

*'Dreams and Visions,
The History of Navarro College*

By Dr. Tommy Stringer

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Preface

Dreams and Visions provides a brief account of the 50-year history of Navarro College. It is basically arranged chronologically by the administrations of the institution's four presidents. A wide variety of sources provided information and insight into the people and events that have contributed to the unique history of Navarro. Numerous interviews, both formal and informal, gave personal insights into the school's development and uncovered episodes that were not "written down" anywhere. Publications such as The Growl, El Navarro, and the Corsicana Daily Sun added more information. Numerous in-house publications, brochures, and photographs were also helpful in telling Navarro's story.

Of course, not every event in the College's fifty year history is included in this work. But a concerted effort has been made to include those episodes that have proven to be of special significance in shaping the institution. Navarro's story is a story of people, and many have been recognized by name on these pages. Others who gave of their time, talents, and resources were not named. The intention was not to slight anyone, but time and space limitations did come into play.

Dreams and Visions is intended to give the reader an understanding and appreciation of the experiences and people that made Navarro College a "first class junior college," as envisioned by its founders. It is impossible to count the number of lives that Navarro College has touched or to measure the influence it has exerted in its fifty year history, but this work is a feeble attempt to describe some of those accounts. The experience of researching and compiling this volume has given the writer a greater appreciation for Navarro College and the many people who have contributed to its success.

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Acknowledgments

A project of this nature can be completed only with the assistance and cooperation of many people. It began when Dr. Kenneth Walker asked me to produce a history of Navarro College as the institution prepared to celebrate its 40th anniversary. The information that was gathered at that time publicized the beginnings of the College and the contributions of many people who were involved in its founding and development.

Over the next decade, suggestions were made to expand the previous effort into a full book-length history of Navarro as part of the 50th anniversary celebration. Many people have contributed significantly to this final product. Former students, faculty members, administrators, members of the Board of Trustees, and community leaders granted interviews, both formal and informal, to share their recollections of the College's development at its various stages. Many shared photographs, documents, and personal memorabilia that added human interest aspects of the life of the institution. The Registrar's Office and the Business Office made available statistical data related to the growth and development of the College. McAfee Daniel not only provided information based on his long association with the College but he also edited the manuscript. Linda Timmerman provided editorial comments, and, along with Lisa Washburn, was instrumental in the lay-out process involved in "putting the book together." Jeremy Pereira supplied photographs from his "collection," and Dr. Lary Reed and Dr. Gerald Burson provided much support for the project. Funding for publication and distribution of the book came from the Navarro College Foundation.

No doubt, there are others whom I am inadvertently omitting who made various contributions to this endeavor. Although you are unnamed, you are appreciated.

Dreams and Visions
The History of Navarro College



A.A. Allison, Corsicana's postmaster and chairman of the Educational Committee of the Corsicana Chamber of Commerce, was among the first in Navarro County to recognize the important role which the junior college could play in the educational process.

Chapter 1 The Dream

Navarro County, which is located fifty miles southeast of Dallas in north central Texas, has a colorful history, dating back to the beginnings of Texas statehood. Stories of cowboys and Indians, Texas Rangers, cotton, railroads, oil, and chili are all included in the rich heritage of the region.

The first Anglo residents, who came

determination would serve the settlers well as they carved out a new life for themselves: building homes, raising crops, starting businesses, erecting churches, and establishing schools as they brought civilization to the rugged Texas frontier.

