“Under the soft sunshine of a blue and smiling sky,” Charles Norton Shaver, sixth chief executive of Sam Houston State Teachers College, delivered his inaugural address during the autumn of 1937. Seated back of the podium, Harry Estill looked on approvingly, while such worthy visitors as State Attorney General William C. McGraw and Robert A. Stuart, head of the Board of Regents, maintained dignified poses. Laying out a bold vision that promised to take up where the former president had left off, Shaver saw from his vantage “the dawn of a new day,” likening higher education to a “field…white for harvest.” Shedding any pretensions of focusing solely on Sam Houston’s traditional role as a teacher-training school, he pledged to cultivate “a program of study that will adequately meet the needs of students who want pre-law, pre-medicine, and pre-farming, or pre-anything else that…should be offered in an institution that is to serve the people to the highest degree.”

The new president hit the ground running toward an open-ended future. Although the national economy was still shaky, the Great Depression was showing signs of relenting, enrollment was up, and a recent restructuring of the academic programs and a master plan for campus development awaited like clay in the hands of the capable executive. With his ascension, the State Teachers Association, the Sam Houston Exes, the Teachers College Federated Exes, and the Huntsville Rotary Club would each be looking for new leaders—Shaver, until his recent appointment, had been president of them all. Now he had the confidence of a more immediate constituency, and everyone agreed that he possessed the vision to further its cause.

Certainly, Shaver enjoyed a head start in executing his plans. One of Estill’s last accomplishments was restructuring the curriculum into seven divisions that foreshadowed its later organization into separate colleges. For the time being, education, vocational agriculture, applied arts, language, science, social science, and fine arts rounded out...
The Campus “Master Plan.” Sam Houston State Teachers College acquired a taste for federal funds after successfully tapping the New Deal’s Public Works Administration (PWA) to build Belvin Hall, which opened in 1942. Hoping to return to the well, the administration put together a list of projects comprised of such additions to the physical plant as new dormitory space, a more modern health education and gymnasium building, a model cottage for home economics, and an agricultural farm shop. Yet even if funding became available, it was clear that little room was left on the hilltop to expand. What resulted was the college’s first ten-year campus development plan unveiled during the 1937-1938 academic year. The program fulfilled many of its cited needs and successfully acquired several tracts of land for future use before World War II ended the program prematurely. The ten-year plan bore fruit in the construction of the PWA-funded Andrew Jackson Hall dormitory for boys as well as a new wing added to Belvin. Through private fund-raising efforts a third dormitory, Elizabeth Elliott Hall, opened in time for the 1941 summer term. At Pritchett Field the school convinced the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to join its efforts by constructing the unique rocked-trimmed stands that linger in the memories of many alumni. By the time the delay-plagued science building opened, the war effort had taken precedent. The first students to fall asleep in its classrooms were not “slackers,” but trainees of an army administrative clerks school who were actually being housed there.

Elizabeth Elliott Hall, 1949

The Campus Plan, 1912

Robert Halley Science Building, 1942

Greek Amphitheater, 1940

SHSTC with no intention of becoming teachers. By then, most of Sam Houston’s sister schools—with the blessings of the Board of Regents—were also beginning to enroll students who wanted to obtain college degrees close to home, without having to take courses designed primarily for teachers. The popularity of the liberalized mission showed immediate results. When the fall semester of 1938 began, Sam Houston counted 1,112 students. Indeed the sun was shining on that “new day” President Shaver had promised.

Over the next two years the curriculum truly blossomed. Reflecting the growing interests of a society trying to right itself in an upside-down economy, new departments emerged that embraced library science and speech arts, while the school offered degree programs such as sociology, industrial arts, and guidance within fields of study that already existed. Not to be overshadowed by the school’s enlarged mission, the education department grew by charting an interdisciplinary course that tapped the expanded curriculum. For students majoring in band and public school music, for example, teacher training meant they would be able to enjoy careers in avocations for which the workaday world offered few opportunities.

