LIFE IN THE G I ERA

During the G I Era as in others, the Brand and the Bronco reflected with a measure of accuracy and fulness of life on the Forty Acres. Brand editing became largely a woman's responsibility. Between 1943 and 1953 there were editors Marie Johnson, Jan Dickerson, Floy Johnson, Dorothy Kincaid, Chere Livingston, Joan Crawford, and Bettie Todd, with only Gene Eppler and Wayland Yates sandwiched in to represent the men. The paper was good and sometimes excellent. The Associated Collegiate Press gave Joan Crawford's Brand an award for the fall of 1951; and I think every editor might well have been given some recognition, if there had been a contest. Before the war, Herschel Schooley, an experienced and talented journalist, supervised these publications, and his brothers, Clark and Eugene, succeeded him and continued the high standards he had set. Homer Hutto gave substantial assistance also.

Lest we should not find it expedient to take up the subject later on, a few additional words about the Brand in later years must be included. As the campus news medium it has continued as a most useful agent, both by way of recording events and shaping campus thinking. In 1967 Sherwyn McNair was brought back to the campus as head of the Department of Journalism and Director of Public Relations and Information. The Brand was made a semi-weekly sheet; and McNair has brought to bear on it his knowledge and rich experience. From time to time it has received recognition from exacting sources: the Southwestern Journalism Congress gave special recognition to Brand columnists Kelly Autry and Collette de Frey, and several of Editor Doug Bridwell's editorials were printed in The Abilene Reporter News.
For a period the Corral appeared as an issue of the Brand. In recent years the journal has given less space to writings and more to art. The issue for the fall of 1974 lists Krista Swilling as literary editor, followed by Lawrence Clayton, literary sponsor, and Debra Brown, Jo Beth Vigil, Ira Taylor as art sponsor, and Paul Brunson associated with various features. Besides several short stories there are pictures and a hymn.

The Range Rider, edited by Kenneth Hill, gives ex-students a good insight into campus life.

The Broncos of the era varied in format but were basically the same, seemingly what the students wanted. The Bronco staff of 1951 was headed by Robert and Richard O'Brien, known to their fellow students as the O'Brien twins, destined to become well known Houston doctors. The book was "dedicated to Pauline Mayes Richardson and Rupert N. Richardson," with words as follows:

No other two people have identified themselves more completely with Hardin-Simmons University during the years than have these two.

We the students of this generation who have seen their capable leadership through the lean years of war and the perilous pangs of extensive growth, know that no one has contributed more to the present and the future of our beloved school.

Mrs. Richardson and I were very grateful for this generous appraisal of our accomplishments.

The Bronco has continued to be of high quality. That of 1966, edited by Frances Darden was awarded A rating by the National School Yearbook Association; Jack Townley's book of 1967 won the same honors and Broncos since that time have been awarded honors.
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Bigger and livelier, if not better, would be a fair description of student activities during the GI years. The Cowgirl Band had never been discontinued, and under the leadership of Bryce Jordan, Dale Schoonover, and later, Marion McClure it frequently took part in between halves pageantry, played at various functions, and made one or more tours a year. In the middle 1950’s it was discontinued as a separate organization, but a number of women musicians united with the Cowboy Band to give impressive concerts from time to time. The Cowboy Band continued with a program much like that of other years. With Sheriff Watson, the women riders and the white horses; such rope artists as Johnnie Regan, Lloyd Mitchell and Don Rogers; and with twirlers like Norma Kniffen, the band continued to receive calls for performances far beyond its ability to meet within the restricted time allowed away from the campus each semester. It took part in Governor Beauford Jester’s two inaugurations and the inauguration of President Truman; it played and paraded at the Veterans of Foreign War national convention at Chicago; it flew to Los Angeles for the game with Loyola; and it toured army posts overseas on a 19,000-mile excursion under the auspices of United Service Organizations.

It is with special affection that I recall a men’s quartette that traveled with me near the middle of the century: Bob Smith, Jimmy Loden, Maurice Alfred, and Charles Downey. And these names call to mind other student entertainers of other years who were so accommodating and faithful: Gene Estes, Jodene Propst, Etawanda Riddle, Mary Frances Moore, Daisy Mae and Tyler Cagle, and a dozen others.

