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The First Seventy-five Years 1876-1951

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THE FIRST
Seventy-five Years

1876



1951

PRAIRIE VIEW

AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE OF TEXAS

THE FIRST
Seventy-five Years

INTRODUCTION

Seventy-five years is a long span in the life of a man or an institution. What do the years mean? For man or institution, if they are filled with the honest sweat of service to humanity—with the patient following of that higher law of unflinching fidelity to the dictates of a calling—the years are a benediction.

Prairie View is an institution—a public institution. But an institution is an empty thing without the beating hearts and yearning souls of mortal men. And down the seventy-five years of Prairie View's existence, men have lived and dreamed here until every blade of grass and every rock, in that wise primordial way in which the primitive earth knows and cares, has joined the choir invisible to bless their memory. For every man whose foot has touched this hallowed soil has found a spirit, and has broadened and deepened it until what started out as an ambitionless meandering stream has become a purposeful river upon whose tide, now turbulent, now tranquil, floats the destiny of countless human hopes and dreams.

The spirit of an institution is the compound of many things—a strange and often quixotic amalgam of unrelated, sometimes contradictory, elements. Founded, symbolically, upon the ruins of a slave plantation, this college was authorized in the spirit of fair play of the constitutional convention of 1876 where wisdom would not allow vengeance to triumph over justice. The men of the parent school at College Station, growing ever wiser with the years, have translated that sense of justice into ever-broadening channels. The humble student, from every nook and cranny in the land, has left the echo of his laughter upon the wind, his hopes within the lurking shadows of our halls and by-ways. The

giants, the world-shakers, have stood on our hill to mingle their search for truth with the fledgling's hopes for life. And men of dedication have worked here—worked to bring a new heaven and a new earth often with only faith and their hands—often without the spiritual or material compensation that their sacrifices merited—but always with a sense of mission—with a sense that somehow, someday, time would reward their efforts—would give to those to whom they had given their minds the victory of a new world—of an enlightened society.

Could we do better at the end of this seventy-five years than pay homage to this amalgam, this spirit? Can we do less than dedicate our lives to the task of fostering it, nurturing it, stimulating it—that those who will walk this ground, these halls, will know, and be better men because of it?



PRAIRIE VIEW, 1878

PRAIRIE VIEW

Prairie View had its beginning in 1876, the first year of the Texas constitution, of the common free school system and at the dawn of public higher education in Texas.

Texas' first state institution of higher learning was the Agricultural and Mechanical College, established in October of 1876. Corresponding with its establishment under the provisions of the Morrill Land Grant College Act, the 15th Legislature authorized a similar school for Negro youth to operate under the management of the A. and M. College Board.

A three-man commission was appointed to locate and build the "Agricultural and Mechanical College for Colored Youth". With the \$20,000 appropriated for this purpose, the commissioners bought the Alta Vista plantation of the late Colonel Jared Ellison Kirby in Waller County, east of Hempstead. His wife, Mrs. Helen Marr Kirby had formerly operated a fashionable girls' school in the stately plantation house set on a hill in the surrounding prairie.

The commissioners spent \$15,787.67 in purchasing the land and buildings and making necessary repairs. The property was then left in charge of the Honorable Edwin Waller at a salary of \$100 per month, and his representative, Ashbel Smith, on January 21, 1878, turned the affairs of the college over to the A. and M. College Board of Directors at its regular meeting in Austin.

Much of the basic pattern of Prairie View was set at this time. The Board of Directors, by regulation, designated the President of the A. and M. College at College Station the executive head of the Negro school. During the early stages of its development, it was also the policy to have a supervisor over the nominal Negro head of the institution, who was to be called, for the next seventy years, "The Principal".

The first Principal of the new College was L. W. Minor, a native of Mississippi, who was selected by Thomas S. Gathright, the first president at College Station. President Gathright knew Minor well from their association in Mississippi and he was the likely choice over three other applicants, R. W. Trimble of Pine Bluff Arkansas, Reverend J. A. Kimble of Larrissa, Texas and J. R. S. Davis of Hempstead.



L. W. MINOR

The Morrill Land Grant Act also called for the teaching of Military Tactics at this school and authorized steps were taken by F. S. Stockdale to procure an army officer for this purpose.

