

A&M fails to give former governor credit for helping create college

By Deborah A. Haring
Reporter

How many Texas A&M students know the name of the man whose act created this University?

Many men were leaders in A&M's early days, but just one man was responsible for setting up the college. (Although Lawrence Sullivan Ross was a prominent figure in A&M's history, he was not the man.)

In 1871, Gov. Edmund J. Davis signed into law a bill establishing the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, said Dr. Dale Baum, an A&M associate professor of history.

Despite Davis' role in the founding of A&M, there are no statues of him and no streets or buildings named after him on A&M's campus, Baum said.

Baum said one reason for this is the difficulty in overcoming the older, racist accounts of the origins of the school. Davis, a staunch Unionist governor, implemented policies that were unpopular with some Southerners.

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"For years we couldn't forgive the accomplishments of the Davis regime and we couldn't forgive the things that were done during Reconstruction," he said.

During the Reconstruction period, Baum said, black people began to be given full civic and political equality, which was unthinkable to some white people at that time.

"That was part of the nightmare of Reconstruction — that Davis was elevating blacks to equality with whites," Baum said.

Davis helped blacks by creating Prairie View A&M, a primarily black college, at the same time he created A&M's main campus near Bryan. The creation of a black college at this period of history was unacceptable,

Baum said.

"It bothers me that A&M students don't really know how their school got started," he said. "I like being at a school that is very proud of its traditions because it makes sense to have a collective memory to fall back on. It hurts when others point out that students here don't know about the origins of this school."

Few know of Davis' role in A&M's creation because it was associated with a controversial time and has been kept somewhat hidden, Baum said.

"Standard histories of A&M hark back to older interpretations that say it's just too bad that this school had to be founded at such a tumultuous time," he said.

Since the period was so controversial, those such as Davis were not honored with statues when most were erected on campus, Baum said.

Baum said recognition of Davis' accomplishments is long overdue because attempts to erase parts of history or keep them hidden just hurt people intellectually, he said.

"There really is no reason to be ashamed of the founding of this school," he said. "In fact, there should be a tremendous amount of pride. We're really the first institution of higher learning in the state."

More understanding of the time surrounding A&M's beginning is becoming evident in the recent interest of people wanting to recognize Davis' contributions to A&M, he said.

Baum agrees that there is a need for recognition of Davis.

"In the name of fairness and justice we certainly should commemorate someone like Edmund J. Davis," he said. "The bottom line is that there's a good Ag here who's not getting recognition."

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Eighth-grade student holds assistant principal hostage

PASADENA (AP) — An eighth-grade student held an assistant principal at gunpoint for about two hours Monday but surrendered shortly after the administrator escaped, authorities said.

Grover Belcher, an assistant principal at Deepwater Junior High School, said he escaped through the back door in his office when the 14-year-old went to use the restroom.

"I had told him the door was a closet," Belcher said.

The boy walked into the school's administrative offices about 9 a.m. asking to see Belcher. He went into Belcher's office, closed the door and then pulled a gun out of his jacket, Belcher said.

"He pointed it at me and said, 'I need to talk,'" Belcher told reporters during a news conference Monday afternoon. The boy mentioned some family problems, he said.

"I've not dealt with him before," Belcher said. "I did not know him at all."

The two were in the office for more than a half hour before the student told Belcher to call police and tell them he was being held hostage, Belcher said. Until then, other school officials were unaware of what was happening.

"He wanted the building evacuated," the first-year assistant principal said.

The 670 students were evacuated to two nearby elementary schools, but they returned to class after the youth surrendered, Deer Park Independent School District officials said.

The school, which has students from sixth through eighth grades, is in a residential area of Pasadena, a suburb southeast of Houston.

Belcher said the student — whose

name was not released because he is a juvenile — did not give specifics about what was troubling him and seemed calm. He did get nervous when he heard a helicopter circling above the school.

The 42-year-old school administrator talked to a police negotiator who also is a chaplain on the telephone and relayed the conversations to the student.

"The chaplain encouraged him to do what was necessary to get out of there," Belcher said.

At one point, the teen-ager mentioned the name of a friend he said he wanted to come to the office so he could surrender to police with him. The friend never was summoned to the office.

The student never threatened Belcher, but he kept the gun perched on a desk and pointed at the assistant principal, Belcher said.

Jury selection begins in trial for slaying

BELTON (AP) — Jury selection began Monday in the trial of a Fort Hood soldier accused in the dismemberment slaying of his pregnant wife.

Ernest Jack Chappelle, 22, was charged with murder in the Aug. 1 slaying of 19-year-old Lisa Chappelle. The head and arms of the woman were found in a trash bin in Austin, near the University of Texas campus.

Chappelle, a medic, was arrested Aug. 7.

An attorney for Chappelle on Nov. 6 requested a change of venue, which has not been acted upon by State District Judge Jack Prescott.

Mrs. Chappelle was seven months pregnant at the time of her death, investigators said.

Controller gives low estimate of city reserves

HOUSTON (AP) — A New York bond rating agency says the city of Houston has more money in reserve than the city controller reported in his year-end financial report, the Houston Chronicle reported Monday.

Controller Lance Lalor's draft of the year-end financial report shows the city with \$4.6 million in reserve on June 30, the end of fiscal 1987. At the end of fiscal 1986, the city had nearly \$24 million in reserve.

But Vladimir Stadnyk, senior vice president of Standard & Poor's Corp., said that the available reserve in the city's general fund is closer to \$29 million.

Rating agencies that determine the interest Houston taxpayers pay for borrowed money judge a city's financial health, in part, on how much money is in reserve.

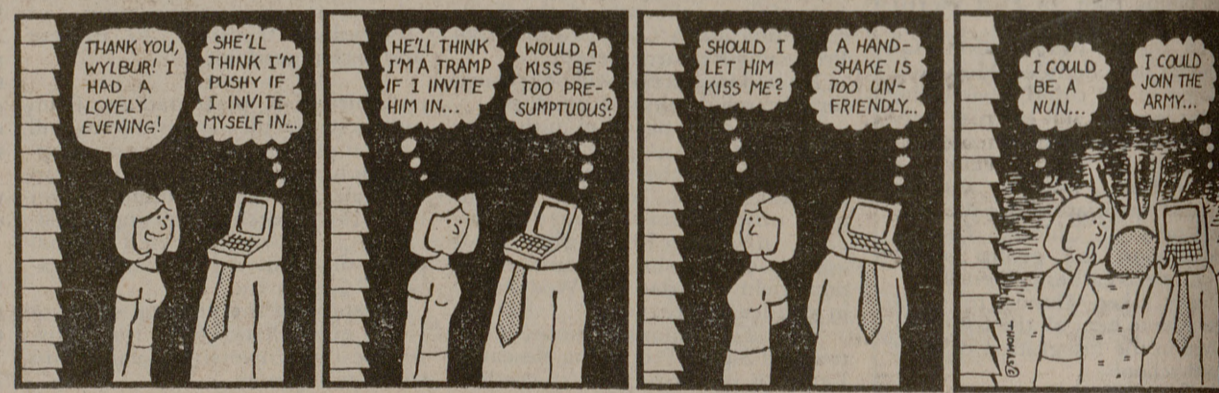
The accounting firm of Ernst & Whinney said there was no real change in Lalor's method of accounting, but said Lalor was inconsistent in recording two major city liabilities — payment of workman's compensation and payment for compensated absences. The inconsistencies in those two categories alone could account for the \$17 million discrepancy.

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