

# Texas A&M: Simple beginnings

Few people thought Texas A&M was destined for any sort of greatness when it was established on a bleak Texas prairie four miles from the raw frontier town of Bryan.

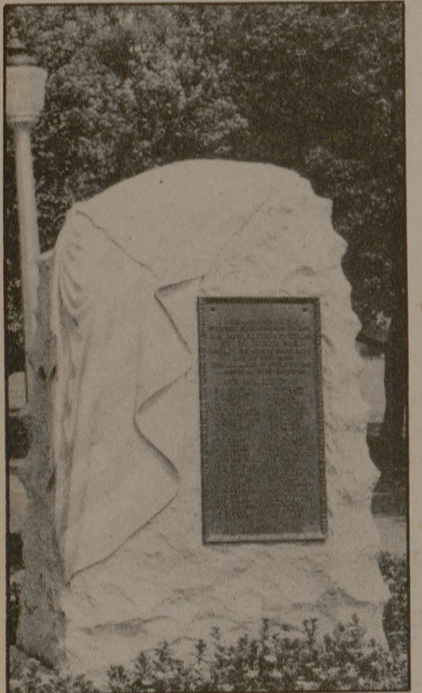
Some doubted it even would survive.

Governor Richard Coke and the Texas A&M Board of Directors would have liked to open the school in the fall of 1875 but were forced to wait another year — there was simply too much to be done. There was no president or faculty and there were no residence or dining facilities — only a vast, unequipped building in the wilderness.

The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was a colorful, if not particularly comfortable, spot for gaining an education. Bathing facilities were only one of the unobtainable luxuries.

And if the site of the new institution of learning was close to primitive, its initial educational efforts were perhaps even more so. While the school was authorized to teach the agricultural and mechanical arts, these subjects had rarely been taught anywhere else — and never in Texas. Knowledge about the subjects was, at best, severely limited. Texas A&M's first faculty shared basic problems with most faculties of that time and necessarily found a similar answer: stick to the basics of a classical education and avoid the unknown.

The A&M College of Texas was the state's first institute of higher



The World War I Memorial has been moved to a temporary site on the MSC grounds.

learning, a land-grant school established under the federal Morrill Act of 1862. Even so, when Gov. Coke addressed the Texas A&M student body at the 1876 dedication ceremonies, the area still served as an assembly point for drives that took Texas beef to Dodge City, Kan.

The Fall 1876 term started with 40 students and six faculty members; 48 students had shown up by the end of the term, and the school year's end saw 106 students on campus. Growth slowed after that; by 1884, the number had only reached 133.

The 1880's saw the Corps of Cadets become something of a cohesive force between and among students, even the harassed freshmen who held the ignominious nickname of "fish."

Corps life — and therefore student life — was by turns arduous and rewarding. Traditions were in the making, but few existed then as they are known today. Students were known as Cadets, A&MC students, and after the turn of the century, Farmers. The term "Aggies" was not used until after World War I.

A strong sense of loyalty was simmering on the Texas prairie. An Association of Ex-Students convened in 1880. Strong company and class rivalries formed the foundation of the Aggie spirit of later days. Other colleges and universities were developing fraternities and social clubs; none of those were encouraged or developed at the A&M College. Instead, the Corps of Cadets became the single organization that encompassed all students.

Despite its name, the College's curricula offered a strong engineering foundation and almost nothing in agriculture. Only 18 percent of the 1880-81 enrollment was in agriculture. Many students, having grown up on the farm, wanted to do almost anything rather than go back to the land.

But engineering, though more popular than agriculture, suffered in the early 1880s, too. The emphasis on "practical" training forced engineers away from the drawing board and into the workshops; for some time, engineering was synonymous with blacksmithing and wood-working.

The establishment of the Agricultural Experiment Station in 1888 helped with the survival and progress of the agricultural program and the College. The station made it easier to sell farmers on the virtues of scientific farming and often actively helped solve farm problems.

