IN MEMORIAM

DANIEL MORLEY McKEITHAN

Daniel Morley McKeithan was born November 9, 1902, in Florence, South Carolina, the fourth child of Oliver Alderman and Ida Altman McKeithan. His McKeithan ancestors, he later came to appreciate, went back in the history of the Carolinas to a time well before the American Revolution. In 1905 the immediate family, eventually to include seven children, began a series of moves to various towns in South Carolina, settling finally in 1912 in Charleston, where Dan finished growing up, graduating from the High School of Charleston in 1920. He remained in the city to attend the College of Charleston, where, with the help of the Boyce Scholarship for three years, he took his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1924. During the summers, beginning with a four-month period in 1921, he shipped as a sailor in various merchant marine freighters -- an experience that few academics can claim. From 1924 to 1926 he taught English at the High School of Charleston. At the same time, he was pursuing graduate studies at the College of Charleston, taking the Masters degree in 1926. His specialization in all of his graduate work was in English and American literature, with added interests in English and Germanic philology and in history.

His next twenty years in the academic world were equally busy, for the academic's life was not often an easy or a settled one. From 1926 to 1928 he was an Instructor at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. In 1928 he came to The University of Texas as an Instructor, simultaneously working toward the doctorate. But before coming to Texas he had studied at the University of Virginia in the summers of 1925 and 1926, and after coming to Texas studied at the University of North Carolina in the summer of 1930. In 1935 he succeeded in taking the Doctor of Philosophy at Texas, completing his dissertation, A Study of the Debt to Shakespeare in the Beaumont-and-Fletcher Plays, under the direction of Professor Robert A. Law. Although his later interests were
predominantly in American literature, particularly in Mark Twain, it should be remembered that in those earlier days many senior graduate professors were still skeptical of study concentrating on American literature. With the new degree, formal study outside of the University could end. But the degree did not necessarily mean a settled position at the University. In the year 1935-1936 he took an exchange appointment as Associate Professor at East Texas State Teachers College, as it was then named, in Commerce, returning to The University of Texas in 1936, still as an Instructor. For five summers, 1936-1940, he went back to Commerce to teach in their summer school.

With the doctorate in hand, with sufficient teaching experience in other universities, and with a growing body of publication, the new Doctor McKeithan was judged eligible for what is now called a "tenure track position" at the University. Progress up the ladder of appointment was slow in those days, at least by the expectations of more recent faculty, but for McKeithan it was steady. From 1936 to 1938 he continued to serve as Instructor; from 1938 to 1946 as Assistant Professor; from 1946 to 1965 as Associate Professor, with tenure; and from 1965 to his retirement in 1973 as Professor. He also continued to do some teaching outside of the University. In addition to the summers at Commerce, he taught summer school in 1948 at North Texas State University, Denton. And during 1957-1958 he was Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Strasbourg and the University of Bordeaux. Authorities in France, incidentally, were high in praise for him there.

During his career he served on numerous departmental committees and, after his promotion to Professor, regularly joined the deliberations of the Budget Council. His colleagues fondly remember his quips and humorous conundrums, delivered with twinkling eye and puckish smile as he tried to enliven their routine. When the form of departmental government was changed from that of a Budget Council to that of an Executive Committee, he was immediately elected to the new committee and served on it until his retirement, being the only member to serve continuously on
both governmental bodies. As a former chairman of the department wrote of him, in recommending his emeritus appointment, "He has always been exemplary, almost proverbial, in his work on the numerous committees required to conduct the business of a very large department."

Dan McKeithan's life, of course, was not limited to the academic world. Any man who worried about how the wild raccoons in his backyard in Austin were going to be fed when he was away on trips was hardly restricted to the classroom. (He rigged up a machine that would release dry dog food nightly, his friends remember.) In summer school at the University of Virginia in 1926 he met an attractive young woman, Greta Truluck, from Olanta, South Carolina. On August 27, 1927, they were married in Olanta. On January 10, 1932, their only son was born, James Daniel McKeithan. James was a good student too, graduating from the School of Law of The University of Texas in 1954, and studying international law at the University of Geneva, 1954–1955, with a Rotary International Foundation Fellowship. From 1955 to 1958 he served in the United States Army, first as an enlisted man and then as an officer, and then entered practice as a promising young lawyer. In February of 1968 he died in a tragic swimming accident in the sea at Natal while on a United States Jaycee goodwill trip to Brazil. The loss to Greta and Dan McKeithan was an overwhelming one, but friends observed with admiration how bravely they faced the loss.

Professor McKeithan retired from active service on the University faculty on May 31, 1973. He was quickly, and fittingly, awarded the title of Professor Emeritus. More bravery was demanded of him as, in his later years, he fought against long illness. But many of us can remember how active, cheerful, witty he remained during those years, and how often he came down to his office and chatted with us in the corridors of Parlin and Calhoun Halls. After his retirement his shock of white hair, so reminiscent of his favorite author, Mark Twain, was nearly as often seen on campus as before. He died on December 9, 1985.
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It is fitting perhaps that one of his last acts of scholarship was to write, at the request of the Jay B. Hubbell Center for American Literary Historiography at the Duke University Library, a biography and a reasoned appreciation of Professor Killis Campbell (1872-1937) of the Department of English of The University of Texas. Professor Campbell, a southerner, one of the early proponents of the study of American literature, and one of the eminent scholars in the field, was admired by Dan McKeithan, who must have found in him something of what the world today calls a role model. A few selected quotations from the conclusion of the biography not only will illustrate McKeithan's ideal but also will speak for McKeithan's own character, unconsciously revealed in his admiration: "His standards were high, and his will was like steel in defense of principles, but he never failed in kindness, courtesy, or generosity.... He never had the slightest touch of arrogance, which he considered pitiful and inexcusable.... In a long career most energetic and vigorous people have occasion to feel that they have at least one or two enemies, but [he] might very well have been an exception. ... He was an unselfish, generous, and lovable man."

William H. Cunningham, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Edwin Bowden (Chairman), James Duban, and Alan Gribben.