IN MEMORIAM

SAM GERALD WHITTEN

Sam Gerald Whitten, Associate Professor of Library and Information Science and widely known library leader, political activist, and champion of intellectual freedom and civil liberties, died January 20, 1986.

Born in 1924 in Talco, Texas, he attended elementary school in nearby Bogata and graduated from Bogata High School at the age of 17. He enrolled briefly in Paris Junior College before enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1943, shortly after his eighteenth birthday. Recognizing him as a potential leader, the Navy sent him to Tulane University and to the Naval Supply Corps Midshipman School at Harvard University. After being commissioned an ensign, he served as the Supply Officer on two ships. He was released from the Navy in August, 1946, just in time to enter The University of Texas (as it was then named) in the fall.

He was within one semester of a degree in accounting when he realized that the business world was not for him. He changed his major, but after receiving a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1949 and another in economics in 1950, he still was searching for a career. It was at this point that the counsel of a librarian friend and work experience as a student assistant in the Texas Collection of the U.T. Library led him to enroll in the Graduate School of Library Science (as it was then named), and he soon discovered that librarianship was indeed the appropriate outlet for his interests and talents. He entered the GSLS in 1950 and received his M.L.S. degree in 1952.

While in the GSLS he worked as a student assistant in the Texas Collection, the Business and Social Science Reading Room, and the Biology Library. His thesis bears the title, "Public Services in the Central
Library: Survey of the Houston Public Library," and shows that he had already discovered that the public library was the kind of library that he loved best -- though he loved all kinds well.

His first job as a professional librarian was that of Public Relations Coordinator, San Antonio Public Library. He spent a little over a year there before returning to U.T. in 1953 to become the Physics Librarian and to lecture part-time in the GSLS. Recognition of his exceptional abilities was rapid and widespread, and in 1955 he became Head, Science and Industry Division, Dallas Public Library. He rose to become Coordinator of Branches at the Dallas Public Library before moving, in 1960, to Southern Methodist University to establish and head its Science Library. His dedication to community-wide library service was not diminished by his move from a public library to a university library, he once explained, because the Science Library served the whole metroplex and not just the university; otherwise he would not have made the move. It was from SMU that Dr. Robert R. Douglass, the founding Director of the GSLS, lured him back to his alma mater in 1967 to become an Associate Professor of Library Science.

The GSLS (Later named the Graduate School of Library and Information Science: GSLIS) was his professional base for the rest of his life, but from it he ranged far and wide. He was especially active in professional organizations, and the list of his offices and committee memberships is much too long to appear here in full. Furthermore, much of his active participation in the American Civil Liberties Union and the Texas Civil Liberties Union stemmed from his fierce devotion to the cause of intellectual freedom. He accomplished much by his work in and through professional and other organizations, perhaps most notably by his help in the design of, and in the successful campaign for, the Texas Library Systems Act of 1969. His list of professional activities includes:
President of the Texas Library Association, 1968-69
Texas Library Association Distinguished Service Award, 1986 (awarded posthumously)
Member of the Texas Library Association Legislative and Planning Committees
Board member of the Texas Library Association Political Action Committee
Council member of the American Library Association
Board member of the American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Round Table
Delegate to the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services, 1979
Member of the Texas State Library's advisory board in the administration of the Library Services and Construction Act
Member of the Board of Trustees of the Austin Public Library
Member of the Systems Advisory Board of the Central Texas Library System

Within the GSLIS, he quickly established himself as a dedicated teacher. He worked constantly at getting to know the students and getting them to talk to him — about libraries and librarianship, and about their personal hopes, fears, and dreams. His belief in the importance of professional associations manifested itself in his long sponsorship of GLISSA, the Graduate Library and Information Science Students Association.

He liked to start his workday with a cup of coffee and The Daily Texan in the GSLIS Student-Faculty Commons Room, but he always soon pushed the Texan aside when the students started clustering around him. In breaks during long classes, the students would also cluster around,
and often when they all went back into the classroom the students would realize that they had been learning just as intensely during the break as during the class meeting. Many are the GSLIS graduates who credit him with leading them into careers in public libraries through such conversations with him. His influence has been well stated by a former student, now a public librarian, who wrote, "He made us realize, not with rhetoric but by example, that libraries and our jobs as librarians are an integral part of this country's democratic process." His very special rapport with students will be celebrated in perpetuity by the Sam G. Whitten Endowed Presidential Scholarship Fund, which will provide aid to generations of GSLIS students to come.

In faculty meetings, he had the gift of cutting quickly to the heart of whatever matter was under discussion. Often it was he who asked the penetrating question that clarified the real issue that other faculty members had been obscuring with their comments. Though he argued frequently on behalf of deserving students, he was nevertheless a careful guardian of the doorway to the profession and would not relax his standards of scholarship and performance to give a student, however deserving in other ways, a higher grade than he or she had earned. Yet he would spend many hours and days in helping students individually, before the exam or before the report was due. He was dedicated to absolute equality of opportunity, regardless of a person's race, color, creed, or sex, and for years he chaired the GSLIS Minority Recruitment Committee.

His love of books as a medium for transmitting ideas goes back to his high school days. He remembered not only the name of every English teacher who read aloud to his class, but also what she read. While in the Navy he read the entire Modern Library. For a number of years he collected books randomly, and it was not until 1975 that his collection
became focused. In that year he and a friend were discussing why no one had, to their knowledge, built a notable private collection of novels with a Texas setting. No one had, the friend surmised, because there were no more than a hundred novels about Texas. Whitten was skeptical of that number and immediately began to identify and collect Texas novels. Within ten years he owned some 1,500 novels set in Texas and representing some 500 authors. The significance of his collection was recognized in The Library Chronicle of U.T. Austin in 1981, and he became a popular speaker on Texas in fiction.

Tributes paid him have appeared in the Spring 1986 and Summer 1987 issues of the Texas Library Journal and in Sam Gerald Whitten: In Memoriam, published by the GSLIS. In January 1986 the American Library Association Council adopted a resolution in honor of his significant contributions to the improvement of libraries and the library profession, and Congressman John Bryant commemorated him in the Congressional Record.

He is survived by his wife, Virginia, and by his children: Lynn, Jeff, Jill, and Holly.
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 Heartsill H. Young, Associate Professor (Retired) of Library and Information Science, and Ronald E. Wyllys, Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science.