The selection of Lawrence Sullivan Ross as Texas A&M's president in 1891 was another step forward for the college. After a career as an Indian fighter, Confederate brigadier general, planter, state senator and governor of Texas, Ross brought with him to the College a healthy amount of status and respect. Parents sent their sons to Ross, not the College. The cadets took great pride in having Ross as their president — at once leader, inspiration and hero.

The 1890s saw Texas A&M begin to branch out a bit. In 1893, the Farmers beat Navasota in baseball 9-0. The first recorded football game shows Texas A&M defeating Ball High School in Galveston, 14-6. For social activities, there was a Fat Man's Club and a Bowlegged Man's Club.

Ross, who served as president until his death in 1898, was proud of his boys, who went on to become engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers, teachers and military men. The physical plant of the college also prospered during his tenure: a new dining hall was built and water supplies and bathing facilities were improved.

Former cadets actively participated in the Spanish-American War two years before the century's end. Of the 89 serving in the military, 63 were officers or noncommissioned officers.

Female students made their debut long before the issue of women students became a serious question. Ethel Hutson, daughter of professor Charles Hutson, attended in 1893-94; her twin sisters Sophie and Mary completed engineering studies between 1899 and 1900. They received no grades or degrees, however; they were considered "courtesy students" as a favor to their father.

Although the College was growing, living conditions were still somewhat primitive. From 1906 until the start of World War I, many students still lived in tents, though new dormitories were being built as quickly as finances permitted.

Faculty members weren't exempt, but the teachers got together in 1906 and built the Shirley Hotel, a two-story frame building which included a dining room, kitchen and guest rooms. The Shirley provided temporary housing for new faculty members while residences were being built.

In 1909, a new engineering building was completed and enrollment hit 757. In 1911, the School of Agriculture was created and its first dean, Edwin J. Kyle, started correspondence courses for farmers and students. Kyle also strongly supported the sports program, and today's Kyle Field is named in his honor.

By 1910, Texas A&M offered eight degree programs; only one of which, agriculture, was unrelated to engineering.

In 1914, the position of athletic director was created because of the growing organized athletics program. The 1914 Texas A&M yearbook, then known as "The Longhorn," boasted that between 1902 and 1913 the Farmers had a football record of 73-18-4. That was the ideal way to look at things, since the 1913 team lost more games in one season than the past four years' teams put together.

The 1915 season saw the beginning of the home-and-away schedule of football clashes between Texas A&M and the University of Texas. The Farmers started the "Kyle Field jinx" by beating Texas 13-0.

The Farmers were beaten 21-7 during the 1916 game in Austin. Texas students planned to bring a live steer to the 1917 Thanksgiving Day battle branded with the 21-7 Texas victory of the year before. But the cadets got word of the plan; three of them found their way into the steer's stall and branded him with the score of the 1915 Texas A&M win, 13-0. When the steer's handlers found the brand they altered it to resemble the letters "BEVO."

The second College Station war saw the home team once more victorious, 7-0. The Farmers went on to beat Rice University a week later for its fourth undefeated season and its first Southwest Conference title.

Bevo did not fare as well; it was served as the main dish at a gathering of the two schools in 1921.

The war between the schools in Austin and College Station, though, was just a shadow of the European war that started in 1914. When the Reserve Officer Training Corps program was started in 1916, A&M College officials asked for and got a senior ROTC program. Freshmen and sophomores were required to participate; juniors and seniors who decided to continue received monthly allotments and could be commissioned as reserve army officers or temporary second lieutenants in the regular army.

In March 1917, College officials offered the school's entire facilities to the federal government for war training purposes, becoming the first college in the country to do so.

The declaration of war came a month later. Most of the senior class was excused to attend the first officers training school at Leon Springs; other students enlisted directly into the military. Those who remained in the depleted student body were on a wartime schedule: classes continued,

but the emphasis was on military exercises.

By June, almost no seniors were left on campus; officials decided to hold commencement ceremonies at Leon Springs. Seniors in good standing — whether they had completed their course work or not — were awarded diplomas.

By the war's end on Nov. 11, 1918, half the men who had graduated from the A&M College since its establishment had participated in "the Great War" — more than any other college in the United States. Texas A&M was the alma mater of 1,232 military officers and 55 Aggies gave their lives for their country.