President Gathright hired a man-of-all-work and a woman to wash and cook. He enclosed fifty or sixty acres of land and bought furnishings for the plantation house to accommodate twenty students.

On March 11, 1878, Professor Minor enrolled eight young men as the first Negro students to be enrolled in a state supported college in Texas. The tuition fee was set by the Board at \$130 for nine months of instruction, board and one suit of uniform.

Mr. Minor, a man of fine education and excellent character, came up fully to all expectations in his management and qualifications. The Spring class did well. The class that entered the following October was smaller and its members soon abandoned the little school for the high wages of cotton picking.

This school was located out of the heart of major Negro concentration in East Texas and the Negro public did not respond readily to the school's effort to secure students. President Gathright became discouraged, and while suggesting a school on the model of Hampton Institute, thought the "A. and M." should be abandoned.

Governor O. M. Roberts, Chairman of the Board of Directors, recommended that the Negro A. and M. College be rented out until the Directors could secure students for it.

Just as the ideas of Justin Morrill had led eventually to the establishment of Prairie View as an "A. and M.", so were the ideas and philanthropy of another self-made New Englander, George Peabody, responsible for the next step in its development. Moved by the Holy Ghost, Peabody turned over to Robert C. Winthrop \$2,500,000 for the education of Southern children irregardless to race. Winthrop persuaded Barnas Sears to resign the presidency of Brown University to spread the doctrine and funds for the establishment of the New England patterns of public, common school education in the South. Sears came to Texas in 1870 and worked with spotted success on the city and state level until the close of the decade brought a decision of the Peabody trustees to concentrate upon teacher training on the pattern of the New England "Normal" school. Sears made his point. The 16th Legislature established the Sam Houston Normal Institute at Huntsville and the Prairie View Normal Institute at the same sitting.

The A. and M. College Board of Directors, meeting in Hempstead August 28, 1879, elected for the new "Normal" a faculty of two (to be assisted by a wash woman, cook,

and handy-man) and authorized the teaching of thirteen subjects on the elementary and secondary level. With Mr. E. M. Anderson, minister-teacher from Memphis and Fisk University, as second Principal, the Normal opened October 6, 1879 with twelve "state" (supported) and four local students, which number increased to sixty before the winter was over with a total of thirty-nine state students. Few of the students were ready for the full normal course, but the emphasis made popular by General Armstrong at Hampton Institute played the major role in the instructional pattern of the institution.

Co-educational since its transition to a Normal, Prairie View, with the girls housed with the Principal in the plantation house now called Kirby Hall and the boys housed in the 30 by 40 foot combination chapel-dormitory called Pickett Hall, had begun its long tradition of over-crowding.

The little Normal was launched in stormy seas. The ambiguous conflict of laws resulting from the evolution of the school finally burst about Principal E. H. Anderson's head. In the Fall of 1881, the fading of the \$8,000 biennial appropriation of the 17th Legislature prompted Comptroller W. M. Brown to refuse to audit the Prairie View accounts or continue payments from the University fund. Prairie View, according to Brown, had never, either as an "A and M." or a "Normal", had any constitutional right to participate in the University fund. Principal Anderson had no funds for three months. When the Governor, who himself had tried to clear up the ambiguity previously, discovered the situation, he was powerless to remedy it. Auditor Brown would not budge from his position and, to further complicate matters, the Chairman of the A. and M. Board had just died. In response to a public letter from the Governor, merchants Ellis and Carson of Houston, Colonel James M. Burrough of Galveston, and James H. Raymond of Austin advanced \$900 to meet pressing debts and payrolls of the struggling college.

