



Evolution: The Soul of SFA

A rich history is unpacked as we take a deep look into the evolution of SFA over the years.

Utkarsh Sharma

Draft



Map of Texas 1830

In 1823, Stephen F. Austin was granted permission to settle 300 families in Mexican Texas. He was adamant about compiling a map of Texas and undertook it upon himself after receiving the grant. His six years of labor resulted in the production of a highly detailed map, the first in Texas. His

goal? To promote American immigration into Austin's colony. It was reproduced with added details ten years after in 1940 as well. In 1829 he finally sent his completed map to a publisher prominent in Philadelphia, one H.S Tanner. To explore the map further, please click on the button "Map of Texas, 1836."



Stephen F. Austin's Cornerstone Map of Texas, 1836

Map of Texas, 1836



East Texas Research Center

When SFA first opened on Washington Square, the only building used was the 'old university building'. It was built by Mr. Howard of Henderson in 1859 in a modified Grecian style using red hand-made bricks; it is now on the National Register of Historic Places and is a Texas Historic Landmark. During the civil war, the old university building served as a barrack and hospital for confederate troops. Presently it serves as a museum and is often referred to as the "mother of education in Texas."



A small wooden chamber was labeled the Chamber of commerce. Located on the High school campus it housed the administration for the first year of SFA. For many years after it was used as a temporary building and eventually moved out came to be known as the "Ag shack".



Anton Birdwell was appointed the president of the newly created Stephen F. Austin Normal school in 1917. However, he arrived at Nacogdoches much later in 1922, delayed because of WW1. He recognized the importance of extracurricular and planned various places such as the school's first athletic field in 1923 itself.



Anton Birdwell



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Austin Building

On April 20th, 1924 the call to get the Austin building was formally accepted by the board of Regents. Everyone seemed to be proud of the steam heating tech present in the building

and the fireproof nature of the building. It was one of the first buildings to have more architectural details.



In the early years of SFA, the buildings were located inside the owl woods (on the left in the areal view presented). Heavily, the land use revolved around agriculture.

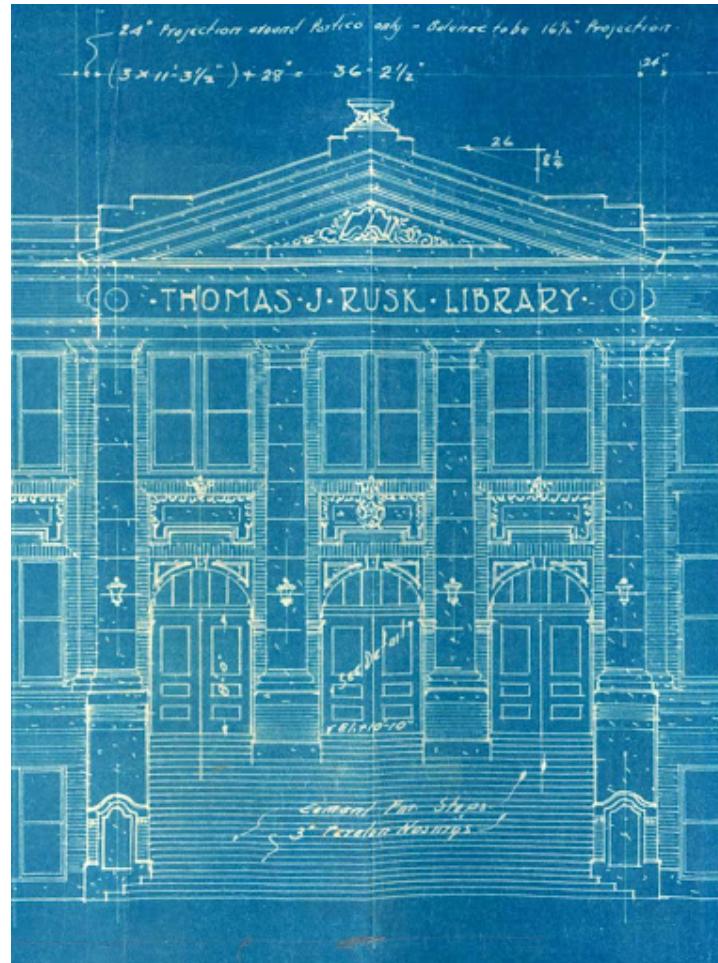


On December 8th, 1941 everyone was to hear President Roosevelt speak. A few months before, Birdwell had announced his retirement. On December 10th an assembly was called which outlined the various things that students could do in order to aid in a national emergency. Post 1941 the number of men in the university dropped heavily. About 90 percent of the enrolled students after the Christmas of 1941 were women and the idea of SFA becoming a female college almost became a reality. Paul L. Boynton's presidential term at Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College started in 1942 and ended in 1958.



