Dale Brown, the former star halfback of the Bearkat football team, could not wait to return to Huntsville and resume the life of a carefree collegian after three nightmarish years of fighting the Japanese. His abrupt departure had cut short his romance with the girl he had hoped would become his sweetheart, Fayrene Thompson. After his induction, the two lost touch. So, for three years Brown lived with the gnawing feeling that the war had robbed him of his one true love. “I figured that ‘Boots,’” as he called her, “had gotten married or had moved off, and I’d never see her again.” Once on campus, however, he was standing in line at the cafeteria, surveying the crowd in hope that he might catch sight of her. “I looked up, and there she stood,” he said. Right then and there, “it started all over again.” Eventually the couple married and enjoyed a “forty-two-year honeymoon.”

Still, Brown intoned, “it was a difficult time for me.” Like many veterans, he dealt constantly with “dark moods” that often kept him from turning acquaintances into friends. His former comrades-in-arms, however, readily identified with his burdens, and several of them from the old football team talked about getting back together. The prospect made Brown look forward to taking up where he had left off. At Pritchett Field, he and some buddies, veterans of the war and gridiron, were involved in a pick-up game, when Brown collided with another player. “I went one way, and my plastic eye went the other,” he grimaced. As everybody combed through the grass on their hands and knees, it hit him: “That was it….Everything I had looked forward to all of a sudden seemed so trivial.” At that very moment Brown counted himself among the veterans who were “serious” and wanted nothing more than “to get on with our lives.”

Even before then, a palpable sense that times were about to change settled dramatically over a Sam Houston State Teachers College campus that outwardly looked much the same in 1946 as it did in
the autumn of 1940. At the same time, everything was different. Freshmen, sporting orange and white beanies for the first time, shared the sidewalk with men like Dale Brown, just back from the war. Those right out of high school spent time in English classes practicing the college's songs and yells, and learned in history classes the school's traditions. Outside of class, undergraduates lined up to join social clubs, helped prepare floats for the Homecoming parade and worked the Halloween Carnival to raise funds for a new student center. The occasional shaved head seen around campus indicated that a student had been caught on the Stephen F. Austin campus pulling some kind of prank.

Such shenanigans were expected of college students. What seemed out of place was the infrequent veteran who took the advantages of the G.I. Bill lightly. Soldier-turned-student George Hope identified “the gay blade among us [who] seems a fine chance to draw sixty-five dollars a month, go on binges with [hot numbers] and have a rip-snorting old time.” While the “ickie,” or grade point hound, represented the typical veteran, he said, there was always one whose attitude was expressed by a comment Hope overheard: “Say, get a load of that babe by the water fountain; ain't she a slick chick?”

Whether “ickie” or idler, the veterans brought to campus a broader view of life that set them apart. Added to the problematic mix of a dual student body were housing and building needs, faculty shortages, a curriculum that would call for undetermined adjustments, and the certainty of additional obstacles not yet anticipated. The situation created the stage for the kind of impossible juggling act that inspired delighted critics of the country’s president to jeer: “To err is Truman.”

While Dr. Lowman’s job was not nearly as weighty, the same problems of demobilization and anxiety over so many unknowns presented a Herculean task all its own. Many colleges had set quotas for returning veterans, a solution Lowman rejected out of hand, especially since he had committed the resources of the Josey Vocational School out of a sense of obligation to these same men. As the fall semester of 1946 approached there were already 521 veterans enrolled in summer school and at least twice that many expected to arrive for the autumn term. So acute had the housing situation become that some former soldiers were caught on the Stephen F. Austin campus pulling some kind of prank.

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As the housing shortage on the main campus eased and student enrollment stabilized, the location began to decline in the mid-1950s. Over the next decade the buildings were either razed or moved, until all but two barracks, a wing of the old hospital, an incinerator, and the golf course are all that is left, along with the school’s observatory, added long after the student residents departed, taking their memories with them.
Lowman

The dramatic rise in enrollment coupled with a campus population that for once was enjoying a measure of prosperity laid bare the inadequacy of Austin Hall as the campus social center. When the time came in 1949 to select a site for a new Student Union Building, administrators found an ideal spot at the foot of College Hill, just northwest of Old Main. Fresh memories of the most recent worldwide conflict all but pushed any thoughts of the first titanic struggle into the background. There, on the site where in 1919 the town and school turned out to remember the mortal sacrifices of former students and alumni who died in World War I, a grounds crew in 1950 unceremoniously felled the grove of trees that memorialized them, making room for the new SUB.

