

Happy 103rd!

Texas A&M had it rough during the good 'Old Army' days

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Nobody's breaking out the required 103 birthday candles, but today Texas A&M University is having a birthday.

Thus, the birthday school's long and rustic history should receive the examination it deserves.

Aggieland was built after the Civil War under authorization of the United States Congress under the Morrill Act of July 2, 1862. The act set up Land Grant schools in various states to provide agricultural and engineering graduates. The schools were also instructed, by law, to provide military training and reserve officers.

Other Land Grant schools include Florida A&M and Oklahoma State University.

This is the reason Texas A&M College, as it was then known, was a cow college with a cadet corps.

The school was opened for registration Oct. 2, 1876, and classes started with 40 students and 6 faculty members on the fourth.

That is a long way from today's enrollment of over 31,000 students and the myriad of professors, teaching assistants and others who teach them.

Life was rough in the early days. Wolves were a problem. So was lodging; for a while cadets lived in tents. The mode of transportation was horse or train. Eventually a trolley was used to connect the school with downtown Bryan.

Academically A&M suffered. The presidency was first offered to Jefferson Davis, who refused it. Thomas Gathwright later accepted the position.

Soon he and his instructors were handed their walking papers. It seemed that they were teaching a classical, rather than agricultural and mechanical curriculum.

In 1890 Lawrence Sullivan Ross, Texas' Governor at that time, assumed the presidency. His statue stands in front of the domed Academic Building. Under Ross the school achieved a certain measure of respectability that it had earlier lacked.

The school was increasing in size. By 1900 the Corps of Cadets was 327 strong. The physical plant consisted of two main buildings.

Disaster soon struck. In 1912

when enrollment climbed to 1,200, the old mess hall burned. Soon after the dining disaster, the Main Building went up in smoke.

That fire destroyed many of the college's early records. However, Sbisa Dining Hall and the Academic Building were built soon afterward.

When America entered the Great War, the entire senior class at Texas A&M volunteered for duty.

The 55 Aggies who died during the first of the two World Wars are commemorated by plaques on the 55 trees surrounding the drill field behind the Memorial Student Center.

It was during the war that J.V. "Pinky" Wilson, serving with the AEF, wrote "The Aggie War Hymn."

The school continued expanding, adding new traditions during its growth.

In 1922 the Twelfth Man was born. In a football game against Centre College in Dallas, the Aggies were decimated by injuries. Gil King, who had been on the team earlier, came out of the stands to suit up. Though he didn't play, he started one of A&M's most original traditions.

By 1941 6,500 were enrolled. Almost 70 buildings stood on campus.

In between wars, some cadets found a black mongrel puppy on road from Navasota. They named the dog Reveille, who became the school mascot. The rest of the Reveille's (the school is on its fourth Rev) have been pureblood collies.

WW II struck America, and Texas A&M responded with more soldiers than any other single institution, including the military academies.

18,000 Aggies served in the war, of whom 13,000 were officers.

In 1943, Hollywood did it to Aggie land with the unforgettable war classic "We've Never Been Licked."

The end of the war caused a massive housing shortage as Aggie veterans returned to complete their education. 1946-47 had a peak enrollment of 9,000. The College utilized the air base out on Highway 21 as an annex. Also, be-



Photo Courtesy Archives

Texas A&M's 50th birthday included a bar-b-que picnic lunch near Kyle Field.

cause of excessive hazing, the freshmen were separated from upperclassmen and kept out at base for a while.

In 1954 mandatory four year participation in the Corps was struck down, but was reinstated in 1957. The struggle over Corps membership grew out of a concern over declining enrollment and stagnation.

Texas A&M College was changed to Texas A&M University August 23, 1963.

Soon afterwards, in 1965, membership in the Corps of Cadets became voluntary again.

In 1964 Gen. Earl Rudder, famed for leading the ranger assaults during D-Day, took over as president. Under his authority the school became coeducational. Women are being admitted for a

while without regard to previous requirements that they be either the wives or daughters of Aggies. In 1971, the year Rudder died, the rules were formally struck down. In 1974 women were admitted to the Corps for the first time in a unit, W-1.

After Rudder died, Dr. Jack Williams took over the job of presi-

dent. He was then elevated to Chancellor. Jarvis Miller was named president of the university in 1977.


After seeing his office stripped of power, Williams resigned as chancellor in the spring of '79.

Frank Hubert was appointed as the new chancellor of the Texas A&M System last week.




Photo Courtesy Archives

President M. T. Harrington, Judge John W. Goodwin a member of the first class of A&M, Charles McGill, then a freshman and Texas Gov. Allen H. Shivers pose in Kyle Field after the 50th birthday presentation.



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