

IN MEMORIAM

MILTON BROCKETT PORTER

Milton Brockett Porter, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, died at his home, 2402 Windsor Road, Austin, Texas, on May 27, 1960, at the age of ninety. He is survived by his wife, Goldie Horton Porter, a member of the Department of Mathematics at the University, two daughters by a first marriage to Minnie McLaughlin Porter, one sister, seven grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren. The daughters are Minnie Moore Porter (Mrs. Robert M.) Turpin of Midland, and Eugenia Porter (Mrs. Newton J.) Rayzor of Houston. The sister is Jessie Porter (Mrs. E. H.) Tassej of Houston.

Dr. Porter was born in Sherman, Texas, on November 22, 1869, the oldest of four children born to James Selden Porter and Eugenia Clay Brockett Porter. He received his early training from private tuition, public schools, and Austin College in Sherman. He entered The University of Texas in 1888 and graduated with a B.S. degree in 1892. He was a private tutor at a sugar plantation at Sugarland, Texas, from 1892 to 1894. Then he entered Harvard University, receiving a Master's degree in 1895, and the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1897.

An appointment as Instructor in Mathematics at The University of Texas for the next two years was followed by a like appointment at Yale for 1899 to 1901, with a promotion to the rank of Assistant Professor at Yale in 1901. He held this position only one year, for, upon an invitation from the Regents of The University of Texas, he returned to Austin as Professor of Pure Mathematics in 1902, a position he held until he retired in 1945. Since that date he has been designated Professor Emeritus by the Regents of the University.

When Dr. Porter entered the University, the Capital Building had been completed only a short time, the University's Main Building (west wing) was not quite finished, and classes were held temporarily in the old Capital Building at Eleventh Street and Congress Avenue. Street cars were horse-drawn on unpaved streets. Thus Dr. Porter "lived" the growth and development of The University to its present size.

Dr. Porter had a versatility of interest, a high standard of intellectual achievement, a penetrating appraisal of men and their projects, a personality and whimsical humor, qualities probably unmatched on the faculty in any one person, qualities that prompted his being given, as the years went by, important assignments and honors by administrative officers and faculty of the institution and by honor societies.

Dr. Porter represented the University at the formal opening of the Rice Institute October 11 to 13, 1912. On this occasion several foreign scholars were invited to give "A series of lectures in the Fundamental Sciences of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and the Liberal Humanities." Among the inaugural lecturers in Mathematics were Professor Emil Borel, Director of the Ecole Normal Supérieure and Professor of the Theory of Functions in the University of Paris, Professor Carl Størmer, Professor of Pure Mathematics in the University of Christiania, Norway, and Professor Vito Volterra, Professor of Mathematics in the University of Rome. Already acquainted with the contributions of these men to Mathematics, Dr. Porter valued always the opportunity to know them personally, and to be known by them. And it added to the personal contacts he had already enjoyed during a sojourn abroad in 1908-1909. There he made personal friends of Edmond Landau and Felix Klein of Germany, Henri Poincaré and Jacques Hadamard of France. More recently Dr. Porter enjoyed knowing and entertaining in his own home a world leader of today in the Theory of Functions, Professor S. Mandelbrodjt, who for several years has divided his time between professorships at the College de France and Rice University.

It seems fitting to say at this time that Dr. Porter's professors at Harvard became his life-long friends. They were Professor Bôcher, who was the immediate inspiration of his early researches, Professor Byerly, and Professor Osgood. Dr. Porter liked to comment, "They made a pet of me as soon as I got there." Likewise, Professor James Pierpont, and the world-famous Professor Willard Gibbs of Yale, and more recently, Professor Leonard Dickson, a Texan and celebrated mathematician of Chicago, and Professor George Birkhoff of Harvard were his personal friends.

In 1922 there was inaugurated at The University of Texas a program of awarding each year the title Research Lecturer to a member of the faculty. The recipient was relieved of a portion of his teaching duties that he might have time to prepare two or three lectures in his field. Dr. Porter was the first to receive this honor, and in the spring of 1924, delivered one or two technical lectures and one or two general ones to fulfill the requirements.

The doctorate was conferred for the first time at The University of Texas in 1915, and only a few times in the next five years, Biology, Mathematics, and German being fields represented. Dr. Porter's interests in furthering graduate study were well known, and in 1920 he was one of a committee of three named by President Sidney Mezes to formulate plans to encourage additional graduate work in still other fields that the University might compete favorably with other institutions. In 1925 President W. M. W. Splawn formed a new committee with Dr. Porter as chairman to re-study and implement the earlier plans. The immediate results were that members of the faculty known to be qualified to plan and teach graduate courses, to engage in and direct research in their respective fields, were designated as belonging to the Graduate Faculty. Thus Dr. Porter had a part in founding The Graduate School of The University of Texas.

Dr. Porter was a lover of books, good books. His personal library shows he read and studied extensively classical literature, languages, history, biography, travel, music, art, and various sciences outside and within the domain of mathematics. This diversity of interest and breadth of knowledge made him a natural choice for the Library Committee, where he served for many years. His wise counsel contributed greatly to the development of the Library as a whole, and he was practically the sole arbiter of the Mathematics Section. When he first came on the faculty, the Mathematical Section was good, "surprisingly good," to quote him. It contained some important treatises, files of periodicals, and collected works. During his professorship he added many volumes in these categories as opportunities arose to obtain them and funds became available to purchase them. At the time of his retirement the world's mathematical literature was well represented.

