

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
CLARENCE PAUL OLIVER**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution Clarence Paul Oliver, professor emeritus, zoology, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
CLARENCE PAUL OLIVER**

Clarence P. Oliver, better known to his many friends as Pete, was born near Union City, Tennessee, on November 8, 1898. He died in Austin, in his 93rd year, on July 10, 1991. During his long life, he witnessed remarkable changes in our society, in technology, and in science, especially in his chosen field, genetics.

Early in life, he, his parents, and his six siblings migrated by covered wagon to Dexter, Missouri. He volunteered for service in World War I, attaining the rank of sergeant in the infantry. During combat in France, he was taken prisoner of war by the Germans on September 25, 1918, fortunately only a few weeks before the armistice. After the war, Oliver worked in the East Texas oil fields but soon decided to follow a different career.

He entered The University of Texas in 1921, receiving a BA in history in 1925. During his undergraduate years, Oliver worked part-time as dishwasher and general flunky in the laboratory of Herman J. Muller, professor of zoology. The intellectual appeal of Muller's research prompted Oliver to switch his professional goals from law to science. On completion of his BA, he entered Muller's laboratory as a graduate student, receiving an MA in 1930 and a PhD in 1931. Muller had recently demonstrated that X-irradiation causes mutations in the fruit fly, *Drosophila*, work for which he eventually won the Nobel Prize. Oliver's research for his dissertation provided the first measurements of an X-ray dosage effect in the production of mutations and contributed to the concern that ionizing radiation could be an important source of mutational risk in humans.

Following graduate school, he was on the faculty of the Department of Zoology, Washington University (St. Louis), from 1930 to 1932. He then moved to the Department of Zoology, University of Minnesota, where he stayed until his move to The University of Texas at Austin in 1946. His research continued on *Drosophila*. With his graduate student, Mel Green, he made important observations on "pseudoalleles," a phenomenon that was inconsistent with the then current idea that genes are always transmitted intact. Although he continued to study the genetics of *Drosophila* throughout his career, his attention increasingly was on human genetics. His first publication on human subjects, in 1939, described the appearance of a genetic problem in the offspring of a first-cousin marriage. In 1941, he founded the Dight Institute of Human Genetics at the University of Minnesota, serving as its director until his move to Austin. The Dight Institute, still in existence, was one of the pioneer centers in the world devoted to research in human genetics.

Oliver came to the University as professor of zoology with a mission of adding studies of human genetics to the very strong genetics program at UT that was based primarily on *Drosophila*. His research at UT Austin focused especially on the hereditary contribution to risk of breast cancer. He demonstrated that close relatives of breast cancer patients have increased risk also of developing breast cancer, a risk that he attributed to shared genes. Many subsequent studies have supported his observations, which were widely cited. He did not live to see the identification of some of the specific genes now known to be important in transmissible risk of breast cancer.

Oliver's reputation as a scientist led to participation in many national professional activities. He was a founding member of the American Society of Human Genetics and served as president in 1953. He was secretary of the Genetics Society of America from 1953 to 1955, and was president of that organization in 1958. He was a member of the Morphology and Genetic Panel of the National Institutes of Health, 1949-1952, and chaired that

panel from 1955 to 1958. The function of the panel was to review applications for research support in all areas of genetics. He has been credited as the person who originated the concept of NIH training grants, a program that has been a major factor in advanced education in biology and medicine since the early 1960s. He also served on committees of the National Science Foundation. In 1960, he was a member of the Science and Technology Panel that provided policy advice to members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science and Astronautics.

Oliver's temperament and skill with people made him an excellent administrator. He became chairman of the Department of Zoology in 1947, serving in that position until 1959. Such a long tenure reflects his administrative skills and the high regard in which he was held by a faculty not averse to contention. His counsel was much sought by the University administration, and he served on many committees, including the committee that planned the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs. From 1962 to 1968, he chaired the Rosalie B. Hite Fellowship Committee, a System-wide committee that administered support of graduate students whose research dealt with cancer.

Oliver also made important contributions as an editor, serving as editor of the *Records of the Genetics Society of America* (1953-1955). In 1957, he, with his colleague Wilson Stone, assumed editorship of the journal *Genetics*, an established journal that was having difficulties. They revitalized it, moving the management and printing to the Printing Division of UT Austin, where it remained for many years after they relinquished the editorship in 1963.

In 1963, Oliver was named Ashbel Smith Professor in recognition of his reputation as a scientist and his service to the institution. The Board of Regents, at their meeting in January 1969, adopted a Resolution of Appreciation, citing his "wise and devoted service to his profession, to The University of Texas System, to generations of individual students, and to the profit of mankind" and his service as chair of the Rosalie B. Hite Fellowship Committee. The resolution expressed the Board's "admiration of and gratitude for the example set by Dr. Oliver as a standard by which honor, integrity, and dedication to service are measured."

For all his other achievements, the one that would probably please him most was his role as a teacher. He was thoughtful, judicious, and even-tempered, qualities that enhanced his rapport with students. Students were always welcomed in his office. He treated them as mature persons and was always ready to help them understand the sometimes challenging patterns of gene transmission.

One cannot recall Pete without recalling his wife Cile (*née* Cecile Wharton Worley), whom he married in 1931. She was an outstanding public school teacher, whose infectious exuberance was a counterpoint to Pete's quiet humor. They had two sons, Peter L. Oliver and George Benjamin Oliver.

In 1969, at age 70, Pete went on modified service, and in 1971 he retired. Even after his formal retirement, "Dr. Pete" came to his office regularly, sorting out his voluminous records, many of which are now archived at UT Austin. Unfortunately, such archives capture only the facts, and not the spirit, of their originator.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors H. Eldon Sutton (chair), Yuichiro Hiraizumi, and Jack Myers.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on June 5, 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/>

Editorships

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