The first Texas Legislature established Navarro County in July, 1846, and named it

for Texas patriot Jose Antonio Navarro. A five-member committee laid out a townsite to serve as the seat of government for the newly created county, and at Jose Navarro's request, called it Corsicana in honor of the island of Corsica, the birthplace of his father. The town grew consistently although not spectacularly during the next decade. Like

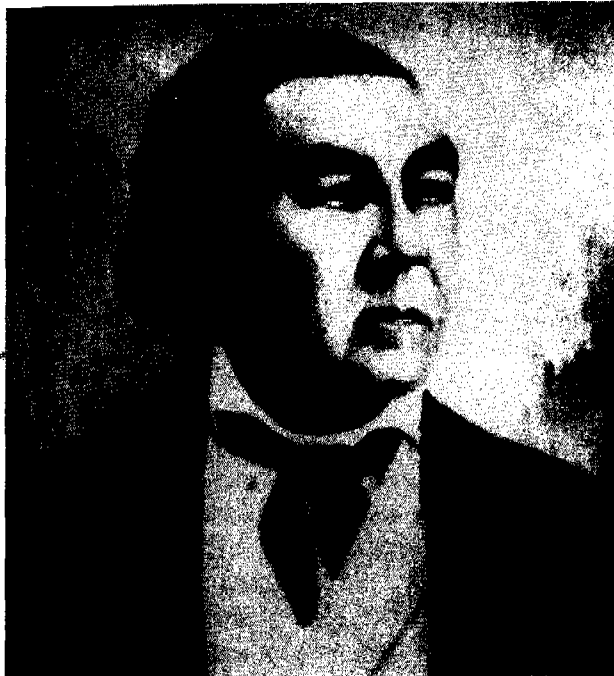


Mule-drawn street car, Beaton Street - Corsicana.

in the 1840s, were typical pioneers, having uprooted themselves to seek a better life and willing to take the risks that accompany such an endeavor. They were attracted to the area by the rich black soil, which was ideal for cotton production, and their spirit of

most communities in East and Central Texas, Corsicana enthusiastically supported secession and the Confederate cause during the Civil War, sending 450 of her sons to fight in General Lee's Rebel army. The arrival of the Houston and Texas Central

Railroad in 1871 brightened the community's future considerably by providing a dependable means of transporting people and goods into and out of the city.



Jose Antonio Navarro

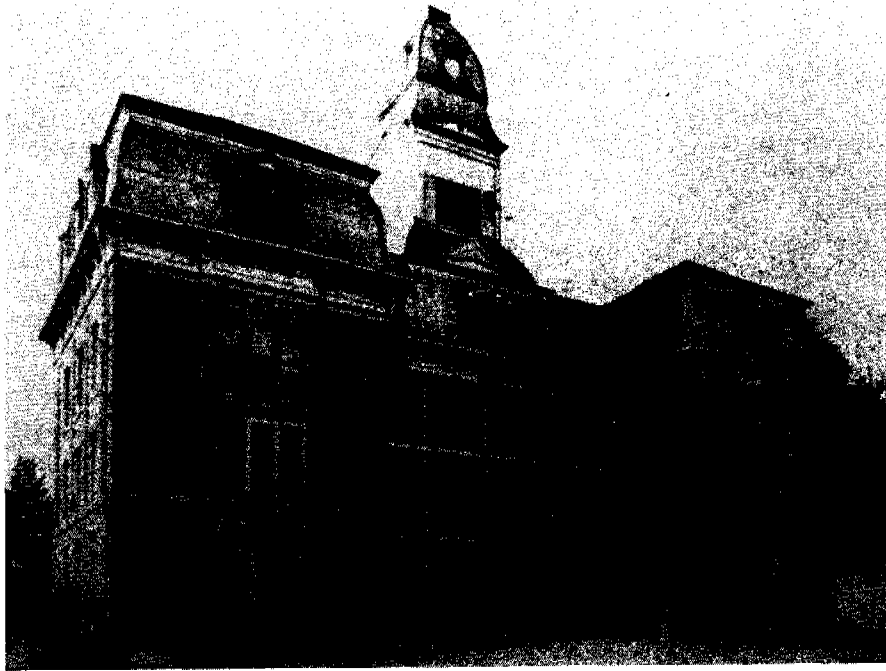
The town's direction was altered dramatically when in 1894 workers drilling a water well only blocks from Corsicana's business district struck oil. By the end of the decade, there were 500 producing oil wells within the city limits of Corsicana, yielding more than 800,000 barrels of crude per year, making Corsicana the state's first commercial oil field. Corsicana became the vanguard for production technology, marketing strategies, and diversified uses for petroleum products. Some of the industry's most dynamic and innovative leaders got their first experience in the Corsicana field.

