IN MEMORIAM

Ervin S. Perry
(1935 - 1970)

Ervin S. Perry died at age 34 in the M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston on December 14, 1970, after several weeks of tests and treatment. Only 11 months earlier at the same hospital he had undergone major surgery for removal of a tumor. During the year (1970) he had resumed his teaching and research in the Department of Civil Engineering at The University of Texas at Austin where he served as Associate Professor. He is survived by his wife, Jean; three daughters, Patricia Ervean, Edna Jean, and Arvis Marie; four sisters, Mrs. Alta Mae Davison of Coldspings, Mrs. Dolphus E. Collier of Conroe, Mrs. Douglas G. Woolfolk of Prairie View, and Mrs. Willie Jean Birmingham of Marshall; and one brother, Lt. Col. Mervin E. Perry of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Ervin Perry was born on a sandy land farm in Coldspings, San Jacinto County, Texas, and grew up in the Coldspings community. All six of Willie and Edna Perry's children, including Ervin and his twin brother Mervin, went on to Prairie View A & M for a college education and they have distinguished themselves by accomplishments which have followed this educational background. This close-knit, remarkable family was inspired by their father and school teacher mother to move toward higher education and, for most of them, careers in various aspects of education.

A reporter for the Dallas Morning News, Richard Morehead, stated it well, "Ervin Perry was born to a remarkable family which never complained of its color or condition, but moved happily from one opportunity to another. Because they were black and poor, perhaps the Perrys had a more difficult time getting educated than do most children. Yet each became a leading citizen through perseverance and application of his talents and training."
Following graduation from Prairie View A & M College with his B.S. degree in Civil Engineering in 1956, Ervin Perry and his twin brother, Mervin, served together as officers in the U. S. Army for two years. Ervin decided to pursue a teaching career at Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at this point while Mervin chose to make military service his career. Both achieved remarkable success in their respective careers and the parents (mother deceased in 1963 and father in 1968) as well as the older sisters viewed their successes with justifiable pride.

In the summer of 1959, Ervin Perry entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas. He moved to Prairie View A & M College as Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering for the following year (1959-60) before resuming his graduate study in Austin in the summer of 1960. In May, 1960, he married Miss Jean Alfred of Baytown, Texas, a registered nurse and faculty member in Nursing at Prairie View A & M. Their coming to Austin was to lead to an ever widening circle of friends who knew and loved them here.

From the summer 1960 until December, 1970, Ervin Perry was continuously connected in some way with The University of Texas and brought distinction to himself and his institution. He was awarded the M.S. degree in Civil Engineering in June, 1961, and in June of 1964 he completed the Ph. D. degree, working in the areas of materials science and structural mechanics. As a graduate student he worked as a research engineer and co-authored several publications on energy absorption of lightweight aggregate concrete and foamed plastics.

It was noteworthy for a Negro to be awarded the Ph. D. at the June, 1964, University of Texas Commencement with President Lyndon B. Johnson the speaker, and both President and Mrs. Johnson receiving Honorary Degrees. In spite of heavy rain and the last minute move in a downpour from the terrace in front of the tower to Municipal Auditorium, this June, 1964 Commencement represented the fulfillment of a long-worked-for goal for Ervin and a proud moment for the entire Perry family. Indeed, it was a happy occasion for all who knew and admired Ervin Perry, including the Engineering Faculty and his fellow graduate students.
Headlines over the State carried the news when Ervin Perry was named Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering in the Fall 1964, the first Negro ever appointed to this level of academic rank at The University of Texas at Austin. Widely sought by other top ranked colleges of engineering over the United States, he elected to stay in Austin. He continued to make noteworthy contributions to his own University and its community. His technical contributions are reflected by his publications, and the honors he received over the next six years are representative of his contribution to the engineering profession. He was recognized for scholarship and research by membership in several Engineering Honor Societies; Chi Epsilon, Tau Beta Pi, Sigma Xi, and Phi Kappa Phi, and listings in 'American Men of Science' and 'Who's Who in the South and Southwest.' Prairie View A & M honored him in 1966 with its Distinguished Graduate Award.