The Cowgirls carried on in traditional style, adding a pleasing touch to half-time shows and serving generally in many other ways. In keeping with the feminine urge for style, they changed uniforms from time to time but the Cowgirl features remained.
Feeling that it was unfair to leave the promoting of college spirit entirely to the women, Don McClure, Bob Moore, and Bob Moates, and a band of associates organized the Rangers in the fall of 1950. This group made a special effort to arouse more enthusiasm among students and a more wholesome attitude toward the university. A little later, Circle K, a college service group sponsored by Kiwanis International, established an organization on the campus.

A new sport became fixed in the college calendar in 1947: intercollegiate rodeo. In an earlier chapter it has been brought out that shortly after World War I, a rodeo, at least bronco riding, was held on the campus for the benefit of a band of newspaper correspondents who were visiting Abilene. This show was a passing thing, however. In 1947, when he discovered that a number of men and a few women were interested in the sport, Business Manager Bill Ledbetter initiated an intercollegiate rodeo, which was held at Abilene's Fair Park. The first contest drew enough interest to warrant a second, and in 1948 seventy-five students from thirteen colleges took part. Rodeo tickets were provided without charge to 1,500 high school seniors and their companions, and the performance thus became a university attraction. The Sul Ross team, from the land of ranches, won the contest. In 1949 the rodeo was reinforced by Frontier Fracas week, during which "Sheriff" Slim Willett and his deputies made nuisances of themselves. In 1950 a rodeo arena and stands were erected at the Grape Street campus. The field was named in memory of Carl Myers, the popular student president of the Hardin-Simmons Rodeo Association who had been accidentally killed some months before. The rodeo, with its whiskers and jamboree, conforms with the Hardin-Simmons tradition and seems to have come to stay. The association of 1949 had fifty-four members, nearly half of them women.
Euell Porter, who joined the faculty of music in 1947, proved to be highly gifted in directing choruses. His acappella choir came to be greatly in demand by Baptist state and southwide meetings as well as by the general public. Greek letter fraternities multiplied during these years. Alpha Chi is the general scholarship fraternity that had its beginning in 1925 as the Scholarship Society of Texas. Beta Mu Kappa stood for better music; Alpha Psi Omega was a select group of players; Pi Kappa Delta was a speakers organization; Sigma Delta Pi, brought together a modern language select group. Pi Gamma Mu, a social science honor group was established on the campus during the 1930's, expired or became dormant for several years, and was revived after World War II.

In addition to those named, there was a veritable tangle of student organizations that cannot be comprehended in any description. Besides the Bronco and Brand staff there was the Press Club including a large number of people. The choral and quartette groups had their organizations. The BSU Council, the YWA officers, the Life Service Band of more than 180 persons, the Ministerial Council, aggregating nearly 250, represented the interests of religion on the campus. Several departments had clubs — the Art League, Los Rancheros, Business Administration, Future Teachers, Physical Education, and Home Economics. The Colts Club was established by Kenneth Hill to bring together the sons and daughters of ex-students. Regional clubs, such as Dallas, Cowtown, Sweetwater, and Odessa were varying factors. The Bronco of 1948 had pictures of nearly fifty different student groups, other than classes, most of which had organizations.

Beyond a doubt the multiplying of organizations and the efforts put into them had a deleterious effect on class groups. Officers found it more and more difficult to get a representative gathering at any class meeting. For some of us this situation did not represent all loss. There was compensation in the fact
that the campus was not thrown into wild and riotous excitement from time to time by the kidnaping of junior and senior presidents, or some organized attack on a class reception. One rarely saw even a freshman flag. Once there was a bit of effort to work up some excitement by hoisting on the university flagpole a flag of the Confederate States of America, with a banner under it reading "The South Shall Rise Again." (This was a fad that ran through the entire Southland. Strangely it preceded rather than followed the great integration crusade). When a newspaper reporter, hoping to find something for a story, inquired of me what we proposed to do about it, I was credited with saying that we would have it taken down when we could get around to it, that I had seen on the Simmons flagpole things worse than the Stars and Bars.

