

Preface

Since 1947, generations of inspired faculty, eager students, dedicated alumni and community leaders have dreamed, given, worked and searched for the development of a first-class higher educational institution on our island, one capable of serving the growing needs of the Coastal Bend and South Texas. From rustic beginnings in leftover World War II wooden barracks and classroom buildings, our dream was born and has flourished.

During the days of the University of Corpus Christi, when I was a student here, our athletic teams crossed the country on a rickety bus that was guaranteed to break down at least once on each trip. Food in the dining hall was . . . well, bad. With little public transportation and limited to an island miles away from the city's downtown bustle, we were compelled to find ways to entertain ourselves. We drew close and were a family, and like all families we quarreled and fought and loved one another. But our academics were great, and we always shared the dream.

Weathering hurricanes and financial setbacks and enduring the slow pace of cultivating community support and confidence, with time and the benefit of a major university system's resources, that dream has become a reality.

And I was one of the lucky ones, because I was here—first as a student, later as an administrator, still later at a critical turning point as a lawmaker and alumni officer, and much, much later as a visiting faculty member.

From the scruffy rooms of windy old King Hall athletic dorm, where during the winter we sometimes scraped ice off of the insides of our windows to see out, and where gas pressure was sometimes so low we sat on our heaters to keep warm, to the modern glass, steel and stone edifices of the Harte Research Institute and the Performing Arts Center, I was here. And, with so many others, I'm still here and still pursuing the dream.

In earlier days we dreamed of what now has come to pass. Now we dream of things yet to come. The history of our "Island University," its struggle, and its growing service to our state and nation is a wonderful adventure; it is a continuing adventure, and this is only the beginning.

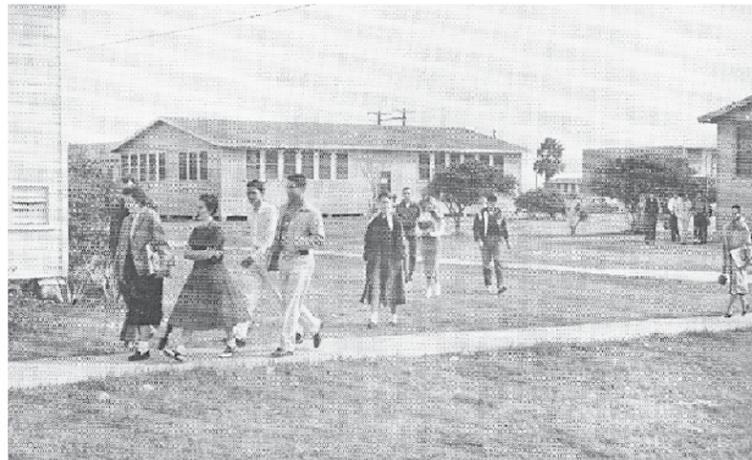
*Bob Gammage
Class of 1963*



Introduction

For sixty years, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (and its predecessors) has been a beacon of learning in the South Texas Coastal Bend. The institution has had five different names over six decades of existence, including Arts and Technological College, University of Corpus Christi, Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi State University, and today's Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Each name reflects a different stage of its continuing development. Yet, each era has been characterized by excellence, engagement, and expansion, qualities that are carrying forward into the future. As University President Flavius C. Killebrew has pointed out, these three words are "at the very core of the vision that is unfolding at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi."

This 60th anniversary of its founding is a time for savoring the rich mixture of change and continuity that has also been the hallmark of "The Island University." It is an educational institution that has come to mean much to its region and the people it has influenced. Thousands of students have passed through its doors, taken classes, earned degrees, and moved forward to meet the challenges of life, armed with the knowledge and skills which they have mastered while here. Over the years, thousands of people have worked at the institution as faculty, staff, and administrators, and they have in their own way been enriched by the experience. The larger Corpus Christi and



Over the last 60 years, the University has grown from a small private Baptist college with 312 students located on a former U.S. Navy training facility situated on Ward Island to a major institution of higher learning with a student population of more than 8,600 students.



South Texas community of which the University is a part has not only contributed to it but has benefited as well. These benefits have been enormous, providing learning, opportunity, and prosperity, enhancing the quality of life for everyone. In order to savor what this school has meant and hopefully will come to mean, this commemorative volume will help the reader to consider its past, appreciate its present, and embrace its future.