Along with teaching and supervision of research, Ervin Perry carried administrative duties for the Civil Engineering Department at The University of Texas, serving as Acting Chairman in the summer of 1969. He was on leave during 1967-68 as a Fellow in the Ford Foundation Academic Administration Internship Program. It was a distinct honor to be selected to participate in this program. During this year he was an Assistant to the President of Drexel Institute of Technology in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was clear that he had a distinct talent for administration and, in fact, he had turned down offers of deanships until he gained more experience in engineering teaching and research. Ervin Perry was one who could organize well, and all who worked with him respected his leadership ability and enjoyed being associated with him. Surveys of student opinion on his teaching always showed favorable remarks concerning his technical ability, ability to communicate ideas clearly, and extreme patience in working with any students who were having trouble keeping up with material being covered. He spent many hours with students who came to his office; his office door was always open. The Civil Engineering students have established an Ervin S. Perry Award to honor each long session semester an outstanding faculty member in the Civil Engineering Department. He enjoyed sports as participant or spectator and one of his favorite forms of relaxation was fishing. Many members of the faculty
and fellow graduate students shared happy experiences of association with him on the softball or bowling teams or as a fishing trip companion.

As a professional engineer he participated in many societies (see listing attached). He presented papers at National meetings of several of these societies and other papers were published in the journals. All of his talks and papers showed the ability to organize material well and express ideas in an unusually understandable fashion. Only a few weeks before his death he made a trip to Germany to present to an International Conference two papers growing out of his research in the basic properties of concrete.

The National Society of Professional Engineers honored Ervin Perry as Young Engineer of the Year for 1970 (see Mrs. Perry's acceptance statement at end of this resolution). He was recognized by the Texas Society of Professional Engineers at both Travis Chapter and State of Texas levels as Young Engineer of the Year for 1970 before being considered at the national level. His own chapter, Travis Chapter, voted after Ervin's death to name all future awards to the Young Engineer of the Year the "Ervin S. Perry Award" in recognition of his outstanding example of achievements as a professional engineer. He was the first Negro member of the Travis Chapter Texas Society of Professional Engineers in 1964 and by 1966 was elected a Chapter Director. The degree to which he proved himself as a person and as a professional engineer is well exemplified by this 1970 recognition throughout TSPE and NSPE.

In areas of community service he gave unselfishly of his time and effort. He served his church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, as a Deacon and for several years he taught a Sunday School class for young men. The Ebenezer Baptist Church had a "send-off" party for the Perry family when they left for Philadelphia where Ervin was to serve the year 1967-68 at Drexel Institute of Technology as an administrative intern under the Ford Foundation Program. They were active in the Lansdowne Baptist Church for the year in Pennsylvania and returned back to Ebenezer Church to resume places of service upon their return to Austin. Ervin Perry was a devoted Christian man who was known to his closest colleagues and his
students as one who deeply cared about others. He didn't talk about it much directly, but he lived every day as he felt a person committed to Christianity should. As his pastor put it in the final service at Ebenezer Baptist Church, "Ervin Perry was a brilliant builder who built with much more than material things; he was an effective builder of Christian Brotherhood and race relations who built his own life according to God's plan as he understood it."

He was active in his Austin Kiwanis Club, United Fund of Austin, Capitol Kidney Foundation and Travis Association for the Blind. He served as a member of the Advisory Council for Technical Services of the Coordinating Board for Texas College and University Systems, and was faculty adviser for the campus group Negro Association for Progress. To all these organizations he made a unique contribution and was recognized as one who was truly interested in helping others. Not one ever to dominate a conversation or a meeting by long speeches, he communicated his sincerity by being a good listener and sharing his keen insights into sometimes complex problems.

Ervin Perry was truly a pacesetter in the short period of his almost 35 years. In the future others will benefit from his breaking of racial barriers. Those who knew him best respected and loved him most and his passing leaves us all saddened.

Bryce Jordan
President ad interim of the University of Texas at Austin

Forest G. Hill
Secretary of the General Faculty

This Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Hudson Matlock, Lymon C. Reese, J. Neils Thompson and Ned H. Burns, Chairman.