This situation prompted the friends of Negro education to open a drive for the creation of the Constitutionally provided Negro branch of the University of Texas. The Board of Directors of the parent school at College Station thought the move unnecessary, and that if it should ever become so, the state could more profitably add to its efforts on the campus at Prairie View. L. C. Anderson, first assistant to his principal brother, hoped Prairie View

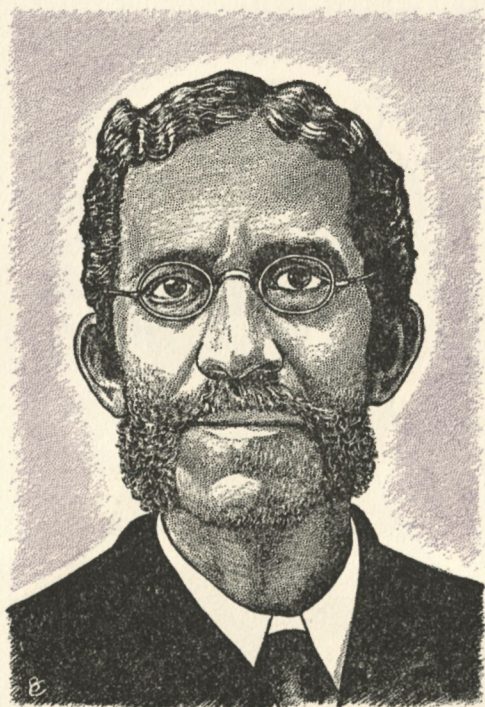


E. H. ANDERSON

would be the site selected in the authorized public election to choose a place for the constitutional University. Though Austin was chosen in the election as the site for the Negro University succeeding political parties continued to promise to endow and build, the opinion of the A. and M. Board prevailed for many years. All that the state was to do for higher education of its Negro citizens was to be concentrated at Prairie View almost down to our own time.

These man-made storms were augmented by a natural one in the Spring of '82. Gone with the wind was the laundry, the fencing, and, but for a large ladder on the side opposite the wind, the auditorium-men's dormitory which was thrown from its blocks. But the storms quieted, and the neo-puritan atmosphere of the little pastoral "Normal" moved again in its quiet routines. It was impossible to hold to an admission policy, but public officials were pleased with the resulting product. Waller County patrons established a practice school in the old kitchen on the campus; and the work of the young men in the garden kept the school table ample and brought something from the public markets. On October 29, 1885 at the age of thirty-five, E. H. Anderson, the second Principal, died and was succeeded by his brother and first assistant, L. C. Anderson.

L. C. Anderson took the reins of the school when the ideas of the trustees of the John F. Slater fund were obtaining equal status with those of General Armstrong and Peabody in Southern education. The Slater trustees' notion was a watering down of the Russian, Della Vos', and was never wholly accepted by A. and M.'s President James and T. M. Scott, the Board's Agent for Prairie View. W. R. Cavitt, Chairman of the Board was not too enthusiastic, but went along with the recommendation for an "Agricultural and Mechanical Department" to be attached to the Normal. The 20th Legislature agreed, and the Hatch Act brought a branch Experiment Station to the little Normal. Professor Randolph of Hampton, Ferguson of Tuskegee, and Miss Sallie Equell, former graduate of Prairie View were hired for the "Mechanical", "Agricultural" and "girls' industrial" departments respectively.



L. C. ANDERSON

Tangible evidence of this new departure could be seen in the erection of Academic Hall, six cottages for teachers, a brick mechanic shop, a two-story dining hall-dormitory, and a blacksmith shop, the digging of artesian wells and the enclosing of land for

cultivation, hog pasture and the experimental operations. L. C. Anderson had a faculty of eleven and eventually a record budget of \$39,700. The influence of the combined Slater-Peabody philosophy was strong in the application of the second federal grant of Morrill money. Governor Ross and the A. and M. Board threw improvements at Prairie View and used it as a part of the Democratic evidence in the fight with the Republicans which reached all of the way from Austin to Washington.

Principal Anderson, an active Republican, served for ten years through this period of rapid expansion for the school on the hill. He was a leader in his profession and for his race and worked untiringly in movements for their betterment. He is credited with founding the Colored Teachers Association of Texas.

From Iowa, and through the public schools of Bastrop and Austin came E. L. Blackshear, who in 1895 was elected the fourth Principal of Prairie View. He came at a time when Booker T. Washington was being lionized in a South which was already gauging for rejection the industrial education substitute for the Negro contemplated by Southern leaders at the passing of the second Morrill Act. The tall, stately, golden voiced Blackshear was a Washington disciple, and before the fully approving Board and a great throng, Booker T. Washington made Blackshear's first Commencement Address. Some form of the Washington brand of "industrial education" was being demanded by Negroes in the state for their public schools, and the A. and M. Board went on record as approving such "practical" education at Prairie View.