In many ways a post-World War II phenomenon, this university officially began on April 1, 1947, when it was chartered as Arts and Technological College (ATC) by the Baptist General Convention of Texas at the behest of local Baptists in Beeville, a South Texas community of around 9,000 people. The keenest student of the University's formative years, Carl R. Wrotenbery, notes that the Beeville residents hoped to use the recently vacated Chase Field, a nearby, wartime naval air base, as

the campus of a private four-year Baptist college. In late 1946, even before the charter was officially obtained, the institution's first board of trustees leased the air base. In early February 1947, the board gave the school its official name and elected E.S. Hutcherson, as the college's first president. Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Houston, President Hutcherson and his early staff were to ready the surplus facilities for the beginning of classes.

Regardless of all that was accomplished, no classes were ever held at Chase Field. Before the fall semester commenced, school officials concluded that financial support proved inadequate for launching the college in Beeville. In July 1947, ATC decided to accept a generous offer from Corpus Christi to relocate to that much larger city which at the time had a population of more than 108,000.

ATC found its first and temporary location in Corpus Christi at Cuddihy Field, another surplus naval air base on the city's southwest outskirts. When classes began in September in a number of the facility's vacant buildings, the school boasted 312 students and 24 faculty members. That fall, the college changed its name to the University of Corpus Christi (UCC), much to the delight of the student body. The faculty and students also chose the "Tarpon" as its team name. The institution conducted classes at Cuddihy Field for only one semester because a permanent home, its third and final move, was found across town on Ward Island, the site which would eventually give the school its moniker, "The Island University."

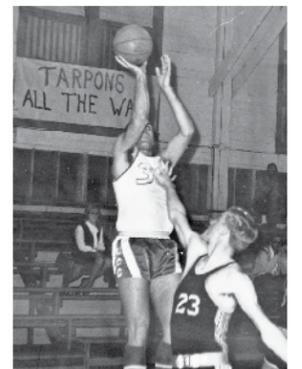
Originally named for its owner Joseph C. Ward who had acquired the property in 1892, the island comprised around 240 acres and was located approximately 10 miles

south of downtown between Corpus Christi Bay and the Cayo del Oso, a shallow, broad estuary of Oso Creek. It had been utilized by the United States Navy as a top secret radar training facility during World War II. The training station was closed in September 1947, and the island was immediately made available as a permanent site for the school. By late November, the University had leased the property for a dollar a year, complete with the surplus buildings. UCC would later gain full title to the property.

Over the Christmas holidays in 1947, UCC moved from Cuddihy Field to Ward Island where fall classes resumed on January 5, 1948. Classes for the spring semester, the first full semester held on Ward Island, began February 2, 1948. Dr. Hutcherson carried forward as president.



The University of Corpus Christi was affiliated with the Baptist General Convention from its inception in 1947 until 1971 when the Texas Legislature authorized the Texas A&I University System to create a state-supported upper-level institution of higher education with an expanded curriculum in Corpus Christi.



During their leisure hours, students have always enjoyed the waters of Corpus Christi Bay as well as on-campus activities such as socials, Greek competitions or Islander sporting events.

From that time on, the fledgling University of Corpus Christi established a small but viable campus community with all the elements of university life. With a permanent home, UCC had a student body of 556 for the 1949-1950 academic year. It utilized the wooden buildings that formerly served the naval training center. The first commencement exercises were held in May 1949, with 29 graduates. Although the number of students fluctuated over the years, its high point came in 1967 with an enrollment of 996.

Student life included an array of clubs and organizations to enhance the learning experience. The students

were served by a campus newspaper which over the years chronicled life at the school. UCC established and maintained an active athletic program which included football, basketball, baseball, tennis, track, boxing, and other sports which competed with schools around the state. The first permanent building at UCC was a women's dormitory which broke ground in 1956. Other structures followed, including the circular library building, known as the "round building" which was dedicated in May 1963. In many ways, the round building remained the most distinctive and historic structure on campus.



Thousands of books were ruined when Hurricane Celia came ashore in 1970 with winds of more than 130 miles per hour, severely damaging the campus and causing more than \$1 million in damage.