The development of the Spindletop Field in 1901 shifted oil interest from Corsicana to the Texas Gulf Coast, but a gusher drilled on a ranch near Powell 10 miles east of Corsicana in January, 1923,

launched a new boom for Navarro County. At its peak, the Powell Field was yielding 315,000 barrels of crude per day, bringing economic prosperity and a population explosion to Navarro County. The future looked extremely bright. It was under those dynamic conditions that the dream of a "first class junior college" for Navarro County was first discussed.

The County's residents had long demonstrated an interest in improving the quality of life through expanding educational opportunities. Dozens of one-room schools had flourished throughout the County, offering fundamental instruction in the "Three R's." As transportation improved, consolidation of many of those schools occurred. By 1860 there were five good boarding schools in Navarro County, including one at Dresden, one at Chatfield, and the remaining three at Corsicana. The Corsicana Female Institute provided instruction for young women in the social graces as well as in academic subjects. Major Henry Bishop established a military school in Corsicana about the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, while Mrs. J.W. Gillick operated a private academic institution. Professor R.S. Roberts operated a female academy in Corsicana which was noted for its outstanding programs in the fine arts, chemistry, physiology, and hygiene. The Catholic Church also operated a parochial school in Corsicana in the late 19th century. The Corsicana Public School system opened in 1880, providing local students with the opportunity to receive an education without tuition cost.

The residents of Navarro County also demonstrated a longstanding interest in higher education. The 1872 records of the Navarro County Court mention a "college of higher learning" at Dresden in the western part of the County. Dresden College occupied a large, two-story building in that community. In 1869, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church established Tehuacana University just across the Navarro County line in Limestone County to train young men for



Trinity University - Tehuacana

was founded in 1899 by the Corsicana Methodist Conference. The institution's name suggested its primary focus, namely to prepare students to transfer to Southwestern University at Georgetown, the leading Methodist college in the area at that time. By 1902 U.T.S. boasted a student body of 200, but enrollment was erratic over the next several years, and financial problems were a constant source of concern for administrators.

the Presbyterian ministry and to provide a wholesome Christian environment for young people to pursue their studies. The school struggled during its tenure at Tehuacana until it moved to Waxahachie in 1902, and the trustees changed its name to Trinity. In 1942 the school moved once again, this time to San Antonio, and today it enjoys an outstanding reputation for academic excellence. The Methodist Church acquired the original Tehuacana University property and established Westminster College, which operated at that site until the 1960s.

In 1910 trustees changed the school's name to Central Texas College. The following year, a bulletin from the State Board of Education classified Central Texas College in a group of institutions "doing work



Central Texas College, - Blooming Grove

Blooming Grove, located 15 miles west of Corsicana, also boasted an institution of higher learning. Known originally as the University Training School, it

above that of a secondary school, but giving no degrees." C.T.C. described itself as a junior college, although no academic or

accreditation agency ever classified it as such. Although Central Texas College had impressive facilities and offered a wide range of academic programs and extracurricular activities, the failure of the institution was almost inevitable. Because of its location in a rural, isolated area and its high tuition cost as a private institution, there was never an adequate number of potential students available from which to recruit, and financial problems were chronic. Consequently, the institution closed its doors in 1912.

Those individuals in the 1920s who began exploring the possibility of a college for Navarro County did have a foundation on which to build. They learned from the experiences of earlier endeavors. They realized that a private school located in a rural setting like Navarro County would have serious problems in attracting sufficient numbers of students and adequate financial resources needed to operate an institution of higher learning. Consequently, the organizers determined that a two-year college rather than a four-year institution would be more likely to succeed in Navarro County, and a public institution rather than a private one would be more affordable for perspective students. Thus a first class, tax-supported junior college was the dream of civic leaders and educators.