Texas A&M moved closer to fulfillment of its technical specialties of agriculture and engineering. The critical shortage of engineers during the war justified the College's efforts, and agriculturists finally convinced farmers and the general public of the value of scientific farming and research.

The society that emerged from the international conflict was one of producers, engineers, scientists and agriculturists — the world for which Texas A&M had been designed.

Ironically, the returning veterans who had given Texas A&M its military reputation mostly refused to participate in military training. As would happen after World War II, the influx of veteran students heralded a spurt of growth for the College: 1919's enrollment was 50 percent greater than any year before.

The growth continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Of all male graduates of Texas high schools in 1923, one-third registered at Texas A&M; enrollment grew by about 600 a year. Tent cities made a reappearance to house some 300 students.

Texas A&M President William B. Bizzell proved to be a highly capable salesman for higher education, and the College survived — helped in large part by the discovery of oil in 1923 on state land set aside for UT and Texas A&M.

The scope of the education offered to Aggies was broadened: courses in industrial education, agricultural administration, and Americanism were brought into the curriculum, as well as graduate programs in civil engineering, architecture and agriculture. Admission requirements were raised, and teaching standards were improved.

There were more visible changes, too. The construction of Kyle Field began in 1927.

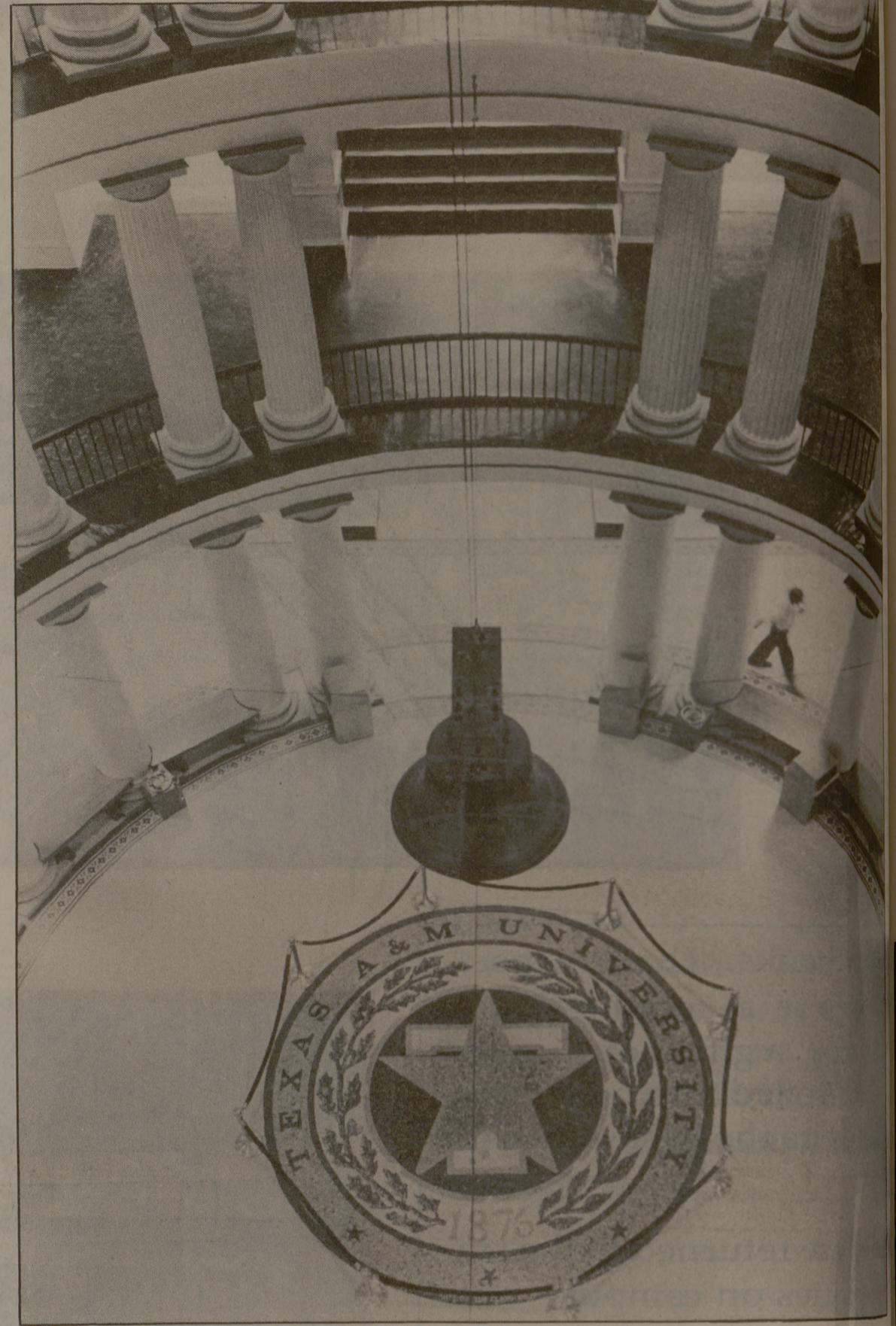
The College survived and even did well in the 1920s and '30s, buoyed in part by oil money, even through the Depression that had begun in 1929. By 1926, oil royalties flowing into the Permanent University Fund shared by UT and Texas A&M amounted to more than \$250,000 per month and total royalties by that time topped by \$5 million mark.