Leadership of UCC also evolved over the years. After President Hutcherson left in 1948, the school had five more permanent presidents, including Raymond M. Cavness, W.A. Miller, Joseph C. Clapp, Leonard Halloway and Kenneth A. Maroney, all of whom worked mightily to keep the institution operating. As can be imagined, the problem of finances plagued the institution from its inception, although many members of the larger Corpus Christi community distinguished themselves for raising funds in a number of ways. To recruit students, UCC locally advertised itself in 1952 as “The University by the Sea.” In 1964, the institution ran ads in newspapers as far away as New York City that it was “intriguingly located on an island,” again identifying the university by its distinctive setting.

Exposed to the coastline, however, the school fell victim to several hurricanes over the years. The worst

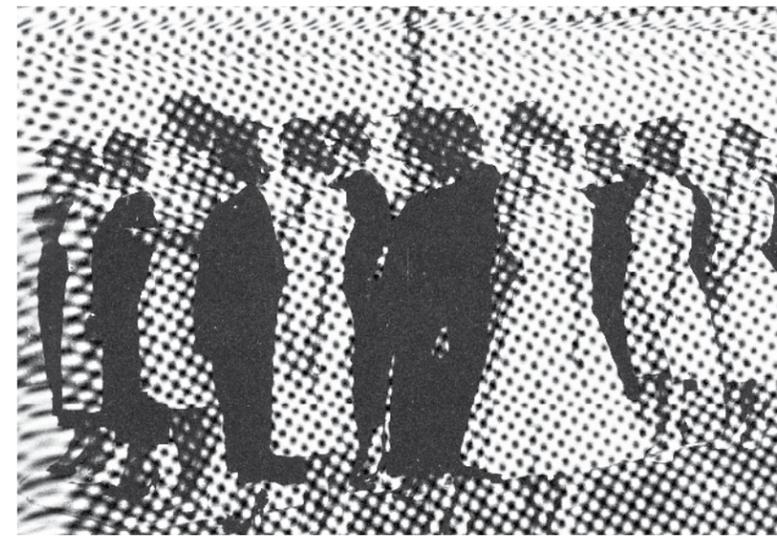
of these natural disasters came in 1970 when Hurricane Celia devastated the campus.

As UCC worked to right itself after Hurricane Celia, a move to create an upper level public university in Corpus Christi bore fruit. Backed by a coalition of prominent local business leaders, civic organizations, and many concerned individuals, and after much discussion and compromise, the State Legislature passed a bill in May 1971, to establish Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi as an upper-level, state-supported institution, hosting junior, senior, and graduate instruction. Except for 10 acres withheld for religious centers for students, the UCC board of trustees transferred the land and facilities to the city of Corpus Christi in 1973. The city in turn transferred the property to Texas A&I University, while local citizens raised approximately 1.8 million dollars to support the school.

With UCC’s final class commencement in the summer of 1973, the four-year private university was no more. As its historian Carl Wrotenbery notes, the Baptist island college could count many achievements after 26 years of existence, foremost having graduated over 1,000 students who would greatly contribute to their community. But a new era for the campus had begun.

With state support, university education in Corpus Christi and the South Texas Coastal Bend moved to a new level. Under the guidance of President D. Whitney Halladay and amid great enthusiasm and community support, Texas A&I at Corpus Christi assumed the facilities of the island campus, recruited faculty and staff (many from the UCC ranks), planned its curriculum and policies, and upgraded its physical plant so that classes could begin in the fall of 1973. It initially enrolled 969 students. In January, 1974, enrollment was over 1,200. All entering students had to have a minimum of 60 credit hours, making the campus profile one of older students.

Texas A&I at Corpus Christi consisted of four academic colleges which included the College of Arts and Humanities, College of Business Administration, College



of Education, and College of Science and Technology. Although intercollegiate athletics were dropped and there was no longer any on-campus housing for students, the campus community centered around a number of clubs and organizations for intellectual and personal growth. In its outreach, the school referred to itself as “the Island Campus” or “the Island University on the Bay.”



After turning out more than 1,000 graduates over 26 years, the University of Corpus Christi, celebrated its last commencement in the summer of 1973. That fall, the University became Texas A&I at Corpus Christi with a campus population of 969 junior and senior level students.