Blackshear was especially interested in the agricultural phase of industrial education, and asked the Board to establish the "factory plan" used at Tuskegee. Aware, however, of the continued fight of Negroes for a University, Blackshear asked for a seven-year course for the college. The 26th Legislature changed the school's name to "Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College", and in 1901 authorized it to offer a four-year college course. The Board added only two years to the four-year Normal Course, and in 1904 Prairie View granted A.B. Degrees to G. A. Randolph, Joseph E. Davis, and Mrs. Ruth King. This was the only time a departure into collegiate status was to be attempted until the Osborne administration.



E. L. BLACKSHEAR

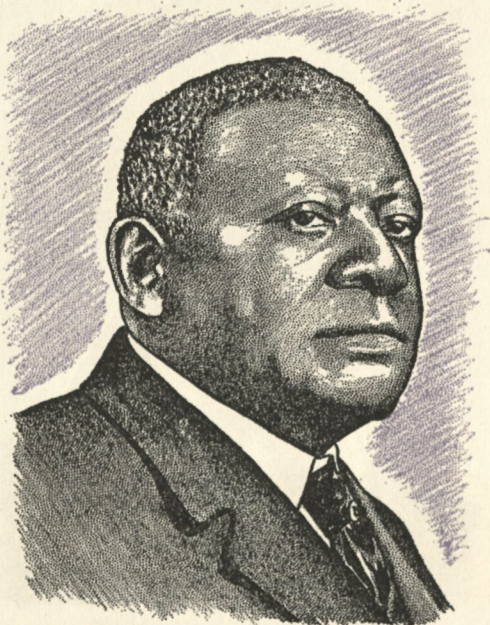
Students loved Mr. Blackshear. His discipline was firm, but life at the college was rich and varied. Predominantly religious in tone, the college life was full of that didacticism which the cultural hunger of the Negro student at the turn of the century found stimulating. Formal intercollegiate athletics came with Blackshear in 1904, and Coach W. P. Terrell's football squad beat Wiley 7-0 in their first game in 1907. Clubs and recitals grew apace despite the ill-heated, ill-lighted, crowded fire-trap frame and brick structures that dotted the "hill". And compensation enough was to be found in Mr. Luckie, Mr. Woodruff, Mrs. Kimbro, Mr. Bledsoe, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Isaacs, and countless others—always wise, profound, just, and urbane.

The extensive building program during this period included Foster and Luckie Halls in 1909; the Auditorium-Dining Hall in 1911 and Crawford Hall in 1912.

Blackshear's twenty years at Prairie View were followed by the short three-year administration of I. M. Terrell, the fifth Principal. He came to the college in 1915 from the public school system of Fort Worth.

Terrell's period of administration, which crossed the years of World War I, was marked by several improvements in both physical development and in programs of service. He converted Foster, Luckie and Crawford Halls into administrative, instructional and power units. The Household Arts building, the Power and Ice Plant, and the Laundry were erected in 1918.

The Cooperative Extension service with Honorable R. L. Smith as the first State Leader and Mrs. M. E. V. Hunter as Home Demonstration Agent, was launched at this time.



I. M. TERRELL

In 1918, J. C. Osborne was nominated by his faculty colleagues to "act" as successor to Terrell, and was finally elected by the Board as the sixth Principal. A medical doctor, Osborne had been employed by William Bennett Bizzell, President of A. and M. College, a boyhood friend whom he had once saved from drowning.

A true devotee of the sciences, Osborne strengthened the Natural Science offering, founded the Division of Nursing Education and attempted some elementary preparation in professional medicine.

The close of the first World War brought the activation of a recognized Reserve Officers Training Corps to the campus. In support of these new programs, the college staff was greatly improved. The Veterinary Hospital, the Science Building, the College Exchange, the Elementary Training School, and the Home Economics Practice Cottage were constructed.

The General Education Board, backing the failing efforts of the older philanthropy, was at this time turning its attention to the improvement of college education. Under their long range plan to improve public education throughout the South, Texas had acquired a "State Agent" for Negro Education. Osborne saw clearly that "Normal training" was not sufficient for the new day and over the covert and open hostility of his staff and patrons established firmly the four-year college course in the framework of the school.

