

DOCUMENTS AND MINUTES OF THE GENERAL FACULTY
REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
J. GILBERT McALLISTER

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a Memorial Resolution for J. Gilbert McAllister, Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM

J. GILBERT McALLISTER

J. Gilbert McAllister, “Dr. Mac” to many generations of students, was an extraordinary teacher who put most of his professional energy into the classroom rather than into research and the politics of academia. He anticipated that his salary might suffer as a consequence but, characteristically, he figured it was *his* career and *his* business. He did not vacillate, and he had no patience with apologists. He viewed himself as an anthropologist, a teacher, and a Texas liberal confronting galloping McCarthyism and deep Texas conservatism.

Primarily a cultural anthropologist, he also carried out significant archaeological research early in his career, and one of his principal contributions to anthropology other than in the classroom was as an archaeological administrator. His courses, however, emphasized social anthropology, in Oceania and among Plains Indians. As the testimonials at the end of this memorial resolution make clear, no student ever forgot the experience of a MacAllister course. He memorized the names and faces of every student—in the McAllister classroom there were no anonymous back-row seats—and used this skill to demand the best of every individual. Survival in his courses required, first, that one study and know the material; second, that one think, and think critically; and third—most difficult—that one express oneself cogently. Dr. Mac dispensed biting criticism and warm praise to precipitate challenging and rewarding classroom encounters. For many students, his class was their most moving and memorable college experience. No matter what the grade, each student knew that Dr. Mac, more than most professors, cared what students thought.

J. Gilbert McAllister (he never used his first name, John) was born January 26, 1904, in San Antonio, Texas. Educated in the public schools of San Antonio, he went on to The University of Texas, and to graduate school at the University of Chicago. He was on the anthropology faculty of his alma mater in Austin for most of his career, during which he became one of the most forceful, respected, feared, and effective teachers ever to practice the art of teaching in the halls of this institution.

Graduating from high school in San Antonio at age seventeen, he worked in a local library for a year—“for twenty cents an hour,” he says on an oral-history tape recording made in 1980 by the Texas State Archeologist, Curtis Tunnell. “None of my family had gone to college, but in 1922 I decided I should go, so I came ... to The University of Texas. The first year I was in business school or something like that

.... The second year I switched to English or journalism and got an article published in the campus magazine."

Then he quit college and took a job on the daily *San Antonio Light*. "The two guys who had the job before me got fired for getting drunk. All the city editor asked me when I came in was if I drank. I was floored, and I said, 'No, but I guess I could learn to drink.' He hired me anyway and said, 'Well, you got the federal room.' "

After a year on the *Light* he returned to The University of Texas, majoring now in Sociology, with Anthropology as a minor. A few years before, the Anthropology Department had been transformed from an earlier Department of Institutional History by an inspired teacher, James E. Pearce, who had trained at Chicago at the turn of the century under Frederick Starr and Cyrus Thomas, and at Paris under Manouvrier and de Mortillet. Also on the Anthropology staff was George C. Engerrand, a colorful French anthropologist of the old school, a polymath who expected his students to be as intimately versed as he in the manners and customs of the peoples of the world. McAllister was much influenced by Engerrand and even more so by Pearce who, by virtue of a marvelously warm and sincere personality and an evangelical belief in the worth of anthropology, turned the young student into an anthropologist. In McAllister's words, "Pearce was a phenomenal individual."

Gaining his Bachelor's degree in Sociology in 1928, McAllister entered the anthropology graduate program at the University of Chicago where he remained, except when in the field, until 1935, when he received the Ph.D. degree. "At Chicago," he said, "I studied primarily under Redfield, and there was Cole, and Sapir." He adds, without elaboration, "Conditions in Chicago were horrible." It is also made clear in his dissertation that A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, the noted British social anthropologist then visiting at Chicago, had a strong influence on him and his fellow graduate students.

The Chicago years were interrupted more than once. From 1929 to 1931 he was Ethnologist at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Despite the title, his position was primarily in archaeology and resulted in two substantial publications in 1933, *The Archaeology of O`ahu* and *The Archaeology of Kahoolawe*, the first systematic surveys carried out on those islands. McAllister recorded every kind of site, adding ethnohistorical and historical information wherever possible. Years later, not long before his death, he was contacted by the Hawaiians and participated in a videotaped interview concerning one of the sites he had recorded in the O`ahu survey, a site that has recently become politically important. Although he did no more archaeology in the Pacific after 1931, his work there remains a solid piece of research that is a valuable basic resource.

In the summer of 1931 he was Acting State Director of Archaeology in Indiana, and here his work was part of a systematic statewide county-by-county survey that was creating the foundations of archaeological research in the state, much as had been the case in Hawaii. *The Archaeology of Porter County*, a 96-page report, was published in 1932.