By the beginning of the Depression, enrollment had grown to about 5,000 students, and the building program had continued, supported by oil royalties. When the Depression hit, though, enrollment suffered as many would-be students found themselves unable to afford college in any way.

Some students slept in steam tunnels underneath street level because they couldn't afford room rent. Unable to afford food, they stole eggs and chickens from the poultry farm and got milk straight from the source at the College dairy farm. After some expensive experimental hens were appropriated, a sympathetic professor pointed out to the cadets which ones were safe and which were off limits.

College Station, once a flag stop on the railroad, was incorporated as a city in 1938.

As the European situation grew bleaker in the fall of 1940, students began to leave the campus as National Guard units were activated.



The Texas A&M emblem figures prominently in the view from the fourth floor of the Academic Building.

Photo by DEANSAITO

The senior class of 1941 entered military service en masse in May 1941.

Texas A&M historian Henry C. Dethloff says the campus was quiet on the afternoon of Dec. 7, 1941. Many students were at the Campus Theater watching "A Yank in the RAF." The film snapped, and over the jeers and catcalls, the theater manager announced "If you would care to know, Japanese forces have just bombed Pearl Harbor."

A shocked silence was followed by yells of "Beat the hell outta Japan!" and "Let's take a Corps trip to Tokyo!"

The Class of '41 was followed into uniform, also en masse, by the class of '42.

Almost 20,000 former Texas A&M students served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II at Pearl Harbor, Bataan, Corregidor, Midway, North Africa, Italy, Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. When a feisty army lieutenant colonel named James Dolittle led a daring aerial bombing raid on Tokyo in April, 1942, his second-in-command was Maj. John Hilger, Class of '32.

On April 21, 1942, as Japanese forces bombarded U.S. forces on Corregidor, 25 Aggies, including former Commandant of Cadets Maj. Gen. George F. Moore, Class of '08, celebrated San Jacinto Day in a cave on the besieged island. They drank toasts of water and had their muster interrupted by Japanese shells. Two weeks later, all were either dead or being held prisoner — Corregidor had fallen.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commander of American forces in the Pacific, said in 1942 that Texas A&M

was "writing its own military history in the blood of its graduates."

By October 1942, about 6,500 Aggies were in uniform. Most were officers, and 23 had been decorated for bravery under fire.

In 1943, a war movie titled "We've Never Been Licked," filmed on campus, tied the spirit of Aggiehood to national defense and became a part of Aggie tradition.

Nearly 20,000 former students of Texas A&M served in the armed services during World War II, about 14,000 as officers — more than any of the service academies — including 29 generals. Seven Aggies were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor; almost 1,000 former stu-

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The Northgate area has changed much over the last century.