That did not mean society had little use for music beyond the mainstream of popular culture. On the contrary, beginning with the Shaver administration, no town parade or halftime show at a Sam Houston football game would have been complete without a well-drilled marching band. As ambassadors for the college and a tool for recruitment, the Sam Houston Raven Orchestra also put the institution’s best foot forward when it performed for area high schools and played at community festivities throughout the surrounding region.

At its first outing in Beaumont, where Sam Houston beat Lamar 16-7, the Bearkat Band stole the show. The 4,500 fans registered their “boisterous approval,” noted a local sports writer, “when the snappy Bearkat musical organization…did their stuff between the halves.” Another reporter affirmed that the “brilliantly attired” seventy-six piece outfit “was the best ever seen here.”

Standing at midfield, student director Elliott Toulmin Bowers commanded resolute precision with the waves of his baton, the fields of study. The next year the 1938-1939 catalog reflected the new president’s emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences. “In addition to the preparation of teachers,” it read, the college “offers courses required for entrance to the professional schools of medicine, law, engineering, dentistry, and other professions.”

The sweeping change, however, was not Shaver’s brainchild alone. Of course, students were already taking business classes at SHSTC and non-teaching majors such as sociology, industrial arts, and guidance within fields of study that already existed. Not to be overshadowed by the school’s liberalized mission, the education department grew by charting an interdisciplinary course that tapped the expanded curriculum. For students majoring in band and public school music, for example, teacher training meant they would be able to enjoy careers in avocations for which the workaday world offered few opportunities.

That did not mean society had little use for music beyond the mainstream of popular culture. On the contrary, beginning with the Shaver administration, no town parade or halftime show at a Sam Houston football game would have been complete without a well-drilled marching band. As ambassadors for the college and a tool for recruitment, the Sam Houston Raven Orchestra also put the institution’s best foot forward when it performed for area high schools and played at community festivities throughout the surrounding region.

At its first outing in Beaumont, where Sam Houston beat Lamar 16-7, the Bearkat Band stole the show. The 4,500 fans registered their “boisterous approval,” noted a local sports writer, “when the snappy Bearkat musical organization…did their stuff between the halves.” Another reporter affirmed that the “brilliantly attired” seventy-six piece outfit “was the best ever seen here.”

Standing at midfield, student director Elliott Toulmin Bowers commanded resolute precision with the waves of his baton,
while an attractive drum major, Frances Marie Handley, kept the beats in time. Once in Huntsville the high school sweethearts from Mexia became college sweethearts. They married in 1940, and after Elliot’s music career was interrupted by the war, he rejoined Frances in Huntsville and began climbing the administrative ladder at their alma mater. Few among their classmates would have been surprised to learn three decades later that the couple who had headed the band would orchestrate a larger undertaking when in 1970 they became President and First Lady of Sam Houston State.

When the couple first arrived at the Huntsville campus, they found themselves under the familiar direction of Clinton Hackney, who had earned an enviable reputation at Mexia High School. Beginning in the summer of 1937 he was charged with the task of building Sam Houston’s programs in both the band and orchestra. A former high school football coach, he relied on the same philosophy he had used to whip his gridders into shape. “When I coached, I made the boys train,” he remarked. “When they broke training, they went off the squad. It’s the same with the band.” That way, he added, “we’ll get somewhere.”

Get somewhere they did—and quickly. The popular band program soon outstripped its meager facilities, and with an enthusiastic administration offering support, Hackney enlisted into service the Peabody Library. The cavernous reading room, long a place where the loudest sounds were the shushes of librarians, all of a sudden resonated with the thunderous blasts of the Bearkat Band. It was a good, if ironic, fit. Where students once searched quietly through the stacks, band members now combed through lockers, filling the side spaces with laughs and chatter. The offices became studios. Situated at a busy corner of the developing Quadrangle, the Peabody enjoyed a new life and identity. The music wafting into the atmosphere provided a familiar sound that filled the campus with a mood of cheer.

