

U. T. AUSTIN - BRACKENRIDGE TRACT - REGENT ERWIN'S REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE TRACT. --At the April 24, 1973, meeting of the Board of Regents, Regent Frank C. Erwin, Jr., presented an oral review of the history of the Brackenridge Tract. At the request of the Board of Regents, Regent Erwin thereafter prepared this written review for inclusion as a part of the record in the minutes of a subsequent meeting of the Board:

July 10, 1973

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS:

On January 26, 1839, less than 3 years after the Battle of San Jacinto, the Third Congress of the Republic of Texas set aside 50 leagues of land with which to endow two state universities.

The earliest known map of the City of Austin, drawn in that same year (1839) indicates a "College Grove" at the place where the U. T. campus was later established, and a map of Austin drawn in 1840 pursuant to an act of the Congress of the Republic indicates the school located on the site of "College Grove," but it was then labeled "College Hill." On the 1840 map, "College Hill" consists of a 12 square block area lying between what are now 21st Street on the south, 24th Street on the north, Guadalupe Street on the west, and Speedway Street on the east.

Unfortunately, the poverty of the Republic and the early difficulties of the newborn State of Texas for years delayed the opening of the college.

Elisha M. Pease, who became Governor in 1853, urged the building of the University, and after several efforts by the Legislature to that end, a bill was signed on February 11, 1858, establishing "The University of Texas" and creating an endowment of bonds and land for its maintenance and support.

Unfortunately, the chaotic conditions ensuing from the War Between The States intervened, and no further action to establish the University was taken until the adoption of the 1876 Constitution.

That Constitution, which was adopted by popular vote on February 15, 1876, expressly provided for the creation of "The University of Texas," which was to be a "university of the first class" and was to be located by a vote of the people. That Constitution also set aside a million acres of the public domain for the support of the University, and in 1883 the Legislature added an additional million acres of public land to the endowment. That 2,100,000 acres of University Lands, situated in 19 West Texas counties, is the foundation of the Permanent University Fund today.

In 1881, at the request of Governor Oran M. Roberts, the 17th Legislature passed a bill, signed by the Governor on March 30, 1881, establishing "The University of Texas" and appropriating \$59,000 for the construction of the initial university building. (That appropriation of \$59,000 appears to have been a clear violation of Section 14 of Article VII of the 1876 Constitution which provides that "no tax shall be levied and no money appropriated out of the general revenue . . . . for the establishment and erection of the buildings of The University of Texas.").

Numerous towns and places in the State competed for the location of the University. However, after the state-wide election was held on September 6, 1881, Governor Roberts filed a proclamation with the Secretary of State declaring that "Austin has been selected as the site for the Main University." (The best report of the campaign to locate the Main University in Austin appears to be the one related by A. P. Wooldridge in the November 15, 1913, issue of The Alcalde. Probably more than any other person, Mr. Wooldridge is responsible for the University's being in Austin.)

However, once Austin was selected by popular vote, no one seems to have doubted that the campus should be situated on the forty-acre site that was designated on the 1839 and 1840 maps of the city, first as "College Grove" and then as "College Hill." In any event, the laying of the cornerstone of the West Wing of the Old Main Building was accomplished on that site on November 17, 1882, before 3,000 witnesses, and the construction was completed in 1883 at a cost of \$62,000. With the assistance of Governor John Ireland, the first classes were opened in September, 1883, in the rooms of the Senate and the House of Representatives and "in such apartments as could be spared" in the temporary Capitol Building. In January, 1884, all classes of the University were moved from the temporary Capitol Building to the completed West Wing of "Old Main." The University opened in 1883-84 with an enrollment of 218.

Colonel George W. Brackenridge of San Antonio served as a member of the Board of Regents for a total of almost 26 years (from November, 1886, to January, 1911; from August, 1917, to January, 1919; and from November, 1920, until his death in December, 1920).

In 1890, when the University was barely 7 years old and when the enrollment had risen to only 278 students, Colonel Brackenridge saw the need for a dormitory for the "poor boys" and offered the Regents a substantial sum of money toward providing such a facility. Colonel Brackenridge's stated purpose was that "the young men of Texas might have substantial aid in obtaining an education to fit them morally and mentally for any honorable calling or station in life." The total cost of the original portion of the dormitory (first called "University Hall," then "Brackenridge Hall," and finally just "B Hall") was \$17,000, of which Colonel Brackenridge contributed \$10,000, plus \$800 to equip and furnish the "mess hall." In 1900,

two wings were added to B Hall, and Colonel Brackenridge contributed to their cost.

By the fall of 1909, Colonel Brackenridge had conceived the idea of moving the main campus of the University from the "forty acre" site to a 1,000 acre site situated in what is now West Austin. At that time Colonel Brackenridge owned a 500 acre tract in that area, of which about 90 acres lay on the west bank of the Colorado River near the Lake Austin dam, and about 410 acres lay on the east bank of the river in the general area where the Austin Municipal Golf Course is now situated. At the same time, the heirs of Governor Pease owned more than 1,000 acres lying between the Pease Mansion (situated on what is now Pease Road) on the east and Colonel Brackenridge's tract on the west.

It was Colonel Brackenridge's dream that he and the Pease heirs would each give 500 acres to the University, thereby creating a 1,000 acre campus in West Austin, stretching from the Pease Mansion to the Colorado River, and that the proposed new 1,000 acre campus would be connected to the "forty acres" by a 400 foot wide boulevard that would run down the present route of 24th Street from the intersection of Pease and Windsor Roads to Guadalupe Street. (A map of this grandiose plan can be found in the map section of Walter Long's history of the Brackenridge Tract entitled "For All Time to Come," privately printed by Steck in 1964.)