The next year a throng of happy students gathered for a ribbon cutting over which a beaming Dr. Lowman presided. The hillside retreat inspired the Houstonian to extol its many “cozy spots created for the delight of the student and ex-student” alike. The president, equally enraptured, expressed that it would become precisely what “its name signifies,” that is, a place to bring together a true “union of students.” So frequently did they linger on the patio and gather in its recreation rooms and snack bar that little more than a decade later the SUB became as incapable of serving the student body as Austin Hall had been. Across the street from the residence the chief executive had occupied during his long administration, the Lowman Student Center began to arise in 1963, providing a fitting tribute to “the students’ president.”

dollar. By any definition, the “purchase” was a staggering gift and represented at that time the school’s largest single donation. The shrewd bargain—enhanced by Lowman’s success in convincing the military to abandon a small fleet of heavy machinery that included tractors, graders, and even a bulldozer—relieved the most pressing need of making housing and classroom space available for the veterans.

The president negotiated dozens of smaller deals, such as procuring office furniture and desks, all kinds of equipment and supplies, and even forty housing units from an army barracks at the Texas coastal town of Palacios. They ended up south of Pritchett Field, where they would remain until President Arleigh Templeton had them removed in the 1960s. Yet, if there existed a “Bargain Shopper’s Hall of Fame,” one particular purchase by Harmon Lowman would have made him a worthy inductee. It came on a day in 1950 when two fl atbed trucks rolled into Huntsville out of New Orleans carrying a 1,075-ton refrigeration unit that gave Sam Houston the distinction of becoming America’s “first completely air-conditioned college.”

Soon, a series of cement tunnels honeycombed the campus, leading to every permanent building. No longer would Sam Houston’s students dread the coming of summer with “the same apprehension as those three Biblical characters who were about to be tossed into the fiery furnace,” chortled a Houston Post reporter. Dr. Lowman observed “the improved spirit on the campus” immediately. Neither did it escape his attention that the library seemed fuller, the wear and tear on the grass lighter, and summer enrollment reaching new highs. When the time came for fall registration, a number of students decided to stay, citing the innovation as the determining factor in their decision.

As the new era emerged, Lowman also took advantage of more traditional means of enhancing the institution’s resources and physical plant by drawing on a state legislature that committed funds to all the teachers’ colleges for a long overdue building campaign. On the Sam Houston campus the windfall resulted most notably in new dormitory space and the near-completion of the Quadrangle. On the west side a four-story music building, complete with a concert hall, a dozen studios, and a recording library opened in 1950. The structure, now the south-most part of the Evans Building, was certainly worthy of what the president called “one of the best music departments in the entire country.” Across a
Even before the flurry of construction ran its course, the state’s Finance Committee shut tight the lid of the public’s treasure chest. A new, more conservative, legislature sent a message to the teachers’ college presidents that they ought to spend more time dealing with problems at home and less time on the road soliciting money for campus expansions. In the meantime, new projects broke ground to beat the funding cuts. All manner of temporary structures littered the campus. Bulldozers and wrecking balls laid siege to old dillets that had outlived their usefulness. The combined activity gave the campus the appearance of a boomtown with all the attendant eyeores of muddy truck paths, helter-skelter fencing, scrap materials, and idle equipment. Little thought was invested in cultivating the kind of grounds that would transform the campus into an idealized haven of ivy-covered halls and verdant landscaping. Then, when the capital for new construction dried up, campus beautification suddenly became a priority.