The junior college is a recent development in the American educational system. Initially, higher education in America was available only to wealthy aristocrats and emphasized studies of the classics. Such institutions prepared young men for life as a gentleman but little else. As democracy expanded, citizens' demands for rights and privileges increased, including the access to education. Among the first to propose a separate institution for the first two years of college was Henry Tappan, president of the University of Michigan. In 1852 Tappan maintained that in such an institution students could mature and develop better study habits before enrolling in a university. William Rainy Harper, founding president of the

University of Chicago, concurred. He proposed restructuring American universities after the German model, devoted to professional training and research. A separate division patterned after the German gymnasium would address the freshman and sophomore years of study. Harper established such an arrangement at the University of Chicago in the 1890s, calling it a junior college, while the upper division, or junior and senior level, was labelled the senior college.

Similar efforts were emerging in the Midwest as academies and seminaries expanded their curricula to include college courses, and they evolved into junior colleges. The first such institutions were privately funded, primarily church-affiliated. The first public junior college opened in Joliet, Illinois, in 1900. Over the next several decades the movement grew rapidly.

Texas was in the vanguard of the junior college movement. The Methodist Church began Lon Morris College in 1854 in Kilgore before moving the school to Jacksonville. Weatherford College established in 1869 and Blinn College founded in Brenham in 1883 were both Methodist colleges before they became public institutions. In the early Twentieth Century three Baptist four-year colleges became junior colleges with the understanding that their graduates would be admitted to Baylor University classified as juniors. Public junior colleges were established in Hillsboro, San Antonio, Paris, Amarillo, El Paso, Temple, and Tyler in the 1920s. The movement was obviously growing and meeting educational needs of local communities as they struggled to provide academic opportunities for their citizens.

A.A. Allison, Corsicana's postmaster and chairman of the Educational Committee of the Corsicana Chamber of Commerce, was among the first in Navarro County to recognize the important role which the junior college could play in the educational process. He published an article entitled "Junior

Colleges," in the June, 1928, issue of Texas Outlook. Citing the rapidly increasing high school population and the already overcrowded universities, Allison saw the two-year college as the most efficient and least expensive way to provide higher education opportunities for aspiring students. Naturally, Allison was promoting the establishment of such an institution in Corsicana. Because of the recent oil boom, the County's population had escalated to 50,000 people, and Allison pointed out that Navarro was the only county that size in the state without an institution of higher learning. By Allison's calculations, 200 to 300 young people from Navarro County were "away at college" in 1928. With a local "first class junior college," he believed that many of them would have stayed near home to study. In addition, Allison maintained that many young people who could not afford to go away to college perhaps could have raised sufficient funds to attend a local two-year institution.

Allison cited other advantages of the two-year college. At the junior college, students would get more personalized attention from instructors who were trained professionals. Their primary interest would be teaching rather than research. Enrolling at a junior college would enable those students starting their college careers to adjust to higher education without having to endure the intense pressure of a large university environment. At the smaller, more personalized school, there would be the opportunity to learn better study habits and to develop the discipline needed to succeed in college. Allison concluded that there was more than an adequate source of potential students from which to recruit. With an improving highway system crisscrossing the county, young people could live at home, thus avoiding the high cost of room and board, and travel a short distance for two years of college training at a campus right at their doorstep. Allison was convinced they would do exactly that.

Apparently Allison's arguments were

convincing to other community leaders. The Corsicana Chamber of Commerce announced that its major goal for 1929 would be the establishment of such an institution in Corsicana. In a published announcement, the Chamber expressed hope that the college would be organized "within the next few months." The seeds for Navarro College had been planted, and all indications were that those seeds would germinate rapidly. Navarro County was enjoying the prosperity of the oil boom, which had swelled the local population and poured substantial amounts of money into the local economy. Everything seemed to be ideal for achieving the Chamber's goal.

