

1862–1885

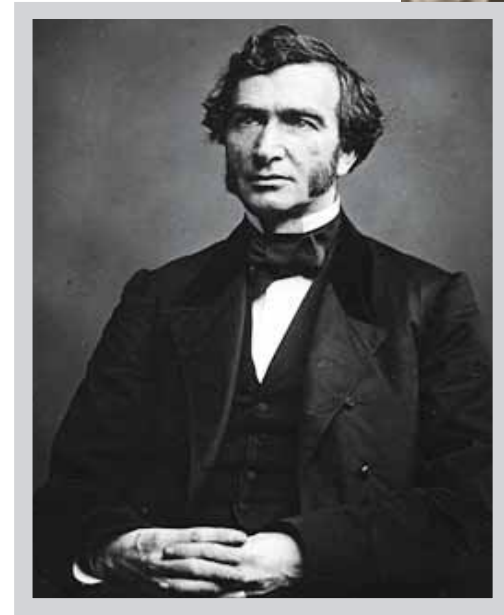
The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas: Sowing the Seeds

In the early 1800s, the United States was largely a frontier nation, even though there was industrial growth during and after the War of 1812. Americans were poorly educated in science and mathematics, since educational traditions were still based on classical studies, following the British model. Workers for the factories that sprang up during the war had to come from abroad, as did engineers to build mines, canals, and railroads. Americans were superstitious and skeptical when it came to technological advancements such as steamboats, the telegraph cable, rail travel, and even street lighting. Agriculture was in decline in the settled regions.

Between 1820 and 1870, however, industry was reorganized in the United States, and there was a growing need for education that was scientific and practical, to meet the demands of an expansive new nation trying to redefine itself. Through the work of proponents such as professor and orator Jonathan Baldwin Turner and Vermont Representative Justin Smith Morrill, and later with the support of President Abraham Lincoln, the movement to educate Americans who could build and support a great nation took hold.

In his national campaign for educational reform, Turner told the Illinois Industrial League during its 1851 convention in Chicago: “Education should be practical, as well as academic, and it should not be the monopoly of the privileged few, but rather the right of everyone who has the desire and the ability to learn.”

In 1852, the Farmers Convention of the State of Illinois issued three resolutions endorsing the Illinois Industrial University. The resolutions called for the same privileges



Rep. Justin Smith Morrill, author of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act



1862



July 2, 1862

President Abraham Lincoln signs into law the Morrill Land-Grant College Act, providing for the establishment of at least one college per state to teach agriculture and the mechanical arts, as well as military tactics and scientific and classical studies, to the working classes. These colleges became known as the 1860s colleges or universities.



The Texas legislature accepts the obligation to provide for the A&M College of Texas by July 23, 1871, in accordance with the Morrill Land-Grant College Act. It will be the first public institution of higher education in Texas.

November 1866



The A&M Board of Directors hires Thomas S. Gathright (below) as first president of the college and appoints the first faculty. Carlisle P. B. Martin, a Presbyterian minister and part-time farmer, is appointed professor of agriculture and science. When Martin left the college in 1880, agriculture courses were suspended for the year.

1876



1873–75

First buildings on the A&M campus, the Main Building and Gathright Hall, are constructed. The four-story Main Building is for instruction; Gathright Hall provides student housing and a mess hall.



August 14, 1876

The Texas legislature establishes a branch of the A&M College of Texas at Prairie View, in Waller County, for African American students. This first A&M branch marks the beginning of what would later become The Texas A&M University System.

“This bill proposes to establish at least one college in every State upon a sure and perpetual foundation, accessible to all, but especially to the sons of toil, where all of needful science for the practical avocations of life shall be taught, where neither the higher graces of classical studies nor that military drill our country now so greatly appreciates will be entirely ignored, and where agriculture, the foundation of all present and future prosperity, may look for troops of earnest friends, studying its familiar and recondite economies, and at last elevating it to that higher level where it may fearlessly invoke comparison with the most advanced standards of the world.”