The institution lasted just three years as a branch of Texas A&I before it became Corpus Christi State University (CCSU), launching its first academic year in 1977-1978 as part of the newly-created University System of South Texas. Still an upper-level university, it now had its own independent administrative status. As CCSU, the institution grew under the leadership of B. Alan Sugg who had been elevated to the office of university president in 1977. Though it added a limited number of dormitory rooms, CCSU remained essentially a commuter campus that played a vital role by drawing students from the local area so that they could complete their undergraduate degrees and pursue graduate study.

As steady as was the University's progress over the next decade, the 1989-1990 academic year saw a beginning of even greater change for the Island University. By May 1989, after much negotiation, state legislation made CCSU part of the Texas A&M University System and called for the introduction of freshmen on campus in the fall of 1994, making the university a four-year institution once again. By the time of this momentous 1989-1990 school year, the university had more than 10,000 alumni and more than 4,000 students. In late 1990, it also hired a new president, Robert R. Furgason, who would lead the way into this new, exciting phase.

Before the freshman class arrived, however, the institution received a new name. In 1993 the system authorized the campus to become Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, once again marking a giant stride in the evolution of the school. The arriving freshmen especially welcomed this new name and took it as part of their identity as college students.

The reintroduction in 1994 of freshmen and sophomores breathed new life into the University. It brought heightened vitality and a sense of renewal as every year the institution would welcome a crop of freshmen who would develop into full-fledged university students and gain intellectual and social maturity on the island campus. Installation of a new athletic program including basketball, baseball, and other sports added a level of school spirit. The students adopted the "Islanders" as the team name. Appearance on campus of social sororities and fraternities provided another dimension of student organizations.

With entry into the A&M System and President Furgason at the helm, a period of unprecedented growth took place during the 1990s and early 2000s. Larger buildings for classrooms, administration, and research were constructed. This expansion was perhaps best exemplified by the opening of the Blanche Davis Moore Early Childhood Development Center, the Performing Arts Center, which features a 1,500-seat concert hall, and the Harte Research Center whose mission is to support and advance the long-term sustainable use and conservation of the Gulf of Mexico. Significant numbers of students began to reside on campus as the University built a large apartment complex on the island which served as student housing. Newly constructed and remodeled plazas provided focal points for student gatherings. In 1992, the University instituted its first doctoral program, a doctor of education in educational leadership as a joint venture with Texas A&M University-Kingsville. The creation in 2004 of the College of Nursing recognized the prominence of that longstanding program.

By 2007, the A&M-Corpus Christi campus community numbered approximately 8,600 students, 420 faculty, and 1,032 staff. Led by Flavius C. Killebrew, who became president in 2005, the University eagerly anticipates the change that will surely take place in the new millennium. This institutional philosophy is best set forth by its most recent plan entitled Momentum 2015, “a ten-year vision charting the next course for the University, one that will establish Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi as the university of choice for South Texas.”

As the name of the institution evolved over the years, continuity remained. Change had obviously come to the University’s nature, size, and physical appearance. It had moved from a relatively small, private four-year institution

to an upper-level, state-supported one, then to a four-year comprehensive university with an expanding number of undergraduate and graduate programs. At the end of the spring 2007 semester, over 830 students received degrees, a stark contrast to the 29 who graduated in 1949. The campus has gained modern academic buildings that house new technologies in teaching and research. Visitors to the campus hardly recognize the island they had once known, whether they were stationed here during World War II or had attended classes here during subsequent decades. All remark that the changes show vitality, that A&M-Corpus Christi is on the move.

By the same token, there is continuity. Students remain primary to the University’s mission which ensures that

they explore their surroundings and develop intellectually and socially. Inspired by their instructors, by what they find in the classroom, in the library, in the laboratories, and in one another, they are the tie that binds the past, present, and future of education at the institution. The presence of eager students from across the state, nation, and world constitutes the life blood of the University.

In the following chapters, this mixture of change and permanence is superbly captured in photographs, ones that combine the past and present. This commemorative volume will give us a glimpse of what has been and what is happening, and also an appreciation that Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is still a work in progress.

Above all, the Island University has a commitment to excellence, engagement, and expansion in the future.

Happy 60th anniversary.

Thomas H. Kreneck

Dr. Thomas H. Kreneck is the Associate Director for Special Collections & Archives of the Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. As such, he curates the historical records of the university. Dr. Kreneck also serves as a graduate lecturer in Public History.