Responding to the legislators’ admonitions, Dr. Lowman in 1947 called upon Grace Longino to help him. The recently widowed wife of William Longino, who had headed the English Department, came recommended by a background in horticulture as well as a reputation for discriminating tastes. It seemed appropriate that such a refined woman would enter the dignified title, Director of Nurseries and Instructor in Floriculture, and just as fitting that the amiable president, with a wink and a smile, was forever introducing her as “Campus Beautician.” Immediately, Longino introduced her to the board of regents as the system’s “Most Improved Campus.”

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of food products. It, too, later fell under the ax as the agriculture department responded to the school’s evolving mission.

Despite a blossoming postwar economy that demanded a better educated workforce, Sam Houston State professed that it had always been, and remained, “a one-purpose institution, a teachers college,” as it concluded in a 1960 self-study prepared for the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Nevertheless, an ever-expanding curriculum and the constant reshuffling of departments belied a sense that the institution was beginning to grow in new directions. At the same time that the college was conducting its periodic review, administrators separated the economics program from the social sciences and added it to the School of Business Administration. Likewise, they acknowledged that the “distributive education” program—retailing, actually—had little in common with classes in education and made it a function of the business school in 1961.

Of course, Sam Houston’s reputation depended on its ability to turn out well-trained teachers, and the education department did not disappoint. Suler Ryan took charge of a program in 1957 that had been ably run by T. S. Montgomery since 1924. The new director, responding to the sweeping Gilmer-Aiken Laws of 1949 that had been ably run by T. S. Montgomery since 1924. The new director, responding to the sweeping Gilmer-Aiken Laws of 1949 that had been ably run by T. S. Montgomery since 1924.

It was an expanding program as well. In 1962 even its name signified growth when it became the Department of Education and Psychology. That year a B.A. degree was approved for the added field. Women’s phys-ed too, added dance and health classes to its course compendium after Margaret Powell became director shortly after the war. Her eventual successor, Mary Ella Montague, directed a successful program that eventually transcended an exercise of sweat to become an artful endeavor. She added dance theory in 1950, and by 1960 the development of intermediate and advanced technique classes necessitated another full-time instructor.

Concerns over how the police action would affect enrollment, of course, paled beside expressions of anxiety regarding the human consequences for students called to duty. Unlike the two previous wars, Korea engendered on the Sam Houston campus more trepidation than patriotism among most of the young men eligible for the draft. Just before the Christmas break in 1950, Houstonian editor Ben Gillespie expressed their collective frustration with government officials—“striped-pants boys”—who “haven’t gotten around to openly admitting we blundered and are once again in the lap of war.” When the spring semester of 1951 rolled around, the Houstonian greeted those returning to campus with the headline: “106 SH Students Leave for Service.” Every edition of the school paper over the next few weeks mentioned the departure of others. Only with the welcome news that the U.S. Congress had approved a student deferment plan did the air of tension abate. All the men had to do was keep up their grades and stay in school to avoid being drafted. Becoming family men along the way also cut their chances of having to fight later. For a handful of graduates, however, Uncle Sam had a job waiting for them. Some accepted their duty with alacrity, others with a sense of resignation, but all who were called answered.

While a willingness to risk mortal sacrifice apparently failed to pervade the male population, many young men nevertheless affirmed their love of country in 1951 by joining a unit designated “B” Battery of the 22nd Armored Reserve Division. That summer the volunteers trained at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, where they “spent 16 out of every 24 hours on their feet and moving, learning the art of warfare.” Their day began at 5:30 am, inspiring one of the reservists to proclaim that he “would never mind attending a 7:30 am class again.”

The next spring, 1952, a Reserve Officer Training Corps organized a unit at Sam Houston State. By October the Houstonian
reported that 405 of the school’s 921 men had registered for ROTC. In fact the program became mandatory for freshmen and sophomore boys. Over the next year eight companies formed, joined by their own band and a ceremonial color guard, the Lowman Rifles, honoring the president.

During these years, and even into the early 1960s, the attitude of conformity that characterized American life in general also set the tone and temper for students attending Sam Houston State Teachers College. Nobody balked when the registrar included a non-communist card among the papers incoming students had to sign. Neither did contests to select campus beauties or the sight of social club initiates kowtowing to regular members trigger any sustained peals of protest, although occasional grumbling about elitism ebowed its way into the pages of the Houstonian. Whether student or faculty, few outwardly chafed at the prevailing social conventions, choosing instead to view their insular environment as a cozy place, where everyone marched in lockstep to the tune of the same drummer.

