## IN MEMORIAM

## IRA IRL NELSON
## (1889-1975)

Ira Irl Nelson, Professor Emeritus of Secondary Education, was born in Springtown, Texas, May 4, 1889 and died in Austin, Texas, January 17, 1975. He is survived by his wife, Grace Lightfoot Nelson whom he married in 1921, two sons Charles C. of Beaumont, Texas and Roger T. of Wiepenkalten, West Germany, one daughter, Mrs. Katherine Kilgore of San Francisco, and eight grandchildren. Of his four brothers and three sisters, only two sisters survive, Mrs. Minnie Wilton and Miss Agnes Nelson, both of Memphis, Texas.

Nelson's early schooling was in the Tarrant County Public schools where he was graduated from the Springtown High School in 1906. In 1918 he received his B.A. degree from the University of Texas with majors in mathematics and physics and was awarded the Phi Beta Kappa key for his academic excellence. He attended the University of Chicago four summers and one full year, 1928-29, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship one summer. The remainder of his graduate work was done at the University of Texas where he received the Master of Arts degree in 1925 and his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1932, the latter under the direction of Dr. Joseph Lindsey Henderson.

His professional experience began in 1910. In the next ten years he taught mathematics and science in Texas public high schools, with an interruption of seventeen months of military service in the Army Corps of Engineers from which he was discharged as second lieutenant. He taught mathematics and

science in Austin High School from 1912 to 1917 and again in 1919-1920 after his military service. During his tenure as teacher in Austin High School his lifelong traits of dedication and generosity beyond the call of duty were revealed by his coaching baseball without extra pay and providing his personal car for trips with no reimbursement. From 1920 to 1923, Nelson served with distinction as principal of the Allan Junior High School in Austin. In 1923 he began his ten-year tenure as Adjunct Professor in the Department of the Art of Teaching at the University of Texas, during which he won state-wide recognition as a leader in Junior High School methods, curriculum, and administration. When the University Junior High School was opened in 1933, Nelson was given a joint appointment with the Austin Public Schools and the Department of the Art of Teaching as principal and Associate Professor, with half pay from each budget of $1,500 and by 1949, $1,800, presumably for half-time service in each position but actually for full time work as principal plus the teaching of his favorite courses on the junior high school and other secondary education courses as needed. His superior work in this capacity gave him wide recognition as one of the outstanding leaders in his field, and in 1941 resulted in promotion to a full professorship. Throughout his work at the University, Nelson excelled in teaching, his first love. He invariably won the respect and esteem of both undergraduate and graduate students. He was held in deep affection by many students, and he was adored by some because the spiritual quality of his teaching enriched their learning with inspiration.

His memberships in professional organizations included those in the National Education Association, Texas State Teachers Association (life member), National and State Association of Secondary School Principals, and the Austin Teachers Association of which he was president in 1934-1935. No written record is available of the committees on which he served over the years but they were numerous and his contributions to them significant.

The contributions of his writings to his field were limited but substantial. In 1946 Noble and Noble Publishers of New York published his two-volume Basic Arithmetic for grades seven and eight. In 1954 he chaired a committee of selected junior high school teachers and principals and prepared the first comprehensive set of standards for junior high schools in the United States, titled Criteria for Evaluating Junior High Schools and published by The Texas Study of Secondary Education. The volume was widely used throughout the United States. The next year he contributed a chapter on "The Role of the Administrator" to a publication of the Southwestern Cooperative Study of Educational Administration and another on "Large Units of Instruction" to a book by that title by Harl Douglass, published by Ronald Press. With Luise Blades in 1951 Nelson published The Study Hall in Texas High Schools, Research Bulletin No. 10 of The Texas Study of Secondary Education.

Nelson remained in the joint appointment until 1949 when he was invited to full time service in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, as the Art of Teaching had been renamed in 1939. His masterful skill in the management of the University Junior High School had won for him the high

esteem and almost reverent respect of all school men who knew him. His sterling personal qualities of gentleness, kindness, consideration, humility and love for humanity improved the lives of countless students, colleagues, and other associates and won their deep affection. As a member of the Budget Council of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and of uncounted Departmental, College and University Committees, Dr. Nelson invariably exerted a calming and constructive influence. No colleague ever heard him adversely criticize any other person. His service as counselor over more than a quarter of a century in his capacity as teacher, principal, and student adviser was admired by his colleagues and appreciated by those whom he helped. His associates would often see tense and distraught students enter his office and some time later emerge relaxed and with well defined purpose.

Nelson's sense of humor was keen but never did he utter a dirty story, nor were associates inclined to tell one in his presence. He was an avid fan of the Longhorns in all sports, particularly football, but rarely lost his composure. On one occasion, however, after a brutal opposing lineman had repeatedly fouled a Longhorn without being seen by the referee, Nelson sprang to his feet and yelled, "Clobber that brute," only on second thought to say quietly, "But do it gently." His lifelong dedication to athletics was recognized in 1963 when the Austin Independent School District Board of School Trustees honored him by naming the athletic field at Reagan High School the I. I. Nelson Field.

Dr. Nelson partially retired in 1959 at the age of 70 but was repeatedly pressed into service as supervisor of student teachers during the

regular sessions through the spring semester of 1973, when he retired completely. Thus his professional career spanned sixty-three years, 1910-1973.

Dr. Nelson was in constant demand as consultant in junior high school education over more than a quarter of a century by school systems in all sections of Texas - Beaumont, Houston, Harlingen, Alice, San Antonio, Dallas, Brownwood, Midland, Amarillo and El Paso, and from twenty to thirty other systems in the interior regions of the state. In addition he served as junior high school authority on numerous evaluation committees throughout Texas. For thirty years, 1942-1972, Nelson had charge of the junior high school section of the Texas Study of Secondary Education annual spring conference in Austin. He delivered numerous papers in his field at local, state and national conventions over the years. As much as any other educator in America, Dr. Nelson enriched and otherwise improved the educational program of the early adolescent. He deserved his title of "Mr. Junior High School."

Scores of Phi Delta Kappans of the national honorary fraternity of the College of Education will long remember their initiation service in which Dr. Nelson played prominant parts for twenty-five years or more. His sincerity gave life to the idealism of the pledge he administered and his dignified manner made lasting impressions upon the initiates. In 1956 he received a plaque from Phi Delta Kappa for "meritorious and unselfish service."

The value of Nelson's community contributions is reflected in his selection in 1951 by the Austin Real Estate Board as "Austin's Most Worthy Citizen" of the year. While Principal of the University Junior High School,

Nelson quietly and unknown to associates made it possible for dozens of children from poor families to remain in school, by raising funds for their food and clothing. For more than thirty years he was a leader of boy scouting in Austin. He served as scoutmaster of Troop 1 for nineteen years and to increase his proficiency took all courses offered at the University during that time in teaching outdoor skills. In 1932 he received the Silver Beaver Award, the highest honor given in Scouting for volunteer service.

Nelson joined the Theosophical Society in Austin in 1912 and was a leader in the group sixty-three years, until his death. He was president of the Society in 1967 and again in 1971, and vice president during the last year of his life.

A great spirit has left the community, but the influence of I. I. Nelson will remain throughout the lives of all whom he touched.

Lorene L. Rogers

Lorene L. Rogers, President Ad Interim of
The University of Texas at Austin

James L. Kinneavy

James L. Kinneavy, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Clark C. Gill (chairman), William A. Bennie, Geneva H. Pilgrim, and James G. Umstattd.