One autumn day, in fact, a beaming President Shaver strolled into the Peabody, drawn to the building by the activity inside. Prompted by the distracted glances of his band, a shirt-sleeved Hackney, baton raised and ready, wheeled around to see who had commanded such attention. With a welcoming smile, he informed the chief he had two pieces ready to play, a march and a swing tune. “Which shall we play for you?” the director asked. “Well…” Shaver’s voice trailed, “I think I’d like to hear a swing number.” With that an applause of approbation arose from the pit, and at the bandmaster’s prompt, the students broke into a peppy rendition of “Saint Louis Blues.” The president found it impossible to stand still, and to the delight of the performers, he swayed and glided with the beat. “I had no idea the band could be this good,” he beamed. For that brief moment, all seemed right with the world.

Another band, the Houstonians, played popular music, mostly for the enjoyment of the students who had come to expect dances as often as twice a week. Just before classes began in 1939, the school paper publicized the first such event of the season. L. E. King, Dean of Men, urged the incoming freshmen “to take advantage of this opportunity to become acquainted with more students.” Many, if not most, were strangers to one another and no doubt felt chagrined at the restrictions he had imposed. “Each freshman boy MUST have a date in order to be admitted,” King announced. Nor would they be allowed to come to the “all-college informal dance” without a necktie and fifty cents admission for the privilege of attending.

As always, it remained a proletarian student body that attended Sam Houston State Teachers College. It was a familiar place, small enough to know almost everyone, and pretension was a behavior few tolerated. It was the kind of place where even a visit home during the middle of a semester might merit a mention in the “Social Scan,” for awhile a weekly feature of the Houstonian. With all the understated conceit of an Eastern column name-dropping some social maven’s visit to Cape Cod, a typical report read: “Miss Louise Pace…of Houston hall, spent the weekend with friends in Austin. While there she attended a Texas University college dance.”

The “Social Scan” was only lampooning the airy high society pages of the time that served no purpose other than adding puffery to the big-city dailies. Another Houstonian column, “What to do About Town” similarly matched the highbrows with common fare that occupied the idle hours of a student body locked into the social scene of a semi-rural college town. “The skating fad seems
Norton Shaver, one who too briefly did well by the old general’s namesake school, stands as a memorial to two presidents—one, Andrew Jackson, an intimate of Sam Houston the man, and Charles Hall in 1946, the boy’s dormitory for which the former president deserved large credit. Thus, Jackson-Shaver Hall died in Dallas on February 22, 1946. In his honor the school attached Shaver’s name to a new wing added to Jackson, an effort to involve him once again in the affairs of the school. Yet, his continued illness left him beleaguered, and he the Board of Regents granted him a year’s leave. By then his wife was gone, taking with her the driving force that had done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Shaver was born near Corn Hill, north of Georgetown, in 1884. There he began his education in a one-room schoolhouse before attending Corn Hill Academy of which his grandfather was a founder. After teaching for two years, he won a state scholarship and enrolled at the normal school in Huntsville, earning his lifetime teaching certificate in 1909. As superintendent at Bellville and Granger, Shaver demonstrated a gift for administration, but realized he could never set his sights on higher aspirations without furthering his education. He chased that goal at the University of Texas, Southern Methodist, and even Columbia before returning to Huntsville and earning his bachelors degree from Sam Houston in 1923. His agreeable nature and executive acumen won the confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Soon, townspeople were encouraging Shaver to run for office, and in 1928 he won the first of two terms as state representative. Always a proponent of the public schools, Shaver served first as vice chairman of the House Education Committee and later as a member of that body’s Appropriation Committee, duties that allowed him to further the interests of his pet cause. Due in large part to his efforts, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enlisted Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Due in large part to his efforts, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

In 1932 Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that most qualified him to lead an institution of higher education. At the same February meeting at which the Board of Regents accepted Estill’s resignation, they also enrolled Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.