On the Sam Houston campus, rebels without causes were few and beatniks even scarcer. At the same time, “hep cats” that assaulted the popular culture as the baby boom years unfolded certainly found their imitators, creating a language only their contemporaries could understand. "Stan and Art were downing a bovine bromide when they decided to cut out for their pad,” went one representative sample. “They picked up their axes and hopped into Art's short.” Longtime English professor Bill Fleming, old enough to know them, provided the translation: “The two were drinking a milkshake and decided to go to their apartment. They picked up their musical instruments and got into Art’s car.”

The relaxation of in loco parentis also added a new dimension to the daily aff airs of campus life. Faculty began to look the other way when the occasional upperclassman at a football game discreetly passed a bottle among friends. Students no longer feared a summons from the dean for “getting tight,” and were even less concerned about being stigmatized by their peers. Tom Perdue, Class of ‘51, recalled with fondness the times he and his buddies squeezed into the Ford roadster of Marion “Big Dog” Skains for a quick trip to Trinity, where they would toss a keg into the rumble seat and head back to campus. Pulling up to the girls’ dorms, they would honk the horn and invite all-comers to follow them to the Huntsville State Park and enjoy an afternoon beer bust.

Not everyone, however, approved of such college high jinks. Even on campus, students were just as likely to reflect the values of their parents as to adopt the casual outlook of the emerging youth culture. An overwhelming majority of men and women in Huntsville believed that their Bible-Belt ways and values were under siege by the corrosive social forces of the new age. Determined to hold the line against the intrusion of bars and liquor stores, their votes assured that Walker County would remain dry. Students wanting to drink something stronger than an R.C. Cola found themselves beating well-worn paths to the “Paper Moon” at Trinity or one of the wet spots between New Waverly and Conroe, such as the Green Top Tavern and Iggy’s.

If anyone needed a reminder that society rested on a bedrock of religious conservatism, the Huntsville Ministerial Alliance in 1950 prevailed upon City Hall to ban the release of the film Stromboli when the clergymen learned director Roberto Rossellini had engaged leading lady Ingrid Bergman in a torrid affair that resulted in an illegitimate birth. Their condemnation of the “illicit and adulterous love life” as an “affront to Christian standards of marriage and home life” caused more eye rolling than indignation on the Sam Houston campus. While two-thirds of students interviewed by the Houstonian thought the ban ridiculous, more than a handful supported the censure.

Elvis Presley became the target of a more lighthearted poll that checked the pulse of over two hundred students in 1956. The strain of fundamentalism nevertheless waxed self-righteously in the opinion of one student who could have spoken for the ministers themselves: “I think he is a perfect example of a propaganda measure aimed at the moral ethics of American youth.” Otherwise, fans and critics alike saw “The King” for what he was. For every one who gushed the moral ethics of American youth.” Otherwise, fans and critics alike saw “The King” for what he was. For every one who gushed, “I think he has the seven year itch and can’t scratch.” The most precient student of the sample, however, hit the bull’s-eye: “He looks like he has the seven year itch and can’t scratch.” The most precient student of the sample, however, hit the bull’s-eye: “He will be popular forever.”
Typically, students of the Fifties and early Sixties were too busy balancing their studies with extracurricular pursuits to invest much time pondering the sociological implications of their activities. They took President Lowman at his word when he proclaimed: “The college exists for the student, and not the student for the college.” The only dead spots on the social calendar surrounded midterms and finals, and Sam Houston seemed always abuzz with the anticipation of some kind of event, many that attracted townpeople to campus. Theater productions were always popular, and with the appointment of Charles Schmidt as director upon Earl Huff’s retirement in 1953, students involved in the plays began earning academic credit under the reorganized Department of Drama and Speech. Otherwise, there were men’s and women’s choirs and an A Capella group. The music department featured a symphony orchestra, jazz ensemble, brass and woodwind groups, and, of course, the Bearkat Marching Band. The program’s zenith came during a 1960 contest between the Houston Oilers and Oakland Raiders. Anticipating the outing—paid out of the Oilers’ special events fund—band director Jack Manry gloved to the Houstonian: “We of the band feel very honored in being—given the entire halftime in which to perform.” Indeed, in a day when instant replays and mid-game analyses existed only in the minds of programming executives, the 125-piece outfit from Sam Houston marched across the television screens of as many as 33 million viewers.