But his primary interest was always in cultural anthropology. In 1933-1934 he and his wife Cora Reveley McAllister (they had no children) were in Oklahoma for a year of field work collecting data for his dissertation, *Kiowa-Apache Social Organization*. This was his major piece of research, resulting in his receiving his doctorate in 1935. In it he reconstructed Kiowa-Apache culture as it had existed some six decades earlier (before being overwhelmed by White culture) on the basis of detailed information obtained from the oldest men of the tribe, who recalled those days vividly. He approached his analysis through the details of kinship structure, acknowledging his intellectual debt to Radcliffe-Brown. The dissertation was published in condensed form in 1937 as a chapter in the famous Radcliffe-Brown festschrift edited by Fred Eggan, *Social Organization of North American Tribes* (Chicago, 1937; 2nd ed, 1955).

With the degree in hand and a potential career ahead studying Plains Indian cultural anthropology, McAllister was lured back to Austin in 1935 by his old mentor James Pearce. In the small department they made a felicitous and charismatic teaching pair. Pearce was toward the close of his career, mellow and conservative, whereas McAllister was in his early 30s, young, vigorous, and iconoclastic. In later years, fondly recalling his relationship with Pearce, McAllister often told how they fought over such issues as race, since Pearce was a racist and McAllister was anything but.

As it turned out, McAllister's days in research had largely come to an end. He was to make his name as an archaeological administrator and especially as a remarkable teacher. Pearce died in 1938, and McAllister found himself not only Chairman of the department but also in charge of Pearce's archaeological program, which, as the Division of Research in Anthropology, was sending field parties to many parts of the state. At first depending on private funds, the Division eventually, in the mid-1930s, became one of the large Depression-era New Deal archaeological programs financed through the Works Progress Administration. The largest of the field projects was the salvage archaeology that Pearce's people were carrying on in the basins of the then-building Highland Lake reservoirs, one of the earliest reservoir archaeology programs in the world. Unfortunately, however, this field work suffered from a lack of up-to-date archaeological training on the part of Pearce and his subordinates, whose efforts were characterized more by conscientiousness and zeal than by sophistication.

Gilbert McAllister, despite considering himself a cultural anthropologist, was now in charge of the whole archaeological research program. He set about to modernize Texas archaeology by bringing in well-trained persons, not a task to be accomplished overnight. He accepted the chairmanship of a statewide committee to examine archaeological methods being used in the state. By the time World War II brought archaeological work to a halt, a number of archaeologists with solid professional training—such persons as Campbell, Kelley, Newell, Beattie, Stephenson, and Krieger—were at work in the state, and most of them had been brought in by McAllister. After the war he was no longer involved in archaeology, but by that time he had laid a solid foundation for modern archaeological research in Texas.

But beyond his administrative accomplishments, it was as a teacher that he eventually excelled. By 1950 he was acquiring a reputation as a splendid pedagogue whom the students never forgot, and it is this reputation that lives on. The list of his courses includes:

- Ant. 311 - Man's Biocultural Heritage [Upper-Division General Anthropology]
- Ant. 320 - Ethnology of Oceania
- Ant. 322 - Indians of the Plains
- Ant. 373 - Applied Anthropology
- Ant. 376 - Early Social Organization
- Ant. 382 - Method and Theory in Cultural Anthropology
- Ant. 391 - Seminar in Social Anthropology

We can do no better than base the remainder of this essay on a series of reminiscences offered by former students.

Bill Moyers, National Public Radio, in his Commencement address at The University, May 21, 1988:

... If we're to build a common future—your generation and mine—we cannot talk about the new economics of competition without talking about a new ethic of cooperation. This means recognizing our capacity to make common cause with others, between government and the business sector, and the necessity of creating a political culture that nurtures and honors obligation and trust.

This is not a new idea, although it is one widely ignored of late. Gilbert McAllister taught it in his anthropology courses here 30-odd years ago. That's where I had my first de-programming. I went to see Dr. McAllister this afternoon. He's 85. We sat and talked for a long time. We talked again about the time he spent among the Apaches as a young graduate student before he came here to teach. I said, "Do you remember what you told us all those years ago that you learned from the Apaches?" He thought a minute and said, "I'm not sure I can remember the exact words but I think I talked to you about reciprocity." "That's right," I said, "reciprocity." Then he got going. "You know, in the Apache tongue, the word grandfather is the same word for grandson—grandfather, grandson—it's all one word. Of course, the Apaches believed in the reciprocity of generations—in both linking and in locking one generation to another." Reciprocity. Mutual help. Reinforcing. Time and time again in this class, he'd look back over the sweep of time to tell us that human beings have advanced more in the past through having learned the value of cooperative caring behavior than through their ability to compete successfully.