Despite his brief tenure, Charles Shaver left a legacy of an expanded curriculum and additions to the physical plant that spoke well for what he might have done, given more time. Tragically, however, his life began to unravel when his Sam Houston accomplishments by conferring upon him an honorary doctorate, thus completing Shaver as the president’s successor. The summer before he formally ascended to the helm, the legislature enacted the state’s first teacher retirement plan. Another, Governor Ross Sterling appointed Shaver State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the post that brought him confidence of local people who made him superintendent of the Huntsville public schools.
statesman Yuuuke Tsurumi rationalize his country's invasion of Manchuria. "Speaking in clear, crisp English," he explained that Japan's sixty million people in a land "but one-half that of Texas" were "treading on each other's heels." Barred from other countries by immigration laws and pressed for raw materials and foodstuffs, he pleaded: "Where can we turn?" However convincing he sounded, it certainly did not square with what America's foreign affairs experts were saying.

Over the ensuing years the vicious circles pulling the country into the world's affairs grew tighter. As economic depression segued into impending war, the college more than ever before needed a stabilizing influence. Yet, at this critical moment, both Charles Shaver and his wife, Annie, began to lose a grip on their health. Initially, it was the First Lady who fell ill. The distraught president found himself unwilling to leave his wife's side and as a result unable to discharge the duties of his office effectively. When she died late in the spring of 1941, Shaver's grief and an unusually hot summer sapped his remaining energy.

Just before the fall semester began, and scarcely four months before America entered World War II, the Board of Regents granted Shaver a one-year leave of absence and appointed Harmon Lowman as president pro tem of Sam Houston State Teachers College. The move proved as wise as it was timely. Facing a peak enrollment of 1,398 students, Lowman responded like anything but a temporary president. The school's first chief executive to hold an earned doctorate, the University of Chicago Ph.D. stepped down from his post as Executive Secretary at Southern Methodist University to assume the challenge of his new office, determined to become the centrifugal presence that the times demanded.

During the fall semester a mood of dread and uncertainty hung over the campus. News reports, mostly out of Europe, sent Americans into shudders of conflicting emotions. At Sam Houston, the school paper outlined the dilemma succinctly: "We are wishing and are trying to bring about the defeat of Germany. At the same time we are trying to stay out of war." It was the powder keg on the other side of the world, however, that suddenly sucked the United States into the raging fight. Sometime around noon on Sunday, December 7, 1941, bulletins announcing the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor began resounding across the hills and through the valleys of Huntsville. The Houstonian reported that at first "the news was a mild shock...and did not stir up too much feeling in the Sam Houston student ranks." Yet, as the confused young men and women fathomed what it meant to the country and how it would affect their own lives, the reality sank in. "Heretofore dry eyes turned to slow, trickling streams of tears," reported the paper. The full meaning hit home the next day, when President Lowman suspended classes and called a campus-wide assembly.

As upwards of a thousand students, professors, and staff entered the Sam Houston Memorial Auditorium at Main Hall, the campus band ran through a litany of patriotic numbers that once again swelled wet eyes. When Mr. Hackney directed his charges to play "God Bless America," the entire assembly joined spontaneously in song, emoting a burst of passion the venerable old hall could hardly contain. While everyone awaited President Franklin D. Roosevelt's declaration of war, broadcast over the auditorium's loud speakers, the school's own chief executive took the stage. Lowman recalled for the riveted audience his experience as a college sophomore who had volunteered his service to the
Harmon Luther Lowman. Harmon Lowman was born in Staples, just below San Marcos, in 1894. When he was only sixteen, his father supported his goal to enroll at the University of Texas, but like many freshmen he spent more time having fun than studying. It was a more serious student who returned to college in 1915, this time at Washington & Lee, where the tuition came out of his own savings. The day after the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, Lowman answered his country’s call, yet his unit arrived in France just in time for the armistice. Returning to Texas, he took up farming alongside his father and taught at various rural schools. In the meantime, Lowman had married Margarette Hightower, a young coed attending the Southwest Texas State Teachers College. He then joined her at San Marcos and earned his bachelors degree in 1923. From there it was back to UT for his masters, which landed him his first job in higher education at Stephen F. Austin. Aiming even higher, Lowman enrolled at the prestigious University of Chicago. He supported his family, which by then included sons Harmon, Jr. and William, by carrying steel at construction sites and waiting on customers at the department store Marshall Field. In 1930 it all paid off when he became Dr. Harmon L. Lowman.