External circumstances, however, prevented the dream from becoming a reality at that time. In March, 1929, Herbert Hoover was inaugurated as the nation's new Chief Executive. The United States had been riding a wave of prosperity during the 1920s, but Hoover had campaigned on a promise that the economy would get even better--"a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." In his inaugural address he announced that "we are just around the corner from the abolition of poverty in the United States."

Seven months later the economy collapsed, plunging the nation into the Great Depression and sending 25 percent of the American work force into the ranks of the unemployed. Millions of others were underemployed, working at jobs far below their capabilities, levels of training, and earning capacity. Navarro County struggled along with the rest of the country. Paul Moore, longtime employee of the Corsicana Daily Sun, related an episode that characterized the economic woes of the county as well as the entire nation. The owners of the Daily Sun called all the employees together to announce that the payroll would have to be reduced by ten percent. Workers were asked to decide if they would rather take a ten percent wage cut or reduce the staff by 10 percent. In a

unanimous vote, the employees opted for the resources simply were not available to pursue it seriously.



Air Activities of Texas, Corsicana Facility

pay cut rather than see some of their colleagues terminated.

Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated the New Deal in 1933 in an effort to pull the country out the economic disaster. Because so many Texans were in prominent power positions in Washington, the Lone Star State got a disproportionately high share of New Deal programs and funds. Corsicana's unemployed benefitted from FDR's programs. A Civilian Conservation Corps camp was located south of town near Lake Halbert, providing jobs for young men between the ages of 18 and 25. Others found work with the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Despite those job opportunities, many people in the county remained unemployed. The Collin Street Bakery provided bread to the needy, distributing it through schools. County officials opened the basement of the courthouse where transients slept on newspapers they spread on the floor. Although there was still interest in the proposed junior college, obviously financial

resources simply were not available to pursue it seriously. Priorities were being rearranged; survival was of more immediate concern to the local residents.

As the economy began to improve by the end of the 1930s, leaders thought they could revive interest in the college again. However, another external obstacle arose, namely the outbreak of World War II. Hitler's invasion of Poland in September, 1939, plunged

Europe into war, but America's initial response was to declare an official policy of neutrality. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the United States into the conflict. The sons of Navarro County responded to the call to arms. More than 3,500 Navarro Countians served in the armed forces, fighting in every theater of the war. On the homefront, the American Well and Prospecting Company converted its operations from the manufacture of oil field equipment to the production of 240 millimeter shells and 1,000 pound semi-armor piercing bombs. The plant ran around-the-clock, employing as many as 1,000 people during its peak period of production. In addition, several local businesses sponsored war bond drives to raise funds to help finance the war effort. Rationing items such as gasoline, sugar,

meat, and tires required all Americans, including the people of Navarro County, to limit their use of such commodities. Many consumer goods were simply not available at all during the war. Once again, prevailing conditions interrupted any plans for the establishment of the college, at least for the time being. Other matters were more urgent, to say the least.

When the war ended in 1945, there were two distinct directions the American economy could have taken. With the cancellation of numerous military contracts and the closing of many war-related plants and factories, the nation might well have plunged into massive unemployment not unlike conditions during the Great Depression. Some economists were predicting that as many as 10 million Americans may lose their jobs in the transition from a war-time to peace-time economy. The other possibility was runaway inflation. Because of rationing and shortages, Americans had been forced to do without many consumer goods during the war years. Because of their pent-up demands for such items, they might be willing to pay exorbitant prices for those goods. President Harry Truman was confronted with the dilemma of trying to prepare for both massive unemployment and spiraling inflation.

