the [John Matthews] Manly and Rickert team. The names of those two scholars, always linked in the minds of academics, still enjoy justifiable esteem, particularly for their systematic work in locating, organizing, and presenting the primary Chaucer documents. Mike's fondness for Professor Rickert was lifelong, and he always had a picture of her, as a beautiful young woman, in his living room. Less conspicuous there was a handsome picture of Professor Manly.

The Manly-Rickert projects were seminal in Professor Crow's academic career. His doctoral thesis was on the Paris Manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, one of the eighty-four manuscripts and Caxton imprints that Manly and Rickert included in their monumental edition of the complete text of the *Tales*. In the course of his research Mike spent several memorable months in Paris living in a pension. After earning the PhD and coming to Texas, he returned to the University of Chicago as visiting professor several summers and one full year (1955-56). When Edith Rickert died in 1934, he and a fellow Chicago PhD, Clair C. Olson, completed her work of compiling and organizing documents, photos, and reproductions of art that have major relevance to Chaucer and his times. Columbia University Press published the volume as *Chaucer's World* and Oxford University Press as *Chaucer's England*, both in 1941. Mike at the same time was publishing articles and reviews, almost always dealing with biographical and textual matters pertaining to Chaucer, in leading journals such as *Speculum*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, and *Modern Philology*.

Professor Crow retired from the University of Texas in 1972 after serving continuously from 1934, except for his two years in the Army Air Force in World War II (1942-44) in which he served as an instructor in pre-flight training and as director of Ellington Field's educational program. After the war he continued for several years in the Army Air Force reserve, discharged with the rank of captain. Back at UT, Mike served as chair of the Department of English from 1946 to 1949, and he taught a variety of courses, including composition, creative writing, and the standard surveys of English literature, and always Chaucer. In his research he and Clair Olson again took up an unfinished project in which Edith Rickert had been involved until her death, this time the much larger work of editing the records of Chaucer's life. As lead editor, Professor Crow labored diligently and patiently for many years, and the work was at last published in 1966 by the Clarendon Press of the Oxford University Press and the University of Texas Press.

The *Chaucer Life Records* was Professor Crow's great life work. In assembling and editing the extensive documents relative to Chaucer's life — many more than we have for Shakespeare or Milton — he and Olson exercised the greatest perspicuity and care. Crow and Olson inherited from Manly and Rickert and Lilian Redstone a trove of materials, which they gave body, form, and clarity, and described in the lengthy preface. In the 629 packed pages presenting mostly Latin and French texts, reinforced with extensive footnotes and translations, errors are almost non-existent. The reviews were unanimously positive. As the well-known Chaucerian, D. S. Brewer, noted in his review (*Notes & Queries* 1967), "Contemplating the enormous labours whose result is before us, one must be pleased, because what has been done has been done forever." He adds the telling question, "How many scholars can say that of their work?" The question is rhetorical, and the answer, of course, is "Almost none." In the appraisal of the always-measured Morton Bloomfield, *Chaucer Life Records* is simply "an invaluable work" (*Speculum* 1967).

As a colleague and teacher, as Professor William O. Sutherland testifies, Mike was both loved and trusted. His genuine kind interest in the personal life, families, and academic activities of others made him warmly loved; and his high standards and keen acumen generated great respect and trust. In his conversation he radiated genial composure. But, while he never indulged in extreme language or behavior, he was not easily shocked and was often amused by the excesses of others both locally and nationally.

Mike's later years were made difficult by failing eyesight, and he became legally blind in the mid-eighties. But he maintained his easy demeanor and made use of a closed-circuit television arrangement to magnify text of all kinds, and he continued as he could his particular interest in Chaucer and Chaucer scholarship. The latest item in his bibliography is the biography of Chaucer, which he and Virginia Leland composed for the standard Chaucer edition, *The Riverside Chaucer* (1987). It displays the care and prudence that characterized all of Mike Crow's work after his dissertation. He embodied the uncommon combination of beloved colleague and teacher, person of uncompromising standards, and eminent scholar.

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

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on December 7, 1999. 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/>