The eleven-year path to the presidency of Sam Houston then took him on a circuitous route that included Washington & Lee, where the tuition came out of his own savings. His self-assurance during these uncertain times radiated through the staff and student body, helping the school maintain high morale in times of scarcity and distraction. He also enjoyed the confidence of the Board of Regents, which sent him to Washington several times during the war to represent all the state’s teachers colleges. When peace returned, Lowman guided the school through an era of unprecedented growth.

If a single label could fit Dr. Harmon Lowman’s enlightened leadership, it would be appropriate to call him “the students’ president.” Rare was the occasion when his appearance before a large gathering of underclassmen failed to extract a standing ovation. Students felt so comfortable in his presence they sometimes called on him late at night to seek advice about problems ranging from romance to personal finances. The president was also known to slip money to some of the poorer students and occasionally even opened his home so they could remain in school. It was a fitting tribute to this man who served Sam Houston so faithfully for over two decades when the Lowman Student Center opened in 1964 dedicated in his honor.

country “without due reflection…because of the war hysteria that swelt the campus.” Now, burdened under the weighty responsibilities due the head of a college, he admonished: “You and I need to keep our feet on the ground as we have never done before.” Lowman then called upon the students to stay in school and support the military with “supplies, calmness, and confidence.”

During the few anxious days before the Christmas break, students debated whether they should follow their president’s advice, or join the stampede to the recruitment offices. For young men majoring in the natural sciences, vocational education, and industrial arts, the likely prospect of receiving a deferment left them especially torn. Lowman pleaded with them to consider their “patriotic duty to continue the normal course of their education unless and until they are called.” From the White House, even FDR cited a crying need for “skilled technicians,” adding that “America will always need men and women with college training.” When the spring semester came, however, the precipitous drop in male enrollment made it clear that the immediate call to arms ruled over any other sense of reason. Even professors and administrators—

including Dean of the College, James G. Gee—answered their country’s call.

The 1942 fall semester began with only 786 regularly enrolled students. The next academic year Sam Houston resembled a girls school, yet even many of the young women had enlisted, leaving on campus only 561 steadfast souls determined to mobilize around the great cause that imperiled the nation. The students’ patriotism found release in such activities as scrap metal drives and war bond campaigns. Assemblies became pep rallies, and scarcely an edition of the Houstonian failed to eulogize those remaining on campus to “remember those who are at arms.”

In the meantime, it became evident that President Shaver was in no condition to resume the rigors of his post, so the Board of Regents in June 1942 formally validated the administration of Dr. Harmon Lowman. At his October inaugural the backdrop of war contrasted starkly with the “blue and smiling sky” that welcomed his predecessor. Nevertheless, Sam Houston State determined to make it a spirited occasion, coordinating the event with that season’s homecoming game against a strong North Texas S.T.C. football team. Before a campus bulging with alumni and visitors, a solemn procession filed across the Quadrangle from the Estill Library to Old Main. At its head was the new president, followed by robed dignitaries from fifty-five colleges and universities as well as twelve learned societies. Behind them were three Sam Houston graduates representing milestones in the school’s development: J. B. Baker, class of 1880, the first to receive diploma; H. N. Anderson, 1919, the first degree class; and Grace Perkins, 1937, the first graduate class. The A Capella Choir and the college’s seniors brought up the rear.

When Vice-President of the Board of Regents R. L. Thomas rose to introduce Dr. Lowman, the audience needed no reminder that “we are assembled today to pay tribute to our new president at the most critical period in all history.” From the same podium where Charles Norton Shaver had shared his vision of the future, Dr. Lowman now outlined a mission that could not have been more different. Acknowledging the state of “total war,” he pledged that Sam Houston would do its part to assure an ultimate Allied victory. Yet, he also underscored the magnitude of the task at hand: “If every shop, laboratory, and lecture room in every college in American were utilized for training to the fullest extent, the facilities would be far from sufficient.” Therein he identified Sam Houston’s duty to the national cause.
“The end of the war,” he asserted, “will bring the need for another kind of expansion—vocational training for wounded men partially disabled.”