Back home it was athletics that provided the largest consistent draw among students and townpeople alike, and during the postwar years attendance—and the Bearkats’ success—reached new highs. Although the football team won the Lone Star Conference three times during this period, both court and diamond challenged the minds of programming executives, the 125-piece outfit from Sam Houston marched across the television screens of as many as 33 million viewers.

Until the 1955 season the roundballers played in a gymnasium built in 1924. The team’s winning ways, especially during World War II when football was suspended, had commanded a loyal following within the town. After the war the dramatic rise in enrollment compelled the school to close the games to all but students and faculty, provoking an outcry among crestfallen townsfolk. When the state legislature, unmoved by the predicament, refused to budge, the magician-like president once again pulled an ace from his sleeve. Aware that funds did exist for an athletic dormitory, Dr. Lowman worked with architects to design a building whose central feature was coincidentally—or not—a roomy gymnasium that today houses the dance program and ROTC.

On the football field, Coach Paul Pierce replaced T. E. “Puny” Wilson, who retired after the 1951 season. The colorful, hardnosed Wilson had arrived in 1938 and also coached the
basketball team until Jack Williams took over after the war. In twelve gridiron campaigns Wilson had posted six second-place finishes. In 1949 his boys registered the most lopsided victory in school history, defeating the Brooke Army Medical Center 83-0, and in 1952 produced the school’s first All-American, quarterback Don “Cotton” Gottlob. Still, the Lone Star Conference trophy had always eluded him.

Pierce’s 1955 squad ended the drought. In the final game that year, a field goal against Southwest Texas State put the Bearkats ahead by two points with two minutes to go. As the gun sounded, a wall of orange and white held fast at the Sam Houston one yardline, ending the Bobcats’ desperate last gasp. The 1956 team, led by All-American halfback Benny Bokes, gave Sam Houston its only perfect season. The Kats capped the 10-0-0 campaign with another victory in the Refrigerator Bowl at Evansville, Indiana, where they thumped Middle Tennessee State 27-13.

The football team once again claimed the LSC crown in 1961, but it was Bearkat Baseball that brought Sam Houston its greatest distinction during the Lowman years. An avid fan of the game, the president in 1947 revived a program that had been mothballed since the onset of the Great Depression. For a while, the only other Lone Star Conference schools to field teams were SFA and Sul Ross, so conference titles in 1953 and 1954 did not exactly generate parades. In the spring of 1963, however, that was exactly the kind of greeting that embraced the champions of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. After coming up short in three previous trips to the finals, the Bearkats swept the four-game series at St. Joseph, Missouri, pounding out 34 runs against 4 for their opponents. The stellar performance netted several individual honors, including an MVP trophy for shortstop Jimmy Dodd of Baytown. Among seven others who made the all-tournament team was a rangy sophomore catcher from Kilgore, John Skeeters, who would later enjoy many victorious seasons as the team’s head coach.

Back in Huntsville a welcome party scrambled to prepare a homecoming worthy of Sam Houston’s national champs. Mayor Raymond Wright declared the occasion “Bearkat Baseball Day.” An enthusiastic mob of townsfolk, faculty, and students met the team at the bus station and led them to the square, where school administrators and civic leaders extolled the team’s accomplishments over the hoots and hollers of excited fans. It was Coach Ray Benge, appropriately, who ignited the wildest eruption. Asked to comment on the Kats’ record-breaking performance, he formed a smug grin and drewled: “The NAIA record book looks like a Sam Houston diary!”