— Justin Smith Morrill, U.S. Representative and Senator, author of the 1862 Morrill Land-Grant College Act

and advantages for the working man — the farmers, artisans, mechanics, and merchants — as those enjoyed by people in the professions. And they called for educational institutions to train them. That same year, at the request of Illinois Representative Richard Yates, Turner prepared a bill on industrial universities to present to the U.S. legislature. When Yates was not reelected, Turner approached another senator about introducing the bill, but he was reluctant. In 1857, Representative Morrill took up the cause. He presented a land-grant college bill twice before it passed the House of Representatives, but it failed in the Senate. It finally passed both the House and the Senate in 1859 but was vetoed by President James Buchanan. When at last signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant College Act granted public lands to the states for building colleges that would provide instruction in “agriculture and the mechanic arts,” military tactics, science, and classical studies to the working-class people of the United States — in an era when fewer than 2 percent of the U.S. population continued formal education beyond the 12th grade.

The Texas legislature organized the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1871, and the A&M College opened its doors to students on October 2, 1876. The new college fulfilled one of the aspirations of the Republic of Texas: to establish two colleges or universities. The establishment of the A&M College of Texas also reflected the goals of the Texas State Agricultural Society, which in 1853 sought “the establishment of an Agricultural College and model farm for the State ... where the important business principles of Agriculture shall be scientifically taught and practically illustrated.”

The state legislature created a board of directors for the college, which initiated a search for a president and secured Thomas S. Gathright for

Texas A&M begins enrolling students.

Classes begin on October 6, with a total of six students enrolled, a number that grows to 106 by the end of the first year. The college is an all-male school with compulsory enrollment in the Corps of Cadets. In the Agricultural and Scientific Course, students can study chemistry, farm tillage, horticulture, arboriculture, and the care of livestock.

October 2, 1876



Charles C. Gorgeson is appointed professor of agriculture; he is the first trained agricultural specialist to hold the position. He helps to form the college’s first beef herd and expands acreage in cultivation on the college farm.

1881



Fall Term, 1877

Texas A&M directors establish a 30-acre experimental farm and designate an additional 20 acres for a teaching and demonstration farm.





the job. Additional faculty members were recruited to head the seven instructional departments — including Professor Carlisle P. B. Martin as head of the Agricultural and Scientific Course, with Hamilton P. Bee named as college steward and superintendent of the farm. The land-grant college was a new experiment in higher education. Instruction in agriculture and the life sciences proved to be a learning experience for students, faculty, and administrators because, unlike in the classical studies, there was no fixed body of knowledge. In its first decade, the A&M College, along with the state of Texas, experienced great changes, from frontier conditions to progressive improvements. The college became a key facilitator of and catalyst for those changes.

By 1885, there were 85 land-grant colleges in the United States, and as they charted their way through unknown educational territory, they developed a new spirit in higher education — the spirit of pioneering and initiative, helpfulness and service, growth and progress, and equal educational opportunity for all.

“This legislature had scarcely met when we heard words of ridicule addressed against the A. and M. College, and derisive sneers at its efforts, and suggestions that it be abandoned as an educational institution and be converted into an asylum. . . . There were those amongst us who believed it was an institution that should receive the first care of the state . . . that the class of our youth that the A. and M. College proposed to cultivate . . . would, when leaving that institution, be worth as much for her prosperity as urbane scholars versed in the languages of Greece and Rome, or proficient in the soft tongues of Spain and Italy, the brilliant language of France, or the stately manliness of the language of my fatherland.”

— George Pfeuffer, Texas senator and member of the Board of Directors of the A&M College
(excerpt from his address to the Texas Senate on March 31, 1885)



September 15, 1883

George Washington Curtis joins the A&M faculty as professor of agriculture, at age 22. He modernizes the curriculum and solidifies the department. Instrumental in the development of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, he served as its director from 1890 to 1893.

The University of Texas opens in Austin. Over time, the rivalry between the advocates of UT and those of the A&M College (over entitlement to proceeds from the state-provided Permanent University Fund) becomes constructive. The two universities will form an educational partnership that expands the perimeters of higher education in Texas and the quality of life throughout the state and nation.

1883



1885–1886

The Texas cattle industry suffers from severe winters, protracted droughts, fencing wars, and Texas tick fever. The open-range cattle industry, characterized by the Texas cattle trails to railheads in the north, nears its end.