After the ceremony adjourned, three hundred invited guests gathered for a barbecue luncheon. The dignitaries then joined the crowd gathering at Pritchett Field, where Coach “Punny” Wilson’s Bearkats fell behind 20-7 midway through the fourth quarter. Just as disheartened fans began to file slowly out of the stadium, the home team suddenly came to life. The faithful who remained witnessed a miraculous finish as Sam Houston pulled out a 21-20 squeaker, providing the perfect end to a day marked by equal measures of promise and foreboding.

Four weekends later Sam Houston beat the Southeastern Louisiana Institute 7-0 in a driving rainstorm. This time most of the fans stayed home. Bearkat halfback Dale Brown recalled that “puddles were everywhere. After every play the referees had to find a high spot just to keep the ball from floating away.” The few spectators who damned the inclement weather would later cherish the moment. It would be Sam Houston’s last game for three long years. “We should have seen it coming,” related Brown. All season long, he laughed, “we had a different team every week, because someone was getting drafted.”

Brown’s greeting from Uncle Sam came during the waning days of the spring semester. At the time his own prospects looked rosy. His remaining teammates had elected him captain for the 1943 season—“captain of a team that never played,” he added. Only three courses stood between Brown and a degree, and with the coming of summer, his girlfriend, Fayrene Thompson, was set to enroll. Then came the letter. “Several of us were in the Army Reserves, and we all got our notice at the same time,” said Brown. When word spread around campus, a large contingent of well-wishers marched downtown with the boys to see them off. “Then we rolled out of the bus station and waved goodbye. We left them standing there in the street.”

Brown came back from the bloodstained beaches and muddy trenches of the Pacific Theater three years later to finish his degree, blind in one eye, but feeling blessed to return at all. In the 1943 Alcalde, already in press before the Bearkat halfback was called up, were twelve pages titled “List of the Boys in the Service,” whose roll count numbered 676 recent students and alumni. Many others joined them, and, like Brown, would live to see a hero’s reception. Still others were reported missing in action or were buried beside battlefields in simple graves with unadorned crosses. There was Milton Steffen, who in 1939-1940 represented the student body as its president, killed in action in Italy. And Eula Falls, a lieutenant nurse reported missing in the fall of Corregidor. Another campus favorite was Little All-American Jimmy Hair, captain of the 1939 gridiron squad that pulled off the greatest upset in the school’s history when it beat Rice, the defending Cotton Bowl champions. Awarded the Air Medal in France for bringing his disabled B-17 back to base with his shaken crew intact, his luck finally ran out in the skies above Sicily.

Ever mindful of the great cause for which these young men and women were fighting, President Lowman expanded the college curriculum to meet the national emergency. Even before the war, students took classes in civilian defense training. Others signed up for “Ground School” and “Flying” under the aegis of the Civil Aeronautics Administration at an airstrip on land adjoining the Wynne Prison Unit north of town. The catalog for the fall semester of 1942 offered training classes in machine shop production, secretarial studies, meteorology, radio and telegraphy, and home nursing—all funded through federal contracts. Lowman also made several arrangements with the government to train Army personnel, the most important one a clerks school that enrolled 1,462 men beginning in the fall of 1943, restocking the campus’s male population.

The young soldiers in their crisp uniforms cut handsome figures as they explored their new surroundings. Girls who had formerly resigned themselves to a manless fate could hardly restrain their enthusiasm. Their impatience to become acquainted with the trainees soon led to the organization of a “Date Bureau,” enlisting the participation of committees formed in each dormitory and boarding house. Dorm director Fannie Matthews dryly exclaimed, “I think a date bureau might be very helpful in getting congenial couples together for college and other activities.” Cutting through the polite rhetoric, Mary Gandy of Elliot Hall expressed in direct language what her sister students were surely thinking—“I’m desperate; I need a man!”

