

The doors of Texas A&M first opened in the academic year 1876-77. At the time of its founding, the new university just south of Bryan had become the first public college of higher education in the state of Texas. On February 6th of that same academic year, Martin Luther (M. L.) Hayes was born in Kansas City, Missouri.

Hayes came from a family of educators, and followed in their footsteps by attending Missouri Valley College in Marshall, MO. There, he earned a B.A. in 1902. A career as a teacher and administrator within the Missouri public school system followed, before Hayes was accepted to the University of Missouri. In Columbia, he earned a B.S. in Vocational Agriculture and an M.A in Education, disciplines to which he would devote his life. After graduation in 1913, he received an offer to join the faculty at Texas A&M. Hayes was headed to Aggieland.

Nearly 5 miles separate downtown Bryan, TX from the campus of Texas A&M University. In the early 20th century, those 5 miles were difficult to travel. As a result, a small community began to grow in and around Texas A&M College (TAMC). Brazos County residents who did not reside in Bryan most likely lived and worked “over at college,” a common phrase mentioned by John Knox Walker Jr. in his book of the same name. Walker was born on the A&M campus in 1926 and grew up with his family there at a time when A&M Consolidated High School was located on campus, not far from Kyle Field. The city of College Station was still years away.

Alongside wife Maybelle and 2-year-old son Martin Edwin, M. L. Hayes arrived from Missouri in 1913. The family settled into a residence on campus and immediately became a part of the Aggie family. As Department Head of Agricultural Education at Texas A&M, Hayes was intimately involved in the life and studies of A&M cadets interested in the field after schooling. As an educator and the father of a son living on campus, he became increasingly interested in the educational needs of children both on the A&M campus and in and around the Brazos Valley.

In 1914, Hayes developed cooperative agreements on courses of agricultural study between A&M and local schools as far away as San Antonio and Beaumont. He visited these towns frequently to inspect and coordinate the efforts of these local schools, and the local students were glad to have him. Studying under Hayes at A&M was strongly desired across the state. A 1914 Bryan Eagle article mentions that “graduates of the school of agriculture at the A&M College of Texas are in demand. Positions as teachers of agriculture in public schools are going ‘abeggin,’ according to M.L. Hayes, professor of agriculture education at the college.”

In 1915, Dr. Hayes successfully convinced A&M to relax military requirements for professionals interested in enrolling in A&M agricultural courses. The goal of the change was to encourage area teachers, entrepreneurs, and pensioners to more easily acquire agricultural knowledge and skills through coursework on campus.

America’s entry into war in 1917 resulted in thousands of A&M cadets leaving campus for Europe. The growing community over at college rallied behind them. Liberty Bonds were sold by Washington to help finance the war effort, and members of the A&M community were reliable purchasers. The Hayes family was one, buying a \$100 Liberty Bond in 1918 (roughly \$1700 in 2018 dollars).

The dislocation of war also brought into sharp focus a growing problem: how best to educate the children on campus and in the surrounding Brazos County rural communities of Wellborn, Rock Prairie,

and elsewhere. In September of 1918, educators from Brazos and neighboring counties gathered at A&M to discuss the future of public education in the region. A&M President William Bizzell and A&M Professors M.L. Hayes were named to an oversight committee. The committee resolved to encourage the state legislature to provide more financial support for public education. It also mentioned Bryan, TX:

“Be It Resolved, that the chairman of the institute appoint a committee of three to ascertain from the school board and the chamber of commerce of the city of Bryan just what we may expect in the way of co-operation on the part of the school authorities of the city of Bryan.”

From the perspective of faculty on campus, sending the kids to Bryan for schooling was not ideal because of the distance traveled. Also, a bias existed on the A&M campus that a superior education was to be had at college. The college, however, was not a municipality and therefore lacked the power to tax and finance a school district. A school associated with A&M was desired, and yet a school associated with A&M was not financially possible.

Armistice Day arrived in November of 1918, and Aggie cadets began to return home. At the same time, M.L Hayes began the work which would increasingly focus all of his time. His novel idea was a school district which “consolidated” the community of families located on the A&M campus with the rural communities of Wellborn & Rock Prairie. While the former could provide top notch facilities and instructors, the latter would be instrumental in providing the tax base needed to finance and compensate.

Hayes spent much of 1919 lobbying community leaders in and around Texas A&M. One of the biggest hurdles was transportation. How would students in the rural communities be shipped to college? The answer came from the volunteer efforts of parents and teachers on the A&M campus. Rural children would be picked up in privately owned cars and trucks, and shipped to and from Aggieland.

By the end of 1919, Hayes had successfully forged a consensus. In the year 1920, a new school would open on the A&M campus representing children of families “over at college” as well as children of families in southern Brazos County. It was a novel and successful compromise between an urban campus and its rural neighbors. The school opened its doors for the first time on October 1920, in Guion Hall on the campus of Texas A&M.

Dean of Agriculture Edwin Jackson Kyle, also known as the name sake of Aggie football’s Kyle Field, sat alongside Hayes on the original board of the new school. Kyle suggested that the new school be named for its founder, and proposed a name of “Hayes School.” M.L. Hayes, however, politely declined. The school already had a name appropriate for its history, and Hayes insisted that it remain as originally proposed. A&M Consolidated School.

Hayes passed unexpectedly in 1923. A funeral was held at the Hayes family home on the A&M campus to celebrate his life. His pall-bearers included Dean Edwin Kyle, the father of Texas A&M athletics and Dean Mark Francis, the father of Texas A&M Veterinary Science. At his request, Hayes was buried in his native Missouri.

But his legacy remains. Hayes is honored today as the father of A&M Consolidated at Veterans Park in College Station; a brick marks his efforts alongside former A&M President Bizzell. The school which he so tirelessly worked to create also lives today. In 2020, A&M Consolidated High School will celebrate its centennial anniversary.