The plethora of organizations and the consequent difficulty of keeping them going brought an editorial in the Brand in 1949 proposing that before any new student organization could come into existence its proponents be able to make a positive answer to the question, "Is this club necessary?" The University maintained the regulation that any new organization of students must have the approval of the dean of students before it was established; but almost any group with a purpose not contrary to the aims and ideals of the institution could get approval. In a free academic society such as we sought to maintain it was not our responsibility to keep down the birth rate of student clubs; we had too many other things more pressing to do. Records indicate that many of the students did not take the organizations seriously. A poll showed that one-third of them did not belong to any organization, that forty percent of the non-participating people were freshmen and twenty-four percent were seniors. With all due appreciation of the benefits of student volunteer activity, it did not disturb some of us to learn that one-third of our students were satisfied just to go to school and work at their courses. This seemed quite
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sensible in view of the fact that so many of them were working to make a living. Some students, however, thought this situation lamentable.

With chapel held five times a week, that gathering continued to be the nerve center of the university and the clearing house for information. There was generally a religious song, a prayer, and a scripture reading; but the majority of the programs were of the assembly type. In keeping with the practice of earlier years, I generally presided, but when I was not on the campus Vice President Walton took the responsibility and performed better than I. Walton relates an incident that I had forgotten. (It may be more important for a college president to forget than to remember). Once when I was presiding at chapel a student in the front row of the balcony persisted in dropping wads of paper (or something worse) on those below. I looked toward him, paused a moment, and said somewhat casually: "A young man in the front row of the balcony is dropping paper on those below. I am sure that this is not helping him as much as it is hurting me, and I wish he would quit it." Everybody had a laugh and we had no more annoyance — that day.

Chapel continued to be a favorite target for the barbs of student reformers. One writer complained that in parts of the building one could not hear. Another wrote that chapel was dull and suggested that more student talent be used. This contributor to the Brand complained at the conduct of students in chapel, and another wrote that the conduct of the faculty was worse. Not all comments were negative, however. From time to time words of approval were spoken or written. Occasionally paid lecturers addressed chapel. I think especially of the messages of Dr. Willis Sutton, former superintendent of schools of Atlanta. His humor, idealism and philosophy made a strong appeal to students. They would listen to him intently for an hour. One anecdote about chapel in that era is told by Fess Parker, a freshman at that time. As chapel was about to start,
Dan Blocker, later also widely known through his television performance as "Hoss," in "Bonanza," rose from his seat and said in a loud voice, "It's off! It's off!" There had been some reference to a freshman picnic, and several freshmen inquired, "What's off?" "Dr. Richardson's hair," said Blocker.

Chapel continued to be, as it had been through the years, the place where basic institutional purposes were given most emphasis, where institutional morale was strengthened, where unity was stimulated, and where there was provided a common experience for all students to remember.

During this period the traditional college "meeting," or revival became religious emphasis week. In 1946, Harry D. Stagg, state Baptist Secretary of New Mexico, did most of the preaching. It was reported that there were about 400 decisions made during that period in a student body of about a thousand. In 1947, Dr. James H. Landes, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, did the preaching, and W. F. Howard, Joe M. Boyd, and Miss Eunice Parker led seminars. Alumnus Fred Swank brought most of the messages during the focus week of 1951.

In 1947 the Hardin-Simmons Bible Conference, which had been discontinued just thirty years before, was revived under the direction of the Bible department. Attendance was good, interest was encouraging, and a second conference was held in 1948. That gathering also was well attended, but there was lack of unanimity as to the need for the conference and it was not held thereafter.

The Cowboy Band, some members of the faculty, and Mr. and Mrs. Guy Caldwell worked with Evangelist Billy Graham on the campus and at the Caldwell ranch in the production of a motion picture carrying a gospel message. In reciprocation, Dr. Graham spent a day on the campus in March, 1951, and
brought an evangelical message to what was probably the largest crowd that ever gathered in Rose Field House.

The four religious groups of power on the campus were the Baptist Student Union Council, the Life Service Band, the Young Women's Auxiliary, and the Ministerial Council. In January 1950, preachers in the student body numbered 249. Some fifty churches in the region were being pastored by students. In addition to the preachers, there were numbers of men and women preparing for religious education, religious music, and missions. Student groups raised funds for moving a Camp Barkeley building to the site of Blanche Lange Hall and putting it in condition for use by campus religious gatherings.

Although the percentage of non-Baptists was higher during the GI era, Baptists were always in the majority by substantial numbers. In 1950, after the enrollment of veterans had declined to some 300, there were 1,203 Baptist out of a student body of about 1,600. All told sixteen denominations were represented in the student body.