When the results did not immediately meet the girls’ expectations, they took to the press. “Come on men,” they exhorted, “get behind this Date Bureau, and help us get it started.” With an all-school dance coming up, they extolled the prospect of landing “a cute formal-clad girl to drape on your arm that night of all nights,” finally importing that all they had to do was pick up the telephone and “call Elliott 201.”

While the clerks school prepared young men going into the service, others on their way out were also coming to campus to fulfill Lowman’s inaugural pledge to provide vocational training for returning veterans. Supported by state bonds and a generous donation from the estate of Colonel J. E. Josey of Houston, the
Josey School of Vocational Education opened in the spring of 1945. Covering an acre of ground on the south edge of campus, its shops for farm machines, metal products, aircraft assembly, welding, machine tooling, ornamental iron, and leather hummed along on a half-million-dollar budget. Inspired by a sense of duty to national service, the training of veterans and others who could not qualify for regular college work represented a radical departure from the academic mission that the former normal school had so long strived to cultivate.

While the Josey Vocational School Bulletin affirmed to its ranks “You are part of the student body,” it also reminded they were a body apart. Those enrolled were “entitled to all the rights and privileges accorded the others students attending Sam Houston State Teachers College,” but their course credits were not transferable, and their goal was a certificate of competency that would win them high-paying blue-collar jobs rather than a degree. Nevertheless, the program grew, embracing work in such fields as agriculture and industrial arts and in classes like printing, photography, and photoengraving that were later absorbed into the regular curriculum. Shortly after 1950 the last of the trainees either joined the workforce or qualified to enroll formally as regular students.

By the time the Josey Vocational School was up and running during the spring semester of 1945, it was clear that the end of the war was nearing. When “V-E Day”—Victory in Europe—came on May 8, community leaders already had a program prepared. Shortly after 9 a.m. five blasts of a fire siren rang out, and throughout town everyone knew in an instant that Europe was at last secure in Allied hands. Just as they had done on Armistice Day, all of Huntsville converged on the county square. After an initial burst of gaiety, any resemblance to the scene of pandemonium that characterized the occasion in 1918 quickly faded. “There was not much shouting,” marveled a Sam Houston student reporter. Instead, he found the atmosphere of solemnity striking. Standing on the running board of a truck, he spotted many a full-grown man and woman “crying unashamed,” but many more stood beside them “silent but thoughtful.” After preachers prayed and read scripture and Professor Earl Huffor led the assembly in song, an official read a lengthy roll call of “those who will not return.” It was over the fate of those awaiting a call for the invasion of Japan that so burdened the souls gathered to give thanks for a war half won.

Scarcely three months later, after the events of August 6 and 9, it was all over—just like that. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one moment gleaming in the bombsights of American B-29’s, all but vaporized in a blinding flash. As people tried to absorb the enormity of nuclear warfare, they awaited “with prayerful suspense” beside radios for news of the Japanese surrender. When it came, expressed the Item, “Huntsville citizens were electrified by the suddenness of their capitulation.” This time the wailing of sirens summoned a crowd to the county square that seemed more incredulous than ebullient. In contrast to the bedlam that marked such celebrations as the one at Times Square in New York, “Huntsvillites didn’t go wild,” the paper noted, “they were just quietly and gloriously happy….There were a few tears, many bright smiles and hearty handshakes,” the report noted, but “most people were quiet and controlled.” On the courthouse lawn, students from the college joined mothers in house shoes and men and women in their work clothes and business attire, where everyone listened respectfully to another round of prayers and Bible verses and joined with Huffor in spirited song. Dr. Lowman seconded the mayor in declaring the next day, a holiday. Then, finally, a spontaneous parade erupted. Car horns blared, competing with the band, while people cheered and followed the drum majors in a circle around the courthouse.

“How can you believe it?” the Item quoted dozens of people, “the war is REALLY over!” For Sam Houston State Teachers College a new era larger in scope and mission than anyone would have predicted was about to begin.
Harmon L. Lowman