Paul Boynton

Although a majority of students opposed the draft in the national poll conducted in 1939. Male students in the 1940s withdrew from the university to fight in the second world war. Boynton worked to keep the college from closing down by proposing opening a Woman's Army Corps school in 1943. If President Boynton had not taken this approach, it's likely that SFA would not have survived WWII.



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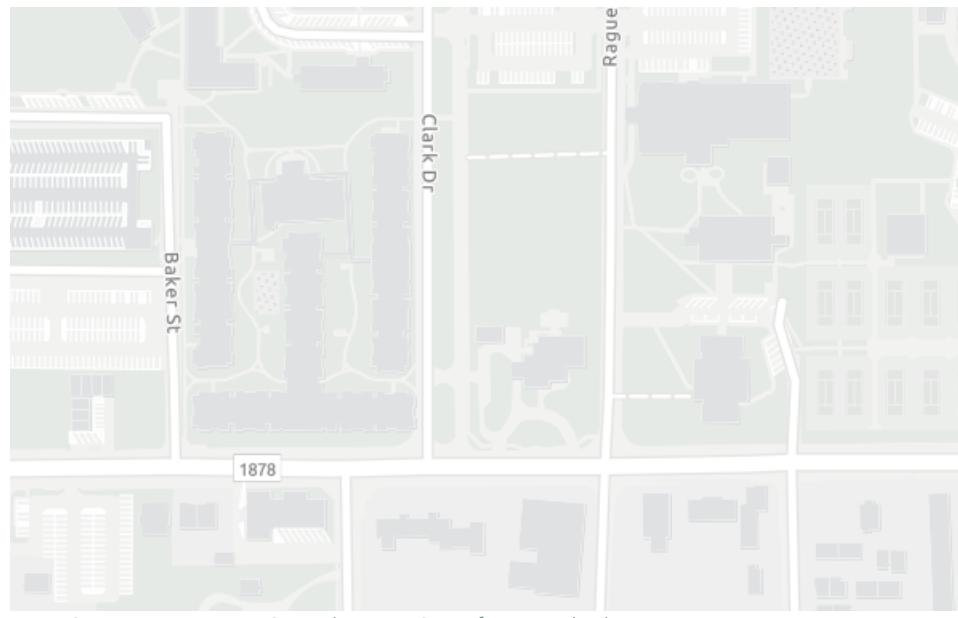
Rusk Library

The very next building that was to be erected was the Rusk library. Libraries were in trend at the time. It was unplanned for it to solely be used for the purpose of the library, the plan

was for additional space to be used for classrooms and offices. The library was originally only supposed to be on the top floor of the building. The original blueprints seemed to please the librarians and it was considered, by few, to be the perfect model for a library.



After the war, in 1949 an article was published that entailed the future of SFA with a map (not available in the archives) that spatially arranged the buildings which were to be built in the coming decade. He immediately got the approval of the board for the powerhouse. During this time most of the architecture was designed by Shirley Simons who established his own architectural practice in Lufkin, Texas. He later gained fame for multiple buildings he built, many of which are now listed under the National Register of Historic Places.



The residence of the President's

In 1937 Birdwell placed a request regarding the president's home. Due to the great American depression this request although approved was actualized at a much later time.

Academic freedom was a hot topic in the years after the war. The fear of communism over America led the Un-American Activities committee to spot-check textbooks. With the strong belief in preserving academic freedom and an understanding of the façade of patriotism that the committee showed, the crisis was averted by the people of SFA.

This fear must not be allowed to lead to the subversion of free institutions of which schools and colleges are among the most important

The death of president Boynton, who passed away in his office after a heart attack, the administration had not anticipated. Under Boynton, there were three buildings being constructed, the liberal arts building, the library which was to be named after him, and the fine arts building.