The baseball crown, however, was actually the school’s second national championship. It was the rodeo team that registered the first one in 1956. Organized the same year as the baseball team, many of the cowboys—and cowgirls—immediately began collecting trophies for individual events in such bone-jarring competitions as bareback riding, bulldogging, and barrel racing. Ira Akers roped in the coveted Best All-Around award in 1955 and 1956, equaling the feat accomplished in 1953 and 1955 by campus legend Sonny Sikes, who, like Skeeters, returned to his alma mater as a coach.

Officially, rodeo was a club, closely associated with the Ag Department. Its activities were naturally more physical than the typical fare students pursued. Most boys and girls rounded out their free time by dancing and going to parties. Campus social clubs, precursors of the school’s Greek organizations, took the lead in organizing such events. For better or worse an air of exclusivity surrounded their activities, especially when rush week unfolded. For the girls there were the Eclectics and Philomethians, holdovers from the old literary societies. There were the CB’s, named after Caroline Belvin, and the Loulies who took their name from Dr. Estill’s wife. Another popular group was the Anne Gibbons Society. The Glamazons, a service club, drew recruits from them all, but restricted its membership to girls who stood at
The boys’ counterpart was the Ramrods. Among their social clubs were the Ravens, the Esquires, the Caballeros, and the Dons. Veterans comprised another group, Chi Gamma Iota.

During the fall everything revolved around Homecoming. The autumn tradition routinely attracted well over a thousand alumni, reaching a peak in 1956 when seven thousand former students attended. The celebration spilled into the surrounding community as businesses and homeowners expressed their support for the school by hanging banners and signs. Campus organizations spent long hours building elaborate floats for that brief moment of glory when they unveiled their creations to eager crowds waiting to see what the students had dreamed up. Spaced along the route among waves of area high school bands, civic clubs, and sheriff’s posses, the floats provided the highlight of the parade and made each event unique.

The list of other activities almost staggers the mind. Also in the fall were pep rallies before each football game, including special evening rallies, one in which everyone showed up in pajamas and another at Homecoming, when a bonfire supplied the attraction. The all-campus Jingle Bell Ball provided the cap for the fall semester. Another at Homecoming, when a bonfire supplied the attraction. The autumn tradition reached a new level of intensity in 1953 after the school formally organized a program and began crowning an all-sports champion. Otherwise, students cut a rug at the VooDoo Dance, the Sweetheart Dance, the Dream Girl Dance, the All-College Sports Dance, and the Raven Ball. There was also the Press Capades, College Capers, a Bathing Revue, Moulin Rouge, and Aquacade, among other events. President Lowman even got into the spirit by hosting an annual reception for faculty in the fall and a picnic for them in the spring. Like many college campuses during these years, students at Sam Houston dressed down for Sadie Hawkins Day, when the girls asked out the guys, and “Dogpatch,” taking its theme from the Li’l Abner cartoons so popular at the time.

One of the college’s unique events, a tradition entirely of the 1950s, was “Pioneer Roundup.” The first one in 1952 set the tone for the annual springtime event. It featured a Wild West town, Pioneer Gulch, complete with a jail and any number of club-sponsored “saloons.” Otherwise its lone street was lined with false-fronted facades. The club selling the most tickets earned the privilege of naming its sheriff, who in turn appointed his deputies. They quickly set about rounding up anyone who dared come to the event without western attire. Such interlopers were considered “Easterners” and were subject to the swift western justice of being deposited into the housegow and fined, which added to the coffers of the students’ fund that benefited from the event. The college’s social organizations also provided most of the entertainment. Typically, pairs of girls’ and boys’ clubs teamed up for variety acts. They also staged chorus lines, the young men contributing the brawn for building the dance hall, and the young women providing the high-kicking performances. Capping the festivities was the student election of a Pioneer Roundup Queen.

Then, in 1959, the clubs suspended the event. A Western Week Revue, held at the Old Main Auditorium, provided a pale imitation. Afterward there was talk of constructing a permanent village, but the students were distracted by larger events, and the tradition faded along with the decade.