Dr. Osborne's administration lasted from 1918 to 1925. His eye for good men is attested by the fact that his key appointees held high college posts for many years. Mr. Charles Lewis, Dr. E. B. Evans, Mr. Harvey Turner, Dr. Franklin, Mr. F. G. Fry, Mrs. Elizabeth May Galloway, and many others were brought to Prairie View by him. Dr. Osborne believed in an able staff, and urged his people to continue study and professional growth. Osborne's administration was co-extensive with the initial movement of Negro Land Grant College Presidents for organization and professional cooperation. He pulled Prairie View into this new movement, thus beginning the destruction of its provincial outlook.

Paul Bledsoe served a year as acting Principal before the towering figure of the gaunt, determined W. R. Banks took the leadership. This Georgian, who had known Booker T. Washington at his zenith and the young DuBois as a teacher at the beginning of his long protest, was asked to come to Prairie View by the officials of the General Education Board and the President and Board of the parent school because of his long experience in school administration and his fitness to execute the program the Rockefeller foundation had in mind for Prairie View. Participating in Texas surveys through



J. G. OSBORNE

Jackson Davis and Leo M. Favrot had convinced the General Education Board that the preparation of teachers was the first need of Negro education in the South; and this could best be done in the state supported colleges.

The influence of the General Education Board was felt in terms of money for needed college projects and in moving its narrow provincial intellectual life into the main stream of Southern and national educational development. It was also realized in the building programs of that time when its funds, combined with Federal grants and other accumulated revenue, made possible the Dining Hall, the Hospital, three apartment houses for men teachers, two of three dormitories for women, a green house, an incubator house, a classroom building, a new auditorium-gymnasium, a new Mechanic Arts building, over sixty cottages for college families, and a model college farm unit.

The Library building which bears the name of W. R. Banks, was built out of a state appropriation and General Education Board funds.

The offerings at the college were improved as well as the efficiency of the staff. Since the salary scale was low, Rosenwald and General Education Board Scholarships made it possible for selected members of the staff to continue professional improvement.

But the principal aim of plant and staff improvement was to become a fully accredited college. Principal Banks worked untiringly for higher salaries, more housing, more books for the library, and higher standards of professional efficiency until Dr. Fred McCuiston wired him from Nashville on December 6, 1934, that the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools had granted Prairie View a class "A" rating.

Believing that "Prairie View College must serve the State of Texas at the points of her greatest needs", Banks continued and originated a host of conferences and meetings with the aim of making the state college the focal point for all efforts at social and economic advancement. The Educational Conference, originated in 1931, is perhaps one of the better known of a host that embraces educators, ministers, doctors, business men and women, musicians, housewives, social workers, farmers, nurses and professional and layity from many walks of life. He sought to make every Negro citizen in the state his student—he sought to make the Prairie View program the model for the nation.

As the rising tide of Negro demand for equality in education arose out of the depression and burst in full under the impetus of the war effort, Prairie View undertook the proffered "Graduate" adjustment going the rounds in the South in the hope of getting through its necessities, better facilities for the college. The foundations were encouraging the movement toward graduate training and there was hope of getting funds from them for

scientific laboratories and libraries. Despite the distractions of the war and its manifold programs, the demand for professional training persisted. Before Banks' retirement in 1946, the 49th Legislature authorized calling Prairie View a "University", to offer, as the need arose, all of the courses offered by the University of Texas.

W. R. Banks was succeeded on September 1, 1946 by Dr. E. B. Evans. Like Dr. Osborne, whom he still admires, Dr. Evans is a man of science—"tops" in his field. Time and happenstance have made the "teacher training" orientation of the college unsuitable to diversified aspirations of an ever-widening clientele and a highly specialized technological age. To meet this new situation, the 50th Legislature named Prairie View the "Agricultural and Mechanical" branch of a University of the first class, and authorized instruction in all areas current at the time equivalent to that at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.

