

# Landmark purchase 30 years ago

by Kristine Toma

**J**uly 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of a significant event in Texas State University history – the acquisition of the San Marcos Baptist Academy property, 78.5 acres now known as West Campus.

A century ago, both Southwest Texas State Normal School and the Baptist Academy were fledgling institutions in a town that valued education. The two new schools joined the Coronal Institute, a private Methodist high school that began in 1868.

Citizens of San Marcos, in conjunction with the Texas legislature, donated the 11 acres known as Chautauqua Hill that became the normal school's original campus. The Normal opened in 1903 with a curriculum that offered three years of work to prepare young women and men to teach in Texas schools. A few years later, the citizens of San Marcos stepped up again, this time in cooperation with the Baptists of Southwest Texas. The city raised \$13,000



University President Lee Smith, left, and San Marcos Baptist Academy President Jack Byrom shake hands in front of the administration building on the 78.5-acre academy campus after the university bought the campus in 1979.

and donated 57 acres for the Baptist Academy, which opened in 1907 as a secondary school for grades 6-12. Within a decade the Coronal Institute's enrollment declined to the point where it ceased operations in 1918, but both the Normal and the Baptist Academy continued to thrive.

Individuals moved between the institutions, gradually weaving strong connections throughout their respective histories. One of the most significant connections was Thomas G. Harris, the first president (1903-1911) of Southwest Texas State Normal School, who also served on the charter Board of Trustees of the Baptist Academy. Harris was an outspoken proponent of

education and prohibition and a long-standing opponent of Texas legislator O.B. Colquitt's political views. When Colquitt became governor in 1911, he promptly removed Harris from his position at the Normal. Harris became the second president of the Baptist Academy in 1911, following the resignation of founding president J.M. Carroll.

Additional connections were formed by students who attended the academy and continued their education at the college on the hill, and by graduates of the college who then contributed to the academy. While Harris remains the only individual who presided over both institutions, three subsequent

academy presidents attended the college. Raymond M. Cavness, a 1925 graduate who also served on the college faculty from 1927 to 1930, became the third president of the academy in 1931. Robert Bruce Reed received his bachelor of science from the college in 1924 before taking the helm of the academy from 1947 to 1960. Jack Byrom did his graduate work at the college before serving as the academy's president 1965-1996. And John Garrison, who went to work at the university in 1975 and was dean of students since 1980, became the 13th president of the academy in 2008.

By the mid-1970s, both the university and the academy were strong institutions with steadily increasing enrollments and desperate needs for room to expand. Then, during a casual conversation between university president Lee H. Smith and academy president Jack Byrom, a most unusual idea occurred. While looking for solutions to benefit both institutions, the idea of selling the academy property to

The academy faced losing the historical aspects of a campus that it had occupied for the better part of a century, but in the end the practical benefit for the academy far outweighed any opposition. As quoted in a press release, Byrom reiterated that the sale provided an “unusual opportunity for us to construct an entirely new campus tailored to the programs and needs of the school as those needs are today, and as we anticipate them for the future.” The academy moved a few miles away to a 200-acre property on Ranch Road 12; they broke ground in November 1979 and held the first classes on the new campus in January 1982. New buildings were constructed and were dedicated with the same names as those on the original campus. Monuments and the Senior Gate were moved as well, and the long-standing traditions of the academy continued.

The university also benefitted greatly from the purchase of the academy property. At the time of the agreement, South-

by academy personnel to serve as their president's home, faces the former academy property and remains a stately reminder of the remarkable event that allowed for the dramatic expansion of both campuses. ★

## Changes

Some of the 18 buildings included in the purchase of the San Marcos Baptist Academy campus in 1979 continue to be used by Texas State.

The academy's Robinson Christian Center, with its 390-seat theater and 55-rank pipe organ, which was built in 1973 and was practically new at the time of the purchase, is now the University Performing Arts Center. The president of the university moved into the academy president's home, and the Glade Theatre, which was neglected for a few years, has returned to its former use as an outdoor amphitheatre.

Derrick Wolf Hall was renamed Bandera and is now Family and Consumer Sciences, soon to be expanded. Sessom Drive, once a deadend into Academy Street, now curves into that street with no stop near the Family and Consumer Sciences Building. Thomas Library was renamed Lavaca Hall and is now the Child Development Center. Crook Hall became San Saba Hall, E.K. (Elizabeth Kokernot) Hall became Bexar Hall, and both are current residence halls. Abney Hall is now Canyon Hall, housing grant programs. The Sabre was renamed the Den and is now Frio, a home for Army ROTC.

Kokernot Gym and Cavness-Reed and Latimore halls once stood on the site of the current Student Recreation Center. For a time after the purchase and before the Health Professions Building opened in 1992, Cavness-Reed and Latimore housed the College of Health Professions. Alexander Hall became Llano Hall and later part of the site for Blanco Hall for student housing. San Marcos Hall, one of the newest residence halls, sits on the site of old Carroll Hall. Talbot Hall became Medina Hall before it was replaced by athletics fields.



Old Robinson Christian Center

the university took root. After four years of discussion and negotiation, a plan was created and the sale was approved. On June 19, 1979, the agreement was signed. The university paid \$11.25 million for 78.5 acres of land and the 18 buildings that stood on the property, and the transfer would happen gradually over a three-year period to allow the academy to continue operations without interruption while it constructed a new campus.

west Texas State was the largest campus in the Texas State University System and the most crowded. The acquisition increased the main campus by nearly 50 percent – from 178.18 to 256.65 acres – providing much-needed space to accommodate the 15,924 students enrolled in the fall of 1979. Since then, the university has expanded and adapted the space to meet the needs of its own programs and student body. The university president's home, constructed