Dr. Ralph W. Steen

There was hence some level of anxiety that loomed during the transition period. Just under two months, Dr. Ralph Steen was elected and assumed his position on the first day of November in 1958. His presidency revolved around the philosophy that with growth and progress most problems would come to an end. Because of this philosophy, the coming years were the most heavily building years of SFA.

Steen's first move after getting the presidency was the establishment of the student union building which was located right opposite the corner of the Austin building. The campus had developed tremendously during the Steen

Presidency. He was a very competitive man, from his years at A&M, where, according to his biography, his "competitive urge" led him to win debates, join multiple clubs and teach more students and classes, he also proposed a master's program. He believed firmly in his ideology where he saw it more as simply a compliment.



The pictures are used to define change between the years 1947 and 1969 before and during the Steen Presidency





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Located beside Austin Building

The original student center was the first building under Steen. He was inspired by what he had seen the Memorial student center do for Texas A&M. Thanks to Sputnik's success and American fear of communism, there was a gross increase in funding for educational institutions in the United States. The amount of funding available to Steen was 12 fold what Boynton had. This circumstance led him to move from temporary arrangements such as huts to first-class facilities.



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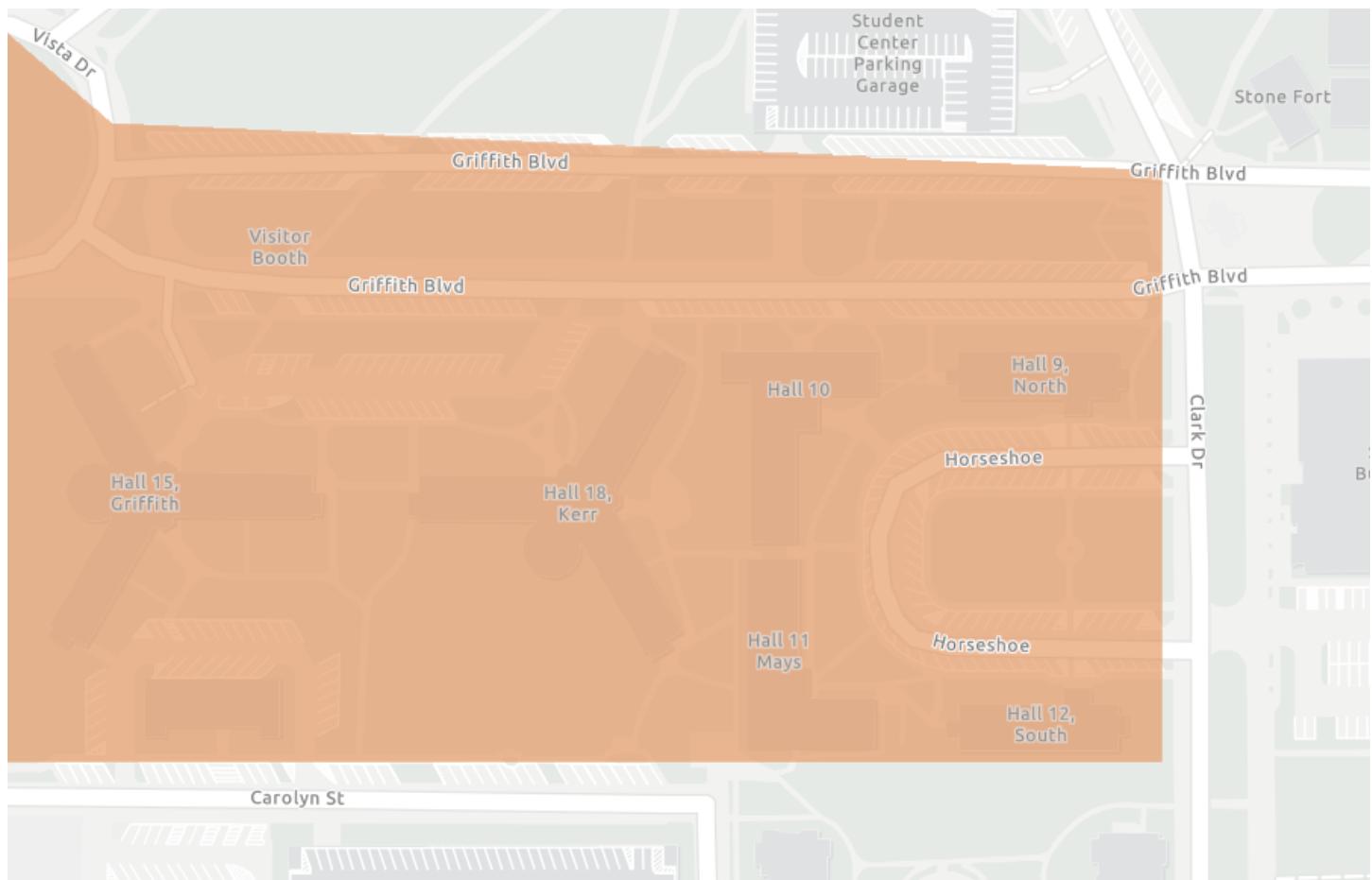
Griffith and Kerr Halls