A new era of efficiency and autonomy throughout the Texas A. and M. College System was marked by the rapid change in the title of the executive head of Prairie View from Principal, to Dean, to President. With the transfer of the Confederate Veteran's pension money to college building, plans for an Animal Industries Building, an Engineering Building and a Training School moved rapidly from drawing boards to bids to construction on Kirby's acres. Two dormitories for men and women, costing close to \$100,000 were erected with income bond funds. Streets are being paved, radio equipment added, grounds landscaped, recreation centers built, and a Federal Post Office established.



W. R. BANKS

The steady development of plant and facilities comes at a time to meet the needs of a long session and summer enrollment, which, as it soars above 4,000, represents the critical demand of the ever-growing college clientele. The new budgets are providing the where-with-all to get technically trained personnel. The Agricultural program, long hampered by the "teacher" emphasis, now spurts ahead with an experimental Sub-Station, a blooded herd, technical personnel, and increased facilities. "Mechanic Arts", under a like influence, is evolving slowly into "Engineering", and Home Economics is planning a technical program in keeping with the

“Evans” revolution. The change of the names of the “Divisions” to “Schools” has broadened the horizons of their academic responsibility and intellectual outlook. The Graduate program is assuming greater loads in wider areas as the gap between demands and personnel and facilities is being rapidly closed.

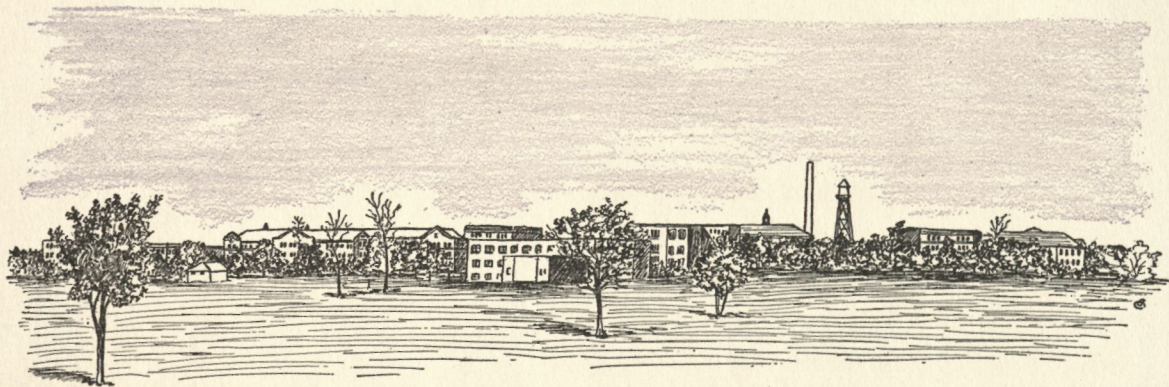
There is something fitting in the fact that after seventy-five years, the college is returning to the full realization of its founding as an Agricultural and Mechanical College. The A. and M. System, with Prairie View at last operating in an instructional area which can be understood, can offer the creative sympathetic support necessary to fulfill a mission with which it has had long years of experience. The men of Prairie View, true to the past, can re-dedicate themselves to the future of Texas, firm in the faith that the stimulation of the growth of creative knowledge is still the greatest human adventure.

These first seventy-five years, with all of their ups and downs, with all of their sudden bursts of activity and heartbreaking periods of slipping back into mediocrity, have been a period of amazing progress. It is a far cry from the unsteady fledgling of Principal Minor’s brief and ill-fated regime to the strong, stable and respected Prairie View A. and M. College of today. Most heartening of all is the knowledge that in this three-quarters of a century Prairie View has earned a place of respect and trust in the minds of all Texans. It has done well the many difficult tasks assigned to it by circumstance and has forged ahead under many difficulties. It has rendered services of great value to Texas in many fields and the true value of these services has been recognized. Because of this the future can be faced with greater confidence than was ever justified at any time in the past. Prairie View has struggled through a difficult and hazardous infancy and childhood and today faces a future of growth and usefulness with confidence and assurance.

We look back on these first seventy-five years with a certain nostalgia for the past, a deep respect for those courageous men and women who struggled through its darkest days. We look forward with pleasure to the next seventy-five, determined to justify those early struggles by fulfilling the dreams which prompted them—and more.



E. B. EVANS



PRAIRIE VIEW, 1951