Edward B. Jelks, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, Illinois State University (at the time of this episode, Dr. Jelks was not a callow freshman but a veteran coming out of World War II):

I met Gilbert in 1947 when, as an undergraduate student at The University of Texas, I enrolled in his class in introductory cultural anthropology. At the first class meeting he delivered what I later learned was a stock lecture in which he eloquently deplored the sloppy use of language by students. Then he said if there was one thing he hoped we would learn in college, it was how to communicate properly in both the spoken and written word. As an English major I was duly impressed that an anthropology professor emphasized the importance of communication skills.

On his first test there was a question asking us to "indicate" which of so and so was such and such. While it was clear that he wanted a discussion-type answer, I could not resist the temptation to respond with a brief sentence, stating that one particular so and so was such and such, with no elaboration. When he returned my paper with no credit for my answer, and with a marginal note that I should have discussed the matter, I stopped by his office and, with some trepidation, told him that the word "indicate" does not mean "to discuss," but to point out something specific, which was what I had done. I also reminded him of his lecture on using language properly and said I had been trying to follow his advice.

Gilbert laughed, expressed his delight that I had called his hand, and gave me full credit for my answer. From that moment on we were great friends. Later, when I became employed as an archaeologist in Austin, my wife Judy and I became part of the University social circle, and we came to know Gilbert and Cora well. Since leaving Austin in 1968, we have kept in touch with them regularly through Christmas notes.

Gilbert was among the three or four of my professors whose teaching skills and personal concern for their students were inspirational. He was a faithful mentor, both in and out of the classroom, and he will be sorely missed by a multitude of former students.

Ronnie Dugger, political observer, in *Our Invaded Universities* (W. W. Norton, New York, 1974):

This reminded me ... of my experiences with a senior professor of anthropology, J. Gilbert McAllister. A practitioner of what he called "education by irritation," Doctor Mac, as we called him, would teach his large classes of Texas freshmen and sophomores whatever would jolt or infuriate them into thinking about the American culture, and then

he would grind it in. They got mad as hell, many of them disliked or even detested him, but he didn't give a damn about that—he was educating them, and that was his work.

Once McAllister said something in class about vocabulary size that I believed was wrong. I was a feisty and conceited young fellow, and he and I had spirited exchanges in class, but by this time in the course I was enforcing a silence on myself. He caught my disagreement on my face, though, and asked me for it, so I gave it. He said that I was wrong; I said, politely, that I was right. Bring me a written paper to prove it, he said. I burrowed into the library, worked hard on a paper that proved my case to my satisfaction, and one morning laid it on his desk as class opened. Without looking it over he told me to read it to the class. I said I had a cold. *Read it*, he said. I read it and received an ovation. He said he still believed he was right, but he let things stand that way. He was secure: he could let me have my day. And there was something in my pride that made me ashamed and redoubled my respect for him.

When, therefore, one evening at the home of another professor, McAllister said to me, "Dugger, you look to me like the kind of smart young guy who's going to sell out," he jolted me clear through to my ego, and that was all the way. As years passed I would hear from students in his classes that he was telling and retelling the story of the paper on vocabulary size, and telling it at his own expense, but all through college, on campus, in halls, on the phone, he would say to me, "Well, Dugger, have you sold out yet?" For ten years, fifteen, he kept asking me this question in the same serious, taunting way. If I had a chance, I would do a lot for Gilbert McAllister.

Joe D. Gilliland, Professor Emeritus in Humanities, Cochise College, in a letter to the editor in *The Daily Texan*, April 6, 1993:

Dr. McAllister was professor of anthropology while I was a student at the University in 1943 and 1947. He was by any standard one of the great teachers in America. He was the finest teacher I ever had at the University or at any university I attended over the years.

Dr. McAllister was a man greatly loved by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of students. At one time or another those same students who loved him probably hated him for the work he made us do. We loved him, not because he made us feel all warm and good inside, or because his lectures entertained and charmed, but because he made us think and often made us angry. But most important he made us aware of our world and taught us how—not what—to think about that world.

Chad Oliver, Robert D. King Centennial Professor in Liberal Arts—Anthropology, The University of Texas at Austin, "Some Blues for a Trio," in Bryan A. Garner, comp. & ed., *Texas, Our Texas: Remembrances of the University*. Eakin Press, Austin, 1984:

... One of the professors my fellow students were talking about was a man named J. Gilbert McAllister of the Department of Anthropology.