Interested in Astronomy from the days of his youth, Dr. Porter was on the committee named by President Benedict that implemented the gift of the McDonald Observatory to the University, and he represented the University on the occasion of the formal opening of the Observatory in 1939. Upon receiving news of Dr. Porter's death, Professor Otto Struve, the Observatory's first Director (jointly with Yerkes Observatory), wrote: "I first met Dr. Porter in 1932 when we were first considering construction of a large optical telescope to be built under the will of Mr. McDonald. Dr. Porter was one of the original members of the Observatory Committee in Austin, and throughout all the years that I was associated with the McDonald Observatory, he was of great help to me in every respect."

In 1938 Dr. Porter was chairman of a special committee to formulate plans for the regular broadcasting from the University of programs "musical, popular and on constructive subjects." The Texas State Network, Inc., offered the facilities of its twenty-three stations for the distribution of the proposed programs. The work of this committee initiated the present program of broadcasting from Radio House.

Dr. Porter's distinction in Mathematics was recognized nationally by the appearance of his name in Who's Who in America from about 1908. In the first seven editions of American Men of Science an asterisk was printed by his name to indicate he was one of the thousand leading men of science in the United States. This custom of "starring" was discontinued with the eighth edition in 1949, but while it was being used, not more than a dozen men of this faculty were selected for the honor. A biography of Dr. Porter is to appear in a forthcoming volume of the National Cyclopedia of American Biography (a publication for Reference Libraries only). He was elected to the Society of Sigma Xi at Yale in 1901, and he was one of twenty-one charter members of the Texas Chapter of Sigma Xi established in 1914. At

the installation of the Texas Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in 1903, Dr. Porter was one of a group elected to membership from those who had graduated prior to that date.

From his Harvard days Dr. Porter was a member of the American Mathematical Society. He was at the meeting of the New York Mathematical Society when its name was changed to the American Mathematical Society. He was on its Board of Directors at times, attended many meetings and read papers before the Society on occasion. At the time of his death he was the Society's oldest member, and one of three of longest membership.

On Nov. 18, 1957, the Department of Mathematics and Astronomy and Sigma Xi sponsored a lecture in Dr. Porter's honor. On that occasion his long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Harry S. Vandiver, summarized in a formal tribute Dr. Porter's achievements in the mathematical world and in building a Mathematics Department at the University that contributed much to the high national standing of the institution. This tribute was followed by a lecture by Dr. Alfred Schild, a research mathematician who had joined the faculty recently.

Dr. Porter's profound knowledge in his own field and the versatility he evidenced was continually a source of amazement to his students. It also served as an inspiration. They recognized his fine attributes as a teacher in his stimulating presentation of whatever the topic of the day might be. Also, he was a friendly counsellor to both students and colleagues. He often said, "I have tried not to give help. Rather I have always tried to help a person help himself." Dr. Porter was the sort of professor whom students and colleagues never forgot.

This friendly counsel was given often outside the academic circle. As one instance, he was so impressed by the talent evidenced in a folio of water colors of flowers that a housewife had painted for her own pleasure that he told her she should seek to have them published, with the result The Macmillan Company has published her several books. A new one is near completion. This friend wrote in June, "I have always felt it was Dr. Porter who launched me on my career, so pleasant and profitable."

Dr. Porter retired from the faculty in 1945, and on his 76th birthday that fall, the Department of Applied Mathematics sponsored a surprise dinner in his honor. Dr. J. W. Calhoun (one time Acting President) was master of ceremonies, and the dinner was attended by about seventy-five of Dr. and Mrs. Porter's long-time friends and colleagues.

The chapter of Chi Phi Fraternity at the University has always been proud of having Dr. Porter as one of its founders. Dr. W. Lefevre, Professor of Philosophy at Texas in Dr. Porter's student days, had been a Chi Phi at the University of Virginia. He formed the founding group of Nu Chapter in about 1890 and invited Dr. Porter to be one of them. In 1957, a member of more than sixty years standing, Dr. Porter was honored by the fraternity with a dinner and was presented with a gold recognition pin. His name and influence will live within Nu Chapter as one of their members who attained distinction in the academic world.

Being home lovers, it was natural that Dr. Porter and his wife created for themselves a home that has been a great pleasure to them and to their friends. Their objects of art, selected with a discriminating taste, give evidence that one does not have to travel extensively abroad or to other far-away places to find interesting things. For the most part their rare porcelains, glass, ivories, and the like were acquired near home.

Dr. Porter's research in Mathematics was in the field of the Theory of Functions. The most accurate count available is the list of fifteen original papers, with the titles and places of publications as attached to this memoriam. Several of these papers excited much interest from leading mathematicians and are still referred to.

That we may look with pride on Milton Brockett Porter, the first Texan (and the first native Texan) to attain distinction in Mathematics, let us quote from a telegram Mrs. Porter received in May from Chairman Floyd E. Ulrich of the Mathematics Department of The Rice University. It read in part,

Professor Porter was unquestionably the first prominent Mathematician from the State of Texas. His works are well known throughout the entire mathematical world. The high esteem in which Professor Porter is held is a result not only of his outstanding contributions in the field of mathematics but also to his fine reputation as an individual. The entire mathematical community has suffered a real loss.

H. S. Vandiver, Chairman, J. A. Burdine, R. A. Law