He believed that there was a need for first-class dormitories which led him to build Kerr and Griffith halls which could be

compared to any other institution's top housing facilities.
Kerr Hall on the right and Griffith in the figure below.



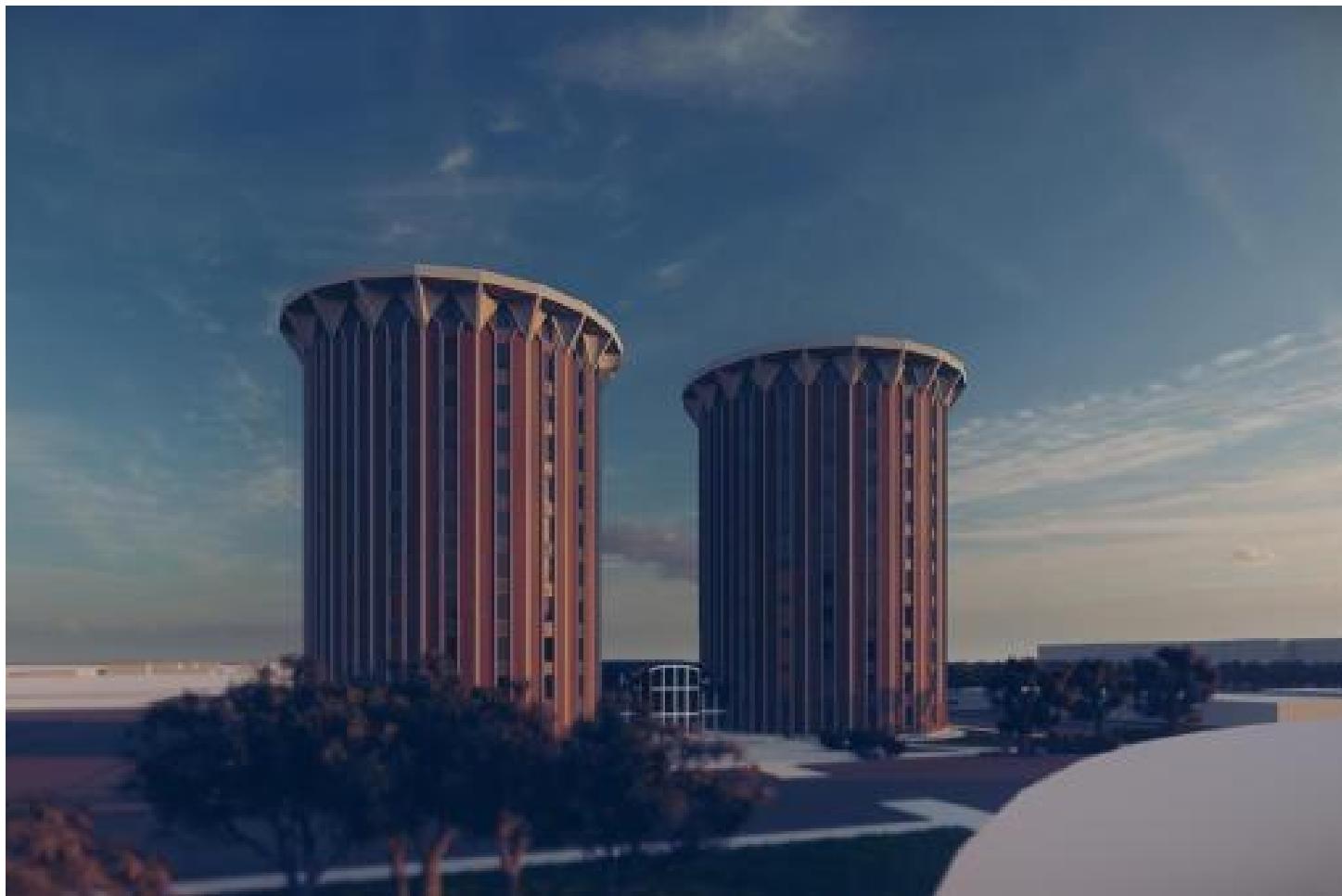
Griffith Hall.