Nobody ever referred to him as Dr. McAllister. It was always "Dr. Mac." The essence of what I heard was this: "Before you get out of this place, you really should take a course from Dr. Mac."

Why not? I was interested in anthropology, although it had never occurred to me that I might one day become a professional anthropologist myself. I had a spot for an elective my senior year. I decided to find out what this Dr. Mac was all about.

I found out. I walked into his class on "Social Organization" with a casual respect for anthropology. By the time it was over, I was an anthropologist. I was on fire with the stuff.

Dr. Mac was like no other teacher I have ever had. He was a somewhat frail-looking man with a vision. The vision permeated everything that he taught. It was a belief—totally sincere and with no element of humbug about it—that this world could be a better place and that anthropology could do a lot to make that happen.

Within a week, he knew every student in the class by name. Within two weeks, he knew our life histories. Within three weeks, he had a personal battle going on with every single student. If you were with him, he pushed you relentlessly to do more and better work. If you were against him, he hammered away to put a dent in your armor.

Years later, when we were colleagues, I would watch former students troop into Dr. Mac's office in Benedict Hall. Invariably, he would call them by name—and this with students he had not seen in a decade or more. "Well, Miss Jones," he would say with a twinkle in his eye, "about that question you missed on the second exam in the Polynesia course. What do you think about it now?"

Dr. Mac believed in what he was doing. He did not just "teach a class." He threw himself into it, heart and mind and soul. I have seen him leave a classroom so spent that he could hardly walk. I remember—and will remember as long as I live—one warm and humid day in his class on "Applied Anthropology." I was taking the course in summer session and had driven in from a lakeside cabin I was renting. I was in high good spirits. We were due to get a test back, and I knew that I had knocked that test dead in its tracks.

Dr. Mac returned the tests. I had a grade of ninety-nine.

Dr. Mac went to work on me. "Mr. Oliver," he said, "I'll bet you think you're really something."

I started to laugh in an aw-shucks manner, figuring that I was about to be singled out as an example. I was indeed, but not in the way I was anticipating.

"You are capable of making 100 on any test I give," Dr. Mac said. "This is an insult. I don't ever want it to happen again."

I began searching for a hole to crawl into. I could hardly believe my ears. I had missed one point on an exam, and this man was *angry*.

Dr. Mac was not kidding. He may have calculated his performance a bit, but he meant what he was saying. His point—which he made at considerable length—was that if I was thinking of going to graduate school in anthropology I had to learn to give my best. Anything less was unsatisfactory.

I left that class chagrined, angry, and determined. I never missed a point on one of Dr. Mac's exams again. I knew I never wanted to go through *that* experience again. The grade, of course, was not all that important. The lesson that he taught me, however, was invaluable; whatever you do, give it your best shot or don't do it at all.

I have no idea how many students Dr. Mac inspired to seek professional careers in anthropology or in related disciplines. There were a lot of us, and we all still make

occasional pilgrimages to his home in Tarrytown. I do know that he gave us more than a vision. Dr. Mac had been trained at the University of Chicago under Radcliffe-Brown, one of the founders of modern social anthropology. When I went to graduate school at U.C.L.A.—which had a very high-powered department of anthropology—I found that I was as well prepared as students from anywhere else in the world. I attribute this largely to the training I received from Dr. Mac.

Oddly enough, I never had a chance to take one of his most popular courses, which was "Indians of the Plains." I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on the Plains Indians, but after I joined the faculty at Texas I did not teach the course until Dr. Mac retired. It was not that he had any objection; Dr. Mac was always a generous colleague and friend. It was simply that "Indians of the Plains" was *his* course, and I was in no hurry to compete with a legend.

Dr. Mac's favorite question in class was, "So what?" He would summarize the contribution of some distinguished anthropologist and then ask his question. It meant: "What difference does it make? What did this person do that affects how you look at the world around you?"

Former students of mine may recognize the question. That is where it came from, along with my addiction to hand-woven Indian ties.

Gilbert McAllister had—and has—a massive integrity about him. I do not believe that he ever did anything that he thought was wrong. I do not believe that he ever gave a dishonest answer to a question. We talk a lot about role models these days. He was one of the good ones.

This seems an appropriate place to say in public what I have said to him many times in private: "Thank you, Dr. Mac."

Dr. Mac retired in 1968 after thirty-three years of teaching. Maintaining contact with a host of former students around the country, he and Cora lived quietly in Tarrytown, the old residential section of Austin, until his death on March 20, 1993.

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professor Emeritus E. Mott Davis (Chair) and Professor Claud A. Bramblett.

Distributed to Voting and Emeritus Members of the faculty of the Department of Anthropology, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on August 31, 1995.