The question on the mind of every club member that year was whether to “go Greek.” Supporters promoted the advantages of being affiliated with national organizations, and even President Lowman expressed “they could be beneficial to the school.” In the broader view he considered the prestige of extending social ties to campuses across the country, the network of contacts that could lead to jobs and positions of leadership in society, and the possibility that passing up the opportunity might reinforce the perception of the school as a provincial country college. While some of the more cautious members expressed their concerns over the expenses they would incur, Caballero Bob Dalehite reminded that “SH is basically known as a poor boy’s school, and the administration is certainly not going to allow any nationals with high ideals about money on the campus.”

Before they could gain membership, however, the local clubs had to find fraternities and sororities willing to accept them. Not every national organization scrambled to send representatives to Huntsville. Some of the most prestigious Greek chapters at the leading private schools and state universities openly snubbed Sam Houston as “strictly a teachers college and nothing else.” Nevertheless, the volume of correspondence flooding the campus and a parade of
interested suitors salved any lingering wounds. Lowman’s pledge to provide first-class housing for the Greeks left no doubt that Sam Houston State was solidly behind the movement, and soon the bids rolled in.

One-by-one the shields of familiar local clubs came down, replaced with foreign letters that left many students scratching their heads and muttering: “It’s Greek to me.” Among the girls the founding sororities were Delta Zeta (Anne Gibbs Society), Zeta Tau Alpha (Philomethians), Alpha Chi Omega (Eclectics), Alpha Delta Pi (CB’s), and Kappa Delta (Loulies). The boys established ties with Kappa Alpha (Ravens), Delta Tau Delta (Esquires), Alpha Tau Omega (Dons), and Pi Kappa Alpha (Chi Gamma Iota).

The Caballeros, who had turned down an offer from Delta Nu in the hopes that Sigma Chi would extend them an invitation, were the last to join. When the good news finally came late in the fall of 1960, pledges Wayne Mason and Ed Dossman wiggled into togas and circled the campus bearing a lighted torch along with the affirming telegram. Their president, Lloyd Flint, received the news ceremoniously and then, just as unceremoniously, was carried to the museum grounds where members deposited him in the duck pond.

Despite the backdrop of the police action in Korea, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and anticommunist red-baiting—or, perhaps because of it—social life at Sam Houston State Teachers College, like the country in general, radiated an aura of innocence that would leave future generations yearning for the Fabulous Fifties. Texas, notoriously behind the times, enjoyed its “happy days” well into the 1960s, although the good times that rolled began spinning in odd directions by the time Dr. Lowman fell ill in 1961. His inability to recover completely began absenting the president from the merry activities that he so enjoyed and eclipsed the sunny disposition of an adoring student body.

Those near to the president claimed a rupture with community leaders over an aborted urban renewal project contributed to his declining health. Like every other chief executive before him, Lowman had tried to cultivate close ties with the city. He believed that if Huntsville could land a proposed $1.8 million federal grant for purchasing property for campus expansion, it would ease the resentment that sometimes attended the aggressive acquisition of individual lots. Yet the requirement that Huntsville meet federal guidelines—guidelines that might upset the racial status quo—not only caused some original backers to lead a spirited opposition, but also engendered suspicion that Lowman possessed liberal notions far removed from the rigid social code to which many of its leading citizens clinged. The resulting defeat left the president feeling wounded and betrayed.

Other developments foreshadowed the turbulence that lay in the institution’s immediate future. They were as vague as the arrival in 1963 of Captain John McCord, veteran of guerrilla skirmishes in an obscure place called Vietnam, who came to train ROTC candidates. They were as vivid as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy that same fall. Then, there was the bitter controversy involving the firing of a professor that would continue to run its course over the next administration. Such burdens weighed heavily on the increasingly fragile chief executive. Like his predecessor, Charles Norton Shaver, Harmon Lowman would stand aside while another man took the helm of SHSTC. At his insistence, Elliott T. Bowers stepped in, at first to help with the routine matters of running the institution. Then, as Dr. Lowman took his physician’s advice and began spending more time at the “fishing hole,” Bowers made the transition to fulltime acting president. Early during the spring term of 1964—January 26 to be exact—Harmon Lowman died after falling critically ill over the Christmas break. The passing of the “students’ president” not only marked the end of a long and productive administration, but also signaled the end of an era marked by a sense of community that—for better and worse—could never be regained.