Those conditions actually proved to be the catalyst that was needed to make Allison's dream of a college for Navarro County a reality. (Mr. Allison died in 1943). In an effort to prepare for the demobilization of the armed forces, Congress passed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, commonly called the GI Bill. The returning veterans would find a job market already saturated with workers displaced by the cancellation of



Cadets on Parade - Air Activities of Texas

military contracts or closing of war-related plants. There simply would not be enough positions for such a large number of job seekers. The GI Bill hoped to alleviate some of the strain by providing \$13.5 billion in educational benefits for the returning servicemen. Many of those men had entered the military immediately upon graduating from high school, and consequently they had no opportunity to begin college. On the other hand, many had their college studies interrupted by the war. Still others would never have even considered going to college because they lacked the necessary funds to do so. The subsidies available under the GI Bill would provide both the incentive and the financial means for those men to begin or resume their college careers.

In addition, the federal government was abandoning various facilities that were no longer needed because of the conclusion of the war. The Air Activities of Texas was among the installations to be closed. Located six miles south of downtown Corsicana on US Highway 287, the Air Activities facility was established in 1941 as part of a government plan to train the thousands of pilots needed by the Army Air

Corps for World War II. Under a plan developed by General H.H. "Hap" Arnold, the Army contracted with private flight schools to conduct the training. The civilian-owned flight schools provided everything except the pilot trainees and the airplanes. A partnership composed of B.L. Woolley, B.W. Woolley, E.D. "Dick" Criddle, Edward "Doc" Booth, and J.O. Womack received a contract to operate such a facility in Navarro County. Under the terms of the contract, the Air Activities of Texas would provide food, housing, and civilian ground and flight instructors, and the Army Air Corps would provide planes, cadets, and appropriate military personnel as part of the training process. The Federal Government paid the school on a per hour basis. The school, which was designated as a primary flight school, was the second leg of a three level training procedure. Upon completion of their schooling at such facilities as the Air Activities, cadets were then sent to basic training where they learned to fly planes more sophisticated than the PT's they were operating at primary schools.

Air Activities was located on a 400-acre tract owned by Corsicana banker, J.N. Edens. A large part of the acreage had been an oil tank farm, which required the leveling and removal of those tanks before construction of the pilot training school campus could get underway. Construction included a parking strip 2,000 feet long and 225 feet wide, several hangars, barracks, office facilities, maintenance buildings, and a mess hall-kitchen. By March 18, 1941, six buildings were completed, and the first class of 51 cadets arrived the following day to begin their training.

The ten weeks of training involved 60 hours of flight instruction and 140 hours of ground school in the theory of flight, airplane engines, maps and navigation, meteorology, and mathematics. There was also a rigorous physical training program which included calisthenics performed to music, a forerunner of jazzercise. The civilian instructors who taught in the ground school usually had a

background in public education, including C.G. Strickland and Margaret Pannill, both of whom would later play prominent roles in the founding and early development of Navarro Junior College.

Miss Pannill recalled being approached by Air Activities officials with an offer to teach in the ground school. Naturally, she was somewhat surprised at the request. After all, her background was in music and literature. Her assignment at the air field would be to teach the cadets meteorology, airplane identification, and navigation, fields which she readily admitted she knew little about. When she raised questions about her qualifications to teach such subjects, she was told the main concern was her teaching ability. "They asked me if I thought I could teach. I told them I knew I could teach. They then told me they would provide the information and teach me what I needed to know." She accepted the challenge, but she admitted that she prepared diligently every night for the next day's lessons, just barely staying one step ahead of her students. She would demonstrate that same level of commitment and talent later as one of the original faculty members at Navarro Junior College.

During its three and a half years of operation, more than 8,000 cadets received primary flight training at the Corsicana field before they moved on to more advanced instruction. Pilots from the Corsicana field flew combat missions in every theater of the war. But as the Allies gained the upper hand in the long and bloody conflict, the need for such facilities declined. The Corsicana Field was ordered closed in October, 1944.

The facility made significant contributions to the Allied victory, and it had an enormous economic impact on the County by providing as many as 500 civilian jobs and the purchase of supplies and materials used to operate the Field. But the Air Activities of Texas had yet another important role to play in the community's history.