Like all college presidents, I was called upon to do a great deal of speaking. Indeed, a college president is supposed to be able to speak on just about any subject at any time; and too often he attempts it, when it would be better for all concerned if he declined the invitation. Church groups, service organizations, ladies clubs, school assemblies, and various other units call upon him and he generally feels impelled to accept the invitation. One such invitation came to me that represented both an opportunity for service and a high experience that I recall with great satisfaction. This was the request that I bring the day messages to the Baptist encampment at Kekehahi, a few miles out from Honolulu. Pastor Jesse Northcutt of the First Baptist Church, Abilene, brought the evening messages. In addition to the inspiration of working with the zealous young Christians and their leaders, I had the high experience of fellowship with my pastor and his family. We had the
privilege also of spending several days in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Lindell O. Harris, who were at that time missionaries in Honolulu. Then followed a trip to the big island of Hawaii, where the W. E. Haltoms, missionaries in Hilo, took us to see the volcanoes and magnificent mountains. On our return we spent a day and night with the E. J. Tharps, missionaries on the island of Maui. Dr. Tharp took us to Mauna Haleakala, the extinct volcano, ten thousand feet high, worth traveling around the world to see. On Kauai, that verdant island of eternal spring, Dr. Carter Morgan and wife broke their busy missionary routine for a day and a half and showed us the wonders of the island.

Just after the middle of the century, after the great G I inrush had ceased, the requirement of military training for men was introduced. For several years we had sought a reserve officers training unit. We had lost hope, however, and even had lost interest. Then out of the Pentagon one day came a call to me inquiring if we still wanted a military training unit. I replied that, since the matter had not been mentioned for a year or two, I should like time to inquire of the executive committee of the trustees. This time was allowed somewhat grudgingly; the number of new units to be allotted was rigidly fixed and half a dozen schools were clamoring for each. The executive committee decided promptly and we took an army unit, an establishment providing for general training. The terms of acceptance were that all male students (with a few exceptions) under twenty-one and single take the training for two years. Qualified men who wished to do so might continue for two more years and on graduation receive a commission. There were some complaints, but on the whole the program has worked out well. The officers of the training command have uniformly been cooperative and have made worthy contributions to university life. The program began in September 1952. Our securing the unit over institutions whose claims were probably as good as our may be credited in a large measure to
the influence of two loyal alumni, Doctors Ira and Steve Marshall, of Roswell, New Mexico, who put in a word for Hardin-Simmons with the right people at the right time.

By 1950 enrollment in education was approximately equal to that in business. Once again young people were coming to realize the opportunity for service in teaching. Interest in teaching was sharpened greatly by the state Gilmer-Aiken laws of 1949, requiring of all public schools certain minimum standards and providing that state finances would undergird local efforts by guaranteeing certain minimum salary standards. The effect of the laws was to raise teachers' salaries everywhere. It stimulated greatly graduate enrollment in the colleges by providing a substantially higher scale of pay for persons with Master's degrees.

The impact of the teachers program added to that of the veterans produced large graduating classes. There would be two hundred or more in the June graduating group and nearly as many more in August. In 1950, 587 candidates were graduated all told, nearly ten percent of them receiving Master's degrees. That was the summer when the exercises for August were held at the stadium. Mosquitoes swarmed, hungry and fierce; so even after we had begun the program, we felt impelled to have the city fogging machine lay a cloud of insect-killing vapor over the entire stadium. Some of the audience believed that the treatment was worse on the people than on the mosquitoes. At best, it only slightly helped alleviate the pests.

In 1950, for the fourth time in its history, the university had to reckon with war; the nation was involved in the Korean conflict. A page in the Bronco of 1950 was dedicated to Walton Henry, one of the first Hardin-Simmons men to enlist in the emergency. He participated in the taking of South Korea, was wounded, and returned home for medical treatment. About one
hundred and fifty men were listed on the university Korean service roll. There followed a new crop of G I's relatively small but a number sufficient to stimulate enrollment slightly for a year or two. The experiences of one trio of student friends may be taken as typical — that of Gene Frazier, James Mickler, and Gene Rushing, who left the university together, joined the Marines together, and stayed together in boot camp. There they were separated: Frazier spent four months on the front lines in Korea, and was discharged with a wound in May 1952; Mickler served aboard an aircraft carrier in Korean waters until he was discharged in May 1952; Rushing, whose military career was not related in the Brand, was discharged at the end of 1951. The three men were back in school again in September 1952. Veterans of the Vietnam contest will be given notice later.