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The decision to purchase Griffith park would come to later haunt Steen who would defend it to the end. He even wrote many years after the whole charade of events that he believed it to be a step in the right direction. It seemed like a natural transaction since the city required money and the college required land. The property was swiftly transferred over to SFA University. With the park though, came strong emotions and history. One of the heiresses protested against it claiming it was a violation of her will. Steen publicly rejected the obstructionists and traditionalists during this time. Eventually, the case was won by Steen's administration, and the construction began shortly after.



On the eve of their anniversary, September 21, 1965, Steen's wife, who had bone cancer, died in her bed in the president's home. The next dormitory, which is the largest on campus, was named after her.



The topic of discussion while the halls were being built was that of integration. Shortly after assuming his position in 1958, Steen started to consider the issue of segregation. It wasn't until 1964, 8 years later, that the issue became mainstream. The boys of fraternities were concerned that they would need to share dorms with individuals of a different race. The first black students were met with ugly demonstrations from the people of the town at Lamar university which alerted Steen and he asked the students to wait a semester before coming to campus as he tries to resolve the issue with the board of regents. This move to integration also came with a lot of resistance. When he ordered the removal of white and colored signs at the cafeteria, the manager refused, and as the story goes, he "marched out of his office with a screwdriver, went to the University Center, took the signs from the moorings". Many professors resigned in 1964 because they did not want to teach people of another race.



The Steen presidency can be divided into two eras by the type of building built. The first one in the early 60s focused on the buildings in residential areas, the second era was focused on the construction of academic buildings. In 1965, Steen decided to move SFA to a university standard as it would be easier to get recognition for the forestry program. By 1965 the map of Nacogdoches looked fairly "full".



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Griffith park sought to expand the property south and in the 1970s the center of the campus was shifted to the east. In the first stages of phase 2, Wilson Drive connected to Starr avenue which established a new corridor on the campus. The new science building was opened in 1968. The liberal arts building in 1969 and 1970 introduced forestry, music, and home economics buildings.

TEMAN

esterday afternoon as four men in the vicinity of the Chemistry building courts and into waiting

n, probably in their early thirties, in the back seat of one auto, ran away and then disappeared

... naked," reported a witness. "That's an awful sight on your brain," another

anonymous tip just prior to identifying himself only as he would appear at approximately

over at campus security," though another telephone call said that they and eight guys had been earlier in the building to hold the thing later. "I'm glad I escaped the area," he said. "We did it."

uses today

One onlooker called the streakers — identified by the anonymous caller as "Ripcord," "Legs," "Redbear," and "Rasputin" — "strange." Others who witnessed the scene called the men "right out of a dirty magazine," "out of their minds," and "someone I would like to join."

Spokesmen for the University Police department have not commented on yesterday's incident. James Sewell, spokesman for the police, had told the *Plaindealer* earlier that indecent exposure and indecent exposure are illegal.



In 1973 SFA made national headlines with students streaking naked and starting a countrywide craze that lasted until 1974.

The story goes that the president assigned a specific streaking day which accomplished nothing and the streaking continued anyways. Images documenting the bizarre incident

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Digital Archive



1976 marked the end of the big boom of growth. Dr. Steen retired and Dr. William R. Johnson was appointed as the 4th president of SFA. In the words of Charles Hass, "Education was no longer the favorite child." Steen suffered a heart attack in 1980 on the stairs of the Rusk Building marking the end of our story.



Dr. William R. Johnson

Questions can be sent to sharmau@jacks.sfasu.edu

Credits!

its just me

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