Colonel Brackenridge approached the Pease heirs with his proposal in October, 1909, and even offered to purchase the Pease house and land and donate them to the University in the name of his friend, Governor Pease. But, according to one of the Pease heirs, after consideration the heirs concluded that they could not afford to contribute the land and their pride would not permit them to allow Colonel Brackenridge to purchase the house and land and donate them in their ancestor's name, so a substantial part of Colonel Brackenridge's plan fell through.

However, he decided to proceed alone, and in December, 1909, Colonel Brackenridge wrote U. T. President Mezes, in pertinent part, as follows:

"In this connection, I tender to the University the land fronting on the Colorado River and embracing the Austin dam, amounting to somewhere in the neighborhood of (500) acres, provided it could be occupied for University purposes advantageously. If you think well of this, won't you kindly have the boys (i. e., apparently a reference to the surveying students in the engineering school) make a survey of it so that I may draw the deeds accurately by boundaries, and also that the Board may see something of the topography of the tract to enable them to decide whether they desire it or not. I am perfectly willing and ready to do this if it meets any of the wants of the University, but would be unwilling to give it to them to be sold or exchanged for other property."

Complying with Colonel Brackenridge's request, the then Chairman of the Board of Regents appointed a committee to examine the land in question and to report back to the Board on its suitability for university purposes.

The deed from Colonel Brackenridge dated June 17, 1910, was formally accepted by the Board of Regents on October 22, 1910. However, entries in the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Regents during 1910 and 1911 indicate that the problem of determining the best use of the land continued to be studied. Among the suggested uses were a park and botanical garden; a state fish hatchery; a scientific research activity in Economic Botany, Economic Zoology, and Economic Entomology, dealing with commercially valuable plants and animals and with the insects which prey on them; a combined dairy, truck farm, and school which would provide work and economic support for pre-college students who wished to prepare themselves to enter the University; a commercially and professionally managed farm operation; and, of course, a new site for the main campus of the University.

Finally, on June 11, 1911, the Regents sent the following telegram to Colonel Brackenridge, who had retired from the Board in January of that

year and was then in San Antonio:

"Regents have inspected property you recently gave University, and suggestion is entertained looking to its future use for site of main establishment. We will be here until Tuesday night, and would be glad to have your counsel on this and other matters if you can come without serious discomfort."

On the following day (June 12, 1911), Colonel Brackenridge responded as follows:

"Thanks for your very kind and highly appreciated invitation to join you in the consideration of any subject pertaining to the future prosperity and welfare of The University of Texas. The land there will eventually be of great value, and I will as a citizen of the State of Texas take pleasure in following as far as possible any suggestion or undertaking of your Board. (I regret) that my health and the extreme heat and dust prevent my acceptance."

It appears that no real conclusion as to best use of the land was arrived at by the Board of Regents at that time, and the Board turned the management of the land over to Regent George W. Littlefield (of Austin) for lease. Major Littlefield reported to the Board that the land was being fenced, that the land on the east side of the river had been rented for \$500, and that the land on the west side of the river had been rented for \$10.

Leaving the history of the Brackenridge Tract for a moment, it is interesting to note that Colonel Brackenridge's dedication to the University was not limited to making grants of land or gifts of buildings that bear his name. On the contrary, by deed of gift dated March 15, 1915, Colonel Brackenridge donated his schooner, known as the "Navidad," to the Board of Regents for the purpose of "promoting the collecting and investigating of marine life along the coast of the State of Texas." Unfortunately, Fate did not smile on that undertaking, because the minutes of the Regents' meeting of October 26, 1915, contain the following:

"By the violence of the storm of August 18, (1915) the 'Navidad'... was driven on land. Fortunately, the damage was slight, and arrangements have been made ... to float the boat again. It was hoped that it would prove practical this fall to establish the work in marine biology for which the boat was given to the University, but, owing to the lack of provision for it in the legislative appropriation and the demands on the Available Fund by reason of the damage to the Medical (Branch

at Galveston) resulting from the storm, it seems advisable to postpone for a time the inauguration of the work. Under these circumstances, Mr. Brackenridge has expressed a willingness to take back the boat and keep it for his own use until such time as the University is in position to prosecute the undertaking . . . ." (There is no indication that the 'Navidad' was ever transferred to the University a second time.)

Two years later, when, on June 2, 1917, Governor Jim Ferguson vetoed the Legislature's itemized appropriations for the University's next biennium, leaving untouched only the salary of the Dean of the College of Arts and the totals at the bottom of the appropriation, both Colonel Brackenridge and Major Littlefield immediately offered to underwrite the entire expense of operating the University (then some \$700,000 per year) out of their personal resources - either separately or together. Fortunately, on June 9, 1917, Attorney General B. F. Looney rendered the opinion that the total amount of the appropriation had not been nullified by the veto of the several items so that it did not become necessary for those two great benefactors of the University to replace the State's money with their own, but there can be no doubt of their willingness to have done so had it been necessary.

That Colonel Brackenridge well knew how to donate and dedicate land for "park purposes" when he chose to do so and that he was always conscious of his great affection for and dedication to the University is clearly demonstrated in the deed by which he gave Brackenridge Park to the City of San Antonio. In an instrument dated November 20, 1899, after conveying the land to the City of San Antonio, Colonel Brackenridge provided that if the City (1) ever permitted the donated premises, or any part thereof, to be used for any other purpose or purposes than a public park, or (2) ever permitted any beer or intoxicating liquor of any kind to be sold, given away or drunk within or upon any part of the premises, or (3) ever permitted the premises, or any part thereof, to be used or occupied for any illegal purpose whatsoever, or (4) ever conveyed, alienated or encumbered same or any part of the premises, then "the title to said