

HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY

Sam Houston State University's history is a witness to the early and determined interest of the community in educational opportunity for the young. As early as 1840, perhaps, a brick academy was built on land occupied now by the Walls Unit of the Prison System. Later, it was called the Andrew Female Academy.

In 1843, Mr. and Mrs. Pleasant Gray gave land for a new college incorporated in 1846. It was known as Huntsville Academy. The Huntsville settlement grew rapidly in those ten years of the Republic, and various new interests in higher education surfaced.

Baylor considered Huntsville as a site for their school, but chose Independence. By 1844, the Presbytery of the Brazos was very actively seeking sites for institutes of learning. One they had established at Nacogdoches was closed in 1847. Reverend Daniel Baker came to Texas in 1849; by August he had visited Huntsville and convinced the Presbytery to approve it as the site. Later the same year, on November 22, Governor George P. Wood signed a charter for the new college. Huntsville citizens proposed the name of Baker College to honor Rev. Baker, but he preferred to honor the "Father of Texas" with the name of the school, and the Presbytery agreed. The name became Austin College.

The first Board of Trustees included Robert Smither, John Branch, Henderson Yoakum, Anson Jones, Sam Houston and several other Texas notables. Dr. Samuel McKinney was elected as the first president of the new school and Baker stayed on as fiscal agent. McKinney organized classes in the building of the Huntsville Male Institute, which had presumably been the Huntsville Academy. The enrollment increased rapidly.

Architect Abner Cook was in Huntsville in August 1848, involved in design and supervision of the new Prison. He was subsequently engaged to design and manage construction of what we know now as Austin Hall. Cook is remembered as the earliest and most able architect of the time in Texas. His surviving work also includes the Governor's Mansion in Austin and other fine homes there. The Austin College building was completed in October of 1852.

Personal squabbles involving Sam Houston and President McKinney surfaced soon after that. Houston moved away and McKinney quit his job. Rev. Baker was having trouble raising money to support the work but, even so, enrollment peaked at 84 students in 1855. The Trustees established a law department that same year, the first in Texas. Debt plagued the school in the late 1850's and enrollment declined.

Then came the War Between the States and enrollment never recovered. A disastrous yellow fever epidemic in Huntsville in 1867 only darkened the picture. Rumors that the college might relocate surfaced in the early 1870's. By 1876 a new site was chosen at Sherman and the school at Huntsville closed at the end of that school year. All Austin College property reverted to the City of Huntsville.

The Methodist Church used Austin Hall for a very brief period as a boys' school, calling it Mitchell College.

Rumors were rife in 1878 that the state would soon establish a normal school for the purpose of training teachers. Huntsville sent a delegation to Austin to offer the state clear title to the Austin College, and that if located there it should be named in honor of General Sam Houston. Governor Oran Milo Roberts signed a bill creating Sam Houston

Normal Institute on April 21, 1879. The following October the school opened with a faculty of four and the student body numbered 110, when it began its first term in the Austin College Building. The enrollment almost tripled in the first ten years.

A succession of Presidents followed, including Bernard Mellon, Hosea Smith, Joseph Baldwin, H. Carr Pritchett, Harry Fishburn Estill, Charles P. Estill, Charles N. Shaver, H. L. Lowman, A. B. Templeton, Elliott T. Bowers, Martin Anisman and Bobby K. Marks have provided leadership and guided development of the university in the 122 years since. Dr. Marks will retire on 15 August 2001, and Dr. James F. Gaertner was selected to succeed him as the thirteenth President of the university on July 8, 2001.

The first baccalaureate degree was awarded in 1919. Since then, more than 85,000 others have been awarded.

The name of the institution was changed from Sam Houston Normal Institute to Sam Houston State University in 1923, during the tenure of Dr. Templeton. Enrollment at that time was 600. The count varied greatly through the thirties and forties, when in 1940 it peaked at 1938. Enrollment dropped during the War years to a low of 600 students. In post war years, from 1946 to 1976, the enrollment climbed to 10,593 and peaked out at 12,906 in 1995. The Fall 2000 count was 12,305.

Currently, Sam Houston State University is organized into four colleges: Arts and Sciences, Education & Applied Science, Business Administration, and Criminal Justice. Students are offered an extensive range of bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as the Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice, the Doctor of Philosophy in

Forensic Clinical Psychology, and the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership.

The faculty and the university are recognized regionally, nationally, and internationally.